

Article

The Beat Generation Meets the Hungry Generation: U.S.–Calcutta Networks and the 1960s “Revolt of the Personal”

Steven Belletto

Department of English, Lafayette College, Easton, PA 18042, USA; belletts@lafayette.edu

Received: 15 October 2018; Accepted: 21 December 2018; Published: 2 January 2019

Abstract: This essay explores the relationship between the U.S.-based Beat literary movement and the Hungry Generation literary movement centered in and around Calcutta, India, in the early 1960s. It discusses a trip Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky took to India in 1962, where they met writers associated with the Hungry Generation. It further explains how Lawrence Ferlinghetti, owner of City Lights Books in San Francisco, was inspired to start a new literary magazine, *City Lights Journal*, by Ginsberg’s letters from India, which included work by Hungry Generation writers. The essay shows how *City Lights Journal* packaged the Hungry Generation writers as the Indian wing of the Beat movement, and focuses in particular on the work of Malay Roy Choudhury, the founder of the Hungry Generation who had been prosecuted for obscenity for his poem “Stark Electric Jesus.” The essay emphasizes in particular the close relationship between aesthetics and politics in Hungry Generation writing, and suggests that Ginsberg’s own mid-1960s turn to political activism via the imagination is reminiscent of strategies employed by Hungry Generation writers.

Keywords: Beat Generation; Hungry Generation; Hungryalists; Allen Ginsberg; Malay Roy Choudhury; Beats in India; transnational Beats; international Beat movement; Beat politics; City Lights Journal; “Stark Electric Jesus”; “Wichita Vortex Sutra”

In March 1962, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky arrived in India, where they would live for the next fourteen months. Students of Beat literature have long noted that during this time they met up with fellow poets Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger, and that together they immersed themselves in the local religious and literary cultures. Partly because all four writers kept journals of the period that have since been published, readers have tended to characterize their own interactions as among the more significant of the trip.¹ While there is a wealth of material to be mined in this regard—not the least of which is their meeting with the Dalai Lama, during which Ginsberg brought up the consciousness-expanding potential of LSD—other important connections were forged that tell differing stories about the international reach of the Beat movement. Indeed, as Ginsberg and Orlovsky traveled on without Snyder and Kyger, they met a host of writers, artists, and holy men in Banaras, Calcutta and beyond; as Orlovsky wrote to their old friend Lucien Carr: “Main thing we do in Calcutta is meat [sic] Bengale poets by the dozen.”²

¹ See Allen Ginsberg (1996), *Indian Journals* (New York: Grove); Joanne Kyger (2000), *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and Indian Journals: 1960–1964* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books); Peter Orlovsky (2014), *Peter Orlovsky, a Life in Words: Intimate Chronicles of a Beat Writer*, ed. Bill Morgan (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers), pp. 175–213; and Gary Snyder (2007), *Passage Through India: An Expanded and Illustrated Edition* (Berkeley: Shoemaker & Hoard).

² Quoted in Deborah Baker (2008), *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India* (New York: Penguin), p. 148.

One such Bengali poet who caught Ginsberg's interest was Malay Roy Choudhury, also a playwright and essayist who had distinguished himself by founding a literary movement he called the Hungry Generation or the Hungryalists, a group of young writers and artists centered in and around Calcutta who were united in their pugnaciously antiestablishment attitudes and in their drive to reinvent what they took to be the tired, academic modes of traditional Bengali arts and letters. Late in 1962, in one of his long, detailed letters to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, owner of City Lights Books and publisher of *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), Ginsberg turned particularly rhapsodic about his latest exploits, and folded in a copy of "The Hungryalist Manifesto on Poetry," a broadside by Choudhury filled with audacious pronouncements about poetry and culture. Ferlinghetti was impressed enough by Ginsberg's letter and the suggestive energies of the Hungryalist Manifesto that he was inspired to start a new little magazine intended to showcase the contemporary international avant-garde, including the Hungryalists. As he replied to Ginsberg: "I have just been prodded by your India descriptions to start another *Journal* and publish your description in it, along with anything else you send, and also publish that beautiful Weekly Manifesto of Hungry Generation of India which you enclosed in letter."³ This exchange was the germ of what would become *City Lights Journal* (first run: 1963–1966), the magazine that introduced Choudhury and the Hungry Generation to Western readers, but did so by suggesting their contributions to international letters were broadly comparable to what the Beats had achieved in the States.⁴

The Hungry Generation's association with the Beats was a boon insofar as Ginsberg was already an internationally recognized writer, and ever the astute marketer, he was able to package the Hungryalists as something like the Indian wing of a global Beat phenomenon. In those early days, Choudhury also tended to play up his connection to Ginsberg and the Beats, at least when describing the Hungry Generation to non-Indian readers. In 1963, for example, Choudhury wrote a dispatch from India for *El Corno Emplumado*, Margaret Randall and Sergio Mondragon's bilingual arts journal published out of Mexico City, and described the situation like this: "We have started a literary rebellion here calling ourselves HUNGRYALISTS, mainly fighting for a change, along with some crazy conceptions. Allen Ginsberg, who came to India and stayed with us for about a year or more (he was in my house for a few days and wrote some beautiful poems in this very room where I am now sitting and writing this letter to you), introduced us to his fellow Beats by reprinting and publishing our Manifestoes and poems etc. in U.S. journals."⁵ Choudhury has in mind Ferlinghetti's *City Lights Journal* (No. 1 [1963]; No. 2 [1964]; No. 3 [1966]), which, thanks to Ginsberg's efforts, was the first to print English translations of Hungry Generation manifestos and poetry, a move that at once announced them to the West and cemented Beatdom's international bona fides. Taking the link between Ginsberg and Choudhury as a starting point, this essay explores the Beat–Hungryalist connections via *City Lights Journal*, which introduced the Hungry Generation to Anglophone audiences by framing it as an extension of the Beat movement. This framing suggested the internationalist cast of contemporary Beat writing while simultaneously conferring hip or underground legitimacy on the Hungryalists through their supposed association with the Beats. Given this scope, I will not wade very deeply into the intricacies of Bengali poetry or the factional rivalries on the local Calcutta literary scene—which would of course be required to more fully understand the poetic and aesthetic interventions of the Hungryalists—but will instead investigate the version of the Hungry Generation presented in English in *City Lights Journal* and other venues

³ Lawrence Ferlinghetti to Allen Ginsberg (2015, p. 166). (November 15, 1962), in *I Greet You at the Beginning of a Great Career: The Selected Correspondence of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg, 1955–1997*, ed. Bill Morgan (San Francisco: City Lights Books).

⁴ *City Lights Journal* 4 was not published until 1978.

⁵ Malay Roy Choudhury (1964b) to *El Corno Emplumado* (August 9, 1963), *El Corno Emplumado* 9 (January 1964), p. 153. In later years, Choudhury would reverse these terms by arguing that the Hungryalists had a profound though largely unacknowledged impact on Ginsberg and his work; see Malay Roy Choudhury (2009), "Impact of Hungry Generation (Hungryalist) Literary Movement on Allen Ginsberg," www.sciy.org/?p=6127.

such as the “Hungry!” issue of *Salted Feathers* (1967), edited by Dick Bakken (Bakken 1967), and the “Poetry of India” issue of *Intrepid* (1968), guest edited by Carl Weissner (Weissner 1968a).

