Holy the Hideous Human Angels! For Everything That Lives is Holy:
Ecstasies and Energy in the Poetry of Blake and Ginsberg.
On a summer afternoon in 1948, the young poet Allen Ginsberg sat by an open window in his Harlem flat, reading William Blake’s collection of poems, “Songs of Innocence and Experience.” As he read the short poem *Ah, Sunflower!* Ginsberg heard Blake’s voice fill the room, reading the same poem aloud, as well as *The Sick Rose* and *Little Girl Lost*. In this moment, Ginsberg “saw the universe unfold in [his] mind” (Notes Written, 229). Ginsberg carried this moment with him throughout his poetic life, referring to Blake often in his own work, both directly and indirectly.

Visionary moments aside, Blake was a natural muse for Ginsberg. Both poets fought the conventions—poetic and societal—of their times, both poets felt the natural holiness of the corporeal world, and both poets wrote with an energy which acts on the reader, which does not stay confined to the page. In this essay, I examine the resonances between two specific poems, Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Ginsberg’s *Howl*, tracing the energy and the sense of motion central to both poems, and examining their respective uses of and engagement with religious dialogues.

In response to *Paradise Lost*, Blake writes: “The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (6). This is written as a “note” in a section of the long poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in which Blake discusses the other side of the story of Satan’s “fall,” arguing that to Satan, “the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss” (5). In response to those who

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1 This account was given both in Ginsberg’s own “Notes Written on Finally Recording Howl,” as well as by Jonah Raskin in *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg Fifty Years Later*. It is also a story I encountered before beginning my research, and exists, in various forms, in the general lore of the Beat Generation.

2 As not all sections of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* have numbered lines, I use Plate numbers (which run from 1-27) as a reference point throughout this paper.
read Blake’s note on Milton as a misinterpretation of *Paradise Lost*, Alicia Ostriker writes

Blake...proposes a radical view of all poetry which might be summarized as follows: All art depends on opposition between God and the devil, reason and energy. The true poet (the good poet) is necessarily the partisan of energy, rebellion, and desire, and is opposed to passivity, obedience, and the authority of reason, laws, and institutions. To be a poet requires energy. (Dancing at the Devil’s Party, 580)

Here, Ostriker takes up those who see Blake’s work as incorrectly interpreting Milton’s message as one of favoring the Devil over God. Ostriker argues that Blake rather sees Milton as “of the Devil’s party,” that is to say, of Energy, which Blake associates with Hell, rather than Reason, which Blake associates with Heaven. To be “the partisan of energy” is not necessarily to argue on Satan’s behalf. From Blake, Ostriker argues that “to be a poet requires energy,” implying that there is something in the production of poetry which requires an energy not constrained by reason, that to produce poetry is to act on, not observe the world.

That poetry can contain energy, and not simply be about energy, is very important to Blake’s work. In examining more recent poets, such as Walt Whitman, Ostriker expands on Blake’s argument, asserting that Dualities are a human invention which we impose on the world and on ourselves in the effort to tame and dominate whatever we conceive of as other. Meanwhile the world remains a continuum, infinite in all directions. The artist, then, defies (our, his, her) impulse to dominate by containing both halves of any argument, and by the attempt to imitate the continuum. (Dancing, 582)

Ostriker takes her reading of Blake’s argument, that it is the poet’s job to address the dualities of reason/energy (while on the side of energy), and argues that it is the poet’s job to attempt to encompass plurality. While Ostriker moves to contemporary poets (such as June Jordan) in her further examination of plurality, I want to argue that the
complexity of Blake’s dualities in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is so great, that they might better be described by Ostriker’s idea of pluralities. Blake is a “partisan of energy,” (Ostriker, 580), and the specific energy with which he engages is, in the words of Colin Manlove, an “energy of tension” (148). This energy of tension emerges from the interaction of dualities, and creates a unique and darkly energetic landscape. Ginsberg, like Blake, has that energy which Ostriker reads as required of poets, and in *Howl*, which itself uses contradictions to create an “energy of tension” and bring forth pluralities, he seems to speak from the landscape created by Blake.

William Blake, both an author and a printmaker, wrote and etched *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* between 1791 and 1793, largely as a response to Emmanuel Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, published in 1758. Blake’s work was originally engraved onto twenty-seven metal plates, and published as both the words and pictures. The textual plates fall into larger sections: “The Argument,” which contains a short poem followed by a statement; “The Voice of the Devil,” a list of arguments and counter-arguments; “Memorable Fancies,” first-person narrations of a visit to Hell and interactions with angels; “The Proverbs of Hell,” a section formatted like the Book of Proverbs; and “A Song of Liberty,” a poem broken down into numbered lines. These sections are interspersed with Blake’s own illustrations. The illustrations often included nudity, yet the hand-engraved nature of Blake’s work made it expensive to distribute, and Blake sold copies mostly to friends. Blake’s biographer, G.E. Bentley Jr., acknowledges the “challenges aplenty to morality and to the Church of England,” yet citing the lack of contemporary critical material surrounding Blake’s work, notes that “the roaring of Rintrah in the introductory poem seems to have frightened most of Blake’s
contemporaries who heard it” (136) into silence. Thus, while Blake’s work was considered highly controversial in his time, it was not distributed widely enough to stir up a reaction.

At several points throughout The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake alludes to Swedenborg, author of Heaven and Hell, an exhaustive picture of Heaven as Swedenborg supposedly experienced it through conversations with Angels. The work was published in 1758, and inspired a new movement within the Church, called the “New” or “Swedenborgian” Church. Heaven and Hell is an attempt at an accurate, rather than fanciful, portrait. Colin Manlove, who discusses both Blake and Swedenborg in his book Christian Fantasy, writes:

The picture [Swedenborg] gives of heaven fit into an increasingly ‘anthropocentric’ emphasis that was appearing in other pictures of it, from Milton onwards… and he is of course important for us as being in many ways both the stimulus and the provocation of Blake, particularly in Blake’s antitype to his work, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Swedenborg reasserts the divorce of heaven and hell. He gives hell but a fifth as much space as he allots to describing heaven, as if to emphasis its triviality and uninterestingness. (132)

Swedenborg’s work was revolutionary in arguing for the importance of balance, for the necessity of hell as an opposite to heaven, but as Manlove shows, Swedenborg deemed hell considerably less important than heaven. Blake thus both responds to and against Swedenborg’s work, building on Swedenborg’s idea of ‘equilibrium’ while bringing hell into the light.

