

Representations of Christianity in the Works of John Berryman

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Chapter 4

The Dream Songs: Henry's Quest for the Historical Jesus

Berryman's Sonnets and *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* represent the expression of a repressed conflict which would become much more tangible in the poet's most famous work, *The Dream Songs*; his second long narrative poem which he started writing in 1956. With the innovation of the Dream Song format, he had at last found a poetic style that enabled him to capture the immediacy of his own experience. The poet was able to assimilate all his intellectual and emotional preoccupations into the poem's open-ended narrative: that is, the evolving personality of its protagonist Henry as he makes his way in the world.

The start of the poem's composition coincided with another important new beginning in the poet's life. In the fall of 1954—following his unceremonious dismissal from Iowa University, as a result of his arrest for drunk and disorderly behaviour—Berryman moved to Minneapolis, where his friend, the poet Allen Tate, used his influence to help him obtain a lectureship at the University of Minnesota. He became a lecturer in humanities in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, a position which required him to study certain new subject areas. The first courses he taught were in Medieval Literature, for which he needed to become closely acquainted with a range of religious material, including: the New Testament, Church documents, Augustine, Aquinas and Dante.¹ Over the next few years he found himself teaching on a range of modules with the aim of exploring the development of western civilisation; there were courses on

¹ Mariani, *Dream Song*, p.291.

Humanities in the Modern world, Greek Civilisation, Christian Origins, and Reformation and Renaissance.²

This development in his life came to be reflected in his poetry, with the *Dream Songs* incorporating an eclectic range of intellectual concerns and inquiries; whatever preoccupied the poet at the time tended to find its way into the poem. His studies for the ‘Christian Origins’ course, in particular, had a special impact on *The Dream Songs*. The main emphasis of the course, as Berryman describes it, is ‘on the New Testament and the *Inferno* of Dante’, but it also examines the cultural context from which Christianity emerged, as well as its subsequent impact on western culture.³ The approach Berryman takes to the study of the New Testament is an ‘historical and documentary’ one, encouraging students to look critically at Scripture, unprejudiced by personal belief or scepticism.⁴ The aims are: to determine what we can know for a fact about Jesus, to explain the composition of the New Testament, and to offer an account of the remarkable rise and cultural influence of this new religion. From very early on in his teaching, he relies on a rather small number of New Testament scholars for his sources, most of whom he cites in ‘The Search’ from *Love & Fame* (1971):

I began the historical study of the Gospel
indebted above all to Guignebert
& Goguel & McNeile
& Bultmann even & later Archbishop Carrington.

These ‘unloseable friends’, as he refers to them in the poem, inspired him sufficiently, by the late 1950s, to attempt to write his own ‘Life of Christ’. Berryman described this project as a ‘labour of love’, and he would work on it intermittently over the next

² U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box I, Folder 10, TS, ‘Humanities 54 - Foreword’ (Introduction to planned textbook based on his ‘Humanities in the Modern World’ course), 2pp (p.2).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, ‘Humanities 62’, MS, teaching notes headed ‘Newman’.

eighteen years.⁵ It took on a variety of formats, but was never completed before his death. He also depicts the quest for the historical Jesus in *The Dream Songs*, the composition of which provided a necessary artistic outlet for his passion; especially since he continually struggled to represent it in a purposeful prose format.

Through a detailed commentary on a number of key Songs—322, 48, 220 and 234—this chapter will demonstrate how the poem’s representation of Christianity was heavily influenced by the work of certain scholars referred to in ‘The Search’. Furthermore, it will also be shown how unpublished material from the Dream Song period reveals the full extent to which Christian origins became a major thematic concern of his poetry. This material also, at times, introduces a variety of challenging new dimensions to the issue. In most of these instances, he employs imagery and concepts, not only from the Gospels themselves, but also from New Testament criticism and other secondary sources. These become as much a primary artistic source for Berryman as do the actual Gospels.

Henry’s quest for the historical Jesus is essentially part of the wider ontological theme of *The Dream Songs*: that is, Henry’s search for the meaning of life, which is central to his predicament as a human being. His quest to unravel life’s purpose reflects the poet’s own, which, as ‘The Search’ suggests, is from the start focussed on the question of whether the claims of Christianity have any credence; in other words, ‘is Jesus Christ the person Christianity claims he is?’ As Christian belief rests on the conviction that God, through the Incarnation, has specially intervened in human history; the poet

⁵ U Minn, JBP, Miscellaneous Prose, Box 6, ‘The Life of Christ’, MS, headed ‘The Life of Jesus Christ / Compiled by JB’. All material for this project is in the same folder and items are mostly loose and unpaginated; consequently, I only reference subsequent quotations from it where further clarification would be helpful. See Appendix for a detailed commentary on this project.

looked to the discipline of historical criticism as the most credible source of justification for any decision in the direction of faith.

Henry's religious quest is continually frustrated by the relentless difficulties thrown up by historical Gospel criticism. The problems don't stop there; Henry also has to grapple with the question of God's existence, and his enquiries are mostly centred round the problem of evil. Henry concludes that God must be either inexistent, incompetent, or, as he suggests in Song 238, 'something disturbed'. God and Christ are not synonymous in *The Dream Songs*, and Henry has far more respect for the latter. Whereas the long poem's portrayal of God is a wittily combative and irreverent one, the portrayal of Christ is more concerned with retrieving this 'great man' from the clutches of misrepresentation (Song 234). For this reason *The Dream Songs* may be described as 'anti-Christian', but it is definitely not 'anti-Christ'.

Song 322

Song 322 portrays the uneasy place of faith and religion within the whole emotional sphere of Henry's existence, and the effect of the historical study of the Gospel on his outlook. Berryman demonstrates his ability to weave a number of often-obscure allusions into an evocative, humorous and emotive poetic vision, even though it makes inordinate demands on the reader. Within this elaborate dream tapestry are woven together the themes of religious faith, family loyalty and ambition. It is constructed as an anxiety dream, possibly even based on a real one, and it is to be approached with the interpretative gravity of Freudian dream analysis, if not necessarily its purpose or technique.⁶ In other words, the associations are not the random scrambling of 'mental

⁶ Although not the dream in question, Haffenden does record a dream of Berryman's in which his mother died. Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, pp.37-38, 48-49.

rubbish' but are intended to convey an epiphanic, if indefinable, insight. The 'dream thoughts' are the strands of Henry's emotional and intellectual life which, though apparently disparate, when correlated into a narrative propose a perspective on the whole. Recourse to biographical information becomes especially important to a commentary on this Song, in order to understand the full implications of the allusions he introduces:

I gave my love a cookie, as I said,
 which she ate. 'Apu-Apu' was my dream.
 My love was all in green,
 as I said. 'Unam Sanctam' was my other dream,
 in a chapel where none of my family could take degrees,
 only start them, & mother was dead

I knelt at a shallow altar high on the right
 where she had prayed. The carpet was blue-green.
 The scholarly frame was French,
 Goguel & Guignebert & the Ecole des Hautes Etudes:
 I took my mother's hand, which would never hold a degree,
 and shook it, behind her back.

I gave my love a cookie, it was her fate
 to be involved with Henry Pussycat,
 I feel only pity for her.
 I'll spare her all I can, in Ireland & elsewhere,
 It must have been that cookie which she ate,
 never take cookies from cats.

The four preoccupations interlocked in the Song may be defined as: his marriage, his relationship with his mother, his academic ambition, and his religious quest.⁷ Song 322 opens with reference to a previously published Song, 'Idyll II', where sending his love a cookie is an affectionately bathetic gesture, set against the wistful backdrop of the passing of time. The Song is a poignant expression of mortality, in which the gift of a

⁷ I take Henry's 'love' to be Berryman's third wife Kate Donahue, since the third stanza implies that his love was with him 'in Ireland & elsewhere'. Since the Song was written during his Guggenheim trip to Ireland in 1967, it is not unreasonable to assume that it refers to his wife who accompanied him there. Sean Ryder suggests that 'My love was all in green' refers to the Irish ancestry of Kate Donahue. Ryder, 'Annotations', p.239.

cookie is a touching but ultimately futile act.⁸ The cookie gesture itself is derived from a scene from *Pather Panchali* ('Song of the Little Road'), the first film of the 'Apu Trilogy' by the renowned Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray, based on the novels by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. The trilogy received wide international acclaim during the late 1950s and 1960s, during the time when Berryman was composing Dream Songs, and they provide a rich thematic backdrop to Song 322, which is introduced by the call 'Apu-Apu'. This adaptation of Bandyopadhyay's Bildungsroman depicts the formative years of 'Apu', an ambitious young man from a poor family in rural India, as he faces the conflict between family responsibilities and personal freedom.

Pather Panchali (1955) depicts the childhood of Apu, and the domestic tensions of his family amidst small village life. Due to the reluctance of Apu's father to find work, the family are extremely poor, and when the travelling sweet-seller stops by on his rounds, Apu and his sister Durga are denied any of his ware by their frustrated mother. Not to be denied, the children follow the sweet-seller as he makes his way to the home of a neighbouring family, where the mother of the household forbids her children from giving any of the sweets they have bought to their poor friends, Apu and Durga. However, in a touching scene of simple child-like affection, one of the children goes behind her mother's back and places a large cookie into the mouth of Durga.

⁸ 'Idyll II'

In the bright calm days of disappearing spring
I sent my love a cookie, which she ate.
Many things were late.
Many things sting.
Other things tend to dim off and disappear.
Few things are clear.

I loved her through our deadly winter, long.
My passion survived itself into the sun
turbulent, Indian-Indian,
futureless as them.
We've come to the close of this particular Song,
futureless as them.

I admired a lioness in a private ground.
I examined her, sound.
She'll live forever.
So far as any of us live, she'll live forever,
in gauze & vines, close by one waterfall,
having long hair & all.

The Song was written on Sunday afternoon of May 9, 1965; U Minn, JBP, Published Poetry, Box 3, F5. MS, #43; first published in *Agenda*, 4 (1966), p.3.

The cookie's appearance in Song 234 'The Carpenter's Son' suggests the remembered act which frames Song 322 is also intended to symbolise more than just a gesture of affection. In Song 234, the intimation that Christ has passed him a cookie suggests a mirthfully impious allusion to the Eucharist, and the cookie is infused with the same kind of Johannine theology in Song 322 as well.⁹ The Eucharist, as a Sacrament, represents Christ's offering of himself; it is the receiving of God in the form of bread, in order to receive eternal life in communion with Him. The sacramental cookie in Song 322 enters Henry's love into a more dangerous communion with Henry, bound to him now in marriage. Henry offers himself in the form of the cookie and this imparts not the eternal life of God, but the troublesome deadly life of Henry Pussycat, with all the trials that any intimate association with him brings. Henry paradoxically pledges to try to save her from himself and ends the song with a sly warning about any such involvement with 'cats' like him. Berryman almost self-parodyingly evokes Song 322 and 'Idyll II' again in a later poem concerning his marriage: an unpublished jaunty villanelle entitled 'One for his wife'. Written after the birth of his second daughter, his gesture of affection is now the giving of a 'mohair'.

I gave my love a mohair, which she wore.
 And I will swear she wore it bloody well.
 She came across the cliffs alert & sore [...]

She wore it, till she had a second baby
 which was in God's hands, and she took no pill

⁹ Pass me a cookie. O one absolutely did
 lest we not know him. Fasten to your fire
 the blessing of the living God.
 It's far to seek if it will do as good
 whether in our womanly or in our manlihood,
 this great man sought his retire.

(Song 234)

Linebarger also makes an association between the cookie and the Eucharistic wafer in *John Berryman*, p.100.

she took no pill, my honey love, as before.¹⁰

What is significant about this poem in relation to the earlier Songs is the very Catholic declaration he makes about his marriage, that it was open to fertility. It recalls his earlier cookie gestures, especially in Song 322 where the metaphor, as in Song 234, is fundamentally Eucharistic. Since Henry himself receives the cookie in Song 234 there is not a direct association between the sweet and the contraceptive pill; but given the poet's use of Johannine theology, with the cookie symbolising Henry's dangerous offering of himself in Song 322, it would appear that the metaphor is ultimately intended to represent a kind of life-preventing or life-destroying anti-Eucharist.¹¹ Within the 'cookie' frame of his marriage, there are at least three other strands of emotional involvement tangled together, which are represented by his two dreams. The first dream is represented by 'Apu-Apu', the repetition of the name resembling the repeated calls of Apu's mother to the boy throughout *Pather Panchali*. Berryman was undoubtedly struck by the parallels of Ray's trilogy with his own life, and so the allusion is used to accentuate important themes of the Song.

The most significant part of the trilogy in relation to this Song is the second film, *Aparajito (The Unvanquished, 1956)*, which concentrates on Apu's transition from adolescence into adulthood and particularly his relationship with his loving over-protective mother. After the death of his father, young Apu is raised by his mother who makes great sacrifices to enable him to go to school, where he excels academically. At sixteen he wins a scholarship to college in Calcutta; the prospect of their separation causes great anguish for his mother, but she eventually allows him to go. The film then

¹⁰ U Minn, JBP, Unpublished Dream Songs, Box V, Unknown Folder, TS, 'One for his wife', 2pp. The TS contains a handwritten poem on the second page, entitled 'Christmas Song', dated '18 Dec 66'. This raises problems because the Berrymans' second child was not born until 1971.

¹¹ An example of the way Berryman thinks in terms of Johannine theology is demonstrated in his essay 'Song of Myself: Intention and Substance', *Freedom of the Poet*, p.231.

focuses on the growing emotional distance between them as, preoccupied with his new life, Apu grows increasingly oblivious to his mother's lonely existence. Pining and broken-hearted, she awaits his visits which never materialize, and becomes progressively more sick and infirm. She eventually dies, alone. Apu returns home to find his parental house empty, with no trace remaining of his mother. Apu is consequently grieved by a crushing sense of guilt and loss.

There is a natural correlation one can make between the emotional predicament of Apu and that of the poet, dealing as he had to with his own protective and over-loving mother, who also made great sacrifices for his own education and scholarly ambitions.¹² A major emotional pull develops in the Song, as his success and fame increasingly become something that divides them. The first dream does interrelate with the second; a certain degree of guilt is conveyed by the fact that 'none of my family could take degrees, / only start them' and that his mother 'would never hold a degree'. Berryman's mother's own higher education had been curtailed in turn by her own mother; it is suggested she then pushed her son to excel, living out her frustrated ambitions vicariously through him.¹³ Here the speaker's mother is also dead (despite Berryman's mother being alive at the time) and this suggests a further emotional identification with the film, in terms of guilt over the present situation with her.¹⁴ The experience of holding his dead mother's hand also recalls the childhood incident of touching the hand of his dead friend, FJ Callahan, in the mortuary, an incident that profoundly affected him and is recounted in an unpublished Dream Song.¹⁵ The fact that he shakes her hand

¹² Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, pp.49, 54-55.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp.11, 37-38, 48-49.

¹⁴ Haffenden cites an early dream of Berryman's in which his mother died. *Ibid*, p.49.

¹⁵ Haffenden records the incident and reproduces the following fragment: 'the dead friend's hand at ten he toucht, as cork / yieldless, odd-textured, with nobody looking'. *Life of Berryman*, p.17. See also Berryman's letter to his mother, 5 Dec 1954, in *We Dream of Honour: John Berryman's Letters to his Mother*, ed. by Richard J. Kelly (London: Norton, 1988), p.277. The instance is recalled in the following unpublished Dream Song:

behind her back indicates the power of her influence over him; even in her absence through death, guilt over his independence is expressed as 'going behind her back'.

Also pertinent to the Song is the final film of the trilogy: '*Apur Sansar*' ('*The World of Apu*', 1959). The film portrays Apu's experiences after the death of his mother, starting from the end of his student days, when he unsuccessfully searches for work in Calcutta, whilst obsessed with the idea of becoming a famous novelist. His self-seeking life is abruptly challenged when on attending a family wedding he is persuaded to step in to replace the bridegroom, who, it transpires, is insane. Apu feels unready for the responsibilities of marriage, but agrees out of a conviction that he is 'saving the girl's life'. Apu, however, soon finds himself falling in love with her, but tragedy occurs when his new wife dies in childbirth. Devastated, Apu refuses to have anything to do with his new son Kajal, whom he blames for his mother's death. The child grows up estranged from his father who after many years returns to seek him out, having been brought to his senses by the admonition of a friend. Kajal rejects Apu's attempts at reconciliation, but, after much persistence, Apu eventually wins him over and the pair begin a new life together.

As a pall-bearer, at nine, I got there early—
to that place which ever after I avoided,
crossing the street not to pass it—
and I was alone with it in the darkened room
and then collecting all my little force
I touched F.J.'s cold hand.

I shrink defiled from evil old & new:
what rite to save his perilous soul alive
can precipitous man perform?
Ahead as behind abysses open too,
protest is sputum in the wind. Survive
my in the great storm.

In this war which is no war, wondered Henry soiled,
we are killing Orientals, for their sake
and for our sake.
Nights I woke screaming 'Mother' from that hand,
over Vietnam I sleep well enough
and count the bodies at breakfast.

(U Minn, JBP, Unpub DS, Box 1, folder 5, #36,
TS)

Another unpublished Dream Song recalls: 'He and F.J. were wicked in a loft. / Another friend's cold hand he toucht in the coffin / when nobody was looking.' U Minn, JBP, Unpub DS, Box 1, folder 5, #5; TS states 'revised in hosp. 6 Dec '62'.

Again, certain parallels with Berryman's own experience suggest why he is evoking the character of Apu in the context of the Song. Apu's frustrating search for employment, whilst consoled by dreams of literary success, is highly reminiscent of the poet's time in New York;¹⁶ also, Apu's relationship with Kajal recalls Berryman's own estrangement from his only son after the collapse of his second marriage.¹⁷ Whilst these biographical details are not obviously inferred from the Song, bearing them in mind informs the necessary 'dream thoughts' evoked by reference to the Apu character. They in turn provide the necessary backdrop of ambition and familial division. Furthermore, the Apu allusion provides certain emotional circumstances that contribute to the Song's anxiety dream scenario. Firstly, there is the fact that his marriage is set against the death of the mother. Secondly, there is also Henry's notion that he is 'sparing' his love whilst at the same time being more than a potential danger to her; this mirrors Apu's attempt to save Aparna through marriage, whilst ultimately leading her to conceive the life that brings about her death. This is an association consequently underlined by the cookie metaphor, which represents the danger of Henry's self-offering.

The Irish location of the Song, which one infers from the third line and the reference in the last stanza, is important to a clearer understanding of the relationship between family and faith, and consequently of the religious dilemma that confronts Henry. The fact that it was written during his stay in Dublin suggests one reason why his family are unable to take degrees; that is, he is in the chapel of Trinity College Dublin, a Protestant college founded by Queen Elizabeth I and which Catholics did not generally begin entering until after Berryman's death.¹⁸ This familial identification with the religion of

¹⁶ Simpson, *Poets in their Youth*, pp.51-70.

¹⁷ See Berryman, *Recovery*, pp.198-99. Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, pp.333-35.

¹⁸ Possibly unknown to Berryman, however, Catholics had officially been permitted to enter and take degrees in the College since 1793. Haffenden dates the Song as being from 1966, in *Critical Commentary*, p.163.

his childhood is illuminated by the fact that the poet's mother had been returned to the practice of her Catholic faith for nearly a decade.¹⁹ This provides for a source of tension within the Song relating to Henry's own religious proclivities.

His mother's prayerful devotion represents a more unquestioning faith in the Church, as opposed to Henry's own faith, which requires justification through a rapacious search for the historical truth behind its inception. The 'scholarly frame', in the shape of the radical critics, represents this tendency of his; in other words, the altar of worship Henry kneels before is framed by scepticism. From the beginning of his researches into Christian origins, Berryman relied consistently on several different lives of Jesus and the early Church by the French scholars Charles Guignebert (1867-1939) and Maurice Goguel (1880-1955). He used their works as source material for his teaching, as well as his own attempted 'Life of Christ', and they are a significant influence on the anxious, fractured vision of Christianity that Henry is confronted with in *The Dream Songs*. For the poet, they came to embody the intellectual, but heretical, side of his struggle with the Christian faith.

Charles Guignebert was in many respects a maverick in the field of life-of-Christ scholarship, a scholar determined to pursue an independent course away from prevailing theoretical schools. From 1906 he taught at the Sorbonne for thirty years—in the 'École des Hautes Études', as Berryman reminds us in the Song. He regarded himself first and foremost as an historian, an identification which defined his approach to New Testament studies. He held no religious beliefs himself; his research convinced him that the evolution of Christianity had irretrievably obscured the intentions of its putative founder. Consequently, his work is characterised by a resolute agnosticism. He attempts

¹⁹ His mother speaks of having returned to her faith in a letter to Berryman dated 30 Nov 1954. See *We Dream of Honour*, p.275.

to demonstrate the way in which the Christian faith is the syncretistic product of other religious and cultural influences; hence, his position tends towards that of the ‘history of religions school’ of scholarship.²⁰ Undoubtedly one of the reasons he continued to remain a firm favourite with Berryman—despite his comparatively limited influence within the discipline—was because of his wit. The French sceptic’s scornfully frank denigration of anyone, or anything, that he considers to be falling below his exacting standards of historical-critical inquiry is one of the most entertaining aspects of reading Guignebert.²¹

Maurice Goguel is the second most important critical source for Berryman, especially with regard to *The Dream Songs*. From 1927 Goguel also taught at the Sorbonne, where he became *Directeur d'études* at the *École des Hautes Études*. Although the poet often refers to them together—for instance, as the ‘formidable sceptics of the continent’—Goguel and Guignebert are far from being a double act, and there are some important differences in their positions.²² A faithful adherent of liberal Protestantism, Goguel, whilst not rejecting the Christian faith, was concerned with informing, and even reforming, it, if evidence demonstrated any aspect to be an inauthentic representation of historical fact. Like Guignebert, his New Testament studies were concerned with an attempt to portray the Jesus of ‘objective’ history, and explain the development of a religion in historical terms, acknowledging that this may conflict with orthodox

²⁰ *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), p.471.

²¹ Berryman draws attention to Guignebert’s ‘wit!’ in his Christian Origins lecture dealing with life-of-Christ scholarship, using as an example an extract from the French scholar’s commentary on the historical debate concerning Christ’s appearance (U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, Humanities 62 class notes, MS, ‘62 – Xtian Origins’). Guignebert’s verdict on the ‘Letter of Lentulus’—a dubious document containing a long eulogistic description of Jesus, allegedly by the ‘Governor of Jerusalem’—is characteristic of his manner. He declares that his evidence against the epistle is ‘suffice to relegate this clumsy document to the company of the forgeries with which the simple-minded consoled their ignorance, and which were, in fact, expressly manufactured to please them.’ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.169.

²² Draft preface to ‘Life of Christ’ (1958). In a much later preface to the same project, dated 5 July ‘71, he still remarks that ‘between Bishop Westcott’s great commentary on the Fourth Gospel (1892) and Archbishop Carrington’s researches into Mark (1961), I have drawn most heavily on Guignebert and Goguel’. U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, ‘Life of Christ’.

Christian doctrine. However, unlike Guignebert, his work is not sympathetic towards the positions of the history-of-religions school, as he stresses the originality of Christianity compared to contemporary religions.²³

Both of these scholars present a version of Christ which is radically different from the Christ of faith, and this constitutes a source of tension with 'Unam Sanctam', the dominant theme of Henry's 'other dream'. 'Unam Sanctam' is the title of the 1302 papal bull, named after its first line: 'One holy ...' (from the phrase 'one holy catholic, and apostolic Church').²⁴ The bull proclaims the dogma of the unity of the Church and its claim exclusively to offer the means of eternal salvation. It also affirmed papal supremacy over the Church and, hence, the requirement to submit to papal authority in order to remain in communion with it and attain salvation. The bull also affirms the superiority of the spiritual over the secular order, from which conclusions are drawn about the relationship between the Church's spiritual power and secular authority.²⁵ It was issued by Pope Boniface VIII as a response to a dispute with Philip the Fair, King of France, and, importantly, here signifies the internal conflict of faith within Henry. The French in this case are Guignebert and Goguel, and much of their work challenges apostolic tradition as it comes to us through the Church. The dream partly represents Henry's anxiety about allowing himself to submit to this subversive intellectual power, rather than before the 'shallow' altar of trusting faith before which his mother had prayed.

²³ *Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Hayes, pp.453; Charles C. Anderson, *Critical Quests of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), pp.46-54.

²⁴ Noted by Ryder, 'Annotations', p.239.

²⁵ J.P.Kirsch, 'Unam Sanctam', *The Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. XV: Online Edition* (2003), trans. by Carol Kerstner <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15126a.htm>> [accessed 7 April 2004].

This conflict is reinforced by implication of another feature of the papal bull: that is the imagery of the 'two swords' representing the opposing powers of the spiritual and the secular orders. The bull states that both are in the power of the Church since the secular must be subordinate to the spiritual. The two swords analogy applies not only to Henry's religious conflict within the Unam Sanctam dream itself, but also to the wider conflicts represented by both of the dreams. Symbolised by the 'Apu-Apu' dream is the conflict between filial ties and the desire for independence, accompanied also by the pressure of marital and paternal responsibilities; hence, this is the 'secular order'. The contrasting, but not necessarily opposing, 'spiritual order' is represented by the religious conflict of the Unam Sanctam dream, in which the powerful influence of his mother also plays a part. The distinction between the two is not clear-cut since the secular is shown here to affect the spiritual, so there is a certain degree of interrelationship between the two. The attempt to create the analogy with the imagery of the bull, however, is clear.

It is not easy, or necessarily purposeful, to identify a particular wish-fulfilment or unconscious desire which is responsible for the disordered associations of the dream; but the defining principle and underlying theme is undoubtedly 'guilt', which manifests itself in a variety of forms. Guilt is shown to be the by-product of his personal relationships and the formation of his own individual religious outlook; 'Catholic guilt' in particular, or the fear that he is choosing against the 'absolute truth', is shown to be latent in Henry's faith-life. Guilt then becomes the principle of displacement by which the anxiety-dream scenario is structured; the disordered relations show the extent to which guilt, in its variety of forms, occupies the multifarious facets of his life. The Song is an example of the way Berryman dramatises his own life through Henry and how comprehension of many of the Songs' messages rests on biographical detail. From the

point of view of the poet's Christian scholarship, what is striking is both the part it is shown to play in Henry's evolving consciousness, and the extent to which the poet draws on it to supply the imagery with which that experience is portrayed.

Song 48

What the poet regards as the tangible clash between the Christ of history and the Christ of faith becomes the basic tension in the Dream Songs which deal with Christianity. As my commentaries on these Songs will illustrate, the historical criticism of Guignebert and Goguel is an important factor in the manifestation of this conflict, and consequently one of the main sources of the religious dilemma which is shown to confront Henry. He considers historical certainty to be a necessary prerequisite for faith, and, anxiously, he cannot commit himself to Christianity without it. This in turn arouses an existential uncertainty in Henry as to whether it is ever possible to discover the meaning of life.

Because there is only the scantiest historical record of the life and teaching of Jesus outside of Christian Tradition (including both canonical and apocryphal sources), the Scriptures themselves are where the main focus of research lies. The person of Jesus cannot be studied in isolation, but only in relation to the early development of the movement that he founded. Distinguishing between later doctrinal developments, interpolated into the Gospels, and the authentic life and teaching of Jesus himself, becomes the main role of the type of historical criticism that interested Berryman. It is also the main critical context from which the figure of Jesus emerges in *The Dream Songs*, and, as such, he draws from historical criticism to construct his troubled portrait of Christ, as well as from the Gospels themselves.

In a number of Songs, Berryman weaves together complex intertextual strands to demonstrate various obstacles to belief. Song 48 is the primary example of this, in which he employs the Gospel, New Testament scholarship, Shakespeare and Greek Mythology, to wittily highlight apparent problems with Christian doctrine thrown up by historical criticism:

He yelled at me in Greek,
 my God!—It's not his language
 and I'm no good at—his is Aramaic,
 was—I am a monoglot of English
 (American version) and, say pieces from
 a baker's dozen others: where's the bread?

but rising in the Second Gospel, pal:
 The seed goes down, god dies,
 a rising happens,
 some crust, and then occurs an eating. He said so,
 a Greek idea,
 troublesome to imaginary jews,

like bitter Henry, full of the death of love,
 Cawdor-uneasy, disambitious, mourning
 the whole implausible necessary thing.
 He dropped his voice & sybilled of
 the death of the death of love.
 I ought to get going.

The Song is constructed round an apparently disjointed stream of pseudo-critical utterances, pieced together to form an elaborate intellectual joke. An absurd phantasmagoric scenario is evoked in which Henry encounters the distinctly unhistorical Christ: a very defamiliarised, almost dehumanised, figure; a kind of cultural Frankenstein's monster, who is attempting unsuccessfully to get his message across, through the obfuscation of linguistic and cultural difference barring his authentic message. This stratification of language, culture and—when it comes to faithfully transmitting the words of Christ—the truth, are what is foregrounded from the outset in Song 48. The first line features an act which is seemingly uncharacteristic of Jesus as he

is presented to us in the Gospels, at least in the ‘authorised’ English versions.

Occasionally he ‘calls out’ and ‘rebukes’, but in general throughout the Gospels the verbs used to report his speech acts are extremely simple and nondescript—the tone of the words themselves conveying the drama (viz. ‘he said’, ‘he answered’).²⁶ This tends to lend a certain authority, and even elusiveness, to the figure of Christ, because the verbs introducing his pronouncements do not convey tone, attitude, or personality. As far as possible, he is unmediated through human description; the absence of any attempt to describe his appearance is the most striking example of this imaginative restriction.

Berryman’s description of Christ ‘yelling’ is therefore unfamiliar and unsettling; it indicates a certain loss of control, or difficulty in communicating, on Christ’s part. The person of Christ remains a brutalised presence throughout the song; he ‘yells’ and ‘sybills’, with his words paraphrased and reported by Henry. The figure we are presented with, like Frankenstein’s monster, is a human creation: a figure whose message, as it comes to us through the Gospels, we cannot take to be authentic in any way. But these descriptions of his speech suggest an ungoverned and even shrill or vehement reaction. One rare Scriptural example of a more ‘characterful’ verb for Jesus’s verbal utterance, which is also echoed in the Song, is his final despairing words from the cross, in the first two Gospels. All the Synoptics remark that Jesus ‘cried out with a loud voice’; Matthew and Mark state that his words were: ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me’. Mark’s representation is arguably more authentic, since his words are a transliteration of the Aramaic—the language Jesus actually spoke—

²⁶ eg. He ‘calls’ James and John on seeing them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Mt 4.21), and he ‘rebukes’ the spirit of an unclean demon in the Capernaum synagogue (Lk 4.35).

whereas Matthew's variant is a transliteration of the Hebrew.²⁷ Both evangelists then provide a Greek translation of the words.

Henry's words on the one hand convey the sense of the commonplace profanity 'My God!' but on the other, serve as an incredulous-sounding affirmation of Jesus's divine nature, echoing Thomas's words to the risen Christ in John's Gospel.²⁸ 'My God!' is primarily an expression of disgust over the fact that Jesus's words are not in the language he actually spoke, but find their way to him via the mediation of a second party, and in a different language, from a nation with its own very different religious culture and traditions. The first line of this Dream Song is extremely reminiscent of Jesus's final words on the Cross; although since this is one of the few instances where Jesus's Aramaic words are reported directly, Berryman is obviously intending his words to refer to an instance of a doubtful utterance that comes our way only in the Greek. According to Haffenden, the poet states in a letter to A. Alvarez that he intended the words specifically to refer to what he called 'the most terrible pronouncement' of the 'Little Apocalypse', in Mark 13.²⁹ His prophecy of the 'death of the death of love,' in the third stanza, would appear to consolidate this reference, as it could easily be an allusion to Christ's pronouncement of the tribulation that will precede his Second Coming:

And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom [...] And brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.³⁰

²⁷ Cf. 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani' (Mk 15.34) and 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani' (Mt 27.46). Luke, instead, depicts Christ as 'crying with a loud voice [...] "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!"' (23.46).

²⁸ Jn 20.28.

²⁹ Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, pp.97-8.

³⁰ Mark 13.7-8, 12-13.

However, the extent to which this information helps the Song's interpretation is highly questionable, since in fact it only serves to provoke some grave problems. Guignebert, Berryman's most valued source, dismisses the Synoptic apocalypse as a 'wholly inauthentic discourse'; he argues that it is not from a Christian (and therefore Hellenistic) source, but is a type of apocalyptic writing, with its signs of the Great Day and Messianic manifestation, that is characteristically Jewish.³¹ He is far from being extreme in this particular view; A. H. McNeile—whom Berryman trusted above all others for general reference purposes and critical overview—states: 'there is a fairly general, though not quite universal, consensus that the discourse, in its original form, was at one time in circulation as an independent pamphlet. It contains, no doubt, some sayings of our Lord; but in the form known to St. Mark it appears to have been the work of a Jewish Christian who understood the Apocalypse of *Daniel* (as many have done ever since) as applying to the events immediately beyond his horizon.'³²

Even if, as Berryman indicated, the Song is intended to question Mark's pronouncement as representing the authentic discourse of Jesus, the fact that he makes a point about it coming to us in Greek is of little relevance beyond the fact that this is the language of Mark's Gospel. The poet may have intended to indicate that, incorporated into the Greek canon of the gentile Church as it was, the prophecy of the Little Apocalypse is part of the Hellenistic development of Christianity; but Mark 13 is a special case since it is generally considered to be derived from a Jewish source, and heavily influenced by the Jewish tradition of apocalyptic writing. One should therefore be wary of associating this discourse with the 'Greek idea', which troubles Henry as an 'imaginary Jew'.

³¹ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.343. He notes that this description of the apocalypse is 'totally incompatible with the gospel statement that the Lord will come *like the lightning*, without warning and at an hour when he is not expected.'

³² A. H. McNeile, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp.30-31.

However, it may trouble him primarily because the terrible apocalypse is something which, as Guignebert points out, is ‘completely in keeping with Jewish beliefs’.³³ Aside from that, it is difficult to see why Mark 13 should have any bearing on the Song.

The most important point that emerges from the first stanza concerns the intrinsic heteroglossia of language, which has implications for the meaning of any utterance; especially one from two thousand years ago, uttered in an archaic language and translated later into another, as part of a rapidly developing new religion.³⁴ Henry self-consciously declares: ‘I am a monoglot of English / (American version) and, say pieces from / a baker’s dozen others’. It is highly significant that Henry draws attention to himself at this point, using his own linguistic status as an example. He is showing that, even within one’s own language, there is evidence of wide stratifications; these are the product of often profound cultural differences, not to mention the ‘pieces from a baker’s dozen’ other languages, each with their own further stratifications, that one picks up and is influenced by along the way. Jesus himself was a cultural product, and in the case of the written Gospels that authoritatively proclaim his words, they are not even in his language; they are the language of the Gospel redactors and we have really no more than theories regarding their original sources. It is therefore impossible, from Henry’s point of view, to have any assurance of the historical authenticity of the words of Christ. Christianity, like any cultural movement, is to a large extent the product of heteroglossia. Berryman’s representation of heteroglossia also becomes to a large extent a critique of the concept of ‘absolute truth’; the meaning of an utterance is only

³³ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.343.

³⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, who coined the term ‘Heteroglossia’, defines it as ‘the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve.’ M.M.Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist. trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.428.

established in a dialogue with others, and that in itself is not static but constantly evolving. Henry, in this way, is alien to the message transposed to him from Jesus, a genuine Jew.

The purpose of the first stanza is hence to introduce a degree of scepticism from the outset. The second stanza is where the Song more seriously questions Christian doctrine, as a development, or interpretation of, the teachings of a founder whose authenticity has already been called into question. Berryman himself, however, draws from the imagery of the Gospel here, and evokes other discourses of Jesus; in this way, we are led into a rich tapestry of Gospel allusions, which the reader is also prompted to question. In fact, the discourses of Jesus that are evoked become to some extent self-reflective and are made to turn on themselves.

The Song is constructed as a stream-of-consciousness, initiated by the shock of being 'yelled' at by Christ. Henry's off-hand phrase ('pieces from a baker's dozen others') prompts what sounds clumsily like a rather strained word-association game. Yet it is nevertheless a witty self-exchange, since it introduces a flood of important Gospel allusions which further underline the Song thematically. They concern the 'bread' theme of Saint Mark's Gospel: in particular, Jesus's argument with his disciples in the boat, on the Sea of Galilee.³⁵ 'Where's the bread?' echoes the disciples' anxious enquiry as they worry about their lack of provisions; they misunderstand Jesus's warning about 'the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of the sadducees'. Jesus then reminds them about the feeding of the five thousand, and the subsequent feeding of the four thousand.

³⁵ Mt 16.5-12, Mk:8:14-21. Matthew's account is a slightly more developed version, as it explains the disciples' cluelessness. Berryman draws from both. I quote from his version here; in Mark's version Jesus warns them of 'the leaven of the pharisees and the leaven of Herod'. The Song would seem to echo Matthew's account more, because the evangelist explicitly states that the disciples then understood that Jesus was warning them to beware of false teachings.

that they had witnessed. He asks them how many baskets full of broken pieces they had collected, to which they respond: 'twelve' and 'seven' respectively. The poet recalls this to the reader's mind with Henry's phrase 'pieces from a baker's dozen'.

Jesus's act is generally interpreted as a demonstration of the abundant generosity of God, and the need to trust in divine providence for the provision of one's material and spiritual needs. This message is cunningly brought into question in the Song. 'Where's the bread?' becomes a question of faith, amounting to 'where's God in all this?' to which he pawkily responds: 'But rising in the Second Gospel, pal'. 'The bread' in this context becomes a slangy, streetwise-sounding nickname for Christ, who is 'the bread of life.' The word-association run at the end of the first stanza leads us on to the whole baking metaphor of the second stanza. Importantly, this is underlined by the echo of Jesus's caution about 'the leaven of the pharisees and the leaven of the sadducees'. As Matthew makes clear, Jesus was warning them to beware of the teachings of these people. The Song is similarly warning the reader to beware of the teachings of Christianity, which developed in a strongly Hellenistic context and may consequently be alien to the intentions of its Jewish founder, Jesus Christ. Central to this is the whole doctrine of the Resurrection, which the seed and baking metaphors represent.

According to Haffenden, 'the second stanza of the Song draws on Archbishop Carrington's analysis of the Second Seed Parable (*According to Mark* (Cambridge, 1960), pp.112-13).'³⁶ We must treat this information with some caution, however, since even by his own reckoning the Song was composed at least a year before Philip

³⁶ Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, p.98. Philip Carrington, *According to Mark: A Running Commentary on the Oldest Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

Carrington's book was actually published, let alone read by Berryman.³⁷ Aspects of Carrington's commentary are echoed in the Song, but these notions could have been drawn from other sources. Furthermore, even if the second stanza were a later addition, the Song's use of Carrington, whom Berryman cites in 'The Search' as a 'later' influence, would be of the most superficial kind, since the whole attitude and argument of the Song could not be more un-Carrington. In *According to Mark*, Carrington is fundamentally attempting to prove that there exists a natural (and therefore predestined) continuity from Judaism to Christianity, and Mark's Gospel is a reflection of this. In direct contrast to the sceptical historicist critics, such as Guignebert and Goguel, he believes that this evolution was foreseen and intended by Jesus Christ, and that the doctrinal development of the Christian Church was faithful to the teachings of its founder, as they were authentically transmitted through the apostles. Indeed, Carrington argues that Mark's Gospel was composed as a series of weekly lections, to be used in worship, in conformity with the Jewish liturgical calendar.

In marked contrast, in the Song Henry is taking an attitude far more in keeping with the line of the radical critics—that Christianity represents a major departure from Judaism and from what Christ, as a Jewish prophet, intended. The development of the Church and its doctrines represents a later Hellenistic influence, as the evolving faith spread beyond the Jewish community. Where such doctrinal developments, such as the Eucharist, are anticipated in the Gospels, it is because the redactors of those writings have interpolated into Jesus's life and teaching, concepts and ideas that were developed much later, but were not anticipated by Christ.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid, p.159. Haffenden dates the drafting of the Song as 22 February 1959, whereas *According to Mark* was not published until 1960. There is the possibility this refers to a very incomplete draft, which Berryman later added to, but its association with Carrington remains problematic.

³⁸ Berryman appears to be especially influenced by Guignebert in this respect: Guignebert has a tendency to dismiss as inauthentic any element of Jesus's teaching or of the Gospel narratives which coincides with

Berryman is, however, clearly drawing from Mark's seed parables; the Song reads as a conflation of them all, especially the second and third, as well as a parody of parables in general. In Mark's Gospel, each successive seed parable builds on, and deepens, the meaning of the previous one. Henry offers the similar progressive description of the life of a loaf of bread; Berryman adds to the absurdity by making it sound like the relating of a recipe, the conclusion being its consumption. The speaker, like the parable, takes the seed to be 'the Word'; or more specifically, the 'word made flesh', as in the Son of God. The absurdity is exacerbated by the fact that he deliberately undermines the symbolism, making the 'god' metaphor an explicit reference; thereby, together with reducing 'God' to a normal noun, denigrating the Incarnation (the dying and rising God-man of Christ) to that of an idol: i.e. one conception of the divine amongst many. The Resurrection is rejected by Guignebert and Goguel, and the poet, in line with their view, is also portraying the resurrected God-man as being very much a human formulation.³⁹

As well as the Second Seed Parable from Mark, the Song's description also echoes the Third, which begins: 'with what can we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it'—in the sense that it both grasps for, and supplies, an analogy.⁴⁰

Whereas Jesus's parable explains how the Kingdom of God must grow, Berryman's

a later tradition: eg. Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.315, 413, 458, 536. Goguel also frequently exhibits this tendency, and declares a guilty-until-proved-innocent approach to the Gospels: 'a Gospel incident cannot be considered authentic simply because there is no direct reason for believing it to have been created by tradition; on the contrary, we must be quite sure that there are positive reasons which make it impossible to think that it could have been created by it.' At the same time, however, he also warns against sweeping scepticism: 'the principle which has been laid down cannot be used in the opposite sense, and we have no right to affirm that every word or saying of Jesus which is in harmony with the conceptions of the Christianity of the Apostolic age is not authentic.' Maurice Goguel, *The Life of Jesus*, trans. by Olive Wyon (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), pp. 206-07.

³⁹ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.535-36; Maurice Goguel, *The Birth of Christianity*, trans. by H. C. Snape (New York: Macmillan, 1954), pp.64-66.

⁴⁰ Mk 4:30-32.

explains how Christianity has grown around the ‘Greek idea’ of resurrection.⁴¹ Unlike the Gospel parable, the analogy here is stretched to take in the human adulteration of the matured seed. The bread-baking reference reminds us to keep the ‘leaven of the Pharisees’ in mind, and here the ‘false teaching’ becomes the doctrine of the Resurrection and the institution of the Eucharist; in other words, the basic tenets of Christianity. He draws heavily on the uncompromising account of Guignebert on this matter, being clearly influenced by the French scholar’s own subversive use of the seed analogy.

To Guignebert, the doctrine of the Resurrection is important from the historical point of view, but only ‘in so far as it concerns the foundation, development and expansion of the Christian religion’:

By means of that belief, faith in Jesus and in his mission became the fundamental element of a new religion, which, after separating from, became the opponent of Judaism, and set out to conquer the world. It also rendered Christianity a favourable soil for syncretistic influences, by virtue of which the Jewish Messiah, unintelligible and uninteresting to the Greeks, became the Lord, the Saviour, the Son of God, the supreme Master of the Universe, before whom the whole creation bends the knee. The ground was prepared for it throughout the oriental world by the ancient myth of the dying and rising God.⁴²

Guignebert’s *Jesus* echoes throughout the second stanza, both ideologically and aesthetically; the seed, or the notion of the Jewish Messiah, is sown in Greek soil. In three short lines, Berryman creates a mock-parable illustrating the creation of Christianity. The use of the word ‘crust’ is also very loaded: as well as serving to extend the absurd bread-baking metaphor, it conveys the sense of a deceptive outer-layer, which is hard to penetrate; in this sense, concealing the truth of its origins. This

⁴¹ As Carrington explains ‘the seed knows how to die and rise again: that indeed is the purpose of the seed. It has in it the secret of eternal life’ and further ‘*the Kingdom of God will not advance or increase or multiply among men without passing through death to life*’. Carrington, *According to Mark*, p.114.

⁴² Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.536.

scepticism is further evident in his consideration of the Eucharist. The ‘troublesome’ nature of this development is made apparent in the fourth line with the large space between ‘occurs’ and ‘an eating’, as if Henry is puzzling at what he regards as the absurdity of the Sacrament.

Again, Berryman clearly draws on Guignebert, who argues that the idea of a Sacramental communion with Jesus, by the company of believers, was also mainly the result of Hellenistic influence; for ‘the Eucharist as a sacrament of communion with the Lord is wholly foreign to his [Jesus’s] thought’.⁴³ He concludes that by interpreting the Last Supper as an instituting of the Eucharist, we ‘attribute to Jesus a concern with and a knowledge of things only shared by the Greek environment of Paul’s time and our conservative critics’.⁴⁴ Henry’s ‘He said so’ consequently becomes an extremely ironic and facetious assertion. There is further reason for Henry, as an ‘imaginary Jew’, to feel troubled; at least by the tenets of radical New Testament criticism, which argues for a further distortion of Christ’s intentions. The overriding purpose of Jesus’s ministry was the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom (although precisely what He meant by that is uncertain). He did not intend the establishment of ‘the Church’ as it came to be, with the development of Hellenistic doctrine; nor did he intend the ‘universalism’ of this Church, as such an idea was entirely alien to him as a pious Jew. However, after being generally rejected by His own people, the message found greater favour amongst the gentiles, so ‘by the time the Synoptics were edited, the faith had been transplanted

⁴³ Ibid, pp.323, 365. In defence of his claim, Guignebert attempts to demonstrate the inconsistencies of the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, and therefore the redactionary nature of the instituting of the Eucharist. In regard to the account in Mark’s Gospel (and hence the source material for the other two Synoptics), he states: ‘Even if the earliest tradition had retained an exact memory of the last scene around the table between Jesus and his disciples, it has been overlaid and obliterated by the ritual and liturgical considerations which occupied the minds of the generation of Christians which Mark represents’ (p.432).

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.448.

into Greek soil' (p.314).⁴⁵ The message that Henry first rejected is now, in a completely distorted form, being offered to him again.

Henry is troubled by the way this 'Jewish prophet' has become completely divorced from his context and the intention of his message, through the formation and development of this new religion, which has been profoundly influenced by the syncretistic, and especially Hellenistic, cultural influences. The Song shows how Henry's concern is not merely a case of something authentic being lost in translation. The Song in the second stanza goes way beyond a concern with language; the whole structure and belief system itself is a product of cultural influences, which have diverted the religion away from the intention of its founder. The question of language in the first stanza is enough to arouse his suspicion, and this develops into a full-scale scepticism regarding the development of Christian doctrine in the second. The implications for the Jewish race are profound, as the poet portrays them in the final 'Macbeth' stanza, where Henry is 'Cawdor-uneasy'.

