

Edward Mendelson: On "Dream Song 29"

This song, number 29, exemplifies in an unusually clear and regular manner the paratactic method by which almost all the songs are organized. The first sestet describes an experience in intensely private terms; the "thing" is on Henry's heart, the cough "in Henry's ears." In the second sestet he notices or remembers the world outside, and does so through a metaphor ("a grave Sieneese face") whose vehicle at least is publicly accessible, although the tenor is only an unspecified guilty "reproach." Rather than locating sound "in Henry's ears," it is the bells, outside, that speak; and although blind, Henry at least "attends." Finally, in the last sestet, he acknowledges almost in defeat the social world of others, all those who persist in surviving despite his dreams of violence (the cause of the "reproach" is now identified), who remind him that the thing on his heart is only private. This neat enactment of Husserlian epistemology (awareness of self, things, others) recurs throughout The Dream Songs. But often in reverse order ? with the awareness of others narrowing down to awareness of self ? or in some other variant pattern.

From Edward Mendelson, "How to Read Berryman's ?Dream Songs?" in Robert B. Shaw, Ed. *American Poetry Since 1960: Some Critical Perceptions* (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1974).

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