

## Thomas Gardner: On "Dream Song 5"

[Gardner quotes the second stanza.]

On a plane, passing over a statue of the virgin atop a mountain, Henry is so excited when the clouds clear and she seems to drop down a ray of light that he claims the plane's turbulence as his own inner rocking and bucking. This feeling of union seems so powerful that when Henry apologizes to a lady he bumped in the turbulence he seems also to be talking to the virgin ? who answers back! The third stanza, backpedaling, establishes a middle ground between the two ? essentially, the middle ground that Henry will seek to inhabit throughout The Dream Songs:

[Gardner quotes the last stanza.]

Each pair of lines in this stanza shows Henry as both "free and determined": he is in "de netting" but sings; he is like Crèvecoeur, author of Letters from an American Farmer ? limited by his heart and the crazy land but farming nonetheless; or he is a newborn, carrying an image of the dead with him even as he is told "De Day?s Yo? Own." In each case, both action and limitation are inexorably linked.

from Thomas Gardner, "John Berryman?s Dream Songs," Chapter 1 in *Discovering Ourselves in Whitman: The Contemporary American Long Poem* (Urbana: U Illinois P, 1989), 37. Copyright 1989 University of Illinois Press.

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### **Publication Status:**

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### **Author:**

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