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“Howl”. A Deconstructed Supernatural Cry

Abstract.-

In this essay, the author argues in favour of the possibility of hybridity between some seemingly irreconcilable literary currents; that is, between Poststructuralism and another group of literary currents deemed as “humanist” such as Modernism, Transcendentalism, Romanticism, Mysticism and the recourse to ancient religions, through the analysis of Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl” as an expression of this author’s search for his own independent and personal voice. In order to accomplish that task, he combines the close reading and the provision of textual evidence from the poem with the theoretical exposition about Allen Ginsberg’s work and poetical evolution and the reference to seminal works on that matter by recognized scholars to conclude that such paradoxical hybridity is not only possible but fruitful and reproducing.

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1.- Introduction.-

1.1.- Rationale.-

It has always struck the author of this essay the clear cut line that many scholars draw between poststructuralism and any prior trend concerning fixity of meaning or the lack of it in our attempt to represent “reality”. It’s certainly undeniable that Foucault’s and Derrida’s theories constituted a startling breakthrough as regards the relativity, malleability and artificiality of meaning and discourse in terms of what Derrida termed difference vs. logocentrism, but we can’t deny either that throughout all the history of literature there has been, on the part of many authors, to a larger or a lesser extent, a quest for the key to understand how meaning and discourse work and the acknowledgement that these are complex and shifting phenomena that cannot be reduced to a received fixed web of correspondences among a set of signifiers and signifieds. In short, to assert that before poststructuralism authors only worked with a received fixed structure of meanings and discourses and a set of “essentialist” stances is largely simplistic.

In fact, the history of thought and of Literature is riddled with names that have been shunned, stranded and even prosecuted by the prominent groups of their societies for experimenting with and for exposing new ways of interpreting human existence in times when this was proscribed and even punished with the death penalty. Saint John of the Cross was imprisoned by the Inquisition for expressing a non orthodox mysticism, Shelley was expelled from the university for expressing his atheism, Oscar Wilde was incarcerated for his sexual orientation, Virginia Wolf was prevented to enter college because she was a woman, etc., etc. In a way, they were “unconscious poststructuralists”. Without “knowing” what poststructuralism was, they were critical thinkers that challenged logocentrism and dared to stand against their societies’ current mainstream way of addressing reality.

Another separating line that in the opinion of this author many scholars draw too easily is the one between poststructuralism and modernism as if they were opposed and irreconcilable tendencies, when in fact there is evidence to assert their

complementariness. We may recall Jean Francois Lyotard's essay "Answering the Question. What is Postmodernism?" in *Postmodernism. A Reader*:

What, then, is the postmodern? What place does or does it not occupy in the vertiginous work of the questions hurled at the rules of image and narration? It's undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday [...] must be suspected. [...] A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end, but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.

[The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself [...] that which searches for new representations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. [...] the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules [...] Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are workings without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Postmodern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo). (Lyotard 44-46)

1.2.- Aim and Scope of the Essay.-

And it's here where we lay our claim: may an author called Allen Ginsberg write a poem in 1955 called "Howl", poststructuralist in concept and form, apparently chaotic as regards morphosyntax and meaning, riddled with apparently senseless juxtapositions of images, descriptions, ideas and angles of subjectivity and identity, that challenged the mainstream 1950s' norms of decorum, authority and academia and provoked his author to be taken to court on the charges of obscenity in the puritan American society of the 50s, feature several undoubtedly modernist traits such as the emphasis on the construction of the self, the search of a aesthetic order and the assertion of meaning and authority through the influence of authors such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams?

And furthermore; can this poem be influenced by literary currents prior to Modernism such as Romanticism and Transcendentalism, which may be considered essentialist stances, through authors such as William Blake, Percy B. Shelley, Walt

Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson,? May it draw on XVI Century's St. John of the Cross's Christian mysticism and include hints of Milton's Paradise Lost? May it display clear echoes of Hebrew biblical writing such as Jeremiah's Lamentations, Isaiah, the Psalms and Saint John's book of the Revelation and explore and make use of eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism?

In short, may poststructuralism, which seeks the deconstruction of discourse and the dissolution of subject matter and authority be intertwined with Modernism, which asserts the construction of the self, aesthetic order, meaning and authorial identity, and even more, with Romanticism and Transcendentalism which is fundamentally supernaturalist, and with ancient religions such as Hebraism and Buddhism that may be deemed as essentialist and univocal?

The answer to this question is that Allen Ginsberg may have done it in "Howl". And the purpose of this essay is to argue that Allen Ginsberg mixed those apparently irreconcilable literary traditions in "Howl" in the search for his own personal and poetic voice in an exercise of constant evolution and poetic interplay and intertextuality.

1.3.- Approach to our Subject of Analysis.-

In order to pursue our objective, we have divided our essay in five sections, each one of them devoted to a main topic subject of our study; The first one is focused on the social, political and cultural context in which Allen Ginsberg wrote "Howl": the U.S.A. in the fifties and the Beat generation; the second section is devoted to its Modernist influences and to authors such as T.S Elliot, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams; the third one deals with several spiritual literary currents such as Supernaturalism, Transcendentalism and Mysticism that exerted a crucial influence on Ginsberg, and with authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Plotinus or Saint John of the Cross.; The fourth one is focused on how Allen Ginsberg's Hebrew heritage appears in "Howl" and its influence on the work of the poet and the fifth section connects Ginsberg's deconstructive stance with his search for a supernatural language. Finally, we have summarized and interconnected these main topics in our "Discussion/ Conclusions" section in order to reassert the initial claim that we lied in our rationale and objectives sections.

1.4.- State of the Matter.-

It would be pretentious to claim that we pretend to bring forward or discover any new element about our subject of analysis. There already exist numerous works over Allen Ginsberg, "Howl" and how he mixed the most avant gardé tendencies of his time such as modernism and poststructuralism with his influences by transcendentalism, romanticism, mysticism and ancient religions such as Hebraism and Buddhism but we are going to honestly try to contribute from our autonomous and critic point of view to the state of the issue.

We have relied greatly on the work of numerous recognized scholars such as professor Peter Barry of Aberyswyth University in Wales and French philosopher, critic and writer Jean Francois Lyotard on Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction; American Poet and Essayist Mark Hirlinghouse on Modernism and William Carlos Williams's influences on Ginsberg; American Writer and Professor of English at the Universities of Yale, Columbia and New York Amiri Baraka on Allen's Ginsberg's fight as a "partisan of consciousness", professors of American Literature at the U.N.E.D María M. García Lorenzo & Ana I. Zamorano. on the Beats Generation and Allen Ginsberg's work itself; literary critic, scholar and professor of English at the University of Northern Iowa Jerome Klinkowitz and professor of English at the University of Vassar in New York State Patricia Wallace on Jack Kerouac; professor of English at the Northeastern University in Boston Mary Loeffelholz on Ezra Pound; American literary critic and literary historian at the University of Illinois Nyna Baym on Walt Whitman; poet, critic and professor emerita of English at Rutgers University in New Jersey Patricia Ostriker on Ginsberg's Hebrew influences; professor of English at the Metropolitan University of Denver Craig Svonking on Ginsberg's spiritual search and experimentation and professor of English at Yale University Amy Hungerford on postmodern supernaturalism. To all of them our most sincere gratitude and acknowledgement.

