

John Haffenden: On "Dream Song 46"

(l. 1) The line alludes to the following dream recorded by Wilhelm Stekel:

'I find myself upon the street. A great panic rules there. The people are in flight, are hurrying; they press into the street cars; in short there is a turmoil. Some one is trying to explain to me the mechanism of what is happening . . . '

In view of Berryman's device in *The Dream Songs* of employing a voiced dialogue between Henry and his friend, it is interesting that Dr Stekel interprets what he calls 'This beautiful dream' in these terms:

. . . represents a flight from the analysis. The highly intelligent patient wants to escape his own thoughts. . . He feels in life the disharmony in his thought and would gladly come to a unity of feeling and idea. He is always hearing a second voice, and this speaks contrary to the first. He is a typical doubter . . . The lower voices out of the harmony of thought make themselves heard in the doubter and often drown out the upper notes. The counterpoint is often too obtrusive, so that hate manifests itself with love, scorn with appreciation, defiance with submission.
(Wilhelm Stekel, *Sadism and Masochism*, English version by Louise Brink (London: The Bodley Head, 1935), vol. I, p. II.)

In Song 46, which is characterised by blasphemy, 'I am', the first words, probably allude to the pronouncement, 'I am that I am'?Ehyeh asher ehyeh (Exodus 3:14), an utterance which denotes the highest existence. In Song 85 ('Op. posth. no. 8') (ll. 14-18), Henry reports his physical dismantlement. For Henry, being ('I am') means simply having a body. God is complete and sufficient to himself, unconditional; in Song 141, (ll. 16-18), Henry asserts the blasphemous view of selfishness and self-interest.

Finally, in Song 320, Henry wakes from a paranoid dream with the words:

"I am?" cried Henry, / waking sweated & sordid' (ll. 17-18).

The phrase 'I am' may be regarded, for the sake of convenience, as a "major triad" in Songs 46, 85, 141, and 320. I borrow the term from one of Berryman's favourite texts, Archbishop Carrington's *According to Mark* (Cambridge University Press, 1960), where it is used to

account for "a threefold repetition, at intervals in the narrative, 'of a word or phrase which draws attention to some theme of high significance.'" (p. 6) It is clear from Berryman's Introduction to Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1960, pp. 7-28) that he thinks of triads, as does Archbishop Carrington, not in terms of an Hegelian dialectic, but in terms of related groups of three. For Carrington, the symbols, phrases and images of the Gospel are structured towards neatness of form, relation and interrelation. The words 'new', 'house', and 'cup', for example, and the phrases 'thy way', 'three days', and 'right hand', are all motifs repeated three times. Although Berryman does not necessarily limit himself to repetition in groups of three, he did use the same technique to bind some of the Songs (not in proximate clusters, but spaced widely about the work) .

Even a partial concordance to *The Dream Songs* reveals a number of words and phrases such as 'survive' and 'ax' which function as triadic in this sense, as leitmotifs and accordingly as a structural device binding the poem. J. M. Linebarger (who also observes the feature) calls the device one of 'interlocking phrases and images', but he feels that they are 'insufficient in themselves to structure *The Dream Songs*'. Nevertheless, he does allow for the possibility that the Songs might contain 'a thematic coherence' (*'Dream Song 6'*, p. 84).

Do, ut des. (*l.* 18) In Chapter III, 'The Theory of Resistance', Stekel explains:

Now experience shows that this transference very soon becomes the source of resistance. Love is only a seeking for love in return, 'Do, ut des' ('I give, that thou shalt give'). If the patient notices that love is not given in return or that it has not reached that degree which he expected, defiance enters in place of the love, which in turn manifests itself as active resistance. Adler has remarked that the parapatric reacts with obstinacy or with obedience. Often both forms of reaction are combined to make the picture still more confused. An intense, unyielding stubbornness hides behind an apparent obedience . . . (p. 46.)

A note on the manuscript (dated 1 December 1958), which Berryman originally entitled 'SEVEN', observes: 'first one, perhaps, all year, written at home: I can only write in solitude (= bars)'.

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