Anselm Hollo's Spirituality: More Finnish than Beat?

Sanad Singha Goswami
Uppsala University-Sweden

ABSTRACT

Anselm Paul Alexis Hollo is a Finnish-American poet whose work, while deeply influenced by the Beat Movement, uniquely integrates elements of Finnish literary tradition. This essay specifically examines Hollo's pursuit of spirituality. Earlier Beat writers like Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and some later disciples of this ideology such as Joanne Kyger, Anne Waldman, and Diane di Prima, took Eastern religions like Zen Buddhism and Hinduism as a medium for their spiritual search —a deep quest for authentic meaning, inner truth, and transcendence in a world they felt was dominated by materialism, conformity, and moral emptiness. Although Hollo is a devoted follower of Beat aesthetics, his spiritual quest mirrors that of Finnish poets: he explores the mysteries of existence while deliberately distancing himself from organized religion. This essay examines Hollo's poetry from 1959 to 1977, illustrating where his passion for Beat ideology intersects with his distinctly Finnish literary heritage, and compares his poetry with that of Eino Leino and Edith Södergran to show how closely his spiritual quest aligns with Finnish literary tradition.

Keywords: *Anselm Hollo, Beat Generation, Beat Poetry, Finnish Poetry, Nordic Poetry, Finnish Literature*

Introduction

> Finnish poets represent the highest individual cultures; many are scientists.
>
> —Annamari Sarajas, "Contemporary Finnish Writing"

Anselm Hollo was a Finnish-American poet, translator, and educator whose work bridged European modernist traditions and the innovations of the American avant-garde. Born in Helsinki in 1934 during a time of significant political and cultural upheaval, Hollo studied in Finland and worked in England before moving to the United States in 1967. In his career, he published over 40 poetry collections distinguished by wit, lyricism, and an advanced engagement with language and culture, and translated Beat poem, "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg into Finnish. Because of his love for the Beat tradition, Hollo adopted the Beats' improvised, conversational vernacular—a jazzy, spontaneous voice built from everyday American speech and snippets of talk. Given the influence of Beat poetics in his work, one must ask whether Hollo's poetry has also absorbed elements from the rich Finnish literary tradition.

In his vast realm of poetry, Hollo dives deeper into the search for the meaning of human existence and its place in the universe. Undoubtedly, the Beat writers, starting from Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac to later-generation female writers like Diane di Prima, also did so. Beat writers are known for their spiritual quest for meaning in the mundane, often drawing on Eastern religious philosophies. Does Anselm Hollo fall into the same category regarding his spiritual journey in his poetry? Has Hollo also tried to explore the world of the unseen with the help of Buddhism, Hinduism, Tantrism, or any other religious philosophy, as the Beat poets generally did?

Although he spent a long time in the United Kingdom, working in the Finnish section of the BBC World Service, and in the United States, working at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University, Hollo remained true to his Finnish spiritual exploration method. Hollo, like the twentieth-century Finnish poets Eino Leino and Edith Södergran, has not adopted the theory of any organized religion in his inquiry into the meaning of life and human existence.

This essay focuses on Anselm Hollo's *Sojourner Microcosms: New & Selected Poems, 1959–1977*, which serves as compelling evidence of his spiritual poetic work. This essay will attempt to trace the characteristics of twentieth-century Finnish poetry dealing with spiritual questioning of life and existence in the poems of Anselm Hollo, which were written over eighteen years (1959–1977) – a prime period of Beat influence in the United States and Europe. Moreover, this essay will compare Hollo's poems questioning the meaning of human existence with those of the Beat era and two Finnish poets, Eino Leino and Edith Södergran, who are two twentieth-century Finnish poets pioneering modernism.

Roads Back Home

How much of Hollo's poetry has been influenced by the Beat poetry? Hollo is an ardent follower of Beat poetry, both in form and content. Many of his poems are inspired by the Beat traits of defiance, rebellion against authority, and critique of consumerism. Robert Lee summarises these key characteristics of Beat poetry: "Beat's ethos at the outset was to be one of unfettering, a rebuke to Middle America's staid paradigm of career and suburb, office and corporation" (18). In "in the octagonal room," written in between 1959 and 1965, Hollo writes,

> to see
> blake's earth
> mother christ
> 1790
> the color of
> clay (37)

The unconventional imagery is a revolt against all that reigns in society. Here, Hollo creates a collage of images, juxtaposing Christ as a maternal figure with the pagan image of the earth, thereby challenging traditional Christian notions of gender and divinity. Even, like the great Beat poets such as Ginsberg, Hollo would like to think differently. All his books, published from 1959 to 1970, present his readers with poems that offer an unconventional point of view on life. Even Hollo does not hesitate to describe the human body openly as in the poem "idyll, nineteen sixty-five":

sunday morning
naked woman, bending
spitting a milky water jet into a basin (43)

