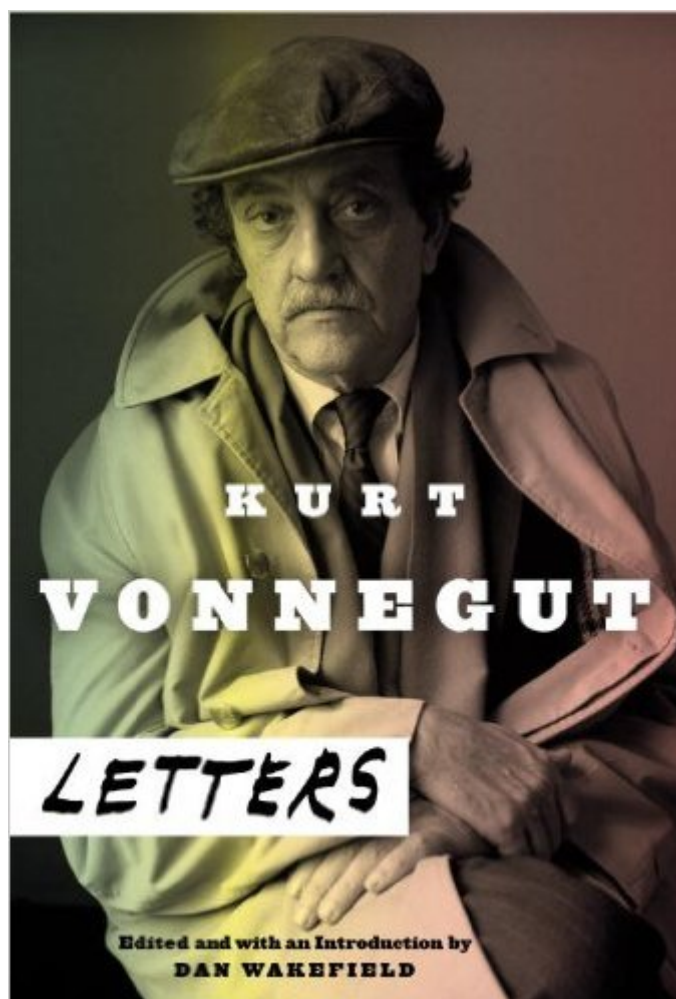


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Kurt Vonnegut: Letters



Synopsis

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY Newsweek/The Daily Beast • The Huffington Post • Kansas City Star • Time Out New York • Kirkus Reviews This extraordinary collection of personal correspondence has all the hallmarks of Kurt Vonnegut's fiction. Written over a sixty-year period, these letters, the vast majority of them never before published, are funny, moving, and full of the same uncanny wisdom that has endeared his work to readers worldwide. • Included in this comprehensive volume: the letter a twenty-two-year-old Vonnegut wrote home immediately upon being freed from a German POW camp, recounting the ghastly firebombing of Dresden that would be the subject of his masterpiece *Slaughterhouse-Five*; wry dispatches from Vonnegut's years as a struggling writer slowly finding an audience and then dealing with sudden international fame in middle age; righteously angry letters of protest to local school boards that tried to ban his work; intimate remembrances penned to high school classmates, fellow veterans, friends, and family; and letters of commiseration and encouragement to such contemporaries as Gail Godwin, Günter Grass, and Bernard Malamud. • Vonnegut's unmediated observations on science, art, and commerce prove to be just as inventive as any found in his novels—from a crackpot scheme for manufacturing atomic-bow ties to a tongue-in-cheek proposal that publishers be allowed to trade authors like baseball players. (Knopf, for example, might give John Updike's contract to Simon and Schuster, and receive Joan Didion's contract in return.) Taken together, these letters add considerable depth to our understanding of this one-of-a-kind literary icon, in both his public and private lives. Each letter brims with the mordant humor and openhearted humanism upon which he built his legend. And virtually every page contains a quotable nugget that will make its way into the permanent Vonnegut lexicon. • On a job he had as a young man: "Hell is running an elevator throughout eternity in a building with only six floors." • To a relative who calls him a "great literary figure": "I am an American fad" of a slightly higher order than the hula hoop." • To his daughter Nanny: "Most letters from a parent contain a parent's own lost dreams disguised as good advice." • To Norman Mailer: "I am cuter than you are." • Sometimes biting and ironical, sometimes achingly sweet, and always alive with the unique point of view that made him the true cultural heir to Mark Twain, these letters comprise the autobiography Kurt Vonnegut never wrote. Praise for Kurt Vonnegut: Letters "Splendidly assembled . . . familiar, funny, cranky . . . chronicling [Vonnegut's] life in real time." Kurt Andersen, *The New York Times Book Review* "This collection is] by turns hilarious, heartbreaking and mundane. . . . Vonnegut himself is a near-perfect example of the same flawed, wonderful humanity that he loved and despaired over his entire life." NPR

