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He would become one of the most important poets of the twentieth century; she was the über-muse of Europe's turn-of-the-century thinkers and artists. In this never-before-translated collection of letters spanning almost thirty years, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé, a writer and intellectual fourteen years his senior, pen a relationship that moves from that of lovers to that of mentor and protégé, to that of deepest personal and literary allies. From the time of their first meeting and consequent affair to Rilke's death in 1926, Rilke and Salomé reeled through extremes of love, pain, annoyance, desire, and need—yet guided each other in one of the most fruitful artistic exchanges in twentieth-century literature. Despite illness, distance, and emotional and psychological pain, they managed to cultivate, through strikingly honest prose, an enduring and indispensable friendship, a decades-long heartfelt dialogue that encompassed love, art, and the imagination.

Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé: The Correspondence Details

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From Reader Review Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé: The Correspondence for online ebook

Juan Almonacid says

Rainer: Y aunque alguien viniera con su alma más inocente, más inmediata, y encontrara su referencia en los mismos astros, aunque me soportara a pesar de mi torpeza y rigidez y conservara su pura e infalible disposición para conmigo; aun cuando el rayo de su amor viniera a estrellarse diez veces en la turbia y densa superficie de mi universo submarino, todavía sería yo capaz (lo sé ahora) de empobrecerlo en el seno de la abundancia de su ayuda renovada sin cesar, de encerrarlo en el irrespirable dominio de una ausencia total de ternura, hasta el punto en que, vuelto inaplicable su auxilio, pasara él mismo de la plenitud a la marchitez, hasta dar en una siniestra decadencia...

...cada cual adquiría, por decirlo con la inocencia de un paisaje, una visibilidad pura, una presencia, y me enriquecía, formaba parte de mí mismo, tanto y de tal modo que por primera vez me parecía ser dueño de mi vida, no por una adquisición, por una explotación, por una comprensión interpretativa de cosas caducas, sin por esta misma nueva veracidad que se esparcía también a través de mis recuerdos.

Lou: Lo que hace el amor de este modo es oscuro, grave y magnífico, y se sitúa del lado de la vida; quién osará descubrir sus primeros frutos! Por lo demás tú mismo los vivirás.

...lo que se dice ser "nosotros mismos"; este inquietante, desorientador fenómeno, de ordinario no se disipa completamente más que en el comportamiento amoroso del otro, y es sólo él quien legitima de manera soportable nuestro cuerpo en tanto que "nosotros mismos". En lugar de eso, las partes integrantes se asocian y disocian de nuevo en el "creador": por ello lo que viene de él es una realidad nueva en vez de una simple repetición. Es eso lo que a ti te hace daño; a través de tu mal presiento la felicidad. Perdóname.

Postfacio:

El animal está en el mundo como el agua en el agua- decía Bataille. Al hombre, sin embargo, le está vedada esta experiencia. La herida que le abre al mundo es irrenunciable: es ella la que le constituye en tanto que hombre. Todo su ser no es sino esa crispada distancia de la que cuanto más se apropia, más le extraña- ojo atento a ese mundo en el que está, pero sin ver, él mismo, mundo.

Mirada y distancia.

La vida puede ser abandonada, pero no puede ser vivida sin orgullo..

El orgullo estriba en asumir la presencia sorda de la propia muerte como contrapunto preciso de la vida, para hacer de cada instante vivido un instante querido- una afirmación. Asumir las fuerzas que brotan desde los abismos del sí mismo y, luchando por expresarse, desgarran la piel delicada del poeta- someterse al daimon para llegar a ser lo que uno es. Asumir esa soledad irremediable que llena de desamor el corazón de Narciso e imponer el silencio al miedo que convierte en lenguaraz el propio dolor- desdramatizar la importancia propia.

Acaso puede decirse "yo" y no mentir?

"lo que en definitiva nos cobija es estar desamparados"

Jenni says

Pretty good. I mean, they are letters, so some of it gets a little boring at times. I haven't read EVERY letter. I don't read letters that way. I usually hop around a lot and read only the ones that seem interesting. Many are descriptions of travel and places. He did send drafts of poems to her as well, and those are interesting. It's definitely an affectionate relationship, and the letters get more "romantic" as time passes. They really start to heat up after 1914. Everything before that is a bit boring.

Christopher Louderback says

Just beautiful and raw, and an early viewpoint into Rilke's language and the poetry and man that would be.

“Now I come to you full of future. And from habit we begin to live our past.”
? Rainer Maria Rilke

alice says

Good insight into a life long relationship

sheena says

This book took me a shiny, beautiful eternity to read, because every ten lines or so I had to pause, inhale deeply, sigh and stare out of my window until I could regain composure. I mean: it was gorgeous.

The relationship between RMR and LAS is a complex but soothing one a lot of mediocre souls will spend their entire lives searching for. Messy and shifting mix of mentor, apprentice, lover, stranger, friend, pen-pal and colleague.

