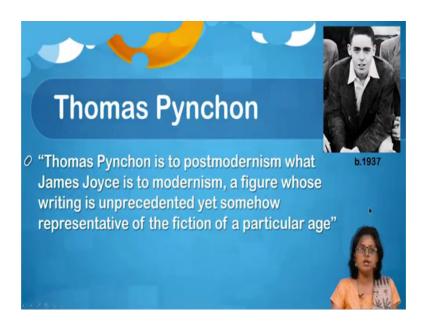
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Example 26 Postmodern Writings: Situating Pynchon and the Beat Generation

Good morning everyone. I am happy to welcome you to today's session of the NPTEL course Postmodernism in Literature. Today we are looking at two distinct kind of postmodern writings particularly the novel written by Thomas Pynchon and also the influence of the beat generation.

Though we are looking at these two distinct literally phenomena rather later to the course; it is important to notice that this hindsight looking back at the influence of Pynchon and oh of beat literature is extremely important to understand; how relevant their legacy has been in understanding and also in situating and redefining the moments of postmodernism.

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Thomas Pynchon is an American writer who is born in 1937 he is generally remain as a recluse and shine away from being photographed and also from giving elaborate interviews. There is a very little glimpse that we have of his personal biographical details and it is also been said that the Thomas Pynchon is a to postmodernism what James

Joyce is to modernism a figure whose writing is unprecedented yet somehow representative of the fiction of a particular age.

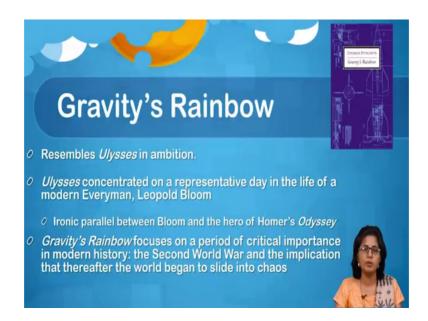
So, just like James Joyce represents modernism in very peculiar ways Thomas Pynchon's works also represent postmodern literature in distinctly unique ways and James Joyce's work is generally considered extremely difficult for the critique as well as for readers to understand and James Joyce himself had post to the one of his works Finnegan's wake that; it would keep the critiques busy for another 300 years and the same could be said about Thomas Pynchon's work as well because advances the publication of Pynchon's works especially his gravities rainbow it is spontan entire industry of critiques and students trying to decode and understand that things that has been written in the novel. So, it could be in that sense equated with the modernist Mormon inaugurated by James Joyce.

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These are some of the important novels by Thomas Pynchon the novel title V the crying lot of 49 and bleeding edge and today we shall be looking at.

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One of his most significant works title gravity's rainbow and gravity's rainbow resembles Ulysses by James Joyce in multiple ways in terms of it is scope in terms of it is ambitious length and it is also a very difficult to read it is not the kind of novel that one could read for pleasure rather it is seen more like a task that needs to be completed.

If you recall what James Joyce's Ulyssesess all about it that is concentrated on a representative day in the life of the protagonist who's Leopold bloom and there is also an ironic parallel that Joyce's successfully draws between the protagonist Leopold bloom and the hero of homers odyssey and we also find that the James Joyce's normally Ulysses has a number of intertextual references to the to homers odyssey as well.

Gravitys rainbow in rather similar way focuses on a period of critical importance in modern history. The Second World War and it talks about the implications of this event and how the world there after began to slide into chaos a take a state of existence.

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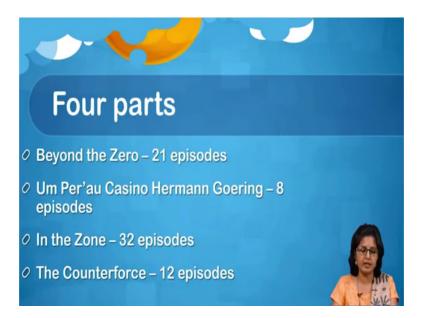


The title is very significant gravity's rainbow it could refer to either the parabolic curve trajectory of a V-2 rocket it is a German rocket which is also a central image in some of Pynchon's novels such as V as well as in gravity's rainbow.

