
John Clellon Holmes letters to Richard Douglass
1976-2011
bulk dates 1976-1977

Abstract: American poet John Clellon Holmes wrote these letters, filled with encouragement and critique, to a young poet named Richard Douglass, who identified with the Beats.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 099, F902
Title: John Clellon Holmes letters to Richard Douglass
Inclusive Dates: 1976-2011
Bulk Dates: 1976-1977
Extent: 17 items (20 p.)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 099, F902, John Clellon Holmes letters to Richard Douglass, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 62, F902: Shelved in SPEC MSS 099 manuscript boxes

Location: Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/

Source: Purchase, May 2011.

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Biographical Notes

John Clellon Holmes

American writer and educator John Clellon Holmes, author of novels, short stories, essays, and poems, was best known as a chronicler of the ideology and lifestyle of the "Beat generation writers."

Holmes's semi-autobiographical novel Go, published by Scribner in 1952 and later in England as The Beat Boys, is considered to be the first published novel depicting the Beat generation.

Born March 12, 1926, in Holyoke, Massachusetts, Holmes died on March 30, 1988, in Old Saybrook, Connecticut.

Richard N. Douglass

Richard N. Douglass is a poet from Northampton, Massachusetts.

Previously Douglass has had one poem, "Charlie One Eye," published in The Brook Alumni Magazine (SUNY-Stony Brook).

On February 7, 2011, Douglass wrote in a letter to Philip Ciapponi of Chloe's Books, "I consider myself, the unknown, unpublished Beat, carrying on their tradition. I still dribble on paper and might start sending out again. At 62, I just want peace and quiet."

Elizabeth Van Vogt

Elizabeth Van Vogt, the sister of John Clellon Holmes, has written several novels and a memoir about the Beats, Jack Kerouac at 681 Lexington Avenue, which was published by Beat Scene Press in 2007.

Sources:


Information regarding Richard Douglass was derived from the letters.


Information regarding Elizabeth Van Vogt was derived from her letter.
American poet John Clellon Holmes wrote these letters, filled with encouragement and critique, to a young poet named Richard Douglass, who identified with the Beats.

John Clellon Holmes began this correspondence with Richard Douglass in response to a letter from Douglass regarding the renewed interest in the Beats and Holmes's book *Go*, which was soon to be re-issued. Holmes also offered to be of help in Douglass's pursuit. It is obvious the pursuit was writing, for in the five letters which followed, Holmes critiqued the poems and short story sent to him by Douglass.

In these letters, Holmes focused on specific poems, discussing both problems and positive points, but always encouraging Douglass to continue to write because he believed that Douglass had talent. He suggested Douglass train himself to read his own work critically, to write about what he knew, and always to "RE-WRITE." Among the critiques, the admonishments on spelling, punctuation or over-writing, were more philosophical expressions from Holmes on poetry and writing. For example, in the July 18, 1976, letter, Holmes wrote: "Poetry is not merely self-expression. It’s communication. Communication is self-expression that succeeds."

In a November 7, 1976, letter, Holmes replied to Douglass's inquiry about Holmes's relationship to the Beats and what the Beats were trying to accomplish. Holmes said: "They (we) were trying to reconnect with the oldest American literary tradition - transcendentalism, a belief that the human being is more than the sum of his social conditioning and toilet training." He continued with his thoughts on Jack Kerouac and the confusion that the media caused Kerouac. Holmes wrote that the Beats protested the "cultural sterility and conformity" of the 1950s by "acting as if we were whole human beings. This was shocking at the time. A sign of how bad it was."

Holmes directed Douglass to other resources, such as books written about the Beats to satisfy some of Douglass's curiosity on the subject. After critiquing a Douglass short story, he suggested the young writer read short story writers, such as Chekhov, Katharine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, Maupassant, Frank O'Connor, and Isaac Babel, to learn more.

In addition to the six letters written by Holmes, the collection includes two letters written by Richard Douglass to Philip Ciapponi of Chloe's Books. In the first letter he enclosed copies of the poems he had sent to Holmes, and in the second letter he enclosed a letter from Elizabeth Van Vogt (sister to John Clellon Holmes) written to him.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Holmes, John Clellon, 1926-1988--Correspondence.
Douglass, Richard N.--Correspondence.
Van Vogt, Elizabeth--Correspondence.
Ciapponi, Philip--Correspondence.

Topical Terms

Beat generation--20th century--Correspondence.
Poets, American--20th century--Correspondence.
Poetics--20th century--Correspondence.

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.
Poems.

Occupation

Poets.

Personal Contributors

Douglass, Richard N., correspondent.
Van Vogt, Elizabeth, correspondent.
Ciapponi, Philip, correspondent.

Related Materials in this Repository

This item forms part of MSS 099 Miscellaneous Literary and Historical Manuscripts.
MSS 099 F864, John Clellon Holmes letter to Shirley Allen
Arrangement

Arranged in chronological order.
**Detailed Description of the Collection**

John Clellon Holmes typed letter signed to Richard Douglass, 1976 July 7 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (1 p.)

John Clellon Holmes typed letter signed to Richard Douglass, 1976 July 18 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (1 p.)

John Clellon Holmes typed letter signed to Richard Douglass, 1976 November 7 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (2 p.)

John Clellon Holmes typed letter signed to Richard Douglass, 1976 November 23 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (2 p.)

John Clellon Holmes typed letter signed to Richard Douglass, 1977 April 13 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (1 p.)

John Clellon Holmes typed letter signed to Richard Douglass, 1977 June 20 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (1 p.)

Richard Douglass autograph letter signed to Philip Ciapponi, 2011 February 7 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (1 p.)

Douglass enclosed with this letter, eight of the poems which he had written and sent to Holmes for critique. Only one poem is titled, namely "I Could Not Afford Paris so..."

Richard Douglass autograph letter signed to Philip Ciapponi, 2011 May 24 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (1 p.)

Enclosed in this letter was a letter written by Elizabeth Van Vogt to Douglass.

Elizabeth Van Vogt autograph letter to Richard Douglass, 2011 March 2 [Box 62 F902]
1 item (2 p.)

The top left corner of the letter is torn and missing.