Read it and swoon as RMR and LAS both mature, while sharing breakdowns, secrets, critiques, observations, ego-strokes, ego-breaks, desires and frustrations in a most devoted manner that spans decades.

Yea. Some quotes to entice you:

"If people happen to be present they offer me the relief of being able to be more or less the person they take me for, without being too particular about my actual existence..." -RMR

"You are still struggling to achieve childhood again." -LAS

"...but you know how it really was, and that I only wanted to help you. But that's something people can't do for each other. Only remain loyal in the deepest, most fundamental sense." -LAS

"To let all this slip past without / desiring" -RMR

Disaster! says

the intimacy between friends over time - in reading their letters, there is the evidence of the gap, or what can go unstated, or the loyal love, or the depth of compassion that they have for one another (although lou asks for much less than rilke). what haunts and goads rilke forward is most present in these letters, sent to lou out of something between a cry for comfort and a desire for a muse, but their relationship changes over time, becomes more even, as they balk at the war and both fall into little states of poverty and disrepair.

Elegant Blossom says

I think I never can get enough of it. The correspondance between them was beautiful, even though for some reasons, I felt sad when it comes to their late letters. Through this book, you not only see the story about their lives RMR & LAS, you somehow can even feel them- even though I would still long for reading the original letters instead of a translated publication.

I prefer the early letters, super youthful and romantic <3

Rachel says

Rilke's early letters are pretty ridiculous, so I was sucked into this correspondence with a lightened heart—and by the time I got to the writing of the first *Elegies*, it was much too late for me to escape unscathed. Also Philadelphia's unrelenting summer humidity set in as I read, so that as the intensity of the letters mounted I felt increasingly nauseated each day. Five stars for making me physically ill!

Here is what it's like:

RMR to LAS
Duino Castle
January 10, 1912

. . . What distresses me this time is perhaps not even the length of the pause but rather a kind of dulling, a growing old, if one wants to call it that—as though what is strongest in me really had been damaged somehow, were a little bit to blame, were atmosphere, you understand: air instead of world-space. It may be that this continual inner distractedness in which I live is partly physical in origin, is a thinness of the blood; whenever I notice it, it fills me with reproaches for having let it get so far. No matter what awaits me: I still get up every day doubting whether I shall succeed in doing so; and these misgivings have grown to their present size through the actual experience of weeks, even months going by in which I produce only with the greatest exertions five lines of an utterly insipid letter, which, when they are finally there, leave an aftertaste of incompetence such as a cripple might feel who can't even shake hands anymore.

Can I, despite everything, move on through all this? If people happen to be present they offer

me the relief of being able to be more or less the person they take me for, without being too particular about my actual existence. How often do I step out of my room as, so to speak, some chaos, and outside, perceived by someone else's mind, assume a composure that is actually his and in the next moment, to my astonishment, find myself expressing well-formed things, while just before everything in my entire consciousness was utterly amorphous. To whom am I saying this, dear Lou, indeed it is almost *through you* that I know this is the way things are, you see how little has changed, —and in this sense people will always be the wrong thing for me, something that galvanizes my lifelessness without remedying it. . . .

RMR to LAS

Duino Castle

February 7, 1912

. . . Clara said, as you, I believe, learned in Weimar from Gebattel, —that she wants our divorce, I understand this very well, unfortunately the thing will be lengthy and drag on. There is no ill will between us, but as my wife she does, so to speak, go around falsely labeled, is not with me and yet cannot move on to anything free of me. It is strange: our relationship consisted of her infinitely and unreservedly affirming and accepting me, and then, as she realized how much she had signed onto there that is absolutely alien, even hostile to her, reversing into wholesale rejection. If behind all this one looks for *her*, for what she has become since the end of her girlhood, one finds (her motherly care and her relationship with Ruth excepted) nothing tangible, nothing but this alternating function of ingesting me and expelling me, and if, as I hope, the analysis succeeds in completely getting rid of me (apparently as pest in her nature after all), then she will presumably have to start up again at that point where I entered and interrupted her . . . Gradually (under the pressure of her decision and my need for someone who can help me, stand by me, offer me protection) I have come to understand why nothing real could come of us living side by side: because she was either my double with all her strengths and thus too much for me, or else my antagonist and thus of course an advocatus diaboli, a pale reverser and endless opponent, without personal background of her own. The many things she herself may have suffered in this are almost impossible fully to identify, but at any rate it was for both of us futile and hopeless. The beautiful letters she sometimes wrote were *mine*, *my* letters, letters in *my* key, or else she did not write at all. I remember when she was in Egypt, a few accounts of her trip arrived, I read parts of them to our intimate circle in Capri: all were amazed, were certain: this could have been written by me. Then she returned, I was full of anticipation, but my mouth dried up, aside from a few inconveniences and mishaps she brought back nothing to tell me, absolutely nothing, because she could never quite make herself echo my way of *speaking*. How often did I ask myself in sorrow: who *is* she, by what means does she express herself? For not even her work is a genuine means of expression for her: this was, when I discovered it, quite early on, so immediately bizarre to me—that someone should be working in art without having come to it through her own inner expansion; I often teased her about this enigmatic origin of her sculpting, which was there without anyone knowing where it had come from; was simply there and got better and better, but without being necessary to satisfy some inner urge or demand. Once it reached excellence it was simply carried on industriously and rigorously and honestly, somewhat like a well-maintained *dépendence* for which cooking is done in the main house—; but it never became that for which something inside her screamed, screamed in order to plunge herself into it head over heels no matter what the cost. Later I stopped teasing, I saw the impending doom in these accomplishments into which nothing ever entered except strength, pure, as it were colorless strength, never a heart-