Over one hundred and sixty years after The Marriage of Heaven and Hell went into circulation, the publication of Howl elicited enormous controversy. Ginsberg wrote Howl in 1955 and delivered the poem to an audience at the Six Gallery Reading in San Francisco on October 7th of the same year. In 1956, Lawrence Ferlenghetti, Ginsberg’s
friend and central Beat Movement member, published *Howl* in *Pocket Poet Series: Howl and Other Poems*, along with *Footnote to Howl* (placed immediately after Part III) and several other Ginsberg poems including *Sunflower Sutra* and *A Supermarket in California*. In March of 1957, U.S. customs official seized over five hundred copies of the book coming in from the press in London; due to the poem’s explicit references to drugs and sex, as well as its use of foul language, Captain William Hanrahan of the San Francisco Juvenile Department brought an obscenity trial against Ferlenghetti. The presiding judge, Judge Clayton Horn, came down on the side of *Howl*, writing in his October 3rd judgment that the poem “presents a picture of a nightmare world...an indictment against...[a] modern society destructive of the best qualities of human nature,” and that it “ends in a plea for holy living.”

Clayton thus saw “redeeming social importance” in the poem, and ended his judgment with the motto “evil to him who sees evil,” implying that those who saw evil in the pages of Ginsberg’s poem were looking for it, and finding the evil not in the poem but in themselves. The obscenity trial ultimately brought more publicity to *Howl*, and most likely helped in Ginsberg’s success.

While *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*’s limited early circulation prevented it from garnering the same level of controversy as *Howl*, like Ginsberg’s poem it carried with it a radical critique of a society which stifles “the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity” (Blake, 6). In *The Daybreak Boys*, Gregory Stephenson compares *Howl*’s indictment of society to Blake’s, specifically in the poem *Jerusalem*. Stephenson notes that “the acceptance of the body is essential for Ginsberg...throughout ‘Howl’ sexual repression or disgust with the body or denial of the senses”

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3 Horn’s statement as found in *Howl Fifty Years Later*. Clayton’s final statement has an interesting resemblance to Blake’s “the eye altering alters all,” from his poem *The Mental Traveler*, circa 1803.
are a form of Moloch, Ginsberg's representation of the oppressing society. In *Footnote*, "body and spirit are affirmed and reconciled" (Stephenson, 57), creating an overturning of societal limits on the body similar to that which Blake performs when he declares that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul" (4). Both poets pursue not only a freedom of the body, but an elevation of the body to the level of the soul, and both poets do so with a fierce and often dark sense of energy.

Like *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Howl* is divided into sections, each of which takes its own approach to the use of language. Ginsberg divides *Howl* into three numbered sections, although he refers to *Footnote to Howl* as an "extra variation of the form of Part II" (Notes Written, 230). Structurally, Part II and *Footnote* are similar, each piece a sort of exuberant list of things and names and places, everywhere full of exclamation marks. Part II builds off of, and assigns attributes to, Moloch, the embodiment of all that is evil in America. *Footnote* does nearly the opposite, building off the word 'holy,' enumerating all that is holy in life, and expressing the idea that everything in life is holy. That these two segments are so similar in style yet seem so different in message is perhaps another suggestion of the complex interaction between the "heaven" and "hell" of the world.

Part I is a single sentence built off the opening phrase, a collective journey of Ginsberg's "best minds" (I, 1) through sceneries both beautiful and hellish. It culminates with those minds rising "reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz" (I, 77) and "with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years," (II, 78) thus ending the first section with a suggestion of a reincarnation
deeply tied to that poetic energy which put Milton in "the Devil's party." Part III builds off the phrase, "I'm with you in Rockland" and is written in much shorter lines than the other sections. It is a lament to Carl Solomon, a friend of Ginsberg's and fellow poet who spent much of his adult life in mental hospitals, and an expression of solidarity with those outcast members of society, those members of the Devil’s party relegated to America’s madhouses. Were it not for the hopeful and exuberant tone of the Footnote, Howl would end with a note of utter hopelessness; the addition of the Footnote returns us to the shimmering language of Part I and complicates a poem of despair, bringing it into that Blakean realm of the marriage between realms.

The first section of Howl begins, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness," and continues in a single sentence built off the word "who." Early on in the rhythmic string, the "best minds" are described as those "who passed through universities...hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy" (I, 6). Ginsberg casts this "Blake-light" over his poem, a light which seems to be made up of the meeting of contraries so prevalent in Blake's work, and which manifests itself in Ginsberg's as the meeting of tragedy, joy, and comedy, of the sacred and the profane, and of the spiritual and the corporeal.

While most of Howl chronicles the largely tragic lives of Ginsberg's fellow poets, the poem itself is full of oddly radiant moments. Phrases such as "angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of the night," (I, 3) "who bared their brains to Heaven," (I, 5) the "kind king

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4 When referring to lines from Howl, I will use I, II, or III to indicate the respective sections and F to indicate the Footnote, and am counting lines by long lines (i.e., those lines that are not indented), as opposed to the lines that appear in traditional print versions, including the one I am using.
light of the mind” (I, 13) the “ride from Battery to holy Bronx” (I, 14) and “bop kabbalah,” (I, 24) “supernatural ecstasy;” (I, 26) being “fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists” (I, 36) and “blown by those human seraphim,” (I, 37) all glow with a light that seems to come from the tensions created by the antithetical juxtapositions of language. There is the religious language: angelheaded, heavenly, Heaven, holy, kabbalah, saintly, seraphim; there is the language of light: burning, starry, kind king light; and there is a much more earthly language oriented in the city and the flesh: machinery, Battery, Bronx, fucked in the ass, blown. Howl is not only a poem of despair; it is an energetic, living, buzzing, burning poem, and that energy comes not only from its forward-moving rhythm but from the images through which it moves.