It could also referred to the arc of the plot which is distinctly similar to that of Joyce's Ulysses and this novel in that sense could be seen as a novel written in the tradition of Finnegan's wake by James Joyce and Herman Melville's the confidence man.

So, there are certain modernist strength that we began to notice in gravity's rainbow, but however, it becomes very predominantly postmodernist as we begin to analyse and look at particular narrative techniques and devices.

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The novel gravity's rainbow is divided into four distinct parts first one beyond the zero has 21 episodes the second one with German title has 8 episodes third-one in the zone has 32 episodes and the fourth-one the counterforce has 12 episodes it is a rather long bulky novel just like a Ulysses with an inheruno difficulty to read.

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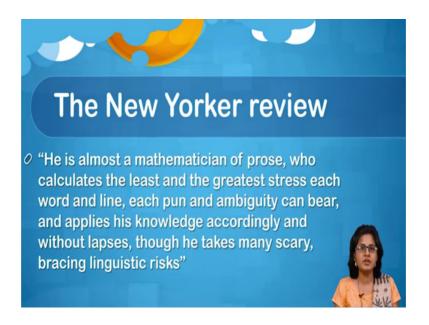


The plot structure is rather complex and it could be rather futile to attempt to give a plot summary in a couple of lines. This complex plot has about 400 characters and each of them have a different story to tell as well, which is narrated through many different

narrative voices and difficult to keep track of a single narrative voice at a single plot structure which is being unravelled. And this is also includes elements of informal self referential usages and there are there are certain instances where we find the novel even breaking the fourth wall the fourth wall being the invisible division between the audience and the actors on the stage.

And it also experiments in terms of it is form and it is narrative techniques we find everything being a part of this particular novel ranging from movie script to that of a stream of consciousness prose technique. So, written with such kind of a complexity the novel also demands a second or third and even a multiple readings to make sense of it and there are a number of study aids which also help us understand and make our way through the novel.

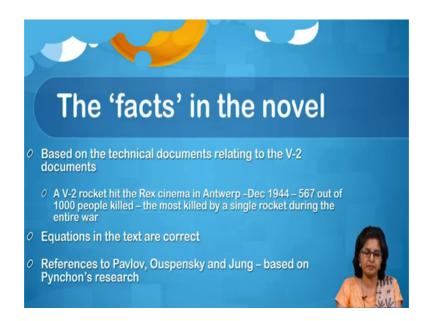
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Gravity's rainbow instantly got the attention of the critiques and the readers as soon as it was published and the New Yorker review had some way significance things to say about their gravity's about gravity's rainbow. This except from the review reads he is almost a mathematician of prose who calculates the least and the greatest stress each word in line each pun and ambiguity can bear and applies his knowledge accordingly and without lapses though he takes many scary bracing linguistic risks.

These scary linguistic risks also inaugurated the different ways in which postmodern literature began to play in sessionly with language.

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There are certain facts in the novel which are also a part of real history and many of the things; that this novel talks about in terms of the details related to the second world war it is also related to the technical documents related to the V-2 rockets which were made in Germany and that was this also reference to a real historical lings ton which happened in December 1944 where V-2 rocket hit the rex cinema in antwerp and a set of thousand people where watching the cinema then and about 567 out of them were killed instantly and this incident is often referred to as the most killed by a single rocket during the entire war period.

And the illus the illusions to a number of such historical instances make this novel all the more historic all the more interesting in terms of it is historical significance. There are number of equations that Pynchon includes and this novel and it has been verified that most them are correct and there are also references to Pavlov Ouspensky and Jung also based extensively on Pynchon's own research.

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In gravity's rainbow we find the juxtaposition of different voices and. In fact, reading Pynchon's also like being immersed in a constant stream of different voices which is while becomes a challenging task for the readers as well as critique.

