

## Colossal Departures

*Figuring the Lost Father in Berryman's and Plath's Poetry*

"—end of this

But an anger helps me"

—JOHN BERRYMAN,

*on a handwritten draft of Dream Song 42, dated 28/9  
Dec. 1962<sup>1</sup>*

IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW done for the BBC, a drunken John Berryman spoke to A. Alvarez about his admiration for and fascination with fellow American poet Sylvia Plath. Berryman especially singled out for praise the famous poem "Daddy," quoting with relish the poem's final line: "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" (244). What particularly intrigued him, Berryman noted, was that since Plath's father died when she was only eight, the bitter poem is essentially "all fantasy; she's only dealing with a father figure, or phantom, and it killed her."<sup>2</sup> While Berryman is perhaps nai've about the awareness and maturity of any eight-year old, let alone a precocious child like Plath, it is both appropriate and ironic that Berryman should focus on the early death of the poet's father and the subsequent mythologizing of this loss, for his own poetry enacts a similar ritual. John Allyn Smith, father of the future poet, then named John Allyn Smith, Jr., died when young John was eleven. Although some degree of mystery has always shrouded Smith's death, it was ruled a suicide by gunshot. Berryman, his last name quickly changed less than three months later, so as to match that of his new stepfather, would be haunted all his life by this loss, and in his poetic masterwork, *The Dream Songs*, would mythologize both the loss and the figure of the father in larger-than-life terms very similar to those of

Sylvia Plath. Poems concerning the father are among the most memorable in each poet's body of work, and signal new directions for the elegy, both honouring and subverting many of the conventions and expectations associated with the genre. The element of raw and even violent anger triggered by the father's death, the range and honest expression of the disturbing inner emotions of the surviving child, mark new areas of language for the modern elegist.

In his landmark study, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*, Peter M. Sacks views the "relationship between the language of elegy and the experience of loss as an event or action" (i). Sacks argues that the language of elegy is not a passive entity, a rhetoric already containing feelings associated with loss, but rather an active "work," both a product and a dramatic process, "a working through of experience" (i). Exploring Freud's phrase "the work of mourning," he analyzes the motivations and effects of elegiac verse, working almost exclusively with English and Irish elegies, with only a brief glance at the American elegy in his concluding chapter. A consistently Freudian approach throughout the study enables Sacks to highlight "a significant similarity between the process of mourning and the oedipal resolution" (8). Early on, Sacks lists the conventions most often associated with elegy, which include imagery involving weaving, vegetation gods, flowers, water, and light. Structurally and tonally, elegies commonly include series of questions, complaints, repetition or refrain, as well as feelings of guilt and attempts to distance oneself from the deceased. Finally, traditional elegies, especially the pastoral elegy, usually turn toward some form of consolation at the end of the poem.

As modern American elegists, Berryman and Plath use some but not all of the conventions listed by Sacks. Plath is more apt to employ some of the familiar imagery, such as water in "Full Fathom Five," or flowers in "Electra on Azalea Path." But instead of the consoling flowers associated with nature's cyclical renewal, Plath focuses on the faded plastic flowers atop her father's grave, an instance of subverting the expected function of the image. Berryman's *Dream Songs* concerning his absent father dispense with the familiar imagery of elegy, but like Plath's poems, they fluctuate between the sombre, sad tone of many canonical elegies, and the vitriolic level of anger that is unique to these two mid-century poets. As Jahan Ramazani notes in *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*, while "self-destructive

mourning had long played a role in elegy," a poet like Plath takes this tendency to new extremes in some of the violent fantasies in her elegies (264). The same is true of Berryman's father-elegies, even if those *Songs* also include the conventions of questions, repetition, and guilt. Guilt, and the ongoing struggle to distance oneself from the dead figure as a means of alleviating guilt, is common in each poet's work, and the oedipal conflict discussed by Sacks is at the heart of this endeavour. Both poets work to recreate, forge a reconciliation with, and finally overcome what Berryman at one point in his unpublished papers called "the blue father."<sup>3</sup> However, neither succeeds in ever achieving the consolation common in so many earlier elegies.

