

Floral Poetics as Spiritual Vision and Ecological Conscience in Beat Poems: Allen Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" and Lenore Kandel's "Rose/Vision"

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Abstract. Flowers are natural organisms that have multipurpose values. Since they embody aesthetic and emotional overtones, they become pivotal images in any literary work such as poetry. Ecopetry is one field of environmental humanities that often depicts trees and flowers both as metaphorical and ecological images. As the latter imageries, the portrayal of trees and flowers often presents some issues about anthropogenic massive activities that cause havocs to the natural environment and any living creature that inhabits the environment. This article discusses floral poetics in Beat poems of Allen Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" and Lenore Kandel's "Rose/Vision" in which both poets use 'sunflower' and 'rose' as metaphors for a spiritual vision and for raising one's ecological conscience about the flowers and the physical environment in general contextualized in this present anthropocene era. Through some poetic techniques inspired by frenetic modern jazz and Buddhist teachings about immaterialism, both poets found their self-identity within the flowers and the spirit of the flowers within their selfhood. This symbiosis between themselves and the flowers signify interdependent relationship and therefore evokes one's ecological conscience to live in harmony with other life forms in sharing the natural life of the biotic community.

Keywords: anthropocene, ecopoetry, floral poetics, jazz, Buddhist teachings, selfhood, ecological conscience, biotic community

1 Introduction

Beat poetry as American literary works during the postwar era embodies ecological views. One of the debuts was Allen Ginsberg's "Howl", a long poem in Whitmanian poetic style that criticized moral and ecological degradation in the 1950s in America. Another Beat phenomenal poetic work that essentially critiqued the rapidly burgeoning consumerism of American people during the era was jazz poetic choruses of Jack Kerouac in his work *Mexico City Blues*. Both Ginsberg and Kerouac were the originators of the Beat Generation group of writers in the East Coast of America (Charters 1992; 2007). In "Howl" Ginsberg portrayed the moral and ecological problems of those young generation in America and of the industrially growing city of New York and its impacts on the social and natural environments. In his jazz poems in *Mexico City Blues*, Kerouac depicted human engrossment in consuming material things by revealing the fact about temporality and transience of the things influenced by Buddhist teachings (Kerouac 1959). Ginsberg's poem "Howl" for instance consists of four parts: Part I, II, III and Footnote to Howl, which all represent four biospheric elements. Part I with its long cataloguing strophes suggests water; Part II with its repetition of "Moloch" or a

satanic figure in the Bible represents fire; Part III with its use of repeated word 'rockland' as a hard and massive landscape thus points toward 'earth'; and the last part "Footnote to Howl" with its repeated word 'holy' implies 'air' or 'ether' as the highest realm among the other three material elements (see Ginsberg 1956; Yulianto 2017). Embodying these four nature basic elements, the configuration of this long poems with its four parts signifies a growing green plant that captures the sun's energy on "its path to entropy" and creates "a self-perpetuating and evolving system" (Rueckert 1996, 111). Furthermore, in one of his choruses "182nd Chorus", Kerouac mentioned 'rose' as one natural organism that has inherent values just like other beings that he named 'Buddhahood' or 'Budha Nature', a term he derived from Mahāyāna Buddhism (see Kerouac 1959, 182). Although Ginsberg and Kerouac and some other male compatriots who formerly initiated the Beat Generation as a group of young American writers (see Charters 1992), in fact this literary activism also consists of female writers. Some of these women became lovers of some of the male Beat writers. Indeed, the male Beat writers tended to predominate the Beatdom in their literary activities. But simultaneously, the women Beat writers had actively written poems and prose works during the 1950s, the 1960s, and early the 1970s. The first era was called the first-generation of Beat writings and the second era was the second-generation of the Beat movement. For instance, the first-generation women Beat writers such as Madeline Gleason, Helen Adams, Sheri Martinelli, Ruth Weiss, and Carol Bergé were those figures of the same era with Kerouac, Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs. Then, the second-generation Beat writers refer to poets and writers from the West Coast such as Philip Whalen, Lew Welch, Ted Joans, Gary Snyder, Philip Lamantia, Gregory Corso, Michael McClure, LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Several women Beat writers of this era include Joanna McClure, Lenore Kandel, Elise Cowen, Diane di Prima, Hettie Jones, Joanne Kyger, Joyce Johnson, and Brenda Frazer. Last, the third-generation Beat writers includes American writers who were born during the Second World War and they emerged as a mixed group rather than as a gender-based one. Several prominent writers of this third generation include Ed Sanders, Bob Dylan, Jerry Garcia, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Lester Bangs, and Laurie Anderson. Two famous women Beat writers were Janine Pommy Vega and Anne Waldman (Grace & Johnson 2004, 8-17). Kandel's poem "Rose" derived from her anthology *Word Alchemy* (1967) is one poem that exemplifies Beat search for new vision (Charters 1992, xix-xx). Simultaneously, this poem embodies ecological values since this portrays the interconnection between human and flower as a living organism in the natural world (Kandel 2012, 23). In comparison, Waldman's long poem "Fast Speaking Woman" written in the 1970s is a mantra poem that clearly reifies ecological aspects in the way the poet identifies a female self-identity with all human and nonhuman beings in the natural world (Waldman 1975).

