



## Letters of E.B. White

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Originally edited by Dorothy Lobrano Guth, and revised and updated by Martha White

Foreword by John Updike

These letters are, of course, beautifully written but above all personal, precise, and honest. They evoke E.B. White's life in New York and in Maine at every stage of his life. They are full of memorable characters: White's family, the New Yorker staff and contributors, literary types and show business people, farmers from Maine and sophisticates from New York—Katherine S. White, Harold Ross, James Thurber, Alexander Woolcott, Groucho Marx, John Updike, and many, many more.

Each decade has its own look and taste and feel. Places, too—from Belgrade (Maine) to Turtle Bay (NYC) to the S.S. Buford, Alaska—bound in 1923—are brought to life in White's descriptions. There is no other book of letters to compare with this; it is a book to treasure and savor at one's leisure.

As White wrote in this book, "A man who publishes his letters becomes nudist—nothing shields him from the world's gaze except his bare skin....a man who has written a letter is stuck with it for all time."

## Letters of E.B. White Details

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## **From Reader Review Letters of E.B. White for online ebook**

### **bp says**

White wrote famously: "Omit needless words".

Therefore, in his honor, I shall omit the majority of my review.

Just read this master of the English language.

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### **sylph says**

I am in love with this book. We're in a relationship now.

As with most tomes of this kind, the latter years are not quite so gripping as early on. But relationships do tend to start off in a torrid frenzy, then settle into quiet comfort. It's only natural that reading someone's correspondence as they age would produce the same effect. It was a joy all the way through.

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### **Dana Stabenow says**

He wrote letters to family, friends and fans every bit as well as he wrote his New Yorker pieces and his books. Worth reading for this snippet alone -- "I can only assume you tripped over the First Amendment and mistook it for the kitchen cat." I. Love. This. Man.

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### **Tom says**

Just a wonderful book. Open it at random and you are sure to find something that warms your heart or makes you wish you were eloquent enough to say yourself. When you're done, it's hard to not to feel like he was one of your friends, too.

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### **Myrna Minkoff says**

Here's a sample from this book that is simply to die for, from "The Hotel of the Total Stranger"

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"Mr. Volente has just arrived at the train station in Manhattan, returning for a visit after years away. He is riding in a cab toward his hotel, on a steamy summer morning.

"New York is stretched in midsummer languor under her trees in her thinnest dress, idly and beautifully to the eyes of Mr. Volente, her lover. She lay this morning early in the arms of the heat, humorously and indulgently, as though, having bathed in night, she had emerged and not bothered to put anything on and had stretched out to let the air, what air there was, touch her arms and legs and shoulders and forehead, he thought, admiringly. The trucks and the sudden acceleration and the flippant horn and the rustle of countless affairs somewhat retarded by the middle-of-summer pause in everything, these were the sounds of her normal breathing (if you knew her well enough and had lived with her in this season in the long past) and her pulse, normal. It was the hour the earliest people were entering the buildings. Awnings were being cranked down already to spread the agreeable shade, the rectangles of relief sketched on the sidewalks. In every street the glimpse he caught of some door or some vestibule or some window would stir his memory and call up the recollection of something in his life that had once been.

"It was in this doorway...

"It was down that side street...

"It was in the back room of this café that..."

"That was the thing about New York, it was always bringing up something out of your past, something ridiculous or lovely or glistening. Here, all around him, was unquestionably the closest written page in the book of his life; here in the city in the streets and alleys and behind the walls and in the booths and beneath the roofs and under the marquees and canopies were the scenes of the story he remembered in tranquility, however poorly constructed, however unconvincing when retold."

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## **Sutter Lee says**

What a fabulous book by a fabulous man. Letters from childhood up to just before his death. Lots of letters from his friends, acquaintances, family, colleagues, editors.

Wonderful to look at our relatively recent history from his eyes, adventures.

It was like living a life vicariously, from his childhood to old age.

I had no idea he was such an outdoorsman.

The last few pages unbearable, knowing it meant the end of his remarkable life.

He has the most integrity of any writer I've come across, started the environmental movement, is passionate about politics. He is so observant, and doesn't suffer fools gladly, altho he is kind while still making his point and sticking to his guns.

He became much more than a gentleman farmer when he and his wife, the editor Katherine Sergeant Angell White, and their young son, moved to a saltwater farm, upstate Vermont.

