

## Joel Conarroe: On "Dream Song 5"

[Conarroe quotes the first stanza.]

As in many of the poems, the peculiar language, which adds a comic tone to the whisky broodings, presents no obstacles to a reader's comprehension. Henry, sitting at a bar (perhaps The Brass Rail [in Minneapolis]), is reflected in a mirror, which is some distance from his glass of bourbon. He likens himself to St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death, and sees himself as "getting even" for his own martyrdom by being at odds with God, and by "getting stoned" in the bar. The "getting even" is played against "was odd," and "at odds," producing a play on "odds and evens." The cruel references to his wife is softened if we notice Henry's habitual baby-talk, as in number 114 ("Henry is weft on his own") and translate "wife" to "life," so that the bitter comment is also self-directed. (It is curious that he also uses "wif," which makes a play with "wife," but not "nuffing." It is never possible to predict exactly where Henry's verbal inventions will take him.)

from Joel Conarroe , John Berryman: An Introduction to the Poetry (New York: Columbia U P, 1977), 100-101. Copyright 1977 Columbia University Press.

### **Publication Status:**

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### **Author:**

Joel Conarroe [3]

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