

# The New Criterion

## Features

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### Cheever vs. Cheever

by [Stefan Beck](#)

On the collected works of John Cheever and Blake Bailey's new biography, *Cheever: A Life*.

In 1958 John Cheever, in his formidably detailed journal, turned his skeptical eyes to Jack Kerouac's novel *The Subterraneans*:

My life is very different from what he describes. There is almost no point where our emotions and affairs correspond. I am most deeply and continuously involved in the love of my wife and children. It is my passion to present to my children the opportunity of life. That this love, this passion, has not reformed my nature is well known. But there is some wonderful seriousness to the business of living, and one is not exempted by being a poet.

That Cheever's life was very different from Kerouac's is well known. There are some similarities, worth noting for the light they shed on what makes Cheever singular. Both were born into drab if not entirely humble surroundings: Cheever in Quincy and Kerouac in Lowell, Massachuset ...

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