The language of Footnote to Howl imitates language from both the Christian and Jewish tradition. The opening lines of “holy, holy, holy...” are a translation of the Hebrew “kadosh, kadosh, kadosh,” the opening words of the Kedusha, a prayer which precedes the opening of the ark and involves physically raising oneself on one’s feet to be closer to God. They also mirror the Latin “sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,” the opening of the Catholic prayer which, similar to the Kedusha, precedes the Eucharist. Thus the opening lines of The Footnote to Howl mirror two prayers, which, in both Judaism and Christianity, open up the holiness of God (contained, respectively, in the Torah and in Communion) to the congregation as a whole. Appropriately, Footnote to Howl enacts this opening up of holiness by applying the word “holy” to a range of ordinary and extraordinary pieces of life.

At an aesthetic, auditory level, the rhythm of “holy, holy, holy...” builds momentum for Ginsberg’s poem as it does for participants in the act of praying. In a
synagogue, this verbal momentum, accompanied by the physical momentum provided by the rhythmic rocking-forward, builds towards a grand revelation; the Torah, translated as “the teaching,” is the center of knowledge in Judaism, and therefore the center of Judaism, a religion which reveres the act of furthering one’s knowledge. The scrolls are holy, because the scrolls are knowledge, and knowledge is holy. Ginsberg’s chant is a warm-up. The string of “holy”s opens into a list of what is holy:

The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy!
The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand
and asshole holy! (F, 2)

The poem goes on, proclaiming the holiness of everything from “the typewriter” (F, 5) to “the cafeterias filled with millions” (F, 9) to “my mother in the insane asylum” (F, 7).

Not only does the Kedushah welcome the Torah and proclaim the Holiness of God, it also declares that Melo Kol Haaretz Kevodo, “the whole world is filled with [God’s] Glory.”

While the content of Ginsberg’s poem, both the Footnote and the larger work of Howl, violate many tenets of Judaism in its explicit sexuality and in the lauding of man-made objects next to man himself, a creation of God, Footnote is deeply in sync with this idea of universal holiness. Ginsberg lends legitimacy to these claims by rooting his poem in central prayers.

While Howl opens at once into its endless sentence, defying poetic convention immediately, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell begins with a poem that looks like

5 The list-like structure of this section, as well as its focus on the beauty of all things human, also evokes the lyric poetry of Walt Whitman. Thomas F. Merrill explores the structural similarities between Howl and much of Whitman’s working, citing Ginsberg’s use of “who” in Part I as an organizing device much like Whitman’s use of words such as “where” and “when.” Merrill notes that for both poets, “the unit of the poem is decisively the line” (93). The line, rather than the sentence or stanza, is the “unit of sense” (93) for both poets. Merrill urges us to “avoid the impulse to search for a logic or a rational connection of ideas [in Howl],” (93) a plea which resonates with Keats’ Negative Capability, discussed on p 16-17 of this paper.
traditional lyric poetry on the page, arranged in short stanzas with an internal rhyme scheme (death/heath, tomb/bones). The attention we give to a poem, and the conventions which govern lyric poetry, create a protocol for reading different than that for straight prose. As Culler says, “the typographical arrangement [on the page] produces a different kind of attention and releases some of the potential verbal energy of [the words]” (Poetics of the Lyric,163). Culler refers to these specific conventions, which include atemporality, completeness, and symbolic coherence as secondary to the convention of expectation, which Culler describes as “the crucial factor, which can operate effectively even in the absence of the others” (164). That is to say, even if a lyric poem does not follow poetic convention, it will still be read in a way specific to poetry. This special reading allows a specific incident to speak universally, allows strict temporality some free space, and allows what might not make sense in prose to be read as a metaphoric means of addressing truth.

The poem uses its own traditional structure to throw us off just enough to hit us with Blake’s revelation, that “a new heaven is begun” (3). The poem opens:

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burden’d air:
Hungry clouds swag on the deep
Once meek, and in a perilous path
The just man keeps his course along
The vale of death. (2)

While the form of the verse itself may not appear radical, the opening poem is ‘revolutionary’ both in structure and meaning. Structurally, the poem literally creates a cycle, beginning and ending with the strange and powerful lines “Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burden’d air/Hungry clouds swag on the deep.” Within the poem itself, a confusing series of switches take place. The ‘just, meek,’ man who starts on the “perilous
path” is driven out into “perilous climes,” while the “villain [leaves] the paths of ease/to walk in the perilous path,” and “the sneaking serpent walks/in mild humility.” Manlove addresses the cyclical nature of Blake’s opening poem, noting that “what was once perilous and deathly in the path the just man followed was removed” (147). This opens the path to the villain who once walked in the “paths of ease.” Nothing is as it was—while the “just man rages in the wilds,” the serpent is allowed to walk, as if it again has its pre-lapsarian legs. The cyclical nature of the poem seems to confuse this revolution; something has turned, but has it, or will it, turn back? This poem can be further read as a criticism of not just the Bible itself, but those who [claim to] follow it. Manlove argues that expelling the just man “made the path attractive to hypocrites, who find feigning good more attractive that espousing evil,” and that “the poem is both descriptive and prescriptive” (147) in that it describes what has happened and, in its cycling, advocates overturning this new, hypocritical order. By enacting such a confusing series of switches, the poem energetically acts out a revolution, one which completes its own cycle by repeating its opening line. In giving legs to the snake, and thus to the Devil’s party, the poem also creates enough energy to keep that revolution going, thus prescribing that we, too, must keep a revolution going, must never allow ourselves to fall into the poison of standing water.⁶

The opening poem does not primarily seek to overturn the Bible itself. As Manlove notes, it is more about religious hypocrisy. In Don Juan, Moliere writes

