

**Avant-Gardes at the Iron Curtain:
A Transnational Reading of Allen Ginsberg and the Soviet Estradny Movement**

by

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Abstract:

“Avant-Gardes at the Iron Curtain” uncovers how Ginsberg’s family connections to Russia, his interest in Russian Futurist and Estradny poetry, his travels to the Soviet Union and other Soviet Bloc countries in 1965, as well as his collaborations and friendships with Russian poets Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko profoundly shaped his shift in the late sixties to a new style of aural composition and excursions into new genres and modes of performance. Because of his complex position between two cultures at war, Ginsberg is able to satirically critique both the American and the Soviet governments from a politically neutral yet activist transnational position. Chapter one of this dissertation claims that Ginsberg cultivates, in his early works, a Russian identity based on his family connections to Russia that simultaneously undermines American exceptionalism by drawing parallels between the two countries’ governments while, at the same time, he uses his own conflicted Russian and American identities to channel Whitman’s ideals of American pluralism and their potential restorative powers for American democracy. Chapter two explains how Russian translations of Ginsberg’s most famous poems failed as Soviet propaganda while nevertheless succeeding in inspiring young Russian poets of the Estradny movement to introduce subtly dissident politics into official Soviet publications in the form of confessional poetry. This Estradny poetry, in turn, influenced Ginsberg after making its way back to America in the form of *Red Cats*, a collection of poems conceived of by Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1962. Chapter three argues that Ginsberg’s travels to the Soviet Union in 1965 led to major shifts in his approach to articulating politics in poetry, his method of poetic composition, and his commitment to poetry’s oral tradition and its potential role in popular culture. When we see Ginsberg’s post-1965 poetry in the global context of its inception, poems long thought by US critics to be inert are revealed to be politically and psychologically complex portraits of Vietnam-era Cold War America. Ginsberg’s understanding and often hagiographic appreciation of Estradny poetry’s power as a popular aural art form resulted in his incorporating his own version of their poetics into much of his post-1965 poetry, which transcends the political, cultural, and language barriers that divided the East and West in the 1960s. While language, cultural, and political divisions between the US and Russia have continued to prevent many critics from fully appreciating Ginsberg’s post-1965 shift towards aural composition and overt political intervention, my transnational reading claims that reading these poems in their appropriate global context can help us better understand their political exigence, complex historical origins, aural aesthetics, and their impact on popular American culture and music. This transnational study is intended to improve our understanding of some of Ginsberg’s most frequently undervalued works, but it is also an argument-by-example of the importance of reading across national and linguistic borders as a way of advancing our understanding of the cultures both inside and beyond those borders.

Introduction: Avant-Gardes at the Iron Curtain

I search for the language
that is also yours--
almost all our language has been taxed by war.
--Allen Ginsberg, "Wichita Vortex Sutra"

Allen Ginsberg said in a 1983 interview with Danish scholars Inger Thorup Lauridsen and Per Dalgard: "I am basically a Russian poet, put in an American scene" (28). This dissertation seeks to explore the implications of this statement by uncovering the Russian poetic and cultural influences that run through Ginsberg's life and work and then tracing how that work, in turn, influenced the poetry and culture of both the United States and the Soviet Union. Ginsberg's connections to Russia through his Russian-born mother, his interest in Russian Futurism, travels to the Soviet Union and other Soviet Bloc countries at the height of the Cold War, and his collaborations and friendships with Russian poets Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko profoundly shaped his work in ways that have not yet been explored. Chapter one of this dissertation claims that Ginsberg cultivates, in his early works, a Russian identity based on his family connections to Russia that simultaneously undermines American exceptionalism by drawing parallels between the two countries' governments while, at the same time, he uses his own conflicted Russian and American identities to channel Whitman's ideals of American pluralism and their potential restorative powers for

American democracy. Chapter two examines how Russian translations of Allen Ginsberg's most famous poems failed as Soviet propaganda while succeeding in inspiring young Soviet poets of the Estradny (Эстрадный) movement to introduce subtly dissident politics into official Soviet publications in the form of confessional poetry. This Estradny poetry, in turn, influenced Ginsberg after making its way back to America in the form of *Red Cats*, a collection of poems conceived of by Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1962. Finally, chapter three examines how Ginsberg's travels to the Soviet Union in 1965 led to major shifts in his approach to politics in poetry, his method of poetic composition, and his commitment to poetry's oral tradition and potential role in popular culture. When you see the larger role Allen Ginsberg played in shaping the late 20th century Soviet literature, his poems, long thought to be inert in the US, are revealed to be politically and psychologically complex, while the Estradny poets these works inspired can be seen as far more sophisticated and subtly insurgent than Western critics have previously thought. Ginsberg's own understanding and appreciation of Estradny poetry resulted in his incorporation of their poetics into much of his post-1965 poetry, which transcends the political, cultural, and language barriers that divided the East and West in the 1960s. While these divisions have continued to prevent critics from fully appreciating Ginsberg's post-1965 shift towards aural composition and overt political intervention, this transnational reading seeks to explore how reading these poems in the global context in which they were written can help us better understand their political exigence, complex historical origins, aural aesthetics, and their impact on popular culture and music. In doing so, Beat scholars can reclaim the mantle of

“beatnik” from a term of opprobrium and Ginsberg’s poetry from the realm of pop culture pastiche. This transnational study is intended to improve our understanding of some of Ginsberg’s most frequently undervalued works, but it is also an argument-by-example of the importance of reading across national and linguistic borders as a way of advancing our understanding of the cultures both inside and beyond those borders and especially those on the other side of international conflicts.

Transnational Readings of the Global Beat Movement

Transnational readings that focus on the international elements of Beat Generation writing have been increasing among the growing number of academics that write about Beat authors, especially in the wake of the transnational turn and the advent of “New Modernist Studies.” In *Bad Modernisms*, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz describe Modernist Studies as moving “toward a pluralism or fusion of theoretical commitments, as well as a heightened attention to continuities and intersections across the boundaries of artistic media, to collaborations and influences across national and linguistic borders, and especially to the relationship between individual works of art and the larger cultures in which they emerged” (25). This move toward more pluralistic and culturally expansive readings has been at the forefront of Beat Generation critical theory in the twenty-first century.

Jennie Skerl’s 2004 *Restructuring the Beats* and her collaboration with Nancy Grace on the 2012 collection *The Transnational Beat Generation* began a critical reassessment the Beat Generation’s place in mid-century American history and

literature, but these collections also began to expand the very idea of the Beat Generation beyond the borders of the United States, as well as borders of race, gender, and identity--making room for minority, female, and international writers who were largely ignored in the initial fifty years of Beat studies. Skerl and Grace argue that this expansion of Beat Studies is essential, as "many Beat writers saw themselves as part of the twentieth-century international avant-garde" (11). Since the publication of Skerl and Grace's *The Transnation Beat Generation*, this argument has been reaffirmed by a number of texts that further explore the Beat Generation in the context of the transnational movement they inspired. These texts include: Jimmy Fazzino's *World Beats: Beat Generation Writing and the Wording of U.S. Literature*, Deborah Baker's *A Blue Hand: the Beats in India*, A. Robert Lee's *Modern American Counter Writing: Beats, Outsiders, Ethnics*, John Tytell's *Beat Transnationalism*, and Todd Tietchen's *The Cubalogues: Beat Writers in Revolutionary Havana*. This scholarship has increased the number of writers around the globe that are now considered to be part of the Beat Generation, but it has also begun to uncover the depth of the many international influences on its core members. These authors, who wrote extensively about their world travels, were also, according to Jimmy Fazzino, "very attuned to [the] local struggles and local histories" of the places they visited and wrote about (83). No Beat author was more interested in local struggles and histories than Allen Ginsberg, who Bill Morgan says in the introduction to his atlas of Beat travel, *The Beats Abroad*, "seems to have visited every country on earth" (9).

Richard Kostelanetz went as far as to say that “second to John F. Kennedy, Ginsberg would seem to be the most widely acclaimed American cultural ambassador.” When Kostelanetz wrote this in 1965, Ginsberg had just spent the previous year in Cuba, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, India, Japan, and Morocco--travels he wrote about in *Planet News*, his first truly international collection of poetry.¹ Adam Beardsworth notes in his essay “And I am the King of May” that, at the time he was composing *Planet News*, Allen Ginsberg “envisioned travel as a means of decolonizing the self by escaping the gaze of US imperialism” (216). Ginsberg’s travel, in fact, often came in the form of resistance to and a deliberate undermining of the hegemony of US-led laissez-faire, neo-liberal capitalism. In his fifteen-month stay in India in 1961-62, for example, Ginsberg encouraged members of the so-called “Hungry Generation,” who were emboldened, somewhat ironically, by the example of the Beat Generation (a Western influence), to *reject* Western influence and write in their native Bengali.

The fact that Allen Ginsberg, an American writer, was in a position to “advise” Indian revolutionaries on embracing *their* native culture illustrates some of the thorniness and inescapable elements of the asymmetrical, postcolonial power dynamics that are often at the heart of such transnational exchanges. Critics like Donald Pease

¹ Other primary examples of international Beat texts include Burroughs’s *Yage Letters*, written in and about his travels in the Amazon looking for Yagé, *Junky*, part of which takes place in Mexico City, and *Naked Lunch*, which was famously pieced together by Ginsberg and Burroughs in Tangiers. Kerouac’s *Mexico City Blues* and *Tristessa* were also written in and about Mexico City, and even the most famous of beat travel writing, *On the Road*, had an international excursion into Mexico in the novel’s climax. The scope of Beat travel writing is, in fact, extensive enough to require two separate City Lights guidebooks, both written by Beat scholar and Ginsberg archivist, Bill Morgan, one of which is devoted entirely to *The Beats Abroad*.

have, in response, rightly argued that transnationalism, in general, “has exercised a monopoly of assimilative power that has enabled it to subsume and replace competing spatial and temporal orientations to the object of study—including multicultural American studies, borderlands critique, postcolonial American studies, and the more general turn to American cultural studies” (10). There are obviously cases where transnational readings of Ginsberg’s work in India or South America ignore some of the valuable insights available through the critical lenses of various post-colonial readings, but transnational readings of these texts can and should consider and work with and within these frameworks.

While the debate between transnational and postcolonial interpretive frameworks continues to shape and reshape Beat Studies as they apply to what, in the Cold War era, was referred to as the “third world,” the focus of this dissertation will be on the most unlikely of transnational influences to come out of the “Global Beat Movement:” the unofficial but very real cultural exchanges that were occurring across the “Iron Curtain” between the United States and the Soviet Union, between the “first” and “second worlds,” the mortal enemies of the Cold War. Allen Ginsberg, a Jewish American, former communist, son of a Russian immigrant, and frequent traveller across the Iron Curtain, is the central figure in this transnational movement and therefore, the focus of this dissertation.

It was Ginsberg’s curiosity and, at times, naive interest in communism that initially brought him to Cuba in the winter of 1965, but it was his outspoken opposition to Cuban censorship and Castro’s oppression of the gay community in Cuba that brought

him to the Soviet Bloc. He was, in fact, forcibly *sent there* by Castro's government on a one-way flight from Havana to Prague. Early in the morning on 18 February 1965, Ginsberg was escorted by armed ICAP (Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos) officers to the airport, where he was put on a plane headed to Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia. Ginsberg stayed in the Soviet Bloc until he was eventually deported again on 7 May 1965, just days after he was famously elected the "King of May" (Kral Majales) by students in Prague. In the intervening months, Ginsberg traveled to his mother's native Russia, where he met with family members and sought out poets whose work he had been reading and helping publish for years--poets like Andrei Voznesensky, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Bella Akhmadulina, and Alexander Esenin-Volpin. He was drawn to these poets, in part, by the varying degrees to which he believed they opposed Soviet censorship and restrictions on artistic and individual expression during and even after the post-Stalin Thaw.

While Ginsberg's interest in communism and the Soviets' interest in his anti-American writing initially brought him across the Iron Curtain, it was, ironically, his opposition to what he saw in the Soviet Bloc that made him stay and allowed him to have a lasting influence on the many artists he met there. This influence on these authors living under Soviet rule defined what Grace and Skerl call the "most significant" international legacy of the Beat Generation, their "model of resistance or dissidence within Cold War cultures," which initiated "a critique of hegemony" in Soviet nations (Grace and Skerl 1). No Beat author influenced this resistance to hegemony more than Allen Ginsberg.

Reclaiming and Redefining Beatnik

Rather than flattening out the concept of anti-establishment writing into a broad and meaningless “Global Beat Movement” that has rejected all society in favor of an amorphous international avant-garde counterculture, this dissertation attempts to explain how two countercultures, the Beat Generation and the “new wave” of Soviet poets known in Russia as Estradny poets (Эстрадные поэты), which translates to “variety,” “pop,” or, literally, “stage” poets, influenced each other across the seemingly impenetrable border of the Iron Curtain. Ginsberg’s initial travel to Cuba and the Soviet Bloc was a form of protest against his government’s role in the perpetuation of the Cold War. The artists he inspired there, however, appreciated his resistance to their own government’s oppressive role in the Cold War, and the extreme political, ideological, and wartime divisions that separated the United States and the Soviet Union actually served as the uniting force that drew together these unlikely artistic influences. And while Ginsberg’s impact on Soviet Estradny writers was indeed profound, the cultural exchange worked both ways, as Ginsberg’s resistance to the Cold War brought his poetry into conversation with his own family connections to Russia and the Russian Estradny poetry contemporary to his own work. These young Russian poets had a significant influence on Ginsberg’s evolving ideology, his poetry, and even his method of composition, all of which changed dramatically in the years following his first trip to the Soviet Union. Ginsberg also used his knowledge of Russian poetry, his family’s history

in Russia, and the poetic influences of Russian Estradny poets to develop and cultivate a transnational poetic identity: a politically neutral yet activist position in the Cold War.

Given that so little critical work has been done linking Ginsberg's poetry to its Russian influences, it is not surprising that the poetry Ginsberg wrote immediately after returning from his first trip to the Soviet Union has been so misunderstood and even maligned. In fact, there has been very little written about Ginsberg's mid and late 60s poetry, especially the poems collected in *Planet News* and *The Fall of America*. Nearly all of the poems in *The Fall of America* were composed with the voice. Ginsberg recorded himself composing poetry vocally using a tape recorder given to him as a gift from Bob Dylan just weeks after leaving the Soviet Union--a method of composition that I argue has its origins firmly in the Russian Estradny movement and Andrei Voznesensky, who introduced Ginsberg to the idea of "thinking in rhythms" and composing poetry in the ear rather than on the page. Estradny poetry got its name from the stage, where it was not just recited, but performed in front of as many as 14,000 people. Sometimes these performances would include musical accompaniments, or they would be performed by famous Russian singers. The oral tradition has a long, uninterrupted history in Russian literature, but the Estradny poets Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko were, perhaps, the first to compose their work not by writing it on the page but by reciting and revising their poetry orally until it was ready for transcription or dictation onto the page in its final form. "I write without paper," Voznesensky said in a 1980 interview, "I walk around, composing and revising, thinking out variants until the poem is finished" (*Paris Review* 106). This dissertation

claims that this Estradny technique of aurally composing poetry had a profound affect on Ginsberg's post-1965 poetry, and especially on the collection of poems Ginsberg began dictating into a tape recorder in September 1965 and published eight years later as *The Fall of America*. My critical intervention is supported by evidence drawn from previously unpublished poems, journals, and correspondences from *The Allen Ginsberg Papers* archived at the Stanford Special Collections.

Ginsberg published three small collections of journal entries: *Journals: Early Fifties, Early Sixties* (1994), *Journals Mid-Fifties: 1954-1958* (1996), and *Indian Journals* (1996). These collections, as well as Bill Morgan's 2008 collection *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice: First Journals and Poems: 1937-1952* and the 2006 *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile* only scratch the surface of the 3000,000 documents Ginsberg began amassing at the age of eleven and sold to Stanford University in 1993 for one million dollars. These published manuscripts and journals, as well as the 2008 *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg* are highly selective and edited samples of the larger archive. They are also, with the exception of *Indian Journals*, primarily focused on examining the origins and context of Ginsberg's most canonical work--"Howl." Because Ginsberg did not meet Yevtushenko and Voznesensky until the winter of 1965, nearly a decade after the publication of "Howl," the journal entries from Ginsberg's trip to the Soviet Union, many of the poems he wrote there, and his subsequent correspondences with the Estradny poets cited in this dissertation are all previously unpublished texts.

Ginsberg's original arrangement of the materials he sold to Stanford's Special Collections in 1993 has been preserved exactly as Ginsberg had himself archived them.

Materials previously housed at Columbia University, however, have been rearranged significantly. As a result, several series in this archive show evidence of conflicting intellectual arrangement schemas, one imposed by Ginsberg and his staff, another by third parties. This makes finding particular items in the archive rather tricky, as does the fact that, as of 2017, none of the documents have been made available electronically. The guide to this collection is 1,241 pages long, while the collection itself is divided into 19 different series ranging from “Correspondence” to “Teaching Materials” and “Musical Scores.” The “Corresponce Series” alone is held in over 380 boxes with as many as many as 96 folders per box.

Buried in the hundreds of thousands of unpublished documents from this massive collection are three journals from Ginsberg’s 1965 trip to the Soviet Union. In an entry dated March 22, 1965, from the second of these three journals, Ginsberg describes his first introduction to the Estradny style of aural composition. This journal entry documents how Voznesensky explained to Ginsberg in his Moscow apartment in 1965 how Voznesensky often “thinks in rhythms” while composing poetry that searches for something Ginsberg translated as “cosmic rhythms” (*Allen Ginsberg Papers*, series 4, box 18, folder 4, page 24).² This method of aurally composing and the dictating poetry that seeks rhythms first had a profound impact on Ginsberg’s changing mode of composition in the 1960s starting with *The Fall of America*, which Ginsberg began composing in September 1965. Up until now, however, scholars have not had the tools for understanding this shift in style. By reconnecting *The Fall of America* with its

² All journal citations in this dissertation are from the *Allen Ginsberg Papers* archived at the Stanford Special Collections and are identified by series, box, folder, and page number respectively.

Estradny origins, however, I hope this dissertation is able to provide a new lense for interpreting this text as an aural artifact that captures a vivid and often stark portrait of Vietnam-era America that is both politically potent and culturally relevant.

Ginsberg's journals from the Soviet Union also reveal the inspiration for his Ginsberg's forays into popular culture and musical performances in the late sixties. Not only did he begin dictating his poems after visiting Russia for the first time, he also began performing in front of larger audiences, starting just weeks after his deportation from Czechoslovakia with the International Poetry Incarnation, a reading performed in front of a sold-out audience of 7,000 people at London's Royal Albert Hall. In addition to such imitations of large, Estradny-style public performances, Ginsberg also began, in 1965, to record albums of spoken word poetry and even, starting in 1971, music that he sang backed by Bob Dylan and his Rolling Thunder tour band. This convergence of popular music and poetry, which also had a profound influence on Dylan's changing lyrical style, was, in many ways, an idea imported from Ginsberg's impressions of post-Stalin Russia, where poets like Voznesensky were, in 1965, already writing lyrics for popular music, performing in soccer stadiums, and even releasing their own records.

John Bayley points out that "Russian poetry has always inspired recitation and a rapt response from the reciter's audience, but Mr. Voznesensky, and his contemporary, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, are perhaps the first Russian poets to exploit this in the actual process of composition — to write poems specifically for performing, as pop songs are written for electronic transmission by singers and band" ("Over the Dark and Quiet Empire"). Ginsberg was well aware of this tradition, and it inspired his work immensely,

especially following his 1965 trip to the Soviet Union. In a 1983 interview, Ginsberg went as far as to attribute the preservation of the oral tradition in Western literature to the works of Russian poets:

Russians always had an oral tradition, and I think that was one of the inspirations for the American oral tradition—we got it from them. I’m talking about the old Russian tradition of oral poetry, which had disappeared in America and England--the vocal bards still survived in Russia through thick and thin... The bardic vocalization was probably the most common thing. With bardic vocalization comes a large consciousness of space around you and some awareness of addressing human beings in that space. That pathetic vocalization of prophecy goes back through Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Gogol. (27)

This tracing of a resurgent oral tradition in late 20th century English and American literature back through Russian culture is not something that is supported by sound evidence-based literary or historical research. The Estradny movement that Ginsberg “discovered” in Russia in 1965 was, ironically, heavily influenced by Ginsberg himself. So, in some ways, Ginsberg was importing a Russian interpretation of his own poetry back to the United States in 1965. It is important to note, however, that Ginsberg made these boldly affirmative claims about the role Russian culture played in shaping American literature partly because he knew how extremely radical they were during the Cold War, as American propaganda often positioned Western art as a superior tradition diametrically opposed to the backward and stifling traditions of the East. While linking American culture to Russian literary traditions was clearly an act of political protest, it

also came naturally to Ginsberg, who was, after all, the son of an Ashkenazi Jewish mother who had immigrated from Russia in 1904. Belonging to an immigrant population shaped, at least in part, by the two cultures that identified themselves during the Cold War as two opposing sides of a binary allowed Ginsberg to see and write from beyond that binary. By reconnecting Ginsberg's poetry with its Russian influences, we can better understand the aural aesthetics of his poetry, his evolving method of spontaneous composition, and the full complexity of his arguments for the simultaneous primacy of the individual *and* the collective. In doing so, Beat scholars can reclaim the mantle of "beatnik" from a term of opprobrium by examining how they actually were inspired, not by communist ideology, but by anti-communist Estradny poetry.

The term beatnik has, up until this point, been used to denigrate Beat writing by implying that it was linked to Russian communism. The term was coined in 1958 by Herb Caen of the San Francisco Chronicle as a typical case of Cold War "othering," as a way to dismiss the rebellious works of Kerouac and Ginsberg as "Anti-American" by vaguely labeling them as Russian with the addition of the "-nik" suffix to "beat." This was clearly intended to imply some nefarious connection with "sputnik" and a supposed Marxist/Soviet plot to undermine America during a time of war. Ginsberg, of course, hated the term "beatnik." After a 1959 *New York Times* review of Kerouac's *Dr. Sax* used the term repeatedly to describe the author and his characters, Ginsberg wrote a letter to the editor complaining that "the 'beatnik' of mad critics is a piece of their own ignoble poetry. And if 'beatniks' and not illuminated Beat poets, overrun this country, they will have been created not by Kerouac, but by industries of mass communication

which continue to brainwash Man and insult nobility where it occurs” (*Letters* 223).

Ginsberg’s critique of this media stereotype is exactly right, and, indeed, the idea of “beatniks” has very little to do with the actual poetry and prose of the Beat Generation. I think the term’s xenophobic and anti-Russian origins tell us more, as Ginsberg suggests, of the culture that created the stereotype than the authors supposedly described by it. And, interestingly, it illustrates a critical parallel between Russian and American cultures at the height of the Cold War. In 1963, when Nikita Khrushchev, in a desperate plea to appease the conservative party officials that would eventually oust him, attempted to reverse the more liberal policies that defined the post-Stalin Thaw. He called a “Meeting of Government and Party Leaders with Writers and Artists” to decry experimentation, abstraction, and art that deviated from the ideal of “Soviet Realism” (Johnson 33). The Russian novelist Vassily Aksynov says, in his *New Republic* article “Beatniks and Bolsheviks” that, “in the stream of insults that Nikita Khrushchev brought down upon us in the winter of 1963, the American word ‘beatnik’ constantly popped up” (1). The term “beatnik,” ironically, represented the evils of Russia to the Americans and the evils of America to the Russians while simultaneously uniting the Beat Generation and the Russian Estradny movement across the otherwise impenetrable Iron Curtain. By reclaiming the term “Beatnik” as a Russian-American, American-Russian movement that transcended the petty party politics and fear mongering of short-sighted wartime politics, we can better understand the true depth of this poetry’s political undertones while highlighting the shallow nationalism and imperialism of both the Soviet and American governments.

