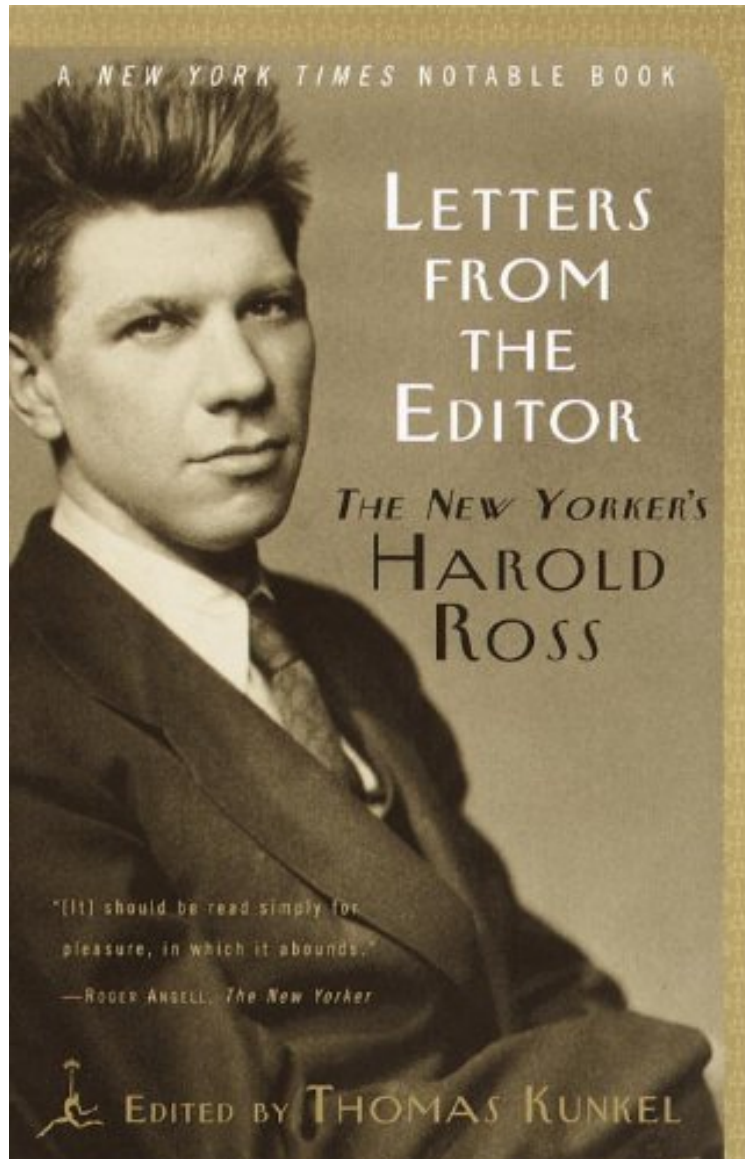


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Von Modern Library : Letters from the Editor: The New Yorker's Harold Ross (Modern Library Paperbacks)
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Entertaining Literary Anthology, Laugh Out Loud Funny Von Richard E. Hegner Even more than Kunkel's brilliant biography "Genius in Disguise," this book offers special insights into "New Yorker" founder and editor Harold Ross, not only a seminal figure in American letters but a sardonic wit reminiscent of H.L. Mencken, one of the people with whom he frequently exchanged letters. (Indeed, the sweep of his correspondence, from "New Yorker" stalwarts like E.B. White and his wife Katherine to Dorothy Parker and James Thurber all the way to John O'Hara, Harpo Marx, various state governors and other politicians, President Truman, and Premier Nehru, is impressive in itself.) While in many of these letters, Ross comes across as that curmudgeon one might expect, there is a touch of tender concern in others that shows you that some of the gruffness was merely a pose--as is his stance as the long-suffering, embattled editor who says he would rather be doing anything else, but who clearly shows he is having the time of his life. The book may be a bit abstruse in places for those who do not know the history of the "New Yorker" during the Ross editorship, but there seems to be enough comedy throughout to maintain even a casual reader's interest. Anyone who has enjoyed "Genius in Disguise" will surely love this book. I guess the greatest complement I can offer is now that I've read Kunkel's two Ross portrayals, I can't wait for his next book. 0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Here's to literacy Von Ein Kunde Ross's legendary gruffness and expansive curiosity are revealed in this wonderful book. Kunkel's superb biography of Ross, "Genius in disguise," deserved this follow-up, in which the subject speaks for himself. He is as lively a letter-writer as ever lived, making one wish that email weren't the washed out modern excuse for correspondence that it so often is. Read it; then go and read the old New Yorkers on microfilm at the university library. Sensational.