â œCongenial, whimsical and often insightful missives . . . one of [Vonnegutâ™s] very best.â •â "Newsday Â â œThese letters display all the hallmarks of Vonnegutâ™s fictionâ "smart, hilarious and heartbreaking.â •â "The New York Times Book Review

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Customer Reviews

It's rare that a book's introduction makes me speak out loud while reading. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't reading aloud. I just found myself saying "Wow" and "Huh!" and "I didn't know that!" out loud, to myself, as I read this beautiful book. As an artist, I found the cover photo and art and even the fonts of the chapter headings both stunning and a fond visit back to the Seventies. But as a reader, and a passionate re-reader of writers I love, I was intrigued and fascinated by the introduction-written with passionate restraint by Dan Wakefield. Honestly? I rarely read more than one page of book introductions, as they usually reveal more about the writer of the Introduction than the person the Introducer is introducing. But this is happily not the case with Dan Wakefield. I love Wakefield's books, especially "Expect A Miracle" and "Spiritually Incorrect." Actually, now that I think about it, I probably only began to read this Introduction because it was written by Dan Wakefield! His clear, concise and empathetic prose informed me deeply about Kurt Vonnegut and his influences, his family and his artistic struggles to have his iconic and iconoclastic voice published and read. In fact, a unique and welcome addition to this book is the introduction of each era of letters- which smartly and helpfully places us in the context of Vonnegut's life when he wrote the letters and to whom he was writing. It's such a simple technique but begs the question of why this isn't done more with published letters of notable people... and in this book the chapter introductions serve to create more

comprehension of Vonnegut's life and how he dealt with family, friends, associates, success and disappointment.

This is the real Kurt Vonnegut - from 'the horse's mouth' as it were, or as he would have added - "Well one end of the animal or the other anyway!" Then he'd of exploded into his trademark sheet-tearing Pall Malls inflicted wet laugh, the brand he smoked furiously all his life and that a classmate eponymously named 'Vonneguts' at Iowa. On the fly leaf of the book, KV replies to a relative who wrote telling him he thought KV was one of 'America's literary giants'. "I am an American fad on an order only slightly higher than the hula hoop," he wrote back. This was in the '80's probably, when the critics were not being very kind to his work. It's true that KV was at just the right place and at just the right time in the anti-war cultural context of the '60's/early '70's and that helped account for the runaway best seller success of 'Slaughterhouse Five'. Like a fine song on the the 'oldies' station in the car, many of the boomer generation can listen to his voice without tiring, like listening to an old friend who has chatting with us from the grave. This no matter no matter what the pecksniffery of English major lit crit twits said about his work in the '80's, trying to dismiss him as '...a 'graphic novelist' who's written a series of what amounts to Marvel Comics'. Well, how about we tell the twits that there are a lot of us 'English majors' out there that happen to like Marvel Comics and Vonnegut and Terry Southern and Bill Fox and Charles Portis too. Anyway, I'm reminded of the Paul Simon lyric: "It's every generation throws a hero up the pop charts; Medicine is magical and magical is art." KV was a magical artist and still is.

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