There is a paucity of critical work on the Hungryalists available in English, but that which does exist tends to cast their importance in terms of rebellion and iconoclasm.⁶ In his introduction to the 1968 issue of *Intrepid* he guest edited, for example, German writer and Beat associate Carl Weissner announced that the Hungryalists “have established themselves as the largest & most remarkable avantgarde element in the country.”⁷ More recently, Aditya Misra has called the Hungry Generation “the first avant-garde uprising against modern Bengali poetry which believed in giving the decaying Indian civilization a mortal blow,” and Bhaswati Bhattacharya underscores that the movement’s “goal” was “to examine the extent to which it could subvert the existing literary and social norms.”⁸ Reflecting on her interviews with Samir Roy Choudhury, Malay Roy Choudhury’s elder brother and original Hungryalist, Maitreyee B. Chowdhury argues that the movement

gave a new vocabulary to Bengali literature, taught new reading habits and made the stench of the road, among other such ‘un-poetic’ things, poetic ... the movement became an expression for those frustrated with the culture and ethics of those times ... the Hungryalists perhaps spoke for an entire city affected by post-Partition poverty politics. New conversations and a new language became the need of the day—a language that would cast aside elitist aspirations and speak of angst, instead.⁹

This critical language of subversion and newness, of anti-civilization stances and “post-Partition poverty politics,” suggests the degree to which the Hungry Generation was a literary, social, and political movement rolled into one, and as such was characterized by uncertain distinctions between aesthetic interventions and political statements. As Weissner put it in 1968, “the HG poets, most of them anyway, are as much political agitators as they are poetic discoverers.”¹⁰

⁶ To my knowledge, no comprehensive, English-language study of the Hungry Generation exists. In fact, there is a surprising lack of work on the Beats and India in general; even the recent, otherwise thorough *Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature*, ed. A. Robert Lee (2018), which has chapters on Beat-associated literature from Australia to China, lacks a chapter on India. Deborah Baker’s (2008) *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India* (New York: Penguin) is the clear exception insofar as it is a lively account of the American Beats in India, but some critics have questioned the book’s accuracy with regard to its brief discussions of the Hungryalists (see pp. 154–59, 177–78, 194–99, 216–20); Maitreyee B. Chowdhury (2016), for example, calls it “a somewhat fictionalized account of Allen’s stay and influences from India” (“Talking Poetry”). See also *Café Dissensus* 26 (special issue on “The Beat and the Hungry Generation: When Losing Became Hip”), ed. Brahmachari and Kumar (2016), <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/06/16/contents-the-beat-and-the-hungry-generation-when-losing-became-hip-issue-26/>. In addition to this special issue (only some of which actually deals with Beat–Hungryalist connections), fans of the Hungry Generation do actively post brief essays, interviews, and other material about the movement online, and while I refer to some of these sites in this essay, note that they can be laced with misinformation and are often colored by the idiosyncratic memories or biases of the compilers. Although it is somewhat difficult to locate, the best English language collection of Hungry Generation material—including poetry, manifestos, letters, and legal documents pertaining to the 1964 arrests and subsequent trials—remains the “Hungry!” issue of *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2 (March 1967). Readers of Bengali may also consult Saileswar Ghosh (1995), *Hungry Generation Andolan* [The Hungry Generation Movement] (Kolkata: Pratibhas).

⁷ Carl Weissner (1968b), “introduction,” *Intrepid* 10 (“Poetry of India” issue) (spring 1968), n.p.

⁸ Aditya Misra (2016), “I can but why should I Go?: The Romance of Opposition in Shakti Chattopadhyaya’s Poetry,” *South Asian Review* 37.2, p. 181; and Bhaswati Bhattacharya (2017), *Much Ado Over Coffee: Indian Coffee House Then and Now* (New Delhi: Social Science Press), p. 196.

⁹ Maitreyee B. Chowdhury (2016), “Talking Poetry, Ginsberg and the Hungryalists: Samir Roychoudhury, a Retrospective,” *Café Dissensus* 26 (special issue on “The Beat and the Hungry Generation: When Losing Became Hip” (June 16, 2016). <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/06/16/talking-poetry-ginsberg-and-the-hungryalists-samir-roychoudhury-a-retrospective/>.

¹⁰ Weissner (1968b), “introduction,” n.p.

In later years, in fact, Malay Roy Choudhury pinpointed the genesis of the movement not to the writing or publication of a poem, but to the manifesto *about* poetry Ferlinghetti would eventually print in *City Lights Journal*: “The Hungry Generation literary movement was launched by me in November 1961 with the publication of a manifesto on poetry in English.”¹¹ According to Choudhury, then, the Hungryalists were “launched” into public visibility via their manifestos, which were printed on broadsides and distributed throughout Calcutta and Patna. Indeed, although Choudhury is widely credited as the founder of the Hungryalists, it was a pointedly social and communal enterprise, and he accordingly insisted that it is recognizable as a “generation” or movement because it sprang not from him alone, but from a coterie of four poets: the Choudhury brothers, Debi Rai, and Shakti Chattopadhyay. There were many other writers and artists who came to be associated with the Hungry Generation, and while I do touch on some in the course of this essay, I’ll concentrate primarily on Choudhury and others who were most visible in the States.

In connection with their poetry and manifestos, the Hungryalists became notorious in Calcutta in the early 1960s for their public acts of protest. As one later observer explains, for example, “the poets started a campaign to personally deliver paper masks of jokers, monsters, gods, cartoon characters and animals to Bengali politicians, bureaucrats, newspaper editors and other powerful people. The slogan was, ‘Please remove your mask.’”¹² Such antics became increasingly irritating to municipal authorities, and tensions came to a head on September 2, 1964, when eleven writers who had appeared in a Bengali-language book titled *Hungry Generation* were arrested and charged with “criminal conspiracy to bring out the aforesaid obscene publication,” which, the complaint read, would “corrupt the minds of the common reader.”¹³ Malay Roy Choudhury, Samir Roy Choudhury, and Debi Rai were among the eleven arrested; Shakti Chattopadhyay, the fourth original Hungryalist, had also published in *Hungry Generation*, but had managed to avoid arrest by agreeing to testify against Malay Roy Choudhury at his obscenity trial. Chattopadhyay claimed that despite his appearance in *Hungry Generation*, “I had no relationship with so called Hungry Generation and this book was not published by me.” He went on to allege that Choudhury’s writing in particular represented “mental perversion [sic] and [the] language is vulgar,” and then “strongly condemned” Choudhury’s contribution to *Hungry Generation*, a febrile, sexually-explicit poem called “Prachanda Baidyutik Chhutar” or “Stark Electric Jesus.”¹⁴ Eventually, the charges against the ten other writers were dropped, but Choudhury, as reputed founder of the Hungryalists, was forced to stand trial for obscenity.

The ensuing trial is broadly analogous to an earlier moment in Beat history, when in 1957 Ferlinghetti and bookseller Shig Murao were charged with obscenity for distributing *Howl and Other Poems*.¹⁵ Although “Howl” was finally determined to have literary merit, “Stark Electric Jesus” was found obscene and Choudhury was fined roughly two months’ salary, fired from his civil service job, and the poem was banned and extant copies ordered destroyed.¹⁶ The immediate, material aftermath of the decision was thus dire for Choudhury, but as the “Howl” trial did for Ginsberg, the public battle over “Stark Electric Jesus” propelled him into a new realm of renown because he came to epitomize the right to free expression in the face of government censorship. In rendering his verdict, A.K. Mitra, Presidency Magistrate of the 9th Court of Calcutta, concluded that “Stark Electric Jesus”

¹¹ Malay Roy Choudhury (2009), “Impact of the Hungry Generation (Hungryalist) Literary Movement on Allen Ginsberg,” www.sciy.org/?=6127.

¹² Nayanima Basu (2011), “A Sour Time of Putrefaction,” *Business Standard* (December 10), https://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/-a-sour-time-of-putrefaction-111121000058_1.html

¹³ The Complaint Against the ‘Hungry Generation’ (1967), reprinted in *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2 (“Hungry!” issue) (March 1967), n.p.

¹⁴ Malay Roy Choudhury’s Prosecution (1967), reprinted in *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2 (“Hungry!” issue) (March 1967), n.p.

¹⁵ See *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression*, ed. Morgan and Peters (2006).

