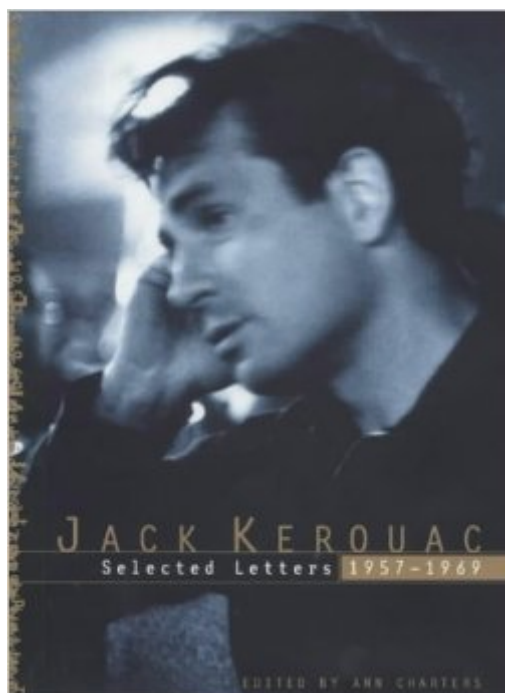


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Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters: Volume 2



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

First, the recommendation is to read the companion book, and predecessor, *Selected Letters: 1940 - 1956*, before starting this one. Both books are really two volumes of the same story. Those familiar with Kerouac's writing will recognize the characters, scenes and events from the letters as the basis

for his groundbreaking novels. Via his letters, you get the unvarnished versions of the later quasi-fictional accounts (and the legend aside, Kerouac's novels were quite polished in their own way - no syllable written by accident). However, these letters (and the excellent non-intrusive editing/comments by Ann Charters) serve as the best biography (auto-biography) written about Kerouac (and I've read them all). Perhaps no person in literature experienced as many self-inflicted highs and lows as Jack Kerouac. He could go from the highest peaks to the deepest valleys from one letter to the next. In addition, the ceaseless restlessness that gripped him his entire life has never been documented any better, or with more frustrating clarity, than in these letters. One day, Kerouac thrills at the prospect of a cabin in the woods in utter isolation (to get away from the partying New York scene); the next day he has plans to live on a commune type ranch with all his friends - or move to Mexico, or Colorado or San Francisco or any number of addresses on Long Island or Florida. Many of these moves he actually followed through on only to find, in very short order, that his urge to wander had returned. At these times you notice Kerouac dropping lines to friends outlining why his new paradise has been destroyed and how perfect the next paradise is going to be.

For any biographer or historian the original letters of the subject is a valuable and extremely important source of information in order to gain insight into the time period, and/or the person under study. In part 2 of Kerouac's Selected Letters, the text truly gives the student or curious, a penetrating look into this enigmatic and ultimately tragic American author. For many, Jack Kerouac represents an important shift in American literature but also a significant historical (literary) mark of an entire generation. Ann Charters, (Kerouac's first biographer) editor of this volume, has done a painstaking and beautiful job with this book - we come to know him as a man, the artist and his concerns; generosity, relationships; his struggle with the demon drink and, most importantly, the development of his unique prose style, leading to his now iconic status. The letters begin in the year (1957) when "On the Road" was published. At this stage of Kerouac's life, from the tone and content of his letters, he is excited, finishing incomplete manuscripts, organizing "get-togethers", writing his publisher and working on new projects. As the years progress, sadly, his drinking accelerates, he becomes more and more misanthropic and, in the end, paranoid. It is true - it was the booze that killed his body but it was fame as an author that murdered his soul. More than likely, it was both. Ann Charters suggests that these letters were experiments in style and possible new ideas for future projects, his friends perhaps 'sounding boards' where the reader can see his development of what is famously known as "spontaneous prose". Kerouac was also a prolific poet. Some call his "novel",

Mexico City Blues, one long, epic poem.

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