The Macbeth allegory conveys the involuntary Judas-complex that Henry feels on behalf of the Jewish race. 'Full of the death of love' is certainly a description we could apply to Macbeth once he has killed Duncan. Macbeth is both uneasy and suspicious when he hears the witches' prophecy, until he hears of its partial fulfilment with the bestowal of his new title: 'The Thane of Cawdor'. He is fearfully reluctant to fulfil voluntarily the next part of the prophecy by killing Duncan, the King. Macbeth is not a villain in the conventional sense; he did not seek the prophecy itself through ambition, but had this fateful intelligence thrust upon him; as such we do sympathise with him, despite his later penchant for atrocities. The Thane of Cawdor is a doomed title from the

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.314.

outset, as we know that the sitting Thane is a traitor; there is an element of sinister predestination about it. The title signifies treachery from within, as the Thane has assisted the invading Norwegians (I:ii).

The question which arises from *Macbeth* is: to what extent did Macbeth have self-determination in the fulfilment of the prophecy? Did Macbeth fulfil the prophecy of his own free will, by slaying Duncan, or was it predestined that he would perform that very act, at that time, so he was ultimately incapable of choosing otherwise? This is shown to be an anxiety of Macbeth himself, as he is uncertain as to whether the 'air drawn' dagger is real or a manifestation of his evil intent. Certainly after the fulfilment of this prophecy his own belief in the supernatural is absolute, and he hangs on to the further prophecies of the witches (as long as they are favourable), as well as the reality of Banquo's ghost (although he is the only one who sees it). The intellectual uncertainty on the part of the audience gives the play its quality of uncanniness.

Berryman is clearly paralleling the predicament of Macbeth with that of the Jews and their fateful place in God's plan. The Jews, as the chosen people, were, according to the New Testament, prophesied to reject their Messiah and betray him into the hands of sinners, assisting the Roman authorities in his downfall. The question of free will is especially pertinent in the case of Judas: was he created from the outset with the propensity to betray his Creator? Could he really have chosen not to betray Christ? Many, throughout history, have misinterpreted the New Testament as espousing the guilt as collective, on behalf of the whole Jewish race, especially with regard to the blood-curse of Matthew's Gospel; this is why Henry also feels implicated.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ 'And all the people answered, His blood be on us and on our children!' Mt 27.25.

‘Disambitious’ is a nonce-word carefully chosen to align Henry with Macbeth, whose ‘ambition’ is a constant reference point in the play.⁴⁷ Rather than ‘unambitious’, Berryman’s choice of word signifies more of a diverted or unhinged ambition; it precisely conveys the uneasy ambition one must have to execute something inevitable, that one also knows is destructive and evil. The first line of the Song places Henry directly in the drama of the Gospel story itself, from the outset; so Henry is more dramatically placed in the midst of the betrayal and immediacy of the Jewish predicament. The ‘whole implausible necessary thing’ therefore becomes, not just the inevitable betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, but also, in view of the second stanza, suggests reluctantly accepting the whole of God’s plan of salvation, as espoused by the teaching authority of the Church, which developed after it.

It is a Church that, in Henry’s view, has become saturated with an alien theology through its expansion into Hellenistic gentile realms; ‘the whole implausible necessary thing’ is also a very evocative expression of Henry’s, and most certainly Berryman’s, ambivalence towards the Christian faith. Despite the problems he encountered in establishing for himself the authenticity of the Gospel accounts, he still found the pursuit of the resolutions to such doubts utterly necessary. This zeal was maintained through to the end of his career, and most definitely played a major part in his scholarship.

There has already been some useful speculation about the neologism ‘sybilled’, which Berryman employs to describe Christ’s prophesying. Boyd Thomes links its use to that of Kierkegaard’s notion of ‘despair’, amounting to a ‘distance from God’ (loss of the father):

⁴⁷ Although it is a ‘vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself’ (1:7) and it is ‘without / the illness should attend it’ (1:5).

The Sybil, whom Aeneas met at Cumae, was able to provide Aeneas with the Talisman, The Golden Bough, which enables him (Aeneas) to actually get to the other side, to cross the river, to actually visit with *his* father (Anchises) and, more importantly, to get back. Having touched base with The Father (if only imaginatively and vicariously) Henry is able, momentarily, to experience relief from despair ('the death of the death of love') and so, for a while, to get going.⁴⁸

It could also be inferred from this plausible mythological allusion that Christ is here offering himself as the (only) way to the Father, as indeed the Fourth Gospel reports Jesus as saying.⁴⁹ Furthermore, as Ryder suggests, Christ 'sybiling' of 'the death of the death of love' is most likely a reference to the Second Coming, with the conquering of evil and the reign of peace and justice which this event is meant to herald.⁵⁰ We can therefore see the last line as Henry's very uncertain, or very reluctant, response to Christ's invitation to come through him to the Father. The poet accents 'ought', and the heavy stress that this necessitates from the reader conveys the sense of reluctant duty, a response which lacks enthusiasm or whole-hearted commitment. But the final line is sufficiently ambiguous also to allow the possibility of Henry not accepting the invitation, as in the sense of 'I ought to get going (as in follow or approach Christ) – but I'm not sure I will'. It can also be taken to mean simply 'I ought to get out of here'—to escape from the Christ figure and his unnerving proclamations whose authenticity he doubts.

Given the sceptical doubts that are expressed throughout the Song, outright rejection and reluctant pursuit of the 'whole implausible necessary thing' are both possible.

However, given the mythological reference, and the fact that the Christ-figure is

⁴⁸ Boyd Thomes, 'A Few Personal Mini-Glosses to Some Dream Songs', p.9. These are a collection of unpublished notes and recollections by Berryman's friend and doctor on those songs he recalls 'having had some inside information on'.

⁴⁹ Jesus said to him [Thomas], 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.' John 14:6.

⁵⁰ Ryder, 'Annotations', p.87.

announcing ‘the death of the death of love’, a reluctant compulsion to follow, or at least not flee from the invitation of Christ, would be more probable. This gives another possible reading of the last line: ‘I ought to get going but I might stay’. In this sense, the Song consequently seems to exemplify Berryman’s attitude towards Christ and Christianity at that particular time. He was filled with profound doubts about the historical authenticity of the Christ of the New Testament, and, accordingly, of the religious authenticity of Christianity. However, he still felt a great attraction and curiosity towards both, which impelled him to pursue the matter further.

Song 220

Song 220 is thematically and conceptually linked to Song 48 as it attempts to portray Christianity’s possible misrepresentation of Christ, the ‘Jewish Prophet’, as the faith developed away from the intentions of its founder. It portrays another major tenet of Christian belief as a distortion of Judaism, the faith practised and proclaimed by Christ. It concerns the concept of the Parousia, or second coming, which from the perspective of the Jews is a distorted expectation of the first coming of the promised Messiah. The Song further demonstrates Berryman’s tendency to draw inspiration directly from his New Testament scholarship, treating these secondary sources almost as primary ones and fully engaging in the critical discourse they promote. There is the usual critical polyphony in the Song that often characterises his work and one can detect a wide consideration of the issues concerning the Messiah; however, it is the commentary of Guignebert, particularly from his book *Jesus* (1933), which dominates the proceedings.⁵¹

⁵¹ First published in French in 1933; the first English edition was published in 1935. Berryman used a reprinted 1956 edition in which Guignebert’s text was left unrevised and so, as Robert H. Pfeiffer states in the new foreword, it ‘is therefore not entirely up to date. But it furnishes an excellent introduction to the subject, a reliable guide to beginners, and an informing manual for scholars.’ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.xi.

—If we're not Jews, how can messiah come?
 Praise God, brothers, Who is a coloured man.
 (Some time we'll do it again,
 in whiteface.) 'Rám,' was his last word, like 'Mary'
 or 'OM' or a perishing new grunt.
 (winged 'em.) Kingdom? Some.

My God! they'm be surprised to see Your face,
 all your admirers, in their taffeta,
 or—upon thought—not all:
 we will not wonder, will us, Mr Bones,
 when either He looms down or wifout trace
 we vanisheth. It's tall

time now in Ghetto-town: it's curtain-call:
 hard now to read the time. Seem to Me I'm
 not altogether the same
 pro-man I strutted out from the wings as,
 like losing faith. Counsel me, Mr Bones.
 —my friend, the clingdom has come.

The Song is stylistically characterised by certain typical features of the Dream Song format, though here they are employed to questionable effect. One may perceive as least successful the very bitty scrambled use of uncouth diction and syntax. As in Songs 48 and 234, which also concern the historical authenticity of Christianity, it appears to throw open a disjointed range of interpretative possibilities that one is hard pressed to unify into a truly coherent statement of intent. Because the Song itself concerns the theme of misrepresentation, or the inaccurate rendering of Christ's life and teaching, an ambiguous statement from the poet on the subject would seem almost appropriately ironic. As will become apparent, however, the diction is far from arbitrary and there is a purposeful, albeit carnivalesque method to the Song, the ultimate inconclusiveness of which can only be seen as representative of the apparently unassailable problem at hand.

Like most of the religious Songs, it is intended to engage humanistically with the theological issues it raises; but it is unusual in that it portrays the melodramatic

emotional life not of Henry, the central character of *The Dream Songs*, but of Henry's blackface friend, his interlocutor in the minstrel show. Because the subject of the 'long poem' is Henry's evolving consciousness, the fact that the discourse is exterior to Henry foregrounds further the performance aspect of the Song, in which the minstrel show format is a defining feature, due to the speaker remaining in blackface virtually throughout. Certain musical features, such as the jaunty closure of the first stanza with its strong internal perfect rhymes, are subversively absurd in view of the profound theological matter the Song entertains. A theatrical campness also pervades the Song, with images such as Christ's followers in their bright silk taffetas and Henry's friend 'strutting out from the wings'. It all contributes towards a spectacularly carnivalesque effect, which demonstrates Berryman's unique talent for inventing subversive and humorous vehicles for exploring profound, but potentially dry and alienating, scholarly subjects. There is unfortunately sometimes the danger of inadvertently complicating and obscuring such matters in the process and, as will become evident, this is a flaw in nearly all of the Dream Songs that deal with the question of Christianity.

The poet maintains a very consistent Negro dialect throughout the performance, as he deals with the weighty theological themes through the medium of Henry's friend. He is characterised by a trusting faith, in contrast to the more inherently sceptical Henry; but here that faith is being put to the test by the power of historical criticism. This Song above all demonstrates the benefit of the Dream Song format as a vehicle for Berryman's theological concerns. Such characterisation removes the issue at hand from its rarefied academic context, and places it within the practical and more immediate realms of an individual's experience, thereby demonstrating the actual consequences of the problem on the personal faith and life of the Everyman. The character can also be used to innocently point out self-evident points that are often obscured by academic

enquiry; however, this can also obscure or complicate the problem itself, something that has arguably occurred here.

Within the framework of the vaudeville performance a similar sceptical-historical point to that made in Song 48 is being introduced: that is, the divergent religious proclivities of different individuals and cultures have directed Christianity away from the message and intentions of its founder; in this case, it produces the perpetually frustrated expectation of the Parousia. Once again, Berryman draws predominantly from his readings of Guignebert and Goguel, and their commentaries on this particular subject echo through the Song. The point about the opening line is that the notion of the ‘messiah’ is a specifically Jewish concept. Historically, it was an essentially nationalistic expectation; the messiah would come to liberate Israel from its oppressors and restore the glory of His chosen people. As far as Berryman’s sceptical sources are concerned, Christ was fundamentally a devout Jew who was mostly, but not entirely, in conformity with the (albeit varied) Messianic expectations of his countrymen, although he himself never claimed to be the Messiah. The early Christian Church interpolated his claim to Messiahship into Christ’s teaching, imposing retroactively what was a later development of the new religion.⁵²

Two further important points must be made about the Jewish concept of the Messiah which are relevant to the Song. Firstly, the Messiah (meaning ‘anointed’) was, and still is today, a largely indefinable concept for the Jews themselves; their expectations about what shape the Messiah would take were determined by their different interpretations of Scripture, as well as the ideas of various religious schools. In the Hebrew Bible, the term is primarily applied to ‘God’s anointed’ or the Kings; in particular, the descendants

⁵² See Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.268-95; Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, pp.310-21, 572-78.

of David. As Judaism developed, the royal imagery began to be applied to the idea of a longed-for future King, who would bring about an era of peace and prosperity to Israel. As John F. A. Sawyer states: ‘at the heart of biblical messianism is the idea that God intervenes in history by sending a saviour to deliver his people from suffering and injustice.’⁵³ Jesus, along with his contemporaries, associated the Messiah’s entry into the world with that of the foundation of the Kingdom of God. The Messiah will enact the power of God’s judgement whereby His enemies will be destroyed and the elect will be taken up into the new world.⁵⁴ Jesus’s message in relation to this was essentially one of preparation, and Goguel’s explanation of the matter can be seen as the principle behind the Song’s religious tension:

The preaching and the activity of Jesus was not intended to hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom will come at the moment appointed for it by God; its establishment will be an act of His omnipotence. Men can do nothing in this sphere, but they realize in themselves such sentiments and live such a life that they will be ready to enter it when it comes. It was to this that Jesus summoned.⁵⁵

The anxious anticipation of the Apocalypse and the second coming is also a major theme in a number of other Dream Songs, most importantly Songs 46 and 347. These Songs portray the anxiety aroused by the anticipation of this promised occurrence. God could spring His Kingdom on humanity at any time; the fact that it is out of Henry’s, as well as humanity’s, hands is a source of unassailable vulnerability. This is particularly the case in Song 220, where the anticipation is both a requisite of and possible threat to faith. The delayed fulfilment of this expectation arouses a crisis of faith, leading the speaker to question the authenticity of this prophecy and by extension the religion with which it is associated. In the first line of the Song, Henry’s friend gives voice to this doubt, calling into question a central tenet of Christian belief; there is a sense of

⁵³ John F. A. Sawyer, ‘Messiah’, *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p.514.

⁵⁴ Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p313.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

bewilderment in his enquiry, the beginning of a sceptical reflection on the whole notion of the Parousia in the light of its apparent delay. The implication is that he, as a Christian, is waiting for something that will never come to him anyway. He is considering a similar view to that purported by Guignebert: that universalism was never a feature of Christ's belief or preaching and that he held the predominant Jewish belief of the time: that the Messiah would come to liberate only the people of Israel.⁵⁶ The Song begins by questioning the fundamental Christian notion of universality: the idea that central to the new religion is the fact that Christ opened the opportunity of salvation to all, gentiles as well as Jews.

The second point is that to the Jews the Messianic age has not yet arrived; they are still waiting for it. The Song implicitly conveys the conclusions of Guignebert who rejects the portrayal of Jesus's self-awareness regarding his Messianic identity, as well as any proclamation of it in his teaching. Rather, such proclamations, together with the notion of universality, are regarded as an interpolation of later tradition; a tradition that developed after the faith had spread into the gentile, particularly Hellenistic, world.⁵⁷ Therefore in essence, the true believer should be still waiting for, not the second, but the first coming. Furthermore, for the Christian gentile such waiting is futile, since the Messiah will in any case be coming only for the people of Israel.

This sceptical view of Christianity is rather subtly conveyed in the Song by the implications of the minstrel routine. The questioning of Christianity's notion of universality leads the poet, through Henry's friend, to consider the consequences of this

⁵⁶ See Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.314-24. Goguel also reflects on Jesus's anti-universalist thinking. Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, pp.321-22.

⁵⁷ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.286-95. Goguel's view is different; he believes Jesus over the course of his ministry did develop a notion that he was the Messiah 'because he had to suffer'. Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.392.

notion in practice, with the subsequent stratification of the faith veering it away from the intentions of Christ. The second line features the interlocutor's expression of misplaced religious exclusivity; through his blackface persona, we have a satirical expression of evangelicalism corrupted by the rhetoric of 1960's black-supremacism. However, the interlocutor announces his intention to be even-handed; it is a minstrel show after all, and so the same corruption by white-supremacism will also be addressed, when it is done 'again / in whiteface'. He is in no hurry, however, as the qualification 'some time' implies a wry comment on the dynamics of race politics. These absurd highly satirical pronouncements, together with the religious heteroglossia that follows, foreground the notion that man's sense of the divine is moulded in conformity to differing cultural expectations, a principle Berryman also entertains in Song 48. The Song suggests that the proliferating multi-conceptions of the divine amongst humanity are the result of conforming the faith to one's own expectations, rather than vice-versa.

This is a suggestion emphasised by the short discourse on 'his last word[s]' that follows. The poet is inviting us to regard this question of authenticity in the light of the inconsistencies between the different Gospel accounts, in particular the different versions of the final words that Christ is reported to have uttered on the Cross. There are three completely different versions given in the four Gospels. The implication is that they can't all be authentic utterances, so several of them must be the result of editorial redaction, affected for either literary or theological reasons. As the radical critics such as Guignebert argue, such redaction often demonstrates the different theological traditions of the communities of the early Church. We must see this discourse in the context of the other Dream Songs where alternative versions of Christ's 'last words' are

provided; in fact, he supplies alternatives from three Gospels.⁵⁸ In Song 48 and the unpublished 'Maris' Song the last words of Christ are also included in a circumstance that challenges the authenticity of the Gospels.⁵⁹

The first utterance the poet records in Song 220 is not actually a word as such, but a description of an utterance. 'Rám' or 'ra-am' is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that in its noun form is translated 'thunder', but in its verb form means 'to rage, to rave, to roar'.⁶⁰ It is most likely the latter form that the Song employs and it alludes to the loud cry uttered by Jesus at the point of his death. The three Synoptic writers record this, although John does not, portraying instead a remarkably composed Jesus.⁶¹ It can be seen more precisely to refer only to Matthew and Mark since the loud cry in Luke also takes the form of the words: 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit' (Lk 23.46). In Matthew and Mark he emits a final non-verbal cry after his actual last words, or rather the writer does not identify the second cry as a verbal utterance. The assertion that this act of roaring 'was his last word' has a range of implications. Firstly, there is an element of jest in the interlocutor's speech; his 'last word' was not a word at all, but something altogether more primal and animalistic; it is an attempt to defamiliarise Christ in a manner similar to that of Song 48, where Henry relates how Christ 'yelled' at him. Even though we are informed by the Synoptic writers of his 'cry with a loud voice', the poet's use of the Hebrew and Aramaic verb implies an aggressive loss of control that one finds absurd, but also unsettling, in the light of the distinctly inexpressive language that the

⁵⁸ 'My God...[my God, why hast thou forsaken me]' from Matthew and Mark's Gospel (Mt 27.46, Mk 15.34) in Song 48; 'Tetelestai' from John 19.30 in Song 354 and the unpublished 'Maris, my dear'.

⁵⁹ See my commentary on the 'Maris' Song below.

⁶⁰ Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Ra'am". "The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon"

<<http://www.biblestudytools.net/Lexicons/Hebrew/hebrew.cgi?number=7481&version=kjv>> [accessed 9 April 2004]. Ryder mistakenly identifies 'Rám' as a transliteration of the Hebrew for 'spirit', and concludes that his 'last word' must allude to Luke 23.46: 'Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!'. Ryder, 'Annotations', p.191.

⁶¹ Cf. Mark 15:37; Matthew 27:50; Luke 23:46.

Gospel writers employ when introducing Jesus's utterances. It represents a literary construction of Christ to challenge the theological construction of the Gospel redactors.

There are further more important thematic implications based on the commentaries from which the poet draws; the fourth line of the Song does in fact confirm the conclusions of both Goguel and Guignebert, despite the views of each being entirely different on the matter. In the circumstance of a Dream Song such as this, however, the synthesis of contradictions is both a stylistic and thematic feature, since uncertainty is part of the religious outlook. Taking 'Rám' to refer to the first two Gospels, the interlocutor's statement affirms the view expressed by Goguel. He argues that the Marcan source, which Matthew retains, is the authentic representation of Jesus's final moments. It represents an expression of despair and abandonment by God that the other evangelists found impossible to accept. This is because it contrasts so sharply with the image of the Son being in perfect communion with the Father, as well as the 'absolute serenity attributed to him' in the earlier stages of his self-foreseen Passion. The very fact that Luke and John felt obliged to alter it proves its authenticity. Goguel argues that Matthew and Mark must have felt absolutely bound by the authenticity of tradition to retain what could otherwise have been a less problematic utterance.⁶²

With the confirmation that this last despairing word is authentic, Berryman is expressing a belief that he outlines in more detail in 'The Disguises of God', an unfinished essay from the mid-1950s. The essay considers the problem of the hypostatic union, the belief that Jesus was both fully human and divine; he finds the coinciding belief that Christ was therefore also without sin problematic:

⁶² Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.541.

Christ [...] underwent the whole punishment for sin: humiliation, scourging, crucifixion. All but remorse. The question is whether this makes him human enough to—I don't know what to say—to trust. Nor does it seem consistent with the teaching of the Church that he was very man, since all men sin and all men are sorry for it at some time.

He concludes that the last words of Jesus on the cross demonstrate that 'Christ did not only sin, [...] but committed before us the worst sin: Despair. He lost faith.' For Berryman, this would not make Jesus any less divine, since 'such a God knows where we are, Who was there, and might reach across for us—as well as down.'⁶³ In this way, the poet developed his own characteristic Christology during the period which found its way into certain other Dream Songs, including Song 234 'The Carpenter's Son' (see below); although Henry does not always appear as convinced about Christ's divine nature.

It is also apparent that the fourth line of the Song has been directly inspired by Guignebert's commentary on the Crucifixion. Guignebert disputes the authenticity of Jesus's words from the Cross in all of the Gospel accounts. He argues that the Psalmic quotations in the Synoptics, such as Jesus's final words, clearly demonstrate that such utterances are the redactor's attempt in each case to show the fulfilment of prophecy.⁶⁴ Furthermore, 'the anguished breathing which overwhelms the sufferer', from the very beginning of a crucifixion, would render him incapable of making such a loud cry, especially after several hours. Guignebert most pertinently adds:

There is every likelihood that the cry itself corresponds more closely with the purpose of the writer than with an actual memory. The first purpose that suggests itself is the fulfilment of 'a scripture,' namely, Joel 3.16: 'The Lord also shall *roar* out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem: and the heavens and the earth shall shake' [...] If our

⁶³ U Minn, JBP, Unpub. Prose, Box 1, A-Mid, #28, 'The Disguises of God', MS, 7pp (pp.3-4).

⁶⁴ Goguel on the contrary argues that this in itself does not invalidate their authenticity: 'The fact that Jesus expressed his sense of desolation by a phrase from a psalm is not at all surprising, for his mind was stooped in psalms.' Goguel. *Life of Jesus*, p.541.

scriptural comparison is correct we must understand the Evangelist's idea to be that the cry marks the victory which Jesus on the cross has won over death and the Devil [*my italics*].⁶⁵

Given that the Song includes other heavy traces of the French scholar's commentary, this would clearly seem to be the poet's source, and he has seen fit to quote Joel in Hebrew.⁶⁶ One can regard Berryman's use of 'Rám' as being more than mere poetic affectation, because it signifies what he regards as the authenticity of Christ's utterance, rather than merely an invention in Greek by the Gospel redactors. However, in view of the commentary from which it is derived, and the thematic context of the stanza, it is more precisely to be regarded as affirming the authenticity of the attempt by the redactors to fulfil prophecy. It conveys a sense of parodic authenticity. In other words, this theological construction of Jesus's last moments really was inspired by the desire to fulfil this prophecy.

The alternative 'last words' the interlocutor offers us are, in a deceptively off-hand way, intended to further persuade his audience of the artificiality of the Gospel accounts. 'Mary' as a 'last word' must allude to the instance in the Fourth Gospel where Jesus from the Cross bestows his mother upon the beloved disciple and vice versa; but there are a number of further connotations, including an allusion to 'the women' who represent the Crucifixion's most important witnesses.⁶⁷ The flow of his argument

⁶⁵ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.485-87.

⁶⁶ The Hebrew word 'ra-am' is not itself actually found in that segment of Joel: instead, another verb with a very similar meaning—'sha-ag' (to roar)—is used. This suggests that Berryman was not attempting to accurately quote the prophet himself, but merely trying to give his understanding of the English translation an air of authenticity. With his limited knowledge of Hebrew, he may have assumed that this is the form Joel would have used, without checking otherwise. Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Sha-ag". "The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon" <<http://www.biblestudytools.net/Lexicons/Hebrew/hebrew.cgi?number=07580&version=kjv>> [accessed 9 April 2004]

⁶⁷ 'But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Mother, behold your son!" Then he said to the other disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.' Jn 19.25-27.

appears directly to follow Guignebert's, the poet's choice of words being intended to evoke the same critical notions. Guignebert states as a 'matter of fact' that 'early tradition [...] was not in a position to do more than assert the essential facts: Jesus was arrested, tried, condemned and executed. *Of that alone are we certain*'. All further details of the Passion and Crucifixion accounts, such as Christ's last words, Guignebert considers to be redactional attempts to fulfil 'the needs of Christian apologetics'. The evangelists, painfully aware of their flimsy evidence, attempt to lend credibility to what are portrayed as eyewitness accounts by inserting 'the women' into the scene, in place of the disciples who had deserted. He forcefully states that 'the presence of the women that constitutes the guarantee [of the truth of the Crucifixion scene] is so necessary to tradition that it was practically bound to be inserted'. The Johannine scene where Jesus delivers his last instructions to his mother and his beloved disciple is declared to be the most 'dubious' of all: 'it represents the same anxiety—to establish a tradition.'⁶⁸

The interlocutor is introducing the name 'Mary', not as one specific utterance of Jesus, or as a reference to one particular person; but rather, as an evocation of this whole cluster of problems for the sceptic relating to the witnesses of the Crucifixion, and, therefore, the possible interpolation of tradition on to history. The comparative clause in the fourth line should be seen not just as offering alternative utterances of Jesus, but also offering other instances of dubious redactionism, with 'OM' clearly being an act of facetiousness on the interlocutor's part. 'Mary' represents the dubiety of the witnesses for this central tenet of the Christian faith, for the Gospel accounts differ on the matter. There were two other 'Marys' accompanying Jesus's mother, according to John's account: Mary Magdelene and Mary the wife of Clopas.⁶⁹ Matthew and Mark mention

⁶⁸ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.486-89.

⁶⁹ John includes: '[Jesus'] mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdelene' (Jn 19.25). There is dispute over whether John is describing 3 or 4 women present; i.e. it is

Mary Magdelene but not Christ's mother, and they identify the second Mary as the mother of James, as well as identifying an additional woman.⁷⁰ Hence, establishing the evidence for the Crucifixion account, as it comes to us through tradition, becomes problematic from the outset, due to the difficulty in accurately identifying the witnesses. Luke's description of the same scene does not identify individual witnesses at all, and Guignebert argues that it actually betrays the intention of all the Gospel redactors to convey the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, especially since it appears to be derived from Psalm 37.11-2.⁷¹ Hence, one can see how the poet has drawn here from Guignebert's commentary, and it is especially apposite to place 'Mary', with all its connotations, as a comparison with 'Ràm'; both are an attempt, on Guignebert's terms, to convey the intention that inspired the redaction.

The association of 'Mary' with 'his last word' also draws us to the Johannine scene in particular, because of Jesus's last instructions from the Cross. For the sceptic, the suspicion of theological redactionism falls acutely on John, because the presence of Jesus's mother and the beloved disciple is not corroborated by the Synoptic accounts; indeed, Matthew and Mark state clearly that the other disciples had fled, without

not clear whether 'his mother's sister' refers to 'Mary the wife of Clopas' or not. Hence, there is even more reason why the interlocutor should evoke this scene, particularly in the Fourth Gospel, as being a source of historical problems.

⁷⁰ Matthew states that 'there were many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him; among whom were Mary Magdelene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee' (Mt 27.55-56). Mark identifies the women 'looking on from afar' as: 'Mary Magdelene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome', and mentions unidentified others (Mk 15.40-41). Brooke Foss Westcott, in his commentary of the Crucifixion scene in John, identifies the three women (besides Jesus's mother) mentioned in each account as the same people but differently described. However, despite Berryman's great respect for Westcott, sympathy with this view is not really implied by the Song. *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorised Version*, ed. by Brooke Foss Westcott (London: Clarke, 1958), p.275-76.

⁷¹ Luke, in contrast to the other evangelists, mentions that 'his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things' (Lk. 23.49). He does, however, later identify 'some of the women who had come with him from Galilee' when they discover the empty tomb and report it to the apostles. He identifies: 'Mary Magdelene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James' (Lk 24.10). Guignebert draws attention to the following verse: 'My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my kinsmen stand afar off' (Ps 37.11). Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.489.

making any exceptions.⁷² Since Jesus's instructions are cited as scriptural authority concerning the doctrine of Mary, particularly her special role as 'Mother of the Church', challenging the historical authenticity of the historical account naturally has doctrinal implications, at least for Catholic and orthodox tradition.⁷³ In the context of the cultural stratification of religious expression that is conveyed by the Song, Marian devotion is consequently offered as an example of another distinct tradition that has arisen; it is sceptically portrayed as yet another expression of the divine amongst the many, one that is based on theo-cultural expectation rather than historical fact.

The example of 'Mary', moreover, also represents a challenge to the Resurrection accounts, at least that of John; since this is the word of recognition uttered by the risen Christ to Mary Magdelene in the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁴ It does serve to recall the similar inconsistencies between the Gospel accounts regarding the Resurrection appearances, as to where they took place and who witnessed them.⁷⁵ Berryman himself held to the belief that Christ only appeared to Peter and Paul, and so clearly regarded the appearances to either or both Marys in Matthew, Mark and John as fictitious.⁷⁶ To the poet, Luke's

⁷² Mt 26.56, Mk 14.50-52.

⁷³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, revised edition (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), pp.220-23.

⁷⁴ Jn 20.16

⁷⁵ In relation to 'Mary' there are the following differences between the canonical accounts: in John's Gospel, Jesus appears first to Mary Magdelene only, as she stands weeping outside the tomb after the other disciples have left. It is said to be early in the morning whilst it is 'still dark' (Jn 20.1-18). This conflicts with the accounts of the Synoptics, which also conflict with each other. In Matthew, Jesus appears to both Mary Magdelene and Mary the Mother of James 'toward the dawn' (Mt 28.1-10). In Mark, the two Marys mentioned in Matthew are accompanied by Salome; early in the day 'when the sun had risen' they find the empty tomb where the angel informs them that the risen Lord will appear in Galilee (Mk 16.1-8). Mk 16.9 then reports that the risen Lord appeared first to Mary Magdelene, before appearing to the others at undisclosed locations. As Mk 16.9-20 is generally considered not to have been written by the same author, but to be a later addition, this account is clearly problematic for the historian. In Luke the empty tomb is found 'at early dawn' by the same two Marys, Joanna and 'the other women with them', or at least these are the people identified that report the incident to the apostles. The risen Christ actually appears first of all to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and around the same time to Simon Peter (Lk 24.1-34). Hence, there are very wide discrepancies between the accounts, relating not only to who the risen Christ appeared to, but also when and where. For a further, more detailed dissemination of the Resurrection accounts and Berryman's main source on the matter, see Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp490-512.

⁷⁶ In his 1970 poem '1st Address to the Lord' from *Love & Fame*, Berryman remarks: 'and I believe as fixedly in the Resurrection-appearances to Peter and to Paul / as I believe I sit in this blue chair. / Only

account of the appearances is the closest to reality since it suggests Peter may have been the first witness. Since Luke does not include any of the women amongst the witnesses of the risen Lord, the suggestion of redaction, by the interlocutor's utterance 'Mary', is also an affirmation of the poet's conviction that Peter was the first.

To Henry's friend such historical problems are becoming an obstacle to faith, as they are to Henry in other Songs, and this disillusionment becomes more pronounced as the Song progresses. It leads him sarcastically to throw in a word ('OM') that is utterly alien to Christian tradition, as if to say: 'well he could have said anything'.⁷⁷ However, one may also detect a more positive relativistic message, which proposes the validity of all these religious proclivities, in the sense that they are all expressions of devotion to the same God. 'OM' is a Sanskrit mantric word in the Hindu tradition, whose utterance is emblematic of the Brahman (absolute reality); it brings one closer to the Brahman, since it replicates the sound of the vibration caused by its creation of existence. The effect, however, is intended to be more absurd than devotional, the image of Christ chanting a mantra on the Cross being culturally unfamiliar, as well as historically improbable.⁷⁸

All the utterances are made more pejorative by the last open-ended alternative he offers; 'a perishing new grunt' signifies a nonchalant and ignorant sounding utterance that denigrates the previous 'grunts' to the same status. It is a further defamiliarising of

that may have been a special case / to establish their initiatory faith.' Lecture notes show that this was a view he held consistently over time, based mainly on his readings of Cullman and Goguel. eg. U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, Humanities 62 class notes, MS, '62 – Xtian Origins'.

⁷⁷ 'OM' is a term used by the Brahmins to denote the one universal God, as Ryder notes: 'Annotations', p.191.

⁷⁸ In Tibetan and northern Buddhist culture it forms part of the sacred formula: 'Om mani padme hum' ('Om, the jewel, is in the lotus: Amen'). A young child is taught it before learning any other words and they are also the last words uttered by the righteous at the point of death. It is therefore very apt that the poet should represent them as the last words of Christ, even though not quite consistent with his cry of despair. Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, rev. by Ivor H. Evans (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1993), p.779.

Christ, the mysterious ‘grunting’ figure whom we have previously witnessed ‘yelling’ and ‘roaring’.⁷⁹ It is the image of Christ as the cultural Frankenstein’s Monster, constructed and shaped by the circumstances and theology of the respective Christian community. Repulsive and jarring as the diction is, it is also highly evocative; such representations of Christ’s life and teaching are here presented as ephemeral rather than eternal truths, since their credibility will be corroded by the progress of historical criticism.

The interlocutor remarks that these words are ‘winged’, an expression with a range of pertinent connotations. Given the Song’s theatrical terminology, ‘winged em’ would indicate that they are spontaneous improvised words, as in the sense ‘to wing it’. It suggests words prompted out of the necessity of performance, without preparation or forethought; or in the Guignebertian context of the stanza, they were words invented by the Gospel redactors to fill in facts and gaps in tradition which they did not possess. They have ‘winged it’ by drawing from the Old Testament and their own imaginations. ‘Winged *words*’ are also ‘highly significant or apposite words’ (*OED*); they are words which in this instance the interlocutor believes underline his sceptical case.

After examining these ‘last words’ of Jesus to illustrate what he suspects to be the inauthentic nature of Christian tradition, the interlocutor then applies this premise to the question with which he began. He inquires whether Jesus really did announce the Kingdom, and to whom. The closure of the first stanza reveals the extent to which Berryman was immersed in Gospel criticism, for the very structure of the Song is inspired by Guignebert’s chapter on ‘The Setting up of the Kingdom’ in *Jesus*. The Song is not only framed by the notion of the coming of the Kingdom and the Messiah,

⁷⁹ Cf. Song 48.

but also by the French scholar's questioning of it. It is a striking example of the way key passages of his favourite sources tend to echo through particular Songs. Indeed, this is one of those Songs where the poet clearly intended to poeticise a specific passage of criticism that struck him as especially significant or interesting.⁸⁰

In Guignebert's view, certain key passages of Scripture prove that Jesus believed the coming of the Kingdom was imminent. He maintains that Jesus's proclamations concerning what 'this generation' shall experience (i.e. the coming of the Kingdom and the Parousia within the lifetime of his contemporaries) are very explicit; consequently, if these words are authentic, then Jesus was most clearly mistaken. He cites three instances in order to prove this, his first example being Mark 9.1: 'And he said unto them: Verily I say unto you that there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come with power'.⁸¹ Guignebert, with reference to another critic, remarks: 'it has been suspected (Loisy) that the word *some* was a correction due to the delay of the event and that the original reading ran: *all those who are here*. Further, it has been conjectured that the *logion* arose, after the death of Jesus, out of the desire to encourage the disciples and to confirm them in their expectation of the *parousia* [Guignebert's italics].'⁸²

The poet's use of the word 'some' is offered as a final conclusive example of redaction at the expense of historicity; it is a mischievous reminder of Jesus's apparently unfulfilled promise. As far as the Song is concerned Jesus was mistaken; even the adulterated version of Christ's prophesy proved unfulfilled, since none of his contemporaries lived to witness the second coming. Christ's discredited promise to the

⁸⁰ Songs 48 and 234 are also prime examples.

⁸¹ Guignebert also cites Mk 13.40 and Mt 10.23 as examples. Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.344-45.

⁸² M. J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Marc* (Paris:[n.pub.],1929), p.205. Quoted in Guignebert, *Jesus*, p344.

‘some’ stands at the end of the verse as an open question which refers back to the beginning; who are the ‘some’ who will witness the Messiah? Will He come only for the Jews as the promised Messiah, or will it be the second coming of Christ to judge the world, as foretold in the New Testament? The interlocutor has revealed through the course of the stanza how his confidence has been undermined in the latter.

Furthermore, the purpose of the Song’s satirical discourse on race and universality is to counter what Guignebert cites as the attempt of ‘resolute conservatives’ to reason that Jesus was not mistaken. He gives M. J. Lagrange’s defence of Mark 9.1 as an example: ‘It is permissible to consider the fall of Jerusalem as the fulfilment of this prophecy, since the Kingdom thereafter ceased to be confined to a single nation and was extended thereafter to embrace the Gentiles.’⁸³ The Song clearly engages with this notion of an extended Kingdom in what amounts to a mocking representation of such a viewpoint. The tone of this first stanza is essential to the critical perspective it imparts. The opening question is conveyed as a sudden declarative illumination of reason, an intellectual realisation of the Messianic concept in its true light: that is, an exclusively Jewish nationalistic conception. The interlocutor then conveys the more inclusive nature of the new Kingdom; though at the same time he promotes a highly exclusive vision of God (‘Praise God, brothers, Who is a coloured man’).

This constitutes a highly sardonic representation of the tendency to make the divine conform to one’s own cultural expectations; he is sceptical of mankind’s ability to harness this ‘universality’, even if it was true. Furthermore, it consequently prompts one to consider the notion that the Jewish Messianic consciousness may have been a creation of the same tendency to racial superiority, rather than an act of divine

⁸³ Ibid.

revelation. The implication is that this universality is not part of 'the divine plan'. at least not that to which Jesus subscribed, a standpoint previously expressed in Song 48. This is important because critics such as Lagrange attempt to portray Jesus as prophesying the extension of the kingdom to the gentiles in passages such as Mark 9.1; this is then used to defend Jesus against the charge of mistaken prophecy, since the second coming did not materialise within the lifetime of his generation. But to Guignebert, although it is legitimate to dispute the passage's authenticity, 'if its genuineness be once admitted it must be acknowledged that its meaning is entirely unambiguous.'⁸⁴ The stanza's closing word affirms this acknowledgement as, together with the previous two lines, it also disputes the authenticity of Jesus's recorded words.

The following two stanzas are far less complex and focus on expressing the consequences of these insights on the interlocutor's faith. The second stanza portrays Henry's friend's disassociation of himself from the 'admirers' of God; it is a dissociation accentuated by the shifting object of his address. A remnant of surety is expressed in the exclamation and address to God that opens the stanza, as if he is still confident of God's presence before him in prayer. However, the general tenor of the Song suggests that this is more the scornful mocking address of a man whose faith in God's existence has been undermined; he begins to exhibit the 'first phase of secularism.'⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ The poet's reading of Karl Heim would have familiarised him with the German theologian's notion of the 'stages of secularism', which he defines in relation to characters in the novels of Ernst Wiechert and E.E. Dwinger. Henry's, and in this case his interlocutor's, habit of mocking and/or accusing God of various evils, especially about His non-existence, is defined as the beginning of the process: 'This condition, in which a man accuses a person who, as he himself says, does not exist at all, and thus cannot merit any reproaches, is only the first phase of secularism, a state of fermentation, in which the wine is still new and is therefore not yet clear.' This is very much the stage in which Berryman has characterised Henry throughout the Dream Songs, and Henry's friend in Song 220 is also portrayed as being in this early stage of losing faith; it is a reasoned, intellectual mocking. This attitude contrasts with what Heim identifies as the final stage, which is the state of 'mature and serene secularism', that is 'free of any ill-feeling and of any complaining against fate. Modestly and unpretentiously the man takes his proper place

Proceeding from the discourse on Christ's last words, the exclamation 'My God!' itself echoes Christ's last words of despair and abandonment in Matthew and Mark.⁸⁶ It denotes an emerging sense of an absence of God, which also translates into a sense of scorn against His followers; a smug, knowing recognition that their expectations will prove unfulfilled. He considers that 'they'm be surprised' for several reasons. Firstly, that He comes at all, in view of his disparagement of the Gospel that has already been expressed; although this is the interlocutor projecting his own doubts, rather than expressing those of His Followers. Secondly, and most importantly, they'll be surprised because He is a Jew, who has come as Messiah only for the chosen people; whereas they are expecting 'a coloured man', an image of God that conforms to their own cultural expectations. Their 'taffeta' refers to what he sees as their overblown, empty and misguided rhetoric; it also evokes the image of His followers in Indian-style silk garments, and, consequently, presents a pejoratively cultish, even faddish image, in the same way such a sceptic might regard a group of Hare Krishnas. The interlocutor expresses a degree of self-satisfaction in his knowledge that it is the exclusively Jewish Messiah, if anyone at all, that they will witness.

With the significant shift of addressee—'we will not wonder, will us, Mr Bones'—which underlines his attempted agnosticism, he then declares his own personal indifference to the matter; but his need for reassurance from Henry indicates a certain false bravado, masking a deep sense of insecurity and uncertainty. This sense of God-fearing anxiety is enforced by the strong echoes of Job 7 within lines 11-12, evoked

in the unchanging order of the world and the eternal laws of existence. The practical attitude which is possible for a man, all of whose religious cloud-pictures have lost their definition, is to help and love his fellow human beings.' It is a state Henry can never be said to attain, although in Song 220 his friend over-optimistically looks to him for reassurance, as if he was representative of such an attitude. Karl Heim, *Christian Faith and Natural Science* (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp.18-20.

⁸⁶ 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me', Mk 15.34, Mt 27.46.

especially by the use of the King James archaism ‘vanisheth’; a form of the verb which occurs only twice in the whole of the Authorised Version of the Bible.⁸⁷ The chapter features Job bewailing his oppression at the hands of God, to whom he attributes the source of his suffering, an anguish exacerbated by the acute sense of life’s transitoriness.

Despite his display of indifference, therefore, Henry’s friend still retains a fear of God, the form of whose intervention in human history he is unsure of; neither is he certain of the way his judgement will be manifested at the end of time. This Jobian sense of oppression at the hands of the one he attempts to reject is evident in the diction; for ‘He looms down’ menacingly and finds Himself referred to in upper case, indicating a slightly intimidated respect on the part of the interlocutor that contrasts with the attitude elsewhere conveyed by his friend Henry.⁸⁸ The interlocutor’s words are both an attempted expression of indifference, over the possibility of either personal judgement or inexistence, as well as an expression of resignation over the question of the time, or manner, of the second coming; if it cannot be humanly determined, why ‘wonder’ about it? Indeed, if it happens outside his lifetime, he will not exist to witness the event. This is the culmination of the reasoned doubt conveyed by the first stanza.

The imagery becomes apocalyptic in the final stanza, which focuses on the consequences of his disturbed faith on his perception of history, a faith that itself was undermined by his attempt to establish the historical truth behind its inception. The

⁸⁷ ‘As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more’ (Job 7.9). The second occurrence of the verb in James also stresses the acute transitoriness of life: ‘Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away’ (James 4:14). In the context of the rest of this chapter of James, the lines represent an exhortation to choose between the world and God; as life is so brief, he speaks of the urgent necessity of renouncing sin and humbling oneself before the Lord. The allusion to both passages enforces the weight of the dilemma Henry’s friend experiences, in that he still retains a fear of God and a sense of urgency about the decision of faith he must make.

⁸⁸ Cf: Songs 146 and 153, for instance, which both refer to ‘god’.

gravity of the dilemma is tempered, as throughout the Song, by the theatrical imagery which stages the discourse in its vaudeville performance context, always conveying a degree of melodrama. The interlocutor states prophetically that we, or at least his 'Ghetto' community, are in the end-time: 'it's curtain-call'. The 'Ghetto-town' setting, and the statement that it is high ('tall') time there, evokes an image of despair, of extreme urban and social degeneration for its persecuted community. The Messiah must surely come now if he is to come at all; they must be ready for Him.

'Tall', however, can also be seen to indicate exaggeration, a 'tall tale' being an exaggerated story. In the climate of their suffering they have recourse to the apocalyptic prophecies of the Gospel, which are here implied to be misleading redactions. The implication is that an apocalyptic occurrence is happening, in the sense that an apocalyptic occurrence is always happening to those predisposed to interpret such events apocalyptically. Whereas previously the interlocutor would have also felt reassured by the imminent arrival of the Parousia, now, with his faith in the whole notion undermined, he finds it hard to interpret 'the time' as the apocalyptic precursor. Furthermore, the fact that despite the intensity of the human situation the Parousia has not materialised only exacerbates this loss of faith. The extended theatrical imagery is used again in a burlesque expression of the interlocutor's anxious vulnerability. He began in confidence like a seasoned actor 'strutting out from the wings' onto the world's stage, but his confidence in all previously held certainties is now undermined: forgetting one's lines is 'like losing faith' in that the certainty about what comes next eludes him. The neologism 'pro-man', a corruption of the 'end-man' of minstrelsy, further conveys this change within him, especially if the prefix 'pro' is taken in the form denoting 'an anterior position' (*OED*).

The culmination of the Song is the appeal to Henry for help: ‘Counsel me, Mr Bones’. Henry’s response—‘my friend, the clingdom has come’—should be taken first and foremost as a drollish remark to his friend who clings to him in anguish. It is one that frames the Song in its vaudeville context; the punning response chimes a sense of closure, since it forms a perfect rhyme with the close of the first stanza, whose closing hyper-beat, in itself, very musically echoes the opening line. Whereas the rhyming musical closure of the first stanza (‘messiah come? / [...] Kingdom? Some’) served to remind us that Jesus was mistaken, and His promise to His generation left unfulfilled, the concluding pun can be interpreted as a very ambiguous form of advice in the face of this perpetually frustrated expectation.

It is not characteristic of Henry the sceptic to advise one to ‘cling’ to their faith, except ironically; the closing pun appears mocking of the faith he perceives as inspiring only paranoia. Whether Henry suggests that now is the time to either ‘cling’ to one’s convictions on the subject, one’s faith, or simply to each other, it affirms what the Song has suggested throughout: that is, the helplessness of man in the face of the ultimate uncertainty. The element of surprise is portrayed as one of the greatest powers God has over man, although human misrepresentation has made His return even more difficult to discern; that is, if He is to return at all. As is characteristic of all the Songs concerning Christianity, the poet portrays the anxiety caused by the struggle to discern an elusive and indiscernible truth, a truth obscured by historical uncertainty. The technical structure of the Song certainly offers a more complete form of closure than its argument, but that is ultimately its purpose.

Song 234: 'The Carpenter's Son'

As my commentary on the previous Songs demonstrated, Berryman assimilated the biblical commentaries he had studied and loved directly into his poetry; he did this to such an extent, in fact, that successful exegesis of these Songs rests on a familiarity with them. The poet's stylistic obtuseness often obscures the theological or historical point, but this is not something that creates an obstacle for interpretation; it is often a fundamental element of the interpretation itself. Suggestive ambiguity is the main characteristic of his biblical Songs, which tends to capture his own divided opinion at the time. He was enthused by the radical critics, although he also maintained a certain degree of sceptical detachment from them; he remained open to the possibility of Christianity's religious authenticity, and increasingly also relied on more orthodox works of biblical exegesis. This is never more apparent than in Song 234 'The Carpenter's Son'; here he draws from both the radical sceptics and orthodox Gospel commentaries, displaying a marked sympathy with elements of both:

The child stood in the shed. The child went mad,
later, & saned the wisemen. People gathered
as he conjoined the Jordan joint
and he spoke with them until he got smothered
amongst their passion for mysterious healing had.
They could not take his point:

—Repent, & love, he told them frightened throngs,
and it is so he did. Did some of them?
Which now comes hard to say.
The date's in any event a matter of wrongs
later upon him, lest we would not know him,
medieval, on Christmas Day.