⁶ In the Proverbs of Hell, Blake warns us to “Expect poison from standing water” (9), and in one of the “Memorable Fancies,” a harper sings “The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind” (19). Over and over throughout The Marriage, Blake advocates movement and warns against stagnancy.
“Hypocrisy is a fashionable vice, and all fashionable vices pass for virtues” (V.ii).\(^7\) The religious authorities, then, are those most guilty of “vice,” and of cloaking their vices in virtue.\(^8\) The implied religious hypocrisy here, that of ‘wearing’ hypocrisy fashionably rather than outwardly “espousing evil,” (Manlove, 147) opens the door for Blake’s sweeping claims—the inversion of Biblical history and the redefinition of Hell—which follow on the heels of this opening poem. At the same time, the opening poem lacks a certain linear coherency. While Culler’s poetry is “a-temporal” in that a poem written about “yesterday” can “refer to [a] set of possible yesterdays,” (161) the poems he discusses cohere to whatever timeline they establish. Blake’s opening poem does no such thing. That “roses are planted where thorns grow,” and that “then the perilous path was planted” (emphasis mine) plays with temporality and with the meaning of “planted” and “grows.” The switching back and forth between both the tense of the poem and the ways of its characters (“once meek...the just man rages”) creates the tension that permeates the entirety of the work.

Blake upsets categories at every level by beginning with a poem that looks traditional (yet proves not to be so), and then continuing to shift not only in temporality, but in style. Blake’s bold declaration in the second part of “The Argument,” distinguished by a new plate and a new style, comes through with a sense of truth and energy. This second section of “The Argument” appears on the page in a much more straightforward way, more comparable, say, to the short, bold declarations that make up the beginning of Genesis than to other early Romantic poetry. While the opening poem’s arguments can be

\(^7\) I do not know for sure whether Blake read Moliere, but Don Juan was published in 1665, almost 130 years prior to the publication of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and his ideas were certainly in the air by the early 1790’s.

\(^8\) As “shame is pride’s cloak” (7) so it would seem virtue is vice’s cloak.
interpreted with the generosity which the lyric form provides, these declarations ask for a
more straightforward reading. The "new heaven" at once alludes to Swedenborg's
*Heaven and Hell*, and opens up a more thorough inversion of the Old and New
Testaments:

> A new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent, the
> Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his
> writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, and the
> return of Adam into Paradise. (3)

These few lines work very effectively to reverse Biblical history—Edom and Adam
holding central roles in Genesis, Adam as the first man and Edom as the brother of Israel.
The two names, Edom and Adam, are pleasant at an auditory level, perhaps explaining
why Blake chose "Edom" rather than "Esau": Edom is another Hebrew name for Esau,
who is Jakob's twin brother and the child of Isaac and Rebekah. Although Esau was born
first, Jakob, grabbing his brother by the heel as he emerged from the womb, quickly
became the dominant brother. Esau was active, an outdoorsman—perhaps, in a reductive
sense, representative of "energy,"—but Jakob was the clever brother, and bought out
Esau, going on to become "Israel" and the father of Joseph and the Jewish people. In
Blake's "dominion of Edom," Adam is returned to Paradise—reversing the Fall of
Man—and the Bible is effectively turned on its head.

An inversion of the New Testament is also present in these lines. The use of the
number thirty-three at once refers to Christ, thirty-three at the time of his crucifixion, and
to 1758, thirty-three years before Blake began his work, and the year Emanuel
Swedenborg published *Heaven and Hell*. Thus, when Blake writes "And lo! Swedenborg
is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up," (3) he
figures Swedenborg as Christ (who, in his ascent, sat at his tomb with his linen clothes
folded up). This in itself is a Biblical inversion, but when Blake goes on to challenge Swedenborg’s ideas, he implicitly figures himself as challenging Christ.

Having so deftly secured this inversion, Blake addresses what is, essentially, a central theme of Christianity, and of monotheistic religions more generally: the battle between Good and Evil. Swedenborg argued for the necessity of a balance between Good and Evil, suggesting that Balance, rather than a complete overthrow of Hell, should be the Christian Ideal. Blake, however, takes a dramatic step forward, attempting to completely eradicate traditional ideas of “morality” from the equation. In plate three, Blake argues:

Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.
Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (3)

Hell is immediately redefined as “Energy.” While Blake’s initial divisions, necessary contrasts, include “attraction and repulsion” and “love and hate,” these oppositions do not necessarily fall on either side of any line—attraction and love need not fall under the headings of “reason” and “good.” Energy and reason, while opposites to Blake, are both in a way all encompassing. Good and Evil spring from contraries, rather than the contraries following from the existence of Good and Evil. In plate four, Blake cites as “error” the idea that “Energy, called Evil, is alone from the body; & that Reason, called Good, is alone from the Soul” (4). Contraries are essential, but it is the mistake of the “religious” to divide the contraries of life into “good” and “evil,” denouncing evil and thus denouncing a portion of what makes us complete.
That evil is the active implies that so-called “evil” is what drives the world, what
drives both attraction and repulsion, love and hate. In “The Voice of the Devil,” Blake
writes, “Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or
outward circumference of Energy” (4). Here, Energy and Reason are not opposed in the
direct way that, for example, Love and Hate are opposed. Reason is a necessary
constraint on Energy, but Energy is no less necessary, for without it, there would be no
life to constrain. Evil, and thus Hell, are completely redefined, and Hell becomes
something more than a location. These moves sets the stage for the “Proverbs of Hell”
section of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, which, like Ginsberg’s Footnote, mirrors
Biblical language ironically, using the form provided by religion to laud ideas not
accepted by religion.