1.5.- Methodology.-

We have tried to find the biggest possible amount of qualified and accurate bibliographic material related to our subject of analysis accomplishing multiple cross and individual searches among the various bibliographic databases to which the Central Library of the U.N.E.D. grants us access through its application LINCEO +,

that is: Academic Search Premier, journals, Dialnet, EBSCO, ERIC, Jstor, Literature Online, MLA International Bibliography, Proquest and The European Library as well as among other free source ones such as Google Académico or Hypotheses.org.

In order to obtain the best possible approach to our search, we have introduced and combined from as many angles as possible the key terms related to the main concepts and authors subject of our analysis, that is: Poststructuralism, Modernism, Transcendentalism, Romanticism, Mysticism, Hebraism, Buddhism, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Ralph Waldo, Emerson, Walt, Whitman, William Blake, etc.; and compiled our results in the bibliographic management application Refworks. Evidently, the amount of useful bibliographic material that we have gathered is so vast that we have been forced to limit it to the list that we provide at the end of the essay.

2.- Social, Political and Cultural Context; the Beats Generation, Hipsters, Madness, Travelling, Searching, Drugs, Sex and Jazz.-

It was the late 40s and the 50s in the United States and whereas in the literary milieu modernism was experimenting a transition to postmodernism the socio-political and cultural environment was one of sameness, homogeneity and ideological narrowness. WWII had just finished and uniformity, capitalism, materialism and puritanism imbued all the segments of American society. The atomic bomb had been thrown over Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the consternation for it added to the tension of the Cold War constituted a state of mind.

Meanwhile, senator Mac Carthy carried out his “witch hunt” against anybody who might be suspected of being involved in “anti American activities”, directing his attack mainly against politicians, intellectuals and artists, and president Eisenhower, within a situation of material abundance restored the rhetoric of capitalism after Roosevelt and WWII. There returned the cult of individualism, the competitive but homogeneous consumerism and the traditional standards, values and gender domesticity and familiar bonds. Anybody who was not white, male, heterosexual, married and with a family became suspicious.

Within this suffocating environment a group of young university undergraduates started to write with a style characterized by what Jack Kerouac called “a sense of furtiveness”. In an effort to assert themselves against the backdrop of their bleak environment they worshipped the social outcasts of their time.(Bums, law offenders, prison interns, the mentally ill, the suicidal, the expelled from the institutions, drug consumers and dealers, speed drivers, heavy drinkers, homosexuals, etc.

They deemed themselves visionaries who could shed a little bit of light into a stagnant culture. In poet and editor Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s words “they were the real realists by touching, tasting and testing everything”. And here is where the figure of the “hipster” arises: someone who wanders in search of new sensations and new patterns. Someone who travels constantly to seek new experiences, who experiments with drugs, speed, sex; music, with states of consciousness, literature, philosophy and religion; who positions him/herself at the limits of the law and who

questions the traditional, personal and familiar bonds. An outcast in search of transcendence.

The word “beats”, come from two sources. The first is “beatitude”, which is any of the declarations of blessedness made by Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount, the supreme blessedness or happiness; and “beaten” or battered, which is what they thought their current society did to them: prosecute, step on and smash them.

Now, let’s provide textual evidence to back all these assertions about the fifties in the U.S.A. and the Beat generation in relation with “Howl”. This poem by Allen Ginsberg is precisely that: a yell in the form of 127 long lines in which the poet cries for himself and his beaten friends in the first part, shouts against Moloch, the god of cement, oil and money, who embodies the capitalist society he lived in, in the second part, and sings his solidarity, love and hope for his friend Carl Salomon whom he met in a psychiatric institution, in the third part.

Before starting the poem proper Ginsberg pledges a dedication to Jack Kerouac (for him, the new Buddha of American prose), William Burroughs (from whom he took the cut-up or pastiche technique) and Neal Cassady (his sexual icon and hipster hero), three of the main members of the Beat Generation. We have to necessarily mention Jack Kerouac because he was one of Ginsberg’s main inspirations and because in his novel *On the Road* he praises the insane as the really worthy people, a crucial motif in *Howl*:

The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, burn, burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes Awwww (Kerouac’s *On the Road*, 11)

As regards William Burroughs, he provided Ginsberg with the *cut-up* or pastiche technique which is crucial to interpret this latter’s poetry. This device consists in juxtaposing apparently disconnected, incoherent and shocking elements which may be decoded intuitively by the reader creating highly expressive and comprising images. We may find many of them in “Howl”, such as the following:

Angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night (angel human hipsters craving to find the sense of transcendence wandering through the city at night)
(3)

Who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's floated out and sat through the stale beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi's listening to the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox. (who passed all night in a nightclub and all afternoon drinking beer in a hipster bar, listening to music, having in mind the crack of doom caused by the hydrogen bomb. (13)

Who jumped in limousines with the Chinaman of Oklahoma on the impulse of winter midnight streetlight smalltown rain (who got into unknown rich men's limousines fleeing from the winter midnight rain in small towns)
(26)

Right after it, William Carlos Williams makes an introduction in which he asserts the following:

Literally, he has, from all the evidence, been through hell. [...] The wonder of the thing is not that he has survived, but that he, from the very depths, has found a fellow whom he can love [...] The spirit of love survives to ennoble our lives if we have the wit and the courage and the faith-and the art to persist. It is the belief in the art of poetry that has gone hand in hand with this man into his Golgotha [...] Poets are damned but they are not bling, they see with the eyes of the angels. [...] He avoids nothing but experiences it to the hilt. He contains it. Claims it as his own—and, we believe, laughs at it and has the time and the effrontery to love a fellow of his choice and record that love in a well made poem.

Hold back the edges of your gowns, Ladies, we are going through hell.”

As we can see William Carlos Williams reflects perfectly the essence of the poem. It's the yell of somebody who goes through hell, cries against Moloch, the Satan God of the cement, plastic, iron, blood and money inferno that is the U.S.A in

the fifties and rises triumphant singing his love for all his fallen friends embodied in the person of Carl Salomon.