Reading Ginsberg as a Beatnik in terms of his relationship with actual Russian authors and influences, the impact of his poems in Russia, and the Estradny movement's influence on his later works reveals his poetry to be a part of what Pascale Casanova calls the "world republic of letters." In this context, Ginsberg's more overtly political and anti-war poems can no longer be dismissed as naive acts of rebellious shock poetry. Instead, anti-war poems like "Wichita Vortex Sutra," anti-communist poems like "Kral Majales," and richly complex political poems like "Capital Air," become critical and complex interventions against the destructive Cold War binaries that were splitting the world apart into politically, ideologically, and artistically isolated "spheres of influence." Uncovering the intricate relationship between Ginsberg's poetry and the poetry it inspired and borrowed from on the other side of the Iron Curtain reveals a complexity that manages to speak clearly against both sides of Cold War while developing a nuanced understanding of the poetic shifts in Ginsberg's later work.

This dissertation attempts to introduce to U.S. critics a critical framework for understanding Ginsberg and other Beat Generation writing in the context in which it was written. The significance of the unrestrained individualism inherent in much of Beat Generation writing has been lost for *most* Americans in the subsequent decades of political progress. Václav Havel, the Czech writer, anti-Soviet dissident, and first President of the Czech Republic said, however, that Ginsberg's poems remained so politically influential for him and his fellow anti-Soviet dissidents because they were perceived, "in the unfree conditions" the Soviet Bloc, as "even more rebellious than in the land of their origin" (*Spontaneous Mind* ix). When I first read this quote, I completely

understood what Havel meant, having myself both studied as a cadet and taught as a professor the Beat Generation in the rather unfree conditions of the United States Air Force Academy. Reading Beat literature in the context of a rigid and controlling system restores some of the context that made those works so famous in the first place; “Howl” seems more rebellious in a military context, where it has a weight and immediacy that may have worn off a little for the average American reader. In this restrictive environment, the references to the Cold War, Vietnam, and World War II are more pronounced and more challenging, and the fact that both Kerouac and Ginsberg served in the Merchant Marines and both struggled with freely expressing their identities in McCarthyite America is something that matters to cadets as they sacrifice their own individualism as they begin to serve in the military. The beginnings of this dissertation go back to the semester that I took a class in the Beat Generation at the Air Force Academy, but the value imposed on these poems by that specific context is universal for any readers who are introduced to Ginsberg’s poems in a context similar to the unfree conditions in which they were written. The Russian Estradniki did not have to understand the complications of being a gay, Jewish, son of a Russian born communist in McCarthyite America to understand the poetry and nuanced protest of Ginsberg’s work. They understood that Ginsberg’s rebellion took the form of individual expression in a system where his particular individual identity was forbidden. The unfree conditions of the Soviet Bloc gave Ginsberg’s poetry an even more obvious exigence, as virtually all public expressions of individualism were banned. I hope that by reconnecting Ginsberg’s poetry with the Estradny poets who influenced it and were influenced by it,

this dissertation can help critics and readers alike see how this poetry advocates for the power of free expression and individualism against the oppressive power of collectivity and hegemony both inside and outside of the United States.

Chapter I:

Transnational Beatnik: Russia in Allen Ginsberg's Early Poetry

America is like Russia.
Acis and Galatea sit by the lake.
We have the proletariat too.

--Allen Ginsberg, "A Poem on America" 1951

The influence of Russian culture, Russian politics, Russian language, and Russian literature can be seen even in Ginsberg's earliest poems. Ginsberg was relatively well-versed in Russian poetry through his mother, Naomi, who was born in Russia, and his father Louis, a Jewish American who was also a High School English teacher, published poet, and, himself, the son of Russian-born parents. Ginsberg said in a 1983 interview that his father's poetic career allowed him contact with Russian literature at a very young age. At thirteen, he was reading Blok and Marlynsky's English translations of nineteenth-century Russian poetry (Lauridsen and Dalgard 28). As early as 1951, Ginsberg was comparing American and Russian politics in "A Poem on America" and referencing Gogol's *Dead Souls* in his poem "After Dead Souls"--Gogol's famous line "Where are you going, Russia, in your troika?" becomes, in Ginsberg's poem, "Where O America are you / going in your glorious / automobile" (107). The young Ginsberg also embraced his parent's leftist politics and shared their opposition to

the “cultural power of the corporate-liberal state apparatus in the United States” (Belgrad 32). He famously confessed this fact in his 1956 poem “America” when he unapologetically says: “I used to be a communist when I was a kid and I’m not sorry” (29). Lines like this one from “America,” declaring “Moscow” as “holy” in “Howl,” and comparing Hart Crane to Vladimir Mayakovsky in “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear” all show that the young, pre-1965 Ginsberg was particularly interested in curating a Russian identity based on his family connections to the country. This does not, of course, diminish the significant role Ginsberg’s Jewishness, nor his practicing Buddhism had on his poetry. Rather, his early interest in Russia was far less significant and perhaps less sincere--inspired instead by a resistance to the Cold War and a desire to subvert the Cold War binary that arbitrarily divided the citizens of the two countries. Ginsberg was able to make parallels between the two countries’ governments in these early poems that served as implicit critiques of American freedom while, at the same time, he used his own conflicted, Russian and American identities to channel Whitman’s ideals of American pluralism and their potential restorative powers for American democracy.

This chapter will explore Ginsberg’s attempts to create an abstract notion of his own “Russianness” without contradicting the excellent research that has been done in Alicia Ostriker’s “‘Howl’ Revisited: The Poet as Jew” or Allen Grossman’s “Allen Ginsberg: The Jew as American Poet,” which both establish the significant impact Ginsberg’s Jewish heritage had on his most significant works--namely “Howl” and “Kaddish.” I agree with these readings as well as Craig Svonkin’s argument that Ginsberg’s interest in combining Buddhist, Jewish, and Hindu traditions may have been

“a psycho-historical move in which [the] poet attempts to kill off his white male American-identified self and adopt a subaltern alter-ego” (167). Craig Svorkin’s argument about Ginsberg using his identity as a form of protest, is only further advanced when we consider his claims in “Kral Majales” of “slavic parentage” (*Planet News* 90). His family connection to Russia at a time when “Russian” was synonymous with “the enemy” was essential to Ginsberg’s curation of, as Svonkin puts it, a “marginalized series of fragmented identities” that create “an operatic syncretic hybridized identity in order to create a sense of poetic freedom at the margins” (167).

Ginsberg’s most explicit early use of his family connection to Russia in poetry is found in his satirical manifesto “America,” which was stylistically inspired by Jewish-Romanian Dada poet, essayist, and performance artist Tristan Tzara’s the “Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine.” Ginsberg said in a 1989 interview with Yves Le Pellec that “I thought I was writing a Dadaist poem, a socialist Dadaist poem. Stylistically the humor of ‘America’ is a Dadaist approach to the hypocritical seriousness of *Time* magazine and the C.I.A. party line” (104). When Le Pellec disagrees with Ginsberg, arguing that America “is not the tone of Dada. It is more sentimental, more serious,” Ginsberg says:

If I read ‘America’ aloud, you would realize the changes in tones of voice. Sometimes it’s a slightly crazy voice, sometimes a very sane one, sometimes a hysterical voice: ‘Them Russians, them Russians. The Russia wants to eat us alive’... All of the lines are mocking a certain type of person. It’s all a collage of different voices! All my own: sentimental, outraged, mocking, complaining... (103)

Despite the fact that all of the fragmented voices in “America” are part of a satirical work of different voices, Ginsberg makes it clear that all of these voices should also be interpreted as his own voice. I think that Svorkin’s argument that Ginsberg creates a “subaltern alter-ego” in much of his work certainly applies to “America.” I also think, however, that there is in the various conflicted voices of “America,” the fragmented perspective of a child of immigrants living in a nation at war with the birthplace of his mother and the home of numerous living family members. As a result, “America’s” multiple competing and contradictory voices seek to undermine not only his own “white male American-identified self,” as Svorkin claims, but also the violence contemporary to Ginsberg’s historical moment. Ginsberg is able to use his own curation of a quasi-Russian identity to counter American xenophobia and McCarthyism with the quintessentially American ideal of Whitmanian pluralism.

“America” is bookended by Ginsberg’s own, sincere voice, earnest in its desire at the poem’s close to “put [his] queer shoulder to the wheel” while simultaneously, in the poem’s opening, furiously demanding that America fuck itself with its atom bomb (73, 5). The first shift away from this angry, complaining, and sentimental voice, is the shift, midway through the poem, to the voice of America itself. Ginsberg adopts this voice after realizing: “I am America. / I am talking to myself again” (45-46). This voice of America, as I’ve written about in the *Journal of American Culture*, is an ironic take on Whitman’s ideal conception of American collective identity as imagined in “Song of Myself” and *Drum Taps*. This collective identity has always been simultaneously defined by and complicated by America’s diversity as a country of immigrants. Ginsberg’s

Jewishness as well as his queerness are commonly used by the poet as self-identified sources his own otherness, but the central focus of “the other” in “America” is Russia. There is, after all, late in “America,” the voice of a stereotypical Russian, ominously threatening to “steal Chicago,” while not so ominously threatening to educate America’s disenfranchised native population, at which point the voice shifts again to that of a stereotypical native American.

Ginsberg’s own sincere and sentimental voice in the poem is very much a Jewish voice, or, as Steven Axelrod argues, the voice of a stereotypical “Jewish mother persona:”

America I’ve given you all and now I’m nothing...

I don’t feel good don’t bother me...

America when will you send your eggs to India?

I’m sick of your insane demands. (1, 6, 13-14)

Axelrod notes that “slippage” in these lines from a prophetic Jeremiad voice to “an exasperated Jewish mother” marks both Ginsberg’s racial identity as well as his gender fluidity (5). The most famous recorded reading of the poem, however, from a 1959 Big Table Chicago reading, which has been set to music by Tom Waits and included on multiple albums, does not show any discernable evidence of these lines being voiced by a Jewish mother character. Rather, they are read in a somber, almost expressionless tone. A reading of a draft of “America,” most likely from 1955, however, has a completely different tone, which supports at least part of Axelrod’s claim. The line “When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?” is

delivered with an exaggerated vaudevillian accent, as are other lines removed from the final version of the poem like: “Your machinery is too much for me.... I don’t want to *work* for a living.” This line is delivered with a deliberate pause before the “punchline,” which humorously emphasises the word “work” and is followed by another pause for laughter and applause. It is a very different poem from the final version, and it supports Axelrod’s argument that that the Jewish tones of “America” may, in fact, be examples of unintentionally “slipping” out of character. More likely, however, these changes may be just another shift in voice and perspective in a poem as fragmented as American identity and as fragmented as Ginsberg’s own identity as a queer Jewish American son of Russian immigrants. Other evidence of this Jewish voice appropriately appears in the poem’s longest line, in which Ginsberg reminisces about going to communist cell meetings with his mother, describes Scott Nearing as “a real mensch,” and recalls seeing “Yiddish orator Israel Amter” and having the words of “Ewig-Weibliche” bring him to tears (61). This opening section of “America” is, along with its humor, quite critical in its address to America (e.g. “Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb”). This critique is softened by other lines like “When will you take off your clothes,” read “When will you take off *your* clothes” in the earlier, more vaudevillian reading of the poem. The Jewish voice coincides with this more overtly anti-American language, as this portion of the poem is written in Ginsberg’s sincere and sentimental voice--the voice of Ginsberg the Jewish son of a Russian communist.

Ginsberg’s sincere voice is clearly addressed to “you, America,” whom he asks, “are you going to let your emotional life be run by Time Magazine?” (39-40). It is here

that the first shift in perspective occurs, as Ginsberg, or at least the poem's speaker admits, "I'm obsessed with Time Magazine," then quickly realizes "I am America. / I am talking to myself again" (41, 45-46). The next seven lines are written in a humorous and ironic voice of America. The voice of America is, through its ironic tone, also still the voice of Ginsberg. This is why America's voice also makes a point of saying *something* about "say[ing] *nothing*" of its "prisons," "millions of underprivileged," and "twentyfive-thousand mental institutions" (50-51). The voice of America also mentions its "ambition is to be President despite the fact that I'm a Catholic"--a pre-Kennedy reference to the limited portion of the population American democracy actually represented in 1956 (53). Generally speaking, the section of "America" written from America's perspective is no less critical of America than Ginsberg's voice was in the poem's first section.

After reverting to addressing America directly, Ginsberg shifts perspectives yet again, adopting yet another voice:

America it's them bad Russians.

Them Russians them Russians and them Chinamen. And them Russians.

The Russia wants to eat us alive. The Russia's power mad. She wants to take
our cars from out our garages.

Her wants to grab Chicago. Her needs a Red *Reader's Digest*. Her wants our
auto plants in Siberia. Him big bureaucracy running our fillingstations.

That no good. Ugh. Him make Indians learn read. Him need big black niggers.

Hah. Her make us all work sixteen hours a day. Help. (63-67)

The section concludes with the poem's speaker (Ginsberg?) commenting: "This is quite serious / America this is the impression I get from looking at the television set" (69). The unfounded fears presented in the absurd hyperbole of this section reflect the fear mongering running rampant in politics and the media in 1950s America. Yet this section is clearly not written in the tone of a news reporter or politician, but rather, it adapts the "omission of syntax," as Hemingway so brilliantly puts it in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," that "stupid people employ when talking to drunken people or foreigners" (381). Russia here is presented in the third person, yet the voice is an imitation of the first person, a foreign accent, more specifically the imitation of a "stupid person's" imitation of a stereotypical Russian accent. The recorded 1959 Chicago reading of this poetry really emphasises the "Russianness" of the accent, which is also imbedded in the poem's inclusion of excess and cumbersome definite articles (e.g. "The Russia wants to eat us alive. The Russia's power mad"). The Russian language does not have definite or indefinite articles, which leads to many missing or unnecessary articles in English that is spoken with a strong Russian accent. This is, of course, a fact Ginsberg would have learned well from his Russian-born mother. The "Russian" voice here is clearly not, of course, Ginsberg communing with his mother's birthplace. It is absurd, exaggerated, and racist. This exaggeration, however, does not originate with Ginsberg's voice. Rather, it is the voice of Russia that is transmuted through the American "television screen," through politics and mass media and into a caricature to be used to instill fear in the American people. This absurd Russian voice is also, of course, ironic. There is the obvious hyperbolic imagery of Russia "grabbing" Chicago, the absurdity of

fearing overly bureaucratic Soviet filling stations, and, of course, the biting irony behind the claims that America should fear Russians invading to “make Indians learn read” and steal African Americans whom this caricature of the US media presumes *belong* to America.

The U.S. hypocrisy regarding American civil rights issues is a concern for Ginsberg, but it was also a central theme in Anti-American Soviet propaganda, which often featured depictions of the KKK, lynchings, and slave labor (Fig. 1). The idea that



Fig. 1. The caption of this Soviet-era propaganda says “Freedom, American Style.” Above the caption are depictions, from top left to bottom right, of William Randolph Hearst mocking “freedom of the press,” a lynching mocking “individual freedoms,” a verdict against communism mocking “freedom of opinion,” and riot police mocking “freedom of assembly.”

Russia is concerned with American civil rights cuts through the fake Russian accent and racist language to recast this section as ironically pro-Russian... while, of course, remaining literally anti-Russian. I should note that Russia was critical of American

racism while remaining itself quite racially intolerant both politically and culturally. Ginsberg's multiple arrests behind the Iron Curtain as well as his deportations from Czechoslovakia and Cuba would have made him quite aware of this hypocrisy a few years later. His own experiences with the Communist and Socialist parties in America, however, would have informed his refusal to take sides in early poems like "America."

All of the poem's voices do have one thing in common--they are all undeniably critical of contemporary U.S. foreign and domestic policy. Yet, there is still something earnest in the poem's final line in which Ginsberg, in his own voice, says that despite not wanting to serve in the army or "turn lathes in precision parts factories," he still wants nothing more than to "get right down to the job.... America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel" (73). Ginsberg is doing what he believes is best for America--not the U.S. federal government, but the ideal, pluralistic, and democratic America of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas*. Ginsberg uses multiperspectivism, to include his own quasi-Russian perspective, to criticize America, but within this perspective there is also America's saving grace--it's complex, sometimes messy, but quintessentially democratic pluralism.

"America" embodies, like Whitman's "Song of Myself," the democratic ideal of simultaneously representing multiple dissenting views. Ginsberg *is*, after all, America, as are those in her "twentyfive-thousand mental institutions" and "prisons," her "millions of underprivileged," "Tom Mooney," "the Spanish Loyalists," "Sacco & Vanzetti," "the Scottsboro boys," "Ewig-Weibliche," and "Israel Amter." Even "them Russians" can also be Americans as in the case of immigrants like Naomi Ginsberg and their children. In

this context, Ginsberg's transnationalist project is a reconciliation of Russian and American poetic traditions that not only makes sense of Ginsberg's own conflicted identity, but also, more broadly, makes sense of the conflicted nature of American pluralism itself. This idea has deep roots, of course, in the poetry of Walt Whitman.

In "Song of Myself," Whitman famously describes America in terms of "leaves of grass," which simultaneously represent individual Americans and America as a whole. Grass is both singular and plural; it represents both a blade of grass and a field of grass, which Whitman describes as "a handkerchief of God left on earth as a gift and remembrance... a uniform hieroglyphic" (6:7-8). The American experiment is, in this context, an attempt to protect individual freedoms from a federal government whose power is derived from those same individuals. These ideas are also clearly at the heart of "America," as Ginsberg transitions back and forth between telling America to "fuck yourself with your atom bomb" and realizing that "I am America, and I am talking to myself again." A 1955 draft of the poem even goes as far as to claim: "I Allen Ginsberg Bard out of New Jersey take up the laurel tree cudgel from Whitman" (13). Ginsberg is putting his queer shoulder to the wheel by pitting his idealized, Whitmanian view of American pluralism against McCarthyism's betrayal of these ideals. These ideals become, in the context of Ginsberg's political moment, a source of biting irony and shtick that make "America" such a powerful work of satire.

The fact that McCarthy and other conservatives used the threat of Russian Communism as the justification for their crackdown on free expression and political and social dissidence was both a source of internal conflict for Ginsberg and the critical irony

to be used to satirize both the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. In his 1957 poem, "Death to Van Gogh's Ear," Ginsberg says that the "Poet is Priest," responsible for standing up against authority and "the president" who "built a War machine which will vomit and rear up Russia out of Kansas" (175). He then laments that the "American Century" has been betrayed by a mad Senate," and that "Franco has murdered Lorca the fairy son of Whitman / just as Mayakovsky committed suicide to avoid Russia [and] Hart Crane... committed suicide to cave in the wrong America" (175). Ginsberg is brilliantly satirizing McCarthyism with the seemingly ridiculous notion that Russia has somehow infected Kansas and needs to be rooted out. But, at the same time, Ginsberg is inviting Russia into American culture as he compares Cold War America's betrayal of Whitman's ideal America to the Soviet Union's betrayal of the Bolshevik Revolution's most famous poet--Vladimir Mayakovsky (Владимир Маяковский). Just as America betrayed Whitman's vision of ideal democracy, Hart Crane was betrayed by American homophobia, Federico García Lorca was betrayed by Spanish Fascism, and Mayakovsky was betrayed by the censorship and bureaucratic totalitarianism of Lenin and, especially, Stalin.³ This juxtaposition of Stalin and McCarthy satirically points out the hypocrisy of McCarthyism while simultaneously pointing out the fact that Russia and the United States are not that different after all.

³ Once a one party system of government was established in the Soviet Union, the Communist party really had little interest in Mayakovsky's "third revolution," the spiritual revolution that would shape art and society. Lenin was more interested in consolidating power and establishing order after the success of the 1917 revolution than he was fermenting a cultural or spiritual revolution amongst the people. He went as far as to refer to Mayakovsky's Futurism as "hooliganism communism" (Jangfeldt 162). By 1930, Futurist meetings were attended by members of the Soviet secret police, funding for new publications was completely cut off, bureaucrats controlled every aspect of society, and satire was banned from all newspapers and magazines.

By linking this protest against McCarthyism's war on American civil liberties back to Whitman, the most quintessentially American poet, through Mayakovsky, one of the most quintessentially Soviet poets, Ginsberg is doing, in "Death of Van Gogh's Ear," some of his most overtly transnational work, linking two of the most seemingly unlikely cultures. But the Soviet Union and the United States have some critical commonalities that go beyond their shared superpower status during the Cold War. Both governments perpetuated the popular myths that they were nations founded on an idea (democracy and communism respectively) rather than national or historical identities.⁴ Both nations used these myths to justify numerous proxy wars, as the US advocated for global liberation and freedom through military and CIA support of "democratic revolutions" around the world while the Soviet Union supported "communist causes" that they argued would free the global proletariat from the oppressive power of US-led capitalism. Of course, to believe that the Soviet Union and the United States were both founded on ideals also makes it possible, even inevitable, that those ideals will be betrayed. That they used the threat of each other to justify these betrayals is, for Ginsberg, the greatest irony of the Cold War and a central theme in his early work.

The link Ginsberg is creating between Whitman and Mayakovsky in "Death to Van Gogh's Ear" also reflects a previous transnational poetic influence Whitman had on the Russian poet. In a 1975 lecture at the Naropa Institute, Ginsberg described Mayakovsky's poem, "An Extraordinary Adventure Which Befell Vladimir Mayakovsky In A Summer Cottage" ("Необычайное приключение, бывшее с Владимиром

⁴ This concept persists in the US, where House Speaker Paul Ryan said in 2016 that "America is the only nation founded on an idea — not an identity. That idea is the notion that the condition of your birth does not determine the outcome of your life" (qtd. Greer).

Маяковским летом на даче”), as “in the tradition of Whitman... an escape from the authority of the state, and the authority of literature, and the authority of rightness and wrongness, and an escape and a refuge in the final authority of personal imagination.” There is actually quite a bit of historical support for connecting Mayakovsky and Whitman. Ginsberg knew that Mayakovsky admired the poetry of Walt Whitman, which he read in translation early in his poetic career.

In 1981 Ginsberg gave a two-part joint lecture on Mayakovsky, the Russian Futurists, and Walt Whitman with the Beat Generation/Mayakovsky scholar, Ann Charters. Ginsberg and Charters explain that Mayakovsky’s revolutionary poetry was influenced by the Whitman’s “conception of a revolutionary/future man.” Charters says in this lecture that “Mayakovsky had loved the Whitman that he had heard,” and that Mayakovsky saw Whitman as a fellow “destroyer of Philistine literary traditions.” When he first read Whitman, Mayakovsky said, according to Charters: “It’s already happened in America! This has happened. This idea of the destruction of the past and the new spirit.” The idea that the most prolific, pro-Bolshevik poet in Russia was inspired by the most famous poet of American democracy is exactly the kind of transnational intervention that Ginsberg hoped would blow-up the world order during the Cold War and free both Russian and American artists to write beyond their borders. In the meantime, Ginsberg says of himself in “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear”:

I am the defense early warning radar system

I see nothing but bombs

I am not interested in preventing Asia from being Asia

And the governments of Russia and Asia will rise and fall but Asia and Russia will not fall... (176)

Ginsberg then declares that all governments will fall except for “the good ones,” which don’t exist yet but are beginning to exist in his poems, in the “death of the Russian and American governments,” and in the “death of Hart Crane & Mayakovsky” (176).

For Ginsberg, The Cold War between the Soviet Union and United States was just a distraction from the real conflict between the governments of the two superpowers and their suppressed artists. While Ginsberg admits in “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear” that “Poets should stay out of politics or become monsters,” he also confesses that “I have become monstrous with politics” and that “the Russian poet [has] undoubtedly [become] monstrous in his secret notebook” (177). Just a year after publishing “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear” in *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1961) Ginsberg helped bring some of those monstrous Russian poets’ “secret notebooks” to an international audience with the publication of *Red Cats* in 1962. While it was inspired by his own interest in Russia and socialism, the relationships that came out of this collaborative work would eventually surpass and outweigh any early role Russian literature had in Ginsberg’s work. Ginsberg would say decades later, in 1983, that the Estradny poets featured in this collection, including Ginsberg’s future friends and collaborators Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko, were drawn together with him and the rest of the Beat Generation by the simultaneous “breakout of our respective post-Stalinist or McCarthyite social conditions” (26). Once they were drawn together, however, neither Ginsberg’s poetry nor that of the Estradny poets would ever be the same.