But it is not only in content; Hollo incorporates the forms of the Beats in poetry. In *Jazz Poems*, which features the works of seventeen poets including Dannie Abse, Pete Brown, Alan Brownjohn, Roy Fisher, Bernard Kops, and Christopher Logue, Hollo writes in the introduction that the collection attempts to give an idea of a new kind of poetry in the making, in which the one unifying element is to have 'something to say'; be it highly personal, simply a voice 'talking to you', or urgently didactic, a voice trying to reach us all" (Hollo). In line with the Beat movement, a group of poets in the UK also started writing poems in spontaneous "jazz" rhythm, as Beat poetry is marked by jazz spontaneity. Jazz musicians influenced Beat poets in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. "For the poets of the 1950s," especially for Beat poets, "jazz is perceived as a more significant social critique of an oppressive social structure" (Thomas 291). Beat poetics incorporates aspects of jazz, such as the emphasis on the breath of a line, spontaneity in writing, and educated barbarism. In *Jazz Poems*, Hollo's poem, the "red piano," which follows the "jazz" tradition is included along with those of other poets of the 1950s. In the red "piano," Hollo writes,

The Red piano
he says
a red piano
I never saw you (25).

This spontaneity in the sense of the improvisational flow of jazz goes on in most of the poems of Anselm Hollo in his later poetic works.

Where Anselm Hollo differs categorically from the Beat writers is in his aloofness from any organized religious philosophy. The followers of the Beat movement developed a new quest for spiritual search, which is marked by the elements of some Eastern religions like Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and Tantrism. The leading thinkers of the Beat Generation, like Ginsberg, and the later poets of this subculture, like Diane di Prima and Joanne Kyger, were inspired by Eastern religions. The works of

Anne Waldman, another later Beat, reflect deep devotion to Eastern spiritual and meditative traditions in her poetry and teaching as well. The Beats voiced freedom of thought, breaking the stereotype —literary, moral and cultural; simultaneously, they struggled for freedom to live against the status quo by living authentically, freely, and spiritually, celebrating individuality, creativity, and nonconformity. Poets like Ginsberg find the justification of their lifestyles in Eastern religions, adopting "bohemian lifestyles" referred to as "bums" by some people—and beliefs—"Dharma" in Buddhism (Garton-Grundling 243). According to Elkholy, the Beats, being synonymous with non-conformity, "utilized the term to describe both their literary styles and styles of life" (Elkholy 1) This spirit of breaking stereotypes motivated Ginsberg to proclaim in *Footnote to Howl*, "The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy!" (134). It is exactly like the Hindus who worship almost everything – air, water, fire, sky, and whatnot. They had gods and goddesses for everything, as the Hellenic civilization had. The way Ginsberg worships all limbs of the human body is completely a non-Abrahamic concept of religion, and hence begins the rebellion against the status quo. The outlook that he derived from Eastern religion helped him express his rage against postwar American censorship, conformity, inhibition, and puritanism. Garton-Gundling writes that the Beats, like Ginsberg, defined themselves "against the American religious mainstream of the 1950s, which promoted a belief in a God separate from and superior to humanity, and conformity to an increasingly consolidated middle-class ideal" (200).This is identical to the case of another great Beat, Kerouac, whose turn from Western religion to Mahayana Buddhism and from the established norms of prose to spontaneous prose are part of the same spiritual pursuit — the recognition of the physical world and physical demands in the search for self. He adopted the Buddhist spiritual goal of enlightenment as a guide in his endeavour to discover himself. The concept of spiritual freedom of Buddhism also made it attractive to the Beats who "present[ed] Buddhism as uniquely suited to America, often by appealing to traditional notions of American freedom" (Garton-Gundling 200). The leading Beats became primarily interested in Mahayana, Tantric practices, and Zen. Tantric practice in India encouraged them to exercise sexual freedom, while Zen gave them freedom of thought, leading to spontaneous prose. In *Mexico City Blues*, Kerouac writes:

But his Karma,
Unknown to him,
May end —
Which is Nirvana (Kerouac 2)

On the other hand, Hollo sometimes, as it appears in his poems, seems to be sceptical of any of the organized religions. This essay will bring the example later in the discussion.