But, evidently, it is the poem itself which gives us the best references. In Part I we can find most of the references related to the Beats's stances:

-rebelliousness against the establishment and academia

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked (1) [...] / who passed through universities [...] among the scholars of war / [...] (6) / who were expelled from the academies for crazy and publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull (7) / who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall. (8)

-Experimenting with drugs:

who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt of marijuana for New York (9) / who ate fire in paint hotels and drank turpentine [...] and purgatoried their torsos night after night (10) / with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls (11) / Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine drunkenness over the rooftops (13) / [...] which chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy –Bronx on Benzedrine (14) / suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone grindings and migraines of China under junk-withdrawal (20)

-Wandering around and being chased by the police:

Who wandered around in the railroad yard wondering to go (21) / who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before the machinery of other skeletons (32) / who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication (33) / who lit cigarettes in boxcars, boxcars, boxcars, racketing through one towards lonesome farms (22) / who walked all night with their shoes full of blood (45)

-Suicide:

who created great suicidal dramas/ who cut their wrists (47) /who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge (57)

-Attraction towards criminals and outlaws:

Who crashed through their minds in jail waiting for impossible criminals. (63)

And socially unaccepted sexual relations:

who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclist (35) /who blew and were blown by these human seraphims, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love (36) /who hiccupped endlessly [...] when the blond and naked angel came to pierce them with their sword.(38)

Who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes [...] and fell off the bed, and continued along the floor [...] fainting on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and came eluding the last gyzym of consciousness (40)

Who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning, but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise [...] (41)

Neal Cassady, secret hero of these poems, cockman and Adonis of Denver— joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots [...] or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat uplifting [...] (42)

But, though it was necessary to outline the main features of the Beat generation in “Howl”, mainly the ones related to challenging the establishment, searching and experimenting in order to set a departure point, we cannot understand Allen Ginsberg without turning to Modernism and authors as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams who were models and inspiration for him.

3.- Modernist influences. T.S Elliot, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams.-

As we have asserted at the beginning of this essay, Jean Francois Lyotard gives us the clue to solve the apparent paradox that lies behind merging two supposedly opposed literary and aesthetic movements. Postmodernism is not “at the end” or “after” Modernism, but “at his nascent state”. The former doesn’t deny the latter but enhance it instead.

In fact, many postmodern features are really modernist. Let’s note symbolism, for example, that conceives the poet as a visionary agent who transcends the “real” world to suggest the world beyond, synesthesia (a sensory experience expressed in terms of another sense), Imagism, that searched for the immediacy and impression left by images, the use of intense juxtapositions that could liberate the poem from time and space limits, the recourse to what T.S. Elliot called the “objective correlative”: a set of objects, a situation or a chain of events that, when given, the emotion is immediately evoked, the reaction to established trends, the alignment with marginal discourses, the experimentation with new rhythms and rhymes, etc, etc.

All these features may be perfectly seen in Howl along with some other “specifically” modernist ones like the search for an aesthetic order, meaning, authority, the reconstruction from fragmentarization and the emphasis on the self. And here it comes one of the crucial points of this essay: how does Howl synthesise reconstruction with deconstruction, the defence of the self with the dissolution of it, the search for an aesthetic order with an intended chaos, meaning with its decentering and authority with the multiple angles of subjectivity?

For this author the answer to this question is that to attain the former, first we should go through the latter. To reconstruct something, first we should deconstruct it. To assert our self, first we have to dissolve it. To seek an aesthetic order, first we have to stumble the established ones. To look for our own meanings, first we should decenter the established correspondences among signifiers and signifieds; and to claim our authority as writers, first we should play with the multiple angles of subjectivity. In short, to be modernist, first we should be postmodernist.

Postmodernism doesn't imply the death of identity and meaning, but the death of the received fixed identities and meanings that hinder our constant evolution and our search for our own answers.

Ginsberg adopted from Ezra Pound the use of Imagism, characterized by compression, a preference for juxtaposition and a search for concise images to convey evocative and expressive perceptions, which was in turn adopted by Pound from Japanese haiku poetry. Howl is full of these images or "eyeball kicks" in Kerouac's and Ginsberg's terms.

Incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lighting in the mind leaping toward poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless world of Time in between (12)

Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, [...] blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind. (13)

As we can note in these two lines, Ginsberg merges images of physical places, drugs, urban motifs, nature, time and space and metaphysical concepts to create highly expressive and emotive flashes that the reader decodes unconsciously and intuitively.

Let us now turn to William Carlos Williams. Poet and editor Mark Hillringhouse, in his article "Allen Ginsberg & William Carlos Williams" published in the Paterson Literary Review in 2006 recounts how in a poetry reading about Williams given by Ginsberg in New Jersey he read with all his heart this latter's poem "Good Night", about a man going to bed who takes a glass of water in the kitchen and who has a vivid slightly lustful memory while standing there looking at sprigs of parsley in a glass next to the sink, to illustrate Williams "No ideas but in things".

In brilliant gas light
I turn the kitchen spigot
and watch the water splash
into the clean white sink.
On the grooved drainboard
to one side is

a glass filled with parsley
crisped green

I glance at the spotless floor
a pair of rubber sandals
lie side by side
under the wall table
all is in order for the night.

Waiting, with a glass in my hand
-three girls in crimson satin
pass close before me on
the murmurous background of
the crowded opera-

It is
memory playing the clown-
three vague, meaningless girls
full of smells and
the rustling sounds of
cloth rubbing on cloth and
little slippers on carpet-
high-school French
spoken in a loud voice!

Parsley in a glass
still and shining,
brings me back. I take a drink
and yawn deliciously.

I am ready for bed. (Williams 589-pgs 85-86)

For Williams, “No ideas but in things” meant discarding preconceived notions, abstract feelings, borrowed ideas and associations that are handed down. It meant going to the source of things to get first hand experience. The poem is without artifice in that it lacks any type of poetic element, be it meter or rhyme, yet it is meticulously structured and Ginsberg in choosing it was indicating that Williams was writing poetry

at the literal level, without association. The object of the water glass in the poem is presented as an emblem of itself. “There are no other ideas imposed on it. For Ginsberg, this attention to the object gives the poem freshness and meaning and the objects no longer remain ordinary”.

Then, Ginsberg explained to the audience the nature of how a poem by Williams should be read. He focused not on the metrics of the words, but on the breath of the line. His irregular rhythm captured the way people speak and it is in the way he structured the lines by listing the objects as they appear to consciousness, that the poem reveals each object’s clarity.

Mark Hillringhouse ends his article saying that when he reads the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, he always sees this connection to Williams in what Ginsberg was trying to accomplish in his own poetry: “to keep no secrets, to provide the open journal of his life”, and this seems a most appropriate assertion as far as “Howl” is concerned. Reading “Howl” we realize that no matter how expressive or complex its images are, they don’t comprise any received or fixed association, they speak for themselves and strip the author absolutely naked.

No matter how complex, chaotic or hallucinatory, Ginsberg’s images only stand for what they are. Drugs are drugs, night wandering is night wandering, shaking in a psychiatric hospital room is literally shaking in a psychiatric hospital room, jumping off Brooklyn’s Bridge is literally jumping off Brooklyn’s Bridge. He doesn’t want to convey any received or handed down association. He wants the images to speak for themselves.