Despite Ginsberg's 1983 claim that he is "a Russian poet, put in an American scene," we can clearly see that, prior to 1965, his connection to Russia was primarily used for "trolling" the US government while pursuing a more Whitmanic version of the American collective. It also, however, ingratiated him to many Soviet governments, who would come to publish excerpts of his work in the official state publications that would first introduce his work to the Russian poets who would reinvent it in their work and reinvent Ginsberg's work through their influence. Chapter 2 will focus on understanding the role of propaganda and translation in bringing Ginsberg and the Estrady poets together by looking at Ginsberg's reception in the Soviet Union as well as the reception of *Red Cats* and other translations of Russian Estradny poetry in the United States.

Chapter II:

Red Cats: Allen Ginsberg in Translation and Propaganda

Это Ален, Ален, Ален!
Над смертельным карнавалом,
Ален выскочил в исподнем!
Бог--ирония сегодня.
Как библейское пророчество
Гениальное: «Сойди!»

--Андрей Вознесенский, "Нью-Йоркские Значки"

It's Allen, Allen, Allen!
Over the lethal carnival,
Allen leaped out naked!
God is irony today.
Like a biblical prophesy--
Genius: "Come down!"

--Andrei Voznesensky, "New York Buttons"⁵

Andrei Voznesensky may have been half joking when he describes in his poem, "New York Buttons," Allen Ginsberg's genius coming down from the heavens like a biblical prophecy, but there is a history and real substance behind this joke. It is also worth noting that this appeal to the genius of an anti-Soviet, American radical was published by the Soviet state and approved by the Glavlit (Главлит), which prohibited the publication of information that could compromise the Soviet Union, and the Goskomizdat (Госкомиздат), which was responsible for the political and ideological

⁵ Translated by Greg Dandeleles and Irina Zadnepryanaya

ensorship of all Soviet publications. This chapter examines the early, Soviet-published Russian translations of Allen Ginsberg's poetry and how the reception of this poetry by young Soviets reveals the complexity and multifaceted nature of Ginsberg's poetry. By connecting with young performance poets known as Estradny poets through his translated works, and eventually by helping translate their work into English, Ginsberg was able to access Soviet popular culture in a way no other western poet could. At the same time, the publication of "Howl" and other poems in the Soviet Union allowed Ginsberg to participate in a global conversation that has had profound ramifications for the course of literary and political culture in the Soviet Union. When you look at Ginsberg in the context of his reception in Soviet Bloc nations, we can see how "Howl" inspired dissident politics to be subtly introduced into official Soviet publications in the form of confessional poetry. When we see the larger role *Howl and Other Poems* played in shaping the late 20th century Soviet literature, Ginsberg's poems, long thought to be inert in the US, are revealed to be politically and psychologically complex. At the same time, the Estradny Poets' complex interaction with the Beat poetry they read and incorporated into their own work shows that they were far more sophisticated and subtly insurgent than Western critics have given them credit for. This subtle subversion did, however, catch the attention of Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who in 1962, published the first English translations of Voznesensky and some of the earliest English translations of Yevtushenko in *Red Cats*, a collection of poems that was part sixteen in the same City Lights *Pocket Poets Series* that previously included *Howl and Other Poems* and *Kaddish*. This collection, translated by Anselm Hollo, tried to present

Estradny poems as far more “Beat” than they actually were, but *Red Cats* still served as an early introduction between Ginsberg and the Estradniki, which would eventually lead to much richer cultural exchanges.

A Transnational reading of Ginsberg is not just effective in developing a deeper understanding of his poetry; it promises a regeneration of the field of American Studies with a long overdue liberation from what Amy Kaplan calls “the tenacious grasp of American exceptionalism” (12). Greg Barnhisel’s *Cold War Modernism* astutely documents how Cold War reading practices transformed Modernist literature into a sign of social prestige in the 1950s, in part, so that it could be used as “a weapon in what has become known as the ‘cultural Cold War,’ the struggle for cultural prestige and influence between the Communist Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites on one side and the United States and the nations of western Europe on the other” (Barnhisel 2). In wielding Modernism against the “barbarism” of the Soviet Union, Western critics and institutions inevitably changed the public perception of its principal works. “Even as it retained its associations with innovation,” Barnhisel explains, “modernism also came to be presented as a pro-Western, pro-‘freedom,’ and pro-bourgeois movement, evidence of the superiority of the Western way of life” (2).

In the process of politically weaponizing Modernism as a mark of civilization, critics ironically excluded the actual innovations that were occurring within late Modernist movements. Just as Soviet culture was dismissed by Western critics as barbaric, so too was the Beat Generation, which K. W. Grandsen condemned as a “decline into barbarism” and Truman Capote famously dismissed as mere “typing” rather

than writing. Harold Bloom went as far as to write in the introduction to a collection of critical essays *about* the Beat Generation, that “Howl” is nothing more than an “Oedipal lament” that lacks “the delicately nuanced artistry of our father, Walt Whitman, whose greatest poems may look easy, but actually are superbly difficult” (2). Adam Kirsch, in a slightly more sympathetic reading of “Howl,” still argues that the poem can be read “simply as an advertisement for fun, for sex, drugs, and rock and roll” (202). The appeal that “Howl,” *On the Road*, and other canonical Beat literature had to young people and its subsequent commercial success led to accusations that these works were merely what Adam Kirsch calls a “commodification of dissent” in which radicalism is a “mere lifestyle choice that pose[s] no real threat to the established order” (203).

What Kirsch and these other critics miss about Ginsberg’s political protest through “lifestyle choice” is that this type of protest is exactly what made Ginsberg’s poetry so translatable into so many languages, cultures, and different political situations. And it is in this global context that Beat literature made its biggest impact, especially where it was able to penetrate the censorship of the Soviet Bloc. Grace and Skerl go as far as to say in *The Transnational Beat Generation* that it was here in the Soviet Bloc that the Beats made their “most significant” impact on letters. In Russia and Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s, “Beat writing became a model of resistance or dissidence” that other poets would successfully use to undermine Soviet censors with subversive poetry that did not always look political to the untrained eye (1). This model of Beat resistance came, however, from an incredibly limited set of translated works. Andrei Voznesensky explained in 1983 that mid-century Russian knowledge of the

American Beat Generation was limited to just one poet--Allen Ginsberg. "We knew Allen Ginsberg in the sixties," he explains, "but at that time we *only* knew Allen Ginsberg" (Lauridsen and Dalgard 41).

Allen Ginsberg's poetry got past Soviet censors in the same way the poetry he inspired did, by looking less politically dangerous to the Communist government than it really is. Just as American critics dismissed "Howl" as posing "no real threat to the established order," Soviet censors published "Howl" simply as anti-American propaganda. They, like American critics, only understood "Howl" on its most literal level. They missed the poem's humor and ironic satire, and they neglected, due to their own ideological blind spots, to understand the appeal of "Howl" to the dissatisfied youth of their own country. Ginsberg captured in "Howl" a complex yet universal sense of dissatisfaction that appealed to young Russians. Soviet publishers, however, focused more on part II of "Howl" and on a literal understanding of Moloch as American oppression through "soulless jail-house and Congress of sorrows" and capitalism: "Moloch whose blood is running money!" (21).

The Soviets willingly published and distributed this poem despite the critical fact that nowhere in "Howl" is the American government specifically named. Rather, Moloch is described as "the stunned governments." This plural use of government for one of the many representations of Moloch in section II of "Howl" has been overlooked by Soviet and American critics alike. There doesn't seem to be much to say about what governments Ginsberg might have had in mind, but we now know, from recently

published drafts of “Howl,” that Ginsberg specifically had the Soviet Union in mind. In fact, a 1955 draft of “Howl” includes the additional lines:

Moloch whose name is America

Moloch whose name is Russia...

Moloch whose name is

Chicago and Moscow (64).

Even though these lines were removed from the final published version of “Howl,” the concept that Moloch represents authoritarian power wherever it exists was well understood by the Russian poets inspired by the work. By underestimating the complexity and depth of “Howl,” Soviet publishers ended up inspiring a poetic revolution right under their noses, not only in their country, but in their Writer’s Union.

This moment of transnational influence is so critical because it undermined the very border that justified all other borders of interpretation to be set up during the Cold War in the defense of US exceptionalism. Winifried Fluck says that the “transnational project can be seen as a response to an impasse that prior approaches in American studies had reached. Analyses of American society and culture by the New Americanists had been carried to a point where subjection by means of interpellation through the nation-state seemed to be all pervasive, so that resistance had to resort to ever more marginalized subject positions as possible sources of disinterpellation” (365). There is a debate about how far we should go in the “dissolving of borders” in search of “a point of resistance” within the U.S. that needs to be “critically unmasked.” But of all the borders that were put up during the Cold War, there is obviously no greater division

than the very explicit one put between the United States and the Soviet Union. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, it was, in part, the association of “Beatnik” literature with the Soviet Union that led to its critical rejection in the United States. To be lumped in with the Soviet Union was the ultimate form of marginalization in Cold War America. Of course, the irony of this marginalization is that it works, at least in theory, because of all the injustices enacted by the Soviet Union. Somehow, in the act of criticising both the United States and the Soviet Union, however, Ginsberg managed to produce a cultural phenomenon that provided a source of disinterpellation for ideological and state apparatus on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

It’s not hard to see how the Soviet censors missed the political potency of Ginsberg’s poetry. Even Ginsberg’s teacher and mentor Lionel Trilling, and his wife Diana Trilling, thought that the radicalism of Ginsberg’s protest hurt liberal causes more than it helped them. This is a common reading often propped up with references to the later failures of the New Left and the hippie movement of the 1960s. Diana Trilling, writing in 1959, predicted some of these failures as she compared the Beat Generation’s excesses to the political pragmatism of 1930s socialists in her essay “The Other Night at Columbia”:

Everyone judged everyone else; it was a time of incessant cruel moral judgement; today’s friend was tomorrow’s enemy; whoever disagreed with oneself had sold out, god knows to or for what.... But it was surely a time of quicker, truer feeling that is now conjured up with marijuana or the infantile camaraderie of Kerouac’s *On the Road*.... Ginsberg says he lives in Harlem, but

it's not the Harlem of the Scottsboro Boys and W. C. Handy and the benign insanity of trying to proletarianize Strivers Row; their comrades are not the comrades of the Steward Cafeteria nor yet of the road, as Kerouac would disingenuously have it, but pick-ups on dark morning streets.... It is no accident that today in the fifties our single overt manifestation of protest takes the wholly non-political form of a group of panic-stricken kids in blue jeans, many of them publicly homosexual. (qtd Kirsch 203)

Trilling's objection to Ginsberg's public homosexuality reveals the generational divide that separated her preferred radicals of the 30s and Ginsberg's radical poetry of the 50s. She is able to dismiss Beat poetry as "wholly non-political" because the parameters of her definition of political were limited by her age and experience. Gay rights were to her a damning distraction from the particular political causes she believed in. Of course, when we take a longer view of the social and political impact of Ginsberg's poetry, we see that the open portrayal of homosexuality in "Howl" did not limit its political impact, as Trilling suggests, but rather, it served as one of the poem's more significant and lasting contributions to American culture. The treatment of homosexuality as "insanity" in the United States during the 1950s was a major theme of "Howl," and it was one of the aspects of the poem that resonated most in the Soviet Union where political dissidents, homosexuals, and anyone the regime considered inconvenient were "diagnosed" as insane and institutionalized.

Of course, "Howl" has been read from a queer studies perspective since at least the early 80s. The canonization of "Howl" is in no small way a result of excellent queer

studies scholarship like Catherine Stimpson's "The Beat Generation and the Trials of Homosexual Liberation," Robert Corber's *Homosexuality in Cold War America*, and William Jeffs's "Allen Ginsberg: Toward a Gay Poetics," in which Jeffs argues that "America's climate of war and its economics of capitalism engendered a race of hypermasculine men, a race that Ginsberg juxtaposes with his emphasis on Whitmanic, tenderly comradeship," which, Jeffs explains, "opened new ground in American poetry and poetics" (72). Given the ample critical celebration of Ginsberg's politics of gay liberation, Trilling's 1959 dismissal of Ginsberg for focusing too much on his "public" homosexuality rather than pressing political arguments is of course ironic. Trilling's dismissal of the personal as apolitical, however, was and still is a common misreading of Ginsberg. It was this same misreading that led the Soviet Writer's Union and state publishers to translate and publish "Howl" without understanding or acknowledging that the poem was actually intended to be as anti-Soviet as it is anti-McCarthyite.

Ginsberg's extremely personal and confessional style has long masked his poetry's more nuanced political points. Marjorie Perloff says in "A Lion in Our Living Room," however, that it is this confessional style that allowed readers to find a place in "Howl" in which to "insert their own identities and desires in the text" (228). This was especially true in translation, where meaning often becomes even more fluid, as translators add additional slippages in meaning both through misunderstanding a poet's intended meaning and intentional editorial changes in meaning. Initially translated and published by the Russian state as pro-communist, anti-capitalist propaganda, "Howl" was, counter-intuitively, received by many young Russian poets as a model of

resistance *against* the oppressive censorship and dehumanizing repression of the very same government translating and publishing the work. The poem's ability to simultaneously represent the political aims of two opposing parties shows the poem's complexity and its universality. This universality can be seen in the poem's impact on other Soviet bloc countries as well.

"Howl" and many other Ginsberg poems were also translated into Czech by the poet Jan Zábřana. When Soviet censors asked about the line from "Kaddish": "with your eyes of Czechoslovakia attacked by robots," Zábřana was able to explain the robots as a metaphor for "Nazis, of course" (*Allen Ginsberg Papers*, series 4, box 20, folder 1, page 4). That this line could simultaneously be Nazis to the Soviet censors and Soviets to the Czech people speaks to the violent history of Czechoslovakia in the 20th century, but it also shows the versatility and effectiveness of Ginsberg's political protest. Even Václav Havel, the first president of the free Czech Republic was heavily influenced by these translations of Allen Ginsberg's work. He was a student in 1965 when he met Allen Ginsberg in what was then Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia. Decades later, Havel wrote that "The general revolt against the official establishment and the literary nonconformism of the Beat poetry and prose have most likely been perceived in our unfree conditions as even more rebellious than in the land of their origin" (*Spontaneous Mind ix*). Within two years of Ginsberg's visit, Havel and others inspired by Ginsberg's anti-establishment poetics began openly pushing for political reform in the Union of Czechoslovak Writers' official publication, the *Literární Noviny* (Literary News). The primary aim of this reform was modest--to cautiously insist that literature should be

independent from Communist Party doctrine. This appeal was very much in line with the model of “lifestyle” protest they learned about from Ginsberg’s work. “Howl,” which Adam Kirsch dismissed, in the context of American politics, as a “commodification of dissent... that pose[s] no real threat to the established order,” was, in the context of Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia, a critical document in the inspiration of the Red Spring of 1968. Justin Quinn says in *Between two Fires* that Zabraná’s translation of Ginsberg helped loosen the “diction and formal palette” of Czech poetry. At the same time, both Czech and Russian poets recognized something in Beat poetry that translated directly into Soviet society and, in the process, brought out a meaning in the poetry that is perhaps more nuanced than what contemporary American critics saw in it. As Eliot Katz points out in “Radical Eyes: Political Poetics and ‘Howl’”: “what has resonated most in the minds and imaginations of readers across the planet for half a century has been the keen sense that here is a poet devoting considerable literary skills and talents to help envision and create a more humane world” (183).

Ginsberg as Propaganda

Ginsberg first appeared in the Soviet Bloc through samizdat (самиздат), the clandestine copying and distribution of English versions of *Howl and Other Poems*. Yevgeny Yevtusnehnko said, for example, that “issues of *Evergreen Review* went from one hand to another among the young poets in Moscow.” These copies were, of course, in English and not accessible to most of the Russian public. It was not long, however,

until official translations began showing up publications like *Literární Noviny* in Czechoslovakia and *Inostrannaya Literatura* (Иностранная Литература) in Russia.

The August 1961 edition of *Inostrannaya Literatura* published a very faithful translation of “A Supermarket in California.” This translation maintains references to homosexuality, with Federico Garcia Lorca still doing something with the watermelons and Whitman is still “poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys”:

**Я видел, как ты, Уолт Уитмен, бездетный, старый ниспровергатель
основ, стоял у мясного отдела и глядел на мальчишек
из бакалеи.**

The only deviation from a literal translation of the text is in the title itself. “A Supermarket in California” is translated as “Рынок В Калифорнии,” which is not a supermarket (супермаркет) or a store (магазин) but an open farmer’s market. This may appear, to a Westerner’s ear, to diminish the poem’s critique on American consumerism and excess inherent in Ginsberg’s description of a “neon fruit supermarket” with “aisles full of husbands!” (1, 3). This slight alteration of the translation was, however, both logical and intentional for the state translators. Of course, “super markets” were not a luxury Soviet citizens had in 1962. In fact, Russia was in the middle of a massive food shortage after Khrushchev’s plan to meet Soviet demand for food with a new variant of cold weather corn ended in catastrophe when the crops failed all across Siberia (Fig. 2). The resulting food shortages meant that government run stores (магазины) were forced to enforce strict rationing of not only meat and dairy, but also bread and grains. If you had money, however, you could still buy food more directly from the source, at a farmer’s market,

the Rinok (Рынок). Supply was, of course, seasonal, and prices were at least four times higher. These markets were by no means the most literal translation of Ginsberg's "neon supermarkets," but their use in this translation of "A Supermarket in California" was certainly more useful in emphasizing the poem's rather subdued critique of a conspicuous consumption. A single-minded focus on this one element of the poem, however, seems to have led to the Soviets completely missing, or at least ignoring, any reference to homosexuality in the poem, allowing Russians to see one of the first open poetic depictions of a lifestyle criminalized by the government.

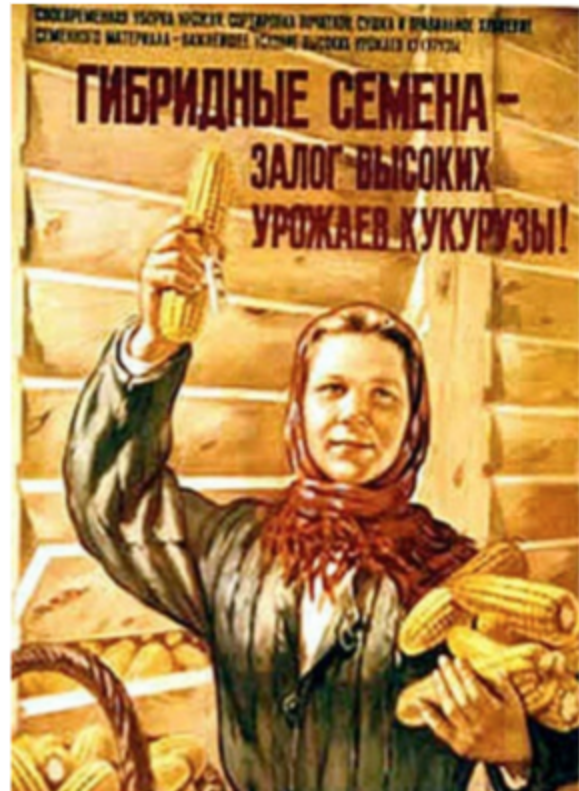


Fig. 2. This Khrushchev-era poster promises "Hybrid seeds are the key to high corn yields!"

Other early state publications of Ginsberg's work were not quite as faithful as "A Supermarket in California." This first translated poem had no editorial introduction other than a brief explanation that Ginsberg was part of a young group of poets known as beatniks (битники) and that Ginsberg was the author of the book "Вопль." Вопль is, of course, "Howl," but the poem would later be published as Вой. Both words translate to "Howl," but Вопль is more of a howl of anguish (to cry, scream, wail, or bellow). Вой is more of a "yowl" or "hoot," like that of a wolf or dog. The switch to the more animalistic Вой title came with a translation that censored most of the poem's anguished and

sexually explicit part one but kept, nearly completely unaltered, the poem's second section, which focuses on the figure of Moloch. The Soviets clearly interpreted part II of "Howl" in much the same way American critics did, as an angry tirade against American capitalism and the military industrial complex. In fact, the introduction to the poem describes it solely in these terms: "In A. Ginsberg's poem, 'Howl,' Moloch becomes a hero-prototype of the capitalist city / state, causing terrible suffering to people" ("В поэме А. Гинзберга «Вопль» Молох становится героем-прообразом капиталистического города/государства, причиняющего людям ужасные страдания").⁶

The censorship and editorialized introduction to Вой reveal that the Soviet bureaucrats who translated and published these works misread "Howl" in much the same way Ginsberg's contemporary, American critics misread it. They fixed on only the most literal interpretations of its protest, as a blunt and unnuanced political protest of American capitalism. "Howl" was appreciated by Soviet poets and artists, however, on a much more nuanced and personal level that focused more closely on the text rather than the poem's few direct political allusions and references. The young Russian poets who read "Howl" for the first time were struck, much like the American youth, by the poem's opening lines, "I have seen the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness." The use of the word "madness" for this destruction was something Soviet writers could perhaps feel as acutely and Ginsberg himself and in equally direct, personal terms. In the years when, under Stalin, as many as 20 million people

⁶ Archived by САРАТОВСКОЙ ГРУППЫ РОССИЙСКОЙ МАОИСТСКОЙ ПАРТИИ

disappeared without a trace, many of these missing people were actually sent to the mental institutions like the Serbsky Center (Центр Сербского) in Moscow. In fact, during the Soviet Era, dissidents were often declared mentally ill for purely political reasons. In almost all cases, these dissidents were officially examined at the Serbsky Central Research Institute where psychiatrists evaluated individuals accused under political articles. Typically, individuals with dissident views were declared mentally ill, regardless of their actual mental health, and sent for involuntary treatment at special hospitals. Among those wrongly hospitalized for insanity were the poets Ginsberg sought out during his travels through the Soviet Union in 1965: Joseph Brodsky, Alexander Esenin-Volpin, and Bella Akhmadulina. Just as Soviet officials were manipulating the mental health profession to silence unconventional Soviet poetic voices, they were publishing the work of Allen Ginsberg, whose open depictions of homosexuality contributed to his hospitalization in a mental institution, electro shock therapy, and an obscenity trial that sought to prevent the distribution of *Howl and Other Poems* in the United States. This irony is, on one hand, a typical byproduct of the Cold War's perverse binary politics, but it is also proof of the depth and versatility of Ginsberg's poetry.

Vasily Aksyonov (Васи́лий Па́влович Аксе́нов) says in his *New Republic* essay "Beatniks And Bolsheviks" that Soviet officials viewed the Beat Generation in America "as shakers of the foundations of bourgeois society, and as promoters of [the Soviet] cause" (3). The specific images Ginsberg uses to portray Moloch in "Howl" are not, however, as simplistically anti-bourgeois as these Soviet officials or American critics

believed. Rather, Moloch is described more broadly as the city, industry, the modern world that surrounds us all: a “sphinx of cement and aluminum” (II, 1). And as the “incomprehensible prison!... whose buildings are judgment!... whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!” (II, 4-6). Ginsberg’s equating of the modern industrial state with authoritarian government was, to the Soviet publishers, clearly a condemnation of the excesses of capitalism. They were so confident in this interpretation that they put Moloch on the cover of “Вой” (Fig. 3). It is incredible to think, however, that decades later, this same poetic image can be found in a memorial to Stalin’s Great Terror.