Wiesenberger's gravity's rainbow companion talks about the different kinds of voices; which are part of this novel and he also differentiates them into formal and informal voices. When he talks about the formal voices he talks about the influence of various languages such as Hebrew German Kazakh Russian Spanish French Japanese and Havero and all of these languages each of these languages are also a represented by a specialised Jargon Hebrew is represented through cabbalistic writings a Russian through; the bureaucratic acronyms and there are a lots of conversational puns which are introduced from French language.

Wiesenberger also tells us that there is a mix of informal discourses and popular slang as well there are references to jokes song lyrics and street speech. There is ethnic usage of language referring to black English and there is also a lot of regional dialect which I found it is way into the narrative about British and American and the novel also makes use of a lot of military service slang and some esoteric linguistic devices it refers to astrology black magic freemasonry etcetera and a number of references to folk language to folk tales it refers to children's games and there is also the use of professional jargon from different feel such as cinematography chemistry and psychology.

So, here we certainly find that Pynchon Pynchon revels in the depth of the position of different voices it also makes this a text rather in accessible, because we also may need multiple referential points to make sense of different things.

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Which are happening within the text there is also an interconnectedness of different real and fictional events which are viewed together rather wonderfully in this novel we find the webs of science technology politics and history interconnecting rules and references to wars the cold war? And also the space race in which most of the advanced countries by participating after the cold war and there is also a significant critique of the post war American society all of these elements make a Pynchon's gravity's rainbow are rather inaugural moment in understanding and in making sense of postmodern literature.

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So, what exactly makes Pynchon's writings post modern particularly here, we are talking about gravity's rainbow. In gravity's rainbow we find that there is a certain kind of a crossing over which is being made possible the text in that sense crosses the border and closes the gap between high culture and low culture, this is also a seminal way in which there novel make this crossover from the modernist to postmodernist.

The approach to narrative as we have noted it also makes it very very distinctly postmodern and difficult and there are also a number of characters in the novel who are trying to discern what is going on around them and unlike the modernist writings where the writer is also in charge of the novel in charge of the characters. We find that here the characters are left to fend for themselves they trying to make sense of the world around them and what makes this particularly more distinctive and significant is the process through which the reader is also participating in this process neither the author characters not the reader seems to know what exactly is going on in the narrative scheme they are constantly in the struggle to make sense of the meaning and make sense of the where it plot structures which are being unravel that are different points of time.

There is also an absence of an external reliable perspective which also makes this novel of critique of a single idea of narrative or a single perception of truth it is often been said about Pynchon's gravity's rainbow that; this is a novel one has to complete as an

finishing a task rather than reading for pleasure. So, these are some of the difficulties associated with the reading process that is involved in gravity's rainbow.

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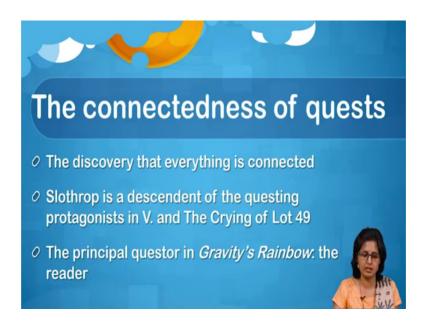
The novel makes use of a complex quest narrative just like it does in James Joyce's Ulysses, but while in James Joyce's Ulysses one can find a single grand narrative which is being a pushed up. Now forward we find that there are multiple quests in gravity's rainbow quite like the modernist text the sound and the fury, but the way in which text like gravity's rainbow distinguishes itself as modernist in comparison with the text such as the sound in the fury written by William Faulkner is the way in which the reader also becomes a partaker in this quest.

While there is a certain mystery to be unravelled into be result in a text like the sound and the fury; we find that even this attempt to resolve the mystery even this quest is rendered futile at the end of it in a text such as the gravity's rainbow. We can we can identify at least two major kinds of quests which are part of this narrative the first one being led by Tyrone Slothrop who is also the protagonist of this work he is trying to find out what was done to him in his infancy when he was handed over to behaviourist psychologist for experimentation.

The second one is led by a number of characters, but also trying to find out what happened at the last launch of a V-2 the German rocket by a rogue German rocket

commander and in addition to this there is also the reader who's constantly in a quest of find out what is what exactly is happening in the process of this narration.