Ecology is a timeless issue. The interconnection of living beings with the natural environment has taken place even from the prehistoric time. Any living being depends on the natural environment to get food and materials to produce goods they need to survive (Ellis 2018, 76-77). As times go by, human interdependence on resources in the natural environment is not just to survive and fulfill his needs. But in the anthropocene era humans then tend to objectify and overconsume the natural resources, so that this behavior causes some detrimental impacts on any life form and the physical environment (Leonard 2011). In the 1950s and the 1970s as the historical eras in the US as Ginsberg and Kandel's poems reflect, environmental issues had been a social concern. In the 1950s, America especially in New York City was growing into an industrial and cosmopolitan city. This era was also known as robustly growing consumerism of American society as the impacts of the Second World War (Cohen 2004, 62-109). Furthermore, America in the 1960s and early 1970s were the eras when there was a

third-wave consumerism, the emergence of market segmentation within mass marketing, the institutionalization of consumerism itself by the government by 34 Acts (Cohen 2004, 345-397). This consumerism also had several impacts on the natural environment (ibid 2004, 359) that lasted until the era of 1970s, in which people's overconsumption of goods produced a lot of garbage, polluted the land and marine habitats (Richards 2010, 39). This material overconsumption suggests human objectification of nonhuman things or human treatment of material things as just objects to indulge his desires. This becomes a problem since people often do not consume material goods to fulfill their needs but to satiate his craving for having new products when the old ones are still usable and functioning well. This phenomenon occurred in America in the 1950s in which 'segmenting the mass' was identical with the 'obsolescence' marketing strategy by regularly producing new goods and throwing away old ones. Manufacturers implemented this strategy also by regularly changing spare parts, colors, and models of any product (Cohen 2004, 293). This obsolescence strategy also takes place in any product that people use in today's era, for instance, handphones and other electronics (Leonard 2011, 161-163). This human objectification of material things tends to view the things merely as inanimate objects so that he/she can do whatever he/she wants towards the things. This includes his/her orientation to overconsume material things and to disregard inherent values in each material thing. This behavior is also the same when humans interact with plants and animals. Most people consider plants and animals as being inferior organisms and they tend to do everything they want to the nonhuman beings. Yet, in fact plants and animals equally have inherent values just like humans in terms of being living creatures that co-exist and depend on each other in the natural world. In Biology and Ecology, one will learn that plants and animals have essential roles to create the biotic life, the interconnection between human, nonhuman beings and the natural environment. Yet, most people do not realize the values of plants including flowers to the planetary life and to the survival of human beings itself. In western and eastern cultures, flowers still become objects of anthropogenic activities such as social and cultural events. Only few people who realize that flowers can be a model of human thoughts and feelings. Some of these people include Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Lenore Kandel who used sunflower and rose as the major image in their poems. They make these flowers as a model of the ways they live as poets and as human individuals in the material world. Their portrayal of the flowers indicates an ecological relation, the interconnection between them as human beings and the flowers as the organisms of the natural environment.

This brief article discusses Ginsberg's poem, "Sunflower Sutra" and Kandel's "Rose/Vision" as a kind of floral poetics. What I mean by the floral poetics is the way the poets organize the floral subject into their poems not as an object but as a subject in identifying themselves with the flowers. "Sunflower Sutra" is one poem in Ginsberg's anthology *Howl* that was written in the 1950s, while "Rose/Vision" is one of Kandel's poems in her anthology *Word Alchemy* written in 1967. So there was around one decade from Ginsberg's era to Kandel's in terms of Beat scholarship. Being different in subject and Beat style, these two poems share a major affinity, in which both use flowers as a subject and treat them as the image of their search for a new vision and of ecological interconnectedness. Dealing with this topic, this article has two questions: first, what floral poetics do Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" and Kandel's "Rose/Vision" portray as their search of spiritual vision? Second, how does their floral poetics serve as an agent for raising ecological conscience? In discussing and explaining these questions, I will use some books about ecopoetics, vegetal poetics, flowers and Beat poetry (Rueckert 1996; Felstiner 2009; Siewers 2011; Tompkins & Bird 1989; Buchmann 2016; Maher 2017; Charters 1992; Grace & Johnson 2004).

Regarding previous researches on similar work and related topics, I have searched some scholarly works on the internet that discuss Ginsberg and Kandel's poems, but could not find many. Some of these are "Manishevitz and Sake, the Kaddish and Sutras: Allen Ginsberg's Spiritual Self-Othering" an article by Craig Svonkin (2010); "Matter and Mind: Cultural Ecology and Elemental Poetics" an article by Hubert Zapf (2016); "Creative Environments: The Geo-Poetics of Allen Ginsberg" an article by Alexandre Ferrere (2020); "Lenore Kandel's *The Love Book*: Psychedelic Poetics, Cosmic Erotica, and Sexual Politics in the Mid-sixties Counterculture", a book chapter by Ronna C. Johnson (2004: 89-104). The three articles about Ginsberg's poems do not particularly talk about his floral poetics but his spiritual poetics. Svonkin for instance focuses his discussion on Ginsberg's long poem, "Kaddish" and does not talk about "Sunflower Sutra" (2010: 166-191). Zapf briefly discusses plants and vegetation in Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" and also mentions Ginsberg's use of the flower as a criticism against America's excessive industrial activities (2016: 180-181). So in this case, Zapf's argument corresponds with mine. But in his article, he does not particularly spiritualize the sunflower as a metaphor for the poet's mind consciousness but anthropomorphizes it as the poet's "hidden potential of beauty and vitality". In his article, Ferrere discusses Ginsberg's geo poetics rather than his floral poetics/ecopoetics. This geo-poetics refers to a physical landscape rather than to its individual living organisms. Ferrere uses this geo-poetic analysis of Ginsberg's major poems in the poet's relish in travelling from one place to another. In one part of his argument, he mentions Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" in which he interprets "the old locomotive" described in the poem as "an industrial vision of America" that forms "a big sunflower" (2020: 9). Though Ferrere's argument about this also touches upon ecopoetic vision when he identifies Ginsberg and Kerouac's disenchantment of nature (2009: 9), he does not particularly talk about "sunflower" as one image that represents natural living organisms in general and the poet's spiritual vision in particular. But there is a noteworthy argument that he states that what he means by Ginsberg's psychogeographical aspect is the poet's collage of the outside and the inside world and also the poem's referentiality to the frontier (2020: 10). Johnson's article on Kandel's poems does not deal with her poem "Rose/Vision" but with poems in *The Love Book*, in which some of them portray lovemaking scenes and use sexually vulgar words (Johnson 2004, 89-104).