Lee, in his seminal book *The Beats: Authorships, Legacies* traces why the Beat poets like Ginsberg turned to Eastern religions like Buddhism. Lee quotes Ginsberg referring to a generation oppressed by crude materialism, bureaucracies, authoritarianism and deprivation of spiritual independence (5). Hence, Ginsberg and other Beat poets turn to Eastern religions to pioneer a more inclusive American society. In contrast, twentieth-century Finland where Hollo's poetry was situated in was faced with a different socio-religious perspective. Finland received independence in 1917, which "created new political opportunities for the implementation of religious freedom. This project had been pending for decades, but the crucial turning point came only in 1919, when a republican constitution was enacted" (Seppo 853). Section 8 of the Constitution Act guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion to Finnish citizens by not only allowing them to practice religion in private and public but also to change it . One may not even belong to any organized religion, too. Consequently, the spirituality of early twentieth-century Finnish poets grew out of subjective experience, inspired by poets like Eino Leino and Edith Södergran.

Following Ginsberg's and Kerouac's footprints, the other Beat poets also leaned towards Eastern religions, shaping their spiritual philosophy based on the model of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Eastern religious traditions. Diane di Prima, "a practicing Buddhist", and is perhaps the most prominent female Beat poet whose spirituality is saturated with a Buddhist view of life, tried to free herself "from samsara by study of, and meditation on, the nonduality of phenomena" (Grace and Trigilio 246). Now, the question is if Hollo followed the footprint of Beats in his spiritual search.

Since this essay claims that Hollo's spirituality owes more to the Finnish tradition of twentieth-century spirituality than that of the Beat Generation, it is appropriate

to have a look at the Finnish way of thinking about spirituality. In this regard, two poets who marked the beginning of twentieth-century Finnish modern poetry and spiritual quest in line with the rest of Europe are Eino Leino and Edith Södergran. Södergran drew inspiration from French symbolism, German expressionism, and Russian futurism. Among several reasons why she is considered one of the torchbearers of Finnish modern poetry is her exercise of spiritual freedom. In her poem, "My Soul," she writes,

> My soul cannot tell stories and know any truth,
> My soul can only weep and laugh and wring its hands;
> My soul cannot reminisce and defend,
> My soul cannot weigh over and confirm (69)

The poet does not depend on any organized religious or spiritual philosophy to know herself. Södergran's spirituality is subjective, adhering to the spirit of her age struggling for religious freedom. Kirsti Simonsuuri writes, "Södergran's poem tells of a total withdrawal from the world of culture and people and from discursive language, from the truth that men have defined" (53). And "It is only through such complete withdrawal, such complete denial, and … the absoluteness and purity of that inward passion" that is key to the spiritual search of Södergran (53). In the poems of Leino, Danish and French symbolism and German Nietzscheanism are evident, but most of them stand for new spiritual freedom and do not fall into any organized religion. Leino writes, in "I was in the beginning":

> I
> Grew up near Almighty
> And all of it was I.
> I was the world's thought
> Work's yield of a thousand strong
> Beginning, also the end of life. (29)

This assertive 'I' inspired the subsequent Finnish poets, and a new era of modernism began, especially in terms of positioning the self in the world. This poem does not conform to any organized religion, but instead expresses a spiritual individualism that aligns with modernist and existential thought rather than religious doctrine. It is, therefore, a poem of spiritual self-awareness, not religious conformity, showing

how Finnish modernist poetry embraced subjective and human-centered spirituality rather than institutional faith.

Hollo not only nourished the ideology of the Beat Movement in his poetry but also cultivated the Finnish spiritual tradition of poetry. In the 1960s, Hollo incorporated Beat elements, such as jazz rhythm and surrealism, into his poems. At the same time, he stuck to Finnish ways of spirituality that are marked by aphoristic, witty, suggestive, indirect expressions of subjective experience uninfluenced by any organized religion. Though Hollo did not write much in Finnish and did not live in Finland for a long time, his poems, which raise questions about the significance of life, have inherited characteristics from the Finnish poetic tradition. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the fundamental trends of Finnish literature in terms of spiritual quest of the early twentieth century poets. By the time Hollo was born in Finland, the country's literature had gone through some landmark changes. The Torch Bearers, a group of writers and artists active in the 1920s, introduced new themes such as "reverence for life" and "brotherhood of mankind" along with "the city, technology, [and] the distant lands" (Envall 158). Secular themes dominated the whole arena of Finnish literature as the country built its new identity. The Torch Bearers' "more literary innovations signified an effort to shed metre" (Envall 158). Although free verse had already existed in Finnish poetry during the previous century (Eino Leino 1898), Katri Vala was the "most skilled practitioner" of the "verse libre" movement and "can be compared with Edith Södergran" (Envall 158). The Neo-Romanticism and New Nationalism of Leino paved the way for a diverse way of thinking, breaking off all conventions. Regarding Leino's metaphysical poems, Kai Laitinen says, "Leino does not use ready-made patterns; he creates his own personal mythology, reflecting the same problem as his lyrical poetry. In some places, he may use elements from Christian legends, but even then, the interpretation is quite his own" (115). Hollo's spiritual poetry carried on this Finnish tradition of Leino.