At the time of the BBC interview, Berryman was less than a decade away from taking his own life, and the recognition of a death attraction shared with Plath is possible.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the courtship with death is dramatically re-enacted throughout much of Plath's poetry and Berryman's *Dream Songs*. But even in these death-drive poems, the presence of the father is typically felt, and the poet's own death is alternately presented as a way of getting back to or back at the father, or in some instances, escaping his haunting presence. Contemplation of one's own death has been another frequent convention of elegy, but not in the intense, frustrated, or sometimes resigned tone found in the work of Berryman and Plath. Rather than musing generally on death and one's own mortality, what we find is an often desperate desire to join the father, the writers flirting with the possibility of ending their own lives.

Although consolation is never achieved, both poets do attempt to reconstruct, and thereby make at least partial peace with, the absent father. One of Plath's best-known early poems is "The Colossus," the title poem from her first volume (London 1960; America 1962). The poem begins with a frank, flat acknowledgement, and like so many poems by both Plath and Berryman, directly addresses the father:

I shall never get you put together entirely,  
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed. (129)

The process of systematic re-piecing of the shattered iconic image, an effort of determination but recognized as sure to fall short, is presented in slightly

different terms by Berryman in Dream Song 42. This poem returns, as the Dream Song sequence intermittently does, to the profound "departure" mentioned in Dream Song i ("All the world like a woolen lover / once did seem on Henry's side. / Then came a departure. / Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought.") By Song 42 Henry, the protagonist and speaker in Berryman's long poem, feels able to intimately address the father:

I see you before me plain  
(I am skilled: I hear, I see)—

Your honour was troubled: when you wondered—'No'. I  
hear. I think I hear. (46)

Here, as in Plath's poem, we observe a willing of the self to comprehend a father never quite known, and ultimately beyond knowing. Each poem wavers between a feeling of weary compromise with, if not acceptance of, the father's inscrutability, and a sense of Sisyphean incompleteness. Henry tells the father he hears, but then qualifies himself: "I think I hear." Plath's speaker suggests that the colossus might possess some oracular wisdom, but admits:

Thirty years now I have labored To  
dredge the silt from your throat. I am  
none the wiser. (129)

The simultaneous sense of intimacy and longing to bridge distance is reinforced by the use of apostrophe in each poem. Berryman's poem, which he once introduced at a reading as "addressed to the ghost of Odysseus," begins: "O journeyer, deaf in the mould." This figure provides a link between Henry and the father, in that by Dream Song 42 Henry is himself a tired traveller, well-embarked on what Berryman termed the "world tour" of his tortured narrator. Additionally, Henry is in a "cast" in this poem, having broken his ankle, the image of the cast referencing the father's "mould." The father is dead, and "Henry Pussy-cat" himself, we have already learned, seems able to die and come back to life as part of his cycle of endless suffering. The distance of the father is verified by his "deaf" state, which

plays on "death," as "mould" suggests a "mould" or cast, and part of Berryman's characteristic irony as part of mourning is the notion that while Henry's auditor, the father, is "deaf," Henry is at last able to "hear" or understand why his father was driven to suicide.

But is Henry really addressing the father as much as he is talking to himself, working things through? After all, the deafness of the father does not interrupt the song of loss, abandonment, and hoped-for reconciliation. Part of the mythopoeic strategy here, as in Plath's verse, is to work toward an awareness of what Berryman terms in his earlier "The Ball Poem," "the epistemology of loss," an awareness not just of inevitable loss, but the process of finding a language to deal with loss. By mourning part of a lost self, by embracing the very act of mourning itself, each poet is able to transfer or displace the feeling of loss and abandonment from the father, so that often what is mourned is not the deceased but the self. The focus turns inward, toward the spiritually-paralyzed survivor, the poet-speaker. Near the end of "The Colossus" Plath's speaker says "My hours are married to shadow." Henry implores the father, or himself, to "consider me in my cast" (130).