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The connectedness of these quest make this novel all the postmodern there is a discovery within the novel within the plot structure that everything is connected. So, the quest led by Tyrone Slothrop and the many other minor characters they all merge together at some point and it is not as of this interconnectedness is the key to resolving the quest is the key to unravelling the mystery it only leads to further complications and further futility.

And Slothrop can be considered as a descendant of the question protagonists which Pynchon put trade in his early novels V and the crying lot of forty nine, but; however, what makes gravity's rainbow although more difficult is a process through which the principal questor is made of the reader the reader is not a someone who is being told how the quest gets completed or how the mystery is being unravelled, but rather the reader also becomes a participant a co participant in this quest narrative.

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The narrative and the entirely theme gets as more complicated and complex when we witnessed the petering out of the quest, because they all bog down in a proliferation of possibilities and alternatives and they need not lead to a single a resolution and these quest also dissolve in ambiguity and uncertainty and both the protagonist law through of and the other characters were in a search of solving the mystery of the V-2 rocket. We find that the all lose their way and this gets e-code in the way the reader approaches; this work as well be find that the readers also lose their way trying to make sense of the various quests trying to a bring them to a sensible conclusion.

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So, why this Pynchon engage in such a long winding process to talk about the unreliability or rather the instability of this world and the primary reason is that the instability of the instability of the world is something that a provoked writers like; Pynchon to launch in to similar kinds of narratives and they also considered at their responsibility to talk about worlds which are riddle with sub worlds and secondary worlds and also project the possibility of the little enclaves of alternate reality.

And theoretically these are also some of the things that we had taken look at when we were talking about the post modern theories. In the earlier sessions and towards seeing; we also find that the entire novel collapses into a war movie in the last page and without any rhyme or reason we find this is shifting across different kinds of registers rather usual and rather common place within such a narratives.

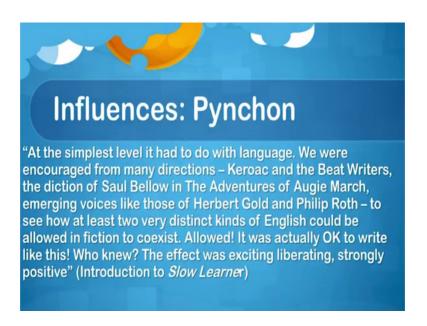
And we also realised this quest for reliable knowledge run around and this the reliable knowledge or the idea of knowledge itself is something which post modern critique post modern theory has been critique in right from the beginning with the liotta who called for an incredulity to metanarratives; we realize at the reader also becomes one of the detectives within the novel and along with the other characters along with the detectives the reader also loses his way and the process of reading.

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It would be rather appropriate to say that rhizomatic approaches. Perhaps needed to make sense of such a novel a rhizomatic approach which we had discussed in the context of the references to Delizon Kothari becomes impose becomes quite useful to engage with text like this, because novel can be compare more to an encyclopaedia or a database and lesser to a linear narrative with a definite kind of progression. And within the novel history itself is envision not as an arbores cent not like a tree like structure with branches lead back to the roots, but as a network where any point in time can potentially lead to any other and this is this is precisely; what Delizon Kothari also spoke about when they were talking about a rhizomatic approach which is imminent in the postmodern societies.

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While Pynchon himself is being a celebrated as a kind of a pioneer in this sort of writing in the sort of postmodern techniques it would be interesting to take a look at some of the elements which influence the person like Pynchon

Pynchon as revealed very little of himself and his writings through interviews or through his own writings and what becomes; particularly revealing is an introduction that he wrote one of his later novels slow learner and in this introduction he talks about some of the important movements in some of the important persons that influenced his later carrier I quote from Pynchon's introduction to slow learner at the simplest level it had to do with the language we were encourage from many directions Kerouac and the beat writers. The diction of Saul bellow in the adventures of augie march emerging voices like that of Herbert gold and Philip Roth to see how at least two very distinct kinds of

English could be allowed infection to coexist allowed it was actually to write like this who knew the effect was exciting liberating and strongly positive.