2 Methodology

In writing this article, I've used qualitative method since the data are in words. First, I read the poems several times and then figure out floral poetics the poems reveal. Second, I contextualize the floral poetics with ecological views as ecopoetry deals with by referring to some meanings of ecopoetry and what ecopoems describe in general. Accordingly, I've used ecopoetics as one literary approach in analyzing and explaining floral poetics in the poems. In fact, ecopoetry as environmental humanities in general does not have theoretical concepts just like other literary approaches or criticisms such as new criticism, reader response theory, cultural materialism and myth criticism. But ecopoetry as literary ecology in general emerges as a kind of daily practice that scholars of environmental humanities encourage readers in particular and people in general to understand and practise in their dailies (Slovic 2010). In doing this research, first I read the poems several times to understand and identify what floral poetics the poems as Beat works reveal. Second, I analyze ecological aspects by correlating the floral images with the impacts they have on evoking readers love for plants in general and flowers in particular. Last but not least, I analyze the floral images as poetics of building human selfhood and his ecological conscience in living with other life forms in the biosphere.

3 The Beat Generation

This movement began with an informal talk among some college students of Columbia University, New York. Among them were Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Lucien Carr. Then, another person, a graduate from Harvard University, William S. Burroughs joined them. They shared with each other about their fondness of writing while discussing their favorite writers who further inspired them to write their experimental works. The word “beat” itself came from jazz musicians and hustlers after the World War II as “a slang term that means down and out, poor and exhausted”. A jazz musician named Mezz Mezzrow modified the word into some terms such as “dead beat” or “beat-up”. Then in 1944 a Times Square hustler, Herbert Huncke said the word “beat” to Kerouac and his friends. In Huncke’s argot, this word meant “exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up and out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, and streetwise.” Kerouac was fascinated by the tone of the word “beat” as Huncke pronounced it. There was a “melancholy sneer” in Huncke’s voice, which evoked Kerouac to later identify the word with his selfhood and further with his literary activism. Kerouac then defined the word as “characters of a special spirituality who didn’t gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization” (Charters 1992, xvii-xviii). This movement began in New York City as the East Coast area in the US. Inspired and fascinated by jazz musicians in NYC such as Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, the Beat poets such as Kerouac and Ginsberg adopted jazz elements in their poems (Charters 2007, 555-559). One example is Kerouac’s *Mexico City Blues* and Ginsberg’s “Howl” (see Yulianto 2017). Kerouac for instance, embodied these elements of modern jazz called bebop in his nine spontaneous prose methods and 30 statements of belief & technique for modern prose (Charters 2007, 483-485).

In the end of 1950s, Ginsberg and Kerouac went to San Francisco where they met their friends, several young poets affiliated with San Francisco Renaissance movement. They were such as Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Philip Lamantia, Gary Snyder, Gregory Corso, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. They then mingled and had a jam poetry reading called “The Six Gallery Reading” in San Francisco on October 7, 1955. It was called ‘the six gallery’ because there were six of them who read their poems for a crowd of young audience in the studio. Among them were Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and the host and Master of Ceremony, a poet named Kenneth Rexroth. Meanwhile, Jack Kerouac who was also present at the event did not read his poem but gave yells to encourage them (Miles 2006, 165-166).

The Beat Generation was in fact a non-sexist movement. In general, the Beat Generation was an ‘underground’ movement since most of the writers criticized the social and political situation and the government during the postwar era (Charters 1992, xv-xxxvi). Though it was male writers who formerly initiated and popularized the movement, several woman writers had also participated in the writing activism. These woman Beat writers were somewhat ‘subaltern’ group compared with the male writers. Yet, most of them similarly embraced Beat vision especially Buddhist values in the way they view the phenomenal world as being an interdependent relation between one thing and another and devoid of true essence. There were about three generations of these women Beat writers who came to the Beat scholarship along with the male writers (see the introduction above). There were some reasons why the women Beat writers co-arose: first, they expressed their voices through memoirs that they considered representing Beat culture, writing, and ethics; second, they in fact produced a more numerous number of works, in which many of them were out of print and unavailable; third, they tried to

shake out the natures of Beat writing and culture with their own ways (Johnson 2004, 3-4). The first generation of women Beat writers for instance tried to “revise or escape academic and traditional literary models.” The second generation of them had a “radical critique of traditional literary genres and forms” that subordinated women. They rejected a feminist concept of Betty Friedan, “feminist mystique” in the 1950s since this concept tended to be skeptical by pointing out repressive gender codes and female conformity. The third generation of women Beat writers continued Beat movement with their support of hippie counterculture and progressive activist movements. These writers strove for women’s freedom and autonomy through their feminist struggle (Johnson 2004, 9-14).