While Swedenborg’s idea of equilibrium (despite his separation of heaven and
hell) may have given birth to Blake’s idea of ‘marriage,’ Blake was vehemently opposed
to Swedenborg’s concept of the soul. Swedenborg credited man with having a similar
mind to that of angels, but did not believe that mind could be activated until the chains of
the earthly body were gone:

    for the human mind is just as capable of wisdom as the angelic mind, but does not
    become so wise in the world, because is in an earthly body, and in that body its
    spiritual part thinks in a natural manner. It is different when the human mind is
    released from its connexion with the body, for then it no longer thinks naturally
    but spiritually; and when it thinks spiritually its thoughts are undescribable to the
    natural man, and thus it becomes possessed of angelic wisdom. (Manlove, 134)

Swedenborg separates body from soul, viewing body as an impediment to any sort of
divine understanding or true wisdom. Blake refutes this idea:

    All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following errors:
    1. That Man has two real existing principles: Viz: a Body & a Soul…
    But the following Contraries to these are true:
1. Man has no body distinct from his Soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of soul discern’d by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age. (4)

Here, Blake complicates the “contraries” he presented on the previous plate. Previously, “all Bibles [and] sacred codes” have divided the human into Body and Soul, and assigned to the body “Energy, call’d Evil,” (4) and assigned to the soul “Reason, call’d Good” (4). Now, Blake’s Devil (who, we must remember, presides over that “Hell” which is a necessary contrary, not the one which must be overthrown) locates the soul within the body, unlike Swedenborg, who gives man an “angelic mind” which cannot become angelic until it is released from the confines of the body. Furthermore, the body is “a portion of the soul discern’d by the five Senses,” which could mean that the body is something perceived by the soul via the five senses, or a part of the soul which is separated by the senses, which are “the chief inlets of Soul in this age.”  

However we read “discern,” the body is not in opposition to the soul, it is the part of the soul which, through the senses, provides it with experience.

The complication of this “contrary” complicates many other contraries in The Marriage. Regarding the errors causes by “all Bibles or sacred codes,” Blake’s Devil argues that “Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy,” (4) which presents “Energy” and “Reason” (or “Evil” and “Good”) as forces which seem to work both in opposition and together. Without energy, reason would be lifeless, and without reason, energy would be shapeless. It also seems that, as a “circumference,” Reason takes a backseat to Energy, which is life. Thus, Blake’s contraries, sometimes struggling against one another, sometimes working together, are always interacting, always moving. There is a co-existence that cannot quite...
be described in physical terms, a co-existence that provides the energy for perpetual motion, that keeps the world spinning, life moving forward.

The complex interactions between Blake’s contraries generate a tension, an uneasiness, which in turn gives way to energy. The poem chronicles contraries, but it also enacts the “energy of tension” upon the reader, forcing us into discomfort. John Keats suggested the importance of this form of discomfort in a letter to his brother:

[Suddenly] several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement...I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. (Letter, 1817)

It seems that in the case of Marriage, a “Negative Capability” is necessary to come to any sort of understanding. It is the confusion, the uncertainties themselves which arise from the greater work. Jacob Wisgod writes,

Keats would see into the heart of things, "into the heart and nature of Man," as he phrases it in the Mansion-of-Life letter (pp. 143-144). This means to him, as it does to Shakespeare, the maintaining of an open mind, a capacity for change, and an aversion to forming comfortable- but in reality unsatisfying-resolutions and philosophies. (384)

According to this reading of Keats, certainties can only ever be unsatisfying. We must both maintain the ability to “be in uncertainties” (Keats, 1817) and to change even our uncertainties. The uncertainty of negative capability is not the passive uncertainty of being undecided, nor is it neutrality. Rather, it is an acceptance of a lack of finitude, and the ability to understand contrasting ideas. Wisgod picks up on the importance of an open mind and the openness to change, both essential concepts in the Marriage, and in Keats’ words, “reason” seems a limitation. However, Negative Capability seems to be a way to be comfortable in change, whereas Blake pushes us into discomfort, creating energy out of tension, not a way to allow tensions to rest in peace.
One could see negative capability as a means to negotiate between Blake’s proposed contraries and Ostriker’s insistence on pluralities. To be in contraries is to be in two places at once; to be in pluralities is to be in many places at once. To be “in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, 1817) seems capable of encompassing both duality and plurality, and of, perhaps, allowing pluralities to emerge from duality. In “Negative Capability: Kerouac’s Buddhist Ethic,” Ginsberg discusses both Kerouac’s understanding of Buddhism, of the impermanence of everything, and Kerouac’s inability to get past his own Catholicism and his fear of a “permanent hell” (6). The conflict that Ginsberg describes Kerouac as experiencing, that between the necessity of conflict, the acceptance of negative capability and the need for something more fixed which itself fits into the necessity of conflict, adds another dimension to the tension which permeates both Howl and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

In “The Poet as Jew: ‘Howl’ Revisited,” Ostriker notes that Ginsberg identified himself “humorously as a Jewish Buddhist” (120). Despite the levity with which this is thrown out, it seems a very apt moniker, at least in regards to Howl, in that Ginsberg is at once concerned with the fire and brimstone of the Old Testament and the oneness of Buddhism which shares its principles with the idea of Negative Capability. While The Marriage does not chronicle the same sort of personal journey which Howl lays out for us, there exists a tension between the Keatsian ability to hold contraries without being restricted by reason, and the importance of the burning energy which comes from the existence of those tensions. To be at once of an Eastern and a Western thought, to be at once of Heaven and of Hell, of sorrow and of joy, of energy and of reason; these might be
contained by negative capability but the very laying of rules which takes place in the
Marriage, and the desperation of that search which runs throughout Howl, negate, if that
is possible, the acceptance of negative capability. Keats' negative capability would allow
one to come to peace with "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts," but peace is not what Blake
and Ginsberg seek. Energy, movement, revolution, all of which grow from an unsolved
tension, are the fruits, are Ostriker's pluralities, that come from the bringing-together of
contraries.