Hollo's Spirituality: More Finnish than Beat?

Hollo's spiritual experience is totally subjective, stemming from the sudden experience of a moment, and not inspired by any organized religion. Hollo depends on his personal feelings and perceptions to explore the world of infinity, unknown and unseen. The poet delves deeper into the world of the unknown by seeing the "fragmentary tusk" in a "glass case" and records his feelings in a poem. In the poem,

"Song of Tusk," the poet does not admit that "the fragmentary tusk in a glass case" of a "bogged down" elephant is "thousands of years old" (Hollo 26). To the poet, "those are untrue statements" because the whole universe, along with the soul of the poet, is of the same age. Here comes the assertive "I"—"i am in the glass case" (Hollo 26). In a surrealistic way, this is the poet's perception of his soul. This is at the same time "individual" and "collective", as found in Finnish tradition. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Finland went through remarkable political and social change. The most important change was "During the decade of the 1920s, the Finnish public, with the energy of a new beginning, embarked on a campaign of reform in the sphere of both material and spiritual culture" (Schoolfield 146). The Finnish tried to be free in their thoughts and practices as well. The aspiration is recognized in their constitution—"A law requiring compulsory education was enacted in 1921, and another that guaranteed freedom of religion was passed in 1922" (146). This social and political recognition of religious freedom is reflected in the poems, and this vein of spirituality continues even after World War II through the later generation of Finnish poets. Hollo, an ardent translator of Finnish literature, followed the individual spiritual practice uninfluenced by any organized religion.

Hollo's spiritual poetry is marked by the subjectivity evident in early twentieth-century Finnish poetry. The socio-political change and the religious freedom offered by the constitution gave Leino the opportunity to think of fate in his own way – a totally subjective evaluation. Leino's winter poems also express defiance, an almost Nietzschean rising against the powers of fate. The speaker of the poems knows destruction lies ahead but does not surrender — he falls with "head held high" (Laitinen 115). Leino continues the subjective way of explanation in his search for the meaning of life:

> This attitude has been called "tragic optimism." Later, too, in the collection *Elämän koreus* (1915; *Life's Splendor*), when signs of decline are already visible — the previous collection has the apt name *Painuva päivä* (1914; *The Dying Day*)—the poet still praises life. He knows he is sinking, but "perhaps that is why / I live high Sunday, / I feel all is beautiful." (Laitinen 115)

Leino does not even use the help of Christianity to develop his narrative of fate and life. He develops his individual "optimism," ignoring all interpretations of organized

religions. Hollo's attempts to define life, death, happiness, and memory are marked by the same individualism as Leino. In his poems, Hollo captures the jazz spontaneity of the Beat poets, but in expression, he, unlike Ginsberg and Kerouac, has not used the lens of the Eastern religions to see into and feel the world.

Hollo can be further compared with Leino in terms of his aloofness from any religious view. Leino's Neo-Romanticism includes a subjective approach to themes. In the poem "Nocturne", Leino pours his subjective experience of inner peace and spiritual harmony:

> Song of a blackbird in my ears,
> a full moon above the heads of grain;
> happiness of a summer night all mine,
> valleys cloaked in smoke of burned-off clearings.
> I don't rejoice, don't grieve, sigh;
> but bring me darkness of the forest, (Leino 39)

His spiritual vision of life is based on personal emotions and experiences. Leinos' vast and varied life experiences give rise to diverse spiritual experiences that do not fall in the area of any established religious and moral philosophy. The new nationalism of twentieth-century Finland inspired the poets, artists, and writers to think in their own ways, adhering to the newly emerged sense of independence in a quest to form a new identity as a nation. Eugene Van Cleef says, "The Finns are a unique people. The development of their nationalistic spirit is likewise unique" (50). The uniqueness is reflected in their spirituality as well. The idea of freedom is mirrored in the poets' spiritual thoughts as the country was advancing towards religious freedom in their constitution as well in the early part of the century. Regarding spirituality, both twentieth-century Finnish poets like Leino and Hollo are more like the English Romantics. Hollo's spiritual search is a "spontaneous overflow of the powerful feelings," which is a purely subjective view of life (Wordsworth 1 – 34). Here, Hollo differs from the pioneering Beat writers like Ginsberg and Kerouac, who cultivated Eastern religious philosophies in their literary works. The poem, "nineteen-thirty" is about a personal experience that turns into an extraordinary spiritual realization:

just sit here telling myself all these stories
when the sun is shining
on the granite & veins in it & the veins
in the back of my father's hand (175)

Memories, the physical world, and emotions are mixed to create a 'great roaring silence/so spacious and hospitable/to the rising voice of' the poet's mind (Hollo 175). Regarding literary devices and forms, this poem bears the influences of Beat poets—free verse and surrealism. On the other hand, Hollo's spirituality does not owe to any organized religions like Zen Buddhism that influenced both earlier and later Beats.