4 Ecopoetics

The term “ecopoetics” consists of two words ‘eco’ and ‘poetics’. The word ‘eco’ comes from ‘ecology’ or the interconnection between human and nonhuman beings and the natural environment (Begon, et.al, 2006, xi). The word ‘ecology’ came from the Greek words *oikos* which means ‘home’ or ‘household’ and *logos* or ‘word’. It was Ernst Haeckel, a German zoologist who firstly coined the word *ecology* in 1869 (ibid., 2006, xi; Howarth 1996, 72). Then the word ‘poetics’ came from a Greek word *poesis* that means ‘forming and shaping’ suggests praxis or practice in writing poetry including the use of language and sound devices (Siewers 2011, 108). *Ecopoetics* is a part of the bigger field called environmental humanities, ecocriticism, or literary ecology (Glotfelty 1996, xv-xxxvii). The term ‘ecocriticism’ for instance came from the Greek words, *oikos* and *kritis*, which in tandem means “house judge” referring to ecocritic as a person who “judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature” (Howarth 1996, 69). An ecocritic, Jonathan Bate defined *ecopoetics* as an expression “which may effect an imaginative reunification of mind and nature” (Siewers 2011, 108). John Felstiner, a late professor in English at Stanford University in his essay once said that what ecopoems should have is their ability to shape one’s “changing consciousness of the world around us” and can reveal “the vital signs and warning signs” of human inhabitation on earth. Felstiner differentiated between environmental and ecological poems, in which the former is focused on surroundings from human perspective that has impacted on conservation of natural resources. In comparison, the latter term is reliant on a “biosystem of interacting organisms” that everybody should preserve for the sake of their sustainability (Felstiner 2009, 4-5). Furthermore, William Rueckert, an ecocritic in his essay argued that ecopoems are stored energy and verbal equivalent of fossil fuels. Yet, the stored energy of poems is renewable that comes from creative imagination as this is analogous to all natural energies that come from the sun and depend upon “a continuous flow of sunlight” (Rueckert 1996, 108-109). Then, by referring to Ian McHarg’s notion, another ecocritic, Rueckert compares poems with green plants that live among humans. Again he analogizes poems to natural phenomena: poets are suns and poems are green plants since both poems and plants clearly capture energy from the sun to entropy, create “a self-perpetuating and evolving system, creativity and community” (Rueckert 1996, 111).

5 Findings And Discussion

Allen Ginsberg’s “Sunflower Sutra” has some affinities with Kandel’s “Rose/Vision” that both depict the flowers as embodying spiritual values rather than material ones. Ginsberg’s poems might have been inspired by William Blake’s poem, “Ah, Sun-flower!” since in the early 1940s, Ginsberg experienced a spiritual illumination of his vision of Blake’s reciting of

the poem (Morgan 2006, 103; Morgan 2008, 47). The difference is in the year, in which Ginsberg's poem came from his anthology written in the mid-1950s, Kandel's poem belonged to her anthology written in 1967. The lapsed decade between the poems does not obliterate their Beat poetics inspired by Buddhist teachings and modern jazz. In the Introduction of her poetry anthology, Lenore Kandel began with a statement about nonconformity of poetry since it is "the manifestation/translation of a vision, an illumination, an experience." Language of poetry then should not be comfortable or safe but should convey truth and vision (Kandel 2012, xvii-xix).

5.1. Flower Poetics as A Search of Spiritual Vision

In terms of form, Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" is like his poem "Howl", in which each long strophe is written in an interlocking typography—one line begins from the left margin and next lines come after in indented edging. This typography typifies Ginsberg's poems that embody Beat spiritual overtones since each long strophe beginning from the left margin and continuing with the indented ones Ginsberg called 'fixed base' (Miles 2006, 154) signify a spontaneous wave of speech-thought (ibid., 2006, 153). This is the trajectory Buddhist monks encourage their disciples in interacting with the external phenomena since they have insight into their insubstantiality (Rinpoche & Lharampa 2012, 39-42). This long speech-thought also exemplifies spontaneity of modern jazz with its asymmetric, frenetic and fast beat and rhythm as the musicians' spiritual awareness of material temporality and volatility (Allen 2001, 18-62). This poem has 22 long strophes in a confessional form; these following quotations are strophes 1-6—

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and
sat down under the huge shade of a Southern
Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over the
box house hills and cry.
Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron
pole, companion, we thought the same thoughts
of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed, sur-
rounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of
machinery.
The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun
sank on top of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that
stream, no hermit in those mounts, just our-
selves rheumy-eyed and hungover like old bums
on riverbank, tired and wily.
Look at the Sunflower, he said, there was a dead gray
shadow against the sky, big as a man, sitting
dry on top of a pile of ancient sawdust—
--I rushed up enchanted—it was my first sunflower,
memories of Blake—my visions—Harlem
and Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes
Greasy Sandwiches, dead baby carriages, black
treadless tires forgotten and unretreaded, the
poem of the riverbank, condoms & pots, steel
knives, nothing stainless, only the dank muck

and the razor-sharp artifacts passing into the
past—(Ginsberg 1959, 35-36)

Just like in “Howl”, Ginsberg uses juxtaposed images in this poem, which seem to be bizarre and unfamiliar that illustrate the influence of Paul Cézanne’s cubist paintings on his poems (Miles 2006, 153; Morgan 2008, 131). So the images such as ‘the tincan banana dock’, ‘gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery’, ‘a pile of ancient sawdust’, ‘Hells of the Eastern rivers’, ‘Joes Greasy Sandwiches’, ‘razor-sharp artifacts’ (Ginsberg 1959, 35). The event each strophe describes beginning with the “narrator’s walk on the banks of the tincan banana dock”, “Jack Kerouac’s sitting beside him”, “the oily water on the river mirroring the red sky”, “a dead gray shadow against the sky”, “the memory of his first sunflower, Blake and Harlem”, “Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes Greasy Sandwiches” exemplify sketching of scenes, the jazz writing technique he learnt from Jack Kerouac, a kind of spontaneous writing that captures any event at a real time (Charters 1995, 356-357). Then, the next scenes that follow these sketched scenes typify Ginsberg’s cataloging of the juxtaposed events. Each of the strophes also describes an interdependent relation between one thing and another, a kind of causality, which refers to what Buddhism teaching calls “conditioned arising” or “interdependent arising” (Fischer-Schreiber, et. al., 2010, 172). In the first strophe for instance, the narrator sat down under “the huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset” but then he cried. This shows that the huge Southern Pacific locomotive while literally suggesting a real locomotive of the Southern Pacific, this figuratively implies a life burden since this causes him to cry. Ferrere called this “old locomotive” as a metaphor for “an industrial vision of America” (2020: 9). Therefore, there is a cause and effect relation between the former physical scene and latter emotional state. In the second strophe, the narrator illustrates how he and his friend Jack Kerouac sat on “a busted rusty iron pole”, which shows an unpleasant condition with the phrase ‘rusty iron pole’. Then, the next scene again indicates their gloomy and poignant emotional state living in a modern life full of high buildings and machines as he metaphorizes in “the gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery” as a causal factor. In the third strophe the narrator sketches “the oily water on the river” that the phrase suggests an oil pollution on the river. The phrase “the red sky” similarly implies “miasma” or an unpleasant atmosphere in the city. This oily river then becomes a cause and its effect is that there was no fish in the river, no hermit in those mountains, but only he and his friend who were felt dreary and exhausted because of the impaired physical landscape. In the fourth strophe, the narrator first uses the image “the Sunflower” with upper case letter that figuratively stands for something else besides the actual flower. This capitalized *S* in this Sunflower then corresponds with William Blake’s poem, “Ah, Sun-flower”, the poem that inspired the poet and gave him a spiritual illumination. In the fifth strophe, he portrays this sunflower clairvoyance more; he had a vision of Blake reciting the poem when he was living in Harlem, New York City (Morgan 2006, 103). In terms of content, the phrases “a dead gray shadow against the sky” and “a pile of ancient sawdust” are causal metaphors for a dreary life and their concomitant dejected feeling that serve as the impacts. The image “ancient sawdust” refers to the narrator’s memories of William Blake, his spiritual figure but also to his visions. These last images depict the narrator’s Beat vision of immaterialism as their criticism against human’s material-oriented life and its impacts on the physical environment. The image “sunflower” signifies another vision of durability, enthusiasm, strength, loyalty, but also love that they want to embody within their selfhood. In the sixth strophe, the narrator sketches several material scenes that again do not describe pleasant but downbeat atmosphere that causes their despondent feeling. The word ‘not’ and the meaning of absence in some words