Regarding Modernism, it’s noticeable in the poem a clear political and social stance against capitalism, the F.B.I, war mongering and the atomic bomb. Let’s retrieve some glimpses of this throughout the poem:

Within Part I:

Who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the F.B.I. (29)

Who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the tobacco haze of
Capitalism (30)

Who distributed supercommunist pamphlets in Union Square (31)

Who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked in delight in police cars (33)

Part II:

Moloch! Solitude! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! [...] Boys sobbing in armies! [...] (80)

Moloch the stunned governments! Moloch whose mind is pure machinery!(80)

Moloch whose blood is running money! [...] (83)

Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs!

{...} Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities! (84)

And Part III:

I'm with you in Rockland where there are twenty five thousand mad comrades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale. (109)

To end this section devoted to Allen Ginsberg's modernist influences, I would like to mention various quotes from an article by Amiri Baraka et al. in the American Poetry Review in 2006 called "From the Poem that changed America: "Howl" Fifty Years Later", in which he praised the former's clear social and political stances.

We remained friends, Allen and I, for forty years. [...] The anti Moloch heavy anti-imperialist line, that wove through HOWL "AMERICA Go FUCK YR SELF WITH YR ATOM BOMB!" Now that was poetry! Plus talking to Allen about Western poetry was always part of a course. On Blake, Smart, Rimbaud, the troubadours, we visited Pound and he apologized for being anti-Semitic, at least Allen heard that, that crazy motherfucker.

Allen and I argued relentlessly, soon as he and me, we went our separate ideological practical day today paths. Malcolm's murder shot me out of the village for good, and our greetings and meetings became measurably less frequent. The gap between Black nationalism and Tibetan Buddhism. I wanted to make War, Allen to make peace. For all our endless contention, often loud and accompanied by contrasting histrionics, we remained, in many ways, comrades in and out of the word, partisans of consciousness!

But then a last word for Allen, gone now, turned completely into spirit on us! What we uphold is the defiance and resistance to "Moloch", in the

collective speech of the multinational multicultural American tongue and voice.(Baraka 3-10)

4.- Supernaturalism and Transcendentalism: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Plotinus, Saint John of the Cross and the Hebrew Kaballah.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston in 1803 and is one of the main exponents of what is known by the name of American Renaissance: a movement whose main trends were to unknot American intellectual dependence from the European past and to construct a new culture based upon direct contact with nature. He actively supported some of his contemporary writers such as David Henry Thoreau or Walt Whitman, who, in his second edition of *Leaves of Grass* thanked him by saying: "I was simmering, simmering, simmering, and Emerson brought me to a boil".(Baym 20-66)

The reason why he exerted a significative influence on Allen Ginsberg is because he was a stubborn experimenter, a questioner and a seeker, rather than following anybody's path or trying to signal the path for anyone to follow. He was the son, grandson and great grandson of Unitarian ministers and he himself was ordained Unitarian minister in 1829. Gradually, he developed his scepticism towards Christianity and reached the conclusion that each person should live his own religious experiences instead of following the set of dogmas and rituals of any established religious institution. In 1831 he resigned from his Unitarian ministry and during the 1830s he became interested in the search of the Inner Voice preached by the Quakers, under whose influence he started to practice meditation in order to recognize the voice of God within each person.

In 1833 he went on a European tour and while in Paris, he had an epiphany of the mystical correspondence between man and the forms of nature which would inspire much of his later work. His first book, *Nature*, published in 1836 is an eclectic amalgam of different cosmopolitan sources, including romanticism, the writings of Swedish philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg and Kant's Idealism and became the founding document or manifesto for a group of friends known by the name of the Transcendental Club.

They wanted to transcend the limits imposed by tradition, listening to each one's own inner voice instead of seeking truth in a set of conventional creeds because "this couldn't be received at second hand" and as a result of defending this position in an address to the Harvard Divinity School graduates he was barred from speaking at that University for almost thirty years. Furthermore; he combated slavery as an absolute moral wrong, supported the Cherokee Nation's refusal to leave their lands and took a leading role in lobbying for the cause of women's rights.

After having outlined a cursory profile of Ralph W. Emerson, we can understand perfectly why he constituted a source and an influence on Allen Ginsberg. Evidently, the answer is that he evolved from following a received fixed set of religious tenets to seeking his own transcendence in nature, in personal experience and in listening to his own interior voice, which in turn are some of the defining features of Ginsberg poetry.

Now, let's quote some of the lines in *Nature* and we will clearly see what we have just mentioned. In its introduction, Emerson challenges any established theological tradition or authority.

The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? [...] (Emerson)

In this following quote that belongs to Chapter I he searches in the stars for some answers to his questions about the final meaning of human existence, making reference to a very romantic term: the sublime.

One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. [...] Every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile

And finally, in this one belonging to Chapter I too, he expresses what he wants to be his main stance regarding transcendence and spirituality: to be a transparent eye, who gets rid of any preestablished lens and melts within the "Universal Being".

Standing on the bare ground, -my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me. I am part or particle of God.

While depicting Emerson's work's main traits we have brought to the fore in terms such as "transcendentalism" and "mysticism" along with some others such as "reflection", "challenging", "seeking" and "experiencing" to convey the idea that Emerson, without knowing it, was applying poststructuralism to religion. Why does the search for any final answer to human existence, if there is any, have to be subject to a received fixed set of tenets? Cannot we try to find our own ways and meanings to those answers? Cannot we apply critical thinking, decentering of meaning and methodic doubt to theology? The answer to these questions is that we obviously can. Emerson searched it in Nature, meditation and Eastern Religions; Ginsberg did it in these same spheres along with drugs experimenting, travelling, sex and jazz. But let's now turn to view how "Howl" is full of references related to Ginsberg's search for transcendence.

In line three he already states that his human divine hipsters are looking for some connection to the universe probing in the maze of the city at night:

angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night (3)

In line four he finds something supernatural in the city water roofs gleaming in the darkness:

sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz (4)

In line five he plays with a pun in which the oil is the elevated line of the New York underground, but at the same time is the Hebrew word for "The Mighty" to recreate a vision of Islamic angels staggering over the city roofs

who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated (5)

In line twelve he juxtaposes the vision of a thundering storm in his mind and his constant journeys between Canada and New Jersey to convey the idea that this lighting in the mind illuminated all the space and time comprised in his voyages..

incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lighting in the mind leaping towards poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless world of Time between. (12)

In line thirteen he merges the use of hallucinatory plants such as peyote with the visions of halls, dawns in cemeteries, the blinking of urban lights, the sun, the moon, the vibrations of the trees and the rantings of garbage cans in a wonderful final image of illumination.

Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, [...] blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind. (13)

In line seventeen he links platonic idealism to images of flying through the night and suicide.

A lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon. (17)

Line twenty three is especially remarkable regarding Ginsberg's and the Beats' spiritual sources. In it, Ginsberg mentions Plotinus, Saint John of the Cross and the Hebrew Kaballah. Plotinus was a neoplatonist Greek philosopher who exerted his influence on Christianity, Islam, Renaissance authors such as Pico de la Mirandola and seventeenth Century English Writers such as Coleridge and Yeats, and which bears resemblances with Hindu Upanishadic and Advaita Vedantic thought.