¹⁶ Howard McCord (1966), “Note on the Hungry Generation,” *City Lights Journal* 3 (1966), p. 159.

was “per se obscene” as “it starts with restless impatience of sensuous man for a woman obsessed with uncontrollable urge for sexual intercourse followed by a description of vagina, uterus, clitoris, seminal fluid, and other parts of the female body and organ, boasting of the man’s innate impulse and conscious skill as how to enjoy a woman, blaspheming God and profaning parents accusing them of homosexuality and masturbation, debasing all that is noble and beautiful in human love and relationship.”¹⁷ Choudhury’s trial became a minor cause célèbre in avant-garde circles in India, the States, and beyond, and thus stands as perhaps *the* landmark moment in the history of the Hungry Generation, even as Chattopadhyay’s testimony against Choudhury symbolized the dissolution of the original coterie.¹⁸

After Choudhury’s arrest, he and the Hungryalists became the latest example of writers and publishers around the world who had been subject to legal action by backward-looking authorities, and Choudhury received letters of support from a wide spectrum of fellow writers, from Daisy Aldan (editor of the poetry magazines *Folder* and *New Folder*) and poet Carol Bergé in New York to Margaret Randall and Octavio Paz in Mexico City; Paz had in fact met some of the Hungryalists while visiting Calcutta and been suitably impressed.¹⁹ However, while Choudhury’s obscenity trial served as a rallying-point for sympathetic writers, even prior to this event the Hungry Generation was being characterized as part of an international avant-garde, thanks in no small part to Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti’s efforts.

In the first issue of *City Lights Journal*, Ferlinghetti’s headnote described it as “a new international annual,” and he announced in the second that its content “circles the world.”²⁰ However much the journal favored eclecticism under the banner of the avant-garde, it was also not above framing these international writers in terms of Ferlinghetti’s favored literary provocateurs, the Beats. The inaugural issue, for example, began not with Indian writing, but with Ginsberg’s and Snyder’s writing about traveling through India. The cover even featured a photograph of Ginsberg somewhere in the “Central Himalayas,” wrapped in a blanket and staring frankly at the camera, his hair whipped up in the wind. Readers were presented, in other words, with the celebrated Beat poet in his newly adopted environment, the implication being that while he may have been broadening his worldview through travel, his mere presence also served to confer legitimacy on the region and its writers.

As he had promised to Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti printed “fragments of letters from ... Allen Ginsberg In India” in the first issue of his new journal. The excerpts he selected emphasize the correspondences among what Ginsberg was witnessing in India and his sense of the American underground: “the common saddhu scene here is, feels like, just about the same as beat scene in US—amazing to see the underlying universality of people’s scenes.”²¹ Elsewhere Ginsberg describes a moment when “drunken saddhus came up—just like mill valley [California] scene” (p. 8), and claims that “all the hip rituals in US involving pot have been developed and institutionalized here” (p. 8). Thus as he draws attention to what he takes to be the more exotic aspects of his Indian experience, Ginsberg also insists on the “universality” of subterraneans the world over. He even calls saddhus “nothing but a bunch of gentle homeless on-the-road teaheads” (p. 8), drawing a direct line from

¹⁷ The Verdict Against Malay Roy Choudhury (1967), reprinted in *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2 (“Hungry!” issue) (March 1967), n.p.

¹⁸ Malay Roy Choudhury (2015), “The Sunflower Collective Interview with Malay Roy Choudhury” (10 November), malayinterview.wordpress.com/category/hungry-generation.

¹⁹ The letters to Choudhury from Aldan, Bergé, Randall, and Paz—along with others, a total of 21—are collected in *Letters/Letters*, ed. Tridib Mitra (1968). Mitra, another Hungryalist writer, explains that the selection is “idiosyncratic,” that he pulled from “thousands of letters dumped in a trunk” and collected “letters from those persons only whom I’ve heard of and am damn fascinated for” (n.p.). Mitra and his wife Alo Mitra edited two little magazines associated with the Hungry Generation, *Waste Paper* (English) and *Unmarga* (Bengali).

²⁰ Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1963), “City Lights Journal,” *City Lights Journal* 1 (1963), p. 4; and Ferlinghetti (1964), “City Lights Journal: Number Two,” *City Lights Journal* 2 (1964), p. 5.

²¹ Allen Ginsberg (1963), “In India,” *City Lights Journal* 1 (1963), p. 9. The excerpts come from a series of letters Ginsberg had written to Ferlinghetti on 2 November 1962, 15 November 1962, and 10 January 1963.

Hindu holy men to the most famous novel of the Beat movement. (Following Ginsberg's letters is Gary Snyder's "A Journey to Rishikesh & Hardwara," a more conventional piece of travel writing that describes yoga and meditation in various ashrams Snyder visited with Ginsberg, Orlovsky, and Kyger.²²)

It is only after these depictions of India through the eyes of sympathetic Westerners does Ferlinghetti present an example of Indian writing, the manifesto that had inspired him to create a new magazine in the first place. Previously published in Calcutta as a broadside signed by some 25 poets and "written and translated from Bengali" by Malay Roy Choudhury, the version in *City Lights Journal* accentuates the idea of a literary "Generation" by presenting a kind of poetic board of directors:

Editor: Debi Rai Leader: Shakti Chattopadhyay

Creator: Malay Roy Choudhury

Howrah, India²³

Framed as it is by the impressions of India from Ginsberg and Snyder, including Ginsberg's mention of hanging out with Shakti Chattopadhyay "of enclosed manifest" (p. 7), readers of *City Lights Journal* could be forgiven for interpreting this manifesto as an Indian counterpart to well-known Beat manifestos such as Jack Kerouac's "Belief & Technique in Modern Prose" or "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," both of which originally circulated in the little magazines *Black Mountain Review* and *Evergreen Review*, respectively. The Hungry Generation manifesto announces that traditional Bengali poetry is "cryptic, short-hand, ... flattered by own sensitivity like a public school prodigy," and that, by contrast, the Hungryalists have "discarded the blankety-blank school of modern poetry, the darling of the press, where poetry does not resurrect itself in an orgasmic flow, but words come bubbling in an artificial muddle" (p. 24). According to such a view, something called "the Hungry Generation" is best clarified in terms of opposition: there is a "blankety-blank school of modern poetry," underwritten by the media—and, presumably, the academy—that is stuck merely regurgitating tradition. In the context of *City Lights Journal*, the details of this tradition are less important than the claim that it is outmoded and "artificial": what matters is that the Hungryalists stand *opposed* to whatever is the dominant strand in Bengali letters. Indeed, in other versions of the manifesto, Choudhury insists that Hungry Generation writing seeks to "convey the brutal sound of breaking values and startling tremors of the rebellious soul of the artist himself, with words stripped of their usual meanings and used contrapuntally. It must invent a new language, which would incorporate everything at once, speak to all senses in one."²⁴ The shattering of values, the embracing of rebellion, the restless search for "new language"; these are the features of the Hungry Generation that would likewise be recognizable to readers of Beat literature, thus providing a familiar template for seeing Calcutta as the latest outpost in a worldwide literary movement.

Like a teaser trailer for coming attractions, the manifesto announces a new generation of Indian poets but is not accompanied by the work itself, and readers of *City Lights Journal* would have to wait until the next issue (1964) to encounter actual poetry by these writers, in a special section called "A Few Bengali Poets." As in the first issue, these poets are framed by and filtered through Ginsberg's perspective insofar as he contributed a prefatory statement explaining why the *Journal's* readers should care about these Bengali poets. First, he establishes a familiar binary between staid traditional

²² A revised version of this piece appears in Snyder (2007), *Passage Through India*, pp. 87-95.

