Engl-GA 2838 Topics in American Literature: The Beat Tradition
Professor John Tytell, Queens College, CUNY

The Beat tradition is a projection of our most idealistic aspirations as well as an angry, nightmarish view of our mutual failure to meet such expectations. Many of the profound cultural antagonisms that so debilitate us now began after the Second World War, and the Beats were like kindling for the fires that ensued. This course examines the work of a generation of writers and artists who emerged in post WWII America, and whose work went on to profoundly shape the development of modern literature and culture. It will focus on major works of fiction and poetry by William Burroughs, Allen Ginsburg, Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, while situating their work within a broader tradition of writing and thinking that includes Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound. Course discussion will emphasize historical and political factors leading to the Beat tradition. Professor John Tytell has been Professor of English at Queens College since 1977. He was one of the first scholars and critics to recognize the significance of the Beats vision and style in his groundbreaking book Naked Angels: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs. He is also the author of Paradise Outlaws: Remembering the Beats, Passionate Lives: D.H. Lawrence, F Scott Fitzgerald, Henry Miller, Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath -- In Love, The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage, Reading New York, as well as Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.