Fig. 3. The cover of a Russian pamphlet of “Howl” (Вой) depicting the “Moloch” figure

Robert Conquest estimates in *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* that seven million Russians were arrested during Stalin’s Purge, of which one million were executed and another two million died in labor camps between 1937 and 1938 (485). While the Soviet Union sought to suppress information on these deaths for decades, in 1989 mass graves were opened to the public as the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery

(Левашовское мемориальное кладбище). More than twenty-two memorials have been erected in honor of these victims, but the most famous is “The Moloch of Totalitarianism,” a statue sculpted by Nina Galitskaya (Fig. 4). While this depiction of an industrial, soul crushing “Moloch” was created in 1986, long before Galitskaya had read “Howl” or any of Ginsberg’s work, she explained in 2017 that “the writers of [Ginsberg’s] circle, Jack Kerouac and Ken Kesey, [were] close to me from my youth” (Galitskaya). The convergence of these images and Galitskaya’s childhood familiarity with the Beat Generation show both how porous the Iron Curtain could be during the Cold War and how universal Ginsberg’s response to repression was.



Fig. 4. “The Moloch of Totalitarianism,” by Nina Galitskaya

It was not just Soviet publishers and censors who localized and particularized the meaning Moloch in “Howl.” American scholars, including many Beat scholars, have long explained Moloch as a representation of the oppressive American politics of Cold War capitalism and McCarthyism. Moloch is, according to Jeffrey Gray, “the military-industrial complex, CIA, FBI, Blake’s ‘satanic mills,’ and multinational capitalism all rolled into one” (41). While McCarthyism was a low point in modern American civil liberties, the young men and women who read the Czech and Russian translations of “Howl” in the stifling bureaucracies of Soviet Bloc countries in the early sixties had even more to identify with in the sentiment that the best minds of a generation are being destroyed by a controlling

and all-encompassing bureaucracy focused on collective identity and industrialization. For Soviet Bloc writers, their political environment lent the revolt and rebellion in Ginsberg's poetry a context that heightened its stakes and its impact. Soviet youth reading "Howl" in the context of an Communist autocracy is not, however, entirely an example of Soviet dissidents "finding a place in 'Howl' in which to insert their own identities and desires in the text" (Perloff 228). Even though the line "Moloch whose name is Russia" was removed from the final published version of "Howl," the concept that Moloch represents authoritarian power wherever it exists was well understood by the Russian poets inspired by the work. It was the work of these poets, inspired by Ginsberg, that took a horrible, highly redacted state-sponsored translation of "Howl," and turned it into an image so powerful that it would become a recognizable symbols of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union.

The Confessional Poetry of the Soviet Estradny Movement

Just as *Howl and Other Poems* was first appearing in Russian through state sponsored translations, a small group of Russian poets was creating a similar form of rebellious performance poetry that was so closely linked with public readings that they were dubbed Estradny poets (эстрадные поэты) or stage poets. And, like the Beats in America, these poets were reaching a large and young audience as they took advantage of small increases in freedom during the post-Stalin Thaw. A. Robert Lee says in *Modern American Counter Writing* that "by 1962, it seemed that Beat, somehow, had surfaced from deep beneath the political cartilage of Khrushchev-era Sovietism."

While Beat influence did spread, in part, through underground issues of *The Evergreen Review* passed around the few Moscow poets that read English, most Russians were introduced to Ginsberg and Beat poetry through state sponsored publications like *Foreign Literature* (Иностранная Литература), which first began publishing the poetry of Allen Ginsberg in August 1961. By 1962, two of the bigger names in the group, Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko, were reciting their poetry to crowds in the thousands, readings so big they were famously held in soccer stadiums and sports arenas.

While these poets were very popular in Russia, this popularity has mostly been treated with suspicion by Western critics who perceive these poets as Khrushchev's puppets. Clive James declared in *The New York Review of Books* that:

Voznesensky's poetry has the same limitations as most other Soviet literature which has ever been officially published.... Voznesensky is a hero to all those in the Soviet Union who want their poets to tell them the truth. But at the risk of his career, freedom, and perhaps even his life, he has never been able to do much more than drop hints. Reading his work through from the beginning, you can see that what ought to be his main subject matter is hardly there. When the subject is the history of his own country, everything he has to say is tangential. And eventually, because he is unable to state the plain truth about his own time and place, he is unable to state the plain truth about any other time and place. The result is a kind of false complexity, a string of profundities that do not add up to much. (1)

Even some American Beat authors, like Michael McClure and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, grew skeptical of Estradny poets with time. Michael McClure, for example, described it as “a copycat movement”: “The Russians decided they needed an Allen Ginsberg, so they set up Yevtushenko. That’s a gross oversimplification, but since I don’t know what the Russian politics are, I can only see it in a kind of cartooney way; and in a cartooney way that’s what it looks like” (117). The idea that Yevtushenko was set up by the Russian government as propaganda proving that even Russia could have “Beatniks” is an oversimplification, as McClure himself acknowledges, but it is not an uncommon or even unfounded idea. Even Anselm Hollo, who translated 25 poems by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Andrei Voznesensky, and Semyon Kirsanov for Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti’s collection *Red Cats*, criticized the three poets as hypocrites in his 2001 book *Notes on the Possibilities and Attraction of Existence*: “The poems now strike me as simplistic,” he says in retrospect, “sentimental, and not a little hypocritical in their post- and sub-Mayakovskian rhetoric” (277).

These critics were not completely wrong to suggest that the Estradny Poets could only “hint at” their political environment, or even that they were “set up” by the government. They were, after all, professional, published poets *in* the Soviet Union. Of course, the work of the Estradny poets looks unpolitical and even hypocritical when comparing their work to that of artists like Joseph Brodsky, who wrote and published primarily in the United States. All published poets *in* the Soviet Union were “set up” by the government, as they were technically employed by the state. The Soviet government was, after all, the only legal means of publishing in the Soviet Union. This

was the only way to make a living as a writer, but more importantly, it was the only way to reach a Russian audience. Western critics, blinded by the politics of the cultural Cold War, were not interested in the Russian reception of Russian poetry. Rather, they were only interested in poets they perceived as explicitly undermining the Soviet Union, even if this meant the poetry was never published or read in Russia. The Estradny poets had a much more complex role within the Cold War. They were not always in the good graces of the Soviet government, but they refused to abandon their country or their Russian audience. When, for example, In 1963, a year after the publication of *Red Cats*, Nikita Khrushchev personally warned Voznesensky to “get out of Russia” or face the consequences, Voznesensky’s reply was, according to the both the poet and official reports: “I am a Russian poet, and I am not going anywhere” (Vest and Woods, *The Paris Review*).

Voznesensky’s commitment to his homeland, to writing in Russia, about Russia, and for a Russian audience, led to criticisms from Western critics who preferred the poetry of those who chose their work over their audience. Even liberal scholars critical of Cold War binaries found it too hard to stomach poets willing to work under and even for the Soviet regime. While Voznesensky was censured by the Soviet Union, he had gained a large audience during the brief window in the early Khrushchev years when poets were given the freedom to publish and perform with minimal censorship. Khrushchev, according to his son, “believed that socialism had to be liberated from the debris of Stalin’s rule and from bureaucracy. It should be made more democratic” (*Cold War*). Similarly, Vadim Zagledin, a close aide to Khrushchev, said that the premier

“understood that politics is about people... he knew that he had to deal with the outside world and that change was needed. He understood it as a man with a lot of common sense, peasant’s common sense. He had very strong instinctive gut feelings and he followed them” (*Cold War*). Professional politicians and members of the politbureau were, however, “horrified” by Khrushchev's “common sense” and his push for the liberalization of the Soviet Union.

It wasn’t long before the Thaw was over and Nikita Khrushchev was out of office. Before being ousted, Khrushchev, who was feeling the pressure that would eventually lead to his loss of power, started cracking down on the very liberties he had ushered in. “Writers are like artillery,” he said addressing the Writer’s Union in 1963, “because they clear the way for our infantry. They cleanse the brains of those who need it. You should fire precisely at the enemy -- not at your own side” (*Cold War*). Vladimir Semichastny, the head of the KGB under Khrushchev, similarly said that it was his agency's responsibility to “make sure our people were getting only what we believed they needed and what we thought was beneficial and necessary for our state, our system, and the policy of our party which played the leading role in our society” (*Cold War*).

By the time Khrushchev threatened Voznesensky with expulsion in 1963, Voznesensky was one of the most popular poets in the Soviet Union. His popularity persisted through the years, as censorship returned in full force, and even as the Soviet Union failed. As a personal anecdote, when I casually mentioned Voznesensky to my Russian mother-in-law, a retired aerospace engineer, she began reciting from memory his most famous poem: “I am Goya.” This poem, like all of Voznesensky and

Yevtushenko's poems, is not explicitly dissident or anti-Soviet. If anything, the politics of these poems tend to be patriotic, as when Voznesensky declares in "I am Goya":

Возмездья! Взвил залпом на Запад –

я пепел незваного гостя!

И в мемориальное небо вбил крепкие звезды –

Как гвозди. (*An Arrow in the Wall 2*)

I have hurled westward

the ashes of the uninvited guest!

and hammered stars into the unforgetting sky-like nails (*An Arrow in the Wall 3*)⁷

While this poem is pro-Soviet in its references to the expulsion of Nazi soldiers from Russia during World War II, it is also about the role the artist in immortalizing this historic event. Voznesensky is revelling in his own role as the artist, comparing himself to Francisco Goya, who immortalized the Napoleonic Wars with his series of prints *The Disasters of War*. The patriotism of the war obfuscates Voznesensky's own glorification of himself. It is this focus on the power of the individual in this poem and other more personal poems he wrote about his own life that led James Cotter to say in "The Truth of Poetry" that he and Yevtushenko were able to write about "the power of the individual against bureaucracy and oppression" (343). This may seem like a subtle political protest to Western eyes, but it was profoundly subversive for its time and place. Ginsberg was able to see the protest in these poems because it took a form so similar to his own misunderstood confessional protest poetry. It's true that Yevtushenko and Voznesensky

⁷ Translation by Stanley Kunitz

were light years away from Ginsberg in terms of what lifestyle freedoms they were advocating for. But in the end, all three poets were advocating for the free expression. In the U.S., the fight for free expression mostly applied to those with underrepresented identities, like Ginsberg, who fit into multiple disenfranchised communities--most notably the gay community. In the Soviet Union, however, the limits on free expression were more universal. To write about oneself as an individual rather than the collective was, itself, an act of protest.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko was, at the same time, gaining similar popularity with Russian readers and notoriety with censors. He said years later, in a 1998 interview, that:

I'd become popular nationally, not as a political poet, but as a poet of love, because for many, many years of cold war after 1945, some poets even didn't use in the poetry about love, the word "I." They were using "we." "We love." "I love you as I love my country," for instance. That was typical, you know, hypocritical quotation from poetry at that time. And even poems about--- not political poems, about loneliness, for instance, like my poem, the early poems, it was accused [of being an] anti-Soviet poem, because if I am Soviet man, how I could be lonely if I'm a member of such a giant collective, like two millions of my friends who are working for the ideals of communism? (*Cold War*)

Yevtushenko and Voznesensky's poetry was political, in part, by not not always being political. Rather than writing poems in the style of Socialist Realism, their poems portray loneliness, dissatisfaction, and modern malaise not unlike that of the American Beat

Generation. While this dissatisfaction is not always explicitly attributed to Soviet policies, the portrayal of a dissatisfied youth did not conform with official Soviet implicit or explicit expectations for its artists. Yevtushenko's most famous early poem, "Zima Junction," opens with a declaration of honesty. Not an honest assessment merely of communism or of politics, but of his own life, of himself, his childhood, and his childhood home of Zima in the Irkutsk Oblast of Siberia:

As we get older we become more honest...

If the way I see you now is not the way

we saw you once, if in you

what I see now is new

it was by self-discovery I found it. (*Selected Poems* 19)

The rest of the poem is an autobiographical account of Yevtushenko's first trip back to Zima after a long absence studying in Moscow. He returns to a town that hasn't changed but no longer looks the same to his eyes, which have seen just a little bit more of the world. The poem's speaker, upon returning, suddenly "disbelieve[s] the floated fairy tales" of his youth and asks, "when was it that the people lived like princes?" (20).

Yevtushenko does not write here about socialism, democracy, or a need for political reform. Rather, he writes honestly about his life in stark terms: his uncles who had been his heroes in childhood but look now to be simply vulgar and violent drunkards, his home that was supposed to be a socialist paradise is impoverished and disconnected from the rest of the world. Yevtushenko is honestly describing his "beat" generation... the minds of his generation (and his uncles' generation) "destroyed by

madness.” And, like Ginsberg, Yevtushenko uses the personal to convey the political in a way that does not seem immediately political. This was, of course, the only option. “To criticize communist ideology was,” according to Václav Havel, “like suicide. It was better to find another way to write about human rights, human freedom, and basic human existence rather than enter into a direct confrontation with ideology” (*Cold War*).

At other times, Estradny poets were able to push more directly against some Soviet policies. Yevtushenko’s most famous poem, “Babiy Yar” (Бабий Яр), documents how Nazi soldiers, backed by local Soviet police, executed over 33,000 Jews in 1941 and buried them in a mass grave at the bottom of the Babiy Yar Ravine outside Kiev (Berkhoff 303). Soviet censors would never have allowed Yevtushenko to write about atrocities committed outright by the Soviet Union, but here he found a gray area where he could skirt the censors by appealing to their anti-Nazi sentiments. Sill, “Babiy Yar,” according to Matt Lebovic, simultaneously “denounced Soviet authorities for covering up the Holocaust and stoking new forms of anti-Semitism, the genocide had been almost totally repressed in the region where it began” (1). The poem opens with the lines “Over Babiy Yar / there are no memorials” (82). Staying true to his first person, confessional style, Yevtushenko also imagines himself as multiple victims at Babiy Yar, including a young boy who says:

I have no strength, go spinning from a boot,
shriek useless prayers that they don’t listen to;
with a cackle of “Thrash the kikes and save Russia!”
The corn-chandler is beating up my mother. (*Selected Poems* 82)

This Jewish boy's mother isn't being beaten by a Nazi soldier but by a local farmer who claims to be committing this genocide to "save Russia!" It's true, as many Western critics have pointed out, that Yevtushenko was never able to publish poems that denounced the millions of murders committed by Stalin's regime (to include the murders of both of Yevtushenko's grandfathers), but this poem, according to Lebovic, "helped open the door [in Russia] to an awareness of the Holocaust, a genocide that did not fit into Soviet authorities' 'Great Patriotic War' narrative" (2). As a result of these direct denunciations, Yevtushenko was not permitted to read "Babi Yar" aloud in Ukraine, where the massacre occurred, until the 1980s. While the poem may not look anti-Soviet from a Westerner's perspective, Yevtushenko said in 2011 that "The poem was a criticism of anti-Semitism worldwide, including Soviet anti-Semitism... I was not afraid, because I had already been expelled from the Literary Institute; I had been expelled from all kinds of organizations, and I believed there was a future of change for Russia, that was also important. The poem was one of the changes; it was one first hole in the Iron Curtain" (BBC). Raymond Anderson notes, in defense of Yevtushenko's status as a dissident, that he "was expelled from his university in 1956 for joining the defense of a banned novel, Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone*. He refused to join in the official campaign against Boris Pasternak, the author of *Doctor Zhivago* and the recipient of the 1958 Nobel Prize in Literature. Mr. Yevtushenko denounced the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968; interceded with the K.G.B. chief, Yuri V. Andropov, on behalf of another Nobel laureate, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; and opposed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979."

Yevtushenko, along with Voznesensky and other Estradny Poets had, according to the Poetry Foundation, “the odd distinction of being a celebrated dissident during a fairly repressive time,” and just like with the American Beats’ fame, which was initially a product of publicity from the “Howl” trial, this notoriety came partly through controversies like the one surrounding “Babi Yar.” This was the first “dissident poetry” published in the Soviet Union during that brief moment in Soviet history that Khrushchev attempted to connect Russia with the rest of the world through at least some freedom of expression. This slight and brief opportunity was just long enough to allow Yevtushenko and Voznesensky to gain a following. Their standing up to and surviving the subsequent crackdown on those freedoms brought them international fame (if not critical acclaim).

Red Cats: Ginsberg and Estradny Poets in Translation

It is almost entirely forgotten today, but the very first English language publication of Voznesensky and one of the first two publications of Yevtushenko came about as a project proposed by Beat poets Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. They reached out to Anselm Hollo, a Finnish friend living in London, to translate poems by Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, and Semyon Kirsanov for publication by Ferlinghetti’s City Lights Books. Allen Ginsberg contributed the title to this international addition to *The Pocket Poets Series* that had previously introduced the world to Allen Ginsberg with the 1956 publication of *Howl and Other Poems*. Ginsberg named this collection of Estradny poetry *Red Cats*, using the idiomatic “cat” to emphasize these Russian poets’ connection with the Beats (Fig. 5). Of course, this particular idiomatic expression, along

with a lot of other aspects of “the hip semantic” injected into *Red Cats* comes from African American slang. The use of an African American idiom to describe Soviet poets is the epitome of American transnationalism (and cultural appropriation). It also, perhaps subconsciously, connects subjugated and marginalized populations from two very different worlds. Ginsberg saw a connection in their position as censored and undermined artists. He openly

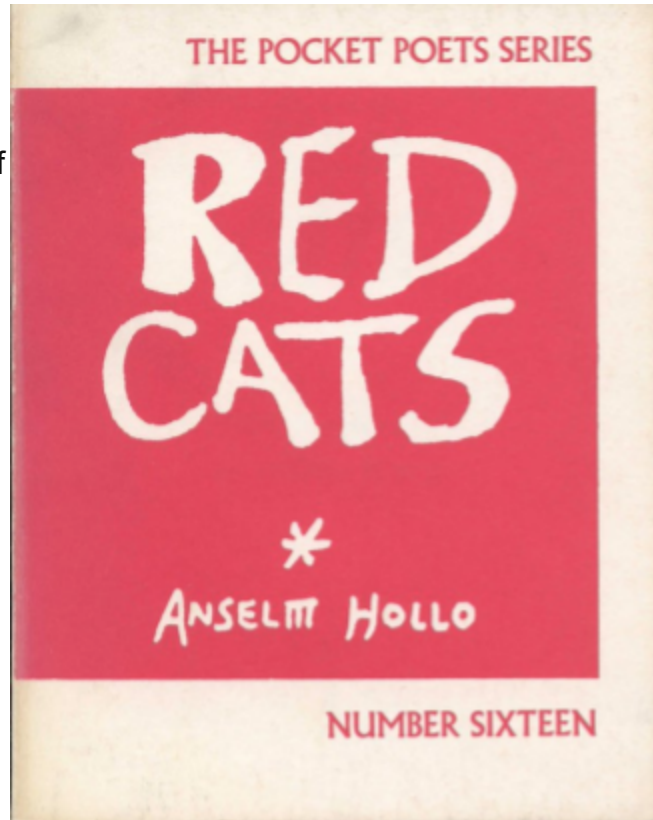


Fig. 5. The cover of “Red Cats” painted by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

admits that “it must be much tougher in Russia than [in the United States], incredibly tougher to survive if you open your mouth, really, as forcefully as we⁸ can here” (qtd Lauridsen and Dalgard 31). Still, Ginsberg said that he saw a “clear connection” between the Estrady and Beat “post-Stalinist and McCarthyite social conditions” (26).

The connections between the Beat and Estradny movements went far beyond their shared social conditions. In fact, both Voznesensky and Yevtushenko claimed Ginsberg as an inspiration for subverting the state with their personal artistic expressions of “human existence” and everyday suffering. In the introduction to *Red Cats*, Hollo says that that “Babi Yar,” which was the collection’s closing poem,

⁸ Ginsberg notes in other interviews that these freedoms are, of course, often limited in the United States based on race.

“expresses something of the poetic kinship Yevtushenko says he feels with Allen Ginsberg, the American poet he ‘loves best’: it is a moving indictment of racism in Russia and everywhere, and, by implication, of all forms of oppression and intolerance” (6). Ginsberg’s influence is explicitly identified in a number of other poems from the mid to late 1960s. The “Allen” in Andrei Voznesensky’s 1968 poem “New York Buttons” (“Нью-Йоркские Значки”), for example, is Allen Ginsberg:

It’s Allen, Allen, Allen!

Over the lethal carnival,

Allen leaped out naked!

God is irony today.

Like a biblical prophesy--

Genius: “Come down!”

In this poem, Voznesensky imagines the prophecy of genius coming down from the heavens in the form of a naked Allen Ginsberg leaping over the “lethal carnival” of censorship and rigid bureaucracy that surrounded Voznesensky and his contemporaries in the Soviet Union. Voznesensky even channels Ginsberg’s poetry of the body in the previous stanza when he describes Ginsberg as “the shaggy one who showed up / cock & balls in dark glasses.” This interest in Ginsberg’s shaggy hair was an important part of Ginsberg’s reception in a country where young hipsters, known as *stilyagi* (стиляги), would be arrested, have their hair forcibly cut and their western style clothing torn or confiscated. Ginsberg’s poetics of open and free expression were enormously influential on young *stilyagi*. With this background in mind, Voznesensky created a portrait of

Ginsberg out of human hair and open handcuffs to celebrate the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Fig. 6).

Clive James, the same critic who dismissed Voznesensky as only “hinting” at politics, also criticised the poet for being “unfortunately thrilled by the profundities of Allen Ginsberg” (5). James’s failure to appreciate what he sarcastically calls the “profundities” of Ginsberg’s poetry directly mirrors his failure to appreciate the subtlety of Voznesensky’s use of confessional poetry to rebel against Soviet oppression. His dismissal of Voznesensky’s real contribution to Soviet culture is no different than Trilling’s earlier dismissal of

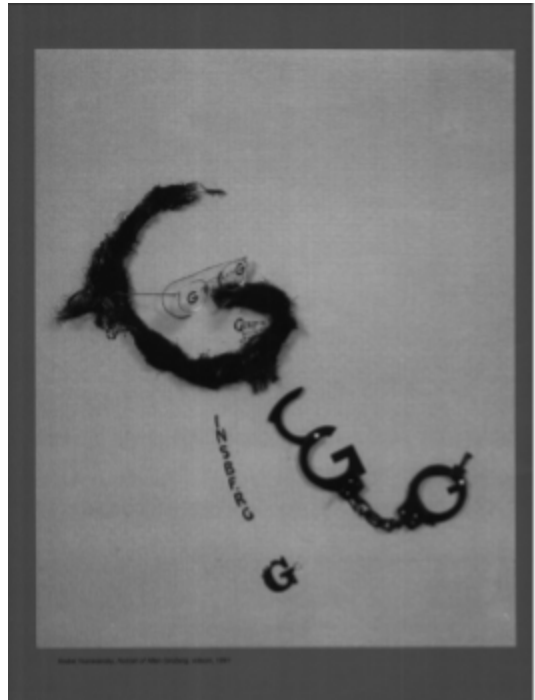


Fig. 6. Andrei Voznesensky, “Portrait of Allen Ginsberg,” hair and open cuffs, 1991

“Howl” as apolitical for its distracting depiction of open homosexuality. Western criticisms of Estradny poets were, of course, made with a higher ideal in mind. James, McClure, Hollo, and so many other critics wanted a stronger call to action against the Soviet Union. In the process, however, they were simply falling into the very binaries that the United States and the Soviet Union sought to establish as part of the so-called cultural Cold War.

Ginsberg mattered in Russian literature because his poetry was a model for personal honesty in a repressive political environment that, above all, repressed the individual. Ginsberg also mattered in Russia because he understood what the Estradny

poets were doing. He was able to influence their poetry by not overtly trying to influence it--by not putting Western demands on Russian poets--but rather, listening to and understanding what they were doing in the context of their political environment. Perhaps Ginsberg understood this environment better because of his mother's experiences in Russia. Or maybe he just understood what it meant to live under a repressive regime because, as an openly gay, leftist, Jew, with family ties to Russia living in McCarthyite America, he felt a direct connection with the Estradny Poets' desire to simply talk honestly about themselves. Critics who demanded more of both Ginsberg and the Estradny Poets did so from a place of privilege that blinded them to the struggle of having one's own identity banned from public discourse.