Saint John of the Cross: was a Spanish mystic friar who wrote "The Spiritual Canticle", an eclogue in which the bride, representing the soul, searches for the bridegroom representing Jesus Christ in a highly mystical, lyric and erotic language inspired in Solomon's Song of Songs and Kabbalah is a set of mystical esoteric teachings about the relationship between the unchanging, eternal and mysterious and the mortal and finite universe within Judaism. In "Howl" Ginsberg mentions it mixed with bop, a type of Jazz.

Who studied Plotinus, Poe, St. John of the Cross, telepathy and bop kaballa, because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas. (23)

In line twenty four he shows is interest in the American Indian religions.

who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary Indian angels who were visionary Indian angels, (24)

In lines sixty one and sixty two he alludes to the beats' search of a vision, eternity, praying, salvation and illumination.(61)

Who drove cross country seventy two hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity. (61)

Who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other's salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a second. (62)

In line seventy four, probably one of the most brilliant, and probably the most comprehensive line in the whole poem, he unveils his poetic and spiritual method. He plays with time, space, mixed images, divine beings, the soul, language and the sensation of the eternal God.

Who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in time & space through images juxtaposed and trapped the archangel of the soul between two visual images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus.(74)

And finally, to end part one, in lines seventy six, seventy seven and seventy eight, he states the spiritual stance of the Beat, paradoxically alluding to Jesus of Nazareth, who was supposed to be the mainstream "god" in the America of the fifties, but who clearly was not: a bum and angel prophet who, though unknown in his time, could state what might be left to say in the future, rise reincarnate and sing the suffering of America's mind for love in an "Oh, Lord. Why have you forsaken me?" A cry that shivered the whole world to finally provide the key to life butchered out of his own body good to eat a thousand years

The madman bum and angel beat in time unknown yet putting down here what might be left to say in time come after death. (76)

And rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an Eli, Eli lama sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio. (77)

With the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years. (78)

In part two, the spiritual mode of the poem changes radically. He doesn't discourse anymore about spirituality in positive terms or in words about searching, but in those of what he despises and rejects.

Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy! Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of the sky! (87)

[...] Visions! Omens! Hallucinations! Miracles! Ecstasies! Gone down the American river! (89)

Dreams! Adorations! Illuminations! Religions! The whole boat of sensitive bullshit! (90)

Subsequently, in part III, the mood shifts again into a mixture of pity, love and transcendental hope for human kind embodied in his friend Carl Solomon. In line 105 he cries against his friend's immortal soul dying in a madhouse:

I'm with you in Rockland, where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse. (105)

in a tone that might remind us "The Ballad of the Reading Gaol" by Oscar Wilde:

This too I know - and wise it were
 If each could know the same -
 That every prison that men build

Is built with bricks of shame,
 And bound with bars lest Christ should see
 How men their brothers maim.(Wilde)

In line 108 he echoes Jesus's resurrection in his hope that his friend come back from death.

I'm with you in Rockland, where you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb.(108)

And in line112, he hopes that when all the nightmares end his friend will come to him in the same way Saint John waits for Jesus to come to him in the end of the Book of the Revelation: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" 22:20

I'm with you in Rockland, in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night. (112)

Finally, in the section he called "Footnote to Howl" he intones a song in the style of some parts of the Exodus, Leviticus, Chronicles, the Psalms and the Epistle of Paul to the Romans to which we will draw our attention with more intensity when we address the Hebrew echos in our poem. Here suffices it to say that he absolutely decenters the meanings conveyed in these books to convey the idea that for him everything on earth is divine and transcendental.

: "the world", "the soul", "the nose, the tongue, the cock, the hand and the asshole"; "eternity, Everyman", "the bum, the Seraphim, the madman", "the typewriter, the voice", "the ecstasy", "his beat friends", "his mother", "the cocks of the grandfathers of Kansas", "the bop apocalypse", "jazz", "the skyscrapers", "the middle class", "the rebels", "New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Paris, Tangiers, Moscow, Istanbul", "the international", "the angel in Moloch", "the sea, the desert, the visions, the miracles, the abyss",... (113-125)

ending his chant with a beautiful praise to several high mystical concepts such as “forgiveness, mercy, charity, faith, solidarity, suffering magnanimity” and “the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul”.(126-127)

5.- Hebrew Echoes.

Let's remember that the aim of this essay was to describe through “Howl” the way in which Ginsberg made compatible poststructuralism, modernism, transcendentalism, mysticism and the use of ancient religious traditions, decentering these latter's tenets in his search of his own mystical and aesthetical path. Now, let us turn to his Hebrew heritage.

Though Allen Ginsberg was raised in an atheist jew family and was not a practitioner of Hebraism, it is unquestionable that several features of this tradition can be seen in his work.

American poet and scholar Alicia Ostriker published an essay in 1997 in the American Poetry Review entitled "'Howl' Revisited: The Poet as Jew." which sheds much light on this issue. She tells us how Ginsberg's poetry shares the “chesed” or loving kindness in Yiddish, a quality of the Torah which consists in compassion and peace. For her, Ginsberg's poetry displays the “shteti ethos”, that is, the value of sweetness and the tone of love that comes from Jewish atheism in Eastern European Countries, from where Louis and Noemi, Allen Ginsberg's parents fed.

For Ostriker “Howl” displays the virtue of powerlessness, the company of the dispossessed and the sanctity of the insulted and the injured, along with humour and acerbity, which are the great themes of Yiddish literature, though in Ginsberg's poetry's case the “Chosen People”, sorted out to be prosecuted and massacred, are “the best minds of his generation”.(28)

In the section “Ginsberg the Prophet” of her essay she asserts that Ginsberg's personal style is an American incarnation of the Yiddish personality and that. Ginsberg himself said, regarding his 1948 Blake-inspired visions, that he realized that his visionary experiences were not unlike the calling forth of the Hebrew prophets by their Creator and that his task as a poet would be to recreate “prophetic illuminative seizure”. (28)

In Ostriker's words, Jean Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain define a "prophetic" stance in Western art as implying private vision, an insistence on the righteousness of the prophet and the corruption of his society, passionate and hyperbolic language, social radicalism, stylistic obscurity or incoherence and "obsession, fine or frenzied", "as if with every technique of language he can muster, the prophet delivers a message that never arrives". (Ostriker 28) She also mentions Herbert N. Schneider's definition of the prophet as "one who forces people to look at their culture and see a myth they can no longer believe in, for it is a living lie". (28)

Based on these definitions she argues that "the prophetic" work "Howl" most resembles is *Lamentations* of Jeremiah because "whereas Isaiah and Ezequiel are inspired and speak for a god, the voice of *Lamentations* howls in a void". (29) God is present as an angel of destruction and yet terrifyingly absent from discourse and it is precisely this failure of divine access which has produced a literature of catastrophe which is itself an agent of survival. Hebrew history is that of the transcendence of the catastrophe as we can see in line 112 of "Howl".