such as ‘treadless’, ‘unretreaded’, ‘nothing stainless’ suggest more about the absence of life essence rather than the insubstantiality of true nature of any material phenomena in view of Buddhist practices. Then the images such as “condoms & pots”, “steel knives” criticizes people’s overuse or people’s haphazard throwaway habit of these goods during that era. Then the images “the dank muck” and “the razor-sharp artifacts” figuratively illustrate the narrator’s sharp pang of misery because of those unpleasant things in his social environment.

In the next six strophes, strophes 7 to 12, the narrator describes the sunflower more in which the sunflower does not refer to something outside himself but his own self. This floral image does not particularize on his physical self but more on his psychic or emotional endurance just as the real sunflower that always durably blooms whose flower petals do not easily fall out—

and the gray Sunflower poised against the sunset,
 crackly bleak and dusty with the smut and smog
 and smoke of olden locomotives in its eye—
corolla of bleary spikes pushed down and broken like
 a battered crown, seeds fallen out of its face,
 soon-to-be-toothless mouth of sunny air, sun-
 rays obliterated on its hairy head like a dried
 wire spiderweb,
leaves stuck out like arms out of the stem, gestures
 from the sawdust root, broke pieces of plaster
 fallen out of the black twigs, a dead fly in its ear,
Unholy battered old thing you were, my sunflower O
 my soul, I loved you then!
The grime was no man’s grime but death and human
 locomotives,
all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad
 skin, that smog of cheek, that eyelid of black
 mis’ry, that sooty hand or phallus or protuber-
 ance of artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—
 modern—all that civilization spotting your
 crazy golden crown—(Ginsberg 1959, 36)

In the seventh strophe, the narrator describes how the gray Sunflower stained by “the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives” kept blooming though the sun was going down. This strophe represents how he and his friend who were getting ageing because of mundane worldly affairs from the world that is getting older kept standing tall and shining despite their age in getting older. As a Beat spiritual vision, the phrase “the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives” also serves as their criticism against human’s materialism-oriented mind that Buddhist teachings encourage Buddhist disciples to also realize and do without in their daily activities. In the eight strophe, the narrator again identifies him and his friend with the parts of the sunflower, “corolla of bleary spikes”, “a battered crown”, “seeds that fell out of its face”. Since the identification has a dreary sense through the words ‘bleary’, ‘battered’, ‘fallen seeds’, this illustration tends to be dystopian. Yet, behind all this murky depiction, he conveys a vision of life opposite to what he has portrayed—being a robust and vibrant sunflower no matter how hard it was. This is like what another contemporaneous Beat writer, John Clellon Holmes said to have “will to believe, even in the

face of an inability to do so in conventional terms” (Charters 1992, xx). The last phrases “soon-to-be-toothless mouth of sunny air” and “sunrays obliterated on its hairy head like a dried wire spiderweb” are also metaphors for the lethargic state and lack of vibrancy of him and his friend. These phrases serve as self-ironizing statements that reveal the impacts of fruitless and loveless modernity. The phrase “toothless mouth of sunny air” suggests lack of vigor in their vibrancy. Then, the last phrase “a dried wire spiderweb” exemplifies the rampant but unfriendly modern life.

In the ninth strophe, he describes the leaves of the sunflower growing somewhat wildly that they “broke pieces of plaster that fell out of the black twigs”. This clause is a metaphor to describe the narrator and his friend’s counteraction against the conventional norms as they found them incongruous. This represents their search for a new vision that meant “to look at the world in a new light, in a meaningful way, and to find valid values” (Charters 1992, xviii). The last phrase “a dead fly in its ear” is also a self-ironizing metaphor to describe their dispirited emotional state because of the inhospitable modernity. In the tenth strophe, he apostrophizes and ironizes him and his friend as “the unholy battered old sunflower. The floral image here then is a metaphor for their spirit and vision itself that has been impaired by the rampantly growing modern life. Yet, he somehow loves his vision though most individuals in their society have obfuscated it with the craze for material things. In the eleventh strophe, he uses the images “death and human locomotives” as “grime” that impair people in common. The word “death” here does not mean one’s physical death but more on one’s spiritual death and the image “human locomotives” stand for human’s mind. In the twelfth strophe, he uses the catalogs of phrases that all contain grim and sceptical senses with the images “that dress of dust”, “darkened railroad skin”, “smog of cheek”, “eyelid of black mis’ry”, “sooty hand or phallus or proturbance of artificial worse-than-dirt.” These phrases all describe the dreary sides of modernity. The last catalogue of images “industrial—modern—all that civilization spotting your crazy golden crown—“ clearly illustrates the narrator and his friend’s confrontation with the modern civilization. The phrase “crazy golden crown” refers to the yellow corolla of the sunflower or the narrator and his friend’s spiritual conscience. In the fifteenth and twenty-second strophes, the narrator evokes his spirit from being downbeat by entertaining and emboldening himself—

A perfect beauty of a sunflower! a perfect excellent
lovely sunflower existence! a sweet natural eye
to the new hip moon, woke up alive and excited
grasping in the sunset shadow sunrise golden
monthly breeze!