The connection Estradny poets had with Ginsberg's poetry allowed them to make critical interventions in reading these works that can serve to bridge the gap between popular and critical receptions of Beat poetry in the United States. The previously untranslated Yevtushenko prose poem called "Омиссар Американской Поэзии," for example, simultaneously celebrates "Howl" as a spiritual awakening and a global pop culture phenomenon. The title "Омиссар Американской Поэзии" is a play on words that translates to "The Commissar of American Poetry" but combines the Russian word for Commissar with the Buddhist mantra "Ohm," which Ginsberg taught Yevtushenko. In the poem, Yevtushenko says:

The beatnik generation⁹ and our generation in Russia are inseparable... the role of the beatnik in American literature is equal in its significance to the appearance

⁹ Yevtushenko embraces the term Beatnik and even draws attention to its Russian origin in this poem.

of Futurism and Mayakovsky.¹⁰ It was an artistic and spiritual revolution, which exploded the bastions of an academy covered in weeds. After the witchhunt of McCarthyism, the appearance of Beatniks was an exhalation, a magical and free “Ohm!,” which had been stuck in the chest of America. England reciprocated with its own exhalation, as an echo, with the Angry Generation. In Russia, the same exhalation after Stalin’s death was the poetry of our generation. It was not accidental that we were catching these echoes. The issues of *Evergreen Review* went from one hand to another among the young poets in Moscow. The beatnik generation and our generation in Russia are inseparable, and the word itself, Beatnik, is linguistically born by the Russian word “Sputnik.”

The voice of the Beatniks is a protest against the aggression of mass culture, against the imperialism of TV. It felt as if the garbage rebelled, and as if the empty cans, broken bicycles, and the rusty cars, like lava rumbling down from Vesuvius, toward the satiated Pompei of spirituality. And on top of a garbage can, that is crazily passing “Plaza Hotels” and “Hiltons” like a Jewish Mowgli of the concrete jungle was Allen Ginsberg--the prophet of this lava beating the rhythm of his own poems on the sides of a garbage can and wresting out from his yet young, tin throat his “Howl”... This garbage rolled through the sleeping streets, waking up everybody who was sleeping... To break this wakeless sleep is the task of the poet. (*Allen Ginsberg Papers*, Series 4, Box 75, Folder 10)

¹⁰ The poem, found in the Ginsberg Papers at the Stanford University Special Collections (box 75, folder 10) was translated by Greg Dandeleles and Irina Zadnepryanaya.

What is so brilliant about this depiction of Ginsberg and his poetry is that it reconciles his poetry's significant impact on popular culture with critical dismissals of the poetry as, itself, popular culture to be dismissed as junk. The image of Ginsberg riding an eruption of garbage acknowledges his work as a product of popular culture, but Ginsberg's "Howl" is a bright spot in the garbage; it is a rallying cry that draws the whole world's attention to this eruption of garbage. Ginsberg's poetry matters critically, in part, because it mattered globally. "Howl" echoes as an exhalation, as a Buddhist Ohm that connects us to our own spiritual interior, and as a volcano erupting out of repressive governments from America to the Soviet Union. These translated works, however, were only the beginning of the interaction between Ginsberg and the Estradny Poets. In 1965, Ginsberg traveled to The Soviet Union, where he met these poets for the first time, at the start of lifelong friendships that would lead to collaborations, more translations, and a radical shift of poetic style for Ginsberg himself. This is the subject of Chapter 3.

Chapter III:

Planet News in 1965: The Estradny Movement's Impact on Ginsberg's Poetry

Night, I am Approaching the house.
The 4 Czars, Stalin are in hidden tombs--
A full orange moon, the snowy fields
Of Moravia, the Carpathian
Mountains ahead at 12 o'clock--
At dawn, the Russian border...
My Slavic Soul, we are coming home again--
Once more on Red Square by Kremlin wall
In the snow to sit and write Prophecy--
Prince-Comrades of Russia, I have
Come from America to lay my beard
At your beautiful feet!
Trembling
In the Railway Station, amazed at the
great red train Moscow-Prague--
The train doors open to the corridor--
A Sealed train--Lenin was a trained
Seal--
I'll trade you one diamond
For 2 Communist Manifestos--
I am approaching the throne.¹¹

--Allen Ginsberg, March 18, 1965

This previously unpublished and untitled poem was written by Allen Ginsberg while aboard a train taking him from Prague to Moscow on March 18, 1965. This was the first time Ginsberg would travel to Russia, the birthplace of his mother and his

¹¹ This poem is from a March 8, 1965 journal entry archived in the *Allen Ginsberg Papers* at Stanford's Special Collections (series 2, box 18, folder 10, pages 6-7).

paternal grandparents. As discussed in chapter one, Allen Ginsberg's family connections to Russia were always present in his work, and that work had a profound influence on the Estradny poets, his contemporaries writing in Russia (the subject of chapter two). The most striking transnational exchange between Ginsberg and his contemporaries in Russia did not begin, however, until early 1965 when, at the height of Cold War tensions, Ginsberg visited the Communist states of Cuba, Poland, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia. He judged a literary contest in Cuba, met Estradny poets and future collaborators Andrei Voznesensky, Bella Akhmadulina, and Yevgeny Yevtushenko in Russia, and was elected *Kral Majales* (the King of May) by students gathered in Prague on May Day 1965. In July of 1965, these travels led Richard Kostelanetz to write in the *New York Times* that "second to John F. Kennedy, Ginsberg would seem to be the most widely acclaimed American cultural ambassador." During this one-man mission of cultural diplomacy, Ginsberg was also arrested four times and deported from *half* of communist states he visited; he was escorted to the airport by the police in both Cuba and Czechoslovakia. On his expulsive flight from Prague in May 1965, Ginsberg wrote "Kral Majales," a poem that is both less adulatory of Russia and more famous than "Night, I am Approaching the House." "Kral Majales" opens with the line: "And the Communists have nothing to offer but fat cheeks and eyeglasses and lying policemen" (89). This chapter examines how what happened in the months¹² between the composition of these two very different poems led to major shifts in Ginsberg's approach to politics in poetry, his method of poetic composition, and his

¹² Months spent entirely behind the Iron Curtain

commitment to poetry's oral tradition. These changes, which manifest themselves first in Ginsberg's *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* were inspired by his experiences in the Soviet Union and the friendships he developed with Estradny poets while there. Ginsberg's more direct approach to political poetics was inspired, in part, by the limitations he saw for the Russian poets he met during his travels, while the innovative techniques in aural composition that defined Ginsberg's National Book Award-winning *The Fall of America* were learned directly from what those same poets were able to accomplish in this restrictive environment.

The shift between "Night, I am Approaching the House" and "Kral Kral Majales" is not necessarily a documentation of a "political awakening," as Bill Morgan suggests in *Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg*. Morgan describes these travels behind the Iron Curtain as Ginsberg "finding the truth [about the Soviet Union] for himself" (413). Morgan says Ginsberg went to Russia because he didn't trust "his contacts in Czechoslovakia" who warned him that he would be "disappointed" in Russian communism. We know from Ginsberg's early work, to include "Death to Van Gogh's Ear" and early drafts of "Howl," however, that the poet had no illusions regarding the state of the Soviet government in Russia. Even as Ginsberg was praising the "Russian-Prince" countrymen of his ancestors in "Night, I am Approaching the House," he was criticizing the communist government of the Soviet Union with lines like "Lenin is a trained seal"¹³ and "I'll trade you one diamond / For 2 Communist Manifestos." The

¹³ A play on words referencing the famous "sealed train" that the German government used to send Lenin back to Russia from Zurich with the hope that he would start a revolution that would take Russia out of World War I. This bet by the German government paid off but raises many questions for Russians regarding the legitimacy of the Bolshevik Revolution.

diamond that holds twice the value of the *Communist Manifesto* is the Buddhist text, *The Diamond Sutra*. Ginsberg was still in the process of developing his Buddhist practice in 1965, but it is clear that he already believed that communism in Russia or anywhere else did not hold any spiritual or political answers for him.

Despite the fact that Ginsberg went to Russia knowing well enough that the political system there had nothing to offer him, his experiences there taught him something that clearly changed both the form and content of his poetry. Helen Vendler recognizes this shift in her review of *Planet News*, “A Onetime Wunderkind Reports on the Globe's New Hopes and Woes-and His Own.” She says, however, that Ginsberg’s world travels represent a “wrong turn” in his career, and that he should have stuck with the “domestic” and “personal” subjects that made him famous prior to these travels (1). Vendler says Ginsberg “lost the early rage of ‘Howl’ and instead dispassionately distributes dishonors” in *Planet News*. She then quotes the opening lines of “Kral Majales” as evidence: “The communists have nothing to offer but the fat cheeks and eyeglasses and lying policemen / and the Capitalists proffer Napalm and money in green suitcases to the Naked, / and the Communists create heavy industry but the heart is also heavy” (89). I agree with Vendler that the “shift” in Ginsberg’s poetry in the late 60s can be explained by Ginsberg’s world travels. By dismissing Ginsberg’s post-shift sense of political urgency as an unpoetic and “dispassionate,” however, Vendler fails to examine exactly how those travels changed Ginsberg’s poetry.

Lewis Hyde also discusses *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* as representing a “major shift” in Ginsberg’s poetry (2). In fact, he describes this as the “first major shift”

in Ginsberg's work and says that it "was not an elaboration of his beliefs so much as a growing skepticism" about those beliefs (2). Like Vendler, Hyde attributes this change to Ginsberg's world travels. He describes the results in equally negative terms. He even goes as far as to call his next collection of poetry, *The Fall of America*, "Mr. Ginsberg's weakest collection" with a "tone of melancholy anger, the mood of a man who has lost much and must sustain himself on wanderlust alone" (3). What is missing from both Vendler and Hyde's analysis of Ginsberg's travels and their impact on the poet's work is any discussion of the places Ginsberg visited and wrote about. It is fitting, however, that the foreign influences that profoundly changed Ginsberg's work starting in 1965 were so misunderstood by American critics, especially considering that so much of the transnational influence on this work came from such a misunderstood place on the other side of the ideological and cultural divide known as the Iron Curtain.

This chapter will uncover the Estradny influences and motivations behind the long-maligned shift that occurred in Ginsberg's poetry in the mid-to-late 60s. It will not, however, be adding to the already extensive biographical scholarship that exists for Ginsberg and other members of the Beat Generation--works like Morgan's *I Celebrate Myself*, Jason Arthur's "Biographical Gestures of Allen Ginsberg," or Mark Shechner's "The Survival of Allen Ginsberg" where Shechner argues that Ginsberg "matters less as a poet than as a figure, an exemplary life" (224). Rather, by exploring Ginsberg's journals and unpublished poems from his time behind the Iron Curtain, I hope to reveal the political substance and transnational complexity of this poetry that has long been dismissed as part of a failed second act in Ginsberg's career. I will not use archival

documents to reveal new readings of Ginsberg's life. Rather, I intend to uncover long lost readings of his most misunderstood work from the late 60s by showing that there is a strong link in these poems not just to Ginsberg's perceived Russian heritage but his ongoing relationship with his contemporary poets in the Soviet Bloc. Deep behind Ginsberg's move toward overt political dissent and aural composition is the work of the Estradny poets whom Ginsberg met for the first time in Moscow in 1965. These influences make Ginsberg's later work some of his most transnational. These poems are also some of his most influential on American popular culture and misunderstood by critics.

Planet News and *The Fall of America* are frequently talked about together by critics, editors, and even Ginsberg himself. I will maintain this framework to some degree, as I believe Ginsberg's own editorial notes and my theoretical intervention support this reading. While most poems in each edition of Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* are still grouped by the collection they were originally published in, the poems from *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* are rearranged into three slightly overlapping sections: VI. Planet News: To Europe and Asia (1961-1963); VII. King of May: America to Europe (1963-1965); and VII. The Fall of America (1665-1971).¹⁴ These editorial choices were made by Ginsberg himself. When the first *Collected Poems* came out in 1984, they included the note: "Herein the author has assembled all his poetry books published to date rearranged in straight chronological order to compose an

¹⁴ Not only was *Planet News* broken into two parts, its most famous poem, "Wichita Vortex Sutra" was removed from both sections, and put in "The Fall of America" section. This was an editorial choice consistent with Ginsberg's original vision for the poem. The first edition of *The Fall of America* even had a bibliographical note that indicated that, "'Wichita Vortex Sutra' (in *Planet News*, City Lights Books, 1968) fits in sequence following 'Hiway Poesy LA-Albuquerque-Texas- Wichita' in this book."

autobiography” (5). The first edition of *Planet News* also presented poems in such a chronological and biographical order, which Ginsberg described on the back cover as a “picaresque around the world globe... then half year behind Socialist Curtain climaxed as Kral Majales May King Prague 1965.” These poems are so critical to Ginsberg’s own vision of his “picaresque around the world” that he gave them their own section of his *Collected Works*--the section titled “The King of May.” The fact that this section also includes poems from *The Fall of America* indicates just how much Ginsberg’s experiences in Russia changed the poetry he composed in the years after his return to the United States.

The King of May and the Unacknowledged Legislators of the World

The first, most commonly identified change that occurs between Ginsberg’s return from Russia and the publication of *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* is exactly what these collections have been criticized for--their *alleged* shift from personal, confessional poetry with political undertones to overtly political poetry that is often seen as naive and even crude in its simplicity. Critical perceptions of Ginsberg from the late 60s focus on outlandish political activism that Ginsberg was only tangentially involved in and, in fact, often spoke out against in his poetry. Still, events like the exorcism of the Pentagon, where Ginsberg was not actually present, and the violence at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, where Ginsberg was present but advocated against violence and even direct political intervention, would, for many critics, eclipse Ginsberg’s poetry during the late 60s. While critics are right to identify a shift in Ginsberg’s political

activism during this time, this shift does not represent a “growing skepticism” of his own beliefs, as Hyde suggests, so much as a reconnection and amplification of his previous poetic interventions, personal poetry, and self-identified “slavic parentage.” This shift toward activism was informed by the Russian poetry he helped inspire. Seeing the power and influence that poetry had and still has in Russian popular culture clearly inspired Ginsberg, especially after he learned just how much his own poetry influenced the Estradny poets who were performing in stadiums with musical accompaniments, releasing albums, and publishing collections of poetry that sold millions of copies.

Misreadings of Ginsberg’s post-1965 shift can often be attributed to a basic misunderstanding of his pre-1965 work. The perception of Ginsberg and other Beats as “beatniks” and pro-communist leftists was so pervasive that Ginsberg’s more deliberate and open criticism of communism in *Planet News* is seen as an abandonment of Ginsberg’s politics and ideals--what most critics perceived as making Ginsberg a “beatnik.” If anything, it is Ginsberg’s ties and growing connection to the Russian Estradniki that made him far more critical of the government that was repressing his new friends behind the Iron Curtain. “Kral Majales” may begin with the famous line about *Communists* having “nothing to offer,” but more importantly, Ginsberg also boldly and explicitly embraces his “slavic parentage” in that very same poem: “And I am the king of May, naturally, for I am of slavic parentage” (24). Ginsberg’s shift here is not that of a poet abandoning a communist ideology; it is a shift of a Russian American poet discovering contemporary Russian poetry. Ginsberg’s personal poetics simply became more transnational in 1965 and, specifically, more Estradny.

Ginsberg was also clearly inspired by the impact his poetry had in Russia and Czechoslovakia. Ginsberg is, after all, the King of May in “Kral Majales” because he was *actually* elected the King of May by students in Prague. This autobiographical detail is outlined in the poem: “And I am the King of May, which is old human poesy, and 100,000 people chose my name” (22). It is exactly this sort of fascinating biographical detail that makes it so easy for critics to focus on Ginsberg’s life rather than his poetry. This biographical moment does, however, also serve as a critical moment of change in Ginsberg’s texts. He even works the idea of being the King of May into much of his subsequent poetry. Building on Shelly’s conceptualization of the poet as the unacknowledged legislator of the world, Ginsberg goes one step further, embracing the mantle of *King*. It is in this capacity that he unilaterally “declare[s] the end of the [Vietnam] war!” in “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” just 10 poems after “Kral Majales” in *Planet News*. Ginsberg maintains the “King of May” moniker in poems written decades later like “Cosmopolitan Greetings” (1986) and “Return of Kral Majales” (1990). The Estradny poets were not the only ones to realize that Ginsberg’s poetry took on a more profound significance in the context of Soviet repression, where it was perceived, as Vaclav Havel explains, “as even more rebellious than in the land of their origin” (*Spontaneous Mind ix*). In his months behind the Iron Curtain, Ginsberg saw firsthand the added cultural significance and political power his poems took on in the context of Soviet repression. Ginsberg was a celebrity in the Soviet Bloc, recognized by strangers and able to make travelling money in Prague by simply reading in Cafe Viola to rapt audiences of young Czech students.

Ginsberg immediately started trying to replicate these experiences once he returned to the west. The infamous International Poetry Incarnation at Royal Albert Hall in London, his biggest ever reading with an audience of 7,000, occurred just one month after his expulsion from Czechoslovakia. This reading, made famous by Peter Whitehead's documentary *Wholly Communion* (one of the first examples of cinema verité film), is often seen as a major milestone in the convergence of political activism, popular culture, and poetry in the second half of the 20th century. David Sterritt explains that:

like the Beat Generation that sparked it, *Wholly Communion* had a spontaneous and almost accidental origin. After participating in the London phase of Bob Dylan's tour of England in 1965, which included a sold-out engagement at the venerable Royal Albert Hall, poet Allen Ginsberg floated the idea that he and other well-known Beat figures could draw an equally enthusiastic crowd to a reading of their work. (147)

While it is always fair to call Ginsberg's life and work "spontaneous," Sterritt's evidence that this event was a spur-of-the-moment attempt to replicate Bob Dylan's concert fails to acknowledge the significant and well-documented influence Ginsberg's travels had on this performance. Sterritt claims that the name of the event was only changed from "An Evening with Ginsberg and Friends" to the "International Poetry Incarnation" after the program was "hijacked by a posse of native poets" (147). In fact, Ginsberg's journals from this period reveal that this event was international in its very conception.

While the Dylan concert at Royal Albert Hall is briefly mentioned in Ginsberg's journals from the time, his experiences at readings in Russia are recounted in great detail. Ginsberg describes a March 29th reading of Voznesensky poems with guitar accompaniment as "a little chic, a little fresh, a little Brecht, a little broad Russian humor--the audience all young lovely normal girls and sensitive dumb looking boys" (series 4, box 18, folder 10, page 66). Despite the crowd being what Ginsberg disparagingly calls "so healthy!" the performance itself included poems to "stripteasers" and Marilyn Monroe and plenty of sexual innuendo. That these poems were still read to large crowds of young Soviets was somewhat reassuring to Ginsberg, as this was after Khrushchev's ouster and the end of the so-called post-Stalin Thaw. Just six days earlier, Yevtushenko had described to Ginsberg how it now took him over a year to publish a poem because "too many passages were questioned" by censors who eventually required 450 changes to the poem before publishing it in a government magazine (series 4, box 18, folder 10, page 41). Despite the post-Thaw crackdown on what new poems got published, Ginsberg was still able to attend multiple readings while in Russia. When Ginsberg asked Yevtushenko the size of his biggest crowd, Yevtushenko reported "14,000--here in Moscow" (41). Ginsberg was intensely curious about how, even in this repressive environment, such large readings of fairly free and open poetry could be performed. While Ginsberg didn't perform any readings while in Russia, the writer's union was interested in recording him reading some of his more famous works. This interest in public reading goes back, of course, to the Mayakovsky tradition, which sought to reach the illiterate masses through performance, but it also was far more

practical in the environment of intense censorship to limit one's paper trail. Ginsberg attended the Voznesensky reading a second time, but this time as a guest of the poet, who introduced Ginsberg as "a great American poet, one of the founders of the beatnik movement, and a good friend of our country" (4, 18, 4, 29). Ginsberg writes in his journal, after this performance, that this regularly staged event was "presented informally at first a dozen times, at odd hours, after regular stage performances--then finally put on separately, sort of sneaked thru into official status" (4, 18, 4, 29-30).

Following this model once back in Prague, Ginsberg started sneaking his poetry into the country by reading at the Viola Cafe, bypassing the lengthy process of seeking government publication and the censorship that came with it. Not that free speech in the Soviet Bloc was somehow protected in its oral form. Ginsberg was, after all, eventually expelled from Czechoslovakia, but only after he had used these readings to build a following large enough to get him elected as the "Kral Majales." The lessons Ginsberg took from the power of these performances would influence his interest in popular culture and political activism when he returned to the West, starting on June 11, 1965 with the sold-out poetry reading at Royal Albert Hall called the International Poetry Incarnation.

The International Poetry Incarnation was international in its very conception, having been inspired by the Russian Estradny movement. David Sterritt's claim that the name of the event was only changed from "An Evening with Ginsberg and Friends" to the "International Poetry Incarnation" only because English poets insisted on reading at the event is completely absurd when one considers the fact that Ginsberg devoted an

entire third of his reading-time at this event to the poetry of Andrei Voznesensky (*Wholly Communion*). This event also included performers from Cuba (Pablo Fernandez), Finland (Anselm Hollo), Germany (Michael Horovitz), the Netherlands (Simon Vikenoog), Austria (Ernst Jandl), Switzerland (Paolo Lionni), and Scotland (Tom McGrath and Alexander Trocchi). Even Voznesensky was in attendance, but he was prevented from reading his poetry at the event by the Russian embassy in London, which threatened to pull his visa if he did. Instead, the first of three poems Ginsberg read was the “New York Bird” section of Voznesensky’s long poem *The Three-Cornered Pear*. Ginsberg dramatically read the poem directly to Voznesensky, who was in the first row of the auditorium.

Ginsberg’s choice to read “New York Bird” to open this performance in front of his first Russian sized crowd of 7,000¹⁵ people (still only half the size of Yevtushenko’s biggest) is a brilliant and complicated act of international political protest. Just as the blending of the personal and political allowed Ginsberg’s poetry to get published in the Soviet Union and the ephemeral nature of readings allowed Voznesensky’s concerts to continue even after the end of the post-Stalin Thaw, the International Poetry Incarnation was able to use a public performance of personal poetry to bypass the very bureaucracy it was undermining. As Patrick Dunn says in “What If I Sang: the Intonation of Allen Ginsberg’s Performances,” “Performance was important to Ginsberg not just economically and spiritually but politically.... He spontaneously composed poetry on stage to circumvent prohibition[s on free speech] and to express his opinion that such

¹⁵ Ginsberg’s previously most famous reading, the October 1955 *Six Gallery Reading* was only attended by about 150 people (Asher).

“censorship was a violation of human rights” (75). The fact that Voznesensky was present in the audience as a poem he wrote in the third person was read to him allowed Ginsberg to simultaneously work within the restrictions set up by the censors while clearly undermining the intent of those restrictions.

“New York Bird” is, on the surface, a confessional poem about Voznesensky’s first trip to America. It is about the FBI’s surveillance of his travels. He describes “seventeen wheezing FBI gullets” and their “long ears,” their “seventeen cameras clicking seventeen times through the crack in the door” (*Evergreen Review* 234). The poem, however, is also written in the third person, so when Ginsberg opens his reading in the *Wholly Communion* with the line: “Seventeen Voznesenskys are groaning yet voiceless!” exclaimed to Voznesensky, sitting silently in the first row of the auditorium, silenced by the Soviet bureaucrats holding his passport, the effect is a chillingly blunt critique of those very bureaucrats. The next lines of the poem indicate that Ginsberg is not entirely warping the meaning of this poem by making it about Russia:

My cries have been torn onto miles of magnetic tape
And endless red tongue, snaked round a big spool
I have been taken apart dismantled and dragged to interrogations
No, I’ve been back for months, and all alive.