²³ "Weekly Manifesto of the Hungry Generation," *City Lights Journal* 1 (Choudhury 1963), 24. Note that there are differing methods of transliterating Bengali names into English, and as such writers' names are spelled variously across venues. I have changed the spelling of names in order to maintain consistency in the context of this essay (for instance, Shakti Chattopadhyay appeared in *City Lights Journal* as Shakti Chatterjee, and Malay Roy Choudhury as Malay Roy Choudhuri).

²⁴ Malay Roy Choudhury (1961), "The Hungryalist Manifesto on Poetry" (Calcutta: H. Dhara, no date), n.p. See also Choudhury (1968d), "The Aims of the Hungry Generation Poets," *Intrepid* 10 ("Poetry of India" issue) (spring 1968), which counts among these aims "abolishing the accepted modes of prose and poetry" (n.p.).

poetry and the freshness and immediacy of the selected poets. Reminiscent of the ways Donald Allen's influential anthology *The New American Poetry* (1960) had positioned the Beats and other writers of the "new poetry" as sharing "a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse," Ginsberg sets the Hungryalists against their national and local traditions.²⁵ As T.S. Eliot came to embody for many Beats the "closed form" of American academic poetry, Ginsberg figures Rabindranath Tagore, Calcutta's Nobel Prize-winning poet and literary giant, as the elder icon to be smashed: "As a modern literary kelson he seems to be a big bore; that is to say early XX century academic preoccupations in the poetic field are so dominated by Tagore festivals, speeches, recitations, criticisms that his work has become institutional and apparently of little use ... to the young."²⁶ Against this "academic" Tagore monolith, Ginsberg identifies another strand of Bengali poetry associated with "'the modern spirit'—bitterness, self-doubt, sex, street diction, personal confession, frankness, Calcutta beggars etc." (p. 117). Substitute "American hobos" for "Calcutta beggars" and this list would be a fair approximation of much Beat poetry, at least in popular conception, and in Ginsberg's telling, the first thing one need know about the Hungry Generation is that its writers attack tradition, that they are iconoclasts invested in remaking language just as he and his circle had done in the States. In fact, Ginsberg insists that the Bengali "poems are interesting in that they do reveal a temper that is international, i.e., the revolt of the personal. Warsaw Moscow San Francisco Calcutta, the discovery of *feeling*" (p. 118). Inasmuch as Ginsberg is gesturing toward the idea of an international avant-garde by facilitating the publication of Bengali poets in *City Lights Journal*, his particular framing also has a curiously leveling effect, such that the Hungryalists are elevated mainly via their association with the Beats, rendered significant as Indian brothers-in-arms in the "revolt of the personal."

Ginsberg's notion of the "personal" does not merely signal intimate, confessional energies, but also underscores the importance of community, and the other thing he wants American readers to know is that the Bengali poets are "excellent drinking companions" (p. 117). Such a statement is not as flip as it may seem at first blush because what Ginsberg is really doing is implying that the Hungryalists can be viewed as part of an ever-expanding network of poets who comprise a global literary underground. In this regard, Jimmy Fazzino's recent work on the "worlding" of Beat literature can help us understand Ginsberg's thinking here. Fazzino borrows the concept of "networks" to describe the "expression[s] of felt solidarity and mutual understanding" that the American Beats shared with others outside national bounds, and in fact uses Ginsberg's attraction to the Hungry Generation as his book's opening anecdote.²⁷ Although Fazzino does not pursue the relationship among the Beats and the Hungryalists beyond noting that both "would be censored ... for their literary licentiousness and antinomian views," he does claim that the relationship suggests that India was not for Ginsberg "timeless or unchanging or utterly exotic ... but vital and dynamic" (p. 1). Fazzino's work has been a useful corrective to the perception that Ginsberg and other Beats were facilely orientalist in their thinking, and demonstrates how the Beats could and did see international writers as progenitors of a literary avant-garde and fomenters of social and political dissent in the context of their own local and national cultures.

For Ginsberg, emphasizing the social spaces he shared with the Hungryalists served both to advertise his own fluency with the local literary scene and to render this scene legible in terms of a diffuse, international Beat sensibility. He notes, for instance, that the Hungry Generation is a "big gang of friend poets [who meet] in an upstairs coffee-house across the tramcar-bookstall street from

²⁵ Donald Allen (1960), "Preface," in *The New American Poetry*, ed. Allen (New York: Grove, 1960), p. xi.

²⁶ Allen Ginsberg (1964), "A Few Bengali Poets," *City Lights Journal* 2 (1964), p. 117. See also Samir Roy Choudhury (1968), "Tagore," and Malay Roy Choudhury (1968b), "from Subimal Basak—Victim & Spirit," both of which discuss Tagore and link him to what Maitreyee B. Chowdhury calls Calcutta's "post-Partition poverty politics" (both pieces appear in *Intrepid* 10 ["Poetry of India" issue] [spring 1968], n.p.).

²⁷ Jimmy Fazzino (2016), *World Beats: Beat Generation Writing and the Worlding of U.S. Literature* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press), pp. 1, 33. For more on the rich connections among another key Beat writer and transnational poetics, see Hassan Melehy (2016), *Kerouac: Language, Poetics, Territory* (New York: Bloomsbury).

Calcutta University” (p. 118). These “friend poets” include the likes of Sunil Ganguly and Shakti Chattopadhyay; Malay Roy Choudhury, Ginsberg explains, “isn’t there with his friends, he lives in Patna way up the Ganges” and “sits upstairs in his room and writes manifestos for the ‘Hungry Generation’” (p. 119). As he did with his own circle of friends, Ginsberg construes a whole Generation from the social bonds of a small group, taking care to write himself and Orlovsky into this group, as when he describes a drinking session with the Hungryalists, during which they apparently begged Orlovsky to read and reread his irreverent poem “Morris.”²⁸ Ginsberg in fact insists on his own role in bringing Hungry Generation poetry to Anglophone audiences: “The poems were translated into funny english by the poets themselves & I spent a day with a pencil reversing inversions of syntax & adding in railroad stations” (p. 118). Ginsberg, lodestar of the Beats, presents a Hungry Generation mediated by his own guiding hand: not only is he a drinking companion, but their editor, agent, and publisher, and so figures himself as the embodied link between otherwise far-flung literary movements.

The poems that Ginsberg rendered into less “funny english” do seem to bear traces of the Beat sensibility; the particular work collected in *City Lights Journal 2* is Sunil Gangopadhyay’s “Age Twenty Eight” and “Interruption”; Sarat Kumar Mukherjee’s “Toward Darkness” and “The Lion in a Zoo”; Sankar Chattopadhyaya’s “Civilization Through Angry Eyes” and “Hateful Intimacy”; and Malay Roy Choudhury’s “Drunk Poem” and “Short-Story Manifesto” (in his preface, Ginsberg explains that Shakti Chattopadhyay, “perhaps the finest poet” of the Hungryalists, was nevertheless “not represented here because his poems are such elegant Bengali they’re too hard to translate”).²⁹ From its title alone, Gangopadhyay’s “Age Twenty Eight” may remind Beat aficionados of Gregory Corso’s “I am 25,” a poem that announces his “love a madness” for the famously youthful poets Shelley, Chatterton, and Rimbaud, declaring: “I HATE OLD POETMEN!”³⁰ Like Corso, Gangopadhyay asserts his love of language, but is by age 28 haunted by “dead friends” and surrounded by “married women,” suggesting that his coevals have passed into adulthood while he clings to the youthful idealism of the written word, piercing “a hornet’s nest with my pen.”³¹ Insofar as “Age Twenty Eight” rails against those friends who have chosen convention, retreating to their “new-bought bed sheet” and hiding “their faces in / domestic dryness” (p. 121), the poem amounts to a critique of bourgeois domesticity that would seem familiar to those white, middle-class Americans worried about the creeping conformity of the long 1950s. In fact, in an essay about the Hungry Generation by Debi Rai and others, the authors leveled similar observations that could have been torn from the pages of classic studies of American conformist culture like William Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956) or C. Wright Mills’ *The Power Elite* (1956): “Cultural patterns are crowded by a system of mass production and mass communication in which we all become like one another, speaking the same slang, wearing the same clothes, reading the same magazines. But instead of creating a sense of community, this only creates a crowd of faceless and anonymous men” (p. 169). Thus the “hidden ... faces” of Gangopadhyay’s domesticated men resonate with the “faceless and anonymous men” against which the Hungry Generation statement positioned itself, underscoring

²⁸ See “Morris” in Peter Orlovsky (1978), *Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs* (San Francisco: City Lights), pp. 61-67.