Using religious rhythms as a structural base for poetry is not unique, but Blake
and Ginsberg's poems are both so focused on the profane, on the worldly desires of the
flesh, that their use of liturgical language has an almost ironic ring to it. However, it is the
very meeting of the prayer-like structure of the poems and their earthly contents that
create the "marriage," which, according to Blake, is "necessary to Human existence."
The religious structure of Footnote, which Ginsberg referred to as "an extra variation of
the form of Part II," (Notes Written, 230) reflects back on the sacred language of Part I,
and the rich contraries which are so necessary emerge as part of, in Mark Doty's words,
"a chronicle of friends seeking—take your pick, satori, godhead, enlightenment, the
permanent ecstatic—through whatever means they find at hand...scraping the self raw, as
it were, to open every pore" (14).

Ginsberg's Howl is just that—a long, loud, and largely fluid howl of everything,
of pain, but also joy, motion, living, America, East and West, his own life, Carl
Solomon's, Neal Cassady's—and it is a cry that could only emerge from the marriage of
heaven and hell, from the union—not the balance—of the great and the terrible. It is a cry
deeply rooted in a Blakean world. As a work, Howl is very different than The Marriage.
Blake’s work is a doctrine of sorts, a fictional story, an allegory, a series of laws, new laws, as Manlove says “prescriptive” (147), whereas Howl is a witnessed account and a lamentation, an experience both of its author and of a generation; and as stated above, it is so well-titled, it is a howl. This cry, it seems, is formed of the “energy of tension,” (148) of which Manlove speaks in discussing Blake. The religious re-workings and ironies of each poem are secondary to the way in which Ginsberg stands positioned in a Blakean world.

The energy present in Howl, both in the language itself and in the world it describes, is an energy that emerges from the perpetual struggle of contraries. The rhythm of the first section of Howl, the repeated “who, who, who,” which allows Ginsberg to circle back and back again, drives the poem forward and unites all of its disparate elements. There is no formal meter, the lines are long and loose, yet the jazz-inspired rhythm is so solid that the most disparate words and images go together. The sounds of lines such as “who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars,” (I, 23) the continual if unevenly spaced return to “who,” the way Ginsberg riffs off certain words, as in

who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who came back to Denver & waited in vain, who watched over Denver & brooded & loned in Denver and finally went away to find out the Time, & now Denver is lonesome for her heroes (I, 61)

lend a musicality to the poem, a sense of unity. This musical unity throughout the poem gives phrases such as “fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists” (I, 36) their own sense of unity. Ginsberg used the phrase “eyeball kicks” (I, 18) to describe what happens to the

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10 Merrill relates the “boxcars boxcars boxcars” moment to “the persecution of the early followers of Christ in Roman catacombs,” (97) calling the parallel “unavoidable.” While this is certainly a possible reading, the Beat movement’s interest in a “hobo culture” suggests a much more contemporary American image, while Ginsberg’s deeply rooted Jewishness also suggests a possible evocation of the Holocaust, of the trains that took prisoners to concentration camps.
eye in looking at paintings by Cezanne, as the eye moves suddenly from one color to a contrasting color. Just as Cezanne’s understanding of ‘the law of contrasting colors’ and his mastery with brushstroke united stark color contrasts, Ginsberg’s grasp of rhythm unites stark verbal contrasts, bringing together words as different as “angelic” and “fucked” without letting the ‘colors’ get muddy. 11

At one point Howl recalls the “saintly motorcyclists...who blew and were blown by these human seraphim” (I, 36-7). Nearly every word in this short segment of the poem does something to the surrounding words. “Saintly” is applied to “motorcyclists”—the latter word conveying an image of grizzled bikers in black leather, Hell’s Angels (its own eyeball kick of a name), bicycle gangs, the smell of gasoline and motor oil, speed, carelessness, and the former with immediate religious connotations, specifically Catholic connotations, of purity, of goodness, of self-sacrifice, of holiness and closeness to God. “Human seraphim” achieves a similar, if not quite as strong, contrast. Seraphs are the highest-ranking angels, those closest to God, and distinctly not humans. Yet both of these contrasts could work on a metaphoric level; that the motorcyclists are, perhaps, saintly in nature, that there are humans so good, so saintly, they could only be described as “seraphim,” seems perfectly plausible. But sandwiched between these angelic human creatures are those “who blew and were blown,” which pulls the image of the saintly into the flesh, emphasizing the corporeality of these “human seraphim” rather than their soulfulness, rather that whatever it is that might make them ‘angelic.’ It is not only

11 Post-impressionist artist Paul Cezanne, whose work Ginsberg studied while at Columbia, used patches of different colors placed next to one another, rather than blended, to create depth, the effects of light, and texture, and at the same time, to evoke emotional responses. In the late 1800’s the owner of a tapestry company, Michel Chevreul, published research on how the eye perceives interactions between different colors (especially colors opposite one another on the color wheel), and titled his findings ‘Of the Law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colors.’ (Rubin, Impressionism).
corporeality, but a distinctly sexual one, and furthermore a homosexual one, which, particularly in the nineteen-fifties, could not be further from any traditional idea of saintliness or closeness to God. This passage is situated in a section which reads

who let themselves be Ricked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy, who blew and were blown by these human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love. (I, 36-7)

The larger context further emphasizes the homosexual sexuality of the “saintly motorcyclists” and those involved with both motorcyclists and seraphim, and contextualizes the seraphim as sailors, further bringing this passage down to a very corporeal earth. Looking at the pared-down version of the passage above emphasizes the immediate contradiction between the language of religion and the language of sex, but one cannot allow the holiness implied in the passage to get lost in the overtly sexual language.

*Howl’s* moments of contrast are not always so sharp. In another moment, “who hiccupped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up with a sob,” (I, 39) laughing and crying are not so much contrasted as confused. The attempt at one leads instead to the other, and it seems that the “sob” and the “giggle” are confused inside of the “hiccup,” such that three involuntary bodily actions—two at opposite ends of the emotional spectrum and one with no necessary emotional implications at all—wind up all together, the body or bodies hiccupping and the soul which might laugh or cry all confused together. This excerpt, too, comes from a religious/sexual passage. The line continues, “behind a partition in a Turkish Bath when the blond & naked angel came to pierce them with a sword” (I, 39). The “Turkish Bath” is probably a reference to gay bathhouses in

12 The conflation of tears and laughter, or joy, can be found in Blake’s Proverbs: “Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth,” and “Joys laugh not! Sorrows weep not!”
New York, where men could often meet or cruise under the radar; the angel carrying the sword is certainly biblical, and possibly an allusion to the archangel Michael, often portrayed with a sword; to be pierced by the angel is at once biblical and sexual. Again, holy religious figures who tend to represent purity are brought together with very bodily, sexual, and homosexual imagery.

