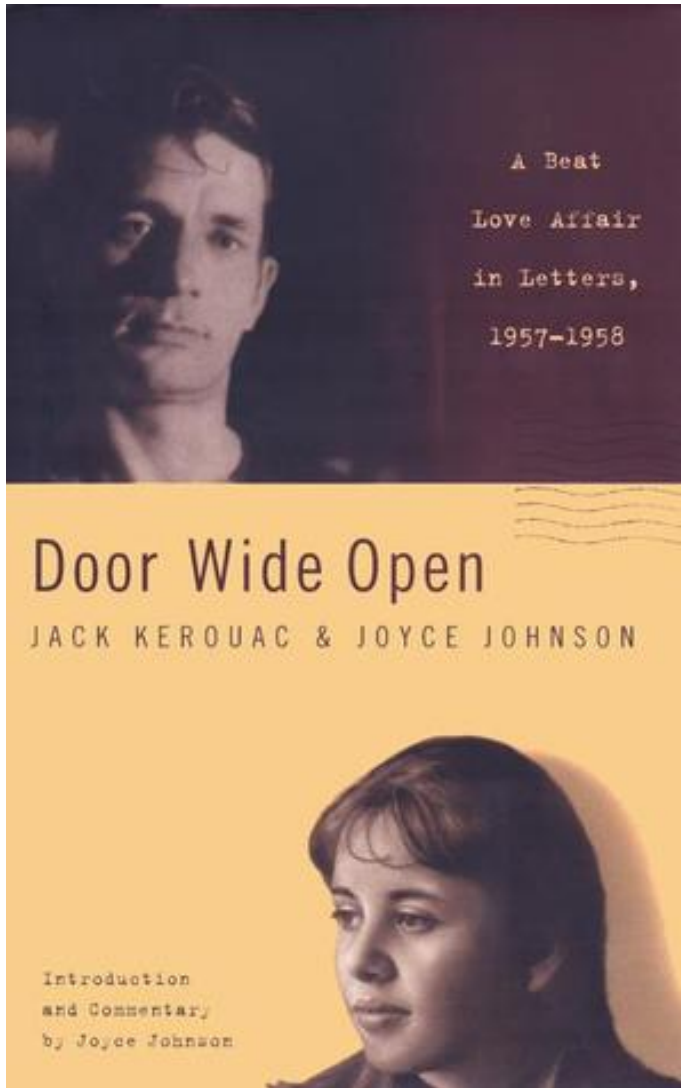

Jack Kerouac

Door Wide Open



Title: Door Wide Open

Author: Jack Kerouac

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Description

On a blind date in Greenwich Village set up by Allen Ginsberg, Joyce Johnson (then Joyce Glassman) met Jack Kerouac in January 1957, nine months before he became famous overnight with the publication of *On the Road*. She was an adventurous, independent-minded twenty-one-year-old; Kerouac was already running on empty at thirty-five. This unique book, containing the many letters the two of them wrote to each other, reveals a surprisingly tender side of Kerouac. It also shares the vivid and unusual perspective of what it meant to be young, Beat, and a woman in the Cold War fifties. Reflecting on those tumultuous years, Johnson seamlessly interweaves letters and commentary, bringing to life her love affair with one of American letters' most fascinating and enigmatic figures.

Insightful reviews

Belinda: I picked this book up at my library recently, once again on my random travels through the biography section (though there is much there that I take umbrage at, lol...) I do like that I find everything from soup to nuts in my local library's bio section but woof--after working at a bookstore for 12 years it can be hard to see things categorized weirdly. However, in this case it worked in my favor. I adore Jack Kerouac--as teen and college student, I was of course obsessed with the Beats in general.. My first love Jim Morrison taught me about Kerouac==I was 10 years old and my local library at the time did not carry *On the Road*, so it took me years to actually acquire a copy. I have loved Kerouac since then.

I have a fondness for some of the other Beats as well, Burroughs for sure--not Ginsberg (shocking I know!) but Kerouac has always been my favorite. So when I saw this book of letters I was fascinated. I was aware of Joyce Glassman(Johnson) from Beat documentaries I have seen but really did not know much about her. This book was a wonderful way to become acquainted with her and also with Kerouac's private side.

This is especially interesting having a woman's point of view be the guiding force here----the Beat writers are so often accused of misogyny, racism and sexism, it was nice to read both sides of the equation in letters that were intended for the eyes of the writers only at the time. One of the things I loved about the book is Ms. Johnson's explanation that is so simple but at the same time not often mentioned--despite these men being the "mad ones" and restructuring fiction and poetry to such an extent--they were still men of the 50's. They still had to battle many of the mores of the time not only outwardly but inwardly. So the fact that there were not a ton of female beats who were taken seriously, is not surprising.

