What is John Berryman as “Huffy Henry” hiding from the reader in Dream Song 1? Since his day has come, my reading does not attempt to put such an unappeasable poem to rest, instead I begin by getting into bed with the poet and his alter ego. But does Dream Song 1 allow its future readers, who alternate with black night, to become the poet’s second self when he is gone? Among these second selves, in the third line of the first stanza, “I see his point, – a trying to put things over”; not trying to put things down or right but “over”. In the final two lines of the second stanza, “I don’t see how Henry, pried / open for all the world to see, survived”. As I pry into the word “pried” I find Berryman’s “I” has already pried it open. Voices speaking the poem anticipate how I would open it up to look closely at it, but “Then came a departure”. Dream Song 1 is portentous and oxymoronic in the manner of this line since a departure that came must have already departed for that which is to come.

This subtly foolish poem came to us as we depart from it; when we would interpret the poem as a departure that came from our explications to come; but it is already prised apart for us to peer into as it is “trying to put things over”. Is Berryman trying to put one over? “I see his point”, which is not a full point but two points – a comma, then a dash – denoting the caesura and dividing the end-stopped line, which ends with “over”. But “I don’t see” how my reading can have survived the enjambment “pried / open” as the poem puts not things but its leg over, enjambing the expression, and prying Henry open for all the world to pry into, when all the world can see that all the world has already left Henry’s side – “and empty grows every bed”.

Although “Huffy Henry hid the day” with no one at his side to put his leg over, the poem remains an invitation to peer into his lonely
bed and even to prise him out of it. My suspicion is that this invitation is put “wicked & away” over my response because of the thought that I thought I “could *do it*”. Then my reading of the poem complains: “But he should have come out and talked.” Instead the poem responds to another kind of voice, which commands, “Write!”.

Dream Song 1 is a scrupulous poem that pragmatically allows graduate students, associate professors, professional critics and all kinds of academics to empathize with it. But, it turns out, the poem is written in secret for the dead whom Berryman loves; it is sung for the ones that he believes will return to read him as posterity: the ideal audience that came as a departure. I ask, is it possible for posterity not to empathize with Dream Song 1? Can I stop projecting my personality or critical consciousness into the poem and die out of it, in order to join the readers whom Berryman has in mind when he writes? Finally, are the dead, whom the poet loves, reading Dream Song 1 as posterity or is the poem movingly but merely empathetic?

Luckily for us, since we are not dead, we find posterity, conversing through the voices of earlier poets, in the sycamore of the third stanza: “Once in a sycamore I was glad / all at the top, and I sang.” I wonder if the Berryman of the summer of 1947 in Sonnet 10, imagining Lise in her “stone home where the sycamore / More than I see you sees you”, would have understood that this sycamore is a different kind of tree – of a different genus – from Tennyson’s large-leafed sycamore in section XCV of *In Memoriam A. H. H.*:

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1 The injunction “Write!” is part of “an old saying” or conversation between two voices, quoted by Søren Kierkegaard and repeated by Berryman in an interview when he was asked why being a poet is “just something you *do*”: “Write! – For whom? – For the dead whom thou didst love. – Will they read me? – Aye, for they return as posterity” (see “An Interview with John Berryman” by John Plotz, *et al.*, in *Berryman’s Understanding: Reflections on the Poetry of John Berryman*, ed. Harry Thomas, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988, 17). For Kierkegaard’s meditations on this old saying, see Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling / Repetition* (1843), eds and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, 244, and *Works of Love* (1847), eds and trans. Hong and Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, 362. In the interview Berryman maintains that the saying is originally from the work of Johann Georg Hamann, but the Kierkegaard scholar George Pattison has assured me the quotation is actually from Johann Gottfried von Herder. See Herder, *Abhandlungen und Briefe über schöne Literatur und Kunst*, in his *Sämtliche Werke. Zur schönen Literatur und Kunst*, I-XX, Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1827-30, II, 45.