To a Soviet censor, this poem is a damning critique of an FBI as intrusive and inhumane as the KGB. In the context of the International Poetry Incarnation, however, this is a poem about being rendered voiceless by the Soviet government. The poem’s speaker, Voznesensky, has been home for months, yet his interrogations continue, both as the

FBI replays their film of his visit to New York and as he continues to live in a police state that has left him “groaning yet voiceless.” This poem is, itself, an example of this groaning for freedom. Voznesensky cannot speak truth about his oppression, yet, as Ginsberg passionately reads these lines, almost screaming them at the silent Russian poet, the audience understands without question that this *is* a poem about Soviet censorship, even as the Soviet censors are allowed to believe that they have won, that this poem is about the FBI, and that Voznesensky has remained obediently silent. What is most remarkable about this reading is that it is still about the United States, even as it is also very clearly, in the contest of this reading, about the Soviet Union. The poem’s innuendo about Soviet censorship does not diminish the surface reading and its literal references to the FBI’s spying on Voznesensky in New York. This dual criticism of both sides of the Cold War binary would become the center of Ginsberg’s post-1965 poetic practice. To his contemporary critics, this dual criticism may have seemed like a “growing skepticism” or lack of conviction, but looking back at the poems through a transnational framework reveals a poet whose rhetoric transcends its often petty and violent historical moment.

If there were any question about the intended double meaning of Ginsberg’s reading of “New York Birds,” the two other poems he performed at the International Poetry Incarnation make the critique of the binary more directly and in the poet’s own words. Ginsberg closes the evening, for example, with the poem “Who Be Kind To,” a poem written explicitly for the event, which makes the most direct linking of the two superpowers with the damning lines:

Be kind to the politician weeping in the galleries

of Whitehall, Kremlin, White House...

Sick, dissatisfied, unloved, the bulky

foreheads of Captain Premier President

Sir comrade Fear! (422)

The “Captain Premier President Sir comrade Fear” figure is a tongue-in-cheek reference to what C. Wright Mills describes as “the power elite” in his book by the same name.

Here Ginsberg is specifically focusing on the political leg of Mills’s “military, economic and political” triad--what Ginsberg calls the “stunned governments” and “congress of sorrows” in “Howl” (21). By combining the titles of figures from both democratic and socialist governments in “Who Be Kind To,” Ginsberg is defining this destructive fear mongering as a global phenomenon that, in Wright’s words, affects “the underlying populations of the world.”

The second of the three poems Ginsberg read at the 1965 International Poetry Incarnation is his own “The Change” (1963), which also draws explicit parallels between the US and Soviet governments:

In Russia the young poets rise
to kiss the soul of the revolution
in Vietnam the body is burned
to show the truth of only the
body in Kremlin & White House
the schemers draw back

weeping from their schemes

Again, the Kremlin and the White House are mentioned together as one, this time as “schemers.” Unlike “New York Birds” and “Who Be Kind To,” however, there is hope in these lines, and it takes the form of the Estradny poets. The schemers are drawing back in the face of the young poets of Russia, rising to “kiss the soul of the revolution” the Soviet Union had betrayed. In the next line, “in Vietnam the body is burned,” Ginsberg draws a parallel between the subtle protest poetry of the Estradny poets with Thích Quảng Đức, the Buddhist monk who who burned himself to death in protest against the South Vietnamese government on June 11, 1963. This parallel may be even harder to see than that between the authoritarian U.S.S.R. and the democratic U.S., but many young Russian poets were sent to labor camps or committed to insane asylums for writing directly against the Soviet government. They wrote this poetry knowing the potential consequences. Not quite self-immolation, but this comparison shows how significant a role Ginsberg felt Russian poetry had in the Soviet Union.

Ginsberg describes these Russian poets in “The Change” as showing the Kremlin “the truth of only the Body,” as they sacrificed themselves for poetry that reflected themselves as individuals rather than mere components of the Soviet collective. Ginsberg, like Whitman before him, always considered himself to be “a poet of the body.” This can be seen in his most famous poems: from the claim that the “holy asshole is holy” in “Howl” to Naomi’s “belly of strikes and smokestacks,” “chin of Trotsky,” and “voice singing for the decaying overbroken workers” in “Kaddish.” Perhaps Ginsberg was projecting his own philosophy and aesthetic onto the Estradny poets in

“The Change” when he says that they too, “show the truth of only the body” to the “Kremlin,” but, like Ginsberg, the Estradniki used personal, confessional poetry to subtly undermine Soviet politics. What most impressed Ginsberg in 1965, however, was the fact the Estradny poets were putting their own bodies and lives on the line, using themselves as protest through confessional poetry but also risking their own lives and bodies in the process. Upon returning to the U.S., Ginsberg began doing the same. Justin Quinn says that, after returning from his trip behind the Iron Curtain, Ginsberg became “a global poet of the Cold War.” His experiences of being both elected the “King of May” by Czech students and harrassed and deported by the government “alerted [Ginsberg] to the degree which walking, breathing, fucking, and and traveling between the two superpowers could be a major poetic theme” (166).

By agitating oppressive states around the world, Ginsberg built his reputation as a performance artist, gradually becoming more famous for “flower power,” “be-in” protests, and personal theatrics than his poetry. This focus on the theatrics of performances was, however, inspired by the Estradniki. Estradny poets considered themselves performers as much as writers. Ginsberg’s experiences at their poetry readings, his election as the “King of May,” and the success of the International Poetry Incarnation radically changed Ginsberg’s view of the possibilities for poetry to enact social change.

Hyde describes Ginsberg’s poetic shift in the 60s as “growing skepticism” in his beliefs, rather than an elaboration of them, but it is clear that in respect to using the body as the subject of his poetry and a metaphor for his politics, “Kral Majales” is not a

turn from Whitman's politics of the body, but rather, an application of it in a transnational space. Justin Quinn rightfully notes in *Between Two Fires* that:

Ginsberg's brilliant intuition is that world politics have no real meaning beyond what they do to our bodies and minds. But even the idea of mind is a bit insubstantial, so in the poems he dwells on the pleasures and pains of the body, because that is where everything is found. A philosophy, an ideology, or a religion means nothing if it leaves our bodies unmarked. (165)

At the same time that Ginsberg was realizing the potential for personal poetry to truly disrupt oppressive political structures, he had the simultaneous realization that the binaries of Communism vs Capitalism and East vs West were false and meaningless in regards to his own body and mind. Ginsberg's deportations from both Cuba and Czechoslovakia affirmed that his body, his desires, and his identity were rejected not just in McCarthyite America, but even more so in Soviet Russia, Cuba, and Czechoslovakia.

In 1998, *The Massachusetts Review* published the first English translation of the "Final Report on the Activities of the American Poet Allen Ginsberg and His Deportation from Czechoslovakia," which was obtained and translated by Andrew Lass immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union. These files reveal that Ginsberg's deportation from the Soviet Bloc was, in many ways, based on similar grounds as the "Howl" obscenity trial, as both prosecutions focused on Ginsberg's "sexual perversion." According to the Soviet secret police (Státní bezpečnost) who had been following Ginsberg throughout his stay in Czechoslovakia, and even stole his journal:

During his stay in Czechoslovakia [Ginsberg] had contact mostly with young artists and with young people centered mostly around the wine club VIOLA. In this environment he sought out individuals from among the young, whom he affected with his intellect and overt sexual perversion. (Lass 188)

The primary criticism of the entire report is not Ginsberg's politics, but rather, his sexuality. Or, as the Státní Bezpečnost called it, his "overt sexual perversion." This was, of course, the same justification for the "Howl" obscenity trial in the US, which focused on "Howl's" depictions of homosexuality rather than his depictions of McCarthyite America as the monstrous Moloch. As Justin Quinn notes, "both the US and Communist authorities disapproved of what [Ginsberg] did, both sexually and politically, and, more pointedly, how he wrote about it" (Quinn 162). Ginsberg's response to this united oppression of Ginsberg's own body and sexuality was to make this an even more central theme in his poetry, as he more openly criticized not just the US government, but communism as well. While critics like Hyde see Ginsberg's growing resistance to Soviet oppression as an abandonment of some imagined communist ideology, it was really just a global expansion of Ginsberg's already well-defined politics of the body and free expression.

Also like the "Howl" trial, one of the main goals of the Státní Bezpečnost report on Ginsberg was placing limitations on free speech. To this end, the report went beyond the actions of Ginsberg, as it also identified the names of five literary critics believed to be responsible for contributing to Ginsberg's popularity in Czechoslovakia: "[Ginsberg] maintained close contact with many literati like the writer SKVORECKY, the critic

KUSAK, the translator JUNGWIRTH, the critic Igor HAJEK, the editor DIVIS and others, who contributed to his popularity with their articles” (188). By August of that year, *Literarni Novini*, which published the first Czech translation of “Howl,” was suppressed, and “public use of the editor of the journal’s name “was banned in Czechoslovakia for two decades” (“Igor Hajek, 64, Dies” 1). Ginsberg subsequently became an outspoken advocate for the suppressed voices of poets behind the Iron Curtain. The same Státní Bezpečnost report that sought to suppress Czech critics also reported that Ginsberg had already begun advocating for such oppressed voices: “[Ginsberg] advised the students to invite the Soviet poet VOZNESENSKY to the next Mayales” (189). According the report, elevating Voznesensky as the next King of May would allow the students to “extend a good deed to a person who is oppressed by the Soviet regime” (189).

What would eventually perplex these Czech poets and American critics alike, however, is the fact that Ginsberg, despite what he saw and experienced behind the Iron Curtain, remained an equal opportunity critic of both the American and Soviet systems of government. Ginsberg told the students that elected him “King of May,” that making Voznesensky the next King of May, would, in addition to giving Voznesensky a voice, “demonstrate, that they are not one sided in their focus on the West” (189). Ginsberg’s promotion of Voznesensky in Czechoslovakia was an attempt to straddle the Cold War divide--to ensure that his reign as The King of May was not a product of a blind “us vs them” vote for the American. Ginsberg would maintain this desire to reject both sides of the Cold War binary in his post-1965 poetry all the way up to the fall of the

Soviet Union. While critics in the West confused this for a loss of political purpose, poets in the Soviet Bloc confused it for naivety. According to Czech scholar, Justin Quinn, Czech poets in particular “quickly forgave the excesses of the US government and judiciary when it prosecuted its anticommunist agenda” (Quinn 163). Jan Zabrana, for one, said in his autobiography, *A Whole Life*, that Ginsberg’s rejoicing in the failures of CIA interventions in Cuba was “a poet exulting with that particular type of American pacifistic idiocy” (532). Ginsberg eventually addressed Russian and Czech criticisms of his Anti-American poetry with the poem “You Don’t Know It.” The poem’s title comes from its refrain, repeated after each Soviet atrocity recounted by Ginsberg. The refrain is quoting Bella Akhmadula, who told Ginsberg in her Moscow home in 1965: “American poet you can never know the tragedy of Russia” (4, 18, 4, 62). In the second half of the poem, after directly quoting Akhmadula, Ginsberg inverts the refrain to address Russians and other pro-western Soviet Bloc poets:

And they don’t know it, Aksinov Skvorecky Romain Rolland

Ehrenburg Federenko Markov Yevtushenko

don’t know midnight Death Squad clubs on cobblestone no

the ears cut off, heads chopped open in Salvador don’t know the million

Guatemala Indians in Model Villages—

Don’t know 40,000 bellies ripped open by the d’Aubuisson hit-men for Born Again

neoconservative Texans,

don’t know Yanquis taking tea & 1916 money from the Douane, exchange for

Chinese opium

trading bananas to Europe for Tax Control in Managua & Shanghai—

don't know the holocaust in Salvador 25 years ago 30,000 shot one week for

thinking Left-Pink-triangle yellow-red headband high on peyote (Collected

Poems 945)

Ginsberg's targeting of Soviet politics in his protest poetry in *Planet News* and other post-1965 collections had obviously not replaced but rather amplified his critiques of American Cold War politics and increased military adventurism. Ginsberg just used his experiences in the Soviet Bloc as a new lense through which to examine his own nation's politics.

In his first interview after being expelled from the Czechoslovakia, while still in England, Ginsberg told Thomas Clark, when asked about the previous six months spent entirely behind the Iron Curtain:

I didn't ever feel that there was an answer in dogmatic Leninism-Marxism--but I feel very definitely now that there's no answer to my desires there. Nor do most people in those countries--in Russia or Poland or Cuba--really feel that either...

But there's one thing I feel certain of, and that's that there's no human answer in communism or capitalism... (Paris Review 12)

Ginsberg did, however, apparently see answers in Russian poetry. Clark describes how Ginsberg "read from an account he'd made of a recent meeting with the poets Yevtushenko and Voznesensky in Moscow" (Ginsberg *Paris Review*). Clark does not quote the passage Ginsberg read, but of the five conversations with Yevtushenko and Voznesensky outlined in his 1965 journals, four deal primarily with Russian politics, the

difficulties of publishing, and the power of public readings. The passage Ginsberg likely read from, however, was from March 22nd, 1965, when Ginsberg met Andrei Voznesensky for the first time. During a car ride from Ginsberg's hotel to Voznesensky's home, the two poets dive immediately into the similarities in their poetic style. Ginsberg describes in his journal how they discussed parallels in their interest in "association rather than metaphor" and in their shared belief that poetry is an "exploration of [the] mind" (4, 18, 4, 24). Voznesensky agreed with this assessment, but he clarified his position on poetics for Ginsberg: "Poetry," he explained, is the "discovery of what is not known before, through the process of composition by investigation [and] recording [the] thought process" (4, 18, 4, 24). This is likely the passage from his *Russia Journal* that Ginsberg read to Thomas Clark in May 1965, as later in the interview Ginsberg describes applying this theory of composition to his own poetry. Here Ginsberg describes his plans to write an epic with a "totally different organization . . . dissociated thought stream that includes politics and history.... The thing would be to take all of contemporary history, newspaper headlines and all the pop art of Stalinism and Hitler and Johnson and Kennedy and Vietnam and Congo and Lumumba and the South and Sacco and Vanzetti-whatever floated into one's personal field of consciousness and contact. And then to compose like a basket... basket weaving out of those materials" (24). Ginsberg's attempt at writing this epic becomes *The Fall of America*. This collection of poems follows Voznesensky's instruction that poetry should be a "discovery of what is not known before, through the process of composition" by "recording the thought

process.” The most significant connection between Voznesensky and *The Fall of America*, however, is exactly *how* Ginsberg “recorded” his thought process.

Dictating the Fall of America: Ginsberg as an American Estradny Poet

Ginsberg’s March 22, 1965 journal entry documenting his first meeting with Voznesensky contains a description of a conversation in the elevator going up to Voznesensky’s flat. It is a conversation that Ginsberg would retell on multiple occasions over the rest of his life:

On [our] way--by the wooden elevator door--[Voznesensky] asked me “What language [do] you think in?”--I thought “No language,” but answered “sometimes French, sometimes Spanish, mostly English?”--He said “Do you always think in words?”-- “No, I understand completely, but I thought you meant words--”
Up the elevator in concrete hallway & in his door... [Voznesensky says],
“Sometimes I think in rhythm.” (Box 18 Folder 7, pages 25-26)

Twenty-three years later, in an interview with Yves Le Pellec in 1988, Ginsberg again describes this conversation while describing the origins of one of his methods of writing:

In a recent *Ars Poetica* I put together called “Cosmopolitan Greetings,” I pointed out that one method of writing is to “move with rhythm, roll with vowels, and “consonants around vowels make sense.” “Savor vowels, appreciate consonants.” Those are three different little axioms for writing and it reminds me of a conversation with Voznesensky in his elevator in Moscow in 1965, in which he asked what language I think in, and I said English or sometimes Spanish, and

he said: "I think in rhythms." And actually in writing we think in rhythms a lot. And then you find a vowel to go along with the rhythm and then consonants assemble around the vowels and make the sense" (92).

To compose in such a way, to come up with rhythms first, and then to form sounds arounds those rhythms was essential to the Estradny focus on performance. It also required that the Estradny poets compose their lines, not on the page, but on the tongue. This is exactly how Voznesensky describes his method of composition in a 1988 interview with Quentin Vest and William C. Woods:

I write without paper. I walk around, composing and revising, thinking out variants until the poem is finished. But once I type or write something (sometimes I dictate). I don't like to change it. With rainy weather you get a rainy mood, and you can never repeat such a mood or such weather. If you change your poem the next day, it will be eclectic. So I try not to. (*Paris Review* 6)

John Bayley says, "Russian poetry has always inspired recitation and a rapt response from the reciter's audience, but Mr. Voznesensky, and his contemporary, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, are perhaps the first Russian poets to exploit this in the actual process of composition" (qtd. Anderson).

In a radical departure from his previous composition method, Ginsberg began composing poetry in 1965 with a method inspired by Andrei Voznesensky--dictating rather than writing on paper. The only difference was Ginsberg's use of a portable tape recorder to dictate in real time. The tape recorder seems to have served primarily as a crutch that Ginsberg used to try and replicate what Voznesensky was able to do more

naturally, rather than an attempt to improve upon the Estradny method with technology. Ginsberg's requirement for a little help capturing what he called "cosmic rhythms" was apparent in the initial March 22, 1965 conversation on the subject. Voznesensky asks Ginsberg: "Does rhythm come to you and do you carry it around for several days?" (26). Ginsberg's response acknowledges both a desire to realize this method of composition, but also his current inability to live up to it. "The first draft is the last--ideally," Ginsberg explains, before admitting that such a fully formed, complete rhythm has only come "maybe two or three times in my life" (26). "The full rhythm," Ginsberg goes on to explain, "a complete rhythm from my whole body--whole physiology moved into one strong rhythm--a sort of cosmic rhythm--I never know when that will happen" (26). Voznesensky likes this description of his own aural composition very much, and the two poets make a toast to "cosmic rhythm" and begin a round of vodka.¹⁶

Ginsberg, enthralled with Voznesensky's concept of "thinking in rhythms" and capturing "cosmic rhythms" through aural composition, made this the core of his poetics after returning to the US. *The Fall of America*, which he began writing in September 1965, is described in its afterward as containing poems "tape-recorded... or sung" or composed, in the case of "September of Jessore Road," in the key of F minor as "a mantric lamentation rhymed for vocal chant." While Ginsberg always had an interest in the oral tradition, and performance was central to his celebrity even in 1965, we also know, from Ginsberg's extensive interviews and journal entries, that the aural composition of *The Fall of America* was heavily influenced by what he saw in Russia.

¹⁶ At this point, Ginsberg and Voznesensky are out of the elevator and in Voznesensky's flat eating sweets and drinking with his wife and the composer who wrote musical accompaniments to much of Voznesensky's poetry.

Ginsberg told Charles Pirtle in 1987, for example, that the origins of *Fall of America* were inspired by “encounters we’d had with Yevtushenko and Voznesensky in Russia and with the high-spirited activity of the Beatles, some kind of hopeful psychedelic resurgence, joining psychedelic activity to the implantation of the new consciousness even among the die-hard Marxists” (54). Given the documentation we have of these encounters in Ginsberg’s journals, it is not hard to see where Ginsberg’s interest in “tape-recording” and singing rather than writing his poetry came from. The fact that Ginsberg was hanging out with Bob Dylan and the Beatles in the month immediately following his expulsion from the Soviet Bloc may explain where the idea of using the Uher tape recorder as a technological aid to capture this cosmic rhythm came from. What Ginsberg chose to do with the recorder, however, has its origins firmly in the Russian Estradny movement and Voznesensky’s concept of “thinking in rhythms” (24). This method of composition drastically changed the form and content of Ginsberg’s poetry.

Ginsberg began this new method of composition immediately upon returning to the United States. In fact, the opening of *Fall of America* documents Ginsberg: “entering U.S. border” with “blue cloud September skies” and “red apples with their tree boughs propt with sticks” (1). The poem is also, figuratively, Ginsberg’s reintroduction to America with his new transnational perspective and Estradny-inspired method of composition. Dictating his poetry allowed Ginsberg to record spontaneous, verbal poetry that naturally came to him while on the road, touring America by car. By doing so, he was able to record his thought process and weave observations of America into an epic

in real time. Charles Pirtle, who interviewed Ginsberg on his writing process in 1987 describes how:

After recording [his first drafts], Ginsberg would then transcribe the tapes longhand into composition notebooks, largely verbatim, using the clicks of the on-off switch on his hand-held microphone and the pauses in his voice to help him determine the arrangement--line breaks, spacing, and indentation--of the words on the page. From these nearly verbatim transcriptions, he went on to type up the poems, doing some editing along the way. The changes he made at this stage consisted primarily of syntactical condensations, elimination of unnecessary particles, and excision of entire passages deemed to be extraneous or unsatisfactory. (90)

This process is very reminiscent of Voznesensky's own style of writing "without paper," and his commitment not to change the lines once they have been dictated.¹⁷ While the political mood of *The Fall of America* was clearly inspired by Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* (a quote from this work serves as an epigraph to the collection), the actual composition style of *The Fall of America* looks most strikingly similar to Voznesensky's *The Three-Cornered Pear*. This was the long epic poem on America that Ginsberg read at the International Poetry Incarnation in the months between first meeting Voznesensky and beginning *The Fall of America*. In his introduction to the 1966 Herbert Marshall translation of *The Three-Cornered Pear* (*The Triangular Pear* in the Marshall translation), Voznesensky describes the work as an epic:

¹⁷ Voznesensky's claim that poems dictated "with rainy... get a rainy mood, and you can never repeat such a mood or such weather" (Paris Review 6).

About the Discovery of America. It is based on my American impressions. But in the process of work, memories, life, and landscapes of Russia and/or the Baltic burst into the narrative, diverting the author from the main line of his theme.

Other things, quite different, were “discovered.” Its heroes now include silver birch trees, sunsets, motorcycles. The poem sank like an overloaded ship. But alongside arose an independent organism--“A Poem of Lyrical Digressions.”

Poems shuffled themselves arbitrarily, outside semantics and geography, like thoughts in the head. Their author draws attention to them. These poems have an independent life and character. Often, sometimes quite independently of the will of the author, they rejected grammar. Sometimes they demanded a fantastic subject... In other cases the melody demanded to be unfettered, to soar in the heights--it becomes endless like the last note of a singer. Sometimes the barriers of periods and commas interfere with it. In this collection are included extracts from diaries, newspaper reports. Without them I cannot imagine either myself or my poetry. (*Selected Poems* 33)

Voznesensky's depiction of *The Three-Cornered Pear* as “A Poem of Lyrical Digressions” is also a strikingly applicable description of Ginsberg's *The Fall of America*. Both long works describe the geography of America on an extended trip across the country. In this respect, they are both, as Voznesensky describes it, “about the discovery of America.” And just as Voznesensky incorporates extracts from newspaper reports into *The Three-Cornered Pear*, Ginsberg describes *The Fall of America* in a letter to Paul Carroll, as “a collage of news radio paper optical phenomena observed &

noted in field of vision outside car window, at stops, etc. + fantasy + imagination, memory of history, desire, etc.” (qtd. Pirtle 36). This description sounds a lot like earlier forms of Dadaist collage poetry and other seminal Modernist works like T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, or Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos*. By attempting to achieve this collage poetry by dictating into a tape recorder, however, Ginsberg created, in *The Fall of America*, a unique series collage portraits of America more akin to found poetry or even photography than Modernist collage poetry.

In an attempt to capture “cosmic rhythms” that were, in Voznesensky’s words, independent of the “will of the author,” Ginsberg let his tape recorder capture not only his spontaneous descriptions of his surroundings but also the song lyrics and news reports that played in the background through the car radio. By transcribing both his voice and the other seemingly random voices of singers and newsman captured by the tape recorder, Ginsberg creates portraits of America that are, in some ways, like photographs. Just as the camera captures the subject the photographer attempts to frame in the photograph along with anything else that happens to be in the lens’s field of view, Ginsberg’s tape recorder captured aural phenomenon outside of his control. Ginsberg’s attempt to capture Voznesensky’s mythical “cosmic rhythms” may have been a naive and impossibly Romantic goal, but the poetry he does create in the process of trying to capture these rhythms results in strikingly vivid portraits of America that are major departures from both his earlier work, the work of his Modernist predecessors, and even the work of the Estradny poets he was attempting to imitate.