²⁹ Ginsberg (1964), “A Few Bengali Poets,” p. 118. Note that from Malay Roy Choudhury’s perspective, Sunil Gangopadhyay ought not to be associated with the Hungryalists, but rather with the circle around the journal *Krittibas*, those whom Choudhury calls a “pro Establishment commercial renegade coterie whose machinations had led to the arrest and trial of the Hungryalists.” At the time he was gathering material for inclusion in *City Lights Journal 1*, such sectarian differences were opaque to Ginsberg, and Choudhury later recalled that “One thing which annoyed me at the time was that Ginsberg was unable to differentiate between the members of avant garde Hungryalist movement and the ... commercially inclined pro-Establishment *Krittibas* group” (Malay Roy Choudhury (2009), “Impact of the Hungry Generation (Hungryalist) Literary Movement on Allen Ginsberg,” www.sciy.org/?=6127).

³⁰ Gregory Corso (1992), *Gasoline* (San Francisco: City Lights; Corso [1958] 1992), p. 42.

³¹ Sunil Gangopadhyay (1964), “Age Twenty Eight,” *City Lights Journal 2* (1964), p. 120.

that the oppositional structure described above was instrumental to both the poetry and prose manifestoes of the movement—or at least to the work chosen for inclusion in *City Lights Journal*.³²

The work by Gangopadhyay and others notwithstanding, it is clear that *City Lights Journal* was positioning Choudhury as the preeminent Hungry Generation writer even prior to the obscurity trial that would later solidify his countercultural legitimacy. Choudhury's "Drunk Poem" may be read as a Hungryalist expression of what Steven Watson sees as a defining feature of Beat literature: "The artist's consciousness is expanded through nonrational means: derangement of the senses, via drugs, dreams, hallucinatory states, and visions."³³ A note appended to "Drunk Poem" informs readers that it was "scribbled" after "taking a peg of 'mamushi,' ... an interesting wine made with the help of snake venom" (p. 128), and the poem begins by hailing the reader then immediately deploying unusual word combinations that betoken a confused sensorium, perhaps akin to what happens in a state of drunkenness: "Ahoy! / Gymtwist spangles of shockboom music."³⁴ Choudhury approximates sense derangement with the kinetic energy of "gymtwist" paired with a visual noun ("spangles") that is then connected to the auditory ("shockboom music"). These opening lines introduce readers to the poem's basic method, to juxtapose that which is generally seen as dissimilar; as Choudhury asserted in another manifesto, "The Aims of the Hungry Generation Poets," he wanted to "break the traditional association of words and to coin unconventional and heretofore unaccepted combinations of words."³⁵

While "Drunk Poem" begins with the individuated body, it quickly links the body and its senses to larger political concerns:

Supersonic bombers of totalitarian peace

hiss inside the adult stew

and the adults

Sell their hipholes

to social sadders

for rhymeless chunks of Rupee \$ £ (p. 126)

The oxymoronic phrase "bombers of totalitarian peace" figures the West as a neoimperial power residing *inside* "adults," rather than vice versa. In other words, rather than depicting adulthood as mere resignation to bourgeois normality, as in "Age Twenty Eight," Choudhury sees existence in the "adult stew" as being infected by Cold War imperatives that cannot be escaped, signaled in this case by "supersonic bombers" and elsewhere in the poem by "the deathskirts of U235" (p. 127), the uranium isotope used in the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. And as attested by the rapid-fire catalogue of "Rupee \$ £," the autonomy of nation states is compromised by the reach of capitalism, so the differentiation of national currencies becomes irrelevant in a world in which even hipness is for sale. In a purposively disorienting poem, such lines suggest that the true object of attack is figurations of "civilization," which Choudhury had declared treacherous in the opening sentence of "The Hungryalist Manifesto on Poetry": "Poetry is no more a civilizing manoeuvre, a replanting of the bamboozled gardens; it is a holocaust, a violent and somnambulistic jazzing of the hymning five,

³² See also Sankar Chattopadhyaya's "Civilization Through Angry Eyes," which couches an anti-civilization stance in the concept of hunger: "In all the ravaged scenes, civilization gives birth to art, love / and hunger in a continuous process" (Chattopadhyaya 1964, p. 124).

³³ Steven Watson (1995), *The Birth of the Beat Generation* (New York: Pantheon), p. 40.

³⁴ Malay Roy Choudhury (1964a), "Drunk Poem," *City Lights Journal* 2 (1964), pp. 128, 126. Given that in August of 1962 Ginsberg had remarked to Ferlinghetti that he could not title his new manuscript "Tasty Scribbles" because he "used the word scribbles too oft in the book already," it seems likely that he wrote the note appended to "Drunk Poem" (Ginsberg to Ferlinghetti [27 August 1962], *I Greet*, p. 157). Note that a very different "Drunk Poem" by Choudhury (1968a) appears in *Intrepid* 10 ("Poetry of India" special issue) (spring 1968), n.p.

³⁵ Malay Roy Choudhury (1968d), "The Aims of the Hungry Generation Poets," reprinted in *Intrepid* 10 ("Poetry of India" issue) (spring 1968), n.p.

a sowing of the tempestual hunger" (p. 24). "Drunk Poem" does not merely exemplify the speaker's deranged senses, then, but does so to derange civilization itself by attacking markers of cultural, religious, and political authority, from "naked Shiva" to "bureaucracy" to the "Pax Romana upon the windmill" (pp. 126–27). If the poem represents an anti-civilizing maneuver, then these and other examples are stripped of their context and authority such that the only course of action is to drunkenly and violently tear down anything smelling of establishment and tradition; the poem concludes:

Pardon the sinner

but

MURDER

the criminal. (p. 128)

"Drunk Poem" is a good representation of the outré, antiestablishment, anti-civilization pose that the Hungryalists cultivated, a pose that was codified in the States when they were presented with perhaps the greatest gift a countercultural movement could be given: withering coverage in the reliably conservative, middle-of-the-road *Time* magazine. In November 1964, two months after the obscenity charges were brought, *Time* claimed the Hungryalists as an upstart movement overly imitative of the Beats: "Born in 1962, with an inspirational assist from visiting U.S. Beatnik Allen Ginsberg, Calcutta's Hungry Generation is a growing band of young Bengalis with tigers in their tanks. Somewhat unoriginally they insist that only in immediate physical pleasure do they find any meaning in life, and they blame modern society for their emptiness."³⁶ Unsurprisingly, *Time* collapses Ginsberg's instrumentality in introducing the Hungryalists to Western readers with his inspiring their very existence, but the mere act of reporting on the "growing band" as a movement heightened their visibility in the States. The association with the Beats via Ginsberg was one that stuck, not merely because of *Time*, but also because of statements by Ginsberg, Choudhury, and the Indian press. In 1965, American scholar and poet Howard McCord, then at Washington State University, became interested in the Hungryalists and traveled to India to meet with Choudhury and others. That same year, he published an English edition of "Stark Electric Jesus" with the aim of raising money for Choudhury's legal expenses, and his Afterword argues that however supportive Ginsberg was to the Hungryalists, it would be inaccurate to say he *inspired* them: "The Indian press believes to this day that the group's origins can be traced to the 1962 Indian visit of Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and Gary and Jeanne [sic] Snyder. But however stimulating the visit of these American poets ... I believe the movement is autochthonous and stems from the profound dislocation of Indian life."³⁷ The very fact that McCord felt obliged to claim the Hungryalists as autochthonous suggests how they had already become entangled with the Beats by 1965.