It's a book I bought and look forward to reading it many more times.

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## **Leslie says**

So it took me nearly seven years to read this wonderful, wonderful book of letters by my favorite writer of all time. I bought it new, as soon as I saw it at my beloved now-defunct Locust Books in Westminster, and it

became my bedside book. And, since I rarely read in bed any more--although I love to read in bed, so why I don't do it more often is a puzzlement--it, yes, took me all these years to finish.

But while reading it, there were many occasions on which I shook the entire bed (including dogs) because I was laughing so hard. (Fortunately, dogs are very patient and stoic about this.) E. B. White's humor is dry, his observations are clear and simple, and he makes it all look so easy. Yes, there are letters about *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little* (I am more of a *Stuart* fan, myself), and his *New Yorker* columns, but it's the day-to-day stuff that overwhelmed me. White is the master.

If you're looking for excitement, this is not the book for you. But if you love good, clean, perfect, precise writing...well, E. B. White is the man for you.

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### **Jeff says**

I love E B White. As I read his essays, his stories, many old pieces in The New Yorker archives, and now these letters my respect for the man continues to grow. I am not sure why I feel such an affinity for his work, I love many authors and essayists but White brings the sense of mastery no one else does. Perhaps it is his all too human frailties and but of prickliness which attract me. In any case all writing by this man is a treasure.

It does make one wish that a trip to the mailbox still meant an occasional letter might be waiting.

His sense of humor, wry and with plenty of asides never fails to bring a smile to my face. The utter fierceness of his resolve to protect his work from alteration and most notably his belief and advocacy for a completely free press is more than admirable. Some of his spats with various editorial boards, especially during the Red Scare, show that this sickly, spindly, little man of words was comprised of a steel and sense of honor that was not to be trifled with.

Would not it be worth about any price to read what Mr. White would have to say about the orange headed menace we are currently being threatened by in this country.

Mr. White would certainly have a great deal to say.

A fantastic book of letters. An even better man.

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### **Rachel says**

Biographies of E.B. White and history books of the 20th century have both been written before, but I would venture that rarely would you find the merging of two hearts more intimately woven and on unadorned display. This personal correspondence that spans the years between the 9 year-old Elwyn and the nearly 86 year-old Andy is unmatched, in my reading of people, in its capacity to capture the essence of a man and the personal implications of the century that shaped him.

At almost 700 pages, the readers journey is lengthy and strewn with facts and people that are unfamiliar and intimately irrelevant, but when the letters cease and the authors life journey comes to a close, this reader felt a melancholy tenderness and an intimate understanding for a flawed, ordinary man, who lived a truly

ordinary life but left a lasting mark because he had something to say, a gift for words, and the temerity to write them down.

The reading enjoyment is in E.B. White's natural, creative wielding of words, but the books magic is nestled in the content within the content, where we witness a life transform before our eyes--real, sincere, and oh so humanly fragile. In that we find the heart of E.B. White and recognize our own as well.

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### **Jocelyn says**

Best thing I've read in years. Period.

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### **Dave says**

Not where anyone should start reading E.B. White. Though this collection gives consistent pleasure to anyone who just likes to read good, clear, amusing writing, it wouldn't be enough to make a case for White the writer without *One Man's Meat*, *Charlotte's Web*, or *The Elements of Style*. Also, since this was put together when White was alive, and since White was well aware of what biographers and interpreters can do, there are not very many major revelations or controversial attitudes towards other writers (Hemingway and Woolcott get gently dissed; Thoreau and Perelman strongly praised) or friends.

Reading this, you get a picture of a man who hated ritual, hated public speaking, hated typos, loved sailing, loved animals, loved Katherine White, and loved freedom-with-responsibility. You do get to wondering why he was sick all of the time--Katherine was much sicker and in more serious fashion--but you also get to love his gentle irony and always interesting ways with words, as much as he frequently claims he can't write/hates to write. Best things are his letters staunchly defending the truth and clarity of "Charlotte's Web." His is the best argument for spiders anywhere.

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### **Tracie Hall says**

I started reading this in 2013, but being 662 pages long, it got set aside and buried at some point. A couple of months ago I dug it back up and have finally finished it.