Unlike Beats' poetic endeavour, Hollo's poetry, like Leino's, embodies a Finnish non-sectarian spiritual quest. David Stephen Calonne summarizes the Beats' association with organized religion in his introduction:

> Theosophy, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Buddhism, Tantra, Tarot, alchemy, astrology, shamanism, and experimentation with entheogens are among the subjects that fascinated them as well as their predecessors in the San Francisco Renaissance such as Kenneth Rexroth (1905–1982) and Robert Duncan (1919–1988). (2)

Besides the leading Beat writers like Ginsberg and Kerouac, the later Beats explicitly practiced Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Calonne writes that even Gnosticism emerges "as a significant theme in the works of di Prima, Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs" (27).

Hollo, like Södergran and Leino, "draws on imagery from nature and the cosmos but has his own explanations that do not go with any organized religions" (Laitinen 115). Simonsuuri writes that Södergran's poetry "does not correspond to any literary tradition but is instead part of nature, part of dreams, and part of life" (53). Hollo finds inspiration in nature and uses it as a symbol of the sublime. In "out of the Kalevala," Hollo writes,

evergreens
pines
rocks grow larger
trees
low up north
riding thinking singing
see her turn
golden
below the charred beams (40)

Hollo's nature is a living being, interacting with the human world. The concept of interconnectedness of natural and man-made objects, as well as human emotions, is a significant aspect of his spirituality. In the poem, "la noche," "the wind," "lights," and "the city" are all in "a procession":

the wind let loose in the dark
and the lights of the city moving
the city is a great dragon it is a procession
it is on the move
but the curtains are drawn
the music unheard
see men and women preparing themselves
for the long journey across a room (27)

All are the inseparable parts of the "moving" city, which is also an allegory of the universe. Annamari Sarajas writes, "Finnish poets represent the highest individual cultures; many are scientists" (153). A scientist's view is not of a believer who weighs everything against a theory; rather, it is of an explorer who is ever ready to discover something new with scepticism as a core value. The Beat poets are different in their approach since they explicitly adopted the views of organized religions. There may be a coincidental similarity between the Beats and Hollo regarding the idea of the interconnectedness of everything, but the Beats are categorical in expressing their interest in organized religions. The Beats' images, metaphors, and allusions clearly speak of their interest in Eastern religions. For example, "Sunflower Sutra" by Ginsberg, unlike any poem by Hollo, explicitly bears the concept of Eastern

religions. The word "sutra," which is a string of aphorisms composing a body of work, is taken from Buddhist literature. The poem reflects the ideas of death and rebirth in Eastern religion. Here, the sunflower stands for America, "tired" and "worn out," which is, as it appears to Ginsberg, tarnished and battered but has the capacity for being redeemed and beautiful once again (Tamony 275). Stephen Prothero writes,

> In addition to the Catholicism of Kerouac, the Protestantism of Burroughs, and the Judaism of Ginsberg, the Beats studied Gnosticism, mysticism, native American lore, Aztec and Mayan mythology, American transcendentalism, Hinduism, and especially Buddhism. (216)

Along with the practice in their personal lives, both Kerouac and Ginsberg used references to organized religions. Like the literary works of their followers, "… by mid-decade, the novels and poems of Kerouac and Ginsberg were filled with references to Buddhism" (Prothero 218).

Hollo's poems often explore his inner world in an attempt to discover himself without adopting the method of any organized religion. In this regard, Hollo is much like Södergran whose poetic works aim at identifying herself with the universe; her metaphysical themes raise questions about the meaning of her presence in the world. In the poem "Hell," Södergran looks deeper into her psyche. She gives a glimpse of a subjective view of life: "Hell is constant and eternal" (81), exuding a pessimistic view of human existence. The point to note is that Södergran's exploration of truth is secular and subjective. No organized religion allows its followers to be pessimistic about existence, and that is why Södergran is a typical twentieth-century modernist Finnish poet. Likewise, Hollo's "man animal clock of blood" looks at the "man" and "animal" parts of our existence separately (28). To the poet, "the animal runs/ it eats, it sleeps/ it dies" while "in the dark man runs/ he stumbles he hurts/ his face" (28). Then comes the pessimistic view that includes the hardship of an individual's spiritual journey. The spiritual journey is eternal with no possible result – "he keeps on walking and wanting/ the beautiful goof walking/ and wanting . . ." (28). This pessimism of "wanting"—perception of a void in spirituality, is a twentieth-century characteristic of modern Finnish poetry, which was handed down to Hollo by his great Finnish predecessors and contemporaries as well.

