



Letters of Ayn Rand

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Adding immeasurably to the body of Rand's work, her penetrating and witty correspondence with Hollywood luminaries, political writers, philosophers, family members, artists, businessmen, and fans offers an unparalleled look at the life of a prominent thinker over more than 50 years of her life and career.

Letters of Ayn Rand Details

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Meghan Portillo says

These letters sucked me in immediately. In the beginning, it was almost like reading a previously unpublished novel; on the flip side, sometimes I wondered if she'd ever shut up.

Simon says

The collection is slanted by the editor, who is the current custodian of the cult. At least two of the correspondents were aware of how this was probably going to go, and obtained statements that basically criticized the decision to publish only Rand's sides of their correspondence. There are minimal letters to Barbara and Nathaniel Branden, referred to as Nathan Blumenthal (which is his real name, but still . . .), and nothing at all that deals with the affair between Branden and Rand and his subsequent expulsion from the cult when the physical intimacy collapsed. The point of this collection seems to be to emphasize that Rand was all of a piece philosophically early in her life, succeeded on her own, married the template for Howard Roark --- she herself described O'Connor as Roark --- and lived her life rigidly adhering to her "philosophy" of Objectivism. Most of which is pretty much nonsense. Her very survival was made possible by members of her family who gave her refuge in the United States (and to be fair, Rand attempted to do the same for an old family friend trapped in Austria after World War II); she persisted in a view of Frank O'Connor's "genius" at odds with everything that is known about him; and most damning of all, she refused her adherents the right to think on their own. That is truly the problem with the way in which the collection is presented. It is entirely possible to shoot some of her presuppositions and historical interpretations down without much effort, but since we never see what her correspondents *did*, the impression given by the book is that she rolled over them. Hardly. By the end of the collection, Rand has degenerated into a rude old lady publishing *Diktats* to her cult and surrounded by sycophants. But fewer of them than one might think, and most of the remaining Keepers of the Flame seem to have spent an inordinate amount of time scrambling to get a secure perch in front of their idol by maligning the others. Sound familiar? Rand blew up when Whittaker Chambers wrote a beyond-scathing review of *Atlas Shrugged* in *National Review* that included the notorious comparison of Our Lady of *Laissez-faire* to Hitler, but by the 1970s, her New York apartment bore suspicious similarity to the Bunker.

The letters, like the novels, are grindingly, irredeemably, third-rate. They do, however, provide a through-line of narcissism on a level so profound it was clearly a personality disorder. I was really surprised. It is difficult to imagine Howard Roark begging people to praise his buildings, but I lost count of the number of times Rand seeks compliments for her books, and by how angry bad reviews made her. Howard Roark would have laughed. Mirthlessly. She also was constantly frustrated by the failure of fans to understand what she was saying --- but it never occurs to Rand that the failure might have something to do with the writing itself. I particularly enjoyed her testy responses to hapless fans who asked her if she was Toohey in *The Fountainhead*.

And by the time of the Branden contretemps, Rand had descended into a conspiracy theory of life (again, something she overtly rejected in her letters). *Ayn Rand stood on the burning deck, whence all but she had fled* . . . I suppose the novels will endure as the bodice-ripping literature of unbridled capitalism and 14 year-old boys, and as a source of bumper stickers. They're kind of like *The Lord of the Rings* for a different fanboy set. The difference is that Tolkien would have repudiated the vulgarity of it all. Rand would have

insisted on a cut.

Oh, and Tolkien could write. His least-developed orc is a more believable character than Dagny Taggart or Dominique Francon.

Teri says

One thing that impresses me about Ayn Rand is her precision of word choice. Her prose was lean and tight, even in her correspondence. This particular book is a collection of letters she wrote to friends, fans, family, and publishers. My only complaint was that the letters she was responding to were not included, so this is mostly a one-sided collection of letters. But I do enjoy reading her opinions about freedom, literature, etc. in these letters. I haven't read them all, but I like to dip into this book every so often. She had no patience for people who did not agree with her, so be forewarned.