The meeting of the holy and the profane, the angelic and the bodily, is not the only 'marriage' of contrasts present in Howl. Picking up on the often-overlooked humor in Howl, Mark Doty responds to a passage which touches on institutionalization, and in listing the terrible treatments mental homes inflicted on their patients includes ping-pong:

Just when the passage has turned from the nihilistic protest...to the grave list of treatments administered to those who won't or can't accept the official version of reality, Ginsberg throws in that 'ping-pong.' It's a signature gesture; any time he might start taking himself too seriously, there's that laughter that keeps perspective, keeps—despite the rants and big claims the poem makes all along the way—one foot planted firmly in a sense of the absurd. (16)

By anchoring the deeply tragic (mental illness) in the purely comical, Ginsberg performs a sort of Beckettsian play on his readers, preventing us from getting too comfortable in any mood. To really feel Howl is to feel, not just a cry, but the whole range of human emotion. There is love, love between friends and sexual love, there is a lustier version of love, there is desperation, there is madness, illness, death, there are absurd sorts of humor, as in "who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown," (I, 57) and there is purely silly humor, as in "who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time," (I, 54) or the ping-pong. Yet even in these absurd moments of humor, no emotion is steady. The ping-pong balls must have elicited a giggle, yet

13 Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible include several references to angels with swords, including Luke, Genesis, and Chronicles.
moments later, the mental patients “in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table,” (I, 68) which almost feels like a slap in the face after the humor in the previous line. It does not seem that the goal of Howl is to make us feel good or bad, but rather to release, and encapsulate, a sort of everythingness, which in turn makes us feel dizzy, uprooted by the all-encompassing imagery/emotionality/morality of the poem. Howl's ability to keep "one foot in the absurd" (Doty, 16) while making such big claims is one of its most disorienting elements. Just like those who "hiccup...trying to giggle but [wind] up with a sob" (I, 39) we do not know whether to laugh or cry, and it is this contradiction which serves, more than the contradictions of the holy/profane or angelic/corporeal, to keep the reader constantly on her toes.

Our inability to firmly orient ourselves in a traditional emotion, or even on a traditional emotional scale, works much in the way Blake's upsetting of the idea of morality or a single truth keeps us on our toes in Marriage, and in this way Marriage can be read as an anticipatory answer to Howl. By toying with the ideas of Heaven and Hell, of Good and Evil, and of the Voice of the Devil, Blake makes it difficult for us to locate ourselves on any moral scale, forcing us to question morality as a concept. The center of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, the declaration of the marriage itself, is contained in:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.
Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (3)

This passage cannot be fully unpacked without examining other moments in the poem; the language is straightforward, yet densely packed with very powerful statements. For now, I am going to take from it that opposition is necessary to keep the world moving.
forward. To look at a later moment in the poem which can move towards unlocking this central passage, I will start with:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of Soul discern’d by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

This is the first of three statements in “The Voice of the Devil,” and presents, in both its words and placements, several contraries. The oppositions created in Plate 3, of “Reason” and “Energy” especially, seem somewhat dissolved by this melding in Plate 4—oppositions and contraries are necessary, yet some of the most fundamental oppositions we know of are only an illusion. By declaring a Body and a Soul, Blake admits to their separate existences yet claims they are not separate. Yet, this passage comes from the “Voice of the Devil,” which in itself is confusing; the idea of Hell has just been overturned, so perhaps the Devil is trustworthy, but there is still an unavoidable association with between the Devil and foul play.

This confusion is different than the “eyeball kicks” (I, 18) of Ginsberg; rather than set two opposing ideas or images right next to each other, Blake removes the line between Good and Evil, Body and Soul, while at the same time emphasizing the need for such oppositions (see Plate 3). It is not, then, the oppositions themselves which disorient the reader (they are oppositions to which we are accustomed), but this double-act, this intentional confusion. In Howl, we do not know whether to laugh or cry or do something else altogether, and in the Marriage, we do not know who to believe, or what it means to believe, we do not know what to conceive of as morality, or how. Blake repeats this shaking of the reader throughout The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, preventing us from holding any too-solid idea for long.
The Proverbs of Hell are supposed to be just that—a body of work belonging to a particular location. Blake collects the proverbs because “as the sayings used in a nation mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell show the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments” (Blake, 6). Prior to the Proverbs section, one could read the *Marriage* as treating Heaven & Hell as ‘separate but equal’ counterparts which are contrary to one another but within themselves contain unity. The Proverbs of Hell, however, are so full of contradiction that they undo the idea that any entity can exist without contraries. Hell is a location and an idea presented as a contrary to heaven, but it itself is full of contraries.

The contraries in Blake’s Proverbs are not as direct as those presented in his opening argument, but their subtlety disorients the reader, keeps the reader perpetually moving between possible meanings, thus embodying an “energy of tension” (Manlove, 148). Many of Blake’s proverbs allow for multiple readings, each of which can problematize other readings of both the Proverbs section, and the text as a whole. A common theme in Blake’s proverbs is the discussion of ‘folly’ and ‘wisdom.’ ‘Folly’ and ‘wisdom’ would, like ‘love’ and ‘hate’ seem to be at opposite ends of a spectrum, yet Blake conflates the two qualities by telling us that “if the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise” (7). Perhaps an adherence to one’s internal course—not an inability to change one’s opinion, but a belief in and a willingness to follow one’s own laws rather than the rules of another—is in itself a form of wisdom. “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom,” (7) could support the idea that an energetic pushing forward brings us to wisdom, but a later distinction the Proverbs draw, that “the hours of folly are measur’d by the clock; but of wisdom, no clock can measure,” (7) positions
wisdom and folly in opposition to one another, suggesting that “folly” can be measured or contained, whereas “wisdom” is beyond such mundane limitations.