In some of Hollo's poems that explore the meaning of human existence, scepticism and pessimism strongly assert that his spirituality does not fall into any category for which the Beat poets are known. It would be unjust to Hollo to confine him to any particular school of spiritual thought. This is where Hollo differs from the Beat poets and stands with Finnish poets. Like the early twentieth-century Finnish poets, Hollo draws inspiration from diverse sources of spiritual traditions, but this openness is a typical characteristic evident in other twentieth-century Finnish poets as well. Hollo does not preach any particular religion. Readers of some of his poems may feel that Hollo is a sceptic, but it would, of course, be an overgeneralization and simplification of his spiritual world. In the same way, finding any link between Hollo's spirituality and any organized religion would be equally flawed. His is a diverse and completely subjective spirituality. In "two gipsy poems," "god" is addressed casually, giving the aura of scepticism:

> hey, god, old buddy, why did you
> dump me here, & i
> built a house & the bailiffs
> came round & tore it down
> left me pisspoor (183)

It seems that Hollo, like the modernist Finnish poets, does not strictly care which school of spiritual philosophy he is cultivating in his literary work. That is why Hollo's spirituality is spontaneous, subjective, and ever evolving. Similarly, although Södergran engages with the concept of "Fate" and personifies it as an active force, her representation of it remains detached from any religious framework, such as Christianity or organized Paganism. Södergran's "Fate" is profoundly subjective and arises from her individual sensibility, rather than from the influence of any established religious belief. In the poem, "The Reflecting Fountain," Södergran's stance on religion is ambivalent,

> Fate declared: white you shall live or red you shall die!
> But my heart decided: red I shall live!
> Now I live in the land where all is yours,
> death never enters the realm (73)

Here, Södergran has the concept of "fate" from religion, but at the same time, has already revolted against fate like a modernist poet. This revolt arose from the newly found confidence of the Finnish in the early twentieth century as the nation was heading towards a new cultural identity. Södergran tends to be subjective in revealing her spiritual perception. Although a Beat in many other respects, Hollo remains a true Finn in his spiritual poetry.

Hollo is closer to Leino, too, in his "cosmic" view of the world. Like Hollo, Leino does not borrow any idea from any religion to build up the narrative of his "cosmic vision." Laitinen writes, referring to Leino's method of interpreting his spiritual quest, the poems of "Helkavirsiä 2" differ from those of the first series in that they are now more cosmic visions, in which the Sun, the Earth, and the stars, light, and darkness play a central part. The Sun, disappointed with the Earth, announces in the last poem: "Now I go to return no more" (116).

Hollo's language refers to individual spirituality, not a vehicle of an organized religious philosophy. A significant aspect of Hollo's spirituality is his language – his vivid use of imagery, metaphors, and his free-flowing style, which contributes to the immersive experience of his prolific spiritual world. His wit and wordplay, which are never cynical, create a bond between the seen and the unseen world. Hollo has hardly used lewd and vulgar language, as seen in the poetic works of the Beats, who used everyday language like slang and colloquial expressions. The language of the Beat poetry is direct and visceral without any effort to avoid obscenity. For example, Ginsberg writes in "Howl," "Who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy" Or "Who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer" (13–14). Ginsberg and Burroughs borrowed the idea of sexual freedom from Indian Tantric philosophy, which foregrounds the attainment of spirituality through physical pleasure. Kerouac was also inspired by "Tantric sexual pyrotechnics" while writing *Dharma Bum* (Calonne 47). Unlike many religious beliefs, Tantrism considers the physical world and its expression divine. Engaging with the physical world consciously and mindfully is a potential means to attain spiritual enlightenment. Moreover, Tantrism deems the mundane aspects of life as an integral part of a spiritual journey. Contrary to many religious beliefs, Tantrism says that human desires are holy, and they are the gifts of life

through the practices of which one can attain spiritual realization. This tantric view of life shapes the language, along with the poetic themes of the pioneering Beat writers. The sexual and spiritual themes in Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* were inspired by "Tantric sexual pyrotechnics" (Calonne 47). Hollo's spiritual expression is concise, suggestive, metaphoric, and indirect as far as language is concerned. He resorts to short forms of poems that perfectly match his suggestiveness and witty expression. The witty, aphoristic, and suggestive style is similar to that of Finnish poets like Leino and Södergran. For instance, the metaphoric expression of this particular poem by Södergran, charged with a spiritual realisation, may show where Hollo derives his ideas:

> Violate twilights I carry within me from my past
> Naked virgins play with galloping centaurs . . . (27)

Together, the metaphor, imagery, and rhythm make Södergran a remarkable modernist poet in Finnish literature. Hollo, being a born Finn and translator of Finnish literature, could not avoid the essential style of expression in his poems. In search of meaning in life, Hollo writes in his poem "Shudder,"