I'm with you in Rockland
 in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea journey on the highway across
 America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night. (Ginsberg,
 112)

For her, the parallels between *Lamentations* and "Howl" are numerous and uncanny, beginning with the one word-title: "the memory of the universal inconsolable infant for whom the umbilicus to the Absolute is broken". "The infant without boundaries, the I who is Other, or infinite, or zero, witness and victim, betrayed by the world. The shriek of the powerless feminized male child". (29)

In both poems the voice is exclamatory, impassioned, hyperbolic, intensely figurative and virtually impossible to locate, and in both the "I" oscillate between the individual and the collective: in chapters 1 and 2 of *Lamentations*, the author is inhabited by a voice recounting horror; in 3.1 Jeremiah says: "I am the man that has seen affliction", and in chapters 4 and 5 the pronoun shifts again to "we". In "Howl" the poem starts with a: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked [...], then the "I" releases into a "we" when

referring to his “angel headed hipsters”, to go back to the “I” at the end of the poem with “I am with you in Rockland [...]”.

The third main resemblance that Ostriker finds between *Lamentations* and “Howl” is in the geographies of both works. In both the locations: “Zion, hallucinating Arkansas, Canada and Paterson, from Battery to Holy Bronx”, etc, the connections between the places and the people are ruptured. Places are harsh, not friendly and don’t sustain its people (29)

Another one lies in the fact that both share a rhetoric of sexual figures and body images, sexual humiliation and public disgrace. In *Lamentations* we can see:

The adversaries saw her (1.7). They have seen her nakedness (1.8) Her filthiness is in her skirts (1.9) the adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant thing... the heathen entered into her sanctuary (1.10) (Jeremiah)

Likewise, in Ginsberg, part I, the body is constantly subject to humiliation and deprivation:

Starving hysterical naked [...] bared their brains to Heaven under the EI [...] got busted in their pubic beards [...] purgatoried their torsos [...] broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked [...] walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks, etc., etc. (29)

“In both we can find the anguished and an intolerable sense of a divine power which thwarts, punishes, destroys and remains silent”. (Ostriker 30) “Moloch” may come from “Molech”, the Canaanite god of fire, to whom children were offered in sacrifice and whose worship by the Israelites is condemned in *Leviticus*, *Kings*, *Jeremiah*, *Amos* and *Ezekiel*. The case is that Israelite society practiced intermittently human sacrifice and in part II of “Howl” Capitalism and Militarism do the same. William Blake’s “Moloch” mainly represents war (Blake); Ginsberg’s one, Industry and Military State.

Moloch is a modern Mammon (the Hebrew word for greed), in Ginsberg’s words “unobtainable dollars”, but whereas in the New Testament you can choose between God and Mammon, in “Howl” Moloch is the unescapable God: “Moloch who

entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body". (Ostriker 30)

The contradiction of a God that is also an enemy is central to the genre of Lamentation and to Jewishness itself and it can be seen in English speaking literature from Milton to Ginsberg. In fact, we have to mention John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which Moloch embodies a satanic god who is one of the greatest warriors of the fallen angels,

First MOLOCH, horrid King besmear'd with blood
 Of human sacrifice, and parents tears,
 Though, for the noyse of Drums and Timbrels loud,
 [...], the wisest heart
 Of SOLOMON he led by fraud to build
 His Temple right against the Temple of God
 On that opprobrious Hill, and made his Grove
 The pleasant Vally of HINNOM, TOPHET thence
 And black GEHENNA call'd, the Type of Hell." (Milton 1831-2055)

But now let us focus our attention on chapter III of *Lamentations* where we may see a fusion of despair and hope: "He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces" turns itself inside out with: "The lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore have I hope" (3.11,21). "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?"(3.38). As literature and as consolation, the poem of lamentation "must communicate its own inadequacy. Its success, in a sense depends on its failure"

After having viewed the figure of the "enemy god" in Milton and Jeremiah, let's see how Ginsberg displays the same contradiction in "Howl". As we have seen in our section devoted to Supernaturalism and using Ostriker's words, "when Ginsberg's manic "Footnote to Howl" announces the holiness of everything, it produces an absurd, irrational, extravagant inversion of Part I. Like the hope of Jeremiah, Ginsberg's celebration is not logical but willed". (Ostriker 28)

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! [...] Holy time in eternity holy eternity in time holy the clocks in space holy the fourth dimension holy the fifth International holy the Angel in Moloch! (Ginsberg, 124)

In this "Footnote to Howl" Ginsberg inverts what was dreadful and "howly" in parts I and II to be majestic and "holy". What was monstrous now becomes sanctified to lead the poem to its majestic final line in which despair gives way to beatitude and hope: "Holy the supernatural extra brilliant intelligent kindness of the soul!". Professor Ostriker locates the literary sources of this ecstatic revelation in the "Holy, holy, holy" shout of the seraphim praising God in Isaiah 6.3, in William's Blake "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" in which we can find "everything that lives is holy" and in Walt Whitman's "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from; the scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer".(Baym 20-66)

Finally, Ostriker ends her essay arguing that Allen Ginsberg was a "non Jewish jew" to make reference to the fact that though he rejected univocal fixed Judaism, his "Jewishness" was never exactly invisible to others. William Carlos Williams called him: "this young Jewish boy" and coupled him with Dante, Chaucer and Jeremiah; Richard Everheart said that "Howl" was "profoundly Jewish in temper" and that it was "biblical in its repetitive grammatical buildup", and Edward Albee called him "a young old testament prophet" (31)

For Ginsberg, the Beat subculture takes the place of the real ethnic and political subcultures forming a community of outcasts which is brought to the fore through an intended ambivalence between the author's Hebrew and American sources. From his father, he took socialism, from his mother a paranoid idealism. From America, he takes Whitman: the manly love and the comrades, the open road, the huge vistas, the infinite hope and the infinite disappointment; and from Judaism the universal compassion, the victimization onto the world, the salvation through victimization, the genre of lamentation and the affirmation out of despair. In short, he deconstructs his ethnical and cultural heritages and uses them as instruments in the construction of his own multivocal and hybridized personal, social, mystical and aesthetical world.

**6.- Ginsberg and the Search for a Deconstructed Supernatural Language.
From Hebraism to Hinduism, Buddhism and Black Jazz Aesthetics.-**

After having described Ginsberg's modernist and postmodernist stances, his transcendentalist sources and his deconstructing of his Hebrew cultural and religious heritage, let's analyze through "Howl" how Ginsberg was expanding his spiritual view to other spiritual traditions in what some authors call "transpiritualism", "spiritual self-othering" or Ginsberg's search for a Supernatural Language.