Kurzbeschreibung These exhilarating letters selected and introduced by Thomas Kunkel, who wrote *Genius in Disguise*, the distinguished Ross biography tell the dramatic story of the birth of *The New Yorker* and its precarious early days and years. Ross worries about everything from keeping track of office typewriters to the magazine's role in wartime to the exact questions to be asked for a "Talk of the Town" piece on the song "Happy Birthday." We find Ross, in Kunkel's words, "scolding Henry Luce, lecturing Orson Welles, baiting J. Edgar Hoover, inviting Noel Coward and Ginger Rogers to the circus, wheedling Ernest Hemingway offering to sell Harpo Marx a used car and James Cagney a used tractor, and explaining to restaurateur-to-the-stars Dave Chasen, step by step, how to smoke a turkey." These letters from a supreme editor tell in his own words the story of the fierce, lively man who launched the world's most prestigious magazine. From the Hardcover edition. "Don't waste your time and words on letters," Harold Ross cautioned more than one writer. "You don't get paid for them." Happily, *The New Yorker's* founding editor and dreamer didn't follow his own advice, and now--thanks to his biographer, Thomas Kunkel--we can share in Ross's revealing, inspiring, and hilarious correspondence. The fizzing communique collected in *Letters from the Editor* begin when he was a serviceman in France during World War I, and from the start his impulses were comedic. In April 1918, for example, a shell came a little too close for comfort: "My morale was shattered. I immediately retreated to a subway station and remained there for two hours. I then came up and consumed a whole bottle of 'morale.'" Ross liked to present himself as an unadorned, uneducated type, but from the moment he magicked up *The New Yorker* in 1924, it's clear that he was far more. Nonetheless, as late as 1949 he declared, "I don't know anything I've done for the human race, except possibly entertain a minute segment of it from time to time, and I can't compare myself with Goethe, because I don't know what he did for the race, either." The above quotes should give readers some notion of Ross's zinging mode, his sentences gathering into an absurd or satirical finale. Here's another: In 1937, he told E.B. White: "A gentleman from Montreal wrote in suggesting that your last piece be set to music. I suppose you got that letter. There was some talk that I ought to write you a letter upon completion of ten years service and I started a couple of times on it, my idea being to have that set to music and sing it to you." And the paragraph only gets better from there--just take a look at page 120. In fact, Ross's dispatches to White and White's wife, *New Yorker* editor Katharine White, are among the book's most tantalizing as he wheedles, exclaims, scolds, and invigorates. Ross lived for his job, and gave endless support to his writers, artists, and editors. His letters to the likes of Fitzgerald, Thurber, Rebecca West--not to mention the various Marx brothers--are graceful and unsycophantic. Yet he was no less solicitous to the obscure. In 1949 he complimented one Sally Benson on her "very good and trim story" before admonishing her: "Twenty-six stories in the next twenty-six weeks is what I expect from you, young lady, and come to think of it no more suicides during that period. Our characters have been bumping themselves off so often lately that our readers think they're reading *Official Detective* half the time." Of course *Letters from the Editor* lets us in on far more than *The New Yorker*, but it is Ross's missives and memos to his staff and contributors--and several more than acrimonious shots at his publisher and advertising department--that are most intriguing. Here was an editor who was concerned with every level of the magazine: he kept a card catalog with story ideas but was equally obsessed with language, commas, typos, and even the vexed question of large or small capital letters. In this sense, Kunkel's collection is a sublime record of a lost era. Ross was a lucky visionary, after all, who never concerned himself with target audiences, focus groups, or user testing. By his own lights, he and his colleagues were not "'aware' of our readers. It's the other

way around with me. All I know about getting out a magazine is to print what you think is good ... and let nature take its course: if enough readers think as you do, you're a success, if not you're a failure. I don't think it's possible to edit a magazine by 'doping out' your audience, and would never try to do that." Hmm, could Harold Ross have something there? --Kerry Fried.com

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