Pass me a cookie. O one absolutely did
lest we not know him. Fasten to your fire
the blessing of the living God.
It's far to seek if it will do as good
whether in our womanly or in our manlihood.

this great man sought his retire.

The title itself is an intriguing example of Berryman's scrupulous quest for historical accuracy when it comes to the life of Jesus; it is deceptively straightforward, but invites a critical debate that can be illuminated with reference to his sources. The poet makes an important note in the margin on page 259 of his copy of Goguel's *The Life of Jesus*; here, the author, with reference to Origen, states that nowhere in any of the Gospels is Jesus called a carpenter, and that the meaning of Mark's Greek reference to his profession is uncertain: 'Is this not [Jesus] *the carpenter, the son of Mary*' (Mk 6.3). Berryman's marginalia challenges Goguel's assertion with a reference to his other favourite New Testament scholar: 'Guignebert 106: Mk correctly makes 'the Son of the Carpenter' in Aramaic = 'the Carpenter' in Gr., whereas Mt is literal & wrong, & Lu. glosses.' Guignebert explains that Mark's Aramaic source described Jesus as the 'Son of the Carpenter', which actually means 'Carpenter' in the same way that 'Son of Man' means 'man'; hence, it is an idiomatic peculiarity of Aramaic which Mark translates faithfully into Greek. Matthew mistranslated this into Greek by retaining its literal meaning, and Luke, who also misunderstood, then tried to be more specific.⁸⁹ One must question therefore why Berryman—who was well versed in the commentaries of both critics by the time he wrote this Song—chose 'The Carpenter's Son' as the title, as it seems he was well aware of what a questionable description of Jesus that was. He is clearly making an opening point about the intrinsically dubious historicity of the Gospels as we receive them, a point that sets the sceptical tone and theme of the Song from the outset.

⁸⁹ Cf. Mk 6.3: 'Is this not *the carpenter, the son of Mary*'; Mt 13.55: 'Is not this *the son of the carpenter*?' Lk 4.22: 'Is not this *the son of Joseph*?' Guignebert, *Jesus*, p106.

The first stanza demonstrates how he merges the Gospel with Gospel criticism. In a masterful example of poetic condensation, we have a conflation of at least four different episodes from the life of Christ from as many different Gospels, in the first stanza alone. It begins with a distorted evocation of the Nativity scene from Luke and Matthew's Gospel; it then goes on to follow the development of Jesus's Messianic consciousness and the course of his troubled Galilean ministry. Guignebert regards the whole of the Nativity narrative as 'sheer hagiography' and Berryman's opening line also suggests sympathy with this view. The child is *standing* 'in the shed' rather than lying in his manger in the shed, because the poet is taking Goguel's conclusion that 'Jesus was born, at the latest, in 4 B.C.'⁹⁰ One might read this line merely as a reference to Jesus in his boyhood, stationed in his father's work shed; but the following stanza's questioning of the date of Christmas day suggests this scenario is intended to prefigure it.

Guignebert's conclusion is even more cautious than Goguel's: 'it is wisest to conclude that we do not know, within about fifteen years, or perhaps more, the time when Jesus came into the world.' As for the traditional date of Christmas he is positively dismissive: 'it will hardly be necessary to add that the liturgical date of Christmas [25 December] has no foundation in history. It was fixed at Rome, only after long uncertainty, probably in the first quarter of the fourth century'. After outlining the history of conjecture that produced the date, he concludes: 'the fact is that nobody knew, and we know no better today.'⁹¹

Berryman is suggesting the historicity, and therefore the authenticity, of the faith stands on uncertain ground. The view of the sceptics, especially Guignebert, is essentially that

⁹⁰ This is based on the premise that the consistent claim of both Luke and Matthew that Jesus was born in the reign of Herod is correct. Goguel comments: 'it is impossible to understand for what theological purpose this tradition could have been created. Thus there is some likelihood that it is historical. Herod died in the year 750 of Rome (4 B.C.) a little before the Passover —that is to say, in the month of March or April. The birth of Jesus seems to have taken place before that date.' Goguel *Life of Jesus*, p.232.

⁹¹ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.103-04.

the Gospel accounts of the life of Christ, particularly with regard to their historical chronology, are attempts to shape history around theology, rather than vice versa.⁹² The poet clearly makes this the main point of the Song. Guignebert demonstrates how the ‘vague indications’ given for the birth-date of Jesus in the Gospels are ‘either contradictory or obviously erroneous’ and entirely hagiographical in nature; they are motivated by a desire to represent the fulfilment of Scripture. Challenging Luke’s Gospel he argues that it is inconceivable that the census of Quirinus, which the Evangelist refers to, took place within the reign of Herod; he throws entirely into doubt Luke’s deceptively detailed chronology. He also disputes the highly irregular nature of the census that allegedly required Joseph’s removal to Bethlehem. Luke, he argues, was simply and rather desperately looking for a reason to take Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem so that Jesus could be born there; thus fulfilling Scripture. Furthermore, Jesus was required to be ‘about thirty years old’ at the start of his ministry because of the traditional significance of that age throughout the Hebrew Bible; for example, thirty is the age set by Mosaic Law whereby a Levite is eligible for his priestly service.⁹³

Berryman, after a discursion onto another point, takes up the matter of dubious dating again half way through the second stanza: ‘The date’s in any event a matter of wrongs / later upon him, lest we would not know him, / medieval, on Christmas Day.’ The ‘wrongs / later upon him’ are the hagiographical attempts to construct a theological version of history, irrespective of the truth. The poet uses his point about the birth of Christ, extended across two stanzas, to frame the discourse concerning the masses ‘not taking his point’. The message is: if Jesus was misunderstood by those who actually

⁹² See for instance Guignebert *Jesus*, pp.204, 483.

⁹³ Matthew and Luke both state that Jesus was born in the reign of Herod, and the latter further states that his birth in Bethlehem was the result of the census called by Quirinus, the Governor of Syria, which required Joseph and Mary’s removal to Bethlehem. Guignebert argues that if it was the same census referred to by the Jewish historian Josephus, then it took place in 7 AD, whereas Herod’s reign ended with his death, four years before the traditional date of Jesus. *Ibid*, pp.90-104.

came into contact with him, because of their own Messianic expectations. then how much more must the truth of his life and teaching have been misconstrued through a century of doctrinal formulation in the early Church, especially with each community having its own theological bias. It is presented as an example of man shaping his religious rites around his own convenience.

There is no obvious reason why the poet adds the further qualification ‘medieval’, since the Church fixed the birth date of Christ as early as the sixth century.⁹⁴ The only thing the word appears to contribute is a suggestion of unsophisticated religious fervency, as the derogatory use of the term ‘medieval’ usually implies. Given Berryman’s long passion for astronomy, the line may be a reference to R. J. Kepler’s discovery of the ‘Christmas Star’ at Christmas 1603, which subsequently led him to date the birth of Christ to 6 B.C.⁹⁵ Kepler is not exactly a medieval astronomer, but there is always room for exaggeration on the part of Henry. It is useful at this stage to examine the final lines of Song 200, where the poet makes the point more topically, since it features Henry celebrating Christmas Day:

let’s exchange blue-black kisses
for the fate of the Man who was not born today,
clashing our tinsel, by the terrible tree
whereon he really hung, for you & me.

⁹⁴ As Goguel points out, the Pope, John I, charged the monk Denis the Little (Guignebert identifies him as Dionysus the Less) in 525 with determining the date of Christ’s birth for the beginning of the new era. Goguel, *Jesus*, p.232.

⁹⁵ On December 17th 1603 Kepler observed a rendezvous in the constellation of Pisces between Saturn and Jupiter. A ‘conjunction’ of this kind, where two planets or stars meet on the same degree of longitude, gives the impression of one large star. Astrological calculations predicted such a conjunction also occurred in 7BC and so Kepler decided this was the year of Mary’s conception, with the subsequent birth of Christ in 6BC. His conclusion was heavily influenced by the rabbinic writings of Abarbanel. Jewish astrologers believed that the Messiah would appear when such a conjunction in Pisces between Saturn and Jupiter occurred. Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, trans. by William Neil (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p.327.

These lines contrast the garish frivolity of Christmas, whose liturgical date and nativity story are based on historical inaccuracy, with the profoundly disturbing, more historically authentic festival of Good Friday. Again, the poet closely aligns himself with Goguel and Guignebert; both challenge the nativity narratives concerning their hagiographical character, but affirm that the nature of Christ's death is largely accurate. Even Guignebert, after he rejects the Gospels in their virtual entirety as inherently unreliable, claims that 'it does not seem legitimate to doubt the historicity of the Crucifixion.' Although he finds most of the Passion narrative redactional in character—since it merely betrays 'the desire to exhibit the fulfilment of various prophecies'—he finds no reason why the manner of his death should be contested.⁹⁶ Goguel too, despite reservations concerning the Passion narratives, essentially affirms the authenticity of the basic fact of the Crucifixion.⁹⁷ Berryman could not have demanded any greater confirmation than that. Trusting the wisdom of his two favourite sources, the poet also finds it consequently safe to affirm that 'he really hung' on the tree.

However, he was far from being uncritical of the two sceptics and usually retained a sharp eye for potential inaccuracies and inconsistencies on their part. Goguel affirms the accuracy of Mark's account of the Crucifixion by noting that 'the agony of Jesus, according to the account in Mark (xv.25, 34), lasted for three hours, from the sixth until the ninth hour (from noon until three o'clock), and, as the evangelist cannot be suspected of any desire to shorten the sufferings of Jesus, this point may be regarded as historical.'⁹⁸ In Berryman's own copy he exclaims in the margin: 'no! 3rd hour! to 9th;' on the inside back leaf he writes 'strange & v. important error (in 2nd Fr. ed???) 536 ∴

⁹⁶ Guignebert argues that if the Christian Jews from whom the particular tradition comes, or St Paul, had invented the death of Jesus, then 'they would have chosen some other mode of death than the cross, which brought Jesus under the doom of the words: "*He that is hanged is accursed of God*" (Dt.21.23) No one creates difficulties on purpose when they can easily be avoided.' Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.478.

⁹⁷ Goguel, *Jesus*, pp.533-38.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.536.

always check him.’⁹⁹ The poet also notes the most likely cause of Goguel’s mistake: in heavy pen he alters ‘Mark xv.25, 34’ to ‘25, (33) 34’. As his corrections indicate, Jesus was crucified at the third hour (Mk 15.25), but darkness appeared over the land from the sixth to ninth hour (Mk 15.33); finally, at the ninth hour Jesus cried his last and died (Mk 15.34).

In Song 200, this solemn and largely authentic occurrence of the Crucifixion is contrasted with the garish ‘tinsel-clashing’ celebration of Christmas, based on a tradition steeped in what his sources regard as tawdry hagiographical embellishment. The poet’s position on the nativity narratives in Song 234 is therefore underlined by its previous representation in Song 200; in both Songs it is portrayed as a travesty of history, and in Song 234 it is used to arouse doubt as to the credibility of Christian tradition in its entirety.¹⁰⁰

The first stanza of Song 234 is a highly suggestive poetic condensation of certain key moments from the Gospels. The references are not explicit; they evoke scriptural passages that only really become clear in the context of Christ’s developing Messianic consciousness, which constitutes the narrative of the stanza. The ‘wisemen’ of the second line deceptively works to evoke the Magi of Matthew’s Gospel, despite Christ’s ‘later’ effect on them. They are representative of a presumptuous mentality, one that considered him to be the ‘king of the Jews’. Such after all was their Messianic fervour

⁹⁹ Richard J. Kelly also points this out as ‘an example of the serious scholarship he brought not only to biblical studies, but also to a wide range of disciplines.’ Richard J. Kelly, *John Berryman’s Personal Library: A Catalogue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p.xviii.

¹⁰⁰ Several further points are important with regard to the extract from Song 200. The fact that he died ‘for you & me’ indicates the salvific nature of the sacrifice; this could potentially conflict with ‘Man’ if it is taken to indicate his humanity over his divinity. Equally, the proper noun can be seen as indicating his special status above humanity by nature of his divinity. However, the speaker is not making an explicit statement either way; the verdict is still out for him on the person of Christ.

that they travelled an inestimable distance ‘from the East’ in the mere hope of paying homage to the child.¹⁰¹

The sentence—‘The child went mad, / later, & saned the wisemen’—also evokes the episode in Luke where the twelve-year-old Jesus is discovered debating with the teachers in the Temple. This account describes the earliest demonstration of his Messianic consciousness, protesting as he does of his duty to his Father.¹⁰² It is the first display of what might sceptically be interpreted as the start of his delusions or mental instability, although he astounded the wise teachers in the temple with his precocity. The line also evokes Jesus’s raging cleansing of the Temple, as he reacted angrily against the commercialisation of sacred rites.¹⁰³

The question about whether Jesus regarded himself as the Messiah is another major debate within the field of Gospel criticism that the Song enters into. It would seem that the line under consideration was at least partly inspired by a passage that Berryman marks out in Guignebert’s *Jesus*, which relates to the Beelzebul controversy, where the Jews argue about the meaning of Jesus’s behaviour. Early in Jesus’s ministry, as the crowds increased, drawn by the power of his preaching and extraordinary signs, a number of the Jews claimed him to be either mad or ‘possessed by Beelzebul’.¹⁰⁴ Following the Beelzebul discourse in Mark’s Gospel is Jesus’s figurative dissociation of himself from his earthly family when they request to see him: ‘Who are my mother and my brethren [...] Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.’¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Mt 2.1-12.

¹⁰² Lk 2.41-51.

¹⁰³ Mt 21.12-13, Mk 11.15-17, Lk 19.45-46.

¹⁰⁴ Mk 3.20-28, Jn 10.20, Mt 12.24-29, Lk 11.15-22.

¹⁰⁵ Mk 3.31-35.

The poet still refers to Jesus as ‘the child’ in order to emphasise how the incident marks his symbolic separation from his parents and his spiritual coming of age.

As Guignebert explains, Jesus’s ‘immediate relatives’ seek him out because they are probably worried by the reports of his madness. The scholar notes that this passage would seem to be ‘one of those authentic recollections which the original disciples contributed to the tradition, and which became sufficiently deeply rooted therein to withstand both apologetic expurgations and Christological elaborations.’ Berryman marks this passage out in his own copy of *Jesus*, approving Guignebert’s affirmation of its authenticity with an ecstatic ‘yes!’ The poet is sufficiently convinced to include the allusion almost as a statement of fact.¹⁰⁶

Importantly, Guignebert adds that ‘this attitude of his family proves conclusively that his vocation was neither foreseen nor visibly foreshadowed in the circle in which his childhood and youth were spent.’ To Guignebert therefore it is more evidence to suggest that Jesus did not believe himself to be the Messiah. It seems that Berryman has relied very heavily on the scholar’s analysis here; his language seems to conflate the incident of the Beelzebul controversy and dismissal of his family in Mark 3, with that of his teaching in the synagogue three chapters later in Mark 6, which Guignebert also refers to.¹⁰⁷ Mark’s description of the latter scene is to a certain extent echoed in the Song’s title: ‘And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many were

¹⁰⁶ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.145.

¹⁰⁷ The following, more extensive, passage from Guignebert will make the connection between these instances clearer: ‘Mark iii.21 relates that his immediate relatives [...], that is to say, his mother and his brothers (iii.31), on hearing of his preaching, and the effect which it was having, went to Capernaum to seize him and bring him home by force, under the impression that he had gone out of his mind. This looks very much as if we were in the presence of one of those authentic recollections which the original disciples contributed to the tradition, and which became sufficiently deeply rooted therein to withstand both apologetic expurgations and Christological elaborations. This attitude of his family proves conclusively that his vocation was neither foreseen nor visibly foreshadowed in the circle in which his childhood and youth were spent, an impression which is to some extent confirmed by the surprise which, according to Mark vi.2, the people of the village displayed on hearing him preach.’ *Ibid.*, p.145.

astonished saying, 'Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? [...] Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary.'¹⁰⁸

Thus Berryman, through a masterful piece of poetic condensation, inspired by a passage of biblical criticism, evokes Gospel scenes that represent Jesus's spiritual coming of age and public affirmation of his Messianic consciousness. It also throws into question the historical authenticity of the Gospel accounts, as well as the notion that Jesus, as his 'saning' suggests, shared the Messianic fervour of those such as the 'wisemen' who assume he is 'the Christ'. This growing discrepancy between the Messianic expectations of his contemporaries and the authentic vision of Jesus himself—and, hence, the possibility of an even greater possible misunderstanding on our part—is what is emphasised over the subsequent eight lines.

The body of the Song centres on a long representation of what is known as 'the crisis in Galilee', the period immediately after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, when the Messianic fervour of the people reaches fever pitch. The crisis in Galilee represents a major turning point in Christ's ministry, since his failure to conform to the peoples' Messianic expectations resulted in a large haemorrhage of support. It draws primarily from John 6, and the poet suffuses the Song with the appropriate Johannine theology. The Fourth Gospel differs from the Synoptics in that, after the feeding of the 5,000, it features an attempt by the people to crown Jesus king. This is followed by a discussion Jesus has with those following him, in which he attempts to explain his divinity in terms of the spiritual 'bread' of himself that he is offering.

¹⁰⁸ Mk 6.2-3.

Jesus's 'conjoining' of the 'Jordan joint' refers to his crossing of the River Jordan, from Tiberias to Capernaum, after the miracle of the feeding. As he arrives on the shore, word of his arrival quickly spreads and crowds gather to greet him, bringing with them the sick.¹⁰⁹ John's Gospel states that the crowd had already followed him from Jerusalem: 'And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs he did on those who were diseased.'¹¹⁰ This comes after the two healings he had performed in Capernaum and Jerusalem, the 'mysterious healings' that are referred to in the Song. It paints a picture of almost mass hysteria; they are not sure why they have followed 'this great man'.

The fifth line falters halfway through with a large space, as Henry almost incredulously contemplates the unimaginable: 'amongst their passion for mysterious healing had.' Henry, it seems, is reluctantly accepting that the mysterious healings had taken place. He has little choice but to be persuaded on this point, since even the two sceptics acknowledge that actual healings had occurred; although they stress that they most likely had a psycho-physiological cause. Furthermore, one must at least concede that both Jesus and his contemporaries interpreted these healings in a miraculous light, since this was the religious mindset of the people of the period.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Mt 14.34-36, Mk 6.53-56, Jn 6.22-26. In St. John's account, the crowds actually follow Jesus across the sea from Tiberias.

¹¹⁰ Jn 6.2.

¹¹¹ Guignebert states that 'Jesus effected cures which were deemed by himself and his contemporaries to be miraculous. He attributed them to the divine *dynamis* which he felt within him. This *dynamis*, whose efficacy implied, or, more correctly, was the result of, the faith of the sick, did not pertain peculiarly to him; it manifested itself wherever there was a strong faith in its existence. It still manifests itself today under the same conditions, exercising its power on diseases of nervous origin. There is no trustworthy evidence to lead us to believe that Jesus cured any other kind of malady.' Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.203. Similarly Goguel affirms that 'there can be doubt that Jesus did heal the sick', but adds that 'it is impossible to distinguish quite clearly between the activity of the healer and the activity of the prophet or the Messiah. This is impossible, not only because the psycho-physiological mechanism is unknown to us, but also because the distinction between these two elements was not made by the narrators, nor, in all probability, was it made by Jesus himself.' Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.221.

It is not only the rampant enthusiasm of the God-fearing crowd, but Christ's reaction to it, which the Song draws from the Fourth Gospel. John states: 'perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself.'¹¹² Berryman also portrays Jesus's desire to distance himself from the misconceived adoration of the multitude in their Messianic fervour. The Jews wanted to make him King, expecting him to be the political Messiah of this world, whereas Jesus proclaimed that his kingship was not of this world.¹¹³ 'His point', which 'they could not take', is that one must prepare for the Kingdom; but this is not an earthly Kingdom, nor is he delivering it to them in the form of some glorious apocalyptic manifestation, or political revolution; instead, he is calling them to an inner-readiness to be achieved through 'repentance and love.' As Goguel explains, Jesus's ministry was not intended to accelerate the coming of God's Kingdom, which will be established at a time appointed and known only by the Father. 'Men can do nothing in this sphere, but they can realize in themselves such sentiments and live such a life that they will be ready to enter it when it comes. It was to this that Jesus summoned them.'¹¹⁴

Jesus's exhortation to the 'frightened throngs' is followed by an extremely ambiguous and potentially heretical suggestion from the poet: 'and it is so he did?' Is it so that Jesus told them to 'repent and love', or did he 'repent and love' himself? A simple affirmation of the fact that he exhorted them in this way, in the former sense, would be a rather flat and pointless assertion; also, the subsequent question ('Did some of them?') would make the latter possibility more semantically plausible. If it is the latter, then by extension he must have also sinned in order to have something to repent of. Such an

¹¹² Jn 6.15.

¹¹³ Cf. Jn 18.36.

¹¹⁴ Goguel, *Jesus*, p.313.

interpretation would indeed be characteristic of Berryman's perspective on Christ during the Dream Song period, as his essay 'The Disguises of God' also suggests. Remarking that Christ both sinned and repented is therefore, from the poet's point of view, not necessarily a denial of his divinity, as the reference to him as 'this great man', in the Song's concluding line, might seem to suggest.

Furthermore, the remark—'and it is so he did'—subtly engages with the debate about the possible theological construction of Jesus as he appears in the Gospels. The line recalls Goguel's comments on the unusually 'consistent' moral character of Christ in Scripture. Goguel states that 'there is nothing in his words which could possibly be interpreted as a sense of sin or repentance'. Although he concedes that men believing in Jesus's holiness wrote the Gospels, he nevertheless finds in Jesus evidence of a self-aware moral superiority that would have prompted him to believe that he was in some way closer to God than previous messengers.¹¹⁵ 'The Disguises of God', however, takes the contrary view: that Scripture does indeed demonstrate Christ sinning—through his last words of despair on the cross—and that this is not only necessary for him to be fully human, but also fully divine. Sin paradoxically derives from God, because 'God tempts'; He provides us with situations that are the opportunity for a possible exercise of virtue.¹¹⁶ It is a further example of the way Berryman draws on the radical critics in his quest for historical truth, but still retains an openness to the Christ of faith in some form, and, at times, confidently affirms his own personal Christology.

Henry questions whether the throngs responded to the commands of Jesus: 'Díd some of them? / Which now comes hard to say'. This can appear to be an instance of infuriating

¹¹⁵ Goguel, p.389. Goguel is not however arguing that this is necessarily evidence of Jesus's actual divinity.

¹¹⁶ Berryman, 'Disguises of God', MS, p.7.

equivocation to pad out the stanza, but it does in fact thrust the reader into a matter of serious historical inquiry, for there is critical debate about the response Jesus encountered during his ministry, and how accurately this was transferred into tradition. Guignebert, for instance, is characteristically dubious about the Gospel's portrayal of Christ's teaching ministry and the extent to which it was a success. He deflatingly remarks that 'at most a few pious men may have attached themselves to him', the reason for the exaggeration being that 'it was hardly possible to admit that the Lord had not been listened to and had not aroused enthusiasm wherever he went.'¹¹⁷

Goguel's enquiry into this particular question is far more nuanced, and he devotes a whole chapter to 'The Crisis in Galilee', the argument of which has unquestionably inspired the Song. Both the Synoptics and John detail the feeding of the 5000 and the subsequent Messianic fervour and expectation amongst the Jews that followed. In the Fourth Gospel, however, John recounts Jesus's discourse concerning 'the bread of life' and the resulting dispute that arises between Jesus and the Jews. They request 'a sign', such as the manna from heaven which their forefathers received; Christ's analogical response is that he is the 'bread of life' sent from Heaven; he who eats his flesh will have eternal life.¹¹⁸ This whole discourse according to Goguel 'reflects the theology of a much later period; it is most important for an analysis of Johannine thought, but it does not help us to understand the thought of Jesus.'¹¹⁹

Goguel believes that John has misunderstood the reason for the general rejection experienced by Jesus following this discourse, which results in a number of his disciples deserting him. He claims John, for theological reasons, had interpreted the feeding of

¹¹⁷ Guignebert *Jesus*, pp.212-15.

¹¹⁸ Jn 6.35-59.

¹¹⁹ Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.375.

the 5000 as Jesus's example of the gift of his life, which was interpreted by the spiritually blind people of Israel as a mere wonder-work. The bread of life discourse is intended to demonstrate the Jews' hardness of heart, as they stick rigidly to the religion of their ancestors who received manna from heaven as a sign. However, Goguel points out that the real reason for Jesus's rejection is also paradoxically to be found in John's Gospel itself. Only the fourth evangelist includes the attempted crowning of the man the Galileans now believed to be the Messiah: 'When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself.'¹²⁰ Goguel confirms that the evangelist has not invented this episode because it conflicts with the more obviously redactional bread of life discourse. The real reason for Jesus's collapse of support and desertions was not that 'they could not take his point' and accept his sayings; that is simply John trying to impose a later theological interpretation on to the situation. The real reason is that they saw his refusal to take on the role of a political revolutionary, as the main duty of his Messiahship, as a sign of impotence.¹²¹

The problem highlighted by the radical critics strikes to the heart of the salvific history of Christianity. Was Jesus merely an inspiring Rabbi, a 'great man' who quickly gained a following, but as quickly lost it again when it was realised that he was not the promised Messiah? Or was he, as John portrays him, the Son of God, destined to be rejected by the chosen people, who in their hardness of heart could not accept his call for inner-conversion: 'repentance and love'? This is the question posed by the poet in the third stanza, the answer to which 'comes hard to say'. Henry muses on the question posed by radical criticism and in consideration reflects on the inauthentic nature of the

¹²⁰ Jn 6.14-15.

¹²¹ Goguel, *Jesus*, p.377.

nativity story with which the Song opened. It represents a questioning of the historical authenticity of the Gospels, which in turn undermines the credibility of Christianity's liturgical construction.

The final stanza appears to be one of the least useful of all the semantic nightmares in *The Dream Songs*. After the weighty problem posed by the previous stanza, Henry diffuses the dilemma with an absurd off-hand request: 'Pass me a cookie.' The fact that it is not parenthesised causes a problem of interpretation: did one absolutely pass him a cookie? Or did one absolutely repent & love? The heavy periods isolating 'pass me a cookie' (as well as the similarly enclosed Christmas digression) would most likely suggest the former. Interpreting the 'cookie' itself is problematic, and the subsequent line—together with the metaphor's recurrence in several other Songs—indicates that we need to treat it with more significance than its casual extrication would suggest.

Linebarger suggests the 'cookie' alludes to the Eucharistic wafer, and, given the heavy Johannine imagery of the Song, this is a far from absurd suggestion.¹²² The proceeding sentence—'O one absolutely did / lest we not know him'—would therefore refer to the institution of the Eucharist as an act of remembrance. The cookie is nevertheless, for all its recurrence, a rather ugly and unevocative metaphor. Originally inspired by the scene in *Pather Panchali*, its appearance in 'Idyll II' and Song 322 is equally ambiguous.

Henry sends his love a cookie in 'Idyll II' and reminds us of this in Song 322; in both cases it would appear to be a light-hearted gesture of affection. In Song 322, however, it takes on a slightly more sinister connotation, as eating the cookie seals her fate 'to be involved with Henry Pussycat'.

¹²² Linebarger, *John Berryman*, p.100.

In contrast, in Song 234 Henry is the one receiving the cookie, which would also suggest that he is the one who ‘absolutely did [pass a cookie] / lest we not know him’. Henry is confronting us with a rather mischievous Christ association here, becoming the ‘great man who sought his retire’. ‘Retire’ in Henry’s case has a number of connotations that are echoed throughout *The Dream Songs*: to escape from the attention aroused by his celebrity, the critics and readers ‘who could not take his point’; to retire also from his anguish and from life itself. This in turn serves as an irreverent reminder of John 6, which the diction of the stanza evokes throughout, for Jesus also ‘sought his retire’ from the crowds. After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus senses that the Jews in their Messianic enthusiasm are about to attempt to make him their King, and so he retires to the hills to be alone, escaping in turn their misconceptions about him.¹²³ The disciples sail on ahead of Jesus towards Capernaum, and he joins them by walking across the water.

As the Song also proposes the fact that Jesus may have been theologically (mis)constructed—as well as historically misrepresented through his contemporary audience and on through apostolic tradition—it seems also to imply that this mere ‘great man’ is escaping the imposition of any doctrinal assertions concerning him by the Church. The diction further suggests John 6, especially in view of the repetition of the verb ‘to seek’: the crowds seek Jesus, and in turn he seeks his retire from them. In John 6 the crowds at Tiberius travel to Capernaum by boat ‘seeking Jesus’. On finding him Jesus admonishes them: ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of loaves’.¹²⁴ In other words, they were seeking him for mere material reasons, rather than seeking the eternal life that he was offering through his word.

¹²³ ‘Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself.’ Jn 6.15.

¹²⁴ Jn 6.24-26.

Jesus further proclaims: ‘As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.’¹²⁵ Berryman draws heavily from this aspect of the bread of life discourse: we are irreverently drawn into it with the cookie metaphor, and this is reinforced by the allusion to the ‘living Father’ in the unusual line ‘Fasten to your fire / the blessing of the living God.’ The poet opts for the term ‘living God’ because he is undoubtedly aware that it is a more common expression in the New Testament, whereas ‘living Father’ is peculiar to John.¹²⁶ The line also reminds us of John the Baptist’s pronouncement concerning Jesus: ‘he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’¹²⁷ Like the cookie, the fire is one of those jarring metaphors of Berryman’s that fail because it arouses a too literal image in the mind; but, given the common spiritual connotations of fire, it is best interpreted as a call to embrace God with one’s spirit. With the subsequent line—‘It’s far to seek if it will do as good / whether in our womanly or our manlihood’—Henry is suggesting that we must strive out of our way to see any evidence of the worth of God’s blessing. He is also suggesting, by implication, that Jesus’s ministry and, hence, the resultant faith has done about as much good as God’s blessing; for cynical Henry, this means not very much good at all.

This interpretively rich Song is essentially an expression of both scepticism and heterodox belief, paradoxically drawing on the Gospel account of Jesus’s own experience to make a point about possible problems with Christianity. Just as his contemporaries misunderstood Jesus, the Song suggests it is just as likely that he has been misinterpreted by the tradition that developed after his death. Furthermore, it

¹²⁵ Jn 6.57

¹²⁶ Cf. Mt 16.6; 2 Cor 6.16; Heb 7.25, where the term ‘living God’ is used and which Berryman also uses in the Song. ‘Living Father’ is a term only John uses. See Westcott, *Gospel of St. John*, p.107.

¹²⁷ Mt 3.11.

proposes that the Gospel from which its imagery is drawn possibly constitutes an imposition of this later tradition upon history. The Song does not necessarily confirm the notion that this misinterpretation includes the divinity of Christ, although it is hinted at through the ‘great man’ remark. As seemingly inchoate as the last stanza is, it can be seen as a fitting expression of buoyant irresolution to the dilemma Henry has thrown up. His characteristic questioning of God’s beneficence towards mankind in the closing triplet ends with an intention that could just as equally apply to Henry as to Christ himself; that is, the will to escape the misrepresentation of his word.

Archbishop Carrington and the ‘Liturgical’ Structure of *The Dream Songs*

John Haffenden has noted how Berryman looked to another of his favourite biblical scholars, Philip Carrington (1892-1975), when searching for a structural schema for the finished collection.¹²⁸ However, it would appear that the influence of Carrington’s theories about the structuring of Mark’s Gospel on the final outcome of *The Dream Songs* is much greater than has been previously realised. As an Anglican Archbishop, Carrington stresses the strictly disciplined and accurate nature of the transmission of oral apostolic teaching from the time of Christ. He also stresses the continuity of the Christian faith with Judaism and how it constitutes a natural progression from it. He remarks: ‘does it seem too much to ask that we may try the experiment of interpreting the literature of the New Testament in the light of the common normative Judaism which preceded it, and the actual historical Christianity which followed it, and loved the

¹²⁸ Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, pp.37, 51.

books, and preserved them in its Sunday worship, and lived by them, and handed them down to us as what we call the Bible?’¹²⁹

This statement encapsulates the ‘liturgical criticism’ of Carrington’s critical approach in *According to Mark*, which argues that Mark’s Gospel demonstrates the natural, and therefore predestined, continuity between Judaism and Christianity. In direct contrast to the sceptical historicist critics, such as Guignebert and Goguel, Carrington believes that this development was fully intended and anticipated by Jesus Christ; and that the doctrinal development of the Christian Church is faithful to the teachings of its founder, as they were authentically transmitted through the apostles. However, Carrington stresses too that, after Jesus, the power and inspiration of Mark’s Gospel lies in Mark’s ability as master artist and story teller, and the construction of his Gospel is mainly down to his artistic ingenuity. It was not a ‘community’ that created this Gospel, as those who dispute Mark’s authorship suggest, ‘because a community cannot create’.¹³⁰

Carrington’s emphasis on the artistic merits of Mark’s Gospel appealed to Berryman, and the structural, rather than ideological, influence of *According to Mark* is evident in the arrangement of *The Dream Songs*. As the poet remarks in ‘The Search’, Carrington was a ‘later’ influence, and he became interested in his work in the early 1960s, around the time that he was searching for an appropriate structure for his collection of Dream Songs. He was impressed by Carrington’s theory in *According to Mark* that the Second Gospel was composed and structured ‘liturgically’, so that it might function as a series of ‘lections’ to be read out each week in the services of the early Church. The overall

¹²⁹ ‘A Survey of Biblical Criticism with Special Reference to the Gospels: The Mary Fitch Page Lecture, Berkeley Divinity School, November 17, 1959’, *Berkeley Divinity School Bulletin*, 170 (1959) <<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/thought/carrington.htm>> [accessed 5 February 2003] (section 10 ‘The Available Evidence’ and section 14 ‘The Present Task’).

¹³⁰ Carrington, *According to Mark*, p.2.

structure of these lections was designed to fit into the Jewish lunar year, and so incorporated the various traditional Jewish fasts and feast days. As Haffenden records, Berryman considered ordering the Dream Songs along the lines of a similar calendar arrangement to fit in with the term of a year. He remarks that ‘Berryman’s discovery from Archbishop Carrington that St Mark’s Gospel was in some sort an artifice or fiction served to confirm the metaphysical underpinning of the Songs, as the philosophical thrust of his own work was both anti-Christian and anti-eschatological.’¹³¹

Although this specific structural principle became lost in the event through the rapid proliferation of the Songs, the final organisation of the long poem reveals that Berryman did retain Carrington’s structural influence, albeit in a slightly different manner. The entire Gospel, Carrington claims, should be divided into two parts: ‘(1) the Gospel in Galilee, which we divide into four ‘Quarters’, and (2) the Gospel in Jerusalem, which we divide into three ‘Divisions’’. Each of these quarters, or divisions, represents a distinct unit, with thematically or dramatically linked lections which also mostly fall into sequences of seven (to be used over seven weeks each). Furthermore, many of these seven lections can themselves be divided up in a similar manner; for instance: ‘the first seven lections of Mark consist of the three lections of the baptismal prologue plus the four lections of the Galilean sequence’.¹³²

As in Mark’s Gospel, Berryman divided the Songs into seven ‘books’, and then divided these sections into two major parts, or ‘volumes’, of three and four books each. Given the poet’s passion for the Second Gospel, and his respect for Carrington’s commentary, it is not unreasonable to deduce that this patterning was a direct borrowing, as he struggled to find a meaningful arrangement for the mass of Songs that had accrued.

¹³¹ Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, pp.51-52.

¹³² Carrington, *According to Mark*, pp.4-10.

Accordingly, it is possible that he may also have thought in terms of ‘ministries of Henry’, both geographical and experiential; this is apparent for instance in the move to Ireland at the beginning of the long Book VII, as well as excursions into death (Book IV), with the long ‘Minneapolis ministry’ forming the remainder in Book VIII. It is a far from neat structuring—for instance, he also takes excursions as far afield as India—but as Berryman would have appreciated only too well, the Gospel editors often took similar liberties with Jesus’s ministry, suddenly moving him to a distant location in order to slot in a thematically relevant incident or teaching.¹³³ Furthermore, if Carrington’s claims are correct, it is apparent that Mark may have taken certain liberties with the arrangement of Christ’s ministry in order to fulfil the lectional requirements, especially so that certain episodes would coincide with specific feasts.

There are numerous other biblical connotations to the number seven—a figure which is clearly significant to *The Dream Songs*—which Berryman may also have had in mind. In the Book of Revelation, for instance, there are the seven spirits of God (Rev 1.4); the ‘seven churches’ symbolise the universal church (Rev 1.20), and the seventh seal, angel, trumpet and bowl all denote the fulfilment of God’s plan. God created the universe in seven days, and seven days make a week. The great festivals occupy seven days; seven weeks separate Passover and the Feast of Weeks, and every seventh year was a Sabbath year. Pertinent to the partition of the Dream Song ‘books’ is the fact that, as the combination of heaven (symbolised by three) and earth (symbolised by four), the number seven symbolises above all completeness and perfection.¹³⁴

¹³³ The radical critics are extremely keen on demonstrating this kind of ‘redaction’. eg. Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.399.

¹³⁴ Haffenden also draws attention to the importance of the number seven for Berryman, noting that he marked in a book the following passage (in 1971): ‘Throughout the Near East the number seven frequently occurs. This should probably be seen as the sum of three, the divine number, and of four, the number which in the four quarters of the wind comprehended the earth. Seven would then be that which pre-eminently represents the plenitude, perfection, and totality.’ (Jan H. Negenman, *New Atlas of the Bible* (London: Collins, 1969), p.42.) Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, p.197. My account of scriptural

The choice of a total of 77 Songs for the first volume (up until near publication he proposed only 76) emphasises and enriches the numerical symbolism. Luke's genealogy comprises seventy-seven names, starting with Jesus and descending back, through David and Abraham, to 'Adam, the son of God' (Lk 3.23). Seventy-seven consequently represents the perfection of God's salvific plan for humanity, since that is the number of generations linking Him to Christ. Guignebert's *Jesus* would have drawn Berryman's attention to this; the French scholar regards the genealogies of both Luke and Matthew as utterly unhistorical; they are 'reconstructions arising from credal or apologetic necessities, and directed solely towards edification.' Luke's construction 'seems to reflect an interest in numerical symbolism. [...] The Messianic number, which is 7, must be the basis of this figure, which is probably to be interpreted as seven times eleven, or seven times ten plus seven.'¹³⁵ Given the sceptical view of fundamental Christian doctrine which is conveyed in *77 Dream Songs*, the poet's choice of title for this first volume may well have indicated an ironic conjoining of God with Christ, intending to express the artificiality of the Christian notion of Godhead.

The number seventy-seven has further scriptural connotations. According to the First Gospel, one must forgive not seven times, but seventy-seven times (Mt:18:21-22); in this sense meaning 'always', in imitation of God's infinite mercy.¹³⁶ Christ's words are to be compared to the declaration of Lamech in Genesis, where, in contrast, the number seventy-seven represents total and infinite vengeance (Gen: 4.24).¹³⁷ Henry's oscillating

numerology draws heavily from David H. van Daalan, 'Number Symbolism', *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p.562.

¹³⁵ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.109-10.

¹³⁶ The AV and RSV translate this as 'seventy times seven times', but newer translations, such as the NRSV and NIV, tend to correct this to 'seventy-seven times'.

¹³⁷ Lamech's words are an adaptation of God's declaration concerning Cain. Following his murder of Abel, the Lord marks Cain, and warns that 'if anyone slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold' (Gen 4.15). Lamech, a descendent of Cain, says: 'I have slain a man for wounding me, a

attitude towards his father is the most striking example in the Songs of the tension between forgiveness and retribution. If we take into account his further grudges against God and the world, the title becomes in a crucial sense ironic. However, perhaps the most important factor that *The Dream Songs* imports from this rich numerical imagery is that the seven books represent not only completeness and perfection but also *everlasting* wholeness. This sardonic testament of irresolution is therefore one that is meant to last.

Haffenden has suggested another possible influence on *The Dream Songs*, with respect to Carrington's theories on Mark's liturgical structuring.¹³⁸ Carrington describes the evangelist's use of 'triads', which he characterises as 'a threefold repetition, at intervals in the narrative, of a word or phrase which draws attention to some theme of high significance.'¹³⁹ It is certainly useful to employ his terminology to refer to the thematic groupings of three which the poet uses twice in *77 Dream Songs*, in order to gather Songs with an eschatological Christian theme: the first such triad being Songs 46, 47 and 48; the second, Songs 55, 56 and 57. They are not triads in the strict Carrington sense, however, as they are not 'repetitions', and they are directly grouped together, rather than separated by intervals; but they do demonstrate a distinct method for drawing attention to a particular theme, and this may have been inspired by the basic principle of the Marcan triad. Other thematically linked Songs are also 'triadically grouped', such as the elegies to Robert Frost (Songs 37-39) or the larger groupings, such as the elegies to Delmore Schwartz (146-57) and the *Opus Posthumous* sequence (78-91).

young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-seven-fold.' (Gen 4.24). Lamech was aged 'seven hundred and seventy-seven years' when he died (Gen 5.31).

¹³⁸ Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, pp.96-97.

¹³⁹ Carrington, *According to Mark*, p.6.

Ideologically, however, Berryman is often at odds with Carrington in *The Dream Songs*. One of the theoretical schools that comes in for heavy criticism from Carrington is that of ‘eschatological criticism’, of which Albert Schweitzer was the main proponent. Schweitzer argues that the emphasis of life-of-Christ scholarship should be on viewing Jesus in his historical religious and social context: that is, first century Palestine. Central to Schweitzer’s thinking is the notion of ‘thorough-going eschatology’, which is the idea that the development of early Christianity was profoundly influenced by the belief that the Parousia, or second coming of Christ, together with the end of the world, were imminent events. Furthermore, the theory proposes that Jesus himself believed in his own central role in this Messianic apocalypse, and his death, at the hands of his contemporaries, was the result of his apparent failure to bring about this conclusion. Hence, Jesus and his teaching represent ‘a morality for the time being’ which does not necessarily have the same significance for modern man, nor should he be reconstituted as an historical figure based on modern presuppositions.¹⁴⁰

This is a view that Guignebert also subscribes to, and Berryman, at least as poet, was very sympathetic towards his perspective on this matter. My commentary on Dream Song 220, for instance, demonstrated how the poet draws from Guignebert’s commentaries concerning Jesus’s prophecies, and how the Song portrays a crisis of faith resulting from this challenge to the Gospel’s reliability. Guignebert believes that pronouncements of Jesus such as that of Mark 9.1 demonstrate that Christ believed the coming of the Kingdom was imminent, and hence that He was mistaken.¹⁴¹ Carrington, as a defender of orthodox Christianity, not surprisingly takes a contrary view: ‘Jesus nowhere says that the Last Judgement or End of the World is shortly to come. He

¹⁴⁰ D. E. Nineham, ‘A. Schweitzer’, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp.613-15.

¹⁴¹ ‘And he said unto them: Verily I say unto you that there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come with power’ (Mk 9.1). See Guignebert, *Jesus*, p344.

speaks of the 'kingdom of God' coming; but he also says that it is amongst men now, and those who have faith and vision "enter" it or "see" it now.'¹⁴² On reading *According to Mark*, Berryman felt compelled to exclaim on the back pages: 'C[arrington] everywhere anti-eschatological, even 314-5!'¹⁴³

In contrast, Berryman adopts a distinctly 'eschatological' viewpoint in Songs 46, 220, 234, 347, as well as the unpublished Song 'The day is murdering itself' (see below). In other words, the historical Christ is interpreted as being 'of his time', in that his teaching anticipates the end of the world and the imminence of the second coming. The great eschatological events will happen within the lifetime of the people he is addressing. Sceptics interpret Jesus's words concerning the coming of the Kingdom in this way, and naturally point to the apparent unfulfilling of Christ's prediction as evidence that either the words recorded are inauthentic, or that Christ has been proved wrong. It is clear from those Dream Songs dealing with an eschatological theme that Berryman was more convinced by the eschatological viewpoint during this period; it is one reason why his ideological sympathies, rather than his artistic influence, may be attributed 'later' to Carrington.

¹⁴² Carrington, 'Survey of Biblical Criticism', section 12.3.

¹⁴³ U Minn, JBP, Berryman's Personal Library. Berryman is referring to Carrington's rejection of the eschatologist interpretation of Mk 14.25: 'Amen I tell you that I will drink no more of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the Kingdom of God.' Encapsulating his attitude towards the eschatologists, Carrington argues: 'the eschatologists will have it of course that this reference to the 'Kingdom of God' must be understood in the light of their own preoccupation with the end of the world; but we are bound to interpret it in the sense which it bears everywhere else in the Gospel, and as it is formally expounded in the parables; that is to say of a dynamic and mystical relation between God and man, which begins on earth through the Son of Man, in the fellowship, though its advent in power always lies in the future. Jesus will never drink wine again with his men in the old way in this earthly life; but he will eat and drink with them in a new way by virtue of the covenant which he has now made with them in his sacrament. [...] There is not the slightest suggestion that the 'end of the world' will intervene first.' Carrington, *According to Mark*, pp.314-15.

History versus Faith in the Uncollected and Unpublished Songs and Fragments

There are a significant number of uncollected and unpublished Dream Songs and fragments, which together reveal how the historical quest for Jesus preoccupied Berryman to an even greater extent than his collected output demonstrates. Given the nature of the new poetic project which he started in late 1955, with its all-encompassing openness to the concerns and experiences of the moment, it is not surprising that the historical problem of Christ makes an allegorical appearance in the very first prototype Dream Song, which, for several years, was also intended to open the sequence:¹⁴⁴

The jolly old man is a silly old dumb
with a mean face, humped, who kills dead.
There is a tall girl who loves only him.
She has sworn:—Blue to you forever.
Grey to the little rat, go to bed.
—I fink it's bads all over.

Goguel says nobody knew where the christ they buried him
anyway but the Jewish brass.
No use asking the rich man.
A story. Stories??
One of these bombs costs a fortune.
So at sweet dawn wás he gone?

A Bloody fortune!
Married her donkey? That can hardly be.
Magics sweat up & down.
Henry & Mable ought to be but can't.
Childness let have us, honey,
so adult the hell don't.¹⁴⁵

Although appearing relatively artless in comparison with his later, more accomplished Dream Songs, 'The jolly old man' embodies the initial burst of creative energy which

¹⁴⁴ Mariani, *Dream Song*, p.332.

¹⁴⁵ The Dream Song is reprinted in Mariani, *Dream Song*, p.299 (first publ. in *The Noble Savage*, 1 (1960), p.119).

ignited the long poem. It justifiably did not make the final collected volumes, but it features embryonic elements of the flexible poetic mould which would harness and artistically visualise his daily preoccupations, like a highly stylised diary, for the next thirteen years.¹⁴⁶ The form evolved out of his earlier ‘Nervous Songs’, the concept of which was inspired by certain poems of Yeats and Rilke.¹⁴⁷ Previously, like the ‘Songs’ in Rilke’s *Book of Pictures*, Berryman had also used the form with different personas; but he now decided to maintain a consistent persona—the character of Henry—across an extended work.