Each poet presents death as a psychological drama, with the poet-speaker in the lead role. Loss is self-consciously staged, language foregrounded, in an attempt to impose aesthetic distance from the event of loss. Christina Britzolakis has observed how, "In Plath's poetry, the work of mourning appears as inseparable from its performance in language; it is inherently rhetorical and self-reflexive, a structure of exacerbated theatricalism" (7). In addition to staging the language of mourning, Plath will at times directly allude to drama, as she does by invoking the dramatic literature of antiquity mid-way through "The Colossus":

A blue sky out of the Oresteia  
Arches above us. O father, all by yourself  
You are pithy and historical as the Roman Forum. (129)

Nearly all of Plath's poems dealing with the loss of the father ("The Colossus," "Eletra on Azalea Path," "On the Decline of Oracles," "Full Fathom Five") allude in some way to classical literature and myth. Others, such as "Daddy," choose to invoke recent political atrocities such as the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup>

But what is common among all these poems is Plath's attempt to render loss as archetypal. In commenting on Plath's poems about her father, particularly the late cluster known as the bee sequence, Helen Vendler has written: "While we may all need such myths to approach the enigma of family relations, Plath not only, with new insights, replaced one myth with another but also changed her style to fit the myth" (280). Late in her life, Plath herself expressed the need to feel that her sense of abandonment, at this stage by husband as well as father, was not parochial: "What the person out of Belsen—physical or psychological—wants is nobody saying the birdies still go tweet-tweet, but the full knowledge that somebody else has been there and knows the worst" (qtd. in Axelrod 313).

The mythologization in Berryman's poems of loss tends to work in the opposite direction, from the outside in. The analogy between the auditor of Song 42 and Odysseus is the exception rather than the rule, as most of the Dream Songs concerning the father present Henry in a dramatic situation, such as his father's grave site, and then telescope inward to explore his anguished emotions. Henry does not seem to feel that he needs the scaffolding of ancient family drama to analogize with his own situation; his own drama is striking enough. For example, Berryman struggled for most of his adult life to clarify a childhood memory of his despondent father swimming far out into the ocean, out of sight, with either himself or his younger brother, terrifying the mother. Late in his life Berryman wrote to his mother, again asking which son the father had taken with him. After receiving yet another of her contradictory responses, he finally determined that his father had only threatened to take one of the boys, and that his memory had transformed the threat into an actual event. Dream Song 145 presents the frightening scene:

but he did not swim out with me or my brother  
as he threatened—

a powerful swimmer, to take one of us along as  
company in the defeat sublime[.] (162)

Although this Dream Song does go on to compare the father's despair with that of a Texas murderer who shot thirteen people, what is more character-

istic of Berryman's work is how the poem recasts autobiography on a grand, dramatic scale that parallels Plath's use of classical myths and texts. Henry, because he is in the midst of his own epic poem (there is a total of 385 Songs), needs to "cast" his own story on a large, sweeping canvas.<sup>6</sup> Of interesting note in this regard is the fact that among Berryman's unpublished papers is a folder containing ideas for a projected essay, "On Death," where he speculates that he "might use my own Maine experience" for a philosophical exploration of death. The experience he refers to is his first serious contemplation of the act of suicide, which eventually did wind up in a poem, "Henry's Understanding," included in Berryman's final volume, published the year of the poet's death:

...it occurred to me  
that one night, instead of warm pajamas,  
I'd take off all my clothes  
& cross the damp cold lawn & down the bluff  
into the terrible water & walk forever  
under it out toward the island. (162)