The third issue of *City Lights Journal* (1966) again enacted such entanglements as its section on Indian poetry contained a single poem, "Stark Electric Jesus," flanked by an expanded version of McCord's Afterword titled "Note on the Hungry Generation," and another seven-page statement by Debi Rai and others simply called "Hungry Generation." By *City Lights Journal* 3, then, the "Few Bengali Poets" of issue two had been congealed into a "Generation," so despite the protestations to the contrary, it was clear that these writers were being advertised in ways broadly comparable to the Beat Generation. Nevertheless, in his prefatory note, McCord again insists that the Hungryalists did not materialize as a group because of Ginsberg's influence, but he does accede that "[t]here was little notice of the group in the West until 1963, when *City Lights Journal* No. 1 carried news of them."³⁸ He goes on to characterize the Hungry Generation's importance in terms of their on-going refusals to be bullied by the authorities: "In spite of prosecution and harassment, Malay Roy [Choudhury] has published two more long poems, 'Jakham,' (The Wound), and 'Aamar Amimangshita Shubha,'

³⁶ The Hungry Generation (1964), *Time* 84.21 (20 November 1964), p. 46.

³⁷ Howard McCord (1965), "Afterword," in Malay Roy Choudhury, *Stark Electric Jesus* (Pullman, WA: Tribal Press), n.p. For more on McCord, see <http://www.possibilityx.com/hm/bio.htm>.

³⁸ McCord (1966), "Note on the Hungry Generation," p. 159.

and other members of the Hungry Generation have continued to irritate the authorities with their work" (p. 160). Thus, while insisting on the Hungry Generation's distinction from the Beats, McCord relies on the Beats' most visible feature, their rebuke of authority, to argue for their importance.

McCord's insistence that the Hungryalists are best seen in light of their antiestablishment posture is echoed in the other essay accompanying Choudhury's poem. Like McCord, Rai and his co-authors contrast their efforts to what they call "The Establishment" while taking care to distinguish themselves from the Beats. The latter can be somewhat tricky as the authors rely on explicitly hip language to make their case, as when they open by declaring "Modern Bengali writing" is "a lump of academic bullshit" or when they claim a younger generation is "digging" Choudhury.³⁹ Fans of "Howl" might hear shades of the memorable phrase "boatload of sensitive bullshit" or even of Moloch, Ginsberg's catch-all embodiment of normative culture, in the Hungryalists' attack on the "manicured robot hand of the Establishment" (p. 164).⁴⁰ Even so, the authors go out of their way to distance themselves from the Beats:

Hunger describes a state of existence from which all unessentials have been stripped, leaving it receptive to everything around it. Hunger is a state of waiting with pain. To be hungry is to be at the bottom of your personality, looking up to be existential in the Kierkegaard, rather than the Jean-Paul Sartre sense. The Hungries can't afford the luxury of being Beats, ours isn't an affluent society. The single similarity that a Beat has with a Hungry is in their revolt of the personal. ... The nonconformity of the Hungries is irrevocable. (p. 166)

While this sounds a lot like Ginsberg's later characterization of Beatness as "at the bottom of the world, looking up ... rejected by society," the Hungryalists force *City Lights Journal* readers to stretch their notions of dominant culture versus counterculture beyond the confines of the United States. This move reminds American readers that the Beats were far more privileged than their Hungryalist counterparts, a fact indexed by the Beats' very mobility.⁴¹ Thus although the Hungryalists rely on some of the same terms Ginsberg and others used to describe the Beats, even borrowing his phrase "revolt of the personal" from his preface to the Hungryalist work presented in *City Lights Journal 1*, Rai and his co-authors figure themselves as more downtrodden or "beat" than the Beats themselves, for "hunger" can never be a mere pose, but is rather an urgent, all-consuming fact that is therefore "irrevocable."

These prose descriptions are valuable complements to the lone poem included in the issue, Choudhury's "Stark Electric Jesus." The poem was of course notorious by the time it was printed in *City Lights Journal*, but despite the opinion of the 9th Court of Calcutta, it does not read as particularly obscene, especially by contemporary standards. The poem is a dynamic paean to lust that, like "Drunk Poem," figures the body as something enigmatic that must be investigated. The poem opens with the speaker's skin in a "blazing furore" of desire as he declares "I can't resist anymore, million glass-panes are breaking in my cortex."⁴² This is the "revolt of the personal" identified by Ginsberg and Rai, et al.; Choudhury is giving himself permission to articulate feelings he himself does not understand as a route to actuating his embodied existence. The first stanza concludes: "I do not know what these happenings are but they are occurring within me," and the poem takes readers through a catalogue of the speaker's sexual desires that might be achieved were he able to "destroy and shatter" his previous notions about himself and his body (p. 161). Taken as a statement of Choudhury's poetics, "Stark Electric Jesus" insists that just as the lover must attend even to those bodily impulses he cannot understand, the poet must find a way to let his body speak through language: "I'll split all into pieces for the sake of art / There isn't any way out for Poetry except suicide" (p. 163). With this final turn of the poem, Choudhury analogizes the true lover's experience of bodily defamiliarization

³⁹ Debi Rai, et al., "Hungry Generation," *City Lights Journal* 3 (Rai et al. 1966), p. 164.

⁴⁰ Allen Ginsberg (1956), *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights), p. 22.

⁴¹ Allen Ginsberg (1999), "Foreword," *The Beat Book: Writings from the Beat Generation*, ed. Anne Waldman (Boston: Shambala, 1999), pp. xiv-xv.

⁴² Malay Roy Choudhury (1966), "Stark Electric Jesus," *City Lights Journal* 3 (1966), p. 161.

with the true poet's need to manifest bodily experience in writing, the very premise of using the word "hunger" to name his generation. Indeed, in the poem's final lines, the speaker says that "Millions of needles are now running from my blood into Poetry," into "the hypnotic kingdom of words" (p. 163), such that his body and his poetry are collapsed into one organic being. It is this sense of poetry as something embodied that "Stark Electric Jesus" really argues for, and what has made it a powerful testament to the poetics of the Hungry Generation. Indeed, although the Hungry Generation may have lasted only a few years, "Stark Electric Jesus" has remained one of Choudhury's better-known poems (for instance, it inspired a short film in 2014), even as he has gone on to have a very prolific career writing poetry, drama, and non-fiction in English and Bengali.⁴³

With respect to the connections among the Hungryalists and the Beats, I think that Choudhury's yoking of the body and poetic utterance offers a suggestive way to understand the shifts in Ginsberg's own poetics after he returned from India. As is well-known, Ginsberg became a prominent political activist in the 1960s while simultaneously developing a pointedly embodied poetics; as Tony Triligio has put it, "Ginsberg's return to the body is not simply a renewal of sensory experience; instead, it claims the body as both product and producer of political experience."⁴⁴ While I will sidestep questions of who precisely influenced whom, I do see Ginsberg's use of his own body to blur distinctions among poetry and political activism as roughly analogous to what Choudhury and the Hungry Generation were doing in India. Ginsberg himself signals some of these associations even as he does not explicitly name them. For example, in an interview that appeared in *City Lights Journal 2* immediately following Choudhury's "Drunk Poem" and "Short-Story Manifesto," Ginsberg discussed his turn to political activism by linking it to his experiences in India. Ernie Barry interviewed Ginsberg right after a demonstration against repressive government leadership in Vietnam, and when Barry asked: "What other political demonstrations have you been involved in?" Ginsberg replied: "None. This is the first time I've taken a political stand."⁴⁵ When Barry pressed him on this "new policy," Ginsberg directed him to his protest sign, a poem which read, in part:

'Oh how wounded, how wounded!' says the guru

Thine own heart says the swami

[...]