The diction and syntax constitutes what would become a familiar hybrid of skewed infantilisms and slang; but at this point the overall effect is one of clumsiness, with certain phrases—‘Childness let have us, honey / so adult the hell don’t’—sounding too awkwardly contrived. The Song also suffers from not quite knowing what it is about, the reliance on free association throwing up arbitrary connections that are frustrating, rather than intriguing, in their obscurity. The poet strives to achieve the natural, dream-like fusion of personal experience and intellectual inquiry which would be a defining feature of the Songs at their most successful.

Through the distancing device of the persona, the ‘confessional’ element of the Song paradoxically becomes more confidently asserted, certainly in relation to his previously published works. The autobiographical aspect here is a celebration of the poet’s new relationship with Anne Levine—who would become his second wife—and the hope that it will mark the onset of ‘childness’. As well as expressing a desire to have children, this closing declaration also appears to represent—as Mariani notes in relation to the Song

¹⁴⁶ Even after publication of the complete version of *The Dream Songs* in 1969, however, Berryman still habitually reverted to the form, albeit with much less frequency. The last known poem he ever wrote was in the Dream Song format. See Mariani, *Dream Song*, p.499.

¹⁴⁷ Plotz, ‘Interview with Berryman’, p.12; Mariani, *Dream Song*, p.149.

as a whole—a ‘suppressed wish to regress to childlike innocence, where such language seemed most natural.’¹⁴⁸

In the second stanza, all this is somewhat incongruously combined with scholarly speculation arising from the New Testament studies which he had recently taken up. The ‘jolly old man’ remarks: ‘Goguel says nobody knew where the christ they buried him / anyway but the Jewish brass. [...] So at sweet dawn wás he gone?’ This refers to Goguel’s conclusion that the crucified Christ was originally given a ‘ritual burial’; that is, a hasty burial before sunset, most likely in an unmarked grave, ‘to avoid transgressing the commandment of Deuteronomy 21.23 which forbids one allowing the sun to rest on the corpse of a criminal. Those who, according to this tradition, would have buried Jesus [‘the Jewish brass’, the religious authorities] were only concerned that his body should not remain exposed and so had no other reason for marking with accuracy the place where they laid it.’ According to Goguel, this developed into the tradition that Jesus was given an ‘honourable burial’; that is, ‘it was done in an honourable way in a tomb which could be found again. This tradition alone is portrayed in the stories but there survive distinct traces of the other [earlier] tradition.’ He argues that the growing belief in the Resurrection, and the apologetic need to defend this doctrine, motivated the requirement of there being a known tomb which was later discovered to be empty.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, he presents evidence disputing the traditional site of the Holy Sepulchre.¹⁵⁰

Consequently, the speaker’s remarks in the Song represent a suggestion of dubiety concerning the doctrine of the Resurrection; although, in this case, he distances himself

¹⁴⁸ Mariani, *Dream Song*, pp.298-99.

¹⁴⁹ Goguel, *Birth of Christianity*, pp.30-37.

¹⁵⁰ Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, pp.546-51.

from such a proposition by explicitly attributing it to Goguel. The introduction of this issue invites speculation for its own sake, but also works as both an allegory for, and a contributory factor towards, the existential uncertainty which is conveyed by the Song. It is the first example of how over the Dream Song period such historical problems would represent obstacles of faith for the poet, and his long epic poem would be the arena in which these conflicts are played out.

He would continue the habit of employing Gospel imagery, as well as the themes of historical Gospel criticism, as deceptively simple allegorical devices, as the following example from much later in the Dream Song period illustrates:

Maris, my honey-love, I have to say
 much: as of how Ann Arbor done Henry in
 nor did the clues accrue
 of how the best of us was crucified
 this is Good Friday — I can't reconcile
 the Synoptic accounts,

nor John. Your husband is my doctor, saving
 — saving — saving — saving — worthless flesh
 which let be.
 I cannot reconcile — we are all trash
 maybe — except your husband — and, well,
 you.

You were in China. Well, I was here.
 I can't reconcile. I hand it over to Boyd
 your beloved busy husband.
 And Steve, and the whole family anthropoid
 as you & I are, sheer.
 The mill-race breaks after the waters clear.
 I spill an empty tear.¹⁵¹

This unpublished Song appears relatively straightforward: a witty and affectionate homage to his friend Maris, the wife of his doctor and friend Boyd Thomes. The poem's

¹⁵¹ U Minn, JBP, Unpublished Dream Songs, Box 1, Folder 5, #67, TS.

central motif, however, is extracted from the field of Gospel criticism, which in itself represents Berryman's attempt to demonstrate that this issue, the authenticity of Scripture, is also a significant preoccupation which has risen to the surface. Here he cannot just reconcile the Gospel accounts, or the fact that 'the best of us was crucified'; but he cannot also reconcile the fact that he, as 'worthless flesh' and 'trash', is being saved by his loyal, dedicated doctor, and also enjoys the friendship and support of Maris and the family. This Song, like most of the other 'Christ Songs', bears the strong imprint of the two Continental sceptics, both in terms of language and attitude. Throughout Goguel's *The Life of Jesus*, and particularly his chapter on 'The Story of the Passion', he consistently uses the phrase 'it is hard to reconcile', or similar, when examining the different narratives.¹⁵² Berryman effortlessly draws us into the discourse of radical criticism to produce an intriguing conceit.

The Passion itself is used to make the first point, as he cannot reconcile what it is in human nature that brought about the Crucifixion of 'the best of us': a natural enough sentiment, and subject of consideration, for the poet to have on Good Friday. He compares this difficulty with his inability to form an existential, spiritual or practical explanation for his own physical and emotional suffering; 'Ann Arbor' presumably refers to his turbulent period of extreme mental instability in Detroit in 1939/40.¹⁵³ What is certain is that he is bringing to the reader's attention an extremely localised instance of suffering, or melodramatic expression of fatigue, that he cannot come to terms with. He takes us beyond this simple allegory, however, by also bringing to our attention a more important instance of irreconciliation, which obviously has more universal implications: 'I can't reconcile the Synoptic accounts, / nor John'.

¹⁵² eg. pp.477, 481.

¹⁵³ See Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, pp.112-28; Mariani, *Dream Song*, pp.110-28.

This remark is not as straightforward as it seems; it has significant implications which someone acquainted with New Testament scholarship is forced to consider. The Song subtly entering itself into a critical historical discourse. It is clear that the poet is not referring to contradictions between the Synoptic accounts, because, aside from a number of minor differences in detail, the basic Passion narratives, together with the reasons they give for Christ's Crucifixion, are largely consistent. Berryman is talking about irreconcilable doubts within the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel themselves, rather than differences between them. Both Goguel and Guignebert take the view that there has been significant redaction in all the Passion accounts, in order to fulfil the theological interests of the evangelists' respective communities. Guignebert in particular finds that much of the Passion narrative consists of interpolations intended to demonstrate the fulfilment of certain prophecies.¹⁵⁴

However, Berryman seems to be talking not of the details of the Crucifixion itself, but of the motivations which inspired it. To the poet, the verdict is still out on Christ's divinity; he still regards him as 'the best of us'. In one sense, he is asking rhetorically: how could one who preached love and forgiveness be subjected to such a cruel death? He is questioning the reasons for the Crucifixion as they are retold in the Gospel accounts. In all of them it is the Jewish religious authorities that are seen to be the main instigators of Jesus's arrest, although they are helped by Judas to achieve it. They want Jesus to be tried under Roman law, so that he can be crucified, something which was forbidden under their own law. They whip up the hostility of the masses against Jesus, so that the reluctant Pontius Pilate feels compelled to relent in the end, against his better judgement. There are differences in detail, chronology and emphasis in the Gospels: for instance, Matthew's account appears to be the most 'anti-Jewish' of them all, and by the

¹⁵⁴ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.489.

time of John, Judas had been transformed into an outright villain; but the basic human motivations that lead to the downfall of Jesus remain the same: spiritual blindness and jealousy, and a proud, hostile resistance to the demands of conversion of the heart.

The real question identified by Guignebert as the central problem of Jesus's life concerns his death and resurrection. To Jesus's disciples, it was through these two events that his life attained its ultimate significance in 'the mystery of salvation'. If the teachings and predictions of Christ which were attributed to him were genuinely his, then 'Christianity is the work of Jesus; he came into the world to *found* it, and by the cross he both realized it and vindicated it.' The question for the historian such as Guignebert, then, is to what extent the testimony of the disciples, and the transmission and interpretation of it by oral and written tradition, are reliable?¹⁵⁵ Guignebert then attempts to demonstrate how much of the Passion narrative is really an interpolation by the early Church; he argues that it often tries to fulfil scriptural prophesy, against what he sees as sometimes conflicting historical evidence.¹⁵⁶ In relation to the reason of Jesus's arrest and Crucifixion, he concludes: 'the probability is that *the Nazarene was arrested by the Roman police, judged and condemned by the Roman procurator, Pilate or someone else.*' It was the Gospel editors that pinned the blame on the Jews, inspired by theological and political motivations, particularly in reaction to persecution against the early Christian communities.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.409.

¹⁵⁶ Guignebert writes: 'Beneath these memories, or at least, beneath the information of the Gospel writers, there lie, perhaps, only these two simple statements: (1) Jesus came up to Jerusalem and died there; (2) Jesus rose again.' The latter he then goes on to dispute. Ibid, p.422.

¹⁵⁷ He picks out the Barabbas episode as the most striking example of this anti-Jewish redaction, particularly with regard to the alleged behaviour of the crowd: 'The scene appears more like a stage effect in a childish play than a piece of historical reality.' Ibid, pp. 468-72 (469).

Berryman's other source, Goguel, also takes the same view, and he explores the historical circumstances in the early Church which led the Gospel writers to downplay the Roman role in the downfall of Jesus, and exacerbate that of the Jews.¹⁵⁸ Goguel believes Christian Tradition was more concerned with the 'moral' rather than the 'immediate causes' of the Passion events; it had a desire to discover the 'meaning' rather than 'the actual course of the events themselves'. The meaning for them is tied up in the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish authorities. In doing this, however, Christian tradition has overlooked 'the Roman authorities, the instrument they needed if they were to attain their end'.¹⁵⁹

This brief excursion into Berryman's sources, in order to illustrate the thinking behind his deceptively simple remark, demonstrates the power of his poetic condensation. The struggles encountered during his academic studies are expressed with a certain degree of melodramatic self-parody, but they do produce doctrinal uncertainties for him which makes faith more difficult, and the meaning of life more uncertain. But the Song is also an expression of the goodness of Christ, as representative of the potential goodness of humanity, which contrasts sharply with all that is fallen and degenerate about it. His doctor Boyd's dedication in tending to 'trash' like him—the alcoholic, chain-smoking poet was not the easiest of cases—is compared to the compassion Christ demonstrated towards sinners, and vice versa. In such Songs the poet proclaims his faith in Christ as a

¹⁵⁸ Goguel concludes: 'it seems very unlikely that the Jews and the Romans would have co-operated to arrest Jesus. Whether that be so or not, if the Romans did proceed to arrest Jesus, or if they merely collaborated, the initiative, or a least part of the initiative, must be assigned to them. In consequence, the Gospel narrative which attributes this initiative wholly to the Jews is a biased perversion of the primitive tradition.' Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.469.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p.482. Goguel sums up the matter by stating that 'no part of the Gospel narrative has been more influenced by the doctrine of the Church than the story of the Passion. The early Christians could not and did not even attempt to make a distinction between the fact of the death of Jesus and its religious significance; instinctively, when they told the story of the death of Jesus they tended to express their own faith. They also took pains to prove that the death of Jesus had been foretold in the Old Testament. In no other part of the New Testament has the interpretation of prophecy exerted a deeper influence than in the story of the Passion (pp.463-64).'

man, but not his faith in Christianity. Historical criticism has presented a serious challenge to it.

In the following Dream Song fragment, the speaker feels compelled to reject the written Gospels altogether, his resignation adopting a more relativistic approach to belief:

Misericords we must, for Gospels, pal,
 broken-winded. Let's us get out from under
 their blunders and mysteries,
 I put my finger hopefully in my ear.
 We are all Th's children¹⁶⁰

Henry deflatingly invites pity on the Gospels, scornfully regarding them as flatulent pomposity, undermined by human error. His growing awareness of their historical inaccuracies makes the truth seem ever more elusive, and his only hope of satisfaction is to block out all second-hand revelation and seek a direct personal relationship with God.

In another Dream Song fragment, his reaction to the apparent fruitlessness of his quest produces a slightly different response. Henry's urge to discover the historical 'truth' results in extreme disillusionment, as he begins radically to question the notion that anything can be certain:

Sooner or later, history pushes: take.
An Adventure, Hitler's little dance
 beside the railwaycar,
 take. A friend's marriage, Strindberg's confidence
 Nietzsche was sane
 The ladies did not hear and did not see

¹⁶⁰ I take this to be an early Song fragment, probably late 1950s, due to the note at the bottom of the manuscript, which shows the poet still at the experimental stage with the Songs: 'DS 1) allow a little more diction 2) - - "nonsense", occas'y & rep'n [occasionally and repetition].' U Minn, JBP, Unpub DS, Box 1, F7, #118. The MS also indicates that this is intended to be the third stanza; the previous two are missing but it could be linked to another fragment in the same folder: 'Has any soul been saved for donkey's years? / Has any been lost? / And that interpret'n of apocatastasis / will it ever be revived? · If as we came they'd tell us: it will cost / so & so much across the decades.' (#112)

there at versailles: the Queen did not return.
 Lazarus is a fraud,
 a product of the theology of John
 'Tetelestai'

Is anything real? Point out to me something real
 & I will stall with you to the world's end.
 --uremic poisoning,
 Mr . Bones, is, and is a baby's smile,
 & ruined cities, clouds
 when the last imposture is seen through—
 but is it?¹⁶¹

The first stanza offers some rather humorous examples of instances where individuals, or groups of people, have perceived 'reality' rather differently from the common consensus of historians. This leads the speaker conclusively to declare, based on his own investigations, what he now regards as fact: that one of Jesus's major miracles, the raising to life of Lazarus, which prefigures the Resurrection in John's Gospel, is 'a fraud'. The Lazarus episode is so significant because John represents it as a test case for belief in Jesus. Many Jews in the Fourth Gospel come to believe through Lazarus's raising; whilst for others, such as the jealous religious authorities, it strengthens their resolve to destroy Jesus, and the Pharisees also plot to kill Lazarus on account of it.¹⁶²

The Song appears to represent a further affirmation of the poet's sceptical position on the historicity of the Gospels, which aligns him closely with his most favoured sources, Guignebert and Goguel. What is surprising, however, is the way the tenor of the Song conflicts with the far more sympathetic opinion of the Fourth Gospel which Berryman tended to hold, in contrast to these other scholars who largely dismiss its historical usefulness. He states his position in the 1958 preface to his unpublished 'Life of Christ':
 'While admitting its theological character (this it shares with the Synoptics) I have placed more confidence in the intermittent, residual historicity of John than most

¹⁶¹ U Minn, Unpub DS, Box 1, F8, #61, TS.

¹⁶² Jn 11.45-53, 12.9-11.

modern critics have been willing to do until very lately perhaps.¹⁶³ Such an attitude is evident, for instance, in his predominant use of the Fourth Gospel as a source for his representation of Christ in Dream Song 234 ‘The Carpenter’s Son’. However, in this instance at least, it appears the raising of Lazarus falls well outside of John’s ‘intermittent, residual historicity’.

Berryman’s perspective on the Fourth Gospel was heavily influenced by his reading of Westcott’s famous commentary on the Authorised Version of the text, first published in 1880. He acknowledges his debt to the Victorian scholar in ‘The Search’, remarking how ‘Bishop Westcott’s analysis (it took him 25 years) / of the first eighteen verses of *St. John* / struck me as of a cunning like Odysseus.’ Westcott, an orthodox exegete, has an attitude to the Gospel which contrasts entirely with that of the radical French sceptics. The Song fragment is, in part, a response to Westcott, and certain passages from his commentary are subtly alluded to. It exhibits more sympathy with the radical critics on the issue of John, but the poet evokes a kind of critical intertextual exchange between them and Westcott to make a more universal point about our relationship with history.

Guignebert’s approach towards the Fourth Gospel in *Jesus* is largely to dismiss it altogether from consideration, except at times when it is convenient for his argument to cite it, usually in order to demonstrate some inconsistency with the other Gospels. Although he concedes that the claim of John’s Gospel to historicity is as valid—or worthless—as the Synoptics, he decides early on that John is probably more contrived,

¹⁶³ U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, ‘The Life of Christ’, TS, headed ‘A Life of the Christ - Foreword’, pp.1-2.

and therefore less reliable, than the others.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, he does not even bother to comment on the Lazarus episode itself. Goguel likewise takes a similar, though typically more measured, view: ‘The evangelist is not concerned with questions of narrative [...] The centre of gravity is not in the facts, but in the words to which they serve as a framework, and of which sometimes ([...], the raising of Lazarus) they are an allegorical expression.’¹⁶⁵ He concludes that the Fourth Gospel is ‘a collection of independent incidents, selected in order to throw light on various aspects of Christian truth. [...] The attempt, therefore, to discover a history of the life of Jesus in the Johannine Gospel is due to a misunderstanding of the nature of the Gospel.’¹⁶⁶ As far as the Lazarus episode goes, he regards it as the addition of an independent narrative which previously existed outside the work, though he claims too that it is ‘so closely connected in ideas and in language with the rest of the Gospel that it is impossible not to assign [it] to the evangelist himself.’ It is therefore a later addition of the evangelist, having been added to make a theological point.¹⁶⁷

In contrast, Westcott takes the testimony of John at face value and defends the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel account. He sees nothing remarkable in the omission of the Lazarus episode from the Synoptics—often taken as an indication that it is a later invention—stating that ‘in each case the selection of the facts was determined by the purpose of the record.’¹⁶⁸ The following passage, from Westcott’s commentary on the Lazarus story, is crucial to an understanding of Berryman’s point. Here, Westcott

¹⁶⁴ He states that ‘the plan of it is entirely dictated by dialectical considerations. Its interest is wholly mystical and theological, and its arrangement is based on the current rules for this species of rhetoric [...] the special purposes and peculiar ideas of the author—or authors—have conditioned their use, and take us far from the earthly plane of human life and history.’ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.28.

¹⁶⁵ Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.155.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp.156-57.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.151.

¹⁶⁸ Westcott, *Gospel of St. John*, p.163.

staunchly defends the essential historicity of the miracle, based on textual evidence alone:

Apart from the antecedent assumption that a miracle is impossible, and that the record of a miracle must therefore be explained away, it is not easy to see any ground for questioning the literal exactness of the history. No explanation of the origin of the narrative on the supposition that it is unhistorical, has even a show of plausibility. Those who deny the fact are sooner or later brought to maintain either that *the scene was an imposture*, or that the record is a fiction. Both of these hypotheses involve a moral miracle [my italics].¹⁶⁹

Westcott is directly opposing any attempt by non-orthodox critics to show that this, or any other miracle episode, is necessarily an interpolation, motivated by theological expediency. He believes that one must accept it all, or not at all; one has to accept that Lazarus was raised from the dead, or that it is a fabrication. To Westcott, it is far more unlikely, given the religious and cultural context, that the evangelist and his community would have approved mere fabrications; this is the 'moral miracle'. The onus is on the critic to prove that it is an 'imposture'.

Henry, though, is still clearly persuaded of the contrivance of John's account; his use of the word 'imposture' in the penultimate line suggests that he really is deciding, on the basis of Westcott's reasoning, to regard the alleged miracle as such. The declaration 'Lazarus is a fraud' conveys a harsh judgement about the intentions of John; that is, it suggests an intentional deception on his part to make history conform to theology.

Westcott, unlike the sceptical critics, maintains that we must regard John as history, and not theology; Henry, paradoxically, is actually affirming this view. Rather than simply rejecting the Lazarus account, however, he is led to consider the possibility that everything is an 'imposture'.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, pp.163-64.

The first stanza rather aptly ends with the last words of Christ recorded by John: ‘Tetelestai’, meaning ‘it is finished’. This also represents a resolution to John’s theological journey, as Westcott remarks: ‘every essential point in the prophetic portraiture of Messiah had been realised. [...] The ‘end’ of all has been gained. Nothing was left undone or unborne.’¹⁷⁰ In the Song, however, it denotes an end to the hope of historical certainty; everything is left undone. This is partly an expression of disillusionment with historical criticism itself. In *Jesus* Guignebert seems to dismiss virtually everything in all of the four Gospel accounts as unreliable, and, even for the non-believer, this complete and utter dissemination of written ‘history’ can be quite unsettling. If the Gospels can be deconstructed in such a way, then so can all reality: ‘Is anything real?’ Henry asks.

In consequence, Henry then challenges his friend to disprove his new, disenchanted solipsism: ‘Point out to me something real / & I will stall with you to the world’s end.’ His request echoes the opening line of William Empson’s poem ‘The World’s End’ (1955): ‘Fly with me then to all’s and the world’s end’.¹⁷¹ To Henry, questioning and discovering the historical truth is ‘progress’, whilst accepting reality, as it is given, is ‘stalling’. He is therefore now prepared to ‘stall’ for the rest of time, if every process of discerning truth is irretrievably flawed. His friend’s reply is an obscure instance of a reality one would rather not face: ‘uremic poisoning’.¹⁷² It is then followed by what could be regarded as either several popular clichés of beauty (‘baby’s smile’ and a picturesque ‘ruined city’), or the contrasting image of the innocent and sinister faces of

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.277.

¹⁷¹ William Empson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Allen Lane / Penguin, 2000), p.13.

¹⁷² A potentially fatal condition caused by a ‘raised level of nitrogenous waste compounds (orig.spec. urea) in the blood, normally excreted by the kidneys, which results in nausea, drowsiness, etc’ (*OED*). Among the famous people to have died of this condition, and the one who may have inspired the remark, is the novelist Jack London, who died on 22 November 1916.

humanity (new life and destruction). Either way, it suggests the simple fundamentals of life which one takes for granted. His friend concludes on a wistful and circular note: ‘clouds / when the last imposture is seen through’; in other words, when the last imposture is seen through, there is yet more uncertainty: another obfuscation of truth in the form of ‘clouds’. Henry’s closing response takes his scepticism as far as it will go; he questions whether both these fundamentals, and uncertainty itself, can be relied upon as ‘reality’. It represents the questioning of Henry’s questioning.

There are some unpublished Songs, however, such as the following, which portray an image of Christ much more akin to the Christian conception of him:

Prefigure me, doomed god, dismantled hells
whence one by one in flame-shot twilight crawl
toward haven
reprieved & griefless paraplegics, all
mad everywhere, & all the sufferers else.
Tell me now of heaven. —

Thanks. I did prefer the short account
but I have heard you.—Mr Bones, respect!
—whites of eyes red-flecked
rebuke your dis-ease, Friend. Upon the Mount
a sermon mentioned promises. Where yóu live?
—no fixt abode, I give

Comfort to strangers, noses on the bar.
What happen’ to the god? —For my sins are
my mercies multiplied, & I see:
He’s banking, banking down the Grand Corniche
on miracles, like a fierce dog on a leash
banking. Then we agree.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ A note on the manuscript indicates that it was finished on 19 May 1964 at 11.05pm, ‘after quarrel’. His extreme prolificacy at the time is also noted by additional comments concerning the output of Songs: ‘6th in 10 days since Abbott; 30th in 2½ mo’s since Mar, 2nd’. He does not actually give the year of the Song’s composition on the MS, but I take it to be 1964, since that was the only year when he spent April/May in Abbott Hospital. Also, the fact that he is still very concerned to sustain a rhyme-scheme suggests a fairly early date. U Minn, JBP, Unpub. Dream Songs, Box 5, unnumbered folder/MS.

Although there is the possibility that Berryman considered the Song unfinished (he never typed it out), it is potentially one of the finest dialogues between Henry and his interlocutor in all the Dream Songs. I say ‘potentially’ because it is apparent from the inconsistency of the interlocutor’s minstrel dialect, and some ambiguities in the last stanza, that the exchange is in need of further development; although it is not by any means unaccomplished in comparison with many of the collected Dream Songs. It is essentially a Song of hope, and is rare amongst the Dream Song material; not only for its comparatively sympathetic portrayal of God, but more specifically in its association of God with Christ, unmediated through the interpretations of historical scepticism.

The Song begins with his interlocutor’s melodramatic, overblown address to Christ, the ‘doomed god’, who has gone before him in suffering; the image is of Christ lighting up the darkness, offering ‘haven’ to the crippled and afflicted who crawled towards Him in faith, for deliverance. Henry’s response is characteristically deflating and cynical, referring him to the Gospel account, which he prefers for its brevity. The dialogue is that between one sufferer and another; but whereas his friend’s attitude is one of trusting faith and hope, Henry’s (at least initially) is apparently one of impatient cynicism. It is a plea for deliverance, and is an example of the way the interlocutor often represents a simple trusting faith, as a counterpoint to the complexities of Henry’s anxiety, with his fierce intellectual pride and churlishness.

However, in this instance, Henry exhibits an unusual peace of mind, the source of which is, uncharacteristically, the Gospel. He notices the blood-shot eyes of his friend, and instructs him to cure himself in the manner of Jesus, by ‘rebuking’ the unclean spirit: it is in this case his friend’s ‘dis-ease’, or needless anxiety, rather than his alcoholism. Henry evokes the Beatitudes from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, which promises

deliverance from all manner of suffering, whereupon he advises: ‘do not be anxious about your life’.¹⁷⁴ Henry is frustrated that his friend had not heard or heeded the message, exclaiming ‘Where you live?’ As with many Dream Songs, there is a degree of not altogether purposeful ambiguity in several of the lines, especially in the final stanza. The interlocutor, considering his plight as a wandering barfly, and that of the dissipaters he comforts, appears to question God’s apparent non-intervention: ‘What happen to the god?’

Henry replies with his personal theodicy, inspired by Christ’s sermon; it is an unusual expression of raw faith. He evokes an intriguing, though slightly confusing, image to illustrate his expression of Christ’s boundless mercy towards him as a sinner. It is not immediately clear whether it is Henry or Christ who is ‘banking down the / Grand Corniche on miracles’; both provide for interesting interpretations. In the first and perhaps most intelligible instance, it is an image of God as protector, guarding him against all his dangerous excesses; in this case, the risks being figured as a skiing metaphor. He miraculously prevents wayward Henry from inadvertently or intentionally hurtling off the edge of life’s cliffs. In his unrestrainable frenzies, for which he compares himself to a ‘fierce dog’, he is miraculously restrained from above. It is a prefiguring of the ‘God of rescue’ image that features in his post-conversion poetry. However, the flow of Henry’s discourse, together with the capitalised pronoun after the colon, would suggest that Christ is the ‘He’ whom Henry refers to; although this presents the reader with a far greater interpretative challenge. Similarly, the meaning in this sense would be that Christ is making extraneous efforts to help and forgive him; racing to his aid and cutting corners. Both Henry and his friend maintain the image of Christ as personal saviour, on that they ‘agree’; but Henry has also found peace of mind

¹⁷⁴ Mt 5-7 (6.25).

in reading, and taking to heart, the written Gospel. In other Songs. he does not find it so reassuring or straightforward; the authenticity of Christ's words themselves, as they come to us through the New Testament, is in question.

Another unpublished Song portrays Henry's fearful respect for the prophecies of Christ, as he contemplates the possibility that the forewarned Apocalypse may come true. It is in a similar vein to Songs such as 46, 220 and 347 which depict the poet's ambivalent attitude towards the Apocalypse, the fulfilment of God's plan for humanity as described by Christian Scripture. As my commentary demonstrated, Song 220, the most complex of this group of Songs, portrays a variety of emotions towards the prospect of Christ's return; it depicts a fearful anticipation of its occurrence, but most of all the challenge to faith prompted by its apparent delay, and the questioning of the concept itself by the arguments of sceptical historical criticism. The following Song focuses on the anxiety aroused by the prospect of it all actually coming to pass:

The day is murdering itself, darling.
 Gobs of the damned thing fall.
 Who can get ready?
 I don't feel they did better, either.
 Ah am in grave doubt whether
 since we all slosht out

(natural' this' a matter for study)
 anybody ever did a bloody hell of a lot better.
 This reaching from underground
 indicates no goodwill from the bottom & back of the business.
 And they are after all so much more numerous!
 Christ!

Which reminds me. Who knows, who knows?
 Though surrexcited he seems when he promises all that horror,
 and then he himself ...
 It may be, likely, Ah am obliged
 to take leave of your fingers & eyes & hair

for ever, and all of this stuff.¹⁷⁵

The Song is far from lucid, but the notion of being ‘ready’ for death does clearly emerge. Exactly how one can be ready is the anxious problem that Henry deliberates over in many of the religious Songs. As in Song 46, he uses the profanity ‘Christ’ in a directly evocative way; here it is used to prompt the suggestion of Christ’s prophesied Apocalypse as a possible outcome. Oblique though it is, the conversational register of the Song gives it a dramatic and jocular air; the inherent bathos of Berryman’s treatment of the subject allows him to confront the most profound and troubling aspects of the human situation, with a humour that evades neither the seriousness of the issue, nor the theological intrigues and intricacies of the problem. The use of an interlocutor, whether present or invisible, is a key factor in creating this conversational feel. Here, Henry’s diction suggests his invisible addressee is not his usual blackface friend; it is both camp and grouchy, and his loquacity makes his entry into the Gospel discourse sound deceptively casual. Henry even adopts a rather artless-sounding yokelism in his dialect, replacing the personal pronouns with ‘Ah’. It actually sounds like a self-parody: an exaggerated send-up of the poet’s own Midwestern-sounding performance of the Songs in public readings.

The simple observation of the day spoiling itself by raining is used to prompt a train of thought relating to mortality; ‘Who can get ready?’ is the question that resonates through the rest of the Song. The diction at this point is frustratingly imprecise, as one can only speculate who ‘they’ refers to. Since he remarks, on the back of this, that ‘we all slosht out’, he is most likely referring to the short-lived life of the rain or snowdrops; they certainly could not prepare for their hurried and unavoidable end. His ‘grave doubt’

¹⁷⁵ U Minn, JBP, Unpub. DS, Box 2, F14, #9, TS.

about whether anyone ‘ever did a bloody hell of a lot better’ in being prepared, leads him to think of the damned; the thought of which perturbs and encroaches on his mind, with the image of them ‘reaching from underground’. The train of thought is suggested by the preceding diction, which appears casual (‘grave doubt’, ‘bloody *hell*’), but punningly invokes an image, which the argument then follows.

Despite being elsewhere reassured by Origen’s theory of apocatastasis—the notion that ‘Hell is empty’; God’s mercy will redeem all, including Satan—here he seems rather more inclined to believe that this is where the majority go.¹⁷⁶ The thought of so many ‘numerous’ lost souls unconsciously prompts the profane exclamation: ‘Christ!’ which is then shown to remind him of certain teachings of the Christ. The ‘horror’, which He promises, could be either Christ’s declaration of what Henry has just considered (that the majority take the wide road to perdition);¹⁷⁷ or, given the neologism ‘surrexcited’, perhaps should more specifically refer us to the Synoptic apocalypse, where Jesus’s long discourse heaps up the prophesied catastrophes and judgement warnings.¹⁷⁸ Jesus’s advice about discerning the ‘sign of the times’, and the accompanying parables (the faithful servant, the wise and foolish virgins, etc), all stress the importance of being ‘ready’ for His coming.

Henry then shrinks from the thought that Christ also prophesied his own horrible end, prompting the conclusion of the Song. Considering the fact that such horrors ‘may be likely’, he then makes a declaration of preparedness for the one thing he is sure is definitely going to happen: his eternal separation from this present life and from the person he is intimately addressing; the delivery of this strikes an unconventionally

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Song 56.

¹⁷⁷ Mt 7. 13-14, Lk 13.23-24, Jn 14.6.

¹⁷⁸ Mk 13, Mt 24-25, Lk 21.5-37. Berryman also describes Robert Lowell’s verse in his collection *Land of Unlikeness* as being ‘surrexcited’: ‘Robert Lowell and Others’, *Freedom of the Poet*, p.287.

wistful chord. The final adjunct in the last line—‘and all this stuff’—also strikes a slightly grouchy chord of resignation, in that he declares he will also be free, from the type of doctrines, and projections of doom, which worry him so much. The Song is a further example of Berryman’s dramatic and humorous interaction with the Gospels, as he confronts the enormity of his religious dilemma within the Dream Song period.

A more Christian message is also found in the following unpublished Song, which he had typed up and marked out for Book 6 of the collection, but ultimately ‘killed’:

The Crush bore faithfully us everywhere
 in all the widen’d-west, in half the East
 and how did we serve it?
 Abandoned in a D.C. filling station
 for nothing, as ruinous, to be retire
 we should have skrunked, or spat.

He grew so tired of Satan’s pestering
 He sold him the universe and He retired.
 Satan came on strong.
 Christ came stronger. Sematic Henry, wired
 for action, wondered, with a random ‘Chimp’,
 an unmistakable clank.

Galloped into Zero the world of horses.
 Old Mrs Kahler, when the fridge from Einstein
 falling from nature had to be retired,
 wrote in English a poem on the subject:
 askt what to do with the poem, a tart reply,
 ‘Put it in the fridge, of course where else?’ Ghosts in & out
 wander me too across & forth wrecked.¹⁷⁹

It represents one of the more frivolous, but entertaining, Songs, in which the poet is able unobtrusively to assimilate the weightiness of biblical allegory. The Song begins with the abandonment of the speaker’s worthless dilapidated car—the Chevrolet the

¹⁷⁹ JBP, Unpublished Dream Songs, Box 1, folder 6, #13. The Song is undated, but is undoubtedly one of the later compositions due to the much freer style and lack of a rhyme-scheme. ‘Old Mrs Kahler’ is the wife of the historian Erich Kahler, with whom Berryman became good friends whilst teaching at Princeton University (1943-53). Albert Einstein also held a position at Princeton during this time.

Berrymans called their ‘Orange Crush’—from which he eventually makes a parallel with his own dilapidation and retirement.¹⁸⁰ From here he makes a comment on God’s apparent attitude towards mankind; God has, according to Scripture, allowed Satan dominion over earth for a time, until he will again be bound to God’s jurisdiction.¹⁸¹ We are presented with a kind of extreme adaptation of the heavenly contest of The Book of Job; in this case, the weary, deistic God does not have the energy for a contest with pestering Satan, and allows His adversary free rein on His creation. The image of an ineffectual, even corrupt, God, is characteristic of His portrayal throughout *The Dream Songs*.

However, the image of Christ is more positive; he arrives on the scene as Saviour, and his duel with Satan evokes his temptation in the desert, and the victory over the Devil that it represents.¹⁸² Consequently we are offered a brief, witty excursion into the salvific, eschatological history of mankind within a few lines, until, in the next half of the second stanza, we are back with the suffering, mortal Henry. In certain ways, this portrayal of God’s relationship with Satan is deceptively playful; it actually throws up profound theological issues concerning the nature of God’s involvement with His creation and the problem of evil. The Song draws its imagery from the language of the Gospel: Jesus speaks of Satan in terms of the ‘ruler of this world’, though he also states that ‘he has no power over me’.¹⁸³ Henry appears to associate himself with Satan, as someone of this world, in the last line—‘wander me too across & forth, wrecked’—which echoes Satan’s replies to God in Job, when He asks him whence he has come:

¹⁸⁰ Mariani refers to the car in *Dream Song*, p.377. In the ‘4th Address to the Lord’, from *Love & Fame*, written several years after this Song, the speaker remarks to God: ‘Thou art not so absent-minded, as I am. / I am so much so I had to give up driving.’

¹⁸¹ Rev 12.7-17, 20.1-4.

¹⁸² Mt 4.1-11, Mk 1.12-13, Lk 4.1-13, Heb 2.18, 4.15.

¹⁸³ Jn 14.30.

‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.’¹⁸⁴ Henry’s power in the world, like Satan’s, has found its limitations, and he is ready for retirement. Overall the Song marks a surprising shift in the Songs’ treatment of the Gospels, displaying a distinct mellowing in the rigorous, catechising attitude towards Scripture that is so striking in the Songs of the late 1950s.

The following Dream Song fragment also comes close to portraying, whilst at the same time disavowing, the Christian conception of God, and is among the rare occasions where God and Christ figure together:

In green age (lucky us), save us. Do your best,
and we’ll forgive You.
Why not? We made you up.
I hope, in your family circle, you have prob’s
reminding you of all them human slobs
and get blue
and fail a really serious human test
and throw up.

They say: You gave Your Son, who went to Hell
but came back O.

The fragment remains in a fairly raw state, but demonstrates the typical, humorously combative attitude towards God in the Dream Songs. It is also characteristic of the way he incorporates and inverts Gospel imagery. The speaker alludes to Jesus’s proclamation to the Daughters of Jerusalem, as he carries his cross to Calvary: ‘if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?’¹⁸⁵ It is Christ’s comment on the treatment of the innocent (himself): if they try to burn ‘green’ or wet wood (the innocent), what hope is there for dry wood (the guilty).¹⁸⁶ In this case. Henry

¹⁸⁴ Job 1.7, 2.2.

¹⁸⁵ Lk 23.31.

¹⁸⁶ *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1966), p.238.

portrays himself, and indeed all mankind, as the persecuted party, protesting his sense of injustice. They are the innocent generation (the ‘green age’), who are now suffering at the hands of an indifferent God. Through this inversion of Christ’s words, it is Henry’s generation who, as the innocent party, are ready to offer God forgiveness, in return for His (probably ineffectual) intervention. The assertion, ‘we made you up’, is one of the most explicitly sceptical disavowals of God in all of the Dream Song material. Henry, acting the injured party, rails at God with a gloriously spiteful and childish-sounding stream of ill wishes; God is the setter of impossible tests and Henry desires that He has a taste of his own medicine.

We are presented with the ribald image of God ‘throwing up’, which is typical of the way the poet employs the comedy device of disassociation to create an absurd, often speculative, vision of God, which conveys an aspect of the problem of evil; in other words, a portrait of God’s probable nature which seeks to explain the human predicament. Henry disturbingly considers the possibility that God may be similar to ‘all them human slobs’. The fragment is very similar in tone to Song 238, ‘Henry’s Programme for God’, where he speculates: ‘perhaps God is a slob, / playful, vast, rough-hewn.’ The punning antidotes that he considers in Song 238, such as ‘bleak denial’ and ‘anti-potent rage’, are ‘resources’ that Henry himself employs in many of his dealings with the question of God. Such puns succeed in heroizing Henry; his wit is the main resource he has against such an awesome unassailable foe; but they in no way mitigate the seriousness of his plight, or soften his offensive and authentic rage.

The fragment was most likely composed around the same time as Song 238, since it is typical of the Songs of the mid-1960s in their unflinching directness, which nevertheless take on a diffusing comic aspect. An important indication of Henry’s—and also the

poet's—stance towards Christ is the prefix 'They say' before the declaration of Christian dogma at the end, since it distances the speaker from any personal identification with the belief. The fragment illustrates the distinction Henry makes between Christ and God, which are not synonymous. Throughout *The Dream Songs*, Henry talks to God in a variety of fashions, but not to Christ. Christ is a matter of historical enquiry, and for Henry the verdict is still very much out on Him. The irony is, Henry engages in a direct address to God, whilst at the same time declaring Him to be a figment of the imagination. This somewhat undermines the attack and paradoxically brings it within the realm of prayer. Such pockets of malcontentedness towards God represent a reaction to suffering, which contains all the anguish and immediacy of the psalms. Though lacking the psalmists' sense of awe, they are nevertheless the petitions of a divided soul to a being over and above the speaker. Their irreverent, jocular nature articulates, rather than undermines, the authenticity of Henry's predicament.

Unless it is viewed as a trait of Henry's characterisation, *The Dream Songs* represents what appears to be a shift on Berryman's part towards a more solidly sceptical position on Christianity; one which is closely aligned to that of Goguel and especially Guignebert. The poem does not exhibit the same openness towards more orthodox interpretations as his contemporaneous 'Life of Christ' or his later poetry do.¹⁸⁷ However, the different perspectives offered by certain unpublished Songs suggest that there may have been at least some intention to make Henry conform to character in the final collected version.

¹⁸⁷ See Appendix for a full commentary on 'The Life of Christ'.

Whereas Henry doubts the existence of God, the existence of Jesus Christ, as a historical person, is taken for granted; as indeed, even the most radical of Berryman's sources, Guignebert, affirms.¹⁸⁸ The poet has no time for the 'Jesus myth' school; the question for him during this period is whether Christianity is a true reflection of the intentions of its founder. Songs such as 48 and 234 certainly veer towards the negative view. Ultimately, no conclusions result from Henry's wider quest, and despite the many disquisitions on God, faith and the meaning of life, true existential knowledge of all these eludes him. The poem constitutes a poignant depiction of both the necessity and, at times, the apparent futility of such strivings, and the way they are a fundamental part of the human condition. *The Dream Songs* does not appear to anticipate the radical new spiritual certainty which would characterise Berryman's last two volumes; but, in relation to the conversion narrative in which he would later view his life, this hopelessness of human endeavour sets the necessary scene for the dramatic entrance of the God of Rescue.

¹⁸⁸ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.75.

Chapter 5

The ‘God of Rescue’: *Love & Fame, Recovery and Delusions, etc*

Having published his final Dream Song instalment, *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest*, in 1968—followed by the complete volume of *The Dream Songs* in the following year—Berryman, after still habitually writing Songs in the same format for a short time, turned his attention to a new style and a new collection. He started writing *Love & Fame* in February 1970; it featured a new naked confessional exposition of the first person, in which he recounted the days of his youthful promise at college in the first half of the volume, contrasting with the washed up, disillusioned, spiritually searching middle-aged poet in his battle with and, for the time being, victory over alcoholism. However, a life-changing event took place during the writing of *Love & Fame*, an incident the poet described as ‘a kind of religious conversion’; after which he re-embraced the Catholic faith and his poetry incorporated a new devotional aspect.

The pivotal poem of *Love & Fame*, ‘The Search’, acts as a bridge between these two halves of the collection in which he recounts the intervening period in the form of an intellectual and spiritual quest to discover the meaning of life, particularly focussing on his investigations of Christianity. The first half of this chapter is devoted to a detailed commentary on the poem, which, although not one of his most aesthetically interesting compositions, offers a broadly authentic narrative structure to his life’s quest. ‘The Search’ cites a number of Christian thinkers that he feels ‘indebted’ to, ranging from the prominent to the obscure. They constitute sources which are important to an explication of his religious poetry, and, as my commentary illustrates, these citations suggest a gradual exploration of, and inclination towards, the Christ of faith.

After his religious conversion in May 1970, he composed ‘Eleven Addresses to the Lord’, the devotional poems which close *Love & Fame*. However, although they rejoice in the poet’s new conviction of there being a ‘God of Rescue’, they are not—as the poet is at pains to stress—Christian poems. However, a rapid Catholicisation of his verse subsequently takes place as he composes further devotional poems for his final collection, *Delusions, etc of John Berryman*. He now depicts the God of Rescue as being in the form of Jesus Christ his personal saviour. The irony of his conversion, as it is poetically portrayed, is that it did not occur as a direct result of his academic ‘search’, but rather as an express consequence of God’s intervention in his life. Certain ‘unloseable friends’, however, whom he cites in ‘The Search’, had enabled him to overcome potential intellectual obstacles to the embracing of this faith.

‘The Search’

‘The Search’ is a central poem, both to *Love & Fame*, and to the meta-narrative of the poet’s religious journey which runs through the course of his life’s work. His period at Columbia College, when his raptness for religion ‘sort of dropped out’—as he stated in his interview with Peter Stitt—followed by his experiences whilst studying abroad at Cambridge, are portrayed in the first two parts of *Love & Fame*. Berryman surveys his formative college years and the process by which he became an artist, but there is a curious lack of self-reflection in the narrative. Indeed, one may find it hard to discern any attitudinal difference between the youthful focaliser and the more ‘mature’ narrator in lines such as:

I fell in love with a girl.
O and a gash.

I'll bet she now has seven lousy children.
(I've three myself, one being off the record.)

(‘Her & It’)¹

Yet this is part of the success of *Love & Fame* as a narrative; while it could be considered, on the one hand, a demonstration of arrested development, the fact that the reminiscences are not unduly coloured by a radically different perspective means that the reader becomes more empathically swept up in the mentality of the enthusiastic young poet. The distinction between focaliser and narrator, as in the above verse, is evident more in the offering of updated story information, and the exhibition of a more developed and stylised poetic personality, which the younger poet did not possess. The self-reflection, however, is implied by the structure of *Love & Fame*, which clearly juxtaposes the poet as a young man with the lost, and then spiritually awakened, poet in his mid-fifties.

The poet depicts his youthful self as being preoccupied with pursuing the dual goals indicated by the collection's ironic title of ‘love’—mainly in the form of sexual conquest—and literary ‘fame’. A likely source of the title is John Keats's melancholy sonnet ‘When I have fears that I may cease to be’, in which the speaker contemplates the prospect of dying before he has immortalised himself in writing, and experienced true unrequited love.² Faced with the knowledge of his own mortality he remarks: ‘then

¹ Haffenden, *Collected Poems*, p.169.

² There has been a degree of critical debate surrounding the title, a summary of which is outlined in Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, pp.193-4. Other suggestions for its source have included George Herbert's ‘The Thanksgiving’ (l.26) and Alexander Pope's ‘Eloisa to Abelard’ (l.39-40). The latter appropriately declares ‘There stern religion quench'd th' unwilling flame. / There died the best of passions, love and fame’. However, since the final section of devotional poems was composed after the collection's title was originally conceived, the pertinence of this source would not have been so apparent to him (see *Critical Commentary*, pp.76-7). Although, as Haffenden remarks, the title may not necessarily be a direct allusion, the well-known Keats sonnet does thematically underpin the opening of ‘The Search’—the central fulcrum of the collection—to the extent that one is strongly suggested. The Keats reference is proposed in R. Patrick Wilson, ‘The Ironic Title of Berryman's *Love & Fame*’, *Notes on Contemporary Literature*, 1, no.4 [n.d.], p.11, and Robert Phillips, *The Confessional Poets* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p.98.

on the shore / Of the wide world I stand alone, and think / Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.' The speaker understands, in the light of this mortality, the potential futility of his yearnings for both earthly love and fame.

Contrary to popular critical assumption, and the impression given by the poet himself in the volume's afterword, Haffenden asserts that the moral juxtaposition of the book's structure was not predetermined, but rather 'corresponds to a radical change in Berryman's outlook which took place during the period of composition.'³ Haffenden is referring to the poet's conversion experience which took place on 12 May 1970; the first three parts of the collection had already been completed by March 23, but the 'Eleven Addresses to the Lord' were not written until after his encounter with the 'God of Rescue'.⁴ This partly explains the lack of critical distance in the narrative, since the focaliser does not yet come under the scrutiny of the spiritually enlightened poet. Haffenden suggests that Berryman 'clearly relished the telling of the secular, lubricious autobiography of Parts I and II.'⁵

This is certainly the impression given by the narrative tone of the first half, although his decision to add the 'Eleven Addresses', after he had already conceived the volume, strategically works to imply, rather than confer, judgement on what precedes it. In the English edition's 'Afterword', the poet gives the impression that the narrative of existential realignment was a preconceived design.⁶ Whereas this might be slightly disingenuous, given its compositional history, it also reveals the manner in which he

³ Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, p.70.

⁴ Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, pp.368-72; Berryman, *Collected Poems*, p.316.