So, here Pynchon talks about some of the major influences in his life and particularly makes a references to the beat writer and the beat generation which was sphere headed by Jack Kerouac and before, we move into a discussion of beat writers it is important to see the legacy which Thomas Pynchon has left behind I read to you an accept from brand Nichols into Cambridge introduction to post modern fiction he may also note; how Pynchon narratives came to be recognised? As models particularly in the rendition of postmodern fiction this is from brand Nichols Cambridge introduction to postmodern fiction.

Pynchon's novels are packed with narratives, but unlike Ulysses the paradigmatic modernist novel. These are difficult to treat as one of the narrative they densely elusive yet without an over arching explanatory math something that can play the role of the odyssey in Ulysses. They do not meditate specific into text, but large number of into text to it is references on an arbitrary basis taking them up when necessary leaving them aside one some more appropriate one for the specific point in the narrative is required.

More than the work of any other writer Pynchon's novels have appealed to theories of the postmodern as parables of how post modernity puts this in the possession of receiving too many signals and dealing with too much meaning one of the movements which influence on writer like; Pynchon on how to deal with too many signals and too much meaning was certainly the beat generation.

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So, that makes that rather important to take a look at the beat generation writers. Before, we wide up this lecture which is predominantly on Pynchon and the beat generation is a movement that influence the American culture and politics in the in the post second World War Era it was mostly in the 1950s and leading figures of the beat generation by Jack Kerouac Allan Ginsberg and William S Burroughs there also seen as the important people who in a certain ways inaugurated the beat generation in America and also later began to influence postmodernism in general.

And there were also people like Gary Snyder and Lawrence Ferlinghetti who were also part of this movement and their reputation where mostly as bohemian, hedonists. And they celebrated nonconformity and spontaneous creativity they were also seen as rather objectionable figures in the in the 1950s and 1960s on count of the bohemian lifestyle and also an count of the ways in which they rejected all kinds of conventions.

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The term beat was introduced by Jack Kerouac in 1948 this refer to an anti conformist youth movement which had originated in New York and the colloquial meaning of the word then included terms the tired and beaten down the way from the African, American origin and they were also expression such as beat to his socks which again referred to being totally beaten down. But however, what Kerouac and his companions did was they altered and appropriated this term beat to mean new things to mean upbeat and also introduced terms such as beatific.

So, beat then began to signify more radical things and also about and also it become synonymous to define all kinds of conventions.

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And talking about things which are taboo; so howl the poem published in 1956; it was initially read out as a performance poem this even mark the beginning of the beat movement and the poem Howl by Allan Ginsberg also had led to an obscenity trial in 1957, this also at catapulted the beat generation to international fame and reputation and the obscenity trial was an on account of the references to illicit drugs and sexual practices just the entire set of events where again depicted in a 2010 film title howl.

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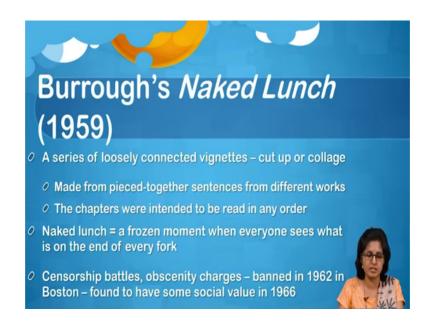
I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night, who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz, who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated, who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war, who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull, who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,

So, I read to you an accept from the beginning of the poem howl and he will also see how Allan Ginsberg inaugurated a certain generation which would know; how to radically deify all conventions of writing and also deify all conventions of existing notions of societal modality this is from howl Allan Ginsberg's poem.

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This is the beginning of the poem and the where many radical things that the poem spoke about leading to leading for the text to be banned in different parts of the world, but of course, it was much later that the begin to realize the significance of these kinds of writings and how it was important; how these counterculture movement very important to identify and critique what was happening in post war American society.

