

"There sat down, once, a thing on Henry's heart".

On Mourning and Melancholia in John Berryman's Dream Songs.

In his 1917 essay, Freud distinguishes between the "normal" state of mourning and the "pathological" condition of a melancholic. Both mourning [*Trauer*] and melancholia [*Melancholie*] result from a sense of lack but melancholia is viewed as a failure of mourning, or an inability to get over absence: "In mourning the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia, it is the ego that has become so." With time, the melancholic is unable to tell what exactly had been lost: Freud relates melancholia to the loss of an object that is "withdrawn from consciousness." (204-205)



Several Freudian characteristics of melancholia mirror the symptoms displayed by John Berryman's hero throughout *The Dream Songs*. Revealing the patterns which regulate Henry's expressions of unspeakable loss, I propose to approach melancholia as inevitably tied to his narrative as a subject. I will talk about the constitutive power of loss in Berryman's poem and posit that the pervasive absence haunting the volume in the form of his dead father and departed friends points to a loss of a different, larger order. Consequently, the complex relationship of loss and language in Berryman will be identified as a necessary condition for the existence of both the speaking subject and the culture that produced it.

Sources:

Freud, Sigmund. *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*. London: Penguin Books, 2005.

Anna Warso has written mainly about the 20th century American poetry and prose (John Ashbery, Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman, Toni Morrison, Don DeLillo) but her research interests include also theoretical aspects of popular culture and science fiction. She has co-edited two essay collections: *Culture(s) and Authenticity: The Politics of Translation and the Poetics of Imitation* and *Interpreting Authenticity: Translation and Its Others*, published with Peter Lang, as well as the forthcoming *Protest and Dissent. Conflicting Spaces in Translation and Culture*. As a translator she has worked, among others, with *Literatura na Świecie*, *Teksty Drugie* and *Kultura Gniewu*. At SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities she teaches seminars in American literature and workshops in translation, and most recently a course focused on the category of monstrosity and its textual manifestations.