War is black magic

Belly flowers to North and South Vietnam

include everybody

End the human war

Name hypnosis and fear is the

Enemy-Satan go home!

I accept America and Red China

To the human race

Madame Nhu and Mao Tse-Tung

Are in the same boat of meat (p. 132)

This poem is notable for a few reasons, not the least of which is that it marks Ginsberg's foray into taking a "political stand." It also abandons the distinction between poetry and protest via the moral authority of the gurus and swamis he met in India. The quoted phrase, "'Oh how wounded,

⁴³ See *Stark Electric Jesus*, dir. Hyash Tanmoy and Mrigankasekhar Ganguly (2014).

⁴⁴ Tony Triligio (2007), *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), p. 67.

⁴⁵ Ernie Barry (1964), "A Conversation with Allen Ginsberg," *City Lights Journal 2* (1964), p.131.

how wounded!," was in fact important enough to Ginsberg that he would repeat it in later work, including the dedication to *Indian Journals*, which names its source, a "conversation on bamboo platform in Ganges with Dehorava Baba who spake 'Oh how wounded, how wounded!' after I fought with Peter Orlovsky," and in what is perhaps his greatest antiwar poem, "Wichita Vortex Sutra," in which he again refers to "Dehorhava Baba who moans Oh how wounded, How wounded."⁴⁶ With this poem on a protest sign, then, Ginsberg identifies the origins of his interest in politics as a conversation with celebrated yogi Devraha Baba, and the protest-poem is itself the germ of "Wichita Vortex Sutra," a long poem in which Ginsberg calls on his own body to declare the end of the Vietnam War.

"Wichita Vortex Sutra," written in 1966 at the height of Ginsberg's fame as a poet-protester, is built around the notion that the Vietnam War is "Black Magic Language," an idea imported from his very first poem-protest sign, which announced "War is black magic," lines written just five months after he left India. "Wichita Vortex Sutra" develops this idea:

The war is language,
 language abused
 for Advertisement,
 language used
 like magic for power on the planet:
 Black Magic language,
 formulas for reality (p. 119)

This is a poem that banishes all distinctions between poetry and political protest, that understands the war as underwritten by the "Black Magic language" of politicians, military leaders, and the media, all of whom retreat into euphemism and vagueness in order to defend and justify actions Ginsberg considers indefensible. In a moment that might seem to echo the Hungryalists mailing paper masks to politicians and others, "Wichita Vortex Sutra" asks "Have we seen but paper faces, Life Magazine?" (p. 118), the implication in both cases being that those practitioners of "Black Magic Language" are hiding their real selves behind masks (in his interview with Barry, Ginsberg had observed that "everyone wants to feel, and wants to feel loved and to love, so there's inevitable Hope beneath every grim mask [p. 137]). In "Wichita Vortex Sutra," Ginsberg's answer to the masked mendacity of language abusers is to collapse poetic utterance and political act so completely that his own embodied voice is given the incredible power to declare the war's end.

As he readies himself for this imaginative act, Ginsberg again calls on those same swamis and gurus from the earlier protest-poem:

I call all Powers of imagination
 to my side in this auto to make Prophecy,
 all Lords
 of human kingdoms to come
 Shambu Bharti Baba naked covered with ash
 Khaki Baba fat-bellied mad with the dogs
 Dehorhava Baba who moans Oh how wounded, How wounded (p. 127)

This catalogue continues on for some time, and grows to encompass not only these compassionate souls he encountered in India but also figures like Christ, Allah, and Jaweh, so that he will claim to counter "Black Magic language" by tapping into positive energies of the world's religions, a universalist gesture that Choudhury, for one, has linked to their time together in India.

⁴⁶ Ginsberg (1996), *Indian Journals*, n.p.; and Ginsberg (1968), *Planet News, 1961–1967* (San Francisco: City Lights), p. 127.

Choudhury has remarked, for instance, that “I can’t claim that I contributed to [Ginsberg’s] thinking, though, perhaps in changing the notion that there can not be only one God; there has to be innumerable gods for innumerable human spreads out in order to be eclectic, tolerant and resilient.”⁴⁷ In his 1963 protest poem, as well as in “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” figures like Dehorhava Baba and Shambu Bharti Baba (whose photograph, incidentally, appears in *Indian Journals*) were routes toward the eclectic tolerance Choudhury describes. It is only after Ginsberg names these figures that he can muster the “right magic” to counter the black magicians’ “formulas for reality”:

I lift my voice aloud,
 make Mantra of American language now,
 I here declare the end of the War!
 [...]
 Let the States tremble,
 let the Nation weep,
 let Congress legislate its own delight
 let the President execute his own desire—
 this Act done by my own voice,
 [...]
 The War is gone,
 Language emerging on the motel news stand,
 the right magic
 Formula, the language that was known
 in the back mind before, now in the black print
 of daily consciousness (pp. 127–29)⁴⁸

These lines have been subject to a fair amount of critical commentary, but I would point out that they are premised on a collapse of the realms of poetry and political action that are reminiscent of the ways the Hungryalists saw poetry and manifesto as two sides of the same coin.⁴⁹ Ginsberg insists that the embodied nature of his language—“my voice ... this Act done by my own voice”—can in and of itself effectuate actual political change. This is a “revolt of the personal” that reverses the mandates of “civilization” and its proxies to invest superhuman power in a single individual, Allen Ginsberg the embodied speaker whose utterance *is* political intervention. Just as the Hungryalists marshaled defiant theatricality as they circulated manifestos and demotic poetry that were political as much as aesthetic statements, Ginsberg’s theatrical declaration of the war’s end is politically effective insofar as it rebukes the very terms of the “Black Magic language” that had led to the Vietnam War in the first place. This moment in “Wichita Vortex Sutra” is in fact one among many examples of Ginsberg’s sixties-era poems and protests that fused aesthetics and politics, the embodied poet and the embodied protester. He articulated such a fusion in a piece published in the *Berkeley Barb* in 1965, in which he couched political protest as “spectacle,” using the same language of declaration found in “Wichita Vortex Sutra”: “Open declarations, ‘We aren’t coming out to fight and we simply will not fight.’ We have come to use *imagination*. A spectacle can be made, an unmistakable statement OUTSIDE the war psychology which is leading nowhere. Such statement

⁴⁷ Choudhury (2015), “Sunflower Collective Interview.”

⁴⁸ Note some later work by Hungryalists employs similar language of declaration. For example, Malay Roy Choudhury (1968c) writes: “I declare AC [“Aamaar Chaabi” by Subhash Ghose] the first Bengali experiment to peel off the rusty anti-communicative bourgeois layers of Bengali language” (Choudhury, “On Subhash Ghose’s AAMAAR CHAABI,” *Intrepid* 10 (“Poetry of India” issue) (spring 1968), n.p.). Robin Datta’s (1968) poem “An Indictment” excoriates “America seeking peace with Starfighters & Napalms through / masskilling in the Mekong Delta” and includes the line “I Declare The End of God” (*Intrepid* 10, n.p.).

⁴⁹ See, for example, Triligio; Amy Hungerford (2010), *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); and Alex Houen (2009), “‘Back! Back! Back! Central Mind-Machine Pentagon...’: Allen Ginsberg and the Vietnam War,” *Cultural Politics* 4.3, pp. 351–73.

would be heard around the world with relief.”⁵⁰ Here Ginsberg is recommending strategies for actual political protests, which, he argues, must exploit “imagination” to be effective; otherwise put, he urges tactics that would seem nonsensical to the “war psychology,” but that would paradoxically be effective precisely for the ways they expose broader cultural and political ideologies that have become so widespread as to seem reality itself. Ginsberg’s political intervention is to reset the terms of reality via the imagination.

