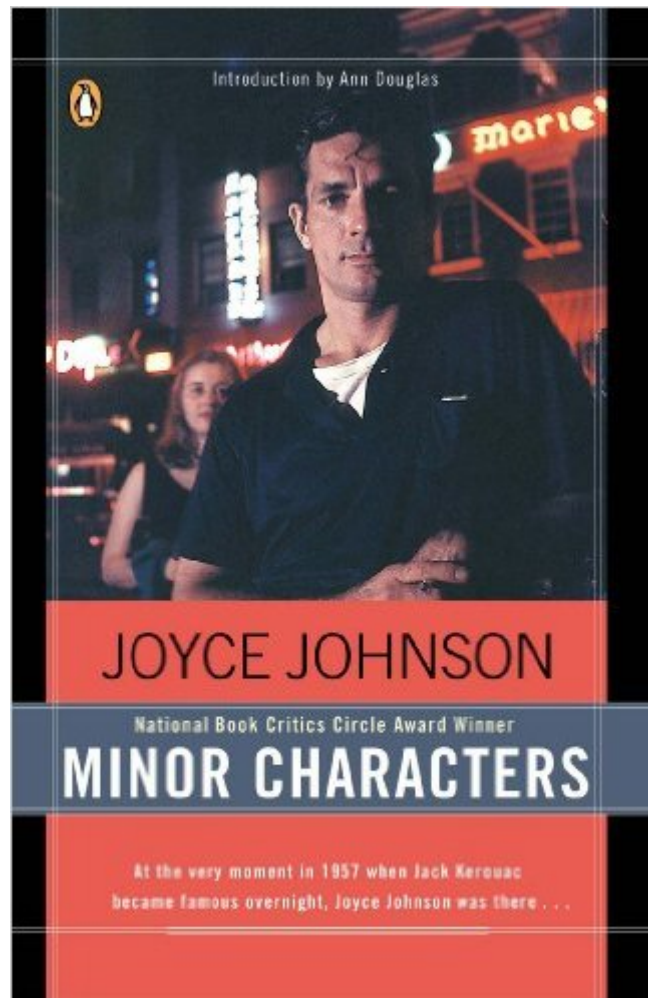


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Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir



Synopsis

Jack Kerouac. Allen Ginsberg. William S. Burroughs. LeRoi Jones. These are the names primarily associated with the Beat Generation. But what about Joyce Johnson (nee Glassman), Edie Parker, Elise Cowen, Diane Di Prima, and dozens of others? These female friends and lovers of the famous iconoclasts are now beginning to be recognized for their own roles in forging the Beat movement and for their daring attempts to live as freely as did the men in their circle a decade before Women's Liberation. Twenty-one-year-old Joyce Johnson, an aspiring novelist and a secretary at a New York literary agency, fell in love with Jack Kerouac on a blind date arranged by Allen Ginsberg nine months before the publication of *On the Road* made Kerouac an instant celebrity. While Kerouac traveled to Tangiers, San Francisco, and Mexico City, Johnson roamed the streets of the East Village, where she found herself in the midst of the cultural revolution the Beats had created. *Minor Characters* portrays the turbulent years of her relationship with Kerouac with extraordinary wit and love and a cool, critical eye, introducing the reader to a lesser known but purely original American voice: her own.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; unknown edition (July 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140283579

ISBN-13: 978-0140283570

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Joyce Johnson's title "*Minor Characters*" refers to her book's focus on the women who loved, dated, married, fought, and partied with the major male figures of the Beat Generation, including Kerouac, Ginsburg and Burroughs. Joyce herself was Jack Kerouac's girlfriend for a while around the time that his classic "*On the Road*" was published. It's a shame that the Kerouac connection seems to

always be used to push this book, because Joyce was not Jack's girlfriend for all that long, he was absent for a lot of that time and on top of that, her story is interesting, exciting and poetic in its own right even if she'd never dated him. Joyce recounts how she escaped an overprotective and oppressive childhood that makes the reader wince, as her parents pry into her private life and grill her on her (nonexistent) activities with boys, when they aren't pushing her to become a pianist instead of encouraging her obvious love for and gift of writing. Joyce's efforts as a young teen at fitting in and belonging to the burgeoning Bohemian scene are very relatable to any young girl who's drawn to an exciting new creative world, full of older and potentially dangerous men that are definitely not OK to bring home to Mama. Along the way, Joyce meets and befriends Elise Cowan, another early Beat muse who unlike Joyce comes to a sad end, and Hettie Jones, the wife of poet LeRoi Jones, and she devotes some time to telling each of their stories as well as her own. I pretty much liked all the women in the book much better than the men before the story was over, but I don't think that was because the author was pushing a feminist agenda.

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