Craig Svonkin, in his essay entitled "Manishevitz and Sake, the Kaddish and the Sutras: Allen Ginsberg's Spiritual Self-Othering", published in the Literary Journal called "College Literature" in 2010 explores Ginsberg's ambivalence to his "endowed" identity through what he calls "transpiritualism", that is, the adoption of marginalized spiritual identities as his own. For Svonkin, in Ginsberg's case, this process didn't consist in sloughing off his received Hebrew heritage for an appropriated Hindu and Buddhist identity, but rather in the crafting of a spiritually complex and hybridized identity that neither adopted nor rejected any tradition outright but experimented endlessly in search of its own answers.

In Svonkin's words Ginsberg moved away from his traditional religious roots and identity in favor of what appeared to be a more enticing, rewarding and hybridized or syncretic spirituality, namely the more iconoclastic, esoteric, unorthodox and hybrid one that he fashioned for himself out of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and black Jazz aesthetics. In his poem "Siesta in Xbalba", written just a year after "Howl", Ginsberg prophesies his future discovery of a foreign, exotic got to be discovered paradoxically inside himself and outside the U.S. and his given Jewish tradition: (Svonkin 166-0_9)

There is an inner
anterior image
of divinity
beckoning me out
to pilgrimage
O future, unimaginable God (Ginsberg)

Svonkin mentions Herman Melville's quote in *Moby Dick*: "We are both Fast Fish and Loose Fish, fish speared and strapped to Ahab's ship and fish loose and free to swim on their own" (168) to convey the idea that for Ginsberg, the "fast" concept of identity as given and fixed was seen as a unicultural trap to be escaped from and though, as David Aniran, Jewish musician and long-time friend to Ginsberg said: "he kept a real Jewish soulfulness, a certain Talmudic rhythm, the Old Jewish wail", he maintained a complex insider/outsider status regarding his Jewishness and rejected the latter's authoritarian, nationalist and monotheistic thinking.(168) Furthermore, we should attempt to historicize Ginsberg's strong critique of Jewish uniculturalism by noting the socioeconomic identity shift that Jews were undergoing in the fifties in which "Most American Jews became part of the big wide and white Establishment" (172) so despised by the Beats.

Notwithstanding, Ginsberg never attempted to escape his Jewish identity completely, rather identifying himself as a hybrid: "a Jewish Buddhist" or a "Buddhist Jew". In many ways, he tried to redefine and rehabilitate his Jewishness by hybridizing or metaphoring it. Signs of these hybridizing and metaphoring may be seen in the facts that he joined a group of American and Israeli progressive Jews in a protest of the mistreatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and in that his self-fashioned his gay genealogy through a comic, sexual revision of the Hebrew tradition to trace the lineage of the Great Patriarchs to the beginning of times. He traced himself back to Walt Whitman through a series of homosexual connections-"Walt Whitman slept with Edward Carpenter, who slept with Gavin Arthur, who slept with Neal Cassady, who slept with Ginsberg" (Ginsberg 2001, 31 7) echoing the frequent accounts of genealogical lineages that may be seen in the Torah and in the Bible.-

"Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, [...], and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king [...] (Mathew 1:2)

In "Howl, Ginsberg doesn't just write a new variation of ancient Hebrew forms. He creates a culturally hybridized poem, borrowing from black sermons, the blues, Japanese Haiku poetry and other Eastern poetic forms mixing these various spiritual,

poetic influences in a cultural blender to create a radically new form. Thus, Ginsberg defends the Beat appropriation of Black and Asian spiritual or poetic practices and an eclectic approach to spirituality. He argues that white poets who adopt jazz and Buddhist or Hindu poetic forms as their own can be healed from the ill-effects of 1960s America's puritanical, anti-human, anti-sexual, anti-Personal, anti-Subject, anti-introspective culture". (173)

In these lines of "Howl", we may see how he intertwines his psalmodic style with his hallucinatory visions of Buddhism and Jazz.

Who vanished into nowhere **Zen** New Jersey, leaving a trail of ambiguous picture postcards on Atlrantic City Hall (19)

Dragging themselves through **the negro streets** ad dawn [...]. (2)

Who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness [...] **contemplating jazz.**(4)

Who barreled down the highways of the past journeying to each other's hotrod-Golgotha jail-solitude watch or **Birmingham jazz incarnation.** (59)

To end his essay, Svonkin argues that while Jewishness, at least as inherited, is a sign of constructedness and limitations to Ginsberg- " a box to be revised or expanded"- Buddhism and other Eastern practices appear to have been experienced by Ginsberg in an almost completely positive manner. "He was introduced to Buddhism by Kerouac and gradually became a dedicated, practicing Buddhist that went so far as to take formal vows" (174). We may think that this might occur due to the fact that he didn't envision Buddhism as a "religion" in the Western or Middle Eastern sense of the term but as a "seeking path", "a way to reflection and spitirual development"

This process of deconstructing and expanding his received Judaism and experimenting with and gradually becoming more involved in Buddishm, that may be seen in a timid and nascent state in works such as "Sakyamani Coming Out from the Mountain" (1953), "Howl" (1955), "Four Haiku" (1955) and Sunflower Sutra" (1955), became more evident in the sixties and seventies with works such as "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (1966), "Planet Nat's" (1968) or "Don't Grow Old" (1976). In this latter one he

no longer turns to Jewish tropes, but rather to Buddhist to deal with the fact of death. “Buddha Death, I wake with you/Dharma Death, your mind is new/Sangha Death, we’ll work it through.”

In his poem “Kral Majales” (King of May), written in 1965, right after having been expelled from Havana when his hosts found that he was not sympathetic to their suppression of “unconventional behavior”, he clearly demonstrates his attempt to create a hybridized spiritual identity

I am the King of May because I am of Slavic parentage and a Buddhist Jew
 who worships the Sacred Heart of Christ, the blue body of Krishna
 the straight back of Ram
 the beads of Chango the Nigerian singing Shiva Shiva in a manner which I
 have invented. (Ginsberg)

In her essay: “Postmodern Supernaturalism: Ginsberg and the Search for a Supernatural Language” published in 2005 in the Yale Journal of Criticism, Amy Hungerford argues that Ginsberg takes the characteristics traditionally associated with Hindu and Buddhist chant: the ability to yoke body and consciousness, the power to dispel illusion and the capacity to transform the chanter into the god whose name he chants; and transfers them to his poetry by making poems that evacuate any expected referential content “to advance an idea of poetry that moves beyond meaning into what became a fantasy of supernatural efficacy centered on the power of sound”(Hungerford 269-298,479).

For Hungerford, Ginsberg, after having written “Howl” in which he asserted a clear authorial intentionality, plunged into a deep personal and poetical crisis when embraced his friend William Burroughs’ cut-up or pastiche technique that stripped poetry of subject matter and authorial intentionality. The answer to that crisis came from India and Japan and might be summed up in a line from one of his major post India poems, “Wichita Vortex Sutra. There, Ginsberg writes that we must “make Mantra of American language now”.(275)

In “Hum Bom” (1968) he pursues the effect of a resonant chanted mantra, in which the words produce a sound meant to transform the listener into a person of peace: “whom bomb? / We bomb you/ Who bomb? / You bomb you”. (Ginsberg)The

actual sound of the poem is meant to effect the moral transformation by means of its intrinsic power. As in the yogic tradition, vibrations produced in the body can transform the consciousness directly, bypassing the intellect. Ginsberg is less interested in producing particular thoughts in the mind of the reader or listener than he is in producing “the movement” of thoughts in a certain cadence through another’s consciousness.