Plath's poems concerning the father's death also invoke the image of the sea, but not as both threat and seductress, as in Berryman's poems. Rather, for Plath, the sea is the mysterious, unfathomable depth where the dead father resides. In "A Life," he is a drowned sea-god who crawls "up out of the sea"; in "All the Dead Dears" he looms "under the fishpond surface." Plath's speaker in these poems is more the observer than Berryman's Henry, who acts as either a participant in dialogue with the father, or, as in "Henry's Understanding," a figure who by walking into the water reenacts, at least imaginatively, the father's death. Even in "The Colossus," which in its early lines presents the speaker engaged in attempting to reconstruct the figure of the absent father, ends with the image of the father being consigned to the sea, to re-emerge on his own, and not his daughter's, time. The poem closes:

No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel On  
the blank stones of the landing. (130)

This tone of resignation is present at the close of several father-elegies by each poet, including Dream Song 42, which presents Henry left to "pick up the tab" for his father's suicide. Again, Berryman turns the focus inward, intensifying the note of loss present in the address to the father's "ghost" in the poem's opening:

Think it across, in freezing wind: withstand my  
blistered wish: flop, there, to his blind song who  
pick up the tab. (46)

Despite emphasizing earlier in the poem a newfound ability to hear and see, Henry is once again cast into his familiar position of flinging a "blind" song into an indifferent wind. The indifference of the surrounding world, so different from the more sympathetic natural world presented in the conventional elegy, also assaults Plath's speaker in "The Colossus": "Nights, I squat in the cornucopia / Of your left ear, out of the wind" (129). Each of these poems ends by acknowledging an ultimate inability to connect with the lost father, despite the effort of elegiac catharsis through the act of writing.

Resignation, however, is not the tone struck in all of the father-poems by either poet. Resentment, bitterness, and anger frequently burst forth, two of the most direct instances being Plath's "Electra on Azalea Path" and Berryman's Dream Song 384, the penultimate poem in the sequence. Each poem is set at the graveside of the father, and this time it is Plath's speaker who directly addresses the dead, while Berryman's Henry, in an attempt to express and possibly dispel what he terms his "rage," ceases to address the father, and instead, literally assaults the grave.

I spit upon this dreadful banker's grave  
.....  
I'd like to scabble till I got right down  
away down under the grass

and ax the casket open ha to see  
just how he's taking it... (406)

As the final of several Dream Songs concerning the father's death, this poem confirms that resignation, acceptance, or even an "indifference" that Henry says he wishes for in vain, will never come. So, at last, Henry unleashes a violent, macabre fantasy in a desperate attempt to find a sufficient expression of mourning.

A similar scene of haunting the gravesite is found in Plath's "Electra on Azalea Path," where the speaker figures the father as a suicide, even though Plath's father, unlike Berryman's, did not take his own life. However, the naming of the cemetery path running by her father's grave, as well as Plath's notes on the poem, make it clear that the mythic father of the poem is her own:

...I found the stone: Otto E. Plath 1885-1940. Right beside the path,  
where it would be walked over. Felt cheated. My temptation to dig him up.  
To prove he existed and really was dead. How far gone would he be? No  
trees, no peace, his headstone jammed up against the body on the other  
side. Left shortly. It is good to have the place in mind. (*Collected Poems* 289)

The wish to violate the actual grave, astonishingly similar to Henry's fantasy in Song 384, is still not likely to bring "peace," the poet acknowledges. The poem itself emphasizes the stark, unadorned bleakness of the grave, a "charity ward" and "poorhouse, where the dead / Crowd foot to foot, head to head" (117). Again Plath uses the drama of a classical text, but even in casting herself as Electra, the spirit of vengefulness is absent. In a revealing admission of her own poetic strategy, she writes, "I borrow the stilts of an old tragedy," and what replaces revenge in this version of the story is an increasing sense of guilt. As the poem begins, the speaker asserts that she "had nothing to do with guilt" upon the death of the father, but by the end of the poem a guilt has developed that is so strong that the speaker blames herself for the father's death, and asks his forgiveness. The poem concludes with these lines:

I am the ghost of an infamous suicide,  
My own blue razor rusting in my throat.  
O pardon the one who knocks for pardon at  
Your gate, father—your hound-bitch, daughter, friend.  
It was my love that did us both to death. (117)

As in Berryman's *Dream Song 42*, it is once again the survivor who is left to pick up the tab, and the resulting guilt is so strong that the speaker presents herself as joining the father in death. Berryman sounds a similar note in *Dream Song 235*, his elegy for Ernest Hemingway, another suicide haunted by a father's suicide: "Mercy! my father; do not pull the trigger / or all my life I'll suffer from your anger / killing what you began" (254).

In this and other poems Berryman presents suicide by the father as a curse and a legacy, "a bad example, murder of oneself / the final death, in a paroxysm, of love" (254). Is the act an outburst of love, or a symptom of an insidious, pathological disease? Another poem written after Hemingway's suicide, *Dream Song 34*, conflates the deaths of Hemingway, his father, Henry's father, and the recounting by Berryman's mother of his father's death, a story which, from the poet's perspective, was contradictory from one telling to the next. Finally, amidst this swirl of associations, the poem concludes with Henry identifying with Hemingway's pre-suicide anguish:

... it's so I broke down here, in his mind  
whose sire as mine one same way—I refuse  
hoping the guy go home. (38)

Berryman's analogues for Henry's suffering are often other survivors of parental suicide, or even suicides themselves, including Plath in *Dream Song 172*. Beginning with the line "Your face broods from my table, Suicide," the poem generalizes Plath's death as emblematic of a long line of fellow writers who have preceded her, and Henry, in death.

p,  
long falls your exit all repeatingly,  
a poor exemplum, one more suicide  
to stack upon the others  
till stricken Henry with his sisters & brothers  
suddenly gone pauses to wonder why he  
alone breasts the wronging tide. (191)

This attitude is a part of Henry's courtship with death, a "stricken" form of mourning akin to the feeling of abandonment upon the father's death.

Plath's earliest poem on what she termed "my father-sea god-muse" is "Full Fathom Five," and it is one of her most essential statements of loss. The poem's first line, sounding a note which will be echoed in nearly all the later poems on the lost father, emphasizes the father's inscrutability and literal inaccessibility: "Old man, you surface seldom" (92). Succeeding lines go on to associate the absent father with the vast sea and its ceaseless rhythms, the line of the tide troped as "wrinkling skeins / Knotted" (92). The familiar elegiac gesture of associating the rhetoric of loss with weaving or fabric is part of the suggestion here, in addition to the idea of the sea as a source, both life-giving and destroying. In the curved line of the surf's foam, figured as the father's hair, "survives / The old myth of origins / Unimaginable."

Plath continues to associate the father with the landscape in subsequent stanzas, first as frozen mountains of ice, deepening the sense of cold separation and danger. She presents herself as attempting to navigate a threatening sea course, one not easily measured, understood, or even contemplated: "All obscurity / Starts with a danger: / Your dangers are many" (92). Then, in a set of lines anticipating the difficulty in accepting the father's death expressed in "Electra on Azalea Path," she refers to that death as "rumors," which she can only "half-believe" (93). His powerful though infrequent resurfacing from the sea puts the rumours to rest, at least momentarily, but his visage is so stone-like as to defy the weather, as if he is beyond time and the elements. Ultimately, as the poem moves toward its powerful conclusion, the ghost-figure of the father asserts its absolute dominion: "You defy questions; / You defy other godhood." The speaker is fated to course the "kingdom's border" repeatedly, "Exiled to no good." This sense of the repeated but frustrated effort to access the father will become a theme in all the father-poems to come, especially "The Colossus" and "Electra on Azalea Path." In the final two lines of "Full Fathom Five," the speaker articulates the stifling feeling of oppression in the wake of the father's death, and the almost desperate desire to join him:

Father, this thick air is murderous. I  
would breathe water. (93)

The ghost of the father as brutal oppressor reappears in the form of the "boot in the face" of "Daddy," the retreat and eventual self-accusation in the opening and closing lines of "Electra on Azalea Path," and the single-line stanza from "The Beekeeper's Daughter": "My heart under your foot, sister of a stone" (118). The same frightening image is employed by Berryman in Dream Song 241, which begins with the line, "Father being the loneliest word in the one language," and progresses to:

Wicked & powerful, shy Henry lifted his head with an offering.  
Boots greeted him and it. (260)

No doubt this sense of being physically brutalized by the death of the father is what leads to the violent, vengeful outbursts of poems like "Daddy" and Dream Song 284. Although psychic and even physical suffering by the survivor, in the form of grief, has always been one of the conventions of elegiac mourning, the psychological violence perpetrated by the deceased, the dead as active oppressor, is an aspect of the modern elegy inaugurated by Berryman and Plath.

Much early criticism of Plath's work took its cue from Judith Kroll's claim that the apparently personal poetry is actually part of a larger "timeless mythic system" meant to present the parochial as impersonal, or at least universal (2). More recently, however, the attention given by Marjorie Perloff and others to Ted Hughes's drastic rearrangement of Plath's intended sequence of the *Ariel* poems clarifies the acutely personal nature of even the final poems, so compact and dense with their cool, precise imagery. Certainly Plath did mythologize the loss of her father in more traditionally mythic terms than did Berryman, but both poets construct a dramatically personal mythos of loss. Each casts the poet-speaker as central character in a recurring drama of struggle, a drama that serves to fuel creativity. Part of what Berryman meant in the handwritten note on a draft of Song 42 was that "an anger helps" by stimulating verse. For Henry, the loss of the father is the "departure" of Dream Song I that colours all subsequent events in the long verse-story of Henry's struggles, but it is also the impetus for the writing of 384 more Songs.<sup>7</sup> Other types of loss throughout the Songs, both specific and generic, are all framed in reference to this specific, personal loss. The

same is true for Plath in the sense that it is the loss of the father to which she keeps returning in her work, a loss not worked through, but reworked, repeatedly. Earlier elegies in both the British and American tradition were largely written as attempts at closure, repeating the motif of the turn toward "pastures new" sounded at the end of Milton's "Lycidas." But for Berryman and Plath, poetic mourning becomes almost obsessive, a sort of wellspring for poetic creation, making it possible to read their elegies as sequences of poems centred around the same figure and theme. With Berryman, it is quite plausible to read that figure, the father, and that theme, loss of the father, as the overarching motif of the entire Dream Song series.

One of Henry's most poignant acts of mourning occurs in Dream Song 76, one of the rare Songs with a title: "Henry's Confession." The very notion of "confessing" to sorrow is in itself odd, suggesting again that some sort of blame for a father's loss be placed on the survivor. Rather than presenting grieving as a natural response to a loved one's death, "confession" implies wrongdoing, transgression. As the poem opens, Henry asks his nameless friend why things seem to have been going so smooth lately. The friend, whom Berryman once characterized as a "Job's comforter" figure, explains to Henry that part of his uncharacteristic tranquillity might be the result of laying off the booze, women, and long telephone conversations. Henry disagrees, and, using one of the more striking metaphors in all of the Dream Songs, pours out his sense of emptiness:

—If life is a handkerchief sandwich,

In a modesty of death I join my father  
who dared so long ago leave me.

A bullet on a concrete stoop  
close by a smothering sea  
spreadeagled on an island, by my knee. (83)

Life as a "handkerchief sandwich" is Henry's characteristic summation of his utter aloneness. Of course the handkerchief connotes sadness and tears, as well as the attempt to muffle one's crying. At the same time, appearing in the form of a sandwich, the handkerchief of grief purports to "help" the

griever by affording sustenance, in the form of food. But how can this be, when biting into this metaphorical sandwich once again leaves an empty, blank taste in the mouth?