--We’re not our skin of grime, we’re not our dread
bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we’re all
beautiful golden sunflowers inside, we’re bles-
sed by our own seed & golden hairy naked ac-
complishment-bodies growing into mad black
formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our
eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive
riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sit-
down vision. (Ginsberg 1959, 37-38)

In the 15th strophe, the narrator calls himself and his friend “a perfect excellent lovely sunflower”; he encourages himself to “wake up alive” and to be “excited about grasping sunrise golden monthly breeze out of the sunset shadow”. This metaphor means that he and his friend have to be enthusiastic and optimistic in reaching the brightness out of the grim and depressing moments. In the 22nd strophe, he and his friend once again reassert their identity as being identical with the “beautiful golden sunflowers”. The first line re-confirms that their identity is not “skin of grime” or “their dread bleak dusty imageless locomotive” but “beautiful golden sunflowers inside”. This self-identification with the sunflower rather than with ‘grime’ and ‘bleak dusty imageless locomotive’ reveals their finding of the new vision. What he means by “golden sunflowers inside” indicates that the sunflowers here are just metaphors; these then mean spiritual conscience or in Buddhism refer to intuitive-mind (Goddard 1994, 307) or mind consciousness that is not much entangled in mundane and material affairs. Furthermore, in the next line he contrasts “these golden sunflowers” with “mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset,” in which the latter phrase suggests unenlightened or discriminating-mind (Goddard 1994, 307) or mind consciousness that still orientates to the material world and is much engrossed in material affairs.

In her poem “Rose/Vision”, Kandel uses the image ‘rose’ as a model of her identity as one of woman Beat writers. One reason why she chose ‘rose’ instead of other flowers is probably because the flower has beauty (its colorful and numerous petals and fragrance) but also power (its thorns). She describes the numerous petals of rose as parts of the flower that embody several visions which she identifies with in her aesthetic vision as a woman Beat poet. In form, this poem has 26 lines divided into a symphony consisting of 4 stanzas. One major feature of this poem as a Beat poem is that it does not use any punctuation but is written in enjambment or run-on lines. This suggests spontaneity influenced by jazz rhythm and by Buddhist teaching about spontaneity in the way one realizes the insubstantiality of any material phenomena. In the first stanza, she depicts the rose petals as something leading to insensibility—

Permit me the concept of the rose
the perfumed labyrinth
that leads one petal at a time
into oblivion’s heart
(Kandel 2012, 23)

The phrase “the perfumed labyrinth” refers to numerous layers of the rose petals. In content, this labyrinth image figuratively also suggests one’s mind that also has various strands that often go insensibly. In the second stanza, she again describes the rose as a representation of her as one woman Beat writer who has visions just like her male Beat companions—

There are visions within the silence of the rose
Here in these velvet rooms accessible to dream
I open my eyes into darkness
until my vision of itself ignites the air
and I not only see but am all possibilities
of time and space and change
From which there is no place to hide, no
season of serenity, no solid ground

and Mother Chaos grips my trembling hand
and with *my* fingers tears the veil from her head
and shows me my own pale face
against the sparkling void
and I am bereft of explanations
(Kandel 2012, 23)

The phrase “the silence of the rose” figuratively refers to “silence of the woman Beat writers” who were somewhat subordinated by the domination of the male Beat writers in literary activism. The phrase “these velvet rooms” in the sixth line literally refer to the soft rose petals and figuratively to “vacant spaces”, the atmosphere that in Buddhist teaching suggests the insubstantiality of any material phenomena. She first realized the vacuity as “darkness” but then she found “the air” that means “lightness” or “enlightenment” out of the vacuity. Being enlightened by the vacuity, she “not only see” but blends into “all possibilities of time and space and change” herself. Being in this situation, she feels “no place to hide, no season of serenity, no solid ground”, which all describe the situation of being in the vacuity. The next line “Mother Chaos grips my trembling hand” figuratively points to the material world that still grips her in her being enlightened in the vacuity. But next she resumed her awakening to the true nature of the material phenomena and felt calm in the “sparkling void” or the vacuity in which she “is bereft of explanations” or to surrender her ego-hood. In the fourth stanza, she identifies with the rose itself and no longer objectifies or detaches from it—

I am at the turning of the labyrinth
and there is only one direction
and it surrounds me
and I am at the turning of the labyrinth
and there is only one way to go
(Kandel 2012, 23)

In the stanza quoted above, the narrator describes how she compares herself with the rose petals where she has got the insight into the true nature of material phenomena and has been enlightened accordingly. The rose here then corresponds with the sunflower in Ginsberg’s poem. Both flowers becomes models of the Beat poets’ self-identification and search of spiritual vision they felt to be lacking in themselves and in individuals in general because of the overwhelming modernity and its all mechanized practices. The narrator asserts this vision in the last stanza of the poem as she found the rose petals to bring her to infinite truth—

The rose contains infinity, I hold the rose
and walk within the velvet tunnels of its dream
there is no way to stop or stand
and there is only one way to go
(Kandel 2012, 23)

