

FOUR POEMS



John Berryman

NOTE: *These poems by John Berryman were found among his papers at the University of Minnesota Manuscripts Division between September and December 1998. The poems are from a collection of hundreds of previously unpublished poems and fragments which were deposited in the University of Minnesota shortly after Berryman's death in 1972. William Meredith, to whom the first of the poems printed here is dedicated, was a long-standing friend of the poet's; his Effort at Speech: New and Selected Poems was published by the Northwestern University Press in 1997. Although the poems here are undated in the manuscripts, it is likely, given their subject matter, that Berryman wrote the second and third pieces during his time in Ireland in 1966-67. The fourth piece, "PSO", was written in response to a letter Berryman received from the Poetry Society of Oklahoma; Berryman was born in McAlester, Oklahoma, on 25 October, 1914. The poems are published here by kind permission of Kate Donahue Berryman.*

PHILIP COLEMAN

[THREE DREAM SONGS]

[1]

(to William Meredith)

Perishing Henry tho't each day of death,
oblivion, all his enterprises ceased,
avenues of loves gone.
He hoped not to die by fire or a stifling of breath:
please let him in sleep go, brave not in the least
after his 50 years' courage in the sun.

His wife said: I don't believe in that god of rewards & punishment,
Oh the hell with that, his Catholic lady stated.
Henry was a Catholic too,
the worst in 18 counties. I am aware
my lady too will die, and her long feet
point up in a coffin.

Now point them up, my dear Sir; & say to me,
as a fact, what in your *knowledge* remains, see,
of the vast & awful lost.
We better study the *Phaedo* once more, kids.
The Eaters & Chroniclers are with us, & the skids.
I haven't felt so bad since Mr. Frost.

[2]

Telegrafa an Phoist. The silly Irish
like the silly Indians, when few understand one language,
want to use two,
multiplying idiocy, rife in both lands,
deserted now by the intelligent English
to their own stupid fates,

Bengali arrogance, cheap Dublin pride,
neither country can make a decent match
& matches cost money here
besides not striking, besides not striking. Catch
my ball with the muscles which are down your arms,
not up in your head.

Irish litter. William Meredith could bring his car here
& spend his whole holiday picking up Irish trash,
tho' how would he tell the trash from the rest?
They don't even stand up when women leave.
Brace yourself, William: you have a country before you,
uncivilized.

[3]

I puff: away the smoke floats, here indoors:
a north African brothel, crawling with whores
in the middle of Dublin,
Tangiers in Ireland, speaking Irish please
wolfish with passion, popularity is disgusting,
& we have not often to put up with it,
and we have not often to put up with it,—
the eyes topaz, in the forest lost
where trackers lost the scent,
elsewhere in Ireland: every time most people praise me
I figure there must be something wrong with my style,
trudging away at perfection.

One Jesuit tortured here, one Frenchman tortured there,
Fr. Hopkins, M. Rimbaud,
I kiss these heroes: we have fought in vain
but at any rate we fought
& gave our souls & legs for one high thought
which perhaps nobody will ever think again.

PSO

Oh, lady Effa Alexander-Rosebloom
is Regional Vice-President, North Central,
of the Poetry Society of Oklahoma,
and Emma Kломann Stealey is either a Sponsor

or a Study Group—baby, I can't tell which—
and the 15th of October is Poetry Day
and members & friends are urged to come & see
the fluid works of Oklahoma singers

collected on the fifth floor, OCU.
I wonder if they're invested [*sic*] in any of *this*
ex-Sooner rhymers, though I think some bird
some months ago instructed me that I

too had been created—elected—something...
But you know what: I bet I never get
the Emma Klomann Stealey Rose Garden award
(ten bucks, subtracting one for entry fee)

in spite of my Anadarko swoop & slash
& far-away transcontinental wails.
O fellow-migrants Belva, Novalene,
Izola & Goldie, Iola & Allene,
Leota! Maxyne! Wilda & Ruama!
Laressa Lilibel Lela, Tressie Mae
and Tamar dark down your State capital
or blonde, forgive my transports & my gall.

© Kate Donahue Berryman