The first “accidental” voice to make it into the text of *The Fall of America* can be found just eight lines into the book. After describing his re-entry to the United States in the opening lines of *The Fall of America*’s first poem, “A Poem of These States,” the lyrics of the Beach Boys’ “California Girls” bleed onto the tape recorder from the window of a passing car. As a result, the song’s lyrics, “I wish we could all be California girls,” become part of the poem, juxtaposed against Ginsberg’s description of a “new corn silo” the car is simultaneously passing in Mesa, Washington. This seemingly unintentional pairing of youthful sexual longing and the mundanity of new farm infrastructure alludes to the generation gap that was, in 1965, on the verge of shaking American culture with anti-war protests, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, and The Summer of Love. Such juxtapositions of images and sounds are incredibly subtle, especially when compared to the clear declarations and deeply personal subject matter of poems like “Howl” and “Kaddish,” but the next line in the poem, recorded forty miles south, near Pasco, Washington, provides a little more commentary from Ginsberg that is useful in making sense of these collages. When Bob Dylan’s voice is captured by the recorder singing “Please crawl out your window,” Ginsberg calls it “a mass machine-made folksong of one soul” before remarking that the “Radio [is] the soul of the nation” (1). Ginsberg’s notion that he was capturing the soul of the nation by transcribing radio transmissions seems to be linked to Ginsberg’s search for mythical “cosmic rhythms” from beyond himself. Of course, it would be impossible to argue that such a “cosmic rhythms” actually exist, that the soul of a nation is in the radio, or that Ginsberg’s Estradny-inspired method of capturing it with a running tape recorder was possible. At

the same time, however, what Ginsberg does manage to capture with his innovative, Estradny-inspired method of composing *The Fall of America* is a remarkably vivid portrait of the soul of Vietnam-era, Cold War America. While there may not be a mythical “cosmic rhythm” delivered from heaven, Ginsberg does manage to capture a glimpse into the American soul as it is filtered through its mass media.

As the title of the collection suggests, *The Fall of America* is a dark, often violent portrait of America’s soul. The numerous news reports that bleed onto Ginsberg’s tape recorder through the radio help create this unvarnished, often apocalyptic portrait. Four pages into *The Fall of America*, Ginsberg is describing “shotgun shells,” “beer-bottles,” and “mashed jackrabbits” on the road when a radio report of “Chinese armies massed on the borders of India” gets captured by the recorder and thrust into the poem (4). After describing the Sinatra song that plays next, followed by the Beatles “crying Help!,” Ginsberg says: “All memory at once present time returning, vast dry forests afire in California, U.S. paratroopers attacking guerrillas in Vietnam mountains” (4). These lines are the first of many times in *The Fall of America* that Ginsberg creates a collage of his own voice and a voice on the radio describing violence from around the world. The effect here and throughout *The Fall of America*, however, is to bring the violence America exports to the rest of the world back home. The smoke of distant forest fires juxtaposed against the guerrilla war America is waging in Vietnam is a form of found poetry, discovered through Ginsberg’s search for a “cosmic rhythm,” but it is also the first of many lines in *The Fall of America* to bring America into contact with itself and the violence it begets around the globe. In the next poem, “A Continuation of a Long Poem

of These States: S.F. Southward,” Ginsberg continues this work even more deliberately as he describes distant smokestacks as “warplants,” juxtaposes “Working Girls” he sees outside the car window with a newspaper headline about soldiers in Vietnam, and describes a passing power plant as “shooting its cannon smoke / across the highway” (7-8).

As Ginsberg becomes more and more comfortable with this new method of spontaneous aural composition, he begins integrating his own voice and voice of the radio’s found poetry in more and more explicit ways. By the collection’s fourth poem, “Hiway Poesy,” which was recorded on a road trip from Los Angeles to Wichita, Ginsberg has begun to conflate his own voice with those on the radio:

Afternoon Light

Children in back of a car

with Bubblegum

a flight of birds out of a dry field like mosquitoes

“... several battalions of U.S. troops in a search and destroy operation in the Coastal plain near Bong Son, 300 mi. Northeast of Saigon. Thus far the fighting has been a series of small clashes. In a related action 25 miles to the South, Korean troops killed 35 Viet Cong near Coastal highway Number One.”

“For he’s oh so Good

and he’s oh so fine

and he's oh so healthy
in his body and his mind"

Here Ginsberg's own voice, describing his own physical location on "coastal highway Number One," gets pulled completely into a quotation of a radio report of 35 Viet Cong killed on a Coastal plain near Bon Son, Vietnam. The effect of this conflation of voices humanizes these 35 deaths, which are now tragically occurring in the forests of California rather than abstractly in a jungle on the other side of the planet. Right on the heels of this humanizing conflation, however, is yet another part of this collage portrait of America. The song lyrics of the Kinks' "A Well Respected Man," with its satirical lyrics mocking the condescension and self-satisfaction of a stereotypical, straight-laced member of the British upper-class, becomes, alongside the previous news report, even more ironic. Ginsberg applies the biting sarcasm of lines like "he's oh so good" to the hypocrisy of American military adventurism, which brings violence and destruction to the world in the name of democracy, human rights, and abstract ideals of "goodness" that very violence violates.

Ginsberg's attempt throughout *The Fall of America* to capture a "cosmic rhythm" independent of and unfettered by the will of the author meant that Ginsberg's own life experiences and explicit interpretations of the events he was capturing were far more subdued than in his earlier, celebrated works of confessional poetry. This is *The Fall of America's* biggest departure from the poems from *Howl and Other Poems* and *Kaddish*. By focusing on Estradny aural form rather than personal experience in *The Fall of America*, Ginsberg wrote poems about Vietnam, the Cold War, and other political

subjects that did not necessarily include obvious political commentary on these subjects. As a result, just as Ginsberg was becoming more famous, and criticized, for his outspoken political activism, the actual poems he was writing during this time were being criticised for their lack of political exigence by critics like Hyde. At the same time, Helen Vendler lamented the loss of Ginsberg's more personal voice. She described his new style as that of a mere "geographer," explaining that, "the minute particulars of mankind seem to be vanishing from Ginsberg's latest verse in favor of the minute particulars of geography" (*Ginsberg Considers his Country and Himself* 2-3). To focus on these descriptions alone, however, is to underestimate the complex arguments inherent in Ginsberg's "weaving" together of "cosmic rhythms" he pulls from both his surroundings and the radio. It may seem incongruous that Ginsberg was being criticised by academics for writing poetry with less autobiography and political commentary while simultaneously getting criticised for being too overtly political and focused on his own celebrity. The contradictions are resolved, however, when one considers Ginsberg's growing interest in both political intervention and "thinking in rhythms" in the context of their Russian inspiration. Voznesensky said, for example:

A poet can't give you opinions—he can only give you a way of thinking, a method. Isn't it more important to teach people how to think than tell them what to think? My poetry is complex, but I like to think that it is a key that opens up other questions: to sexual life, social life, political life. It's more important that I do that than that I answer, as a poet, specific political questions... as a poet, we have only to give a key. A crystal of harmony (*Paris Review* 7).

If we are to apply this framework to *The Fall of America*, the crystal of harmony is clearly held in its search for “cosmic rhythm” and the “soul of America” through aural composition. Ginsberg, like Voznesensky, tries his best to limit alterations to his dictated lines while transcribing them to the page. This style of aural composition goes beyond Kerouac’s style of “spontaneous prose.” It is not simply a “first thought best thought” approach to creating a narrative after-the-fact so much as an attempt to capture a moment, an observation, a rhythm, or simply a thought in real time. It is the unflinching “gaze” of the tape recorder that creates this real-time portrait. Ginsberg says in his 1966 “Wings Lifted over the Black Pit,” from *The Fall of America*, that the purpose is to make “my own music / [an] American Mantra--” (41). Ginsberg’s search for a “cosmic rhythm” or a “mantra of America” is not a contradiction to his political activism, but rather, it is the essential characteristic of his expanding role in the late sixties as a performance artist inspired by the Estradny movement.

Both Ginsberg’s new focus on aural composition and his interest in performing this verbal art at large concerts like the International Poetry Incarnation are two sides of the same Estradny influence. Michael Horovitz calls The International Poetry Incarnation a “groundbreaking mega-gig.” While this event was not “ground-breaking” from a Russian perspective, the spectacle of such events in the West somehow eclipsed the work being performed. These concerts and events as well as Ginsberg’s new aural composition style were both inspired by Yevtushenko and Voznesensky and were a major reason why Ginsberg’s claim to be “a Russian poet, put in an American scene” can be read as more than a reference to his mother’s birthplace or an attempt to

troll American political conservatives (28). In that American scene, however, literary poetry was not supposed to be part of popular culture. By taking his work deliberately into this space, Ginsberg may have extended his fame, but he left Western critics confused and, in some cases, feeling betrayed. The oral tradition is as important to English poetry as it is to Russian poetry. Ginsberg notes, however, that “the old Russian tradition of oral poetry, which had disappeared in America and England--the vocal bards still survived in Russia through thick and thin” (27). As Ginsberg rightly notes here, the Russian bardic tradition was not just a historical root of poetry, but rather, it remained a performance-based and *popular* art form into the 1960s and beyond.¹⁸ The Russian music critic, Artemy Troitsky, says in his 1987 book, *Back in the USSR: the True Story of Rock in Russia*, that:

‘Serious’ academic poetry is really very popular in the USSR. Books of verse often become bestsellers, and the most popular poets – such as Voznesensky or Yevtushenko – sometimes read their works in sold out sport palaces, just like rock stars. In the late fifties we already had a recognised school of bard performers, poet intellectuals who sang their verses and played an acoustic guitar accompaniment. (Troitskiy 34)

Ginsberg had, himself, attended two separate Voznesensky readings in Moscow that included actors and singers performing Voznesensky poems to guitar accompaniments. Some of these performances were so popular that some Estradny poets weren’t just *like*

¹⁸ The bardic tradition is still relevant today, with internet programs like the “Citizen Poet” (Гражданин Поэт) project, which, according to *The New York Times*, is “pushing the edges of internet programming in Russia, delivering political satire to an audience that numbers in the millions” (Barry). The show had 11 million viewers in just the first ten months of 2011. I’ve seen the show playing in the background at dinner parties in Russia and in the homes, not of academics, but retired engineers and furniture salesmen.

“rock stars;” they were *actual* rock stars. Voznesensky, for example, wrote the lyrics for “A Million Scarlet Roses” (“Миллион Алых Роз”), which was one of Alla Pugacheva’s (Алла Борисовна Пугачёва) most famous songs, selling over 55 million records. And it wasn’t that Voznesensky’s poetry was successfully adapted to music; it was written to be a pop song. While “A Million Scarlet Roses” is clearly a piece of Russian popular culture, it is also serious, well-crafted poetry about the life of Georgian painter Niko Pirosmiani. Voznesensky even wrote a successful rock opera with composer Aleksei Rybnikov called *Juno and Avos* about the life of the explorer Nikolai Rezanov. In 1966 W. H. Auden said in the *New York Times* of Voznesensky: “Here, at least, is a poet who knows that, whatever else it may be, a poem is a verbal artifact which must be as skilfully and solidly constructed as a table or a motor-bicycle. Whatever effects can be secured in Russian by rhythm, rhyme, assonance, and contrasts of diction, he clearly knows all.” This understanding that a poem is a “verbal artifact” wasn’t limited to Voznesensky and other Estradny poets; it is essential to the Russian understanding of poetry. This is what allowed Voznesensky to sell out stadiums and record successful albums. The Russian people wanted to hear poetry.

The blurred lines between music and poetry in Russia meant that even Rock songs were treated in the Soviet Union like pieces of poetry. Yngvar Steinholt Says in his article “You Can’t Rid a song of its Words,” that, “Russian rock critics and academics, as well as those who participate in Russian rock culture, persistently emphasise the literary qualities of Russian rock music and most still prefer to approach rock as a form of musical poetry—‘Rok Poeziya’” (89). The overlap between pop culture

and poetry in Russia did not just mean that poets were treated like rock stars. Rock stars have also been treated by critics as Rock Poets (Рок-Поэты). Troistkiy attributes this critical appreciation of pop music to its connections to the Estradny movement. “Rock lyrics here,” he explains, “have a direct tie to our poetic tradition and reflect its lexical and stylistic heritage” (34). It is not surprising then, that Ginsberg and Yevtushenko exchanged records in Moscow. Ginsberg gave Yevtushenko Dylan and Beatles records, and Yevtushenko gave Ginsberg a record of Mayakovsky reading poetry.

One of the most important lessons we can take away from reading *Planet News*, *The Fall of America*, and other post-1965 poetry from an Estradny perspective is to understand this Russian context of poetry as a verbal art closely connected to music. Ginsberg clearly understood this and sought to bring it to America. Not only did Ginsberg change his composition style and emphasis on performance, but those performances themselves tended to focus more and more on the music of language. Ginsberg rarely performed without his harmonium after 1965. He even performed a mantra accompanied by the harmonium at the International Poetry Incarnation. Even in its written form, Ginsberg would often include musical notations and chord progressions to his post-1965 poems. For example, “On Jessore Road,” the last poem of *The Fall of America*, includes sheet music for the poem’s melody along with the chord progression for its intended musical accompaniment (Fig. 7).

In addition to the many mantras and songs Ginsberg published and performed after 1965, he also recorded sixteen records between 1965 and his death in 1997. By

1971, Ginsberg was singing his poetry to music performed by Bob Dylan and, in other recording sessions, members of Dylan's Rolling Thunder Review band. Despite the fact that Dylan played on many of the recordings and the record was produced by John Hammond, who worked with Dylan, Billie Holiday, Aretha Franklin, and Bruce Springsteen, the "American scene" wasn't quite ready for what would become *First Blues*. Hammond said that "Columbia Records refused to issue the results, considering the songs obscene and disrespectful." When Hammond was finally able to release the album on his own

The image shows a page of sheet music for the song "On Jessore Road" by Allen Ginsberg. The music is written in a 2/4 time signature with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The tempo is marked "Rubato". The lyrics are: "Mil-lions of ba-bies watch-ing the skies / Bellies swollen, with big round eyes On / Jessore Road long bam-boo huts / No place to shit but sand channel ruts / Mil-lions of fath-ers in rain / Mil-lions of moth-ers in pain / Mil-lions of broth-ers in woe / Mil-lions of sis-ters no-where to go". The music is divided into a main section and a "Final Verse" section. The final verse lyrics are: "Mil-lions of ba-bies in pain / Mil-lions of moth-ers in rain / Mil-lions of broth-ers in woe / Mil-lions of child-ren no-where to go". The sheet music includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

Fig. 7. Sheet music for "On Jessore Road," published with the poem in *Collected Poems*.

private label, John Hammond Records, in 1983, he says "I am thrilled to finally be able to present Allen.... I will present 'disrespectful' music like this as often as possible." *First Blues* never sold anywhere near as many copies as either the musical or the spoken word records of the Estradny poets. But the very idea of a poet rockstar, which was such a novelty in America and England when the Estradny poets were at the height of their fame, did begin to grow through Ginsberg's influence... it came, however, mostly through his friendship with Dylan.

In 1965, just as Ginsberg was bringing the idea of poetry put to music back to America from Russia, Dylan released *Bringing It All Back Home*, an album that opens with “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” a spoken work song clearly influenced by Beat poetry and a major turning point in the perception of what song lyrics can be in American music. Some have even called “Subterranean Homesick Blues” a progenitor to rap music. The influence Ginsberg had on the album is undeniable. Ginsberg appears in the video for the song, part of the film *Don’t Look Back*. And in the liner notes for *Bringing It All Back Home*, Dylan says, “why allen ginsberg was not chosen to read poetry at the inauguration boggles my mind.” These notes on the back of the LP also include photographs of Ginsberg and Dylan wearing the same suit with matching top hat (Fig. 8). If this didn’t blur the image of the poet and the songwriter enough, Dylan ends the liner notes by saying, “a song is anything that can walk by itself / i am called a songwriter. A poem is a naked person... some say that i am a poet.”



Fig. 8. Images of Ginsberg and Dylan, both wearing the same top hat; from the liner notes of *Bringing It All Back Home*.

Dylan’s desire to be treated with the seriousness of a poet predates Ginsberg’s post-1965, Estradny-inspired shift. Richard E. Hishmeh explains that when Dylan first met Ginsberg in 1963, he invited him to come on tour with him, but Ginsberg declined,

stating later, “I was afraid I’d become a mascot” (395). By the May of 1965, however, immediately following his six months behind the Iron Curtain, Ginsberg was completely on board. Hishmeh says:

By 1965, the two seemed determined to make their new friendship a public affair. This impulse is seen in a number of places in 1965 including the following: the filming of D.A. Pennebaker’s documentary on Bob Dylan, *Don’t look Back*; Larry Keenan’s photography session outside of City Lights Bookstore; the release of Dylan’s album *Bringing It All Back Home*; and the first mention of Dylan in a Ginsberg poem entitled “Beginning of a Poem of these States.” The year 1965 is also when Dylan appeared on Les Crane’s TV talk show and discussed, among other things, future collaboration with Ginsberg on both film and music projects. Together, these events comprise the foundation of a public friendship that would be as carefully constructed and consciously manufactured as any marketing or publicity strategy in today’s corporate entertainment industry. Perhaps the only difference is that the product up for sale was really no product at all: it was the image of genius. (395)

Hishmeh argues, rather cynically, that this “revolutionary development in the popular music industry” was intended to “assuage resistance from Dylan’s folk-purist audience. Prepared for this group’s imminent objection to the albums’ electrified sound, a marketing strategy had to be implemented that could maintain as many of these listeners as possible, while simultaneously reaching out to a new, broader fan-base” (396). While it is true that Dylan and Ginsberg were able to cross their genres in a way

that was both popular and commercially successful, there is no evidence that this was the result of a planned “marketing” strategy. Hishmeh calls Ginsberg and Dylan’s collaboration “cross marketing” driven by the 1965 formation of CBS Records International, which brought music, publishing, and film under one corporate entity, which just happened to be Dylan’s record label. But this argument suffers from the same bias against popular culture that has long bedevilled the work of Allen Ginsberg. From a marxist or anti-capitalist perspective, Hishmeh is able to argue that Dylan’s rock poetry is “derived from a fully commodified artistic ethos of the 1960s” and point to “Popism” as an articulation of the same phenomenon. Hishmeh may be right that Dylan’s friendship and imitations of Ginsberg may have been rooted in a desire to negotiate a transition to a role of the “poet-laureate of rock and roll,” but even he admits that, while “the benefit to Dylan is obvious; for Ginsberg, it is less so” (396 and 405). Hishmeh even quotes Ginsberg’s initial 1963 reluctance to be turned into a “mascot” or “counter-culture icon” used to sell pop records, but he never tries to explain what happened between 1963 and 1965 to make Ginsberg change his view of poetry as popular art. The answer, I believe, is in Ginsberg’s travels behind the Iron Curtain.

While Ginsberg was clearly disappointed in the governments he saw in the Soviet Bloc, and the “Communists [who had] nothing to offer,” he clearly saw something liberating in the poetry that so counterintuitively flourished in these otherwise oppressive conditions. Understanding that Ginsberg’s pop culture excursions in the late 60s were not simply products of America’s capitalistic system, but rather, stemmed from a long oral tradition kept alive in Russia despite the suppression of capitalism there, allows the

American critic to approach this long overlooked work with a fresh perspective. *The Fall of America*, *Planet News*, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, and even *First Blues* can now be read and listened to in the context of the Russian bardic tradition, which appeals to the masses while challenging authority. The mantra of *The Fall of America* can be rescued from its dismissal as pop culture pastiche and re-examined as a practical approach to use mindfulness as a way of confronting, processing, and dealing with our modern political strife and endless wars. Reconnecting this work with its Russian roots also gives American critics a framework through which they can examine American poetry that is all too often dismissed as low art; like the Russian critic, we too can take a serious look at the poetry that is being written in our popular music. Ginsberg learned in his travels, not just in Russia, but around the globe, that poetry is all around us. His ability to see that has, up to this point, often led to the unfair critical dismissal of his most popular works. To take a new, transnational look at these poems does more than resurrect them; it can open our eyes to the possibilities of poetry as a verbal artifact that is alive and well and the other “cosmic rhythms” that surround us unnoticed and unappreciated.

Conclusion: Avant-Gardes After the Iron Curtain

Soul to crotch the streets commit hara-kiri,
Burnt-out stores chessboard moonlit households,
The City of Angels stares into black holes—
See down through Earth to scorched Nagorno-Karabakh.
How long is the tunnel of pain?
Does God need Welfare?
Even so, remembering the sheen on Peredelkino's black gooseberries,
Rodney King's name sounds Russian, rodnik for ground-spring.
As for me who crapped up my own homeland
How lay the blame on anybody else?
Rain & ashes seal my lips.
The two superpowers left the Little Man supersufferings.
Us—blown to hell. You—immolate yourselves in flame?
Any light at the end of the tunnel of pain?

--Andrei Voznesensky, "Angelic Black Holes"
Translated by Allen Ginsberg May 17, 1992

Allen Ginsberg's poetry was always influenced by Russian literature, but as the research behind this dissertation has shown, this influence evolved and deepened over the years through translations, travel, and, most important, the friendships Ginsberg developed with Russian Estradny poets Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko. These friendships outlived the Cold War and the Soviet Union. Ginsberg's above translation of "Angelic Black Holes," for example, was written with Voznesensky after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is a Voznesensky poem, but this English translation is the only version of the poem to ever be published. Ginsberg says that he and

Voznesensky “worked it up together” without a source text in Russian, other than some notes scribbled on sheet of paper with “To Allen! Allen! Love you!” scrawled in English across the Russian text of the draft

(Fig. 9). The poem, completed on 17 May, 1992 is simultaneously about the LA riots that had just ended and the Soviet Union, which had fallen just five months earlier. The poem makes parallels between the failures of these “two superpowers” and the “supersufferings” they caused. “Angelic Black Holes” was written thirty six years after Ginsberg first drew parallels between the two nations in his 1956 poem, “America.”

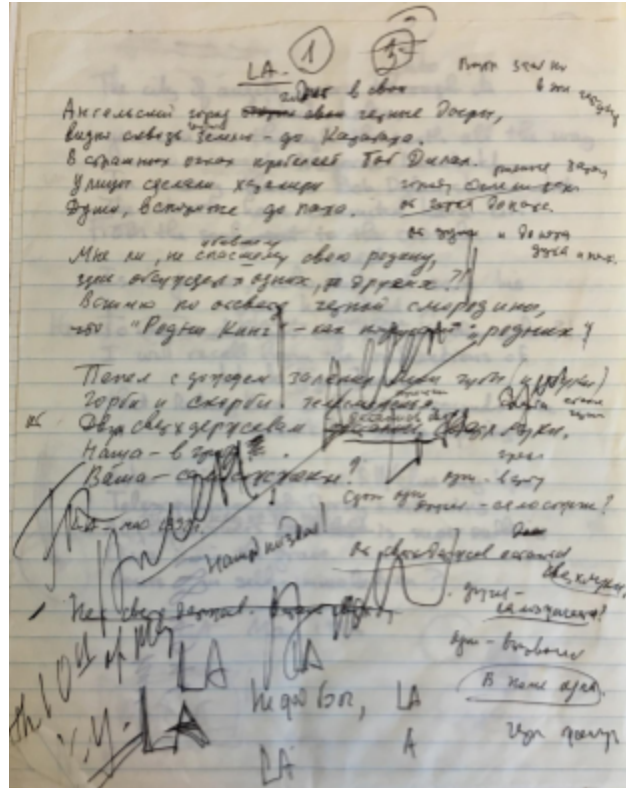


Fig. 9. The unpublished, Russian draft of “Angelic Black Holes.”

