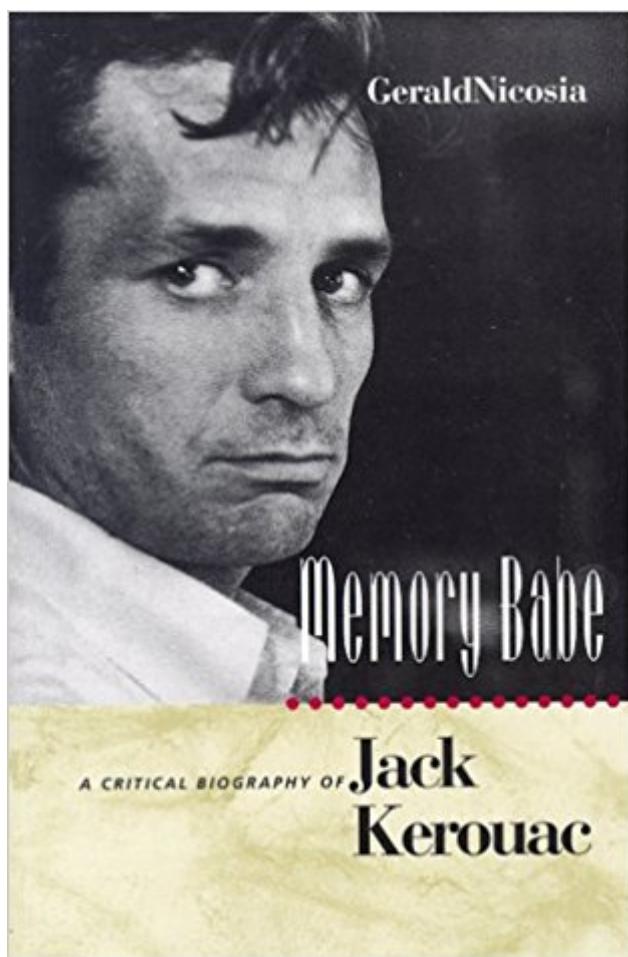


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Memory Babe: A Critical Biography Of Jack Kerouac



Synopsis

In 1969 Jack Kerouac died a premature death. While his legendary lifestyle and unique creative talent made him a hero in his lifetime, his literary influence has grown steadily since. With Memory Babe (a childhood nickname honoring Kerouac's feats of memory), Gerald Nicosia gives us a complete biography of Jack Kerouac—an honest, discriminating and, above all, compassionate assessment. This edition is enhanced by many rare photographs never before published.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Chronologically, from birth to death, author Nicosia tells Kerouac's life story with unflinching honesty and utmost respect. Blessed with a sharp memory, very early on Jack's childhood friends nicknamed him "Memory Babe" and that is where the book got its name. Packed with fascinating details and exquisitely written, this book needs to be discovered by a younger generation of readers. Many of us alive today have heard of Jack Kerouac but I doubt few know the details of his tragic life. That he remains the voice of a generation and a literary icon goes without saying.

Kerouac was a physically beautiful but emotionally flawed man with a tormented spirit. He spent his life as man and writer trying to prove that "the past is the root of the future, and that a man cannot live without the continuity of both." Jack remembered everything he heard, as if words were sacred and his mind was a sponge. Despite his many flaws, he always paid "exquisite attention to the sound of language." Even as he mapped new territory as a writer, Kerouac was adrift as a man. As the first spokesman for the "beat" generation, he perfected that voice with guilt, self-doubt, and

self-punishment. This biography clearly states Jack's definition of "beat": "beat down, beat up, all-tired-out." Still, his words were always carefully chosen. Word by word, Kerouac carefully created phrases to express time, place, emotion, and man's senses, communicating deep meaning. His writing was full of symbolism and visions, allegory and veiled reality, profanity and parody, as he groped his way with prose towards his own death. For his time, Kerouac's verbal ingenuity was unsurpassed.

This is an absolutely fantastic biography. It just amazes me how Nicosia was able to uncover so much information on Jack Kerouac. I guess the huge amount of correspondence he left behind would have been his first treasure trove he would have ploughed through, plus the large number of his friends and acquaintances that the author was able to interview. I have heard some reviewers on and elsewhere complain that this biographer is too 'blinded' by his adulation of Kerouac. Although the author's respect for Kerouac is indeed evident throughout the book, I disagree. Nicosia exposes all the drug and sex debauchery, scandals and many low points in this man's very, very troubled life while at the same time giving us an intelligent analysis of the value of his art immortalized in his books. I was particularly impressed with his deep analysis of Mexico City Blues, Town and the City and Visions of Cody - three of my favourites. Through this book, I also came to discover lots of other 'minor' works by Kerouac such as Old Angel Midnight (originally called Lucien Midnight) and various articles he wrote for magazines like Esquire. To my mind, this is 98% a perfect biography - that is, provided that all of the information in the book is accurate and true. It's well written without being verbose or pretentiously academic, it is nicely paced, it contains plenty of information for diehard Kerouackians and is well referenced for people like me who want to check out his sources even further. I was only disappointed by one thing - the last chapter of the book. While I am grateful to Nicosia for having spared us some of the more unpleasant details of Kerouac's final months and years, I was left wanting to know a little more about what exactly happened to him between 1965 and 1969.

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