John says

This was so much better than a bio because it was real. for the first time, I feel that I know who Ayn was and what she thought and how she thought. anyone wanting to read any of her books for the first time should read this first. Wish I had read it many years ago. will go back to it many times in the future .

Emma B says

I am not reading this book in a methodical, linear fashion. It is 700 pages of letters written by an egotistical, demanding, stubborn author. I am, however, leafing idly through and reaching conclusions from the letters I do read.

Firstly, she was whole-hearted about her beliefs. Reading some of the letters she sent to her nieces when they asked for money, I have discovered that she extended her belief system to encompass everyone, including family, without a shred of exception or leeway. She told one niece, Connie, that "if, when the debt becomes due, you tell me that you can't pay me because you needed a new pair of shoes or a new coat...then I will consider you as an embezzler. ...I will write you off as a rotten person and I will never speak or write to you again."

Secondly, I really need to find *The God of the Machine*, by Isabel Paterson. She keeps going on about it as the *Das Kapital* of Capitalism.

Minerva says

I don't know how you could possibly give a star rating to someone's personal correspondence, so I won't try. This book is enlightening and entertaining, if you're already a fan of the author. I only wish some of the more trivial and personal letters had been excluded.

Craig Bolton says

Letters of Ayn Rand: 8 by Ayn Rand (1995)

John Harder says

Letters of Ayn Rand includes only outgoing correspondence, which is like hearing only one side of a conversation. Though this is problematic this compilation offers a unique insight into objectivism. Objectivism is a difficult philosophy to live by; it demands that every circumstance and choice be viewed analytically. Emotions are fine but they must be based upon reason and as a genuine response reality. Rand's letters show that every day and with every relationship she lived the philosophy she espoused, often going into nuanced explanations, distinguishing her views from seemingly similar philosophies.

Though she is occasionally punishingly direct with her correspondence, she also shows a warmth and generosity – but only to those who deserve it. There is no altruism even when she is lending help and advice.

This book is worth one's time, but only if you have already read the Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged. Without this basis you will be lost.

Parapraxis says

I read this while holed up in snowy Denver, CO one winter. Mildly interesting letters from a warped mind.

Laura Romero Fuentes says

Sabio capitalismo.

Lisa Lilly says

This is a fascinating book. The letters cover Rand's personal and professional life, including her relationships, her fiction, and her philosophy. I learned much that I hadn't known about her time working as a screenwriter and the research she did for Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead.

Many of the letters are almost like getting a one-on-one tutorial from an amazing writer. She talks about plot, theme, developing characters. Some letters offer critiques of newer writers' works and even without reading the work being discussed, I found the comments helpful and insightful. I also was fascinated by the letters regarding marketing her writing. In one letter, Rand presents a very detailed marketing plan for her fiction, including identifying her target readers and discussing how they should be reached. Plus there are numerous

letters where she discusses her reactions to various actual and proposed ads.

As someone who loves Rand's fiction, I found her letters about her characters and her plot choices fascinating, as well as the information on why she chose certain themes and settings. I also loved learning more about her views on and involvement in the movie version of *The Fountainhead*.

The letters also include information about her life in the Soviet Union, her attempts to connect with family and friends still there, and the roots of her views on communism and capitalism. Many letters show Rand discussing her philosophy and how it applies to life, both with people who seek to understand Objectivism better and those who disagree with her. The latter are the most interesting.

I highly recommend this book to any writer, anyone who loves Rand's fiction, and anyone who is interested in her philosophy. I not only learned a great deal, I felt inspired. I wish I could have met her.

Marge says

I was surprised and impressed, not only by the kindness that Ayn Rand showed, but also to her refusal to compromise on principles. Wonderful collection. I have tried to live my life as close to Objectivism as possible and I will never, never regret it. And, like Ayn Rand, "And I mean it!"

Mark says

Ayn Rand is candid and straightforward. Her answers to questions from readers and critics pull no punches. She gets right to the point and calls it like it is. Refreshing and enjoyable. I recommend this collection to any reader who is familiar with Ayn Rand's work.

At a minimum, I recommend reading *For the New Intellectual* in lieu of Rand's larger works of fiction or nonfiction.