In “America,” Ginsberg’s early curation of a Russian identity allowed him to critique McCarthyism and Cold War hysteria from an intentionally subaltern, Russian perspective. This identity was grounded in Ginsberg’s relationship with his Russian-born mother, but its poetic purpose was limited to satirically exposing the hypocrisy of American exceptionalism. Ginsberg’s mother and father gave him access to Russian poetry at an early age and insight into some of the parallels between the Soviet and American governments, but this openness to the other side of the Cold War culture war

did not, itself, make Ginsberg the “Russian poet” he claimed to be in 1983. Ginsberg’s open critique of McCarthyism did, however, serve a critical role in bringing his poetry to the Soviet Union. The publication of Ginsberg’s poetry in Russia starting in 1961 was made possible by his undermining of American politics in poems like “America.” While these translations failed as anti-American propaganda, they provided a model to Estradny poets for introducing subtly dissident politics into official Soviet publications in the form of confessional poetry. This work was first translated into English in *Red Cats*, a City Lights collection of Estradny poems proposed and named by Ginsberg, who, in the process of helping publish this book, discovered a “clear connection” between the Estrady and Beat “post-Stalinist and McCarthyite social conditions” (qtd Lauridsen and Dalgard 26). By the early to mid 1960s, Ginsberg’s connection to Russia was no longer simply an ironic device in his satirical poetry. Rather, his imagined, subaltern Russian identity was replaced with the works and lives of actual, flesh and blood Russian poets who were members of their own Beat Generation--the Estradny movement. Ginsberg was drawn to these poets because of the similarities he saw between the Estradny and Beat movements, but it was the differences between the movements that proved to be the most influential on Ginsberg’s poetry and American culture going forward. Once Ginsberg met and talked to Andrei Voznesensky, he learned that Estradny poems worked so well as verbal artifacts because they were created orally, through repeated recitation and eventual dictation. At the same time, Ginsberg was inspired by the Estrady poets’ large scale readings with musical accompaniments, their recordings of both readings and popular songs, and their general ability to bridge the gap between

academic poetry and popular culture. This Estradny influence shaped Ginsberg's subsequent shift in poetic style as well as his expanding role in American popular culture.

Understanding the Estradny origins of Ginsberg's previously misunderstood, dismissed, or maligned second act can help repair our understanding of his shift in the late sixties to aural composition, explicit political intervention, and pop culture excursions into new genres and modes of performance. These shifts were not, as other critics have suggested, a product of America's capitalistic system, a betrayal of Ginsberg's counter-culture and confessional roots, or imitations of popular culture and Modernist collage poetry. Rather, Ginsberg's post-1965 shift was inspired, in part, by his education in Estradny poetry and poetics during his travels in the Soviet Block in 1965. Until now, critics have not had access to the tools required to make sense of poems like those found in *Planet News* and *The Fall of America*. While Beat Literature is in many ways part of a late Modernist move towards Post Modernism, to consider Ginsberg's post-1965 poetry only in terms of earlier examples of the collage poetry of High Modernism and Dadaism leaves the reader with an incomplete understanding of how these poems work and what they are trying to do. Modernist Collage poetry and political protest in popular culture did proceed and coincide with *The Fall of America*, but as the previously unpublished poems and journals cited in this dissertation show, the biggest influence on the style of these poems comes from the Russian Estradniki. The Estradny poets showed Ginsberg the power poetry could still have in pushing back against

government oppression while simultaneously reaching a large audience and profoundly shaping mass culture through records and concert-like readings

I hope that the work this dissertation does in restoring the Estradny context in which the poems of *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* were written provides the lense through which future scholars can further examine the political and poetic complexity of these works. The poems in these two collections clearly replace the strictly personal narratives of Ginsberg's earlier work with more political and international subjects while, at the same time, replacing the long lines of "Howl" and "Kaddish" with shorter lines, quoted song lyrics, and even sheet music. Understanding that these changes are a product of Voznesensky's concept of "thinking in rhythms" while searching for "cosmic rhythms" that can be captured in real time restores the global context of their inception. I hope that by restoring the Estradny origins of these poems, I have revealed them to be politically and psychologically complex portraits of Vietnam-era Cold War America that transcend the political, cultural, and language barriers that divided the East and West in the 1960s. Reading these poems in their appropriate global context can help us better understand their political exigence, complex historical origins, aural aesthetics, and their impact on popular American culture and music.

Reading *The Fall of America*, *Planet News*, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, and even *First Blues* in the context of these Russian bardic traditions rescues these works from critical obscurity, but it also provides a model for understanding and writing about other artifacts of contemporary popular American culture. As scholars reconnect Ginsberg's

later works to their Russian inspiration, it is critical that they also consider how these works directly influenced songwriters like Bob Dylan, Patti Smith, The Fugs, and other musicians with literary aspirations for their song lyrics in the late sixties and early seventies. The tradition of the poet-musician has only intensified in the subsequent decades. Bob Dylan and Patti Smith's spoken word songs were seen by their contemporaries as avant-garde musical experiments. Today, however, the genre's evolution into rap and other explicitly spoken word musical genres has made popular music one of the most culturally relevant genres of contemporary poetry in America. The academy's reluctance to accept this work as essentially poetic may have begun to show signs of cracking in recent years with Adam Bradley's *The Poetry of Pop*, the Yale *Anthology of Rap*, Greil Marcus's *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*, and, of course, Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017. The backlash this award caused in much of academia also revealed, however, the need to further understand exactly how song lyrics fit into our other literary traditions. Tracing the resurgence of poetically inspired song lyrics through Allen Ginsberg and back to the Russian Estradny movement gives this shift a literary context, but it also gives us a model for treating song lyrics as serious literature. Like the Russian critic, we too can examine our popular songs in context with their international and domestic literary progenitors, repairing in the process music's place in the academy and the academy's relevance in our popular culture. *Planet News* and *The Fall of America* show us that poetry is all around us, connected to our culture, and connected to literary traditions in the United States and beyond.

Looking beyond borders for explanations for our culture and identity is not only practically necessary for understanding Ginsberg's later works, it also has a renewed exigence in the context of our current moment of nationalistic populism and anti-globalist politics. Ginsberg's mid-century resistance to American exceptionalism used the binary of the Cold War as its inspiration, but his connecting with the Estradny poets across Iron Curtain is not simply a matter of historical significance. Understanding the transnational origins of our culture allows us to move toward a pluralism that repairs continuities and intersections across national and linguistic borders. Well researched and substantiated transnational readings are required now more than ever, as the US government has resumed and redoubled the construction of both rhetorical and physical barriers between the US and the rest of the world in the name of American exceptionalism. These new walls include the resurrection of old Cold War rhetoric from both Russia and the United States at a moment when, by no coincidence, both nations move back towards nationalistic, anti-globalist politics of national and racial identity. It is imperative that we remember, like Ginsberg before us, that these two large and diverse nations are made up of people and not just the politicians who supposedly represent them. The connections between Ginsberg and the Estradniki outlined in this dissertation help us understand the form and content of *The Fall of America*, *Planet News*, and the Estradny poetry that influenced these works. These connections also reveal that our understandings of the American Beat Generation, the Russian Estradny Movement, and the cultural lives of both countries that produced these movements are far more rather than less complex. Borders--even those as clearly demarcated as the Iron Curtain--are

not the outer limits of our culture where one culture stops and another begins; rather, they are the locations of generative interchanges that create our most innovative, rich, and complex cultural and artistic artifacts. May this dissertation serve as a model of the richness that can be found in these intersections.

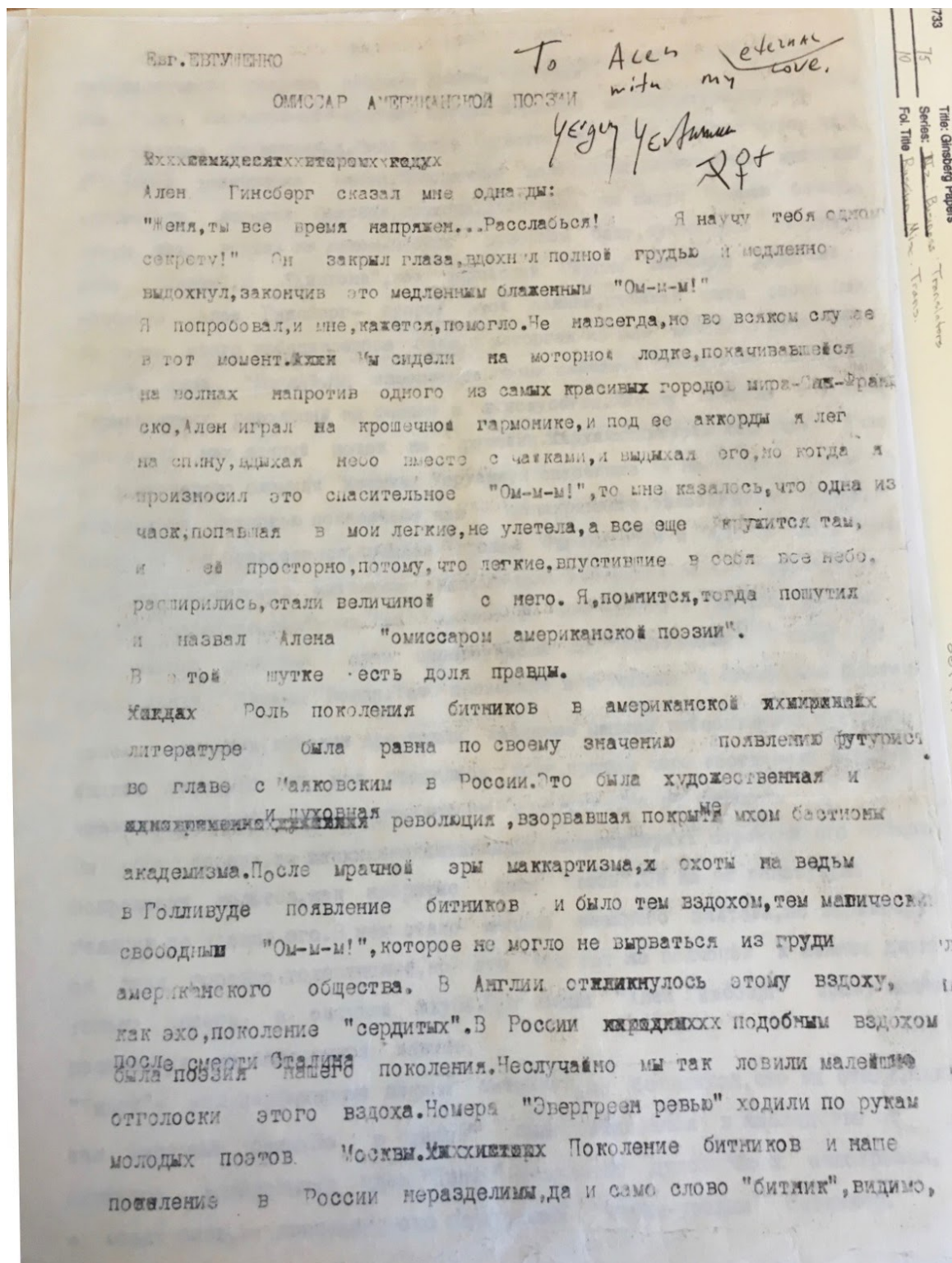
Appendix

Fig. 10. From Ginsberg's March 22, 1965 journal Entry on first meeting with Voznesensky.

(Vos - cont. from 2-page previous) 3/22
"Sometimes I think in rhythm--"
"yes" he said "I think in rhythm--"
We were in house, I was excited, we
were getting to the point, but now
old family livingroom with inexpensive
solid brown wood furniture, a glass
fronted bookcase--
Voznesensky's wife slightly older
than he, very mature, in red dress, friendly,
almost young matron--He very calm,
tranquil almost, a very fine soft reassuring
presence--mottled face + ~~big~~ slightly large
big nose, but slow calm household
gestures, relaxed in chair--later he lay
back on couch to watch & listen while
his composer friend banged Brecht-like
Night Club classic tunes on the piano to
new poems by Vos.

"Sometimes I think in rhythm"--
"Yes" he said "I think in rhythm"--
We were in house, I was excited, we were getting to the
point, but now old family livingroom with inexpensive
solid brown wood furniture, a glass fronted bookcase--
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household gestures, relaxed in chair--later he lay back
on couch to watch & listen while his composer friend
banged Brecht-like Night Club classic tunes on the piano
to new poems by Vos.
He asked me "Does rhythm come to you and do you carry
it around for several days?"
"No the first draft is the last--ideally--that is
the ideal, not to touch the first composition--So the
rhythm comes as an impulse to writing--or comes during
the composition--sometimes--maybe 2 or 3 times in my life,
the full rhythm, a complete rhythm from my whole body--the
whole physiology moved in one strong rhythm--a sort of cosmic
rhythm--I never know when that will happen--sometimes minor
rhythms, but beautiful too--"

Fig. 11. Yevgeny Yevtushenko's "The Ohm-issar of American Poetry" (Омиссар Американской Поэзии) translated by Greg Dandele and Irina Zadnepryanaya in Chapter II.



Панки-это уродливый протест против уродства. И в действительности Неслучайно панки не породили своих великих поэтов. Когда-то Мопассан написал великий рассказ "Мать уродов"-о женщине, рожавшей на продажу уродов. Для этого она специально перетягивала живот во время беременности, или запихивала новорожденных в фарфоровые формы, чтобы из детей получались забавные карлики, у которых лопатки торчали, как крылья. Наша эпоха-мать уродов. Но Ален, родившийся с рождением усакенный эпохой в фарфоровую форму "американской мечты", разбил ее и вышел на св боду. Именно поэтому он-великий американец. И кто-то, кажется Карлейль, сказал: "Великий художник, как Самсон, уносит на себе ворота, которыми его хотят запереть." Таков Ален Гинсберг.

Он именно потому и надел галстук, и сбрил бороду, ~~хотя~~ ибо почувствовал, что хитрая эпоха ~~я~~ уже смирилась с его прежним образом, и ловко академизировала его, навязывая поэту только одну роль. Но великий поэт, как великий актер, способен на тысячи ролей. Возможности великого поэта безграничны. К сожалению, безгранична жизнь. А, может быть, нам только так кажется. И если после смерти поэту суждено быть не всадником взбесившегося мусорного бака, а самим мусорным баком, то этот бак все равно взбесится, и поскачет по сонным улицам, будя своим грохотом всех тех, кто, ~~хуже~~ ~~хуже~~ ~~хуже~~ спит почти непробудным сном. Разламывать эту "почти непробудность"- и есть задача поэта.

Евг. Евтушенко

Fig. 12. "Night I am Approaching the Throne," written in Ginsberg's journal as he entered the USSR by train on March 18, 1965.

9 P.m. March 18--
Night, I am approaching the throne.
The 4 zar, Stalin are in hidden tombs--
A full orange moon, the snowy fields
of Moravia, the Carpathian
mountains ahead at 12 oclock--
At dawn, the Russian border. In
compartment of a train
one hundred years ago Prince Myskkin
stared at the black hair and white
eyeballs of Rogoyin--
At the end of the book, in the funereal
apartment, by candlelight,
the corpse of Rogoyin and Myskkin
sobbing like a baby--
"Nikolay, Nickolay, how can we
forget you?"
My Slavic Soul, we are coming home again--
Once more on Red Square by Kremlin wall
in the snow to sit and ^{write} ~~route~~ Propheesy--
Prince-Comrades of Russia, I have
come from America to lay my beard
at your beautiful feet!
Trembling
in the Railway Station, amazed at the
great red train Moscoka-Prague--

The train doors open to the corridor--
A Sealed train--Lenin was a trained
Seal--
I'll trade you one diamond ^{Sutra}
for 2 Communist Manifestos--
I am approaching the throne.

Fig. 13. "Kremlin Museum Rock," an early example of Ginsberg composing spontaneous music intended to paint a portrait of his surroundings (in this case Moscow's Red Square).

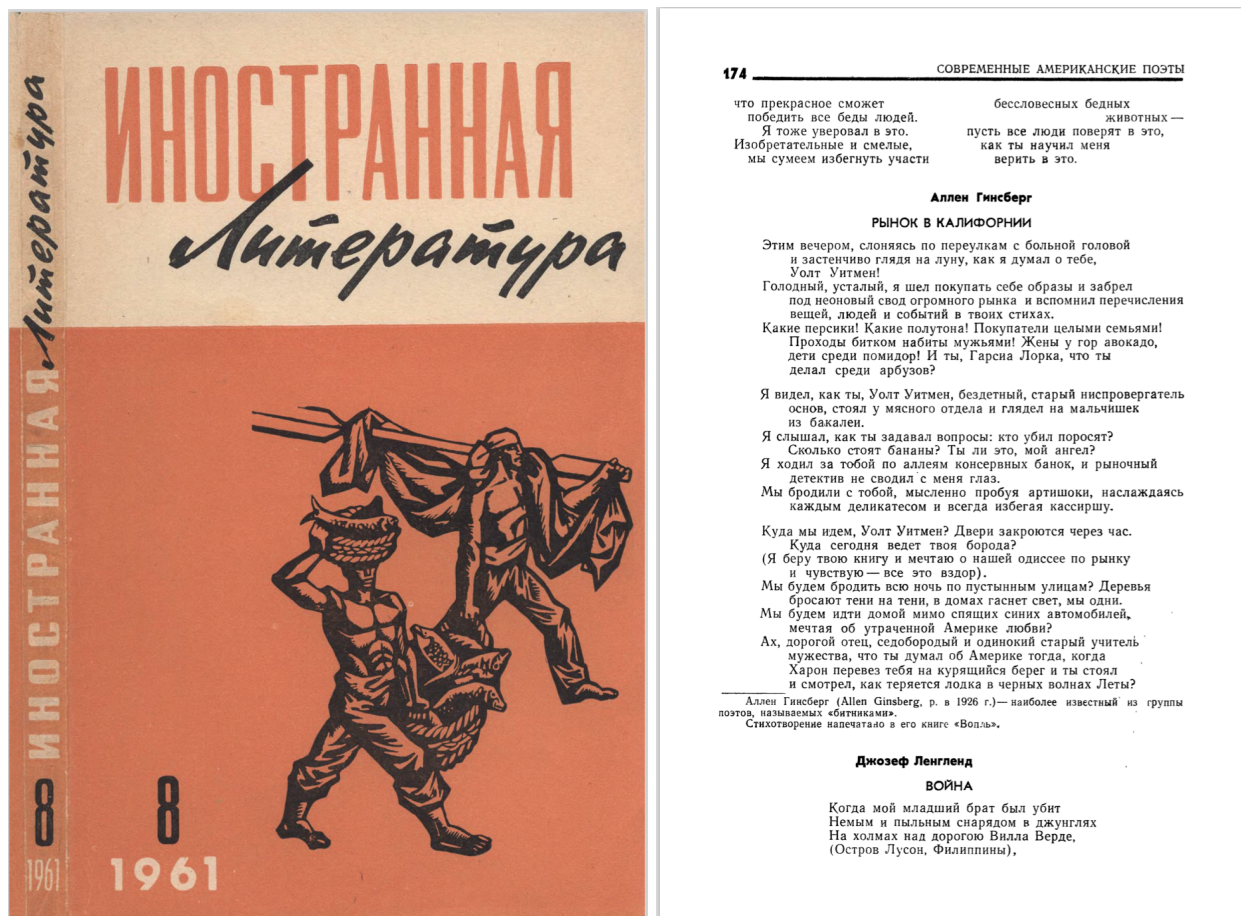
21

40 Kremlin Museum--Rock [✓]Crystal [✓]Mace
Turquoise [✓]disks, the things
and Shirley Temple in the Kremlin,
drest in red coat, white fur hat
& little black booties,
Come [✓]searching medicines in Soviet--
visiting the museum, on the great stairway
with a State Department Gent--
Golden filligree bibles,
Ivan the terrible liked sapphires,
amulets against Treachery--
Khansables of Italian velvet decorated with myriad pearls.
150,000 pearls embroidered in Catherine the Great's cloak--
A mania for beautiful
presents from France--
[✓]porcelain, the olympic dishes from Napoleon--
41 Even Pushkin wore a copper crown at his wedding--
and a royal collection of watches--
Napoleon & his generals watching the great fire of Moscow 1812
and the magicians who made wooden watches were imprisoned--
The Ivory throne of Ivan--
The Persian Turquoise throne,
The Diamond throne, the Double throne of Peter/Ivan

Very clever answers of 2 small boys

from the secret compartment
 behind the throne
 where Sister Sophia sat--
 and a symbolic horse nobody could sit on--
 I almost slipped & crashed thru the glass
 showcase into the Turkish Gold Saddle
 and a shiver ran thru my back & forehead--
 and Queen Elizabeth's carriage presented to Boris [✓] Gudinoff
 (windows of Polish ^{ca} mien)
 a giant glass enclosed sleigh
 to travel Petersburg Moscow--3 days by daylight
 Boucher painting the sides of Elizabeth's [✓] carriage--
 Cap of State, orb & scepter, shield,
 the fire-cap of the Czar of Fazan
 the Diamond caps for the brothers--
 Boots made by Peter the Great--
 Earrings of river pearls for peasant girls--
 The embroidery girls turned blind after 2 years--
 an embroidered ocean from the
 Shirley Temple all alone in the vast museum--

Fig. 14. August 1961 issue of *Foreign Literature*, the first Soviet publication of an Allen Ginsberg poem.



что прекрасное сможет победить все беды людей. Я тоже уверовал в это. Изобретательные и смелые, мы сумеем избежать участи	бессловесных бедных животных — пусть все люди поверят в это, как ты научил меня верить в это.
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Аллен Гинсберг

РЫНОК В КАЛИФОРНИИ

Этим вечером, споняясь по переулкам с большой головой
и застенчиво глядя на луну, как я думал о тебе,
Уолт Уитмен!
Голодный, усталый, я шел покупать себе образы и забрел
под неоновый свод огромного рынка и вспомнил перечисления
вещей, людей и событий в твоих стихах.
Какие персики! Какие полутон! Покупатели целыми семьями!
Проходы битком набиты мужьями! Жены у гор авокадо,
дети среди помидор! И ты, Гарсиа Лорка, что ты
делал среди арбузов?
Я видел, как ты, Уолт Уитмен, бездетный, старый ниспровергатель
основ, стоял у мясного отдела и глядел на мальчишек
из бакалеи.
Я слышал, как ты задавал вопросы: кто убил поросят?
Сколько стоят бананы? Ты ли это, мой ангел?
Я ходил за тобой по аллеям консервных банок, и рыночный
детектив не сводил с меня глаз.
Мы бродили с тобой, мысленно пробуя артишоки, наслаждаясь
каждым деликатесом и всегда избегая кассиршу.
Куда мы идем, Уолт Уитмен? Двери закроются через час.
Куда сегодня ведет твоя борода?
(Я беру твою книгу и мечтаю о нашей одиссее по рынку
и чувствую — все это вздор).
Мы будем бродить всю ночь по пустынным улицам? Деревья
бросают тени на тени, в домах гаснет свет, мы одни.
Мы будем идти домой мимо спящих синих автомобилей,
мечтая об утраченной Америке любви?
Ах, дорогой отец, седебородый и одинокий старый учитель
мужества, что ты думал об Америке тогда, когда
Харон перевез тебя на курящийся берег и ты стоял
и смотрел, как теряется лодка в черных волнах Леты?

Аллен Гинсберг (Allen Ginsberg, р. в 1926 г.) — наиболее известный из группы поэтов, называемых «битниками». Стихотворение напечатано в его книге «Волль».

Джозеф Ленгленд

ВОЙНА

Когда мой младший брат был убит
Немым и пыльным снарядом в джунглях
На холмах над дорогой Вилла Верде,
(Остров Лусон, Филиппины),

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