While we can finally only remain suggestive as to questions of influence, I do think it is fair to say that the Beats and the Hungryalists were mutually generative literary and cultural movements. This is perhaps most evident in the material history of how the Hungryalists were circulated and packaged to Anglophone readers as a “generation” not unlike the Beats. But there is also a deeper argument to be made about how these movements came to perceive the relationship between poetry and politics. I do not think it is incidental that in the *Berkeley Barb* piece quoted above, Ginsberg insists that the use of imaginative spectacle in political protest “would be heard around the world with relief,” for this underscores his post-India interest in cultivating political solidarities beyond national borders. When thinking about the Beat movement, then, readers and critics must be attentive to the particularities regarding how U.S.-based writers read and interacted with the work of global writers, and vice versa, which helps us understand the profusion of texts produced in the context of an international avant-garde. And as attested by the various connections among the Beats and the Hungryalists traced throughout this essay, there is need for further work that acknowledges these continuities while still attending to the particularities of the writers understood as associated with these movements.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- Allen, Donald. 1960. Preface. In *The New American Poetry*. Edited by Donald Allen. New York: Grove.
- Baker, Deborah. 2008. *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India*. New York: Penguin.
- Bakken, Dick, ed. 1967. Hungry! Special issue, *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2, March.
- Barry, Ernie. 1964. A Conversation with Allen Ginsberg. *City Lights Journal* 2.
- Basu, Nayanima. 2011. A Sour Time of Putrefaction. *Business Standard*, December 10. Available online: https://www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/-a-sour-time-of-putrefaction-111121000058_1.html (accessed on 27 December 2018).
- Bhattacharya, Bhaswati. 2017. *Much Ado Over Coffee: Indian Coffee House Then and Now*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Brahmachari, Goirick, and Abhimanyu Kumar, ed. 2016. *Café Dissensus* 26. Special issue, The Beat and the Hungry Generation: When Losing Became Hip. Available online: <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/06/16/contents-the-beat-and-the-hungry-generation-when-losing-became-hip-issue-26/> (accessed on 27 December 2018).
- Chattopadhyaya, Sankar. 1964. Civilization Through Angry Eyes. *City Lights Journal* 2.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1961. The Hungryalist Manifesto on Poetry. Calcutta: H. Dhara.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1963. Weekly Manifesto of the Hungry Generation *City Lights Journal* 1.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1964a. Drunk Poem. *City Lights Journal* 2.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1964b. Letter to *El Corno Emplumado* (9 August 1963). *El Corno Emplumado* 9.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1966. Stark Electric Jesus. *City Lights Journal* 3.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1968a. Drunk Poem. In *Poetry of India*. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1968b. From ‘Subimal Basak—Victim & Spirit. In *Poetry of India*. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.

⁵⁰ Allen Ginsberg (2000), “Demonstration or Spectacle As Example, As Communication; or How to Make a March/Spectacle,” in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays, 1952-1995*, edited by Bill Morgan (New York: Perennial), p. 10.

- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1968c. On Subhash Ghose's AAMAAR CHAABI. In Poetry of India. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 1968d. The Aims of the Hungry Generation Poets. In Poetry of India. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 2009. Impact of Hungry Generation (Hungryalist) Literary Movement on Allen Ginsberg. Available online: www.sciy.org/?p=6127 (accessed on 15 October 2018).
- Choudhury, Malay Roy. 2015. The Sunflower Collective Interview with Malay Roy Choudhury. November 10. Available online: www.malayinterview.wordpress.com/category/hungry-generation (accessed on 27 December 2018).
- Choudhury, Samir Roy. 1968. Tagore. In Poetry of India. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.
- Chowdhury, Maitreyee B. 2016. Talking Poetry, Ginsberg and the Hungryalists: Samir Roychoudhury, a Retrospective. In *The Beat and the Hungry Generation: When Losing Became Hip*. Special issue, *Café Dissensus* 26, June 16. Available online: <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/06/16/talking-poetry-ginsberg-and-the-hungryalists-samir-roychoudhury-a-retrospective/> (accessed on 27 December 2018).
- Corso, Gregory. 1992. *Gasoline*. San Francisco: City Lights. First published 1958.
- Datta, Robin. 1968. An Indictment. In Poetry of India. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.
- Fazzino, Jimmy. 2016. *World Beats: Beat Generation Writing and the Worlding of U.S. Literature*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press.
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. 1963. City Lights Journal. *City Lights Journal* 1.
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. 1964. City Lights Journal: Number Two. *City Lights Journal* 2.
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence, and Allen Ginsberg. 2015. *I Greet You at the Beginning of a Great Career: The Selected Correspondence of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg, 1955–1997*. Edited by Bill Morgan. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Gangopadhyay, Sunil. 1964. Age Twenty Eight *City Lights Journal* 2.
- Ghosh, Saileswar. 1995. *Hungry Generation Andolan [The Hungry Generation Movement]*. Kolkata: Pratibhas.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 1956. *Howl and Other Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 1963. In India. *City Lights Journal* 1.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 1964. A Few Bengali Poets. *City Lights Journal* 2.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 1968. *Planet News, 1961–1967*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 1996. *Indian Journals*. New York: Grove.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 1999. Foreword. In *The Beat Book: Writings from the Beat Generation*. Edited by Anne Waldman. Boston: Shambala.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 2000. Demonstration or Spectacle As Example, As Communication; or How to Make a March/Spectacle. In *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays, 1952–1995*. Edited by Bill Morgan. New York: Perennial.
- Houen, Alex. 2009. 'Back! Back! Back! Central Mind-Machine Pentagon...': Allen Ginsberg and the Vietnam War. *Cultural Politics* 4, pp. 351–74.
- Hungerford, Amy. 2010. *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kyger, Joanne. 2000. *Strange Big Moon: The Japan and Indian Journals: 1960–1964*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Lee, A. Robert, ed. 2018. *Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Malay Roy Choudhury's Prosecution. 1967. In Hungry! Special Issue, *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2, March.
- McCord, Howard. 1965. Afterword. In Malay Roy Choudhury, *Stark Electric Jesus*. Pullman: Tribal Press.
- McCord, Howard. 1966. Note on the Hungry Generation. *City Lights Journal* 3.
- Melehy, Hassan. 2016. *Kerouac: Language, Poetics, Territory*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Misra, Aditya. 2016. 'I can but why should I Go?': The Romance of Opposition in Shakti Chattopadhyaya's Poetry. *South Asian Review* 37, pp. 178–90.
- Mitra, Tridib, ed. 1968. *Letters/Letters*. Howrah: Zebra Books.
- Morgan, Bill, and Nancy J. Peters, eds. 2006. *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Orlovsky, Peter. 1978. *Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Orlovsky, Peter. 2014. *Peter Orlovsky, a Life in Words: Intimate Chronicles of a Beat Writer*. Edited by Bill Morgan. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Rai, Debi, et al. 1966. Hungry Generation. *City Lights Journal* 3.
- Snyder, Gary. 2007. *Passage Through India: An Expanded and Illustrated Edition*. Berkeley: Shoemaker & Hoard.
- The Complaint Against the 'Hungry Generation'. 1967. In Hungry! Special issue, *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2, March.

The Hungry Generation 1964. *Time* 84.21, November 20.

The Verdict Against Malay Roy Choudhury. 1967. In Hungry! Special issue, *Salted Feathers* 4.1–2, March.

Triligio, Tony. 2007. *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press).

Watson, Steven. 1995. *The Birth of the Beat Generation*. New York: Pantheon.

Weissner, Carl, ed. 1968a. Poetry of India. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.

Weissner, Carl. 1968b. Introduction. In Poetry of India. Special issue, *Intrepid* 10, Spring.



© 2019 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).