In characterizing death as "a modesty," Henry cuts against his tendency to present the father's death as an act of defiance, or a conscious abandonment of others, as he does in several other Songs. The "modesty" of death suggests a more lonely sort of retreat, a quiet act of self-effacement as opposed to a loud gesture designed to frighten, or garner attention. This is the sort of death-gesture that Henry may wish to emulate, as, in his state of lonely depression, he decides to "join" his father. His friend, in an ironic gesture that reinforces the sense of Henry's suffering being so private as to be inaccessible, offers him a handkerchief for comfort. Of course this is the last thing that Henry needs, having tasted too often the emptiness of grief. Still, the friend attempts to dance Henry off the stage, as he does at several other points in the sequence of Songs, proposing a stroll by the "beautiful sea," the same sea that Henry has just described as "smothering," the symbolic representation of the vast void that overwhelmed his father, and threatens to overwhelm him. In a haunting, ambiguous final line, Henry responds to his friend's suggestion by saying: "I saw nobody coming, so I went instead." But where? Perhaps Henry alludes to going into death, or walking into the sea itself, or openly embracing grief, giving expression to his sorrow. It is significant that this is the penultimate Song in the initial volume of *77 Dream Songs* published in 1964, closing Henry's story at present for the reader, until Henry's reappearance with an additional 308 Songs in 1968. In the next and final poem, Song 77, Henry is indeed getting ready to depart, perhaps joining his father in the void: "his head full / & his heart full, he's making ready to move on."

In gauging poetic expression of loss in mid-century American poetry, a reader encounters varied attempts to work within, and yet extend, the genre of elegy. While many of the conventions of the pastoral elegy tradition continue to surface, American elegies since 1950 tend to be shorter, more personal lyrics. Among poets coming to maturity during this period, Berryman and Plath are the most daring in their reworkings of the genre. Refiguring conventions of mourning into classical analogues, personal mythologies, macabre fantasies, stark expressions of jealousy, anger, and even hatred, they challenge what had previously been associated with the

work of mourning. Bold and daring in their explorations of the innermost recesses of the private psyche, they present memorable characters, voices, and metaphors in treating the theme of loss, one of the major sources for expression in verse.

#### NOTES

1. John Berryman archive, University of Minnesota Libraries, Special Collections. My thanks to Kate Donahue for permission to quote from the archive.
2. The film is part of the Berryman archive at the University of Minnesota.
3. Berryman archive, University of Minnesota Libraries.
4. Of course Berryman, though anything but a casual reader, may, like so many, have been caught up by the dramatic details of Plath's final days and eventual suicide.
5. Plath's controversial use of Holocaust imagery in her poetry has been thoughtfully analyzed in several places, perhaps most notable in: Jacqueline Rose's *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991); Susan Gubar's "Prosopopoeia and Holocaust Poetry in English: The Case of Sylvia Plath," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2000): 191-215; Harriet L. Parnet's *The Terror of Our Days: Four American Poets Respond to the Holocaust* (Bethlehem [PA]: Lehigh UP, 2001); Robin Peel's *Writing Back: Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics* (Madison [NJ]: Associated University Presses, 2002); and Amy Hungerford's *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2003).
6. For further discussion of what Berryman termed his "programmatic" for the overall themes and movements of *The Dream Songs*, see my essay "John Berryman's 'Programmatic' for *The Dream Songs* and an Instance of Revision," *Journal of Modern Literature* 23.3/4 (2000): 429-39.
7. Berryman's short fiction, limited to four short stories, is also crucial to an understanding of his vision of loss and regeneration. See my essay "John Berryman's Short Fiction: Elegy and Enlightenment," *Studies in Short Fiction* 30.3 (1993): 309-16.