The poem, taken thus by the listener or reader as a mantra, form and direct the movement of consciousness and the vibration of the body replicates the poet himself. As Ginsberg himself stated: “the rhythmic units that I’d written down in “Howl” and “Kaddish” were basically breathing exercise forms which if anybody else repeated would catalyze in them the same pranic breathing, physiological spasm that I was going through and so would presumably catalyze in them the same affects or emotions”(277).

For Hungerford, whether we take it as a natural physiological exercise, whose spiritual effects are the result of physical effects, or as a supernatural energy that is transferred through the sonic medium into the devotee, Ginsberg uses the supernatural structure of mantra to make a “white magic” poetry, efficacious even where narration and traditional structures of meaning fall away and may ultimately be best described as a formal poet, despite his protests against High Modernist poetic form, “since it is the literal form of the sound that carries the weight of what he imagines the poem to do in what we might call “ a supernatural formalism”.(280)

The case is that when coming to Ginsberg’s poetic transformation in the sixties towards poststructuralism and Derridian, de Manian and Lacanian understandings of language, while the materiality of language for these theorists represents a challenge to meaning construed in an idealist paradigm and to what Derrida called “the metaphysics of presence”, that is, Western philosophy’s metaphysics privileging immediate access to meaning and presence over absence which deconstructive thinkers intend to deconstruct., it does precisely the opposite for Ginsberg

Hungerford claims that Ginsberg’s rediscovery of the material word, particularly its sound, through Burroughs’s cutups, and the elimination of subject matter that for Ginsberg goes along with that rediscovery, “ushers in a poetics of

absolute presence, and a metaphysics that has more in common with Hinduism's Brahma or the incarnate Word of St. John's gospel than with the seemingly secular world of deconstruction" (280). Notwithstanding, she says seemingly because she argues that both Derrida and de Man, far from evacuating human presence from language, instead personify language in the most radical sense, imputing to language, in Derrida's case, mortality, and in the case both of Derrida and de Man, a consciousness and autonomy only imaginable in personal terms. "In this sense one might argue that deconstruction already entails a kind of supernaturalism, or, if you will, a kind of animism" (280).

Namely, for this author there is no contradiction between Ginsberg's ushering in a poetics of absolute presence and of supernaturalist metaphysics and his embracing of poststructuralism because, for her, deconstruction already entails a kind of supernaturalism due to the fact that Derrida and de Man personify language in the most radical sense, imparting to it mortality and a consciousness and autonomy only imaginable in personal terms.

7.- Discussion/Conclusions.-

As far as our aim was to argue that seemingly irreconcilable literary trends became hybridized in Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" we have provided an overview of each one of these movements in relation to this poem, its author and the authors that have exerted an unequivocal influence on him, grounding our assertions in a combination of a close reading of the poem and the work of recognized scholars in our matter of analysis. . We have started describing our poem's poststructuralist and Beat traits to compare and contrast them with its modernist features through the work of poets such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams and argued that the merge of these two literary trends is completely pertinent based on French philosopher and scholar Jean Francois Lyotard's theories and on our own critical and autonomous stance.

Subsequently, we have performed the same process with XIX Century's American Transcendentalism. We have analysed this movements characteristics through the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and its influence on Ginsberg to argue that its specific features enable a revolutionary deconstructive poet such as Allen

Ginsberg to feed from a supernaturalist source, traditionally linked to logocentrism, essentialism and univocalism.

Thereafter, we have focused on Ginsberg's Hebrew heritage and our poem's Hebrew influences through the work of critic and poet Alicia Ostriker to describe how this author makes use of traditional ancient religions to extract from them all their lyrical potentialities, but deconstructing them to convey his own messages and meanings related to his challenge against the static and reactionary American society in the fifties and his search for his own critical spiritual voice. In this section we have also mentioned other mystic currents in which Ginsberg was interested such as Neoplatonism through Plotinus, XVI Spanish mysticism through Saint John of the Cross and the Esoterism of the Hebrew Kabbalah.

Once we have justified our argument in favour of the hybridity between poststructuralism, modernism, Transcendentalism and Ginsberg personal use of Hebraism and Christianity our task was to search for the key to understanding Ginsberg "transpiritualism", that is, his appropriation of Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism in his search for his own spiritual identity and the compatibility of these ones with the former trends we have described. This time we have relied on the work of scholar Craig Svonkin who asserts that In "Howl, Ginsberg doesn't just write a new variation of ancient Hebrew forms, instead, he creates a culturally hybridized poem, borrowing from black sermons, the blues, Japanese Haiku poetry and other Eastern poetic forms mixing these various spiritual, poetic influences in a cultural blender to create a radically new form in an eclectic approach to spirituality.

Finally, we have reflected on Ginsberg search for his own deconstructed supernatural language and for that we have analysed scholar Amy Hungerford's essay "'Postmodern Supernaturalism: Ginsberg and the Search for a Supernatural Language" in which she argues that Ginsberg transfers to his poetry Hindu and Buddhist chant's ability to yoke body and consciousness, its power to dispel illusion and its capacity to transform the chanter into the god whose name he chants by making poems that evacuate any expected referential content, moving beyond meaning into a fantasy of supernatural efficacy centered on the power of sound.

For Hungerford, Ginsberg uses the supernatural structure of mantra to make a “white magic” poetry, efficacious even where narration and traditional structures of meaning fall away and, and he may ultimately be best described as a “supernatural formal poet” since it is the literal form of the sound that carries the weight of what he imagines the poem to do

Regarding Ginsberg’s poetic transformation in the sixties towards poststructuralism, Hungerford holds that whereas the materiality of language for deconstructive theorists represents a challenge to meaning construed in an idealist paradigm which they intend to deconstruct, for Ginsberg, it ushers in a metaphysics that has more in common with Hinduism’s Brahmma or the incarnate Word of St. John’s gospel than with the seemingly secular world of deconstruction. Anyway, she sees no contradiction between these two facts because for her, deconstruction already entails a kind of supernaturalism in that Derrida and de Man personify language in the most radical sense, imputing to it mortality and a consciousness and autonomy only imaginable in personal terms.

As we can see, we have tried to connect and force to dialogue literary currents as seemingly distant as Poststructuralism, Modernism, Transcendentalism, Mysticism, Romanticism and the use of ancient religions such as Hebraism and Buddism in order to stress the importance of hybridity and intertextuality in literary criticism and the necessity to avoid too clear cut classifications no matter how instrumental and convenient they might be. This essay has precisely tried to be an exercise of dialogue, interaction and intertextuality taking as an excuse Ginsberg’s wonderful poem.

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