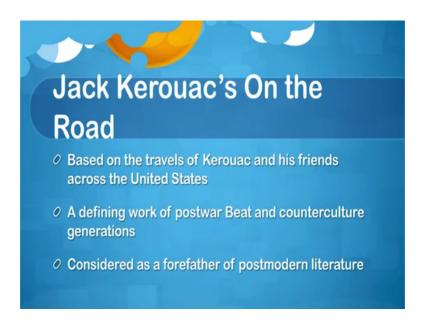
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The other significant event part of beat literature part of beat generation was a Burroughs publication of his novel naked lunch in 1959 naked lunch was fashion as a series of loosely connected episodes it was like come bring together of a cut up or collage this is made from pieced together sentences from different works and many thoughts that was very interesting to begin with and the chapters he himself announced that the chapters were intended to be read; in any order like a hypertext affection of the contemporary..

And the naked lunch literally meant a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork just like a howl by Allan Ginsberg this 1959 novel by burrows also had to face a number of censorship battles they were obscenity charges against the work this was banned in 1962 in Boston. And however, the decision was revoked and it was found to have some social value in 1966.

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Jack Kerouac's on the road was another significant to work that influence the beat literature and also the American postmodern literature. In the latter tickets on the road was based on the travels of Kerouac and his friends across the united states and this is been considered as a very defining work of post war beat and counterculture generations Jack Kerouac is also considered as a four father of postmodern literature. So, it is true then that writers such as Pynchon they began to realise that link which can be means to experiments with and language can also be used to deify all kinds of conventions and are they are the kinds of moral tendency which have prevalent in particular societies.

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And this is for New York times have to say when Jack Kerouac brought out his work on the road it is the most beautifully executed. The clearest and the most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as beat and whose principal avatar he is.

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So, what did the beat generation do how did these writers come to come to contribute significantly to the postmodern moment; they wrote about everything and it is specially about whatever was taboo and this was something which was precisely needed in the decades which succeeded the modernist movement and also in the decades with succeeded the progressive modernity.

They also wanted to dismantle the modern society in which of the ways that they could and this was primarily done through their own lifestyle and through their writings they also critiqued; the madness of societies constraints we find that all of these elements put together they also found the crux of much postmodern theories and much of postmodern literature.

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The legacy of Beat Generation

The Beat generation made a lasting impact on the structure of modern American society. With Ginsberg's *Howl*, the notion of what was acceptable literature was broadened immensely. Censorship as a force for modulating public discourse, in the realm of literature at least, came to an end. Perhaps more importantly, the Beats propelled discussions of ecology and environmentalism into the mainstream. Before the 1950s, environmentalism as it is understood today did not really exist. The Beat Generation's infatuation with Native American and Eastern philosophies contributed to the genesis of modern environmental ethics, at least as a byproduct. Modern poetry underwent a relaxation of structure and style that basically allowed for anyone to express themselves in whatever fashion they chose. Experimentation became an expectation, as the stuffy formalism of the Moderns was wholly subverted.

As a begin to wrap up this lecture, I leave you with a quote which talks about the legacy of the beat generation and this excerpt also captures rather; secondly what not just be generation, but also the entire set of the postmodern writers had been doing into the contemporary.

The beat generation made a lasting impact on the structure of modern American society with Ginsberg's howl the notion of what was acceptable literature was broadened immensely censorship as a force for modulating public discourse in the realm of literature at least came to an end perhaps more importantly the beat propelled discussions of ecology and environmentalism into the mainstream before the nineteen fifties environmentalism as it is understood today did not really exist the beat generations infatuation with native American and eastern philosophies contributed to the genesis of modern environmental ethics. At least as a by-product modern poetry underwent a relaxation of structure and style that basically allowed for anyone to express and whatever fashion they chose experimentation became an expectation as the stuffy formalism of the moderns was wholly subverted.

Some of the things that the beats manage to do became a yardstick and became an even that open the floodgates of postmodernism and the later decades they challenge the structure of society they challenged acceptable notions of literature they also they also redefine the notions related to censorship. And finally, they also made it possible for

experimentation to be unexpected thing in the field of literature on this note we also begin to wrap up today's discussion.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.