The image “infinity” refers to vacuity of material phenomena and the phrase “the velvet tunnels of its dream” does, too. The phrase “the velvet tunnels” describe the smooth and unlimited quality of the vacuity itself. The image “its dream” suggests somewhat illusory and bizarre state of the vacuity. The last two lines are repetition that describe the narrator’s growing awareness of the true nature of the material phenomena. In world histories, people

associate flowers and their colors with various emotional and psychological states. For instance, white flowers such as jasmine suggest purity; orange-colored flowers mean virginity; red flowers connote ardent love. In a like manner, roses and their various colors have multifarious meanings. Red roses for instance suggest passion; pink roses happiness; yellow roses mean infidelity and unconscious beauty (Buchmann 2016, 210-213). Ginsberg's sunflower in yellow color and Kandel's rose in uncertain color are therefore floral organisms that become mediums for re-asserting their search of a more spiritual foothold in living the life in the American material-oriented culture and in finding hope to rejuvenate it.

5.2. Floral Poetics as An Agent of Raising Ecological Conscience

The flowers 'sunflower' and 'rose' Ginsberg and Kandel use in their poems exemplify some kinds of flowers that some poets might have used in their poems, such as the British Romantic poets, William Blake in "Ah, Sun-flower!" and Robert Burns, "A Red, Red Rose" (Appelbaum 1996, 7; Ricks 1999, 336). Ginsberg and Kandel's identification with the flowers signify human awareness of the values of the flowers as spiritual metaphors and ecological organisms. Buddhism teachings about the insubstantiality of material phenomena are in the ultimate and spiritual sense. Meanwhile, in a conventional sense, any living being lives with and always needs material things to fulfill their daily needs for food and others in the material world. Buddhism itself teaches any individual to cherish any life form including any material thing he/she consumes for daily necessities. Even Buddhist teachings respect any object that humans in general consider inanimate things such as stone, pebble, soil, lichen and other related things. They believe in inherent values of each material thing that they call "Buddha Nature" (Abe 1985, 40). In modern environmental humanities or what is known as ecocriticism or literary ecology, ecocritics and environmental humanists begin to evoke public's awareness of the values of any life form on earth. Like the American predecessors of transcendentalist poets of the 18th century such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau (Buell 1993, 97-120) and the 18th century American naturalist, John Muir (see *The Complete Works of John Muir* 2019) and even from ecological visions of eastern spiritualities such as Hinduism and Buddhism, the recent ecocritics and environmental humanists again try to raise public's understanding of conserving their natural environment through literary works.

Ecopoetry and ecopoets is one of the related fields that raises this awareness through poetry. An American author, philosopher, naturalist, and ecologist in the 1930s, Aldo Leopold pointed out some ecological principles such as biotic community and raised people's awareness to have what he called "ecological conscience" (Meine 2013, 172-176). Furthermore, an American environmentalist and ecocritics in the postmodern era, John Felstiner argues that poetry can shape one's changing consciousness of the world and raise one's awareness of conserving the natural environment including its resources in one's reliance on them to fulfill his/her necessities (Felstiner 2009, 4-5). Then, another postmodern ecocritic such as William Rueckert more specifically compares poems with renewable stored energy and green plants (Rueckert 1996, 108-111). Without specifically referring to Leopold's, Felstiner's, or Rueckert's notions about the power of ecopoems in raising one's ecological awareness, I argue that what ecological conscience that Ginsberg and Kandel aim to raise is their love for the flowers as being living organisms that co-exist with them in the natural world. This conscience also refers to their humility in cherishing natural beauty of the flowers and in identifying themselves with the flowers. This certainly also includes their awareness of

inherent values within the flowers, the organic life inside each petal and part of the flower. The numerous petals in rose and the vibrant color and endurance of petals in sunflower produce energy that according to Rueckert capture energy from the sun to entropy and create a self-perpetuating and evolving system for the selves of Ginsberg and Kandel. The beauty and strength of the sunflower and rose create creativity and community for them. Ginsberg's use of the word "sutra" after sunflower indicates his way of domesticating the flower as a sutra to be chanted by the community of Buddhist adherents. Then, Kandel's use of the word "vision" after 'rose' also anthropomorphizes the flower to be a model of human's spiritual vision that means the vision of human community in general.

In "Sunflower Sutra", Ginsberg contrasts "sunflower" as an original natural beauty with machinery culture as anthropogenic products. The flower blooming among the grime, smut, smog and smoke of the machines signifies the remaining natural treasure out of the urbanized and modernised physical environment. He describes the surging modernity as dreary things that menace or disturb the existence of the sunflower itself. He says this for example in strophes 13-14—

And those bleary thoughts of death and dusty loveless
eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the
home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar
bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards
of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely
tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what
more could I name, the smoked ashes of some
cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the
milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs
& sphincters of dynamos—all these
entangled in your mummied roots—and you there
standing before me in the sunset, all your glory
in your form! (Ginsberg 1959, 36-37)

The cataloguing of images in the first line of strophe 13 describes the narrator's and his friend's state of mind that is bleak and depressed by the robustly growing modernity. They feel that their selfhood as the sunflower to be withered by, to be grounded not in the compacted soil but in "home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely tincans with their rusty tongues alack". The next juxtaposed phrases "the smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows" and "the milky breasts of cars" are Ginsberg's several typical images that often mention genitals. These sex-related images also ironize their physically jeopardized state by the anthropogenic machine-related activities. These "crackly bleak" scenes he has described reveal ecological crisis in America during the mid-1950s. His distress by the terrible impacts of the industrial and mechanized life unveils the fact that people during the era had massive activities in the mechanized industries. This excessive industrial practice means an exploitation of natural resources as the major commodity and material of any industrial product. The over-extraction of the sources certainly means to damage ecological balance of any life form and to impair biodiversity in the natural world. He contrasts the "sunflower" with the machine industries in which the former is a naturally born organism and a divine beauty, while the latter are man-made inorganic products such he says in strophes 18-19—