However, this book proves that at least the King of the Beats did not disparage women as artists--his letters constantly refer to Joyce's writing and encourage her greatly---his behavior as a lover? Not so great but this is not shocking either--being faithful or committed would have been seen as "square" and part of the charm of this book is watching how Joyce handles her "traditional" desires to be in a committed and "normal" relationship---I have to say I think she was one tough cookie--concealing her sadness at Kerouac's infidelity, or his vacillation between needing her and pushing her away and at the same time, pounding away at her own writing, supporting herself in New York City and attempting to become a more creative and rounded person.

She knows Kerouac is not traditional and in many ways she does not want him to be--his

freedom is also her freedom--the reader does become annoyed with Kerouac's constant back and forth (I can only imagine her frustration) but at the same time enthralled--what it must have been like to live in his head. Joyce has been minimized in Kerouac's life for many years--I believe these letters put her back in her proper place--she was in the midst of and part of the Beat evolution to a great degree--she was friends with nearly every important Beat writer and also many painters and artists as well. Her attitude was most assuredly Beat. The letters between she and Kerouac show the extent to which he trusted her, writing her poems, sharing his frustrations, being honest about his head space--at the same time he was often doing things that would have broken her heart---things she did not know about until many years later when Kerouac's correspondence began being published.

While the woman in me wants to smack him, I can stand back from it and realize that he was often trying to protect her--there is definitely a feeling of him enjoying and wanting to not only be a part of her creative life but also wanting to have her protection and normalcy to balance him. I came away with the feeling that he loved her very much, did not want to string her along even when he felt more committed (knowing his butterfly brain would change as soon as it settled) and that he wanted to see her become successful in her own right. Was the relationship always fair? Of course not--the significant age difference, Kerouac's already extreme drinking problem and his established legend (well before his established success) all gave him the upper hand in some ways in terms of teaching lessons and being a figure of adoration. However, part of the charm of this book is in Joyce's strength in the face of this--the way she seemed to know this experience would be important to her--that she wanted to know and love this man as an artist and lover before the world began clamoring for him. Her recognition of his magic before it became world famous.

At the same time, it's Joyce's story--she intersperses the letters between them with commentary about various happenings at the time and her perception of things now that time has passed. It also touches on her recovery from the end of the relationship, her finding of a true love and relationship (sadly short lived due to her first husband's early death) and her finding of herself as a writer, woman and artist. She later married again and had a child (also an author) and has continued her literary career quite successfully. She also did something Kerouac never could have---survived to tell the tale. Her own ability to pick herself and dust herself off never wavers here, even through devastation. I walked away with the picture the woman as a strong and centered person despite her travails, and a true artist in her own right.

Rosie: I've always thought Kerouac was a shit and this verifies it. Shows him to be insecure, juvenile & manipulative as well, and surprise surprise!! a Momma's Boy! Joyce was young & naive and useful to him. Couldn't have been a more mismatched pair. Enjoyable reading if you're interested in them & their times.

Maol Mhuire O'Duinnin: I read this book several years ago and found it an intimate and intriguing look into Kerouac's letter writing. I also learned about Joyce Johnson for the first time. I distinctly recall, however, Johnson denouncing anyone's claims or any evidence that Kerouac was at all homosexual. I'm not really sure why she felt a need to do this, and in the face of overwhelming evidence from folks like Kerouac's close friend, poet Allen Ginsberg, I don't believe Johnson's argument holds up. Of course Kerouac had heterosexual relationships, including that with Joyce Johnson, but Kerouac himself speaks of his own attraction to men in different books, including *Subterranean Kerouac* by Ellis Amburn. I don't mean to get into a

debate about Kerouac's sexuality, but it is telling that this is the one specific thing I remember about Johnson's book.

Melissa: This publication of letters among Kerouac and Joyce Johnson was once relatively stress-free for the 1st half. It was once attention-grabbing to benefit the interior scoop at the Beat world. approximately midway via it was once getting a bit slow. probably since it appeared repetitive? probably the attract had worn off? It was once nonetheless a superb learn overall. As a reader, i needed Joyce to maneuver on from Jack, yet can also see precisely why it was once so tough for her to do that. I felt undesirable for her as he was once calling her to go to him on his travels in a single letter after which within the subsequent inform her not to hassle coming, he used to be headed elsewhere. Her remark jumbled in with the letters sheds mild at the international during which those letters have been being written and the way she feels in retrospect. If I had stopped midway via it is going to were five stars.

Ronnie: this can be first thing i ever learn having to do with kerouac. the constitution and language in their letters was once diversified than so much and me immediatly and that i quickly picked up 'on the road' and so on.

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