What a charming and pithy letter writer was Mr. White. I guess that's no surprise given that he became a co-author of the famous "Elements of Style" on just that subject.

I loved meeting his friends and family in this way, and learning his views. Despite enjoying a bevy of "litry" friends and several friends outside that realm as well, he seems on the whole, to have been a shy person, never accepting an offer to speak to, or even belong to any group, nor even make an appearance to receive a national award from a president (both Kennedy and Nixon show up in these pages).

I mostly loved his interest in, affection for, and attendance to creatures in all shapes and sizes.

What struck me too, about the book, that seems unique to a book of letters, was the passage of time. He doesn't mention his age until he's in his 50's, by which time we've already had visits to the hospital for one thing or another for he or his wife, and then, occasionally, an age number is dropped, and each time is a call to reminisce about the days of old, even though I wasn't alive when he was young. Imagining, at times, my folks in those days, I'd gotten fond of his memories, as though they were mine and I missed our younger days of better health and less clash, grit, and modernity in our world.

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## **Charlotte says**

Oh, how sad I am to be finished with this book. For over a month, I've been reading 20 pages or so every night before sleep, and I think I've been sleeping better. E.B. White was what the kids call a "class act," and these letters are by turns poignant and hilarious, with an emphasis on the funny. My writing must improve by osmosis after reading so many beautifully crafted sentences. This book also makes me want to move to a farm immediately. Perhaps we will acquire just two geese...

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## **Larry Putt says**

A few months ago I started Letters of E.B. White and enjoyed the writing so much I made a conscious decision to read the book slowly, enjoying each letter, and letting the writing digest before starting the next letter. Toward the end of the book White mentioned in a letter that it took him longer to read good writers, because he wanted to savor the writing. Little did he know he was describing what I was doing at the very moment I read that letter.

I felt sad when I finished the book. Sad, because his life was over, there would never be another letter, and I hate closing the cover of a book that I have truly enjoyed. With good writing I am greedy, I always want more.

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## **Consuela says**

I read this book years ago but I'm reading it again because his granddaughter has recently added new letters. It's a wonderful read.

At the beginning he tells of his adventures with a fellow Cornell graduate where they bought an old model T and traveled around the country getting jobs only when they ran out of money. When they were in Kentucky in 1922 they caught the horse-racing bug and decided to bet some money. White's travel companion, "Cush" (Howard Cushman) had done research and tried to figure out the racing forms and advice and had placed his bet. White went with his gut and bet on "Auntie May." Here's his account of the race which had me laughing out loud:

"The race was scheduled, I observed, for 'maidens three years old and upward.' By carefully tracing down the page I found that Auntie May's number was 8. This was a needless effort, for when a moment later I looked up and gazed down the track I knew her immediately. The race was, as I have said, for maidens three years old and upward. Auntie May looked upward of thirty-five...The other maidens were all life, all zest. They were frisking and sidling in the most maidenly fashion...Not so Auntie May. She not only had no personal enthusiasm for the race, but she had actually lost interest in life. The sight of the eager stands failed to thrill her; the feel of the turf under hoof failed to send a gladdening beat to her heart...I was sobbing quietly in my seat in the stands, beating gently upon my breast. Suddenly the starter cried "Come On,"...There never was such a change in any animal. Folks at home, I wish you could have seen my Auntie May! Thirty-five years of maidenly experience had taught her that prancing and showing enthusiasm before in front of the stands before starting time required just so many vitamins, and that the real dope was to save 'em for the performance." Auntie May won the race and White received the amazing sum of \$24.60 for his \$1 bet.

It's not all humor. The letter he wrote in 1929 to his new wife, a divorcée, older than him, and with 2 children

is beautiful and at the same time down-to-earth: "Dear Katherine (very dear), I've had moments of despair during the last week which have added years to my life and put many new thoughts in my head. Always, however, I have ended on a cheerful note of hope, based on the realization that you are the person to whom I shall return and that you are the recurrent phrase in my life. I realized that so strongly one day a couple of weeks ago when, after being away among people I wasn't sure of and in circumstances I had doubts about, I came back and walked into your office and saw how real and incontrovertible you seemed. I don't know whether you know just what I mean or whether you experience, ever, the same feeling; but what I mean is, that being with you is like walking on a very clear morning—definitely the sensation of belonging there."

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