The “nature of Infernal wisdom” (Blake, 6) continues to radiate with tension. The Proverbs tell us that “folly is the cloak of knavery” (7) as “shame is the cloak of pride” (7)—does this mean that pretending shame disguises pride, or that shame keeps pride in? The possible readings imply that “folly” either disguises “knavery” or prevents one from acting upon it. The first definition would imply that acting foolish is but a guise for ill-intentions, although the idea of ill-intentions is rather hard to grasp, considering one should “sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desire” (10). This is one of the more disturbing proverbs. Critic John Villalobos argues that Blake would never “countenance killing a defenseless child” (257), but that traditionally, prophecy is “predicated on powerful human emotional response,” (257) and this proverb is meant to arouse our emotions and emphasize the importance of action, of energy. While it is certainly not necessary to read this proverb as an advocacy of infanticide, it is a deeply disturbing moment. If it is a hyperbolic evocation of emotion or energy, then all the other proverbs potentially lose their force, no longer advocating action. If, contrary to Villalobos’ belief, it is literal (an unlikely possibility, but one necessary to consider if only to give the text its own authority), then Blake’s ‘evening out’ of the moral field is problematized by the crossing of what is probably a most deeply and widely held moral line.

If folly is merely a cloak, then how is a fool different from a wise man, or the hours of folly different from those of wisdom? Could not a knave, acting the fool, be considered “cunning” (Blake, 9) like a fox? Perhaps wisdom involves losing the cloak;
perhaps "folly" is different than being a "foolish man," or perhaps we are not meant to make sense of everything together, perhaps these proverbs demand a "negative capability."

While the content of the proverbs creates a tension in that the proverbs contradict themselves, the structure of the section is itself ironic. The Proverbs have the short, aphoristic structure of the biblical proverbs. Yet as Villalobos notes, Blake's proverbs are ordered in a seemingly random way, whereas the biblical proverbs are grouped into thematic sections. Many of Blake's proverbs are very energetic—we are told to never stop moving, that still water is poison, to go to excess, to love and live, to pursue our desires; yet the biblical proverbs are about constraint. —While Blake's proverbs tell us, in a message emerging through all the contradiction, to submit to our energies, the biblical proverbs tell us such things as "counsel shall keep thee, and prudence shall preserve thee" (2:11), or "keep my commandments, and thou shalt live: and my law as the apple of thy eye" (7:2), while warning against all that Blake's proverbs promote, telling us to stay away from "from the man that speaketh perverse things/who leave the right way, and walk by dark ways" (2:12-13). Blake thus uses a structure designed to uphold the "meek" morality to do just the opposite. Manlove sums it up:

Blake has chosen to enclose energetic truths in the bonds of aphorisms and definitions. In this way he enacts in miniature the tension portrayed in the poem.

The word "enacts" is perfect here. The tensions throughout the poem occur at every level: content, structure, and argument. The poem itself is active, forcing a tension, and from that tension an energy, upon the reader.
Blake’s emphasis on energy/continual motion speaks to much of *Howl*. The motion in the first section of *Howl* is at once energizing and exhausting. The vague protagonists push forward as those who “chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine,” (I, 14) “who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge, lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon,” (I, 16-17) “who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard wondering where to go, and went,” (I, 22) “who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary indian angels who were visionary indian angels,” (I, 25) “who walked all night with their shoes full of blood” (I, 45) “who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision” (I, 60). They are never still. In both the Proverbs and the rest of the Marriage, the one theme on which Blake does not seem to contradict himself is the need for motion. The proverbs warn us to “expect poison from the standing water,” (Blake, 9) and every piece of the poem, from the opening poem to the inversion which takes place in Plate III to the contradictions manifest in the proverbs, not only encourages, but requires, motion.

Stephenson relates the perpetual motion of *Howl* to the motion of the “night-sea journey,” (51) citing “recurring images of falling and rising, destruction and regeneration, starvation and nourishment, sleeping and waking, darkness and illumination, blindness and sight, death and resurrection” (52). The night-sea journey is, according to Stephenson, one of man’s earliest myths, with its roots in an ancient oral tradition, often taking the form of a visit to the underworld, and reaching up through such works as Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Dante’s *Inferno*, and Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. 
Tracing the genealogy of *Howl* back through *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* all the way to the Homeric tradition reminds us that while the ever-moving, energetic life of these poems is exuberant, the underworld is always there. And while Blake may have redefined “Hell” and “Evil,” bringing them into a literary light, there is a seed of darkness, of decay, that we cannot escape. The very last proverb acknowledges this, exclaiming “Enough! or Too much” (10). The “road of excess” may lead to a “palace of wisdom” (Blake, 7), but we can, and inevitably do, go too far. The revolution completes itself, we are once again at the bottom (and again “Rintrah roars” [Blake, 2]), but we cannot lose energy, must push forward.

Both *Howl* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* use the rhythm of their language to enact upon their readers the complex marriages of their poems. The explosive, energetic growth, the production of “purgatori[ng] their torsos night after night,” (Ginsberg, 10) has a dark streak, of madness, of burning—the darkness is perhaps more disturbing in *Howl*, where Mental Moloch is the structural partner to the holy litany of *Footnote*, and the “partisan[s] of energy” (Ostriker, 580) are behind the walls of mental institutions. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, there is no life without energy, and no progress without contraries. As the poems enact on us the “energy of tension,” (Manlove, 148), they also enact on us a sense of decay. In Ginsberg, it takes the form of “eyeball kicks” and of our emotional disorientation; in Blake, in takes the form of biblical inversion and moral disorientation. In the experience of reading these poets of the Devil’s party, there is no energy without tension, no ecstasy without a sense of despair. We are left, ultimately, disoriented, uncomfortable, and buzzing with an energy that encourages us, above all things, to keep moving.
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