⁵ Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, p.77.

⁶ He commends Professor Gelpi from Stanford University for recognising that 'it is—however uneven—a whole, each of the four movements criticising backward the preceding, until Part IV wipes out altogether all earlier presentations of the 'love' and 'fame' of the ironic title. [...] But the attack on these two notions begins in the opening poem.' Berryman, *Collected Poems*, pp.290-92.

now regarded the narrative of his own life. The first two parts still represent an attempt at an intellectual autobiography—he does reflect after all on his literary formation—although it is one entertainingly subject to the poet’s wry self-parodying. In ‘Olympus’ for instance, as a result of his revelatory encounter with R.P. Blackmur’s work, he remarks:

My girls suffered during this month or so,
so did my seminars & lectures &
my poetry even. To be a *critic*, ah,
how deeper & more scientific.⁷

As for examining the motivations and ‘deeper’ purpose behind such a vocation, and the meaning of the life encompassing it, the poet had not yet secured for himself a sufficiently assured philosophical vantage point with which to evaluate his life’s experiences. ‘The Search’ consequently represents the poet as being genuinely ‘in transition’, with his search still in progress, rather than functioning as an entirely retrospective bridge to a foregone conclusion. The poem also, in the first two stanzas, clearly portrays the sense of anxious disillusionment with the wholly secular ambitions which characterised the first half of the narrative. It brings the reader up from the 1930s to the poet’s recent experiences with alcoholism, hospitalisation and recovery. He perceives that period as one of striving after answers, but Part Three portrays how his search has still not been resolved.

In ‘The Search’, Berryman portrays the beginning of his scholarly quest as being prompted by a particular moment of existential crisis, which one may deduce as having taken place during the academic year 1939-40, when he was teaching at Wayne University, Ann Arbor, Michigan. ‘The Search’, the poem that opens Part Three,

⁷ Ibid, p.180.

represents the bridge between the two halves of *Love & Fame*, and it conveys the same kind of solipsistic and disconcerting epiphany as does Keats's sonnet. The opening of Berryman's poem reflects how a similar sense of malaise and mortality affects his attitude towards these pursuits, although a more disturbing factor is also introduced:

I wondered ever too what my fate would be,
 women & after-fame become *quite* unavailable,
 or at best unimportant. For a tooth extraction
 gassed once, by a Russian woman in Detroit,

I dreamed a dream to end dreams, even my dreams:
 I had died—no problem: but a mighty hand
 was after my works too, feeling here & there,
 & finding them, bit by bit.
 At last he found the final of all one, & pulled *it* away, & said 'There!'

I began the historical study of the Gospel
 indebted above all to Guignebert
 & Goguel & McNeile
 & Bultmann even & later Archbishop Carrington.

The Miracles were a stumbling-block;
 until I read Karl Heim, trained in natural science;
 until I had sufficiently attended to
 The Transfiguration & The Ecstasy.

I was weak on the Fourth Gospel. I still am,
 in places; I plan to amend that.
 Wellisch on *Isaac & Oedipus*
 supplements for me Kierkegaard.

Luther on *Galatians* (his grand joy)
 I laid aside until I was older & wiser.
 Bishop Andrewes' account of the Resurrection-appearances
 in 1609 seemed to me, seems to me, it.

I studied Titian's remarks on The Tribute-Money.
 Bishop Westcott's analysis (it took him 25 years)
 of the first eighteen verses of *St. John*
 struck me as of a cunning like Odysseus'

And other systems, high & primitive,
 ancient and surviving, did I not neglect,
 sky-gods & trickster-gods, gods impotent,
 the malice & force of the dead.

When at twelve Einstein lost belief in God
 he said to himself at once (as he put it later)
 ‘Similarly motivated men, both of the past & of the present,
 together with their achieved insights,
waren die unverlierbaren Freunde’ —the unloseable friends.⁸

The poem, which begins in a wry tone, is strategically placed at a pivotal position in *Love & Fame*, marking the transition from the youthful poet’s preoccupation with the worldly pursuits of the title, to the pursuit of something altogether more intangible, but lasting, prompted by a disturbing insecurity. It is constructed as a continuation of his reminiscences from where he left them in the preceding poem, ‘Tea’, which portrayed his sense of being an ‘American poet’ in the ascendant, as he wins over the aspiring English actress, Beryl Eeman, who was to become his fiancée. The opening line denotes the perceived sense of insecurity which undermines his pursuit of love and fame, the sense of his ultimate ‘fate’; this represents not just the conclusion of his life, but one that is fixed by an agency out of his control, as he fulfils a role in time. The poet, somewhat tongue-in-cheekily, notes the transitory nature of his sex appeal as age creeps on, as well as the vulnerability of lasting fame—the kind of ‘after-fame’ through which the speaker of Keats’s poem desires to be immortalised.

Berryman, in the late 1930s, could not have shared the irony. The period he spent in Detroit came to be characterised by mental and physical exhaustion, and a crushing sense of failure, especially as literary fame, and even the time to write, proved frustratingly elusive. His love-life too was problematic; his relationship with his fiancée was on the wane, partly because she was literally ‘unobtainable’ in England. The actual incident in the dentist’s chair remains undocumented in any other source, but it does

⁸ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, pp.199-200.

most certainly allude to a period when the poet's grip on reality appeared tenuous: a moment when his autarkical confidence became seriously impaired.⁹

The 'gassing' in Detroit appropriately draws the reader into a parody of the introduction to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*: 'as I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place, where was a den; and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and as I slept I dreamed a dream.'¹⁰ Bunyan's visionary narrator witnesses the protagonist Christian's moment of epiphany as he reads the Bible, and then proceeds on his allegorical pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. The poet experiences the disturbing loss of his sense of self-sufficiency. Whereas death does not worry him, the prospect of not being immortalised through the living testament of his literary works does.

Employing the comically-nightmarish image of an ether-induced hallucination—where he is at the mercy of a God who resembles an over-zealous dentist—the 'mighty hand' also delivers him of what is most important of all: that is, his literary works, the 'rich garners' which hold, in the words of Keats, the 'full ripened grain'. Such a prospect pulls the very ground of his being from underneath him, situating him where he is forced to look for a more fundamental purpose to life. Shaken out of the wilderness of his youth by this disturbing epiphany, the poet embarks on the 'search' to find his goal of the truth, which is presented, mock-heroically, as a sedentary academic pilgrimage.

In the light of archive material which has been discussed in my chapter dealing with Berryman's early poetry, several of the declarations that he makes in the poem are problematic, and remind us that he was probably right to state: 'I am not writing an

⁹ See Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, pp.112-28; Mariani, *Dream Song*, pp.110-28.

¹⁰ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.39.

autobiography-in-verse, my friends.’¹¹ Although the incident in Detroit—if it is factual—may refer to a specific moment of insight, his period in Cambridge, and his subsequent time in New York before moving to Detroit, contained certain moments when he experienced an intense calling back to the Church, which he expressed poetically. Furthermore, his taking up of the historical study of the Gospel was not quite as instantaneous as the abrupt shift at the beginning of the third stanza implies. The experience in Detroit left him with a hunch that he felt inclined to pursue, but it was another ten years at least before he began to research the subject in earnest.

The question of whether he should commit himself to the faith, however, did remain a big issue to him during the intervening period. This was brought to a head by his marriage to Eileen Mulligan, a practising Catholic, in 1942, and many of his unpublished poems of the period depict the agony of his indecision. These poems represent an alternative ‘autobiography-in-verse’, and contribute to a more complete picture of the poet’s attitude towards Christianity at that time than his later retrospective, published poetry is able to. *Berryman’s Sonnets* and *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* both constitute poetic representations of the intense spiritual crises which would grip him intermittently during the interlude of thirteen years which is not covered by ‘The Search’. From the incident in Detroit in 1939-40 in the second stanza, the poet, at the start of the third stanza, takes us up to 1953, shortly before his move to Minneapolis:

I began the historical study of the Gospel
indebted above all to Guignebert
& Goguel & McNeile
& Bultmann even & later Archbishop Carrington.¹²

¹¹ ‘Message’ (from *Love & Fame*), *Collected Poems*, p.201.

¹² The poet identifies the period around 1953 as marking the beginning of his ‘interest’ in the historical study of the Gospel; he notes in a 1971 draft preface to his ‘The Life of Jesus Christ’ that he ‘became

This stanza focuses on the historical quest for Jesus, after which he then moves on to other aspects of his interest in Christianity. What Berryman parades here is the eclecticism of his influences, which do not sit easily together, but portray a broad-minded, earnestly investigative individual determined to scour all avenues for the truth. The critics mentioned here are representative of positions from right across the political spectrum of New Testament scholarship. Much has been said already about Guignebert and Goguel—the ‘formidable sceptics of the continent’ as he refers to them—and the way their dedication to the cause of ‘objective’ history leads them to dispute the Gospels’ account of events. Their conception of the authentic Jesus is not the Christ of faith, but a man whose life and teaching have been misrepresented by the apologetic and doctrinal motivations of the early Church, particularly with regard to fundamental tenets of Christian belief such as the Resurrection.

These critical positions are countered by the ‘conservative’ approach of two prominent Anglican clergymen and scholars, Alan Hugh McNeile (1871-1933) and Philip Carrington. McNeile’s *Introduction to the New Testament* was another favourite text of Berryman’s, who regarded it as an invaluable reference work.¹³ Like Carrington, who was discussed in the previous chapter, McNeile was both a learned scholar and a defender of orthodoxy. His work challenges the approach as well as the conclusions of

interested in the subject 18 years ago.’ However, there is no conclusive archive evidence that he had read the work of any of the New Testament scholars mentioned in ‘The Search’, before he began researching for his new university courses at Minneapolis in late 1954. U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, ‘Life of Christ’, MS, titled ‘The Life of Jesus Christ: (on earth) so far as we have record of it’.

¹³ He so treasured his edition of this book that he felt compelled to write the following on the front endpaper: ‘John Berryman — & don’t steal! whoever you are. My original copy of this was stolen, like my Pfeiffers *O.T. Intro.* & my Bruce Rogers’s *Rubaiyat* & RPW’s [Robert Penn Warren] *36 Poems* inscribed, etc, etc.’ U Minn, JBP, Personal Library. (Cited also in Kelly, *Berryman’s Personal Library*, p.236.) The extent to which this relatively unassuming critic infiltrated Berryman’s artistic consciousness can be seen in a draft for Dream Song 17, in which Henry mutters: ‘Lord of matter. thus: / upon some more unquiet spirit knock, / my madnesses have cease’; the poet writes above ‘Lord of matter’ the note: ‘mcneile on either Hebr. or Jude’. He did in fact absorb this epithet for Satan from McNeile’s commentary on the epistle of Jude, in McNeile, *New Testament*, p.240.

radical historicist critics such as Guignebert and Goguel. A devout Christian, he confronts the sceptics over the extent to which they claim the Gospels to be unhistorical, as well as the consequences they infer that this has on the Christian faith. For Berryman, McNeile represents the possibility that trust in historical criticism may not necessarily be at odds with a faith in the Christ of Christianity.

In terms of status within the discipline, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) is the most significant, and controversial, of all the names mentioned in this stanza; indeed, he completely revolutionised New Testament scholarship in the twentieth century.

Bultmann expresses a radicalism which stems from his pioneering application of two distinct systems of thought: 'form-criticism' and existentialist philosophy, which, although neither was originally conceived by him, were innovatively combined in his studies of the historical Jesus. Form-criticism is a type of investigative literary and historical criticism, which goes beyond the primary textual source (eg. one of the parables of Mark's Gospel) and attempts to identify the origin and development of the oral tradition from which it emanated. One of the consequences of form-criticism was a diminishing interest in the historical Jesus, and a greater focus on the role of the primitive church.¹⁴ Bultmann's existentialist approach exacerbates this indifference towards the 'objective-historical' Christ; rather, he is interested in the 'existential-historical' Christ; that is, the importance that His life and teaching have on one's individual decisions now, in the present.¹⁵

¹⁴ Anderson, *Critical Quests*, p.105.

¹⁵ These are terms that John Macquarrie employs as an English translation of the German words *historisch* and *geschichtlich* in *An Existentialist Theology*, a book which provides a detailed account of Bultmann's existentialist interpretation of Christianity. John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp.168-71. Bultmann regards the death and Resurrection of Christ as the two special events important to faith; they offer the believer the opportunity of a redeemed, authentic existence. He rejects the Resurrection as an objective-historical event, but he accepts the Crucifixion as one (though not necessarily the written Gospels' version of it). However, the significance of both lies in their existential-historical aspect, and so the question of their objective-historical occurrence is, to all extents and purposes, an irrelevance. The Cross and Resurrection represent a 'single, indivisible cosmic

Bultmann is most renowned, and in some quarters, infamous, for his work in ‘demythologising’ the New Testament. His intention is to remove the obstacles to faith that modern man encounters because the ‘kerygma’ (the proclamation of Christ) is expressed in terms of a ‘mythological world view’. He argues that man in every age attempts to express the divine in terms of the worldview available to him; the New Testament proclaims a unique existential truth, but to make that truth intelligible to modern man its imagery must be reinterpreted in terms of its existential significance. Hence, the process of demythologisation ‘rejects not the message of scripture; but the worldview of scripture.’¹⁶ Aside from the acknowledgement that Jesus was an historical person, the consequence of all this is that Bultmann effectively eliminates the quest for the historical Jesus altogether; he believes that the written Gospels, instead of providing a source for such a life, do no more than express the kerygma of the primitive church.¹⁷ The intonation in Berryman’s remark implied by ‘Bultmann *even*’, wryly conveys the attitude with which the radical German critic is regarded in certain quarters.

As regards the poet’s own stance towards these critical positions, *The Dream Songs* represents an almost avowedly sceptical view of Christianity, based on the historical criticism of Guignebert and Goguel. Radical criticism certainly raised serious problems for Berryman, which he felt were obstacles to a personal commitment to the Christian faith, and it is these conflicts which appear to offer more dramatic scope for the trials of Henry, as part of his wider struggle to uncover the meaning of life. However, relevant writings from the long Minneapolis period—his class notes, draft essays, ‘The Life of

event which brings judgement to the world and opens up for men the possibility of eternal life’. Rudolf Bultmann, ‘New Testament and Mythology’. *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. by Hans-Werner Bartsch, trans. by Reginald H. Fuller, 2 vols (London: S.P.C.K, 1964), 1, pp.34-42.

¹⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ & Mythology* (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp.19, 35.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Critical Quests*, pp.116-19.

Christ', and poetry not included in *The Dream Songs*—reveal a more open approach towards orthodox interpretations. They collectively reveal a position that, from the beginning of his New Testament studies in the early 1950s, up until his conversion experience, is largely consistent. It is, however, one that is highly individual and carefully considered.

For the most part, he appears to be sympathetic towards what is known as the 'liberal lives' of Jesus—characterised by the work of Goguel—in that he has faith in the ability of textual research, the natural sciences, and psychology, to create a useful portrait of the historical Christ. He regards the Synoptics as being reliable enough to provide a basic outline of Jesus's ministry; but he does not consider Christ to be the Son of God; rather, he is to be seen more as a great Jewish prophet, or simply an inspirational rabbi.¹⁸ However, historical criticism could not provide him with all the answers he was looking for; his search consequently cast itself further afield, taking in artists, philosophers, scientists and theologians, whom he feels could provide him with a special insight into the meaning of life, and especially the claims of Christianity to hold it. 'The Search' begins to resemble a random litany of influences he is reeling off the top of his head, but the reminder of the names cited in the poem—with the exception of Einstein—suggests his growing parallel interest in Christian apologetics and representations of the Christ of faith.

¹⁸ This affinity with the liberal school is demonstrated in a 'Christian Origins' lecture; he employs the conclusions of Goguel to 'sketch the "Synoptic" ministry', in order to show 'what we do know' about Jesus's life. U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, 'Humanities 62', MS, headed '62 – Xtian Origins: These studies are new but solid'. The notes for this particular lecture are undated, but as he announces 'this might be regarded as a centenary (Strauss 1862 on Reimarus)', they are most likely from 1962. The absence of any alternative versions of this lecture, or the absence of alternative notes for other lectures, suggest that either Berryman generally recycled his notes, or that he only kept the most up to date versions. Furthermore, the course's reading list over an eight year period seems to suggest he did not revise its content a great deal. A clear picture of his view of Jesus emerges from *The Dream Songs*, but as late as July 1970 he stated: 'I don't know whether he was in any special sense the son of God, and I think it is quite impossible to know. He certainly was the most remarkable *man* who ever lived.' Stitt, 'Art of Poetry', *Berryman's Understanding*, p.42.

In consequence, from early on in his studies, some highly orthodox beliefs inconsistently begin to find their way into Berryman's liberal framework, particularly concerning the 'supernatural' aspects of the faith. Very much contrary to the 'liberal lives' school, which tends to take a very rationalistic approach towards miracles, the poet is resolutely open to the possibility of them. As he states in one of the draft prefaces to his unfinished 'Life of Christ': 'I may add that it is almost useless to read the Gospel accounts with settled incredulity, such as a conviction (based upon what evidence or faith I have no idea) that what are called miracles cannot happen.'¹⁹ As regards the greatest of all Gospel miracles, the Resurrection, his position is equally maverick, for he believes that Peter and Paul were the recipients of some form of exclusive visitation experience, as he affirms in the '1st Address to the Lord' from *Love & Fame*:

and I believe as fixedly in the Resurrection-appearances to Peter and to Paul
as I believe I sit in this blue chair.

Only that may have been a special case
to establish their initiatory faith.²⁰

His position at this point consequently appears to be rather irregular and problematic; on the one hand, he is sceptical towards the fundamental claim of Christianity: that Christ is the incarnate God; and yet he strongly affirms the possibility—in some cases the authenticity—of the major 'supernatural' claims which underpin that belief, such as the

¹⁹ U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, 'Life of Christ', TS, headed 'This volume is not of course intended as a substitute', 2pp (p.1).

²⁰ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, p.216. As his class notes reveal, he had maintained this position for many years. It is derived from Oscar Cullman and Goguel, based on a critical interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15, in which Paul states that Peter was the first witness of the resurrected Christ. Cullman regards this passage as coming from the earliest Christian text that we possess, and, hence, it is considered to be the most authentic determinant of the origin of the Resurrection tradition. U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box 11, F19, 'Humanities 62', MS, headed 'after Synoptics + 'Hon. Bur. Story'. See Oscar Cullman, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*, trans. by Floyd V. Filson, 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 1962), p.60, and Goguel, *Birth of Christianity*, p.75.

miracles and the Resurrection appearances. For each aspect of Christian belief, he needed to be presented with a powerful and convincing argument in order to reconcile it with the demands of rationalism. He was converted to the cause of miracles by the books of German theologian Karl Heim (1874-1958), as he explains in the fourth stanza of 'The Search':

The Miracles were a stumbling-block;
 until I read Karl Heim, trained in natural science;
 until I had sufficiently attended to
 The Transfiguration & The Ecstasy.

Miracles, as they are commonly regarded, constitute an incredible event that is inexplicable according to the 'laws of nature', or unaccountable to human action, and which consequently demonstrates both the existence, and intervention, of some supernatural agent. However, to recognise an occurrence as such, even if one has had personal experience of it, one must believe in both the existence of the supernatural force, and also the fact that it has intervened. In contrast, Heim proposes a radically different view of perceiving miracles. He insists that one must reject the notion of the *miraculum suspensionis*; the idea that God, when he acts miraculously, somehow suspends or disrupts the natural course of events.²¹ The distinction between 'natural'—what happens along the causal nexus—and 'supernatural events'—meaning the interruption of it—is a false one because 'everything happens naturally'.²²

To Heim, nature is not a machine whose course is regulated in fixed terms; rather it is in every aspect 'alive' for it consists of the interaction of multitudinous 'wills', a notion which is supported by the law of modern atomic physics. He sees all reality as being

²¹ Karl Heim, *The Transformation of the Scientific World View* (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 169-72.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.186-87.

shot through with a will that is analogous with, though of a different nature to, human life. As all people possess an ‘inner-I’, so too does all organic and inorganic matter, although it is of a nature we cannot fully understand or relate to.²³ We can only make deductions about the pattern of outer behaviour based on external technical observation. ‘Objective’ reality is the medium whereby every individual ‘inner-I’ can interact with other inner-Is on the world’s stage, and ‘all events, however great, we know to be the accumulation of decisions which occur in the infinitesimal realm’.²⁴

Heim sees within the inner-process of life at every level—from electrons to complex multi-cellular organisms—a ‘wholeness-tendency’, an inner-will, which we in our ignorance term ‘instinct’. All wills are relative to the ‘one absolute magnitude’, God, whose power is limitless and before whom ‘no power which has the character of will, wherever it acts or holds sway in the world, can remain neutral in relation to Him.’ All are confronted, at every moment, with a decision for or against the will of the absolute power. Heim explains that, rather than being ‘the antithesis of miracle’, the causal nexus of ‘nature’ is itself ordained by God, who ‘emancipates man from chaos and grants him an “order” in accordance with which he can direct his life and work.’²⁵ Order, what we call ‘the laws of nature’, is in fact God’s will.

‘Miracle’ is the outward manifestation of the act by which God, at a given instance, overcomes the opposing wills, which, according to Scripture, are controlled by a ‘single unifying will’, Satan, who rebelliously seeks to destroy His creation. The destructive satanic will manifests itself not only through possessions, but in the whole array of physical affliction and diseases of the body, as well as the inorganic powers of natural

²³ Ibid, pp.220-21.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 153-56.

²⁵ Ibid, pp.188-89.

disaster.²⁶ Heim contends further that the original order of creation, willed by God, which will be restored at the world's consummation, is devoid of destructive forces and death. Suffering, disease, death and destruction consequently result from the opposing wills against the divine order. Jesus was able to perform 'miracles' on earth because, as the Incarnation, his will was entirely in harmony with the will of the Father. Through miracles we receive a glimpse of the divine order's restoration as a sign of God's supremacy. However, 'since in the Bible the process of nature is not a causal mechanism the interruption of which may be demonstrated objectively, it is not possible, on the biblical view, to find in miracle an experimental proof of God's existence.'²⁷

An enthusiastic Christian apologist, Heim embraced the dialogue with science, as well as the secular philosophical movements of his time. Discovering the work of Heim is by far the most revolutionary stage in Berryman's search, because it convinced him that—contrary to the view even of some prominent theologians, such as Bultmann—the biblical world-view is not irreconcilable with the modern scientific world-view; rather, that recent advances in the natural sciences actually support Christian revelation. He felt that one of the main obstacles to faith had been lifted by Heim, that he had supplied the intellectual ammunition required for articulating his own sensation of the 'mighty hand' behind his existence.

Expressed like an ironic, seemingly self-instructive understatement, Berryman also remarks how it wasn't until he 'had sufficiently attended to / The Transfiguration & the

²⁶ Ibid, p.190.

²⁷ Ibid, p.191.

Ecstasy' that the 'stumbling-block' of miracles was relieved. Although mock-pretentious, the remark does also convey the rigorous, self-disciplined approach he took towards his critical investigations of the Gospel, and there is a considerable degree of literalness to the statement, for he did 'attend' closely to The Transfiguration and The Ecstasy in his studies. In fact, in a draft outline from 1970 of the latest manifestation of his 'Life of Christ', he plans to dedicate a whole chapter to the subject of 'Christ's Ecstasy and Transfiguration', mainly intended as a discussion of the notion of Christ's 'Sonship'.²⁸ His great interest in this aspect of Christ's life is borne out much earlier in a letter to his mother, dated 16 January 1955, where, referring to his 'Christian Origins' course, he writes: 'My teaching is going beautifully and I enjoy it. The *most* surprising and magnificent things that I think I have come on so far are both in *Matthew*, Christ's Ecstasy (end of ch.11) and the Temptations.'²⁹ 'The Ecstasy' refers to the very Johannine-sounding discourse in Matthew, where Jesus openly expresses his exclusively intimate relationship with the Father:

At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Mt 11.25-30).

As far as Berryman understands it, 'The Ecstasy' demonstrates how Christ is, or believes himself to be, 'above his forerunners'; it is when he feels himself in prayer to be truly one with the Father, and in consequence can also express his protective love for humanity.³⁰ The overall importance of the Ecstasy for the poet is demonstrated by way

²⁸ U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, 'Life of Christ', MS, chapter outline headed 'A New Life of Christ' (4 Jan 1970).

²⁹ Berryman, *We Dream of Honour*, p.286.

³⁰ 'Life of Christ', chapter outline of 'A New Life of Christ' (4 Jan 1970), MS.

of several different sets of teaching notes for his ‘Christian Origins’ course, from a class dealing with ‘The Mission’ of Christ. Berryman cites three examples from the Gospels of Jesus acting in a way that is highly unusual; they are particularly significant because elsewhere Jesus acts ‘otherwise “natural”’. In other words, they are instances which appear to undermine the consistent characterisation of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, which is one of the reasons why Berryman regards at least two of these episodes as ‘authentic’. They are also examples of Jesus appearing to reveal his divinity through his behaviour. The extracts in question are: 1/ the episode in Mark where—after beginning his ministry and arousing the excitement of the crowds—the evangelist states: ‘And when his friends heard it, they went out to seize him, for they said, “He is beside himself”’ (Mk 3.21); 2/ The Transfiguration from all three Synoptics (Mk 9.2-9); and 3/ ‘The Ecstasy’ from Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 11.25-30).³¹

Berryman outlines what is ‘absolutely authentic in Mk’ as it is ‘uninventable by Xtians’.³² This represents the principle of judging authenticity by the ‘embarrassment factor’; in other words, the idea that Christian tradition would never have interpolated something that would have been problematic doctrinally. Therefore, if such an instance occurs in the Gospels, it is thought that the evangelists must have felt under pressure to include it since it was considered to be a direct authentic utterance of Jesus, or event in his ministry.³³ He cites Mk 3.21 amongst five instances of ‘absolute’ authenticity in the Marcan source, most probably because he believes Guignebert makes a strong case to

³¹ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, ‘Humanities 62’. MS, class notes entitled and dated ‘The Mission – NT (2) ’56’.

³² JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, ‘Humanities 62’, MS, teaching notes headed ‘Absolutely authentic in MK’.

³³ Craig A. Evans. *Life of Jesus Research: an Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Brill, 1996), p.128. Cf. Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.242; Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, pp.206-07.

this effect;³⁴ Berryman highlights with great approval his affirmation of its authenticity with an ecstatic ‘yes!’ in his own copy of *Jesus*.³⁵

Further confirmation that he draws from the French scholar on this matter is to be found in his teaching notes which state: ‘3.21 His [Christ’s] relations (?) ... He is beside himself’. It is clear that he is working from Guignebert’s, rather than the Authorised Version’s, interpretation of the line; whereas the AV translates *hoi par’ autou* as ‘friends’, Guignebert translates it as ‘immediate relatives’. With regard also to Mk 3.31—which mentions the worry of Christ’s ‘mother and his brothers’—Guignebert argues for the episode’s authenticity on ‘embarrassment’ grounds, since ‘this attitude of his family proves conclusively that his vocation was neither foreseen nor visibly foreshadowed in the circle in which his childhood and youth were spent’.³⁶ He suggests therefore that Jesus’s behaviour is characteristic of someone being swept up by the ‘religious temperament’ of his time; his sudden change of character is interpreted by others as madness. The whole episode undermines any notion that Christ’s community was witnessing the gradual emergence of a convincing Messianic consciousness.

To his list of five authentic passages Berryman states that he would personally also add three passages from Matthew, including ‘The Ecstasy’.³⁷ He regards the Ecstasy as ‘the

³⁴ ‘Mark iii.21 relates that his immediate relatives [...], that is to say, his mother and his brothers (iii.31), on hearing of his preaching, and the effect which it was having, went to Capernaum to seize him and bring him home by force, under the impression that he had gone out of his mind. This looks very much as if we were in the presence of one of those authentic recollections which the original disciples contributed to the tradition, and which became sufficiently deeply rooted therein to withstand both apologetic expurgations and Christological elaborations. This attitude of his family proves conclusively that his vocation was neither foreseen nor visibly foreshadowed in the circle in which his childhood and youth were spent, an impression which is to some extent confirmed by the surprise which, according to Mark vi.2, the people of the village displayed on hearing him preach.’ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.145.

³⁵ JBP, Personal Library. This passage is discussed further in relation to Dream Song 234 in the previous chapter.

³⁶ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.145.

³⁷ Berryman also includes ‘The Tribute Money’ (Mt 22.15-22) and ‘Go not into the way of the Gentiles’ (Mt 10.5).

most remarkable of the 3'.³⁸ Guignebert devotes several pages to discussing what he takes to be the spurious nature of this extract, and it would seem Berryman has discerningly picked up on an inadvertently positive consequence of the French scholar's argument. Guignebert forcibly argues that the most important elements of the Ecstasy discourse, which he remarks 'at first sight seems to be a Johannine fragment', are far too characteristic of a later Christological tradition to be authentic: 'It is hard to believe that Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Son in this manner, when it would mean nothing to his hearers [the Jews] and implies a Christological development quite foreign to *Urmarcus* [an early draft of Mark, believed to be one of the sources for the Synoptic Gospels], a development, moreover, which is of Greek origin.' He is wary of the passage for being so unlike anything else to be found in the Synoptics, and notes that Jesus's proclamations here 'give the impression of a gnostic formula'. However, he also adds: 'that Jesus believed that he had received from God a certain "*paradosis*," and that he proclaimed this belief, is quite possible, and critics who are in no way orthodox have maintained as much, by admitting the substantial authenticity of this passage.'³⁹

Berryman's judgement on this issue shows a certain degree of independence from Guignebert, fulfilling this last point whilst still relying on his commentary. In contrast, he considers the Ecstasy authentic, presumably because it is an example of the public display of Jesus's erratic 'religious temperament', and therefore is in a similar vein to Christ's previous display of Messianic consciousness in Mark 3.21-35, which prompts the worried reaction of his family and friends. It is likely that Berryman links the two episodes by way of Carrington, who remarks the following about the passage from Mark:

³⁸ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, 'Humanities 62', lecture notes headed 'non-Marcian (Q+)' [undated].

³⁹ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.262-65.

We are told that some of his own people, '*hoi par' autou*', were trying to get hold of him; they said 'he is beside himself'; '*exestē*'. The word can be used of any exalted or paranoiac state of mind in which self-control is surrendered. It is used by Mark of the excitement caused by an act of healing: '*exestēsan megalei ekstasei*'; it is the original of the English word ecstasy.⁴⁰

Carrington argues that the Marcan episode demonstrates Jesus's unique, rather unworldly, personality and persona, which do not give the impression of a mere 'great man', or of a portraiture evolved from doctrinal formulation. He states: 'The figure of Jesus as he appears in these records is not by any means that of a calm exponent of a new ethic or piety; he has, as we have said before, an excess of spiritual power.'

Berryman regards the importance of Mark 3.21-35 as residing more in its demonstration of Jesus's sense of received *paradosis*, rather than necessarily the *paradosis* itself.

However, he clearly finds Carrington's description of Jesus's ecstasy to be highly applicable to Mt 11.25-30, and transfers his terminology. Carrington also notes that the same ecstasy—a word employed for 'any exalted or paranoiac state of mind in which self-control is surrendered'—is a frequent occurrence in the New Testament, where one has experienced some kind of direct divine inspiration, such as Peter and Paul in Acts (11.4, 22.17, 23.9). Peter is said to be in a similar state during The Transfiguration, for 'he knew not what he was saying'.⁴¹ This is one of the likely connections the poet is making between the Transfiguration and the Ecstasy, but the former is more relevant in terms of his perspective on miracles.

The Transfiguration is the episode in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus's divine nature is disclosed to the apostles Peter, James and John on a high mountain; as Carrington remarks: 'What the three disciples are aware of in Jesus is the actual power and

⁴⁰ Carrington, *According to Mark*, pp.88. The term 'The Ecstasy' itself is not used by any of Berryman's usual sources in relation to Mt 11.25-30, and may be his own coinage based on Carrington's definition.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp.88-89.

presence of Almighty God; he is seen with Elijah and Moses, the great Men of God of ancient times; but he is greater than they.’⁴² For Berryman, this is an important common theme with the Ecstasy, which he considered to be symbolic of the way in which Jesus is ‘above his forerunners’. Whether he considered the Transfiguration to be an authentic occurrence in the objective historical sense is another matter. Guignebert, not surprisingly, has little time for the Transfiguration, remarking that ‘all this kind of fantasy, in which the voice of heaven is heard [...] brings under suspicion anything connected with it’, and further, that such episodes are to be understood ‘in the light of the great Mystery of the Redemption which fired the imagination of the Greek world at the time of the subapostolic generation. It has nothing to do with an actual historical reminiscence.’⁴³

Unlike the Ecstasy, there is relatively little attention given to the Transfiguration in Berryman’s lecture notes, and he does not appear to argue for its historical authenticity, which generally indicates that he follows the line of Guignebert and Goguel on such matters. Aside from broad reference to the episode in various outlines of the Synoptics, however, he does cite it in relation to Heim’s explanation of miracles.⁴⁴ This provides an important insight into his remark in ‘The Search’. Understanding the Transfiguration aids his acceptance of the miracles because it represents a glimpse of God’s eternal glory, as Carrington remarks: ‘The significance of the vision for us is that what was regarded in the apocalypses as so far off and distant, above all the bright blue sky, is present in power and glory as it was on Sinai. God’s Kingdom is among us, or within us, as Jesus says in Luke xvii. 21; but some have eyes and cannot see it.’⁴⁵

⁴² Carrington, *According to Mark*, p.196.

⁴³ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.265, 458.

⁴⁴ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, F19. ‘Humanities 62’, Lecture notes headed ‘Ministry’ [undated].

⁴⁵ Carrington, *According to Mark*, p.196.

In the same way that the Gospel miracles offer a foretaste of the world's consummation, with the will of the creator and creation united, so too does the Transfiguration manifest God's salvific plan to the three Apostles. It also illustrates the perfect union between the Father and the Son which elucidates the Gospel miracles; the latter was able to perform them through his will being harmoniously united with that of the Father. At least from a theoretical point of view, Heim's teaching also suggests why the Ecstasy helped the poet to appreciate the role of miracles, as they are dependant on Christ's divinity, of which the Ecstasy represents an expression.

Although it would appear that Berryman embraced the basic reasoning of Heim's teaching, there remained an inconsistency in his outlook. Since, for Heim, the explanation of the Gospel miracles depends on the fact of the Incarnation, the poet's openness to these acts of Christ—without accepting the very reason he was able to perform them; that he was God in human form on the earth—implies a negative intellectual capability towards Christianity which was to persist for some time. His greater understanding of the Ecstasy and the Transfiguration, however, brings him closer to accepting the possibility that Jesus was the Son of God.

He regards the Ecstasy as an authentic passage, in which Jesus appeared to lose his self-control in some kind of spiritual rapture, believing himself to possess this special, close relationship with the Father; at that moment, he really thought that he was the Son of God. This consequently challenges the notion—proposed by critics such as Guignebert—that the doctrinal development of Christianity, with the notion of the Incarnation at its centre, was a wild deviation from the intentions and thought of Jesus. The Transfiguration displays a similar state of mind, this time on the part of the

Apostles; it could indicate that they in their similar state of ecstasy, at that particular instance, also perceived Jesus in this way.

The stanza represents a declaration that through his own critical reasoning he has developed a case—albeit a small one—for the claims of Christianity. The achievement of this realisation is expressed with a certain degree of mock-pomposity; the message is ‘this is a profound insight which I’ve worked out for myself, through a very clever cross-examination of my sources.’ However, the case is still far from conclusive. The obstacle of miracles was out of the way, but he needed another type of Karl Heim to convince him now of the Incarnation.

Berryman’s ironically pedantic-sounding programme of self-improvement moves from the miracles in general to the most problematic of the Gospels as far as historical criticism is concerned: ‘I was weak on the Fourth Gospel. I still am, / in places; I plan to amend that.’ Indeed, one of the main reasons he feels ‘weak’ on the Fourth Gospel is that historical criticism—particularly that of the two scholars he most relies on: Guignebert and Goguel—has tended to ignore it in favour of the Synoptics. They generally regard John as a ‘theological construct’, which tells us more about the evolving faith of the early Church than about the historical Jesus.⁴⁶ Berryman’s remark might also appear intentionally absurd and inappropriate given the more meditative, prayerful nature of the Fourth Gospel, implying an over-logically declared plan of spiritual renewal. However, from early on in his New Testament research, he does

⁴⁶ See Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.28; Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, pp.156-57.

profess an unusual faith in the usefulness of John, which distinguishes him from his favourite sceptical critics. In the 1958 foreword to his 'Life of Christ' he declares:

While admitting its theological character (this it shares after all with the Synoptics) I have placed more confidence in the intermittent, residual historicity of John than most modern critics have been willing to do until very lately perhaps. Nor am I able to regard the question of chronology as entirely hopeless, much as we may long for a mid-ministry Francis Meres.⁴⁷

The German tradition—which dominated New Testament studies throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries—was generally only interested in the Synoptics, as John was not thought to contribute anything useful towards the historical quest for Jesus. Berryman, however, is far more sympathetic towards nineteenth century English scholarship on this matter, as epitomised by Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901), whom he cites two stanzas later in 'The Search'. By and large this school holds the Fourth Gospel in much higher esteem, considering it an authentic portrayal of Christ's personality and ministry.⁴⁸ Berryman's faith in the historical value of John does reflect a growing trend in Gospel criticism during the time he taught on the subject. Since the middle of the twentieth century, attention to the Fourth Gospel has been growing, due to the theory that its author independently drew from his own sources, rather than creating a theological construction out of the Synoptic material.⁴⁹

The influence of Westcott on Berryman's attitude towards John's Gospel is demonstrated by the number of times he cites the scholar in the various draft prefaces

⁴⁷ We know the dating of certain Shakespeare plays only because they are mentioned in Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury* (1598), and so one must logically conclude that they must have been written by that date. Unfortunately, as Berryman suggests, we have no similar authentic documentary evidence, at least outside of Christian tradition, attesting to the fact that Christ was in certain places, and did certain things, by certain dates. Such evidence would be particularly helpful during Christ's 'mid-ministry', where we could determine whether he really did make additional trips to Jerusalem during his time of teaching in Galilee, or whether this is merely a narrative device of John. U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, 'Life of Christ', TS, 'Foreword' (Good Friday, 1958), pp.1-2.

⁴⁸ Coggins, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, p.362.

⁴⁹ *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p.374.

and notes to his 'Life of Christ'. For instance, at the end of a 1958 preface, he remarks how 'even among debts so numerous and deep I cannot forbear signaling those to Goguel and Cullman, and, among older works, to Westcott's great edition of the Fourth Gospel.' Similarly, thirteen years later he writes: 'Between Bishop Westcott's great commentary on the Fourth Gospel (1892) and Archbishop Carrington's researches into Mark (1961), I have drawn most heavily on Guignebert and Goguel.'⁵⁰ Since none other of his sources devotes so much attention to John, it would appear to be Westcott who really opens up for him the potential of the Fourth Gospel as a reliable basis for life-of-Christ scholarship. Westcott proposes a different perspective on history to that of the liberal historicist critics, one in which John's 'theological' purpose can still be viewed as being very much a historical one.⁵¹

Westcott is another of the more conservative Christian scholars amongst 'the unloseable friends' of 'The Search', serving as a counterpoint to the radical sceptics, and, hence, defending the notion that faith is a rational commitment. In the field of biblical scholarship he is best known as being part of the influential 'Cambridge Triumvirate', along with his university colleagues Joseph Barber Lightfoot and Fenton J.A. Hort. They intended to demonstrate a middle way between radical new forms of scepticism and Traditionalism, and together planned a complete commentary of the New Testament. Although this was never finished, one of Westcott's contributions to the endeavour was his commentary on John; it contains many examples of his rigorous defence of orthodox positions, characterised by an approach that has been described as

⁵⁰ U Minn, *JBP*, Misc Prose, Box 6, 'Life of Christ'.

⁵¹ Westcott argues that 'Christian doctrine is history, and this is above all things the lesson of the fourth Gospel. The Synoptic narratives are implicit dogmas, no less than St. John's dogmas are concrete facts. The real difference is that the earliest Gospel [Mark's] contained the fundamental facts and words which experience afterwards interpreted, while the latest Gospel [John's] reviews the facts in the light of their interpretation.' Westcott, *Gospel of John*, p.xli.

‘forensic’.⁵² Berryman is sufficiently captivated by Westcott’s style of reasoning to make a mock-heroic comparison of him in ‘The Search’:

Bishop Westcott’s analysis (it took him 25 years)
of the first eighteen verses of *St. John*
struck me as of a cunning like Odysseus’.

His work represents a Trojan horse which, rather than evade a dialogue with radical historical criticism, enters into the midst of one, in order to expose his opponents’ fallacies. It is Westcott’s commentary on John’s famous prologue which the poet singles out in particular, and he is greatly intrigued by the fact that it took the Bishop twenty-five years to write it. He may well have felt reassured by this fact, given his long-standing failure to complete certain key projects of his own, such as his critical biography of Shakespeare. In a set of teaching notes, presumably from 1959, he remarks how this would mean that if he himself started such a commentary now, he would not finish it until ‘1984’.⁵³ Westcott’s painstaking attention to detail appeared to give him considerable authority in the poet’s eyes. Both John’s prologue and Westcott’s commentary also leave their mark on Berryman’s verse by way of ‘The Facts & Issues’ from *Delusions, etc* (see below).

Following his declaration on the Fourth Gospel Berryman makes a slightly more esoteric statement: ‘Wellisch on *Isaac & Oedipus* / supplements for me Kierkegaard’.

⁵² Westcott, *Gospel of St. John*, p.ii e; Coggins, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, pp.725-26; Hayes, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, p.633.

⁵³ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, ‘Humanities 62’, unnumbered notes headed: ‘John---a composition (the Synoptics are compilations)’.

He refers here to two texts which both concern the *Akedah*, the story from Genesis of the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham (Gen.22.1-19): Erich Wellisch's *Isaac and Oedipus: A Study in Biblical Psychology of the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Akedah* (1954), and Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843). As these books derive from two different disciplines—the realms of psychology and philosophy—and periods, the approach taken towards the famous story is very different. This is one reason in itself why they supplement each other, but there are also important similarities in their perspectives. They both regard the *Akedah* as one of the most significant existential events in the history of mankind; they describe the implications of this Christian symbol of supreme faith for the individual, and the exercise of that faith in the world of human relations.

Erich Wellisch (1898-1954) was already the 'Late Medical Director of Crayford Child Guidance Clinic, Kent' when his only published book appeared in 1954. A work of clinical psychology, the central thesis of *Isaac and Oedipus* is that the *Akedah* offers the only full resolution to the Oedipal Complex identified by Freud.⁵⁴ What Wellisch terms the 'Akedah Motif' follows a similar mechanism to the resolution described by Freud; however, Wellisch explains a religious phenomenon which takes into account, but goes further than, the purely psycho-sexual approach of the Oedipus Complex. He takes Freud's notion of the super-ego—the self-censor on the ego formed by the introjection

⁵⁴ Freud's theory is based on the notion that there have been three stages in the development of the parent/child relationship through the history of humanity; and that remnants of these still play a role in the unconscious and are a fundamental aspect of a person's natural process of maturation. The first primitive stage is characterised by dual possessiveness and aggression towards the children, particularly by the father; in primitive societies this often manifested itself as infanticide. The second stage consists of a guilt reaction to this previous phase which results in a 'compromise solution'. Freud termed this 'the Oedipus Complex', where these opposing tendencies are held in check. The third stage is what Freud termed 'the resolution of the Oedipus Complex'; this is where a new 'covenant of love' almost entirely replaces the aggressive tendencies of the parent. However, although the theory contributes certain useful insights, Wellisch believes that it does not adequately explain the phenomenon, as the Oedipus Complex is based on ancient Greek concepts and attitudes. Erich Wellisch, *Isaac and Oedipus: A Study in Biblical Psychology of the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Akedah* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), pp.3-5.

of parental and other attitudes—and formulates a new conception of it, which includes the introjection of the ‘image of man’s divine calling’. He argues that ‘the introjected call of God contains an altruistic aim and therefore love for this ego-ideal decreases narcissistic love and increases object love. [...] Object love is amplified to embrace all human beings and future generations. It becomes messianic love.’⁵⁵

The Akedah Motif recognises an event of divine intervention in human history.

Wellisch assumes that the Oedipus Complex existed in the relationship between

Abraham, Isaac and Sarah, and that the *Akedah* itself was subsequently God’s way of introducing a new dawn in the development of human familial relations.⁵⁶ The

realisation of this process ‘depends on a situation in which selfish aims are abandoned and real personal love and dedication to God’s call are possible. From the

phenomenological point of view this new relationship can be described as *a covenant*

between parent and child which inaugurated a new era of moral code.’⁵⁷ Wellisch goes

on to demonstrate the clinical applications of his theory by way of certain real life case

studies in which he believes the Oedipus Complex has been overcome. He proposes the

need for a ‘Biblical psychology’ as a necessary development for modern psychiatry,

contending that ‘the phenomena described in the Bible provide a unique contribution to psychological truth.’⁵⁸

Wellisch consequently succeeds in drawing together two of Berryman’s greatest

passions of the time: psycho-analysis and biblical studies. In fact, Wellisch is to psycho-

analysis what Karl Heim is to natural science; both attempt persuasively to reassert their

Christian faith into what have become entirely secular disciplines. Their intention is to

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp.113-15.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.74, 96.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.96.

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp.115-16.

demonstrate not only the way in which the scientific and biblical world views support one other; but moreover, that these scientific disciplines cannot offer a complete insight into existence without being reconstituted in the light of Scripture.

For Berryman, this Christian reworking of Freud supplements another, more famous, commentary on the *Akedah*. He had developed a rapacious appetite for the works of Danish philosopher, and father of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) during his time at Princeton in the 1940s. His own copies of these texts feature copious scrawled annotations revealing a lively and highly personal interaction with Kierkegaard's ideas.⁵⁹ In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard defines his interpretation of Christian faith and its implications on moral choice, mainly as a counterpoint to the secular ethical system of Hegel which was highly influential at the time.

Fear and Trembling, written under the *nom de plume* of Johannes *de silentio*, is a discourse in the form of a dialectical lyric in which Kierkegaard describes how true 'faith' is exemplified by the *Akedah*. Johannes believes Abraham's faith was exemplary because of his certainty that he would receive Isaac back, recognising that the source of Isaac's life itself was God.⁶⁰ In explaining why Abraham's act was in fact a holy one—as opposed to an immoral act of murder—Kierkegaard proposed the concept of the 'teleological suspension of the ethical'.⁶¹ The concept is partly formulated as a critique of the popular Hegelian moral system, which regarded a moral act as one that

⁵⁹ In *The Sickness unto Death*, for example, Berryman highlights the following passage: 'The youth despairs over the future, as a present tense *in futuro*; there is something in the future he is not willing to accept, hence he is not willing to be himself. The older man despairs over the past, as a present *in praeterito*, which refuses to become more and more past—for so desperate he is not that he entirely succeeds in forgetting it.' Berryman wryly remarks: 'At 29 looking both ways I suffer both'. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p.95. JBP.

⁶⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), pp.15, 65 ('Problemata: Preamble from the Heart').