You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a
sunflower!
And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me
not! (Ginsberg 1959, 38)

The image “locomotive” in strophe 18 represents any anthropogenic machine product and “Locomotive” in strophe 19 with capital L suggests human’s material-oriented mind. This juxtaposition between the man-made product and the natural organism reveals the fact about the duality of matter and spirit, body and mind, human culture and Mother Nature. Both concepts co-exist rather than one concept predominates over the other. The knowledge about this duality will evoke one’s ecological conscience that one has to cherish any life form and natural resources in the natural environment since only this human caring behavior and manner that will keep the biotic sustainability for the sake of human and nonhuman living. In the last strophe, the narrator reasserts his self-identification with the sunflower, which suggests his ecological conscience in cherishing the flower as being a self-perpetuating subject rather than a self-disheartening natural object and embodying good qualities of the flower within himself—“we’re all beautiful golden sunflowers inside, we’re blessed by our own seed & golden hairy naked accomplishment-“. The images “seed” and “golden hairy naked accomplishment” are not only poetic metaphors for Beat vision of germinating consciousness in a spiritual sense, but these also have ecological sense since these refer to the sunflower. Biologically, the sunflower originates from seed and its blossoming depends on sunlight, rain, and air. This means there is an interdependent relation between the sunflower and the basic elements in the natural environment as an ecological system. The formation of seed similarly originates from atoms that interdependent upon each other and form seed because of the four basic elements (Close 2009, 25).

In Kandel’s “Rose/Vision”, the narrator’s self-identification with the rose exemplifies her ecological conscience about the qualities of the flower that embody beauty, delicacy, but also strength that its blossoming also depends on the four basic elements. In the third stanza, she humbly and surely identifies herself with the rose—“I am at the turning of the labyrinth”. The phrase “the turning of the labyrinth” figuratively depicts an interconnectedness, a web, or a mesh (Morton 2010, 28) between her and the petals of the rose, in which this rose represents the natural environment. The rose here represents any other plants that grow in the natural environment with which humans interact and co-exist. The way the narrator interiorizes the rose in her own self means what Felstiner called to change one’s consciousness of the world (2009: 4), especially the floral world. This consciousness means ecological conscience to cherish the rose and other species of flowers as living organisms which have inherent values and important roles in conserving the biotic community. In the last stanza, similar to Ginsberg’s gesture in holding the sunflower and sticking it at his side (strophe 20), Kandel realizes the “infinity” of the rose and holds it and “walks within the velvet tunnels of its dream”, which mean to broaden her consciousness of the rose as a natural organism. The rose petals that have impressed her similarly represent an ecological state of the natural world, the mesh or the interconnectedness between her as a human and the rose as one living organism. This shows that she and other humans have a genetic kinship with nonhuman organisms such as plants (Morton 2010, 29). The repetitions “there is no way to stop or stand” and “there is only one way to go” in the last stanza suggest that there is no “absolute center or edge” in the rose petals and in the natural environment since each element of the interconnectedness serves

both as the “center and edge of a system of points” (ibid., 2010, 29). The phrase “only one way to go” as an ecological value also means the natural environment which means the physical landscape and biotic community with its all life forms where everybody should take care of and preserve for the sake of their sustainability.

A late American scientist, Marcel Vogel argued that there is a spiritual interconnection between plants and humans. Both of the living beings could influence each other in terms of their emotion and other psychological states that they express in their physical behavior. Though looking quiet and dumb in human’s sense, plants are “sensitive instruments” that can reflect man’s emotions. In a similar vein, human’s gestures and acts related to plants also have direct effects on the plants’ emotions. Vogel calls this symbiotic influential energy as “Life Force” or “Cosmic Energy” that any living being shares with each other. This mutual share makes the unity of persons and plants and enable them to intercommunicate (Tompkins & Bird, 23-24). The idea of this cosmic energy and intercommunication between humans and plants means to strengthen one’s ecological conscience about any life form in the biosphere.

6 Conclusion

Floral organisms always become wonderful images in any literary work. But in daily life people oftentimes feel more superior than any vegetative plant and objectify them as much as they like. They consider flowers just as inanimate things. In fact, flowers just like humans are animate organisms. Literature as the field of the humanities has to be agent of social and ecological change. Ecopoetics as one field of environmental humanities is the agent that can bring the changes. Form and content used in ecopoems should reflect the ecological values. Particularly language devices or called poetic devices such as imageries, figures of speech including sound devices should be able to portray ecological phenomena occurring in one’s natural environment surroundings. A poem should convey a renewable sourced energy as it is like what Kandel said a medium of vision and experience. Or it becomes what Ginsberg called a beautiful golden sunflower. A poem should also be ecological that it connects any natural phenomenon it describes with its readers as human beings in terms of evoking their ecological awareness of the jeopardized state of the natural environment. Any description about natural organisms such as plants and flowers therefore serves as an agent to raise the readers’ love and respect for any life form. Ginsberg’s “Sunflower Sutra” and Kandel’s “Rose/Vision” are examples of poems that reconnect humans with flowers in a symbiotic relationship between equal inhabitants rather than between subject and object. Despite the backward time of the Beat poems in the 1950s and 1960s, the ecological vision the poems express is still relevant to today anthropocentric era when globalization has brought worldwide homogenized consumerism and its impact on people’s throwaway habit in overconsuming material things. Floral poetics in their poems then re-awakens human consciousness of the wonder and values of flowers as a spiritual model of human’s growing and evolving selfhood. This floral portrayal similarly functions to enhance one’s ecological conscience that the delicateness but also the indispensableness of the flowers in the ecosystem means to evoke anyone’s awareness of conserving them for the sake of any life form in the natural world. This conscience also means that anyone should have ecological thought in his/her daily interaction with each other living and non-living being, the thought of the interdependent principle of the beings in the natural environment.

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