



Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters: Volume 2

By Jack Kerouac

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When Viking published the first volume of Jack Kerouac's letters in 1995, it was considered a major addition to Kerouac scholarship. The early correspondence portended the uninhibited and spontaneous prose style that would later become the author's trademark. In the second and final volume of this life-in-letters, Ann Charters, renowned Kerouac biographer and editor of *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, features selected letters that illuminate the latter years of this inimitable writer--the years of fame, alcohol, and disillusionment.

Written between 1957, the year of the publication of *On the Road*, and two days before his death in 1969 at the age of forty-seven, Kerouac's letters tell his own story through his candid and voluminous correspondence to friends and confidants--from Malcolm Cowley, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder to Joyce Johnson, John Clellon Holmes and Sterling Lord. In his letters, Kerouac explores his development as a writer, as well as revealing how the onslaught of publicity and criticism after the publication of *On the Road* in 1957 nearly destroyed him. Offering unparalleled insights into the mind and life of a giant of the American literary landscape, *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1957-1969* is a major addition to the understanding of the artist and his work.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The peripatetic urgency, Buddhist catchphrases and casual prose of *On the Road* (1957) and *Dharma Bums* (1958) made Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) the star of the Beat generation. Kerouac's "craft of spontaneous prose" (in Charters's words) let him use his letters as rough drafts for some of his autobiographical fiction. Devotees of those novels can troll for their favorite episodes among Kerouac's complaints, requests, loans, repayments, reports, retorts, rebukes and resolutions. "[W]hen I write a book it's just a chapter in the whole story," a 1960 missive to Neal Cassady explains, "but there wd be no literature in the world safe to say i would rather read than my own remembrance of things." Editor Charters (also Kerouac's biographer) uses her annotations and commentary to make the sometimes hasty, expressive missives cohere as an account of the novelist's life. A first volume of letters appeared in 1995; this second starts with the publication of *On the Road* and continues almost to the day Kerouac died. The years 1957-1960, the height of Kerouac's career, occupy more than half the volume. Later letters record his struggle to care for his ailing mother, his efforts to finish his later books and his troubles with money and health: "I drink more than ever, my hands tremble, I can't type." Frequent addressees and subjects include Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg ("I still think he's a false prophet, sheep's clothing and ravening wolf"). By turns witty, slovenly and empathetic, the letters provide a look into Kerouac's psyche and into the exhilarating, frustrating, ramshackle milieu he helped create. (Nov.)

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Review

"Charters's carefully selected letters shed a revealing light on this self-analysis and his attempts to capture 'the objective beautiful sad ungraspable world as it is.' For Jack Kerouac's eternal admirers, the beat goes on." -- *Memphis Commercial Appeal, January 9, 2000*

"Selected Letters presents the bare, bleeding bones of jack undergoing his final tribulations... ." -- *Valley Advocate, December 9, 1999*

...moments of frank self-inquiry are rare, and gradually the reason becomes clear: menace and doubt confronted Kerouac whichever way he looked. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, James Campbell

About the Author

Jack Kerouac(1922-1969), the central figure of the Beat Generation, was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1922 and died in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1969. Among his many novels are **On the Road**, **The Dharma Bums**, **Big Sur**, and **Visions of Cody**.

Ann Charters is the editor of **The Portable Sixties Reader**, **The Portable Jack Kerouac**, two volumes of Jack Kerouac's **Selected Letters**, and **Beat Down to Your Soul**. She teaches at the University of Connecticut.

Users Review

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