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp.82-83 ('Problema I').

contributed to the 'universal good', a notion grounded in the system of ethical values determined by the populace, on which the state is then founded.⁶² Abraham's act would be plainly immoral if judged by the Hegelian system, since it could be seen in no way to contribute positively to the universal good. In order for Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son to be regarded as a righteous act, therefore, it must be seen as having recourse to some higher moral authority:

Then faith's paradox is this, that the single individual is higher than the universal, that the single individual [...] determines his relation to the universal through his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute through his relation to the universal. The paradox can also be put by saying that there is an absolute duty to God.⁶³

The individual, who has an absolute duty to God, is raised above any obligation towards a secular social morality that does not correspond to the demands of faith; indeed, it may demand an action, as in the case of the *Akedah*, that is totally incomprehensible to the world, and only understood in the light of faith.

Berryman's interest in these two texts is apparent in the portrayal of Henry's relationship with God, and his deceased father, in *The Dream Songs*. The *Akedah* provides an important backdrop to the epic poem's counter-theodicy, with Henry finding the notion of the 'teleological suspension of the ethical' particularly troubling. In view of both universal suffering, and more importantly, his personal suffering, Henry is at the mercy of a God whom he fears may be 'something disturbed, / ill-pleased, & with a touch of paranoia / who calls for this thud of love from his creatures-O' (Song 238). This Song presents the problem of an absolute duty to a God who is not benevolent, and apparently less moral than the ideals of mankind would aspire to. This also manifests itself, for instance, as the master/slave metaphor in Dream Songs 51 and

⁶² Ibid, p.29.

⁶³ Ibid, p.98 ('Problema II').

113. The counter-theodicy of the Dream Songs is one that responds to Kierkegaard's concept by portraying a God who has seriously abused the teleological suspension of the ethical; He has taken it too far, through his erratic and despotic behaviour.

It is the God of the *Akedah* episode that haunts *The Dream Songs*; this presents the image of an unstable God who makes seemingly impossible, even sadistic, demands of faith on his creatures. The God 'who has wrecked this generation' with his mindless culls (Song 153) incited Henry's most sorrowful loss of all through the act of his father; for, as he remarks in Song 136: 'It all centred in the end on the suicide / in which I am an expert, deep & wide.' The hurt of his father's self-murder is directed towards God the Father, since his father was a victim of the suffering inherent in a God-given existence, and so (after all) he 'did what was needed' (Song 145). This redirected blame allows Henry at such times to respond with understanding and forgiveness towards his father. Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his beloved son for God; Henry's father, he believes, threatened to 'swim out' with Henry 'forevers'[sic], though in the end decided instead on self-sacrifice (Song 143).

God, however, welcomed rather than prevented the sacrifice, and the overriding consequence for Henry is portrayed as an arrested Oedipal development, where its natural resolution was prevented from occurring by the suicide. Despite the promise of loving reconciliation in earlier Songs, it is the violent image of the long poem's penultimate Song that we are left with. Henry is portrayed as irretrievably trapped in the Oedipal stage in Song 384, pleading 'when will indifference come', and attempting to reclaim the father from his mortal retreat, in order to vent fully his primitive murderous desire.

suicide, which dogs him on his journey. As the duped Don Quixote punishes himself to undo the curse he believes is on Dulcinea, so the poet carries on punishing himself over the curse of his father's act. The one main grief—the one main figure—that stands behind him is the one emerging from the first cited location, Tampa, the place of the suicide. His father is the 'someone else' behind him, whose self-murder robbed the poet of the opportunity to resolve his Oedipal Complex, by way of forging a new 'covenant of love'. 'Sophocles and God' hints at the resolution offered by Wellisch; as only Sophocles—as writer of *Oedipus Rex*—knows the identity of the old traveller whom Oedipus slew, so only God—as author of his life, and source of the complex from which he suffers—knows the identity of the 'someone else' who stalks his inescapable memory. Still, one may more optimistically interpret the post-conversion poetry as Berryman finally establishing this 'covenant of love' with God the Father.

In the sixth stanza of 'The Search', Berryman refers to two Protestant exegetes whom he had become closely acquainted with through the teaching of his 'Reformation and Renaissance' course: Martin Luther (1483-1546)—'who undone / the sacramental system and taught evil / is *ingrained*', according to Dream Song 254—and Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), who is widely regarded as one of the intellectual greats of the Church of England. His remark concerning the more famous of the two is typically dry in its wit: 'Luther on *Galatians* (his grand joy) / I laid aside until I was older & wiser.' Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* (1535)—transcribed and edited from his lectures of 1531—has been called 'a declaration of Christian independence'. It expounds the freedom of the believer—one who has accepted Christ's Gospel in faith—not only from the Law, but from all reliance on 'works' and the institution of the Church for one's

salvation. As Berryman suggests, the work held a special place in Luther's heart, or at least the epistle on which it is based did; Luther declared 'the epistle to the Galatians [...] is my epistle to which I am betrothed. It is my Katie von Bora [Luther's wife].'⁶⁵

In his letter to the churches he had founded in Galatia, the Apostle Paul rebukes its members for being too easily swayed by other teachers, and not remaining true to the Gospel he had taught them. The Galatians had been persuaded to revert to certain practices of Judaism, especially circumcision. Paul reminds them that through Christ they have been freed from such obligations of the Law, which are no longer necessary for their salvation; hence, they are unnecessarily enslaving themselves. He is also annoyed that these other teachers have attempted to diminish his apostolic authority: they are claiming he should adhere more closely to the practice of the church at Jerusalem which commissioned him. Paul retorts that he had been commissioned by a direct revelation from God, and his authority has never rested on any formal appointment by the Jerusalem Church. Indeed, he claims that the other main leaders of the Church recognise his special mission to the gentiles, and have acquiesced in his authority in this particular area.

Luther interprets the epistle as affirming what he claims to be the most important aspect of Christ's Gospel; that is, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. His commentary draws a distinction between the 'passive' righteousness of Christian faith, and the 'active' righteousness of works, laws, rituals and ceremonies. True Christian faith amounts to an embracing of the former type; those who pursue the erroneous active righteousness believe that their works will in themselves gain them merit before God, and in some way contribute towards their salvation. However, Luther declares that it is

⁶⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 55 vols, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and others (Saint Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1975), xxvi (1964), p.ix.

impossible for fallen man to justify himself before God, and that only in Christ is he saved, since Christ has already paid the price for all sinners through his sacrifice. The believer's entire submission in faith allows Christ to work within him. Luther maintains that he is not rejecting the necessity of good works for their own sake, but merely insisting that they are not regarded by God as in themselves justifying.

This doctrine consequently also refutes the authority of the Roman Church to recommend or stipulate any religious practice which may in any way aid one's salvation.⁶⁶ To Luther, Paul affirms the notion of the universal priesthood of believers; his authority was directly vested in him because he responded in faith to a direct revelation of the Gospel through Christ, and not because it was granted to him by the Church. He declares that 'any Christian is a supreme pontiff', a Christian being someone who responds in faith to their encounter with Christ on hearing the Gospel, and believes that he is justified by that faith alone.⁶⁷ In this way Luther's commentary on Galatians attempts to validate the central tenets of the Protestant Reformation.

Judging by Berryman's extensive notes on the work, he had in fact studied the lectures on Galatians in considerable detail, as well as being able to offer a concisely illuminative general evaluation of Luther's life and works in the relevant classes of his 'Reformation and Renaissance' course.⁶⁸ However, there are several reasons why the poet—in his mock-modestly tongue-in-cheek fashion—remarks that he must lay the work aside, pending greater experience and wisdom. Firstly, there is the sheer sprawling length and needless verbosity of the work. The book spans at least 600 pages in most editions, the product of an approach vastly different from the more concise editorial

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp.4-12.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.233.

⁶⁸ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box III, Folder 40, 'Humanities 63: General', numerous loose notes.

demands of modern scholarship. One reason for this, however, is that it purports to be a faithful transcription of Luther's lectures; as Luther himself remarks: 'I myself can hardly believe that when I delivered these public lectures on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, I was as wordy as this book shows that I was.'⁶⁹

Luther expounds the epistle of Saint Paul line by line, but in a manner that is highly tangential and repetitious; he constantly draws parallels between the Apostle's exasperating experience with the Law-clinging Galatians, prone to false teaching, and the trials of the Lutheran Reformers in their efforts to propagate and uphold the true faith. He frequently uses the Apostle's words as a springboard for impassioned Reformation apologetics, as well as scathing invectives against his enemies: chiefly the 'papists' and 'sectarians'. The papists, for instance, 'are slaves of the devil to be burned in hell',⁷⁰ and the sectarians—members of Protestant movements which have schismatically separated from Luther's—will similarly 'receive a punishment worthy of this wickedness of theirs'.⁷¹ Berryman's comment consequently appears sarcastically diplomatic in the face of the Reformer's violent condemnatory outbursts. It is also not without some degree of awe, however, as one cannot fail to be captivated by the enthusiasm of a man who knows himself to be stirring a monumental tidal wave in history. The lectures are also essentially sermons, and their prolixity reflects the way preaching and the expounding of sacred Scripture was becoming of heightened importance to the new desacramentalised *sola scriptura* religion.

In the light of all that Luther's work on Galatians represents, it is also apparent that the poet is offering a slightly weary remark on the crucial issues raised by the Reformation.

⁶⁹ Luther, *Luther's Works*, xxvii (1964), p.145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.7.

⁷¹ *Luther's Works*, vol.xxvi, p.344.

One can see his continual consideration of the claims of both the Catholic and Protestant traditions of Christianity in all of the scholarship suggested by ‘The Search’. However, there is a certain degree of not entirely mock apprehension at having to deal with these key issues of the Reformation, especially the notion of *sola fidei*, which, as it contributed to the division of Christendom, and its multiplicity of further schisms, represents one of the most profound ideological issues in the history of western civilisation. Despite his admiration for Luther, Berryman considered his notion of justification by faith alone to be deeply problematic, as the annotations in his copy of Luther’s ‘Concerning Christian Liberty’, in which the doctrine is also outlined, demonstrate.

In ‘Concerning Christian Liberty’, Luther employs Christ’s own analogy of the fruit tree (Mt 7.18) in order to illustrate how good works will proceed from faith, but the latter must come first; however, the believer’s ‘works do not make him bad or good, but he himself makes his works either bad or good.’ Berryman remarks: ‘yes; but a fundamental Lutheran problem is—like contrition, what he knew—that Faith is imperfect and ambiguous too.’ Furthermore, as if he were marking a student essay, he prompts Luther in the margin to ‘give examples (e.g. mercy killing)’.⁷² One possible consequence of the *sola fidei* principle that Berryman appears to pick up on is an anxiety about the purity and acceptability of one’s faith in itself. Indeed, this concern is even more apparent when considered in the context of his religious poetry, which tends to focus on the tensions of imperfect and ambiguous belief; never more so than in those poems which actually take the prayerful format of an expression of faith:

I say ‘Thy kingdom come,’ it means nothing to me.

⁷² Martin Luther, ‘Concerning Christian Liberty’, in *Great Voices of the Reformation: An Anthology*, ed. by Harry Emerson Fosdick (New York: Modern Library, 1954), p.91. U Minn, JBP, Personal Library.

Hast thou prepared astonishments for man?
 One sudden Coming? Many so believe.
 So not, without knowing anything, do I. ('Second Address to the Lord')⁷³

Lines such as these almost concede a sense of unassailable scepticism, even if faith is desired. In this way, the devotional poems of both *Love & Fame* and *Delusions, etc* stress the indefinite and heretical areas of the poet's Christian belief. He also draws attention to a concern that, when embracing Lutheranism, such self-doubt over one's faith will in turn lead to dismay over one's works, however good. Luther declares: 'no good work can profit an unbeliever to justification and salvation; and, on the other hand, no evil work makes him an evil and condemned person, but that unbelief, which makes the person and the tree bad, makes his works evil and condemned. Wherefore, when any man is good or bad, this does not arise from his works, but from his faith or unbelief.' Berryman's overall verdict on this doctrine is that it is 'much more sinister to the human race generally than Catholicism is (& therefore intolerant)'. He remarks that Luther's teaching is like 'Aug[ustine]'s later teaching, rigid & bizarre.' He also responds with a disgusted 'ugh!!' and accuses Luther of 'a nightmarish naiveté' over his further insistence that 'he who wishes to do good work must begin, not by working, but by believing [...] for nothing makes the person good but faith, not bad but unbelief'.⁷⁴ One possible consequence of this doctrine on the individual conscience is suggested by the dilemma of Dream Song 239:

Am I a bad man? Am I a good man?
 —Hard to say, Brother Bones. Maybe you both,
 like most of we.
 —The evidence is difficult to structure towards deliberate evil.
 But what of the rest? Does it wax for wrath
 in its infinite complexity?

⁷³ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, p.217.

⁷⁴ Luther, 'Christian Liberty', *Great Voices*, pp.91-92. JBP.

Henry's friend attempts to resolve Henry's anxiety about his general moral constitution, reminding him of the mediocrity of humanity's fallen nature. Henry's response reveals that the fear is eschatological; he raises the spectre not just of original sin, but also apprehension raised by the *sola fidei* principle that bad fruit only emanates from a bad tree, irrespective of the intrinsic nature of the fruit itself. Henry is worried, not about consciously evil acts, but about all other acts committed, good and evil, as well as whether he is constitutionally evil; in other words, does he act in 'good faith'?

However, Berryman does believe that he finally gets to the bottom of Luther's doctrine. The Reformer claims that he does not reject good works in themselves, but only when they are done with a view to seeking justification through them: 'for such works are not free but blaspheme the grace of God, to which alone it belongs to justify and save through faith'. Berryman remarks that 'what he really feels is that they [good works], so done, are insolent (anti-Greek Xtianity)'.⁷⁵ By 'anti-Greek' he means 'anti-*metanoia*'; these works would not be done as a result of having consciously orientated one's heart entirely towards doing the will of God, but would have been done with a more Judaic legalistic disposition; in other words, by believing that one could in some way 'buy' God's favour through the performance of good acts, regardless of what is in the heart. The notion does not appear distinctive enough, however, for him to offer further comment.

The overall burden of Berryman's interaction with this text suggests that he regarded this central tenet of Lutheranism to be ill-conceived, or at least badly articulated by its propagator. Indeed, the 'older & wiser' poet, through his embracing of Catholicism, seems to have rejected the major contentions of 'Luther on *Galatians*', although this too

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.92.

constituted a highly ambivalent adherence. What is certain is that for Berryman faith itself is always a lot more ‘imperfect and ambiguous’ than he felt Lutheran doctrine suggested it ever could be. He was, however, fascinated by Luther the man and felt that, for all his apparent faults, history has done Luther a great injustice.⁷⁶

Berryman’s interest in Lancelot Andrewes—whose ‘account of the Resurrection appearances / in 1609 seemed to me, seems to me, it’—is likely to have been aroused by T.S. Eliot, who championed the great literary merits of his work in the essay ‘For Lancelot Andrewes’ (1928). Eliot declared that his sermons ‘rank with the finest English prose of their time, of any time.’⁷⁷ Andrewes was the leading light of the ‘witty’ or ‘metaphysical’ movement of preaching.⁷⁸ He rose to great fame in his time as a scholar and a clergyman, gaining favour in the Royal court and enjoying certain prominent positions of both Church and State.⁷⁹ He was appointed by King James to participate in the writing of the Authorised Version of the Bible, ‘the most notable prose stylist of the scholars and divines appointed’ to the task.⁸⁰ Of special significance to

⁷⁶ His estimation of Luther is summed up in the conclusion to a lecture from his ‘Reformation to Renaissance’ course: ‘The verdict of history has settled strong against Luther—he is not read; not regarded as the central figure of his age. Ordinary person not interested in him. Faults regarded as outweighing virtues (Erasmus)—wrongly, I think, & this will change. BUT [Luther had] strong personal common sense: rejected 3 religious nuts Melancthon was impressed by, and other results: 1/ a new passionate faith 2/ reform of Church.’ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box III, Folder 40, ‘Humanities 63; General’, notes headed ‘Luther (3)’

⁷⁷ T.S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p.11.

⁷⁸ G. M. Story in the introduction to: Lancelot Andrewes, *Sermons*, ed. by G. M. Story (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.v.

⁷⁹ He was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth, and then King James. During his career he held the Bishoprics of Chichester, Ely and Winchester; he also rose to the highest levels of the Royal Court, becoming Dean of the Chapels Royal and Privy Councillor, as well as a member of the Court of High Commission, the Court of Star Chamber, the Star Chamber and the House of Lords. For two decades he was at the very centre of public life, and in a commanding position to ‘mix influences of religion with designs of state’. *Ibid.* pp.xviii-xxi.

⁸⁰ Andrewes, *Sermons*, pp.xvii-xix.

Berryman, however, is that Andrewes was at one time appointed to the 'Stall of S. Pancras' during his period as a prebendary at Saint Paul's.⁸¹

G. M. Story traces the source of his unique prose style mainly to 'a European metaphysical movement in which the tradition of human eloquence was replaced by the use of conceits, puns, and startling antitheses to inculcate moral truths by the shock of surprise.'⁸² In stark contrast to the unruly verbosity of Luther's sermons, Andrewes's are extremely refined, structured, and poetic; they are 'highly organized discourses whose economical, interlocked stages of subtle exposition and argument require close attention.'⁸³ Because of this, his writing does not lend itself well to bite-size quotation, and this has often been suggested as the reason why he is not as widely read today as his contemporary John Donne.⁸⁴ For Eliot, Andrewes's comparative obscurity also results from the absence in his sermons of the 'impure motive' that he believes is characteristic of Donne. By this he means Donne's recourse to expressions of poetic personality, celebrity and histrionicism, whereas Andrewes maintains a 'relevant intensity' throughout. In consequence, his sermons 'are not easy reading' and 'are only for the reader who can elevate himself to the subject'.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Story notes: 'To contemporaries Andrewes was a man "deeply seen in cases of Conscience". At S. Paul's he was appointed to the Stall of S. Pancras [around 1589], and, annexed to which was the office of Penitentiary of Confessioner. It had long fallen into disuse, but Andrewes revived it, and "especially in Lent time" he "would walk duly at certain hours, in one of the Isles of the Church, that if any came to him for spirituall advice and comfort, as some did, but not many, he might impart it to them."' Ibid, p.xvi. Berryman expended great psychoanalytic effort in attempting to uncover the reason why his unconscious had thrown up the name 'St Pancras Braser'. It is unlikely that he was significantly aware or knowledgeable about Andrewes at the time this dream material was first recorded in the early 1940s; however, he would have been intrigued to learn that his favourite metaphysical preacher worked as a therapist in the 'St Pancras Stall'. U Minn, JBP, St Pancras Braser, Folder 1, MS, preface, p.1; Folder 3, TS, preface; Folder 5, TS, p.3, discourse on 'St. Pancras Braser' name.

⁸² Andrewes, *Sermons*, p.xxvi.

⁸³ Ibid, p.xliii.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.xxix; Eliot, *Lancelot Andrewes*, p.15.

⁸⁵ Eliot, *Lancelot Andrewes*, p.23.

The sermons are typified by a meditative focus on the subject in question. Through extensive multilingual quotation, he unravels the significance of each word of the chosen scriptural passage, drawing out rich interpretative layers which progressively build on each other through the course of the sermon in a carefully controlled trajectory of purpose. His style is colloquial, but elevated by a variety of technical and poetical devices; his punning, assonance, alliteration, repetition, syntactical rearrangement, and rich ‘mosaic of quotation’, all combine for a virtuoso performance of wit, which, however, does indeed appear curiously unostentatious; instead, it seems only to provide a deeper, more involving and moving exegesis.⁸⁶

The sermon which seems to Berryman ‘it’—Andrewes’s ‘A Sermon Preached before the King’s Majesty at Whitehall, on the Sixteenth of April, A.D. MDCIX., being Easter-day’—demonstrates all of these qualities, and was included as required reading on his ‘Reformation and Renaissance’ course.⁸⁷ The sermon concerns a single verse of the Fourth Gospel, John 20.19:

The same day then, at night, which was the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the Disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said to them, Peace be unto you.

After setting the passage in the context of the other Resurrection appearances of John’s Gospel, Andrewes anticipates the structure of his argument by breaking the extract down into syntactical and descriptive units for close examination, in order then to draw out the rich example he believes the evangelist has recorded for us. The most significant words here are Jesus’s salutation, ‘*pax vobis*’, or ‘peace be unto you’:

Which salutation is the very substance of the text, the rest but appendant all.

⁸⁶ Andrewes, *Sermons*, pp. xxxviii-xli.

⁸⁷ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box III, F40, Humanities 63 reading list, Fall Quarter 1969.

In it, two things give forth themselves: 1. The persons to whom, *vobis*. 2. The matter of the wish itself, 'peace'. The persons are thus set down: *Discipuli, congregati, conclusi*. 1. His 'Disciples' they were, 2. 'gathered,' 3. and 'the doors shut' on them 'for fear of the Jews'.

There will fall out besides four other points. 1. Christ's site; that He stood, when He wished it. 2. His place; that in the midst He stood. 3. The time; all this, the same day, the first day of the week, Sunday, Easter-day: 4. and the very time of the day, that it was late.⁸⁸

The extract demonstrates how Andrewes's prose can be both simultaneously analytical and poetic; the short concise sentences appear syntactically arranged for a livelier cadence, for instance, 'the rest but appendant all', rather than a more prosaic variation, such as 'the rest are but appendant to it.' The constant recourse to the parallel words of the Latin vulgate is typical of his sermons' multilingual quotation, and though it at first appears to clutter the prose, it is rather assimilated into it, and reflects both his respect for his sources, and his determination to do every word of Scripture justice; as Eliot remarks: 'Andrewes takes a word and derives the world from it; squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning which we should never have supposed any word to possess.'⁸⁹

Every word of John 20.19 receives this exacting treatment from the Bishop, but the message is relatively straightforward. Peace—of mind and with others—emanates only from first establishing peace with God. The disciples had lost this peace with God and men, and hidden out of fear, although on the positive side their fellowship with each other remained. The message we learn from Christ's actions is that this peace, inspired by God, is also an active peace. Christ did not allow the disciples to suffer long in their distress, even though in human terms they merited His scorn, and even revenge, for forsaking Him. He came immediately, on the day of His Resurrection, to offer them His unconditional peace. The fact that Christ is *stetit* ('standing') affirms the activeness of

⁸⁸ Lancelot Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons*, 5 vols (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1951), II, p.239.

⁸⁹ Eliot, *Lancelot Andrewes*, p.20.

his peace; it is not a ‘sedentary desire’ that never fulfils itself.⁹⁰ However, Andrewes derives his most significant point about Christ’s nature from the position in which He is standing, *stetit in medio*:

The midst is Christ’s place by nature; He is the second Person *in Divinis*, and so the middlemost of the other two. And on earth, follow Him if you will, you shall not lightly find Him out of it; not according to the letter, speaking of the material place. At His birth, *in medio animalium*, in the stable. After, a child, *in medio doctorum*, in the Temple. After, a man, *medius vestrum stetit*, saith John Baptist, ‘in the midst of the people;’ saith He of ‘Himself’, *Ecce ego in medio vestri*, ‘in the midst of His Apostles.’ At His death it fell to His turn likewise, that place; even then, He was in the midst. And now rising, there He is, we see. They in the midst of the Jews, and He in the midst of them [...] His office being to be ‘a mediator’, *Medius* ‘between God and man’, where should a Mediator stand but *in Medio*? [...] Nor in things natural either combine two elements disagreeing in both qualities, without a middle symbolizing with both; nor flesh and bone, without a cartilage between both [...] And the way to peace is the mid-way [...] In a word, all analogy, symmetry, harmony, in the world goeth by it.⁹¹

The significance for Berryman of Andrewes’s sermon is highlighted in a letter he wrote to his mother, ‘Easter evening’ (1971):

Did you ever notice that Christ was always ‘*in medio*’—central person of Trinity, *among* the doctors in the Temple, *among* his followers, etc., and finally ‘venit, et stetit in medio, et dixit, Pax vobis’—Bishop Andrewes points this out in the great 1609 sermon on the Resurrection that I was reading at Mass this morning after trying in vain to get anything out of the drivel from the goodhearted celebrant—anyway it proves that He was *human*—we are ever in the *middle* of something or everything [...] See my poem in The New Yorker ‘Ecce Homo’ this week.⁹²

This sermon by Andrewes directly inspires a poem, ‘The Prayer of the Middle-Aged Man’, written around the same time as the letter, in which Berryman realises that, being himself *in medio* in life, this is an opportune time for him to implore the help of the Mediator:⁹³

Amid the doctors in the Temple at twelve, between

⁹⁰ Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons*, pp.238-49.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, pp.249-50. Extracts from this passage are also cited in Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, p.155.

⁹² Quoted in Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, p.155.

⁹³ The MS is dated ‘14 April 1971’: U Minn. JBP, ‘Delusions’, Folder 3, #31. Also noted in Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, p.155.

mother & host at Cana implored too soon,
 in the middle of disciples, the midst of the mob,
 between the High Priest and the Procurator,
 among the occupiers,

between the malefactors, and 'stetit in medio,
 et dixit, Pax vobis' and 'ascensit ad medium
 Personarum et caelorum,' dear my Lord,
 mercy a sinner nailed dead-centre too,
 pray not implored too late,—

for also Ezra stood between the seven & the six,
 restoring the new Law.⁹⁴

Berryman directly assimilates the language and prose style of Andrewes's sermon into the poem, in a way which is reminiscent of Eliot's use of Andrewes in 'Journey of the Magi'.⁹⁵ The poem adopts the format of Andrewes's directory of instances where Christ demonstrates his *in medio* nature, throughout his natural life, and after. Like Andrewes, the poet mentions that Christ was amidst the doctors in the Temple at twelve, and also in the midst of his disciples, and in the midst of the people (or in view of his problematic ministry, 'the mob'). However, the sermon inspires him to such an extent that he easily thinks up examples of his own in addition to those provided by the Bishop.

He refers to Mary's attitude towards her son at the wedding at Cana from John's Gospel. After the host runs out of wine, Jesus responds to his mother's approach for help with the apparently reluctant words: 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come', before going ahead to perform his first public miracle.⁹⁶ For Berryman, the notion that Christ was 'implored too soon' by his mother was part of his ammunition against her, as he had long considered the Catholic conception of the

⁹⁴ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, pp.261-62.

⁹⁵ The opening of Eliot's poem is adapted from Andrewes's Nativity sermon, given before James I on Christmas Day 1622. See B. C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 6th edn (Faber: London, 1994), pp.237-38.

⁹⁶ Jn 2.1-11.

Virgin Mother of God to be a purely doctrinal—rather than historical—construction.⁹⁷

In an unpublished ‘Xmas Poem’ from 1970, for instance, he refers to ‘Mary’s grandiose & shallow precipitancy?’⁹⁸ He also cites the instance of Christ being caught ‘between the High Priest and the Procurator’, an instance of Christ becoming the focus of a dispute between the Roman occupiers of Israel, and the Jewish religious authorities; He is caught *in medio* between the secular and religious powers, and rejected by both. The High Priest wanted Pontius Pilate to sentence Christ as they could not put him to death under their own law; but Pilate, reluctant to become involved in a tribal religious case, desperately sought a way to avoid condemning Him.⁹⁹

The poet clarifies Andrewes’s assertion that ‘at His death it fell to His turn likewise, that place’, by noting how Christ found himself crucified in the company of two condemned ‘malefactors’ either side of him.¹⁰⁰ Both these cases stress, more than Andrewes’s words, the humiliation endured by Christ on humanity’s behalf; the poet heightens the pathos in anticipation of his appeal at the end of the second stanza. The list culminates in a stylistic allusion to Andrewes’s sermons by slipping into Latin

⁹⁷ In a draft footnote to the second chapter—‘David to X’, later titled ‘Thou Son of David’—of his ‘Life of Christ’, Berryman gives an uncompromising verdict on the Catholic Church’s explanation of the ‘brothers and sisters’ of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels: ‘The Church’s view that these were Joseph’s by a previous marriage is an idle suggestion. Of course it may be true, but we have no reason to think so. When the Church of God goes even further and requires ‘brethren’ to mean merely cousins, no doubt it is guilty of hypocrisy. And why does it dare hypocrisy?—to maintain a mistranslation of the Hebrew “[ha]almah” (maid) as Greek “[pathenos]” (virgin).’ U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, ‘Life of Christ’. Berryman’s position on this is informed by his reading of Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.115-132.

⁹⁸ Our ignorance begins when He was born.

Shadowy Joseph leaving any mark
on that devouring intelligence?
Mary’s grandiose & shallow precipitancy?
Siblings a trace?

Welcome on Him contentions in the Temple,
telling His elders off. He vanishes
from all enquiry then for 20 years
until John’s fanfare blows to Galilee
calling Him abroad

(U Minn, JBP, Unpublished Miscellaneous Poetry, Box V, #4, ‘The Xmas Poem’, dated ‘Xmas 70’).
⁹⁹ Mt 26.57-26.31; Mk 14.53-15.20; Lk 22.54-23.25 (Luke also brings Herod Antipas into the dispute); Jn 18.15-19.16.

¹⁰⁰ Mt 27.38; Mk 15.27; Lk 23.33; Jn 19.18.

quotation. In the first instance he cites John 20:19: '[Jesus] stood in their midst. and said to them, Peace be unto you', which is the focus of the Bishop's sermon; he then offers his own Latin description of Christ rising to sit in the middle of the judgement throne of heaven: 'ascensit [sic] ad medium / Personarum et caelorum'.¹⁰¹

His closing appeal to Christ the King, during the *in medio* of his life—'mercy a sinner nailed dead-centre too, / pray not implored too late'—symmetrically contrasts with the actions of Jesus's mother who 'implored too soon', another situation in which He finds himself *in medio*. He supports his case by recalling the reassuring episode from the Hebrew Bible, where Ezra the scribe was enabled—through God's intervention—to reinstitute the Law of Moses in Jerusalem, after the Jews had returned from their long exile. The exiled people of Israel had allowed themselves to fall into sinful ways, defiling their religion especially through intermarriage with idolatrous foreigners. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah proclaim Yahweh's compassion on his wayward people, by inspiring the Kings of Persia to allow the Jews to return home, rebuild the Temple and restore their Law. As the poet recalls, Ezra found himself *in medio* as he read the Law to the crowd in Jerusalem, for 'beside him stood, on his right, Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; on his left, Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam' (Neh 8.4). The crowd weep when they hear the word of God, and joyfully celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles, having re-orientated their hearts towards Him.¹⁰²

At the time of writing the poem, in April 1971, Andrewes's sermon epitomised for Berryman the image of Christ that had rapidly developed since his conversion

¹⁰¹ A direct source for this has proved elusive; it is not from the Latin Vulgate or the Latin Mass. The first MS features a slightly different construction: 'ascendit ad medio / personarum et caelorum'. U Minn, JBP, Delusions, Folder 3, #31, MS, dated '14 April 1971'.

¹⁰² Neh.8. Extracts are also cited in Haffenden, *Critical Commentary*, pp.155-56.

experience; the ‘God of Rescue’ whom he felt had intervened spiritually in his life is now the God who had entered physically into ‘the midst’ of mankind in the person of Christ. He is the mediator between God and man who had reconciled the poet to his Creator, in the same way that Christ had actively sought peace with the Apostles after they had forsaken him in John 20.19. His inspirational ‘indebtedness’ to certain Christian writers and divines, such as Andrewes, is therefore twofold; they can provide him with not only the spiritual insight itself, but also the vocabulary or image required to communicate that insight poetically.

Berryman also draws the same kind of inspiration from religious art, and, in one of the most puzzling statements of ‘The Search’, notes how he ‘studied Titian’s remarks on the Tribute-Money’. There are two original paintings in existence on the theme of *The Tribute Money* by the Italian high Renaissance painter Tizian Vecellio Di Gregorio (c.1485-1576), better known as ‘Titian’. They are based on the episode in the Synoptics where Christ is challenged on the issue of taxation by some devious Pharisees and Herodians. They aim to entrap him in a situation where his answer can only be blasphemous or traitorous, but he responds with the famous circumvention: ‘render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s’.¹⁰³ This is one of the few episodes derived from the Marcan source which Berryman regarded as being ‘absolutely authentic’;¹⁰⁴ he regarded it as an example of Christ’s ‘intellectual command’ of situations, and over people, as well as an early example of the ‘Church versus the world’.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Mt 22.15-22, Mk.12.13-17, Lk 20.20-26.

¹⁰⁴ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, MS, class notes headed ‘Absolutely authentic in Mk’.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, MS, class notes headed ‘non-Markan (Q+)’ and ‘1st lect. after NT--62--W.’59’.

The first, most famous, and what is generally considered the more accomplished of Titian's two works, is now housed in the Staatliche Gemäldegalerie, Dresden. It was painted around 1516 for the Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso d'Este, whose gold coins contained Christ's words as their device. It was originally produced for the door of his medal cupboard, and it also had a wry political significance, since at the time the Duke was in debt to both the Pope and the Emperor. The second *Tribute Money*— now contained in the National Gallery, London— was completed in 1568 for King Philip II of Spain; it is painted in Titian's 'late heroic style', and therefore considerably different to the first.¹⁰⁶ Both depict Christ confidently dealing with the Pharisee who goads him with the Roman coin; but the first painting appears far warmer, intricate and refined in style, conveying a divinely handsome and composed image of Christ.

Berryman's reference to the painter's 'remarks on The Tribute Money' is rather ambiguous, since there are no actual direct 'remarks' from Titian concerning either painting; except that is for the following allusion he makes to the second work in a letter to the King of Spain, dated 26th October 1568:

Most Invincible and Potent King,

I finished within the last few days the picture of 'Our Lord and the Pharisee showing the Coin,' which I promised to your Majesty, and I have sent it with the prayer that your Majesty may enjoy it as much as earlier works of mine, as I desire to close these days of my extreme old age in the service of the Catholic King my Signor.¹⁰⁷

It is unlikely that Berryman found much scope for study in such simple, obsequious remarks; however, there are several more likely possibilities for the source of the

¹⁰⁶ Charles Hope, *Titian* (London: Jupiter Books, 1980), pp.51-52, 149-50; Harold E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian: Complete Edition*, 3 vols (New York: Phaidon, 1969-75), I: *The Religious Paintings* (1969), pp.163-65; J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *Titian: His Life and Times*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1877), I, pp.116-21, II, pp.386-91.

¹⁰⁷ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Titian*, II, p.388.

comment. A second-hand anecdote about the first *Tribute Money* appears in Francesco Scannelli's *Microcosmo della pittura* (1657).¹⁰⁸ The poet's immediate source would most likely have been J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle's *Titian: his Life and Times* (1877), where Scannelli's passage is reproduced in translation:

Titian was visited on a certain occasion by a company of German travellers, who were allowed to look at the pictures which his studio contained. On being asked what impression these works conveyed, these gentlemen declared that they only knew of one master capable of finishing as they thought paintings ought to be finished, and that was Dürer: their impression being that Venetian compositions invariably fell below the promise which they had given at their first commencement. To these observations Titian smilingly replied, 'that if he had thought extreme finish to be the end and aim of art, he too would have fallen into the excesses of Dürer. But though long experience had taught him to prefer a broad and even track to a narrow and intricate path, yet he would still take occasion to show that the subtlest detail might be compassed without sacrifice of breadth, and so produced the Christ of the Tribute Money.'¹⁰⁹

Berryman's keen interest in religious art is self-evident from his poetry, and he also had the opportunity to focus on Renaissance painting in detail in several of his humanities courses.¹¹⁰ There is the possibility, therefore, that he is referring to his study of Titian's technique in relation to his contemporaries; this anecdote would naturally be of great interest in this respect. He may also be poetically referring to Titian's painting of the subject itself: that is to say, Titian is 'remarking' on the passage of Scripture through his depiction of the scene. However, the description of the painting by Crowe and Cavalcaselle, which follows their citation of the Scannelli anecdote, elaborates on Titian's remarks in the context of the painting's theme. This has far more bearing on 'The Search' and is consequently more likely to be what the poet had in mind when

¹⁰⁸ Francesco Scannelli, *Microcosmo della pittura* (Cesena, 1657), pp.231-34.

¹⁰⁹ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Titian*, I, p.118. In relation to the source of Berryman's remark in 'The Search', Charles Hope of the Warburg Institute states of this anecdote: 'So far as I can see, this is the only possibility'. Letter from Charles Hope to Tom Rogers, 20 August 2002.

¹¹⁰ See U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 18, Humanities 132, 'Report Topics: Religion and Art', and Folder 22, Humanities 133, 'Reformation and Baroque'.

making the statement. Crowe and Cavalcaselle explain at length how one might regard

Titian as living up to his remarks with *The Tribute Money*:

Titian on this occasion showed a transcendent power of imitating nature, and displayed a capacity for finish never before equalled by any of his countrymen.

Looking at the human face at a certain distance, we lose those details of pore and down which we know to exist, but only care to realise on a closer inspection; and as in nature so in Titian, the hairs or the veins and sinews are delineated, though we lose them by drawing back from the picture, which is then as broad and as fair as if it contained none of those minutiae. Vasari reflects an opinion which holds to this day, that the “head of Christ is stupendous and miraculous.” It was considered by all the artists of his time as the most perfect and best handled of any that Titian ever produced; but for us it has qualities of a higher merit than those of mere treatment. Simple as the subject is, the thought which it embodies is very subtle. Christ turns towards the questioning Pharisee, and confirms with his eye the gesture of his hand, which points to the coin. His face is youthful, its features and short curly beard are finely framed in a profusion of flowing locks. The Pharisee to the right stands in profile before Jesus, holds the coin and asks the question. The contrast is sublime between the majestic calm and elevation, and what Quandt calls the “Godlike beauty” of Christ, and the low cunning and coarse air of the Pharisee; between the delicate chiselling of the features, the soft grave eye and pure cut mouth of the Saviour, and the sharp aquiline nose or the crafty glance of the crop haired malignant Hebrew.

It is a peculiarity which Titian has caught from Palma, and even carried out in Palma’s manner, that he contrasts the fair complexion and marble smoothness of Christ’s skin with the rough and weatherbeaten tan of his tempter. The hand “every finger of which” points so gracefully and naturally to the effigy of Caesar on the coin, is manly in spite of its delicacy, and not a whit less strong than that of the Pharisee, whose joints are gnarled by work. The form of a boatman in his working-day shirt, whose arm is hairy in its strength and swarthy from exposure, is pitted against that of the Redeemer, whose gesture, shape, and dress reflect the elevation of His life and thoughts. The form of Christ was never conceived by any of the Venetians of such ideal beauty as this. Nor has Titian ever done better; and it is quite certain that no one, Titian himself included, within the compass of the North Italian Schools, reproduced the human shape with more nature and truth, and with greater delicacy of modelling. Amidst the profusion of locks that falls to Christ’s shoulders there are ringlets of which we may count the hairs, and some of these are so light that they seem to float in air, as if ready to wave at the spectator’s breath. Nothing can exceed the brightness and sheen or the transparent delicacy of the colours. The drapery is admirable in shade and fold, and we distinguish with ease the loose texture of the bright red tunic, and that of the fine broadcloth which forms the blue mantle. The most perfect easel-picture of which Venice ever witnessed the production, this is also the most polished work of Titian.¹¹¹

Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s commentary on the painting reveals an important thematic link with issues raised by the other citations in ‘The Search’, and it is certainly of more

¹¹¹ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Titian*, 1, pp.119-21.

direct relevance than Titian's own alleged words contained in the anecdote.

Consequently, 'I studied the remarks on Titian's *The Tribute-Money*' may in fact be a more accurate reflection of the poet's intention. In a poem which refers the reader to such a wide spectrum of perspectives on the person of Christ—from sceptical historical-criticism to orthodox apologetics—Titian's depiction of Him, certainly as described by Crowe and Cavalcaselle, would again signify Berryman's consideration of the Christ of Christianity, as embodied in art. The painting exemplifies the epiphany of the hypostatic union that he portrays in 'Ecce Homo' and 'The Prayer of the Middle Aged Man'.

Titian, as Scannelli's anecdote suggests, aims to capture with detailed authenticity the living, physical minutiae of Christ's humanity, and so 'amidst the profusion of locks [...] there are ringlets of which we may count the hairs'. However, Titian is also anxious to demonstrate how this intricacy of human detail may be 'compassed without sacrifice of breadth'. This 'breadth' is the overall impression, or message, that the artist wants to convey. Titian therefore also wants to capture what, in the above passage, is described as the 'Godlike beauty' of Christ, an image of 'the Redeemer, whose gesture, shape, and dress reflect the elevation of His life and thoughts.' *The Tribute Money* consequently represents the artist's attempt to portray a person simultaneously of this world, and infinitely beyond this world. The depiction of Christ's interaction with humanity—in this case with the devious Pharisee—also contributes crucially to this breadth: the way he 'confirms with his eye the gesture of his hand', with a 'majestic calm and elevation' that contrasts with the 'low cunning and coarse air' of his adversary. This is God in 'the midst' of his creation; however, in the light of Berryman's poem 'Ecce Homo', it may be regarded as over-perfecting and subliming Christ's humanity, to the point where it paradoxically becomes dehumanising, over-weighting the delicate artistic balance of the true hypostasis.

In the letter to his mother, Berryman refers to 'Ecce Homo' in relation to the insight he received upon reading Andrewes's sermon, and the poem depicts the development of his attitude towards Christ by way of inspirational examples he discovered in Mediaeval art. As he confirms in this poem, for most of his life he regarded Christ as '*almost* beyond humanity but not'; only the experience of seeing the iconic Pantocrator of San Clemente de Tahull ever made him briefly recognise Him as otherwise. The twelfth century fresco in question features a disturbingly imposing Zeus-like image of Christ; it portrays the thunder of his divine justice and majesty, but is certainly devoid of any human warmth. In contrast, the 'Burgundian' painting, from the same period, of the *Crucifixion* exemplifies the poet's new faith in the hypostatic union; he believes it conveys Christ's divine mercy, as well as the full human vulnerability He entered completely into: 'your dead head bent forward sideways, / your long feet hanging, your thin long arms out / in unconquerable beseeching'.¹¹² In this way, Berryman represented his quest for the authentic image of Christ through poetic visualisations of, and references to, the paintings which provided him with specific insights, the Titian allusion in 'The Search' being one such example.

Berryman concludes 'The Search' by expressing his special affinity with the scholars and artists cited by way of an ironic allusion:

When at twelve Einstein lost belief in God
 he said to himself at once (as he put it later)
 'Similarly motivated men, both of the past & of the present,
 together with their achieved insights,
waren die unverlierbaren Freunde' —the unloseable friends.

¹¹² Berryman *Collected Poems*, p.251-52.

The physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955)—who revolutionised twentieth century man’s view of the universe with his ‘special’ and ‘general’ theories of relativity—is the only thinker mentioned in the poem with whom Berryman had actually crossed paths. In 1933, when the Nazis gained power, Einstein renounced his German citizenship and settled permanently in the United States, taking up a professorship at the Institute of Advanced Study, University of Princeton, New Jersey, where he remained until his death.¹¹³ Berryman moved to Princeton in 1943, where he lectured in English at the University, on and off, for the next ten years. His wife Eileen took a job at Einstein’s Institute, where the poet recalls that she would meet the scientist ‘at precisely 10:30 every morning’.¹¹⁴ The poet’s attitude towards his famous colleague was not altogether warm; the suspicion that Einstein had once made off with his umbrella after a Princeton party—‘leaving his shabbier own’ as he recalls in *Dream Song* 336—being at least one long-standing point of suppressed vexation.¹¹⁵ However, he was very surprised to discover that the scientist also possessed a certain degree of literary talent, as he describes in the following *Dream Song* that unfortunately he eventually ‘killed’:

When, later, our adventure has bogged down,
 or umbrella’s to an end, and mountains & lakes
 if any are the friends—
 and that reminds me of a story—and so does ‘if’—
 Einstein—who personal’ never caught my fancy—
 he took my umbrella once,—

¹¹³ Einstein officially retired in 1945, although he continued to maintain an office in the Institute until the end. *The Quotable Einstein*, ed. by Alice Calaprice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. xxxii-iv.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Mariani, *Dream Song*, p. 157.

¹¹⁵ Eileen Simpson, his wife at the time, would later record a perhaps more accurate account of the proceedings: ‘Einstein had just left [historian Erich Kahler’s house] when John arrived. Soon after John returned home Lili [Kahler’s wife] telephoned frantically. Had John by any chance taken the professor’s umbrella? The world-famous physicist, who was even more absent-minded than the obscure poet, had left his in the hall rack, and the poet had unwittingly taken it (leaving behind his almost identical one): the physicist’s secretary had spotted the loss when her employer returned, rain-drenched, from his walk, had called Lili, who called me, who checked to see, and sent John hurrying back to make the exchange, lest it be thought—“Horrors!”—that he, like so many admirers, had been after a souvenir of the Nobel Laureate.’ Simpson, *Poets in their Youth*, pp. 98-99.

or I took his—years gone—but as a soul,
 brain, that stuff, yes—only his prose
 I never knew was so good:
 is getting over his loss of religious faith
 at . . . twelve maybe? and he must replace it
 and says, all the decades later,

‘Men of the same bent & end, past and now,
 along with what they happened really to discover,
 were the un-lose-able friends’:
 the German’s better, I did that stupid English
 myself. Oh: ‘if’. I meant the air & water
 peeled off, in a fouled test.¹¹⁶

The discourse appears gawky, but the poem is far from irredeemable by Dream Song standards; in fact, it has a great deal to commend it. The notion of life’s adventure being over-burdened by one’s dealings with humanity—to the point where it becomes unendurable—is quaintly reflected on through the bathetic umbrella relation. Equally imaginative is the closing metaphorical representation of God as scientist; His ‘fouled’ experiment of creation will at the end be stripped of the veneer of nature, in order to inspect and judge the disordered chaos that has been cultured in the Petri dish of mankind. The strands of the Song are deceptively well integrated: the loss of faith in humanity, and of life’s toleration, leads by way of the triggered reflections on Einstein—his umbrella and his beautifully expressed observation—to the familiar Dream Song theme of whether theistic belief is justified in view of human suffering.

The poet is captivated by this particular prose extract of Einstein’s, and keen to bring it to the attention of his readership. It is derived from a memoir written in German by the Nobel Laureate for a volume of essays commemorating his achievements, and intended

¹¹⁶ U Minn, JBP, Unpub. Dream Songs, Box 1, F6, #65. The Song is undated, but it may have been written around 1962 when he first came across Einstein’s quotation (see letter to Edward Hoagland below). The TS has been struck in pen at the top with a big ‘X’, which is Berryman’s usual way of indicating that the Song would not make the collection. He would call this process ‘killing’ Songs; he remarks, for instance, in a 1968 interview that ‘I killed about fifty in Greece [...] I killed a lot of songs in Ireland too’. Plotz, ‘Interview with Berryman’, *Berryman’s Understanding*, p.9.

to mark his seventieth birthday. A parallel-page English translation is provided by the editor, Paul Arthur Schlipp, so Berryman was not required to translate it for himself. However, he does understand enough German to realise that, on closer inspection, Schlipp has not done sufficient justice to Einstein's prose. It is also the sentiment of the memoir that intrigues the poet; even if he does not quite share it, it certainly provides a useful analogue with which to express his own position, and so supplies a useful autobiographical model for 'The Search'.

