

ENGLISH 3245.03**The Beat Generation**

McCain 2017, Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:05 pm-5:25 pm

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Course Description: The writings of the self-proclaimed Beat Generation, starting in the late 1940s, have long constituted an area of literary, cultural, and political debate. Beat writing bridges, as Robert Holton has noted, postwar “optimism and prosperity” on the one hand, and, on the other, “Cold War tension” and McCarthyism. Beat writing also serves to connect--temporally, aesthetically, and politically--the traditional nostalgia and experimentation of American high modernism with the radical questioning of the countercultures of the 1960s and, later, of postmodernism. Likewise, while acknowledging “traditional” literary traditions as influences, the Beats were also heavily influenced by the aesthetics of jazz and the blues, and their work formally experiments with replicating these musical structures in textual form. This last fact also raises the question of cultural appropriation, and whether the Beats were challenging or reinforcing social hierarchies.

This tense positioning leads to myriad (and conflicting) readings of Beat works. In this course, we will examine the writings of several Beat authors and place their writings into wider literary contexts, examining literary movements ranging from the confessional poets, to the Black Mountain poets, to the Black Arts Movement, and such contemporaneous authors as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. The course will be framed by discussions of the precursors and literary and cultural descendants of the Beat Generation.

Required Texts All texts, except the course reading package, are available in the Dalhousie bookstore. The course reading package is available on Brightspace.

Burroughs, William S. *The Wild Boys*.
 Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems 1947-1997*.
 Holmes, John Clellon. *Go*.
 Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*.

Course Reading Package.

Course Requirements

Assignments

Midterm: 25% **In-class October 12; 80 minutes**

Essay (1800-2400 words; approx. 6-8 pages, double spaced): 35% **Due November 16**

Final exam: 40% TBA (during University exam period); **120 minutes**

Assignment Descriptions

Midterm: The midterm will consist of short multiple choice questions, and short analyses of passages chosen from the works studied before the midterm.

Essay: In the essay, you will analyse one or two texts by authors we have studied during the term; essay

topics will be handed out in class. You will construct a coherent argument about the texts; you will need to use at least two critical/theoretical texts to help to support your argument. Proper research techniques and citation will be discussed in class. Proper MLA-style citation (8th edition) is required for the essay.

Cool Note: you can choose works we have not studied, provided they are by authors listed on the reading and class schedule. You are required to inform the professor first if you decide to analyze a text from outside of the reading list.

Not-cool Note: proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources is mandatory: see the statement on plagiarism, below, for possible penalties that will arise from a failure to properly acknowledge *all* sources.

Final Exam: The final exam will consist of two sections. The first section will follow the format of the midterm. In the first section, questions and passages will be from works covered after the midterm. The second section will consist of an essay; you will have to cover material from both before and after the midterm in the exam essay.

Reading and Class Schedule

Note: all asterisked items appear on Brightspace. All other items can be purchased at the University Bookstore.

Sept. 05 Introduction

Beating the Path: Canons and Origins

Sept. 07 Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California"

12 William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, Books I and IV*

14 Hart Crane, *The Bridge* (sel.)*

"This is the Beat Generation"; or, Canonizing the Beats

19 John Clellon Holmes, "This is the Beat Generation"*; *Go*

21 Holmes, *Go*, continued

26 Holmes, *Go*, continued

28 Jack Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose"*; *On the Road*

Oct. 3 Kerouac, *On the Road*, continued

5 Kerouac, *On the Road*, continued; *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (sel.)*

10 MIDTERM

12 Allen Ginsberg, "Sunflower Sutra", *Howl*

17 Ginsberg, *Howl*, continued (including "Footnote to Howl"); "America"

19 William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (sel.)*; *The Wild Boys*

24 Burroughs, *The Wild Boys*, continued

26 Burroughs, *The Wild Boys*, continued

Beyond Beat: The Problems with Canons

Oct 31 Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *A Coney Island of the Mind* (sel.)*; Denise Levertov, *With Eyes at*

the Back of Our Heads (sel.)*; **note: this is the last day to withdraw (with a “W” on your transcript)**

Nov. 2 Diane Di Prima (sel.)*; Bob Kaufman (sel.)*

7-11 Study Break

14 Anne Sexton, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (sel.)*; Ted Joans (sel.)*

16 Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), “In Memory of Radio,”* “Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,”* “Notes For a Speech”*: FINAL ESSAY DUE

21 James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”*

23 CLASS CANCELLED

Beat Generations: Resistance and Repetition

28 Ted Joans, “I, too, at the Beginning”*; Ken Kesey, “The Day After Superman Died”*;

30 Ginsberg, “Elegy to Neal Cassady,” “Memory Gardens”; review