> bending
> over my own
> old cigarette smoking
> in the ashtray
> the fumes of it
> suddenly throw me back
> smiling
> into my old
> embrace (195)

This is Hollo's dominant style free from slang, obscene language, and vulgar suggestion. Moreover, unlike the Beats, Hollo gives a laconic expression that is indirect, suggestive, and purposefully mysterious. The past and present of the poet's life are not separated. The "fumes" of his cigarette may push him into the "embrace" of his past. The poet seems to be living in an undivided time where his past and present merge without any fine line. The Beat elements – jazz rhythm,

surrealism, and metaphysical concepts – are still present in this poem, except for the spirituality inherited from the Finnish tradition.

Hollo's spiritual Finnishness is reflected in his poems' direct and indirect allusions to his motherland. Besides being a translator of Finnish literature, Hollo manifests the literary ideology of twentieth-century Finnish writers – openness, detachedness, subjectivity, and secularity. Some poems like "finnish folk" (116), "grew up in finland" (174), "helsinki 1940" (1977), "Out of the Kalevala" (40) refer to his interest in his own culture as far as the direct references are concerned, and the spiritual veins of these poems are associated with. The poem "grew up in finland" traces out his identity – physical, emotional, and spiritual. The poem provides direct references to his parents – his father a "philosopher and writer/wrote the works of cervantes in finnish" while his mother "a talker and talker/all over the known world" (174). These are Hollo's physical identities while his spiritual identity – "a great golden light / strobed out from behind them"—he nourished throughout his life. Hollo remained a "writer," "philosophos" and "talker" from an early age to the last breath and carries the "light" of spirituality (174).

Of course, Hollo differs from the leading Beats like Kerouac or Ginsberg in terms of spirituality. Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs used their spirituality as a tool of rebellion against the culture of conformity. Prothero writes about the perspective from which the Beats started looking into spirituality: "A decade before the *death-of-God* movement in theology and the eastward turn in religion, the Beats were announcing the death of the gods of materialism and mechanization and looking to Buddhism for spiritual insight" (222). Hollo is also a rebel in his forms and content, but he is undoubtedly different from the early leading Beats. As a poet, Hollo felt committed to raising his voice against social injustice but not in the way the Beats criticized materialization, capitalization, and militarization of the United States. Hollo's primary concern was human existence, which had been defined from a variety of perspectives throughout his poetic career. A. Kingsley Weatherhead writes, "He is absorbed by the fairness of the passing moment and is self-conscious in his absorption and pleasure in the observation of it . . ." (159). In his long career, Hollo exercised his awareness of all "animate and inanimate objects" and tried to look deeper into how they forge a link with each other and with himself in particular (159). This unique and individual observation of life is a new religion

that evolved over the decades during Hollo's career. Kerouac practiced rituals of different religions like Buddhism and Islam in an effort to see the problems of his age through the lens of those organized religions. His *The Dharma Bums* (1958) and *Mexico City Blues* (1959) are examples of such efforts aimed at contemporary intellectual and spiritual patterns. By contrast, Hollo used his consciousness, perspective, and experience to explore his spiritual world– a tradition borrowed from the Finnish way of thinking. The spiritual quest that grew throughout his career is not a means of protesting against any dogma or philosophy, but his method of spiritual search is a religion itself.

Are Hollo's short poems a sign of his Finnish tradition? Hollo is known as a poet of the Beat tradition that began with a number of long poems revolutionizing the American poetry both in form and content. In contrast, Hollo initially built and then preserved a reputation for his short poems. Like his Finnish predecessors, Hollo squeezed his idea and inserted it into a group of words – aiming at expressing the maximum in a minimal compass. He is neither too frank nor excessively laconic – just "*lagom,*" a Swedish and Norwegian word meaning "just the right amount." Most of his poems dealing with spiritual questions consist "of single perception only," a trait not common in the poetry of the leading Beat poets (162).

Conclusion

Hollo is a typical Beat in his spirituality in that he remained open to every ideology, philosophy, and belief system without letting any of them dominate his thoughts. Hollo is not like those who let their "emotional life be run by Time Magazine," or like those who are "obsessed by Time Magazine" (Hollo 40–41). To be a Beat does not necessarily mean that one needs to adopt a particular religious view like Ginsberg or Burroughs. Instead, it means to be one not "frightened" of one's "natural ecstasy" (Hollo 22). The movement aims to be true to individual experience and perception of the world instead of being swept away by conventional artificial intellectual practices.

The Beats' culture of being true to "natural ecstasy" (Hollo 22) and prioritizing personal experience aligns Hollo with Finnish poets, in aspects of spirituality. More research on Hollo's personal life is needed to understand the dynamics of his

spirituality better. Extensive biographical study may reveal more minute and subtle facts about Hollo that may help literary scholars look deeper into his spirituality.