The sixty-seven-year-old Einstein begins his memoir—or 'obituary' as he calls it—by explaining that he agreed to write it because 'it is a good thing to show those who are striving alongside of us, how one's own striving and searching appears to one in retrospect'. He remarks how he came to be struck by the 'nothingness of the hopes and strivings which chase most men restlessly through life', the pursuit of goals that do not satisfy 'man in so far as he is a thinking and feeling being'. He first attempted to fulfil such a higher sense of purpose through recourse to religion, 'which is implanted into every child by way of the traditional education-machine'; but his scientific readings at the age of 12 convinced him that the Bible stories were untrue, and he found a new vocation in the scientific exploration of the physical world:¹¹⁷

It is quite clear to me that the religious paradise of youth, which was thus lost, was a first attempt to free myself from the chains of the 'merely personal,' from an existence which is dominated by wishes, hopes and primitive feelings. Out yonder there was this huge world, which exists independently of us human beings and which stands before us like a great, eternal riddle, at least partially accessible to our inspection and thinking. The contemplation of this world beckoned like a liberation, and I soon noticed that many a man whom I had learned to esteem and to admire had found inner freedom and security in devoted occupation with it. The mental grasp of this extra-personal world within the frame of the given possibilities swam as highest aim half consciously and half unconsciously before my mind's eye. Similarly motivated men of the present and of the past, as well as the insights which they had achieved, were the friends which

¹¹⁷ Albert Einstein, 'Autobiographical Notes', trans. by Paul Arthur Schlipp, *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. by Paul Arthur Schlipp, The Library of Living Philosophers Ser. 7 (Evanston, IL: Banta, 1949), pp.3-5.

could not be lost. The road to this paradise was not as comfortable and alluring as the road to the religious paradise; but it has proved itself as trustworthy, and I have never regretted having chosen it.¹¹⁸

After the first several pages, this potentially interesting memoir becomes impenetrably technical for someone who does not possess the relevant scientific background. Einstein moves the focus from human interest to a largely theoretical description of the development of his ideas and contribution to modern physics. Consequently, the beginning of his account stands out as especially poetic for anyone attempting to read it. Berryman's enthusiasm for the manner in which he is able to express the epiphany of his scientific vocation is highlighted in a letter written to the writer Edward Hoagland in 1962. A former student of Berryman's, Hoagland had written to him in order to show his appreciation for encouraging his work; but Berryman had replied that such inspiration and support between artists was reciprocal. His response shows how Einstein had led the poet to reflect on the special relationship he seemed to have with those who shared his own vocation:

In six years I could not explain properly the joy you gave me that summer – and not only joy, but – I don't feel witty enough to put a name to it . . . so I'll pass you on a staggering sentence of Einstein's. He's been talking about his early (12 or so?) loss of religious faith, and then says: 'Similarly motivated men of the present and of the past, as well as the insights which they had achieved, were the friends which could not be lost' – only the German is on the other plane, 'waren die unverlierbaren Freunde' – the *unlose-able* friends.'¹¹⁹

It is testament to Berryman's keen eye for detail—as well as his Lancelot Andrewes-style respect for the original source—that, on being intrigued by reading the passage in translation, he reverts to Einstein's own words on the parallel page, which are in the scientist's native language. He notices that Arthur Schlipp, the translator, has done his subject a disservice; for he has blandly translated what in German literally means 'the

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.5.

¹¹⁹ Cited in Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, p.329.

un-lose-able friends’—an appealingly poetic turn of phrase as it stands—into the more prosaic ‘the friends which could not be lost’. To his credit, however, Schlipp, as editor, does at least retain the original *Autobiographisches* for the sake of his more discerning readers, such as Berryman.

Having excluded the Einstein Song from the final published collection, the poet appears still to have been looking for a suitable home for the quotation. Eight years or so later, in ‘The Search’, the quotation comes to represent, not the community of artists, but the inter-temporal community of those who found their vocation in the study of Christianity. Despite their varying perspectives on the subject, what unites these critics is that they all regard Jesus Christ as the most significant figure in world history. Their combined insights have contributed to the kaleidoscopic perspective on the religion that Berryman expresses through his poetry. The use of Einstein’s words in this context is consequently ironic, for the poet’s ‘unloseable friends’ are not those who have contemplated the physical nature of ‘this world’, like Einstein’s, but those who have dedicated themselves, in one way or another, to the study of the one believed to be also beyond this world. Since he regarded Christ as ‘the most important human personality’, and wanted to ‘hit everybody but the elect with their indifference to the life and thought of the most influential of men’, it is natural that he wants to express his affinity with these scholars.¹²⁰

Berryman finds an important parallel with Einstein’s life through his own loss of faith at twelve, which he associates with his father’s suicide. However, the search outlined by the poet is one in which he appears to be attempting to reclaim what has been lost; whereas the physicist opted for an alternative, purely scientific quest, which he believed

¹²⁰ U Minn, JBP, Miscellaneous Prose, Box 6, ‘Life of Christ’, MS, Preface (4 Jan 1970); Unpublished Prose, Box 2, Mod-Z, #97, ‘Sacrifice’, MS, ‘The Historical Personality of Christ’.

would disclose a more worthwhile and truthful account of existence than religion ever could. The poet also sustains a certain affinity with Einstein's ideas on religion at this point, for he has long held a conception of God very comparable to the scientist's.

Although he did not believe in the God of Christianity, or the need for any organised religion, Einstein was not an atheist, or agnostic, as is often believed. He consistently affirmed his own conviction as to the nature of God; as he once typically stated: 'I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists, but not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and actions of human beings.'¹²¹ Einstein's God is the Creator, but he is definitely not an intervener; His design can be perceived and appreciated by science, but He does not concern himself with the welfare of His creatures, and makes no moral demands on them; ethics is a purely human matter.¹²²

Speaking through the mask of Alan Severance in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Recovery*, Berryman describes the similar, though not as extensively deistic, view of the Creator which he held for most of his life, and his radical revision of this conception following a dramatic conversion experience. The conversion was prompted by an incident which took place while he was hospitalised for the treatment of alcohol dependency on 12 May 1970. The poet had been in a state of nervous hyper-tension about being unable to leave the hospital to give his lecture on the Fourth Gospel, as he thought he would be seriously failing his students at a time when they needed him most. He was in despair at the apparent hopelessness of the situation, until suddenly his counsellor, who by chance happened to be trained in divinity, offered to give the lecture for him:

¹²¹ Telegram to a Jewish newspaper, 1929; Einstein Archive 33-272; reproduced in *Quotable Einstein*, p.147.

¹²² *Quotable Einstein*, pp.145-61.

That afternoon as I thought over what had happened I saw that a direct intervention had taken place and I recovered one particular sense of God's being I lost as a child. My father shot himself when I was twelve. I didn't blame God for that, I just lost all personal sense of Him. No doubt about the Creator and Maintainer, and later it became quite clear to me that He made Himself available to certain men and women in terms of inspiration—artists, scientists, statesmen, the saints of course, anybody in fact—gave them special power or insight or endurance—I'd felt it myself: some of my best work I can't claim any credit for, it flowed out all by itself, or in fact by His moving. But I couldn't see him interested in the individual life in the ordinary way. Now I did.¹²³

In a further reflection on his earlier attitude towards God, intended for possible inclusion in Severance's journal, he considers that he perhaps did blame God after all for his father's suicide:

He had not exactly lost his faith. He had gone into violent rebellion. God was a son of a bitch who had allowed Daddy to go mad with grief and fear. This sentiment subsided very gradually into a sort of not quite indifference, but two senses remained vivid and even strengthened in adult life [that of God the Creator/Maintainer and of God the Inspirator].¹²⁴

The recovery of this spiritual, 'third' sense—that of a personal God—becomes as important as the medical and social recovery from alcoholism portrayed by the unfinished novel. The narrative, partly by way of extracts from Severance's journal, outlines his attempts to 'become a methodical man, seeking non-chemical salvation'.¹²⁵ This includes not only his efforts to complete the Alcoholics Anonymous 'Twelve Step' recovery programme, but also to successfully fulfil his quest for religious truth; indeed, through the spiritual dimension of the Twelve Steps, the two goals become very much interrelated. His relationship with the impersonal God of *The Dream Songs* was one characterised by antagonistic rebellion, in which he challenged both the existence and attributes of God in the light of his own personal suffering—partly rooted in the long

¹²³ Berryman, *Recovery*, pp.45-49. Berryman provides a similar account of the real incident in Stitt, 'The Art of Poetry', *Berryman's Understanding*, pp.39-41. See also Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, pp.368-70.

¹²⁴ *Recovery*, p.233.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p.203.

shadow cast by his father's suicide—and the suffering of the world. God became an object of philosophical inquiry and scholarship was the means by which the true nature of man's religious impulse, and the Christian faith in particular, would be revealed. However, having re-established his relationship with the personal God, in the poetry and prose which follows, this spiritual search is now portrayed as taking place as much in the realm of prayer as in the realm of books.

The 'God of Rescue' – 'Eleven Addresses to the Lord', *Recovery and Delusions, etc.*

In his October 1970 interview with Peter Stitt, Berryman describes the devotional poems which close *Love & Fame* as being a direct result of his conversion experience in hospital four months earlier: 'I lost my faith several years ago, but I came back—by force, by necessity, because of a rescue action—into the notion of a God who, at certain moments, definitely and personally intervenes in individual lives, one of which is mine. The poems grow out of that sense, which not all Christians share.'¹²⁶ One of the reasons the sensation of being saved in this way had such an impact was that it confirmed for him a concept with which he was already very much familiar:

When I thought it over in the afternoon, I suddenly recalled what has been for many years one of my favourite conceptions. I got it from Augustine and Pascal. It's found in many other people too, but especially in those heroes of mine. Namely, the idea of a God of rescue. He saves men from their situations, off and on during life's pilgrimage, and in the end. I completely bought it, and that's been my position since.¹²⁷

Berryman's 'position', however, did not remain static, but would continue to develop over the final year of his life. At the time of the interview, which directly followed the

¹²⁶ Stitt, 'Art of Poetry', *Berryman's Understanding*, p.39. The term 'God of Rescue' is the poet's own coinage; neither Augustine nor Pascal explicitly defines such a concept; however, they do in various ways describe the efficacy of God's grace in the individual life, which is what Berryman is referring to.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.41.

completion of *Love & Fame*, the poet was adamant that ‘those addresses to the Lord are not Christian poems’. He still had unresolved issues regarding the true nature of Christ and was not sufficiently convinced of his divine nature to address him in prayer. These poems are therefore addressed to God by way of numerous epithets, but, although he refers to him as ‘Father’, he is not regarding Him as the first person of the Trinity. At this time he considered the possibility of converting to Judaism. However, a reappraisal of his view of Christ would subsequently take place, prompted by special insights experienced through prayer, reading and the viewing of art, and these would be portrayed in the devotional poems of *Delusions, etc.* The God of Rescue would increasingly become associated with the full Christian conception of Jesus Christ the Saviour. Furthermore, his verse becomes distinctly Catholic in nature as he finds himself gradually embracing other aspects of his childhood faith, such a Marian devotion, which he would now profess his return to.

The ironic conclusion of Berryman’s search—as portrayed for instance in the ‘Sixth Address to the Lord’—is that in the end it is God’s grace that is depicted as bringing about the conversion, rather than the reasoned result of his own academic pilgrimage:

Confusions & afflictions
followed my days. Wives left me.
Bankrupt I closed my doors. You pierced the roof
twice & again. Finally you opened my eyes.

My double nature fused in that point of time¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, p.219.

The poet's depiction of his journey to faith consequently represents a paradox that may be considered problematic in the light of the apparent aims of his search.

He strives to establish a faith formulated and articulated by reason, and yet, in the end, the essence of that faith is exterior to it; it is depicted as an act of God, which pierces the reluctant blindness of his reason. Even if he concludes the belief itself to be reasonable, it is 'will' that is behind faith's affirmation, a will that, as in the above prayer, is ultimately united, not by his own volition, but by God's. Intellectually justifying any leap of faith, which he regarded as so important in the secular context of modern academia, in the end proved less efficacious than simply embracing what is not necessarily open to reason. He would have found William James's psychological evaluation of the process in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* pertinent to his own situation:

If you have any intuitions at all, they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits [...] This inferiority of the rationalistic level in founding belief is just as manifest when rationalism argues for religion as when it argues against it [...] The truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favour of the same conclusion.¹²⁹

In other words, as James puts it more concisely: 'instinct leads, intelligence does but follow'.¹³⁰ This was a work of great interest to Berryman; it features on the reading list of a number of his courses, including a late one he was planning entitled 'Religious Experience', which seems to have been directly inspired by it.¹³¹ It would appear that at least one outcome for him of the academic quest is a confirmation of James's observation. Indeed, this ultimate irony is prefigured by the tongue-in-cheek tone of 'The Search', which inadvertently anticipates a conclusion which could go either way:

¹²⁹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1982), pp.73-74 (Lecture III).

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p.74.

¹³¹ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box 3, F53, 'Misc', TS, 'Examples of "Breeder" courses – II'.

to belief or resignation. The quest's futility is confirmed by the depiction of the continually lost poet of Part Three of *Love & Fame*, and the irony is underlined by the addition of 'Eleven Addresses to the Lord', where faith is the unmerited gift of God's intervention.

The 'Sixth Address' also echoes Saint Augustine's description of his conversion experience in *Confessions*, a text Berryman had a long association with.¹³² Augustine writes of the 'agony of indecision' where he tussled with his apparently divided will. Even when the arguments against Catholicism entirely paled for him, he still found he was unable to exert his will to embrace the faith:¹³³

The mind gives an order to the body and is at once obeyed [...] but when the mind commands the mind to make an act of will, these two are one and the same and yet the order is not obeyed [...] The reason [...] is that it is not given with the full will. For if the will were full, it would not command itself to be full, since it would be so already [...] It is a disease of the mind, which does not wholly rise to the heights where it is lifted by the truth, because it is weighed down by habit. So there are two wills in us, because neither by itself is the whole will, and each possesses what the other lacks.¹³⁴

By 'habit' Augustine means the worldly passions, attachments and 'paltry inanities' which still seemed unavoidably attractive to him. Even when the importance of these also waned he still found himself unable to will the fulfilment of his desired course of action. However, he refutes the Manichean notion that this means there are within us 'two minds of different natures'; it simply means that we have one mind with which it is virtually impossible 'fully' to will. He suspects that the reason for this impotence is man's fallen nature, the result of original sin. Eventually he realises that only God has

¹³² Kelly lists four different editions of the text, three of them annotated by Berryman, in the poet's personal library collection. Kelly, *Berryman's Personal Library*, p.18. Berryman employs Augustine, in conjunction with William James, for the section on philosophical studies of the self, for a proposed course entitled 'The Self to the World'. U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 32 ('New Courses'), TS, 'The Self to the World'.

¹³³ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), pp.170-72 (Bk VIII, Chs.7-9).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* p.172 (Bk VIII, Ch.9).

the power to save him from himself, and all he needs to do is to ask for, and accept. this grace.¹³⁵ This is Augustine's conception of the 'God of Rescue' to whom he proclaims:

You converted me to yourself [...] You are merciful. You saw how deep I was sunk in death, and it was your power that drained dry the well of corruption in the depths of my heart. And all that you asked of me was to deny my own will and accept yours.¹³⁶

He realises that God had always been an observant 'Guardian' throughout his life—even when he was a great sinner—subtly directing him towards the truth; but the *metanoic* embracing of the faith eventually occurred only because he allowed God's power to work in him, though God had also mercifully worn down his sensual self-opposition.¹³⁷ Augustine's account of the 'God of Rescue' experience articulated the process by which Berryman recognised God's intervention in his life, and the 'Sixth Address' attempts to portray this paradox of conversion, where the will is both exercised and conquered. The poet felt God had made His merciful nature fully known to him through the contrivance of apparently fortuitous circumstance in the alcoholics' ward; through irrepressible gratitude he had responded in faith by finally accepting His grace: 'I fell back in love with you, Father, for two reasons: / You were good to me, & a delicious author, / rational & passionate' ('Tenth Address').¹³⁸ Saint Augustine is not mentioned in 'The Search', but he is surely an example of one of the poet's 'unloseable friends', as his life also became preoccupied with investigating the truth behind Christian revelation.

These Addresses are largely inspired by the instructions of the Twelve Step programme, which, as he portrays it in *Recovery*, became the model for the poet's prayer life. After

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.172-76 (Bk VIII, Chs.10-11).

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, pp.178-81 (Bk VIII, Ch.12 – XI.1).

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp.31, 176 (Bk I, Ch.11; Bk VIII, Ch.11).

¹³⁸ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, p.221.

admitting that one is ‘powerless over alcohol’, and then believing that ‘a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity’, Step Three is to have ‘made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.’¹³⁹ In a key scene in the novel, Severance is described taking the decision to make this third step, whereupon ‘he felt as if a weighty knapsack had been hoisted off from between his shoulders, he felt *possible*.’ The rescue experience had convinced him that he really could trust this higher Power to intervene in his life and take care of him.¹⁴⁰ The joyful, unburdening submission of the poet’s will to God is expressed throughout the prayers of Part Four; however, this is also done, as in the ‘First Address’, with a stress on the qualification ‘as we understand Him’:

I have made up a morning prayer to you
 containing with precision everything that most matters.
 ‘According to Thy will’ the thing begins.
 It took me off & on two days. It does not aim at eloquence.

You have come to my rescue again & again
 in my impassable, sometimes despairing years.
 You have allowed my brilliant friends to destroy themselves
 and I am still here, severely damaged, but functioning.

Unknowable, as I am unknown to my guinea pigs:
 how can I ‘love’ you?
 I only as far as gratitude & awe
 confidently & absolutely go.

I have no idea whether we live again.
 It doesn’t seem likely
 from either the scientific or the philosophical point of view
 but certainly all things are possible to you¹⁴¹

The poet now makes a point of expressing his trust in the providence of a God whom he once accused—or rather Henry accused Him—of having ‘wrecked this generation’ with

¹³⁹ Berryman, *Recovery*, pp.253.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp.105-06.

¹⁴¹ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, pp.215-16.

His mindless cull of its most talented poets.¹⁴² He concedes the role of free-will in the self-destruction of his 'brilliant friends', and perceives a trail of previous, merciful interventions in the fact that he was not 'allowed', despite his best efforts, to follow suit. The subtle dryness of the wit is what enlivens the open, prosaic style of the *Love & Fame* poems, and in the Addresses this contributes to a sincere, but ironical, affected kind of piety. The Addresses constitute a profession of ambiguous faith; although he professes his belief in the goodness of God's actions, He remains an abstraction, 'unknowable'. But even here there is still a knowing hint of suspicion concerning His motives, a suggestion implicit in the poet's analogy that God is using humanity as His 'guinea pigs'. But such doubts and suspicions are presented in the context of a relationship based on 'gratitude & awe' from which he seeks further reassurance. They are also necessitated by a frank, confessional self-exposure in the spirit of the Fourth Step, in which one is required to have 'made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves'.¹⁴³

To fulfil Step Eleven is to have 'sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.'¹⁴⁴ Berryman's devotional poems are about establishing a rapport with one whose response can only be anticipated and not immediately received. Consequently there is a certain degree of self-consciousness about them, especially an uneasy tension between humility and intellectual pride: the latter manifests itself as a desire to present a prayer with artistic merit, as well as a reluctance to relinquish carefully considered opinions.

¹⁴² Dream Song 153.

¹⁴³ Berryman, *Recovery*, p.253.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.254.

By the time of the poems of *Delusions, etc* this tension appears more resolved and he regards intellectual virtuosity as a form of prayer in itself. The deepening relationship with his unseen interlocutor means that God and His ways are now becoming a more involving, though less troubling, mystery. This leads him to re-evaluate the First Address in his clumsily witty paeon ‘Unknowable? perhaps not altogether’:

I dare interpret: Adonai of rescue.
 Whatever and ever other I have lain skew over
 however O little else around You know
 I doubt I’m wrong on this.
 Augustine and Pascal swore the same strange.

Yet young men young men in the paddies rescue.

Add Sway omniscient, add pergalactic Intellect,
 forbearance invisible, a tumbling thunder of laughter
 (or whence our so alert pizzazz & laughter?),
 an imagination of the queens of Chartres the kings there, if these only, still
 we’re transacting with You.¹⁴⁵

He realises now that unlike his guinea pigs he has the capacity to recognise and interpret the benevolent being who watches over him. With added reverence, the ‘God of Rescue’ becomes the ‘Adonai of rescue’, adopting the Hebrew term for ‘my Lord’. This title was used as a respectful substitute for the holy name represented by the Tetragrammaton, ‘YHWH’, which was deemed too sacred to utter.¹⁴⁶ As the bathetic line about the ‘young men in the paddies’ suggests, however, *Adonai* is more than merely a ‘God of rescue’; the rescue experience has opened up to him a glimpse of God’s nature in its entirety. He acknowledges the turbulent problems he has had with the mysterious ways of God in the past, all the things he has ‘lain skew over’; indeed, the second stanza reads like a reappraisal of ‘Henry’s Programme for God’ in Dream Song 238. The lazy, incompetent, ‘ill-pleased’, un-hinged God of a suffering life’s

¹⁴⁵ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, p.258.

¹⁴⁶ ‘The Hebrew word is a plural of majesty (with a singular meaning) of ‘ādōn, which is translated “Lord” (e.g., Isa. 1.24; 3.1).’ *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, pp.548, 738.

nightmare, whose mysterious ways are a source of grave unease rather than wonder, becomes the ‘omnicompetent’, infinitely patient, helpful and creative God of one who feels he has been touched by a special insight into His character.

Affirming one conception that he previously held, he finds that He is also the God of ‘inspiration’, the source of all creativity, from simple good-humour to the vast dramas of human history. The poet draws attention in particular to the great kings and queens of the Old Testament, whose images adorn the facade of Chartres Cathedral. His magniloquent rhetoric is ironically elevated beyond all verbal bounds by adding ‘if these only, still / we’re trans-acting [MS. ‘in business’] with you.’ The final published version, with its wrenched syntax and sesquipedalian praise, does contrast sharply with the less cluttered, more straightforward, and more moving prayer of earlier drafts.¹⁴⁷ In comparison with the arguably more successful ‘Eleven Addresses to the Lord’, a distinct problem with many of the *Delusions* poems is this tendency to overload the diction at the expense of an inviting cadence, as well as the poems’ devotional focus.

This affirmation of God’s efficacy in his own life also convinces him of the divine will bestowing order on all existence. The poet is able to reconcile Christianity with the scientific quest of modern man, no longer perceiving a credible conflict between the two. He glorifies God’s ‘quodidian miracles’ in the vast causal nexus of the universe, whether it be on the macro-astronomical level—‘parsecs-off yielding to the Hale

¹⁴⁷ I interpret you: a God of rescue.
 And whatever else I have been wrong about,
 however little else about You I know,
 I am not wrong about this.
 Augustine & Pascal so saw you too.

Add sway omnipotent, add intellect,
 mercy without end, a roar of laughter
 (else whence is our humour & laughter?)
 an imagination of Chartres; if these only, and
 we’re in business with You.
 (U Minn, JBP, *Delusions*, Folder 3, #62)

reflector' ('Lauds')—or the micro-biology of his own body—'Corpuscle-Donor, to the dizzy tune / of half a hundred thousand while I blink' ('Sext'). However, now that, as a Christian, he had risen to the challenge posed by the modern scientific world-view, he felt the intellectual community should reciprocate by confronting the challenge posed by Christianity. He states his position in a draft essay entitled 'The Historical Personality of Christ', written in late 1971, and intended for inclusion in a proposed collection of essays to be called 'Sacrifice'. Referring to the famous Snow-Leavis controversy over the 'two cultures', he declares: 'Snow hit us humanists with our indifference to scientific thought. I was hurt, because it was true [...] Now I want to hit everybody but the elect with their indifference to the life and thought of the most influential of men.'¹⁴⁸

The poet's own shift of attitude towards this 'most influential of men' is what is most significantly portrayed in the religious poems of *Delusions, etc.* Although his conversion experience had convinced him of the Judeo-Christian conception of God the Father, his first instinct was to consider embracing Judaism since his dispute with Christianity remained unresolved, a struggle which is recorded in *Recovery*. In a passage from Severance's journal, intended for a chapter on 'The Jewish Kick', he outlines his thoughts on the spiritual direction he felt he should take:

Left and came to my room and incredibly thought of *becoming a Jew*. Always held it impossible because of inadequate concept of God. Ok since Vin's [his counsellor's]

¹⁴⁸ U Minn, JBP, Unpublished Prose, Box 2, Mod-Z, #97, 'Sacrifice', TS 3pp, MS 8pp, 'The Historical Personality of Christ', MS. The novelist C.P. Snow initiated a public debate in 1959 when he delivered his Rede lecture, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, which was subsequently published in *Encounter*. It identified an unhealthy 'gulf of mutual incomprehension' between scientists and 'literary intellectuals', and advocated a 'scientific revolution' within the education system. F.R. Leavis responded with a bitter attack on Snow in his Richmond lecture, 'Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow', criticising what he perceived as the philistine and utilitarian nature of his arguments.

rescue—but hostile to Trinity, dubious of X (Christianity?), hostile to the Blessed Virgin, anti-Pope, deep sympathy with Church, but *not for me*.¹⁴⁹

Berryman still felt a conflict between faith and reason, and he felt that Christianity—and particularly Catholicism—demanded too much of one at the expense of the other, especially when important tenets of the religion were contradicted by conclusions drawn from his New Testament studies. The passage from *Recovery* where Severance fights his way through the Lord's Prayer illustrates the dilemma the poet was facing; he begins with the Sign of the Cross, and this proves particularly problematic:

'In the name,' he said mentally, 'of God the Father (no doubt about *Him*) 'and of the Son' (amazing, God-inspired, unique, whether a special Son who knew?) 'and of the Holy Ghost' (not clear, far from clear, Pentecost scene misunderstood by Luke unrecoverable) 'Amen' (Let it—this prayer—be established) joining his palms and fingers flat as he had done every bedtime until he was twelve years old.¹⁵⁰

Berryman's indeterminacy regarding Christ is stated in his October 1970 interview with Peter Stitt. The interview took place shortly following the period portrayed by *Recovery*, and demonstrates the rapidity with which his views were changing. He explains why the 'Eleven Addresses to the Lord' are not to be regarded as Christian poems:

I am deeply interested in Christ, but I never pray to him. I don't know whether he was in any special sense the son of God, and I think it is quite impossible to know. He certainly was the most remarkable *man* who ever lived. But I don't consider myself a Christian. I do consider myself a Catholic, but I'd just as soon go to an Episcopalian church as a Catholic church. I do go to Mass every Sunday.¹⁵¹

He had come to the conclusion that the Church was in fact for him, and, rather than going through with his conversion to Judaism, had instead become a professed Catholic.

¹⁴⁹ Berryman, *Recovery*, p.240.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.120.

¹⁵¹ Stitt, 'Art of Poetry', *Berryman's Understanding*, p.42.

However, as his remarks suggest, it was a highly ambivalent profession of faith, and he found himself in the incongruous position of being a ‘Catholic’, but not a ‘Christian’, who was still unable to accept the most fundamental belief of the Church. However, by March 1971 he felt the need to add footnotes to the transcript of the interview before it was published retracting his remarks about Christ. With regard to his statement that he never prays to Him he noted: ‘Situation altered; see “Ecce Homo,” poem to be published in the *New Yorker*. He also called the suggestion that Christ’s divine nature was unknowable a ‘delusion’.¹⁵²

As poems such as ‘Ecce Homo’ and ‘The Prayer of the Middle Aged Man’ record, special insights attained through inspiring works of art, literature and prayer had resulted in epiphanies concerning the Christ of faith. His conviction that the God of Rescue is also Christ the Saviour now eclipsed the scepticism which had been affirmed by his researches into historical criticism. One such epiphany is depicted in ‘The Facts & Issues’, which draws heavily, both structurally and thematically, from the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, and particularly Westcott’s commentary on it. He rapidly composed the poem between 1.15 and 2.15am in room #406 of the Shoreham Hotel in Hartford, Connecticut, after reading Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* for the third time around, and experiencing a hyper-awareness of ‘the Presence’ of Christ:¹⁵³

I really believe He’s here all over this room
 in a motor hotel in Wallace Stevens’ town.
 I admit it’s weird; and *could*—or could it?—not be so;
 but frankly I don’t think there’s a molecular chance of that.
 It doesn’t seem hypothesis. Thank heavens
 millions agree with me, or mostly do,
 and have done ages of our human time,

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ U Minn, JBP, Delusions, Folder 3, #6, untitled MS draft of the second half of ‘The Facts & Issues’; first line reads ‘So infinitely better, but to me’. Cited also by Mariani, *Dream Song*, pp.462-63; Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, p.397.

among whom were & still are some very sharp cookies.
 I don't exactly feel missionary about it,
 though it's *very* true I wonder if I should.
 I regard the boys who don't buy this as deluded.
 Of course they regard me no doubt as deluded.
 Okay with me! And not the hell with them
 at *all*—no!—I feel *dubious* on Hell—
 it's here, all right, but elsewhere, after? Screw that,
 I feel pretty sure that evil simply ends
for the doer (having wiped him out,
 by the way, usually) where good goes on,
 or good *may* drop dead too: I don't think so:
 I can't say I have hopes in that department
 myself, I lack ambition just just there,
 I know that Presence says it's mild, and it's mild,
 but being what I am I wouldn't care
 to dare go nearer. Happy to be here
 and to have been here, with such lovely ones
 so infinitely better, but to me
 even in their suffering infinitely kind
 & blessing. I am a greedy man, of course,
 but I wouldn't want that kind of luck continued,—
 or even *increased* (for Christ's sake), & *forever*?
 Let me be clear about this. It is plain to me
Christ underwent man & treachery & socks
 & lashes, thirst, exhaustion, the bit, for *my* pathetic & disgusting vices,
 to make this filthy fact of particular, long-after,
 far-away, five-foot-ten & moribund
 human being happy. Well, he has!
 I am so happy I could scream!
 It's *enough!* I can't BEAR ANY MORE.
 Let *this be it*. I've *had* it. I can't wait.¹⁵⁴

The experience he depicts is one that would have led him to consider Westcott's
 commentary, as it concerns an intimate realisation of the opening of John—particularly
 as interpreted by the Victorian scholar—in his own life. The title itself is derived from
 Westcott's comments regarding John 1.10, where the evangelist proclaims: 'He was in
 the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.' Westcott
 remarks that this verse 'gathers up *the facts and issues* of the manifestation of the Light
 as immanent [my italics].' He further notes that 'it is impossible to refer these words
 simply to the historical Presence of the Word in Jesus as witnessed by John the Baptist';

¹⁵⁴ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, pp.262-63.

he claims that the words convey a 'wider sense' that 'the Word acts by His Presence as well as by His special Advent.'¹⁵⁵

The situation depicted recalls to mind the case studies offered by William James in his third lecture, 'The Reality of the Unseen', from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James provides numerous testimonies from people who have experienced the acutely genuine sensation of a 'presence'; he does this to illustrate the 'reality-feeling' of religious conception, in which the abstract object of belief becomes as tangible and certain as one perceived by the senses. He observes that 'as his sense of the real presence of these objects fluctuates, so the believer alternates between warmth and coldness in his faith.'¹⁵⁶ Employing the Heim-inspired language of natural science, the speaker expresses the conviction that there is not 'a molecular chance' of the Presence not really being there with him; at least 'it doesn't seem hypothesis'. This scientific declaration of faith strives to affirm not only the reality of, but also a justification for, this 'reality feeling'; the object of his belief is, paradoxically speaking, an objective, rather than subjective, object.

He meditates on the uncanny irrefutability of this reality-feeling, unable not to self-consciously consider those 'who don't buy this'. He feels compelled to express his sense of unworthiness in the light of Christ's sacrifice, before portraying a climactic ecstasy of spiritual submission. The poem's affirmation of faith that the Presence is with him in the motel room is a constantly qualified, uneasy one. It has all the dynamics of impulsive prayer: it is curiously insular—the addressee appearing to be the implied projection of his self-consciousness—but it also constantly anticipates a response, not only from God, but also from a sceptical, if not hostile, audience, as well as courting the

¹⁵⁵ Westcott, *Gospel of St. John*, p.7-8.

¹⁵⁶ James, *Religious Experience*, pp.53-77 (p.64).

approval of other believers. The speaker struggles to overcome not only an innate scepticism, but also the expected reaction of others to any expression of what he is now experiencing.

The speaker's tone is highly conversational, but the apparent stream-of-consciousness progress of the poem can conceal important tectonic elements which Berryman has thematically assimilated from his sources. The poet very appropriately adopts the rhetorical structure of John's exordium to express these tensions of faith in a secular environment. Westcott notes the 'stately symmetry' of John's narrative, epitomised by the paratactic sentence structure of the prologue.¹⁵⁷ Concerning verse 10 he notes that 'the form of the sentence is peculiarly characteristic. The clauses are placed simply side by side (...*and the world...and the world...*). In this way the statement of the issue (*and the world knew him not*) gains in pathos.'¹⁵⁸ In the terminology of his commentary, the 'fact' is a general statement of truth, and the 'issue' is the consequence in the world resulting from that truth. In the case of John 1.10, therefore, Jesus is the Incarnate God who entered the world of His own creation, but was rejected by his creatures who refused to recognise Him. In 'The Facts & Issues', the 'issue' undermines the poet's proclamation of faith; he makes a statement, followed by a self-conscious qualification of that statement; for instance:

I don't exactly feel missionary about it,
 though it's *very* true I wonder if I should.
 I regard the boys who don't buy this as deluded.
 Of course they regard me no doubt as deluded.

The speaker's expression of belief—at times unorthodox—is the 'fact', followed by the 'issue', where we receive a modification of that declaration, usually concerning his view

¹⁵⁷ Westcott, *Gospel of St. John*, p.2.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.8.

of the world's view of that belief, similar to John's 'and the world knew him not'. In the poem the Johannine pathos is exacerbated by the speaker's remorseful hyper-identification with the humanity that has rebelliously rejected its Creator:

Let me be clear about this. It is plain to me
Christ underwent man & treachery & socks
 & lashes, thirst, exhaustion, the bit, for *my* pathetic & disgusting vices,
 to make this filthy fact of particular, long-after,
 far-away, five-foot-ten & moribund
 human being happy.

As a 'filthy fact' the poet presents himself almost as sinful humanity personified, a vile spoilt wretch infinitely unworthy of the 'fact' of the sinless Christ's sacrifice on his behalf. The relentless accumulation of Christ's self-sacrifices at the tormenting hands of man, antipathized by the speaker's snow-balling self-indulgences, also appears to echo the same Johannine symmetry. The inspiration of the book he was reading at the time of the experience, *The Power and the Glory*, is also evident in such places. Certain key passages of Greene's novel echo the sentiment of the poet's lines, especially those portraying the thoughts of the whiskey priest during his encounter with the pathetic 'mestizo', the communist informer who severely tests the priest's patience and sense of duty to mankind. For instance, during the mestizo's confession he muses:

Man was so limited he hadn't even the ingenuity to invent a new vice: the animals knew as much. It was for this world that Christ had died [...]. It was too easy to die for what was good or beautiful, for home or children or a civilisation – it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt.¹⁵⁹

The passage also encapsulates the poem's major spiritual realisation that the Presence is not only abstractly in the world, but had entered the world physically, both to endure and redeem the sin of man. The pathos inherent in the 'issue' of the Incarnation declared by John is exacerbated by the use of the whiskey's priest's language of pity towards

¹⁵⁹ Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1991), p.97 (Pt.2, Ch.1).

sinners, as well as self-loathing as a sinner; this tends to manifest itself in the poem almost entirely as self-pity, or rather extreme humility.¹⁶⁰ He proclaims the kind of heretical eschatology familiar from previous poems; in this case he is ‘*dubious* on hell’, but speculates on some form of after-life for the good.¹⁶¹ For that privilege, however, he feels unworthy, and so rejoices now in an ecstatic gratitude for Christ who has suffered for him and allowed him the happiness and blessings he is enjoying in this life, despite his ‘pathetic & disgusting vices.’ The poet’s concept of the God of Rescue is now represented as one which is inextricably connected with the necessary role of Christ as mediator between God and sinful humanity. In this way, the poet moves towards a fuller realisation of the rescue process as described by Pascal, from whom Berryman partly derived his God of Rescue concept:

[Christianity] teaches men both these truths: that there is a God of whom we are capable, and that there is a corruption in nature which makes us unworthy of him. It is equally important for us to know both these points, and it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness, and to know his wretchedness without knowing the Redeemer who can cure him of it. [...] And so, as it is equally necessary for us to know both these points, it is also equally due to God’s mercy that he made us aware of them. The Christian religion does this, and it is indeed in this that it consists.¹⁶²

The philosopher argues that it is the merciful intervention of God’s grace which enables humanity to perceive this dichotomy and the need to believe in Christ as Redeemer. The poet feels that Christ, through his Passion, has done infinitely more for him than what his loved ones have done, which is in turn infinitely more than he feels he has done for others: ‘such lovely ones / so infinitely better, but to me / even in their suffering infinitely kind / & blessing.’ The outpouring of emotion is evident on the first draft of the poem, as he lists in the margin those he has ‘exercised about’, including family, ex-

¹⁶⁰ A more jocular identification with the whiskey priest of Greene’s novel is found in Dream Song 229.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Dreams Songs 56, 57, 353; ‘5th Address to the Lord’; ‘Compline’.

¹⁶² Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. by Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.171.

wives, friends and associates (earlier in the day he had attended an honorary degree ceremony).¹⁶³ Reflecting upon whether Christ's love has penetrated even his self-centred moribund resignation, he responds in the affirmative:

Well, he has!
I am so happy I could scream!
Its *enough!* I can't BEAR ANY MORE.
Let this be it. I've *had* it. I can't wait.

Haffenden remarks on the tone of ironic mollification in the speaker's voice at the end of the poem.¹⁶⁴ This notion does somewhat redeem the conclusion from simply appearing as unmediated emotion, which, though sincere, does not necessarily transfer well into poetry. This can be seen as an example of how the poems in *Delusions, etc* tend to demonstrate Berryman's organic poetic sense itself breaking down. However, the apparently spontaneous outpouring that constitutes 'The Facts & Issues' does also demonstrate the extent to which the critical discourses of New Testament scholarship have imprinted themselves on what is left of his poetic consciousness. The intellectual invitation to unravel his sources and follow suggested vistas of enquiry still remains, and here, the title's allusion to Westcott's commentary on John invites the reader's interaction with the Johannine theology of the commentary's focus. 'The Facts & Issues' essentially rewrites John's prologue from the point of view of a sinner, with the unapproachable Presence making the ultimate sacrifice in coming to him as mediator. The confused, emotional, heretical meditations on the implications of this theology become in effect part of the representation of fallen humanity. In this poem we see the speaker no longer 'weak on the Fourth Gospel' for he has had it 'amended' for him, through a full epiphanic revelation of John's theology in the motel room.

¹⁶³ See Mariani, *Dream Song*, p.482.

¹⁶⁴ Haffenden, *Life of Berryman*, p.397.

It is not just his position on Christ which is portrayed as undergoing a radical change in *Delusions, etc.* A further Catholicisation of his verse occurs through an epiphany regarding Christ's mother in which he retracts the statements he had made regarding her in his 'Xmas Poem', written a few days earlier. Whereas he took issue with Mary's attitude towards her son and the dogma of her perpetual virginity— 'Mary's grandiose & shallow precipitancy? / Siblings a trace?'—he declares that he has now abrogated this sceptical position. He seems to imply that Marian devotion is an essential aspect of the faith, and hence, necessary for full communion with God:

Father, Father, I am overwhelmed.
I cannot speak tonight.
Do you receive me back into Your sight?
It seems it must be so, for

strangely the Virgin came into my mind
as I stood beside my bed—
whom I not only have not worshippéd
since childhood, but also

harsh words have said of, that she pushed her Son
before his time was come
which he rebuked her for, and leaving home
repudiated hers & her—

and for no reason, standing in the dark
before I had knelt down
(as is my custom) to speak with You, I found
my tongue feeling its way

thro' the Hail Mary, trying phrase by phrase
its strangeness, for the unwelcome
to my far mind estranged, awaiting some
unacceptable sense, and

Father I was amazed I could *find none*
and I have walked downstairs
to sit & wonder: You must have been Theirs
all these years, and They Yours,

and now I suppose I have prayed to You after all
and Her and I suppose she is the Queen of Heaven
under Your greater glory, even

more incomprehensible but forgiving glory.¹⁶⁵

The poem appeals through its impression of humble sincerity and unusual straightforwardness; it is an authentic depiction of spontaneous prayer, but more canorously inviting than most of the *Delusions* prayers, mainly because of its single-chiasmically rhymed quatrains. It is typical of the late devotional poetry, however, in the way it expresses the contrast between his former and current outlooks, as well as a fascination at having been reunited with the Faith after such a long period of apostasy. The image in poems such as 'Back' and 'A Prayer After All' is that of the undeserving prodigal son relieved to be so readily accepted back into the fold. Here, the impulse also to pray through the Mother of God appears to him as a meritless reward for attaining this reacceptance. The reverent dogmatic titles of the 'Virgin' and 'Queen of Heaven' are sharply contrasted with the image of Mary presented in the third stanza; that of an over-zealous and vicariously ambitious mother who is justly 'rebuked' and forsaken by the Son.

His description of re-experiencing the 'Hail Mary' almost dramatises William James's observation that the intuition of faith comes 'from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits.'¹⁶⁶ He expects to find the theological implications of the prayer unreasonable, but the sceptical arguments which previously held sway no longer impose themselves, and no 'unacceptable sense' can be found. Reeling from the surprise of this revelation, he contemplates—as a convert is wont to do—how he could have maintained such a radically different perspective for so long; the third person referent in the penultimate stanza can be interpreted as those believers

¹⁶⁵ Berryman, *Collected Poems*, pp.252-53. It was written between 27-8 December 1970 according to Haffenden, in *Critical Commentary*, p.147.

¹⁶⁶ James, *Religious Experience*, p.73.

who have enjoyed communion with God during his apostatical years ('43` of them as he informs us in the collection's subsequent poem 'Back'). Given the upper case, however, it is more likely intended to refer especially to both the Mother and the Son of God, since acceptance of the latter also implies an acceptance of the former.

The prayers and religious poems of *Delusions, etc* consequently bring the narrative of Berryman's spiritual life, as depicted in his verse, full circle, back to the time when 'rosaries / based Henry's vaulting thought'. The resolution is portrayed as taking the form of a new certainty which he does not understand, but he now feels impelled to search its mysteries. Although this new faith brings a sensation of hope and joy, he also recognises his struggles are not over and that new challenges lie ahead. Now that he has made the decision to live a Christian life, many of the poems in *Delusions, etc* portray the trials which accompany such an intention.

Conclusion

When asked by Peter Stitt in 1970 about ‘the role of religion generally’ in his verse,

Berryman responded:

It’s awfully hard for me to judge. [...] Now the point is, I have been interested not only in religion but in theology all my life. I don’t know how much these personal beliefs, together with the interest in theology and the history of the church, enter into particular works up to those addresses to the Lord in *Love & Fame*. I really think it is up to others—critics, scholars—to answer your question.¹

This study has attempted to address the question posed, and, in doing so, demonstrate how the Christian faith—particularly the poet’s dilemma over whether or not to commit to it—is the most consistently crucial thematic concern of his verse. At the beginning of his literary career, his sense of spiritual procrastination and unworthiness was a frequent source of artistic inspiration; however, the difficulties of developing a style with which to express such private matter successfully meant that his religious poetry of *The Dispossessed* period mostly remained unpublished. He achieved his stylistic breakthrough with *Berryman’s Sonnets*, which dramatically portrayed the emotional turbulence caused by his extra-marital affair. The struggle with his conscience is depicted as a religious conflict, in which his decision to pursue the relationship results in a confrontation with the Law of God.

Homage to Mistress Bradstreet features a more developed representation of this conflict; the two alternative life choices before him are personified in the characters of Anne Bradstreet and the ‘poet’. The narrative depiction of the triumph of the spirit over the flesh offers hope of a possible resolution, but an impenetrable nescience surrounding the question of life after death is represented by the closing imagery. These existential

¹ Stitt, ‘Art of Poetry’, *Berryman’s Understanding*, pp.41-42.

uncertainties subsequently contribute to the drama of *The Dream Songs*, where the poet, adopting the persona of Henry, directly confronts God and Christianity with the problem of evil and the historical quest for Jesus. The devotional poetry of *Love & Fame* and *Delusions, etc.*, however, is dominated by the poet's new sense of relationship with the God of Rescue, who increasingly becomes associated with the full Christian conception of Jesus Christ the Saviour. With a return to the first person, an open 'confessional' style, and frequent use of the form of prayer, these poems are often reminiscent of the sequestered output of *The Dispossessed* period. However, by this stage Berryman's verse was characterised by a well-established poetic persona, which confidently enabled the transparency necessary for the representation of prayer, and the explicit communication of personal preoccupations.

In certain ways, Berryman was always a Christian apologist, even, paradoxically, when he was openly critical towards Church doctrine. His writings express a demand, both implicitly and explicitly, that the world give the question of Christianity's claims due intellectual consideration; as he once remarked, Christ's 'is the most important human personality, and the most important career, of which we have knowledge; and it befits us to try to understand them.'² This missionary attitude is demonstrated in an early essay he began drafting entitled 'Religion and the Intellectuals'. It was in response to what was billed as a 'provocative' article by the philosopher W.T. Stace in the September 1948 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, entitled 'Man Against Darkness.' Stace argues that religious faith is now irrecoverable for most of mankind, which must, as he puts it, 'grow up', accept the impersonal 'irrationality' of the universe, and learn to live

² U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, 'Life of Christ', MS, headed 'Life of X Pref.', dated '4 Jan 1970'.

morally without the comforting prop of religion, with its 'Great Illusion' of an ultimate 'purpose' whose end is good.³

Berryman's planned counter-essay, which he intended to send to the *Atlantic*, surveys the attitude of twentieth century intellectuals towards religion, and is clearly intended to challenge Stace's implication that religious faith now constitutes an intellectually immature recourse to illusion. Calling his scientific civilisation 'pragmatic and arrogant', and 'indifferent on the whole equally to theology and philosophy', Berryman argues that the religious impulse is intrinsic to man, and parades a procession of famous twentieth century writers who have converted to Christianity: '[T.S.] Eliot, [Evelyn] Waugh, [W.H.] Auden, G[raham] Greene, [Allen] Tate, [Robert] Lowell, etc.'⁴ Even at this early stage, he appears to identify with these well-known literary conversions, even if he would not whole-heartedly join their ranks for another twenty-two years. One must be wary of attaching categorising labels to poets, as most of the time they are unnecessarily reductive; but there is one important sense in which Berryman can be considered to have always been a 'Christian poet'.

Donald Davie—pondering the problem of selection for *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse*—proposes a definition which I believe to be useful when considering the nature of Berryman's poetry. Davie suggests that 'Christian poetry [...] appeals, either explicitly or by plain implication (and in whatever spirit—rebelliously for instance, or sardonically, as often with Emily Dickinson) to some one or more of the distinctive doctrines of the Christian church; to the Incarnation pre-eminently, to Redemption, Judgment, the Holy Trinity, the Fall'. Furthermore, he points out that Christian faith also rests on a 'narrative of historical events' related by Scripture, and, if

³ W. T. Stace, 'Man Against Darkness', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 182 (1948), 53-59 (pp.54-55).

⁴ U Minn, JBP, Unpub. Prose, Box 2, Mod-Z, #94, MS, 'Religion & the Intellectuals', 2pp.

it incorporates any part of this narrative, a 'Christian poem' is one which shows itself to be aware of its doctrinal implications.⁵ The qualification 'in whatever spirit' is most important when applying this definition to Berryman's work. It is the urgent necessity of making a decision about the meaning of life, with a view to the possible eschatological consequences, which is recurrently portrayed in his poetry; and Christianity provides the constant frame of reference in which this personal drama is situated.