The concept of Beat is too broad to be defined. To Lee, the word "Beat" offers a wide range of meanings: "Beat seemed one of the wonders of the age: alternative, full of stir and passion, youth-orientated, spiritual while given over to sexual liberation, jazz-inclined and yielding a compendium of landmark texts" (5). Every Beat writer is uniquely a Beat. Hollo is a Finnish-American who brought with him the European tradition of poetry and fell in love with the Beats. American literature is diverse in that writers, like Hollo, coming from different cultures and countries have added their unique views and approaches to the existing spectrum of thoughts. Some of the writers, by dint of their uniqueness, can leave an impact on others, thus creating a legacy of a new school of thought or form. The pioneer Beat writers influenced many younger ones who helped the Beat Movement flourish. Thus, the question remains: can Hollo's unique blend of Finnish spirituality and Beat influences forge a lasting impact on contemporary poetic traditions?

Works Cited

Calonne, David Stephen. *The Spiritual Imagination of the Beats.* Cambridge UP, 2017.

Elkholy, Sharin N., editor. *The Philosophy of the Beats*. UP of Kentucky, 2012.

Envall, Markku. "The Period of Independence I, 1917–1960." *A History of Finland's Literature*, edited by George C. Schoolfield, U of Nebraska P, 1998, pp. 158–77.

Garton-Gundling, Kyle. "Beat Buddhism and American Freedom." *College Literature*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2017, pp. 200–30. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44507179.

Grace, Nancy M., and Tony Trigilio. "Troubling Classical and Buddhist Traditions in Diane Di Prima's *Loba*." *Hip Sublime: Beat Writers and the Classical Tradition*, edited by Sheila Murnaghan and Ralph M. Rosen, Ohio State UP, 2018, pp. 226–51. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/j.ctt2204rr5.15.

Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems 1947–1980. Harper and Row,* 1988.

Schoolfield, George C., editor. *A History of Finland's Literature*. U of Nebraska P, 1997.

Hollo, Anselm. *Jazz Poems*. Vista Books, 1963.

_____. *Sojourner Microcosms: New & Selected Poems, 1959–1977*. Blue Wind, 1977.

Kerouac, Jack. *Mexico City Blues*. Grove Press, 1959.

_____. *The Dharma Bums*. Penguin Books, 1986.

Laitinen, Kai. "The Rise of Finnish Language Literature, 1860–1916." *A History of Finland's Literature*, edited by George C. Schoolfield, U of Nebraska P, 1998, pp. 106–57.

Lee, A. Robert. *The Beats: Authorships, Legacies*. Edinburgh UP, 2019.

Leino, Eino. *The Salt of Pleasure: Twentieth-Century Finnish Poetry*. Translated by Aili Jarvenpa, New Rivers P, 1983.

Prothero, Stephen. "On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest." *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 84, no. 2, 1991, pp. 205–22.

Sarajas, Annamari. "Contemporary Finnish Writing." *Books Abroad*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1955, pp. 149–54. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/40094122.

Seppo, Juha. "The Freedom of Religion and Conscience in Finland." *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1998, pp. 847–72. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23920051.

Simonsuuri, Kirsti. "From Orality to Modernity: Aspects of Finnish Poetry in the Twentieth Century." *World Literature Today*, vol. 63, no. 1, 1989, pp. 52–54. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/40145048.

Södergran, Edith. *Love & Solitude: Selected Poems, 1916–1923*. Translated by Stina Katchadourian, Fjord P, 1991.

Tamony, Peter. "Beat Generation: Beat: Beatniks." *Western Folklore*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1969, pp. 274–77. *JSTOR,* doi.org/10.2307/1499225.

Thomas, Lorenzo. "'Communicating by Horns': Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement." *African American Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1992, pp. 291–98. *JSTOR,* doi.org/10.2307/3041856.

Van Cleef, Eugene. "Finnish Poetry—Nature's Mirror." *The Scientific Monthly*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1922, pp. 50–56. *JSTOR,* jstor.org/stable/6423.

Weatherhead, A. Kingsley. *The British Dissonance: Essays on Ten Contemporary Poets*. U of Missouri P, 1983.

Wordsworth, William. "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*." *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*. Edited by Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter, Broadview Press, 2008, pp. 1 – 34.

Sanad Singha Goswami (goragaibandha@gmail.com) holds an MA in English Literature from Uppsala University, Sweden. His research focuses on postcolonial studies, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, eco-criticism, and modernist literature. He has published several articles in reputed international journals and serves as an assistant professor of English working under the Islamic Arabic University, Bangladesh. ORCID https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7129-550X.