⁵ *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, ed. by Donald Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.xx-xxii.

Appendix: 'The Life of Christ'

Jesus Christ was a major poetic and scholarly obsession for John Berryman, resulting in numerous works that draw on the subject. The most dedicated of these is his unfinished 'Life of Christ', an unintentionally long-term project that he referred to as his 'great labour of love'. Only two full chapters were completed before his death, although numerous draft prefaces and extensive plans for the work also remain. As it was a project worked on periodically over an eighteen-year period, it demonstrates an intriguing development, both in terms of his personal faith, as well as his intellectual and artistic involvement with the subject. Berryman identified the time around 1953 as the real beginning of his interest in life-of-Christ scholarship, and the existing manuscript material was produced over two time periods: the mid to late 1950s and the final two years of his life (1970-71). However, the intervening decade was not one of loss of interest in the subject and he would often poetically depict the historical quest for Jesus during *The Dream Songs* period.

This appendix outlines the history of the project and provides a detailed commentary of the remnants of the work itself. As well as documenting the development of Berryman's engagement with the subject, this material also offers a fascinating glimpse into how the finished work would most likely have transpired. It promised in the end to be one of his most original and inter-disciplinary artistic achievements. Important to the project, as well as his poetry of the period, are the sources from which he derived his information and critical approaches; and the drafts show how the poet relies on, and at times retains an independence from, them.

The First Attempt: Berryman's 'Harmony' of the Gospels

Berryman's plans show evidence that he attempted two versions of his Life of Christ in the late 1950s. It appears that he had two distinct works in mind as two separate forewords are typed for them, except that, since one was started several years before the other, it is possible the second project superseded the first. The first one, drafted in either 1956 or 1957, Berryman planned as an annotated 'harmony' of the Gospel, featuring commentary compiled from various sources, as well as his own reflections:

This volume is not of course intended as a substitute for the Gospel narratives to be found in the New Testament, a book easily available. These invaluable accounts of the most interesting man who has lived differ so much among themselves that they must be studied as wholes: that of St Mark being crude, short, comparatively reliable, and hair-raising, St Matthew's magisterial and preserving among other things the Temptations, the Sermon on the Mount, the Ecstasy, and several great parables, St Luke's accomplished and comparatively human—these three being known as the Synoptic Gospels because they tell what is more or less one story, whereas the Fourth Gospel tells its own story. But the popularity of re-tellings of the life and ministry of Christ, especially when vulgar, sentimental, and theologically contemptible, suggests that many readers do not in fact study the New Testament; and some readers who do may be helped by having the materials set in an order and, as compositions now nearly two thousand years old, annotated. The annotations are drawn from English and American scholarship, chiefly Protestant, from the formidable skeptics of the Continent like Guignebert and Goguel, from the Fathers, and from the Reformers; I hope they contain nothing original, but some of them have much surprised me and I suppose they will probably surprise most readers. I may add that it is almost useless to read the Gospel accounts with settled incredulity, such as a conviction (based upon what evidence or faith I have no idea) that what are called miracles cannot happen. The experience lately of a man, a physician, who was accused of the murder of his wife and their unborn child, who was convicted and who within a few weeks of his conviction had to attend the funerals of his mother (a suicide) and then his father, itself ought to make a dogmatic skepticism uneasy.

It must be understood that the Christian faith and the Christian Church not exactly rest upon confidence in the truth of the revelation contained in the Gospels and the Epistles. It is the other way round, and no one has ever put it better than Luther.¹

¹ U Minn, JBP, Misc. Prose, Box 6, 'Life of Christ', preface, TS, untitled, 2pp (pp.1-2). No date is given on the TS itself, but his foreword mentions the case 'lately' of the doctor accused of murdering his pregnant wife—the famous case of Sam Sheppard. As I mention below, this also concerns the subject of an unpublished poem, the MS of which contains the following handwritten speculation: '1st (or 2nd?) winter in Mpls'. Since he took up his Minneapolis post in 1955, it must have been written in either the winter of 1955-56 or 1956-57. All subsequent material referred to from Berryman's 'Life of Christ' is derived from the same folder. Much of this material is in the form of loose, unpaginated notes, and in such instances I identify the respective sheet by citing its heading or first line.

Gospel harmonies were traditionally an attempt to reconcile the four Gospel accounts into a single chronological schema. It is a process that fell out of favour with Gospel critics during the eighteenth century, as the emphasis shifted more towards synopsis.² Berryman perceived his work to be plugging a gap in the market. It was not intended to be a ‘substitute’ for the existing Gospel accounts, but an annotated chronological compilation of what he perceived to be the most reliable bits. It was to be a ‘re-telling’ of Christ’s life which avoided the ‘vulgar, sentimental and theologically contemptible’ elements of popular accounts. It was intended primarily as an aid for the non-specialist, but nevertheless also for the more discerning reader who would take the trouble to study the New Testament. Such a reader may benefit from ‘having the materials set in an order and, as compositions now nearly two thousand years old, annotated.’ Berryman’s project is actually remarkable in the twentieth century in that it aims to resurrect an old discipline in the light of recent scholarly advances. Whereas a harmony was originally intended to integrate the different Gospels into one, reverently presupposing their historical authenticity, Berryman’s harmony acknowledges the deficiencies of every previous attempt, and aims to create a harmony on the basis of authenticity itself. The poet himself comments on his plan: ‘This gives at any rate a chronology which is non-subjective; no harmony-chronology is really possible.’³

² A famous early ‘harmony’ was written by Tatian in the second century, after which time the Church moved to establish the Canon which ended the harmonising process. Historical criticism of the Gospels was a much later development, as Goguel explains: ‘The problem of the life of Jesus did not become an historical problem until after the eighteenth century. From the sixteenth century until that time, Christian people, Protestants as well as Catholics, believed that the teaching of Jesus was in absolute harmony with the teaching of their respective Churches, and they believed that in the four Gospels they possessed a very reliable narrative of the story of their Lord. Their one idea was to harmonise and paraphrase the four accounts of the evangelists that they might be given in a form suitable to the mentality of the faithful. This endeavour gave rise to various “Harmonies” of the Gospels, and also to works in which the Gospel story is paraphrased in order to make it easier to understand.’ In the eighteenth century, the emphasis of Gospel scholarship changed to that of ‘synopsis’ whose aim was no longer ‘to combine the four accounts into one, but to study their relations with each other.’ Goguel, *The Life of Jesus*, pp.38-40.

³ ‘Life of Christ’, MS, headed ‘Call it The First Witness?’

Unfortunately, there is no completed work on which to pass judgement, but the plans offer a revealing insight into the way it would have worked out. For one matter, he experimented with several titles, including ‘The First Witness’ and ‘His Life & Teaching’. These titles indicate that he was primarily concerned with the historical Christ in relation to the subsequent development of Christian tradition; in other words, the extent to which Christ founded Christianity. Detailed blueprints were made of the layout of the work: there would be an introduction outlining many of the problems of Christological scholarship, with a systematic overview of such issues as Christ’s birth, language and politics. It was to use Mark as a framework, though extrapolating from the other Synoptics, as well as from John, Paul and Acts, ‘what is plainly genuine that Mark omits’. He would draw nine-tenths from the Authorised Version, accepting emendations (from the Revised Version, Donay & Knox, Godsped, etc) where appropriate.

Extensive marginalia would accompany the Gospel material: his discussion would incorporate quotations from his favourite scholars, along with substantial reference to Old Testament material.⁴

It is in the sources which he proposes to utilise that the project becomes problematic: ‘The annotations are drawn from English and American scholarship, chiefly Protestant, from the formidable sceptics of the Continent like Guignebert and Goguel, from the Fathers, and from the Reformers; I hope they contain nothing original.’ This eclectic group of sources is both a strength and weakness of the proposed work: on the one hand it promises a comprehensive (chiefly Protestant) survey of critical opinions; on the other hand, it threatens at worst to be the self-indulgent, arbitrary *mélange* of a dilettante. Whereas such eclecticism may produce an interesting poetic or personal vision, it is not necessarily a useful resource for the student. In terms of his personal vision, while being

⁴ Ibid, MSS, headed ‘The First Witness’ and ‘His Life & Teaching’.

heavily influenced by the historical approach of the ‘formidable sceptics’, he retains an important independence from them in his openness to the ‘supernatural’ elements of the Gospel. In this respect, Berryman makes an important assertion in his foreword, which reveals the extent to which he had embraced Karl Heim’s definition of a miracle, without the knowledge of which the statement makes very little sense:

I may add that it is almost useless to read the Gospel accounts with settled incredulity, such as the conviction (based upon what evidence of faith I have no idea) that what are called miracles cannot happen. The experience lately of a man, a physician, who was accused of the murder of his wife and their unborn child, who was convicted and who within a few weeks of his conviction had to attend the funerals of his mother (a suicide) and then his father, itself ought to make a dogmatic skepticism uneasy.

At first sight Berryman appears to be making a rather ill-conceived comparison, suggesting that the miraculous events of the Gospel should be no more a source of incredulity than other occurrences that appear extreme to our experience. It may be countered that the difference between the Gospel miracles and the tragic story of the doctor is that the latter events, though unusual, are perfectly attributable to human agency and natural causes. The Gospel miracles on the other hand would constitute an apparent overcoming of the ‘laws of nature’ through some paranormal action of Jesus. Berryman’s remark, however, seems to be inviting a re-examination of the reality we take for granted, and in this way, works as an implicit propagation of Heim’s teaching on miracles, particularly considering the reference to the high profile contemporary murder trial of Dr Sam Sheppard.

Heim’s arguments persuaded Berryman to reject the notion of the *miraculum suspensionis* that had presented him with a ‘stumbling block’ to miracles. Heim had opened up for him a radically different conception of the universe, whereby nature is not a machine regulated in fixed terms by the impersonal ‘law of causality’; but rather,

that it represents the interaction of living wills at every level, a view he attests is proved by modern natural science. Rather than God standing idly behind the causal nexus, intervening when He feels inclined, the causal nexus itself is instituted by God, the ‘wholeness tendency’ being apparent in every organism. Miracles are the fulfilled manifestation of this wholeness tendency, demonstrating nature in harmony with the will of its Creator, and therefore fulfilling its true purpose. The divine miracle no longer constitutes a ‘supernatural’ occurrence, but a supremely natural one. The moral code demanded by God is based on the ‘natural law’ that He has made inherent in nature, the perfection of which was demonstrated by Jesus Christ. He was also able to perform ‘miracles’ since, as the Incarnation, his will was wholly in harmony with that of the Creator; His apparent control of nature meant he could, both morally and physically, reveal a glimpse of the original order of Creation, as well as its future consummation.⁵

The extent to which Berryman embraced Heim’s interpretation of the biblical world view is demonstrated in an unpublished poem from the mid nineteen-fifties, in which he light-heartedly depicts his exasperated efforts to inspire in his students a greater openness to the possibility of miracles:

My students have no trouble with miracles—
 they leave it to me, lecturing. The stroll on the sea,
 the hungry multitude, the thirsty wedding,
 Jairus’ daughter, the appearances
 to Peter & to Paul that mastered the thought
 of a hundred generations, all stigmata,
 tongues, cures: they don’t believe in ‘em.
 They don’t believe in the possibility of them;
 enjoying a knowledge of Nature of which the less said the better.
 Heims [sic] & the rest are nothing to my good students.
 They all believe though, when I tell it them,
 and the jury did, that a human being did
 butcher his pregnant wife: that’s wife & child;
 and not without reflection, for at once he broke

⁵ Heim, *Transformation*, pp.153-56, 169-72, 186-91.

(but very very slightly though) his neck,
 doing so safely, being, the man, a doctor,
 & dedicated, so, to the saving of life;
 on whose conviction, his mother killed herself
 (that's the source of the man, who ought to know)
 whose funeral he was allowed to attend, as also
 his father's, who then immediately died
 also; like the whole of Hell beginning here
 (which seldom shows a sign) or Purgatorial fire;
 and I believe all this, in grave difficulties,
 hair rising, uneasy for man, ignorant where to turn—
 for it happened just now, in the press of the nation
 fully reported, and my students have no trouble with miracles.⁶

Tentatively and sardonically subtitled 'a Humorous Poem', it demonstrates many of the characteristic features of the Dream Songs which he was just then beginning to compose. Most distinctively, a human persona is evident: this allows the fluid assimilation into verse of his immediate experience and the seemingly effortless combination of intellectual musing, ironical rhetoric, and the unconventional disordering of syntax. Berryman, in attempting to free himself from the strictures of form, opts for a rhetorical blank verse template in which his argument takes precedence. It is most of all intended to elucidate Heim's teaching on miracles, especially to demonstrate the misapprehension of sceptics, such as in this case his students, as to what a miracle actually represents.

The first two lines feature an ironic inversion: the familiar comedy structure of statement, followed by an unexpected and subversive qualification of that statement. The implication is that the poet alone is left to trouble over the question of miracles, as his students do not bother with them at all. The reference to 'Heims' [sic] suggests that his students cannot conceive even the possibility of miracles because they mistakenly

⁶ U Minn, JBP, Unpub. Misc. Poetry, Box 1, F1, #15, TS, 2pp (pp.1-2). Berryman writes on the TS of the second draft: '1st (or 2nd?) winter in Mpls'. Since he moved to Minneapolis, upon taking up his new lectureship, in 1955, it must have been written later that year, or in the winter of 1956.

view them on the basis of the *miraculum suspensionis*; they regard 'Nature' as a continuous causal mechanism, and any miracle would therefore constitute God's suspension of it. 'Nature' itself, as indicated by the proper noun, has been elevated to the status of 'the one absolute magnitude' in their eyes. Although they appear to possess a secular scientific world-view, however, they paradoxically accept without argument the occurrence of a very malignant form of 'miracle'.

The example Berryman is citing is the recent case of Dr Sam Sheppard, which would later turn into one of the most famous unresolved homicides in American legal history, and, in the 1960s, become the inspiration for the hit television series *The Fugitive*. As the poet remarks, the murder and the subsequent trial had received widespread coverage in the nation's media; in fact, it became such a media circus that the trial was later decreed to have been unfairly prejudiced by it. On the early morning of 4 July 1954, 'Dr Sam', as he was known locally, called friends to his home in Cleveland, Ohio, where they found him with the badly bludgeoned body of his wife Marilyn. She was four months pregnant at the time. Sheppard claimed that she was murdered by an intruder, with whom he had subsequently struggled, sustaining certain injuries in the process, including 'serious damage to the spinal cord in the neck region.'⁷ During the trial, the prosecution accused him of inflicting these injuries.⁸ Police were suspicious of Sheppard's story, as were the local media who quickly turned against the doctor.⁹ The prosecution's case was supported by a range of forensic and circumstantial evidence, including the discovery that he was having an affair at the time of the murder.¹⁰

⁷ Fred McGunagle, 'The Murder of Marilyn Sheppard', *Dr. Samuel Sheppard, The Fugitive*, The Crime Library, <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/sheppard.htm>> McGunagle, 'A Suspect Emerges', *Sheppard* <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/shepsuspect.htm>> [accessed 24 April 2003]

⁸ McGunagle, 'Who Killed Marilyn', *Sheppard* <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/shepwho.htm>>

⁹ McGunagle, 'The Finger of Suspicion', *Sheppard* <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/shepfinger.htm>>

¹⁰ McGunagle, 'The Coroner Wows the Housewives', *Sheppard* <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/shepinquest.htm>>

The trial took place amidst a blaze of publicity, and on 21 December 1954 Sheppard was convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Several weeks later on 7 January 1955 his distraught mother Ethel Sheppard ended her life with a shotgun, and within a fortnight on 18 January his distressed father died of a haemorrhaging ulcer and stomach cancer.¹¹ Sam Sheppard, however, maintained his innocence, and after a concerted campaign gained his freedom nine years later on 16 July 1964. His conviction was quashed after the federal district court judge ruled that he had not received a fair trial. The ruling was affirmed by the U.S Supreme Court two years later.¹²

Berryman assimilates into the poem extracts from newspaper reports of the trial; for instance, the two penultimate lines clearly echo the words of Sheppard's attorney, William Corrigan, complaining to the jury about the trial's media coverage: 'If you read a story like this about the People's Court in China or behind the Iron Curtain it would raise the hair on your head. But this is something that happened in our own city of Cleveland.'¹³ At the time when Berryman wrote the poem in 1955-56, Sheppard had recently been found guilty, a verdict which was in line with public opinion, at least as reflected by the media. The poet also appears to accept the guilty verdict, although he does imply a certain irony when remarking on his students', and the jury's, credulity with regard to the charges. Indeed, the poet remarks on the draft: 'tighten irony, smooth texture', suggesting the gently derisive tone he hoped to achieve. The irony, however,

¹¹ McGunagle, 'The Jury Speaks', *Sheppard* <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/shepjury.htm>>

¹² McGunagle, 'The Supreme Court Speaks', *Sheppard* <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/shepcourt>>

¹³ McGunagle, 'Dr. Sam takes the Stand', *Sheppard* <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/sheppard/shepstand>>. On the typescript of the poem Berryman writes 'D.S.?' next to the words 'hair rising', possibly indicating that he intends to use the phrase, or the scenario, itself as the source of a Dream Song. Certainly Dream Song 29 could be said to be influenced by the Sheppard case, especially considering the growing unease about the doctor's conviction during the time of its composition.

appears to be intended more in relation to his students' acceptance of the charges in the light of their rejection of the Gospel miracles.

Heim defines the Gospel miracles as a sign of the forthcoming consummation of the world, when it draws harmoniously into line with the divine will, and, as the Lord's Prayer declares, it is 'on earth as it is in heaven'. Conversely, to the poet, the Sheppard case is a sign of 'Hell'; it is a 'miracle' by a satanic will, the evil disruption of God's natural law through the corruption of sin and death. God's divine will demands obedience to this natural law by way of His moral law, and in this case it has been violated by the convicted doctor. The doctor's actions lead to further deaths: the suicide of his mother, and the father consequently losing the will to live and being eradicated by the biological processes of his own body. The tragic tale he relates is intended to illustrate a corrupt, downward-spiralling whirlpool of destructive satanic will, opposed to the true natural law. The Sheppard case is one of individual wills at every level—human and molecular—all influenced by the centrifugal will of Satan, to whom God has granted dominion in this life. The poet therefore likens this to 'the whole of Hell beginning here' because it represents a glimpse of the total macro-rejection of the Creator's will.¹⁴ Furthermore, it has just received coverage 'in the press of the nation', and been accepted by rational people, including his students, as objective reality; but they do not see 'nature' as it really is, nature in harmony with the divine will, as reflected in the miracles of Christ.

The poet affirms that he 'believes' in the full implications of the Sheppard story, and yet also remarks how this makes life disturbingly 'uneasy for man, ignorant where to turn': the poem therefore curiously overlooks the more reassuring aspect of Heim's teaching.

¹⁴ See Heim, *Transformation*, pp.188-91.

which stresses God's dominion over all creation, and the eventual restoration of the harmonious divine order. The repetition of the first line as the poem's conclusion frames its crafted comedy structure. The statement that 'my students have no trouble with miracles' is literally true in its ironical first instance, but paradoxically, it is also literally true, though in another sense, in the second instance. The students have 'no trouble' believing in the negative 'miracles' of evil corruption; they just have trouble with the positive Gospel miracles that—rather than working counter to 'Nature'—actually reveal nature as it should be, freed from the corruption of sin and death.

It can now be seen why Berryman should remark in the preface to his 'Life of Christ' how the Sheppard case 'should make a dogmatic skepticism uneasy', when it comes to the question of 'what are called miracles'. He regards it as a widely-reported recent and accepted miracle, which is not recognised as such only because of the general misconception about what a miracle actually is. He regards it as perverse that a sceptic should accept the disruption of the natural order as plausible, but not the natural order itself. Berryman consequently draws a distance between himself and his two most favoured sources.

Such 'dogmatic skepticism' towards miracles is espoused by Guignebert and Goguel, the 'formidable skeptics of the Continent', who both, for various reasons, reject the authenticity of such phenomena as described by the Gospels.¹⁵ Guignebert, employing

¹⁵ Guignebert disputes both the textual credibility of the Gospel accounts, and the concept of 'miracle' itself. He challenges the whole notion of the 'laws of nature': there are only 'facts' which we either comprehend or do not comprehend, but all of them, by the very act of their occurrence, are part of 'nature'; 'to say that a *fact* is contrary to nature is a meaningless proposition'. In some ways this is a position similar to that of Heim, who also considers the term 'supernatural' to be meaningless, since he too believes all events to be 'natural'. However, Guignebert's main contention towards the Gospel miracles is based on the unreliability of the witnesses, and the religious interpretation they put on the events experienced, and in turn, the interpretation of those witnesses' accounts by the Gospel writers. Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.190-91. Goguel's position is based on what Heim would regard as the grave error of making an artificial distinction between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'. He remarks how 'the

the most colourful language of the two, claims that the Gospel miracles are 'facts badly observed, distorted, and enormously exaggerated, by the unbridled imagination of those originally who bore witness to them.' To Guignebert faith is a major obstacle to historical criticism, as the 'critical desire for information involves a doubt which faith does not ordinarily experience, and does not want to experience.'¹⁶

Berryman seems to imply at the end of his preface that he believes the two are in fact compatible because one does not rest on the other: 'It must be understood that the Christian Faith and the Christian Church not exactly rest upon confidence in the truth of the revelation contained in the Gospels and the Epistles. It is the other way round, and no one has ever put it better than Luther.' To Luther, faith is based on a personal relationship with God rather than a trust in certain historical facts.¹⁷ This comment explains to some extent how Berryman was able to reconcile an apparently strange contradiction in his work on Christ: he relies predominantly on the hard-line sceptics, Guignebert and Goguel, and yet he retains an area of openness on the question of miracles that he will not let the rigours of historical investigation and form-criticism penetrate. Instead, he turns to sources that will support the possibility of their authenticity. Through the Luther reference, Berryman closes his preface by pointing out that the Gospels are above all a testament to the faith of the communities from which

current meaning of miracle is that of a fact which differs from the ordinary course of events, a fact which does not seem to be explained by the play of natural forces, but is the result of supernatural forces. Thus an element of subjective appreciation enters into the description of a fact as "miraculous." Facts are not miracles because their miraculous character has been proved, but certain facts are, for a time at least, unexplained, and some people therefore regard these facts as miraculous. A fact could not be described objectively as a miracle save by someone who knew all the laws of nature and all the multiplicity of their possible combinations.' Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, p.216.

¹⁶ Guignebert, *Jesus*, pp.191.

¹⁷ As Alistair McGrath explains, to Luther 'faith has a personal rather than a purely historical reference [...]. Faith is not simply historical knowledge. Luther argues that a faith which is content to believe in the historical reliability of the gospels is not a faith which justifies. Sinners are perfectly capable of trusting in the historical details of the gospels; but these facts of themselves are not adequate for true Christian faith. Saving faith involves believing and trusting that Christ was born *pro nobis*, born for us personally, and has accomplished for us the work of salvation.' Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp.439-40.

they arose. Throughout his work the poet is seeking through his multifarious sources to establish both the Christ of faith and the Christ of history, as well as a possible reconciliation between the two.

The Second Attempt: 'A Life of the Christ'

By 1958, work had begun on a slightly different project, although it is uncertain whether Berryman intended this to accompany or supersede the previous attempt. As the next blueprint almost 12 years later is still following the same format, one presumes he had settled on this and abandoned the other. The new project, now titled 'A Life of the Christ', was to take the form of a critical commentary; it is essentially a work of historical criticism, in a similar vein to that of Goguel and Guignebert. The previous work in comparison took the form of a re-arranged harmony of the Authorised Version, replete with assorted annotations and commentary. 'A Life of the Christ' aims to systematically evaluate the life and teachings of Jesus as they come to us through the New Testament, in the light of historical scholarship of the twentieth century. It attempts to evaluate the Gospel accounts in the context of their time, in order to determine their historicity and relationship to the development of Christian doctrine.

The chapter outline was firmly established as follows:

Foreword

Place & Time, Race & Sect
John the Baptist

Ministry in Galilee
Exhortation
The Disciples
Politics

Miracles
 Failure
 The Closed Ministry: Caesarea Philippi
 Kingship: Jerusalem
 Character & Limitation
 The Passion

Peter; Saul

Afterword¹⁸

Thus the work was to follow the chronological pattern of the Synoptic accounts, and the extent to which he would base the work upon the format of Goguel and Guignebert's accounts of Jesus's life is evident from his notes: 'Draft out, with Harmony etc, from Goguel – Guignebert – commentators before really going into other authorities paying no heed to errors of any kind'.¹⁹ What is striking about the accompanying foreword is its self-deprecating, apologetic character:

An apology may properly be expected for a book on this subject, but I offer none. I have written it for my own, not satisfaction but, instruction. I had no thought of entering into an arena either with say Mr Jim Bishop's florid invention or with M. Goguel's magisterial enquiry in The Life of Jesus (translated, London 1933, wickedly reissued 1954 without reference to the second French edition, and shamefully not even yet published here) and the opening chapters of The Birth of Christianity. I have small learning in this area; 'lesse Greeke', experience in textual criticism, some familiarity with biographical evidence; it makes no equipment upon which I could advise any reader to rely, and I publish the book only for anyone similarly curious who has not happened to undertake a study for himself.

Why study is necessary, why the Gospels alone will not do, ought to become evident, I think, shortly here. I follow conservative opinion in taking Mark to have been written at Rome, in the Petrine tradition, about 70 A.D.; Luke (with Acts) and Matthew, the one in the Pauline tradition, the other perhaps at Antioch, about 80-90 A.D.; the Fourth Gospel somewhere in Asia, in the Johannine tradition, by the unknown Jewish genius who is called the Elder in 2 and 3 John, conceivably a boyish eyewitness of the Crucifixion, at an unknown date around the turn of the First Century. While admitting its theological character (this it shares after all with the Synoptics) I have placed more confidence in the intermittent, residual historicity of John than most modern critics have been willing to do until very lately perhaps. Nor am I able to regard the question of chronology as entirely hopeless, much as we may long for a mid-ministry Francis Meres. The present work, I hope, exhibits little sympathy either with critics such as Bultmann, for whom 'there is not one of his words which we can regard as purely

¹⁸ 'Life of Christ', TS, headed 'A Life of the Christ'.

¹⁹ Ibid, MS, headed 'Draft out, with harmony etc'.

authentic', or with writers who find themselves able for example to inform us of Christ's physical appearance. Guignebert's survey of this latter topic is worth preserving.

The appended book-list aims solely at the elucidation of references. Even among debts so numerous and deep I cannot forbear signaling those to Goguel and Cullman, and, among older works, to Westcott's great edition of the Fourth Gospel. I have quoted regularly from the Authorized Version of 1611, in the usual normalized form; when I depart, the fact is noticed.

Good Friday, 1958 J.B.²⁰

Berryman intends to occupy a middle ground between the critical extremities of 'dogmatic skepticism'—'critics such as Bultmann'—and hagiography—'writers who find themselves able for example to inform us of Christ's physical appearance.' There is evidence here of a yet further limitation in his sources than he admits to. The quotation from Bultmann is cited in the introduction to Goguel's *Life of Jesus*, and Berryman seems to be basing his stance on Goguel's interpretation of the quotation, rather than a first-hand appraisal of the German work from which it actually comes, or viewing it in the context of Bultmann's writing as a whole.²¹ Indeed, the quotation in *Life of Jesus* is an English translation of Goguel's French translation of a quotation taken from a book by Bultmann, published in German, which had not even been translated into English at the time when Berryman wrote his remarks.

Goguel uses Bultmann's comment to illustrate what he supposes to be the typical view of the form-critics: that it is impossible to construct a 'Life of Jesus'. Bultmann provides a concise account of his position in *Jesus and the Word*, from which Goguel lifts a similar quotation to enforce his point.²² In the context of this book, the German

²⁰ Ibid, TS, headed 'A Life of the Christ – FOREWORD'.

²¹ Goguel, p.59. The quotation is taken from: Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien*, (Göttingen: Deutsche Bibliothek Verlagsgesellschaft, 1925), p.33. Berryman undoubtedly came across the remark through Goguel's *The Life of Jesus*, p.59, not only because of the interpretation he gives it but also because the work was unavailable in English at the time.

²² Goguel writes: 'The protagonists of the *formgeschichtliche Schule* [the form-critics] maintain that [...] it is impossible to construct a *Life of Jesus*. 'We can no longer know the character of Jesus, his life, or his personality,' writes Bultmann, 'there is not one of his words which we can regard as purely authentic.'

theologian is merely questioning the notion of ‘impersonal objective history’ as espoused by the likes of Goguel and Guignebert; he then actually builds a comprehensive picture of the putatively authentic teaching of Jesus, based on his dissemination of Scripture. Our present encounter with the text is what matters, he argues; objective historical truth is a contradiction in terms, since we engage in a ‘dialogue with history’.²³ The sceptical historicism of Guignebert—whose work Berryman seems to suggest in his foreword is more useful—is certainly far more extreme than that of Bultmann, when it comes to weeding out elements of the Gospel material deemed to be inauthentic. In practice, Guignebert, throughout his *Jesus*, succeeds in rejecting almost every word of the written Gospels as ‘redactional’. It is clear, at this stage at least, that Berryman has not read Bultmann, and is basing his opinion more on the impression given by his notoriety.

Despite his reliance on such a limited range of sources, above all Guignebert and Goguel, Berryman yet shows a not insignificant degree of independence from them. Greatly influenced by Brooke Foss Westcott, he relies more on the historicity of the Fourth Gospel, which is largely dismissed by historicist critics as a theological construct. However, although Westcott’s work did much to persuade the poet of the value of John, he does not go as far as the Victorian scholar in tracing the authorship back to John the Apostle, Son of Zebedee. As he clarifies in a lecture, ‘John the Elder’ is not the Son of Zebedee, ‘the Beloved Disciple’ of the Fourth Gospel, but a disciple of his, who probably composed the Gospel ‘at Ephesus, around 100’[A.D].²⁴ However, his

And again ‘In my opinion we can sum up what can be known of the life and personality of Jesus as simply nothing.’ Goguel, *Jesus*, p.59. The second quotation is taken from Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus* (Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek Verlagsgesellschaft, 1926), p.12; it was published in English with the altered title *Jesus and the Word*.

²³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the word*, trans by Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p.11.

²⁴ U Minn, JBP, Class Files, Box II, Folder 19, ‘Humanities 62’, unnumbered lecture notes, MS, first line reads ‘John—a composition (the Synoptics are compilations)’. In view of his remark demonstrating the

general position is clearly very much inspired by Westcott. The Victorian scholar argues that John's purpose in writing his Gospel was theological rather than what might be conventionally termed 'historical'; however, he did draw from a wealth of material which was historical, and, moreover, much of it was the eyewitness testimony of the author himself.²⁵ As Berryman remarks, his interest in John does reflect an emerging trend in New Testament studies, which now views the evangelist as possibly having drawn independently from his own historical sources, rather than creating a theological construction out of the Synoptic material.²⁶ Overall, however, it would appear that he did not have enough confidence or interest in the approach he had taken to sustain the project, and it would be shelved for the next twelve years.

The Third Attempt: 'A New Life of Christ'

Berryman did not commit any other firm plans to writing until 1970. The new project, now titled 'A New Life of Christ', was to be arranged thematically, beginning with the chronological outline of Mark, and then dealing with half a dozen of the main historical problems of Church tradition in turn:

Preface

- I The Marcan Outline
- II Christ's Ethical Teaching
- III The Apostolate
- IV Christ's Ecstasy & Transfiguration
- V The Fourth Gospel
- VI The Resurrection Appearances

time it took for Westcott to right his commentary on John's prologue ('1984, 25 yrs after') the notes are clearly from 1959.

²⁵ Westcott, *Gospel of St. John*, p.ii e.

²⁶ *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p.374.

Appendix: The Church (Pentecost & Paul)²⁷

Berryman is consequently concerned as much with explaining the evolution of the faith through the primitive Church as with the immediate life of its traditional founder. In devoting chapters to the Fourth Gospel and 'Christ's Ecstasy & Transfiguration'—passages from the Synoptics which he argued contained strong elements of authenticity—he demonstrates a greater openness to the Christian conception of Christ than his favourite historicist sources. In line with proponents of the liberal school, such as Goguel, however, he still believes an objective reconstruction of the historical Christ is both important and possible. By this time it seems the poet was thinking in terms of a 'biography' as the following preface demonstrates, and this was to become more of a biography in the chronological-historical sense over the next year. The preface displays a more straightforward attitude and earnest tone, lacking the ostentatious parade of learning, behind the thin veil of modesty, which is characteristic of his earlier prefaces:

The materials for a biography of Christ are the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke), the Fourth Gospel, and Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians. The Apocryphal literature adds nothing reliable to these sources. It has been repeatedly denied that a 'life' can be constructed from them; but many men have tried, with varying results of interest, and the present volume is simply another attempt, made upon reflection and with candor. This is the most important human personality, and the most important career, of which we have knowledge; and it befits us to try to understand them. Our knowledge is not indeed what we could wish it, the Evangelists' interests being for the most part only in certain respects coincidental with ours. But our knowledge is extensive and real.

I hope I have acknowledged enough of my multitudinous indebtedness to show that practically nothing here makes any claim to originality. JB 4 Jan 1970²⁸

Whereas before Berryman entertained pretensions to filling a gap in the market and producing something useful and unique, now it seems his biography is just one of many.

²⁷ 'Life of Christ', MS, headed 'A New Life of Christ / Preface'.

²⁸ Ibid, MS, headed 'Life of X Pref.'

The fact that this version of the project also did not sustain his enthusiasm for very long suggests that the admission is humble and sincere. Another interesting aspect of this preface is the attitude it displays towards Christ and by association Godhead, and the (perhaps conscious) allusion to a recurring joke in *The Dream Songs*. The poet admires Christ as a human being and acknowledges his importance as a 'human personality'. Throughout *The Dream Songs* Christ and God are not synonymous and here the separation is reinforced. In Songs 153 and 335 Henry refers to Howard Nemerov's unfavourable contrasting of 'God's career with Mozart's'.²⁹ Whereas in these Songs God's career is the 'worst career', in the preface Christ, as 'the most important human personality', performed a ministry that represented 'the most important career'. Written shortly before Berryman's own 'conversion experience', it seems the distinction, between the careers of God and Christ was still very much a personal attitude as well. The next attempt, begun over a year later, shows a possible reconciliation between his notions of Christ the man and God; it turned out to be not only his final effort but by far his most extensive and successful.

The Final Attempt: 'The Life of Jesus Christ: (on earth) so far as we have record of it.'

The version that Berryman made most headway with is a very different kind of book from that which he planned in the 1950s. Now given the circumstantial title 'The Life of

²⁹ 'A friend of Henry's contrasted God's career / with Mozart's, leaving Henry with nothing to say / but praise for a word so apt' (Song 153). 'I nod to [Frederick William] Rolfe / & all the other unpopulars / including that worst career, whose was it? God's / I seem to remember, he makes me wish I had taken up golf / or the study of the stars' (Song 335). As Sean Ryder points out, the allusion is to the following remark of Howard Nemerov's: 'Mozart's life and work express a purer and more efficacious benevolence to mankind than the life and work of God'. Howard Nemerov, *Journal of the Fictive Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p.12. Quoted in Ryder, 'Annotations', pp.156-57.

Jesus Christ: (on earth) so far as we have record of it', the first preface—for, curiously, there are two quite different drafts relating to the same period—finds him in a similar (to some extent ironic) self-effacing mode to that which marked the forewords of his earlier attempts, together with the same (unconvincing) boasts of unoriginality. His sixteen years of teaching and research in New Testament studies, as part of the Humanities program, did not qualify him in any way as a specialist in his own eyes:

This little book – I have kept it as short as possible – was made for my children and friends and pretends to no learning (I am a Shakespearian Scholar), though of course I have looked into various topics since I became interested in the subject 18 years ago. In publishing it, I hope merely that it may serve as a well printed, accurate aid to meditation. Nothing much like it, curiously, exists in English, so far as I can discover. — whether in any other modern (or ancient) language I don't know.

Well, I have adopted the marvellous version adapted from William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale by King James's groups at Westminster during 1611, correcting it when desirable by reference to later translations all hopelessly inferior. The (no doubt eccentric) commentary is pure token.³⁰

Once again, as with the first version, he sees his work as fulfilling a niche in the market, whereas he acknowledges the 1970 version is an unoriginal addition to an already flooded one. Its intended purpose has likewise shifted: from being a useful study aid for the more discerning reader to being an 'aid to meditation'. The poet's own religious fervency following his recent conversion impels both the change in direction and the scope of its progress: two whole chapters were drafted. The subtitle also suggests a fundamental change in attitude: '(on earth) so far as we have record of it' implies an existence of Christ beyond this world, suggesting for the first time in these drafts his possible synonymy with God. The fact that Berryman regards the Gospels as they come to us through Tyndale and Coverdale as constituting in any way a record of Christ's life on earth, even 'as far as we have record of it', demonstrates an attitude far removed

³⁰ 'Life of Christ', MS, titled 'The Life of Jesus Christ / (on earth) so far as we have record of it.' The MS is undated, but, due to the title, it must have been written around the same time as the two surviving chapters, which identify the author as being 'age 56'.

from the sceptics whom he still nevertheless employs as his main sources. Yet the two last lines of the preface curiously suggest that he still planned an annotated harmony of the Gospel. If so, this preface does not directly relate to the two chapters that actually survive. The second preface from around the same time, however, unmistakably pertains to these two finished chapters:

This labour of love, done for my middle children and published with a view to its possible usefulness to other enquirers (for nothing much like it exists, oddly enough) makes no claim whatever to either scholarship or originality. I hope I have shown in other books that I place a due value on both these high accomplishments. But here I am willing to appear a mere ignorant magpie, borrowing without acknowledgement or compunction (but laying no claim though to any virtue) from men both learned and original. Between Bishop Westcott's great commentary on the Fourth Gospel (1892) and Archbishop Carrington's researches into Mark (1961), I have drawn most heavily on Guignebert and Goguel; any interested reader will easily locate for himself my not very numerous sources, and only where controversy was absolutely unavoidable have I given the credit which I would like to make ubiquitous and would do but for my certain knowledge that even mere summ luigue [sic: *Sume, lege*] puts many readers off: more people are interested in Christ than care for scholarship, thank Heaven.

Over the text and illustrations I have taken some trouble too, and if anyone is inclined to thank me for them he should thank (1) the inspiration of Walter Greg and (2) my American publishers — as I do. JB 5 July 71³¹

As well as being limited, his main sources remain unchanged since his original attempts at a life of Christ, with the addition of Philip Carrington, his 'late' discovery. It would seem that he still relies on Goguel and Guignebert for an historical outline, since they attempt to construct an objectively accurate portrait of Jesus's career divorced from Christian tradition. To counterbalance this, he draws from Westcott and Carrington, who are rigorous defenders of the faith. Again, Berryman, with some tongue-in-cheek, brazenly admits to virtual plagiarism, but he aims more aptly at the general reader.

³¹ Ibid, MS, headed 'The Life of Jesus Christ / Compiled by JB'.

The Two Chapters

The two complete chapters he managed to produce reveal the new, exciting and highly original direction the work had taken. The book does mean to be as short as the preface promises: each chapter spans only three pages, although, as the plans and the extract below indicate, the lavish work was to include maps and original illustrations. No chapter list of this version remains, but it would seem that the poet was returning to a layout similar to his 1958 version rather than to his 1970 one. In these two chapters he concentrates first on the historical and religious context of Jesus's life, followed by an examination of his ancestors as they come to us through the First Gospel. The finished chapters are an enthralling culmination of his eighteen years of research and his quest for a suitable prose vehicle for it. They contain some features characteristic of the earlier versions, such as a 'harmony' of the Gospel materials, and 'eccentric commentary' assimilating the work of his favourite critics, but these have been integrated into a distinctly literary framework.

Under the title of the typescript Berryman adds the sub-heading: 'collected for Martha at age 8 by her father (age 56), and high time.' The work does indeed take the form of the author narrating the story of Christ to his young daughter. The first chapter exploits this literary device to the full; it is a lively paced narrative, integrating synopsis, eccentric commentary, and asides to Martha, as this opening passage demonstrates:

In ancient Jewish story—and perhaps in truth—the Lord God Yahweh (known too as Elohim and Shaddai) created the Sun and the Moon and the Earth, its seas and its lands, and then created a Garden eastward of Eden (over here is your map, honey) where He made the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve. The first thing they did was sin.³²

³² Ibid, TS, headed 'The Life of Jesus Christ [...] Chapter 1', 3pp (p.1).

Beginning naturally with Creation, he achieves the remarkable feat of delivering a concise and lively summary of the Hebrew Bible—portraying the pre-Christian history of God’s revelation of Himself to mankind—in just three pages. The synopsis is frequently interspersed with this kind of parenthesised commentary and directions addressed to Martha as narratee. Some of this commentary, addressing complex historical problems, is wildly inappropriate for even the most precocious eight-year old, and it is obvious that the narratee is above all a literary device. The implied reader is his regular readership, who are in tune with the Berryman persona and forgiving of, or indifferent to, his ‘magpie’ scholarship. The extra-diegetic asides to Martha introduce a great homeliness to the proceedings, enabling him to overcome the self-consciousness of producing a pseudo-scholarly work that ‘pretends to no original learning’.

Poetry is also incorporated in the same illustrative manner as the illustrations themselves, although sadly the latter were never commissioned. For instance, he uses a quotation from Robert Lowell’s poem ‘Leviathan’ when summarising the story of Cain and Abel:

The Lord preferred to his [Cain’s] offering of sacrifice, the fruit of the ground, the offering of his brother Abel, the firstlings of his flock; so Cain killed Abel. What this means is that the Jewish tribesmen were developing, against old-fashioned resistance, from a nomadic pastoral existence to a settled agricultural existence; as a friend of Daddy’s put the matter 30 years ago,

When the ruined farmer beat out Abel’s brains
Our Father laid great cities on his soul.³³

As this extract shows, the higher-narrative level between father and daughter enables him to combine synopsis and commentary, as well as poetic emphasis and illustration. It

³³ Robert Lowell, ‘Leviathan’, *Land of Unlikeness*, Introd. by Allen Tate (Cummington, MA: Cummington Press, 1944). Berryman discusses the poem in his essay ‘Robert Lowell and Others’, in *Freedom of the Poet*, p.288.

is a highly effective means of assimilating his scholarly interest and attention to detail into an accessible and enjoyable retelling of the story. Altogether it is a very personalized, not to mention artistic, interpretation of the historical problem of Christ.

Sometimes the commentary is extremely localised, as when he comments on Matthew's genealogy of Christ in the second chapter:

What authenticity can we allow this remarkable list? — noting, though, first, that the Jews like other primitive peoples were as strong on genealogy as we Americans are neurotically indifferent to it (you probably do not yet know the name of my great-grandfather, a Confederate officer after whom a large U.S. Army camp is named in Arkansas, and I myself know only scattered names, hardly any achievements, before him).³⁴

This reference to his great-grandfather, Colonel Robert Glenn Shaver, provides for an eccentric distraction, before he indulges in some serious critical dissemination of the Gospel genealogy, which the rest of the chapter is then devoted to. Curiously in this case, and in spite of the claims of his preface, his commentary does indicate some independence from his 'not very numerous sources', as it not always easy to identify his comments from them. A closer examination of his exegesis reveals both his reliance on, and independence from, Guignebert; the only one of his sources who devotes any considerable attention to this issue. The tone and language of his analysis exhibit the imprint of the French scholar, through a slightly tempered version of his prose style.

Commenting on the genealogy, Berryman muses: 'Some of the names are unknown to both the Old Testament writers and Josephus, and were probably pious inventions. (The Messiah—Christ—was descended from Abraham through David; good through

³⁴ 'Life of Christ', TS, headed 'Thou Son of David', 3pp (p.1). Haffenden provides a summary of his famous ancestor's life and achievements in *Life of Berryman*. pp.421-22.

whom, is the only problem. The Evangelists wrote missionary works, not biography or history).³⁵ The term ‘pious inventions’ is certainly straight out of Guignebert’s scornful, but witty, repertoire. However, his defence of the evangelists—that they wrote missionary works, not ‘biography or history’—is more charitable than that of Guignebert who slights them as mere ‘hagiography’ (which is very much a term of abuse for the scholar), and says of the genealogies: ‘it would show lack of intelligence to apply critical methods to these reconstructions arising from credal or apologetic necessities, and directed solely towards edification.’³⁶

The commentary Berryman provides on Matthew’s possible sources begins as a straightforward synthesis of generally accepted scholarship on the issue. The line his argument goes on to follow, however, appears rather more unorthodox and bears little resemblance to that of his favoured authorities. He claims that ‘two motives almost equally powerful, and contradictory, dominate the First Gospel: anti-Jewish propaganda, and dogmatic insistence on Old Testament predictive texts’.³⁷ He concentrates solely on the former, however, arguing that Matthew’s genealogy was motivated by anti-Jewish bias. It aims to show that various discredited women are easily found in the Jewish royal line (Bathsheba, Tabar, Rahab), in order to counteract Jewish refutations of Mary’s virginity through insinuations of fornication: “‘You Jews’—we are obliged to read—‘impugn the virtue of the Mother of our Lord: Look at the ladies of your royal line’”.³⁸

This approach suggests two things about the overall direction of the work: either it relied on sources more numerous, wider or obscure than those to which Berryman

³⁵ ‘Life of Christ’, ‘Thou Son of David’, p.2.

³⁶ Guignebert, *Jesus*, p.109.

³⁷ ‘Thou Son of David’, p.3.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp.2-3.

admitted, or it did in fact contain some 'original' research. Moreover, it suggests that he was not attempting to offer a comprehensive critical survey of each major historical problem, but, rather, a streamlined agenda based merely on what concerned him most. Given his interest in Judaism and his identification with Jewishness, it is not surprising that he chooses to concentrate solely on the anti-Jewish aspect of Matthew's genealogy.

Unfortunately, from the literary point of view, the consistency of his narrative style begins to break down during this second chapter. Half way through he seems to forget the presence of Martha as narratee; the narratee in effect becomes what was the implied reader. As he assesses the origins of this aspect of tradition, the explicatory asides lose their fatherly familiarity and become mere academic commentary. Whereas the first chapter promises an interesting, and perhaps even unique, hybrid of literary narrative and academic analysis, it is questionable whether he could have successfully maintained this trick through the whole work. On the evidence of the preceding chapter, however, there is no reason why he could not have managed it; most probably, he would have revised the second chapter to bring it into line.

Regrettably, as unfinished as the work is, we do not even reach the most important aspect of the study, which is Berryman's assessment of the person of Christ himself, and his teaching. His re-acquaintance with the Christ of faith is to be found in the devotional poems of *Delusions, etc*, and one can only speculate how this new insight would have influenced his quest for the 'historical Jesus'. The ultimate surviving portions of the work in progress seem to have been written during the summer of 1971, and, as usual with Berryman, the work was being written in tandem with numerous other writing projects, such as his novel *Recovery*, the Shakespeare biography, and the poems which were to constitute his final collection. Sadly, the work that after so many

years of false starts eventually showed so much promise, now exists as a mere glimpse of what it might have been. Luckily, however, we do have a large corpus of published and unpublished poetry on the subject, which embodies in far more imaginative ways the preoccupation with Jesus Christ towards which he had reached for so long, and so falteringly, in his prose writings.

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