surge, never anything that achieved its equanimity there, —always only this equanimity itself. Thus finally the exhaustion after all, the feeling of an unending repetition, the Buddha-idea that came as such a relief because, in a manner of speaking, it discharged the rhythm of these monotonous exertions.

Many of LAS's letters were lost, so there is quite a bit more of Rilke in this volume.

Alejandra says

An incredibly intense read...

Emily says

I give the correspondence itself 5 Stars - but the introduction made me angry and makes me question the translation. I'd be very interested in reading another translation. Here's the thing: these letters were clearly translated by devotees of Rilke and of course, that is logical and sensible, who else would do it? However - their high opinion of Rilke serves to diminish Lou Andreas-Salome, who happened to be the reason I wanted to read this correspondence. This very curious introduction makes Andreas-Salome out to be a sort of castrating mother-lover figure who never really understood the poet. They reference several letters as evidence of this. Luckily, the letters are here to read and I can decide for myself what I think of her. Rilke was devoted to her from the moment he met her and I prefer to take his point of view on her than read her through the judgment of these contemporary translators.

As for the letters themselves - there are moments of sublime turns of language, inspirations, reflections on the life of an artist (many of which I found very poignantly like my own life) and a continual undercurrent of love and respect between two writers. I was particularly moved by the many ways Rilke struggled with his own artistry, wondering if he was good enough, if he'd ever amount to anything. I kept wanting to shout at him in the past: "You don't know it yet? You're amazing! You haven't even written the Duino elegies yet! Just hang in there!" Which is, of course, the message I took away for myself.

Jo Walton says

This is great, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. It's not a love story, whatever the title says, it's the letters of two writers who are friends.

It's odd though, RMR keeps writing these letters where he says that if only he could get his brain in gear he'd produce something really good, and I kept getting impatient (though Lou never does) and telling him to pull himself together and toss out the Romantic worldview and just get on with it. Then one day in 1922 he finally did get his brain in gear and wrote the Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus in a no-kidding fortnight, because he really is that amazing and that was his process and he was in fact right, who could have guessed? 99% of the time people who are going to write something great one day when things are just right are kidding themselves. The other 1% they're Rainer Maria Rilke. Wow.

There's a poem in here that he wrote when WWI started which isn't in either of my facing page collections of

his poetry, and it's brilliant and wonderful. It would be worth whatever I paid for this collection even if I hadn't enjoyed the rest of it.

You probably want a reasonable knowledge of Rainer and Lou before you embark on this -- there is some minimal information in the book, but not enough. I also wouldn't recommend this to anyone who doesn't appreciate Rilke's staggering genius, because he does get whiny from time to time.

The best thing about it, apart from that poem, is the appreciation of creation. Much better than a love story, and more interesting and unusual too.

Mathiasquimby says

It has been so long since people wrote letters that it is a great wonder and novel to read letters that people have written to each other. A what people! Fame is not a yardstick of how interesting people are, but they often coincide and this is one of the best. Rillke seems like a student desperately trying to please his wonderful and beautiful teacher. It was a beautiful book about a beautiful life.

Cristina says

Leo el intercambio epistolar entre Rilke y Lou Andreas-Salomé en una edición muy cuidada de Límits, editorial andorrana que presenta en catalán obras de la literatura universal especialmente seleccionadas por su calidad artística. Tanto la traducción, a cargo de Joan Fontcuberta Gel, catedrático de Traducción e Interpretación de la UAB (Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona) como la presentación son exquisitas.

El libro recoge algunas de las cartas escritas entre el año 1897, cuando se conocieron, él con 21 años y ella con 36, y el año 1912, cuando Rilke empezó a escribir las Elegías de Duino. Quien más y quien menos conoce a Rilke; sin embargo, mediante las cartas nos enamoraremos de Lou, una mujer libre, inteligente, de una gran vitalidad y optimismo, que contrasta con la personalidad melancólica del poeta.

Lou Andreas-Salomé fue una mujer de una mentalidad muy avanzada para su época, no olvidemos que estamos hablando de principios del siglo XX, que mantuvo relaciones afectivas con Freud y Nietzsche, entre otros. Sabedora de que el deseo físico se esfuma en cuanto se consume primó en sus relaciones con los hombres que le interesaron la amistad profunda basada en la complicidad intelectual. A veces lo consiguió pero otras no, pues no todos sus amigos aceptaron dichas condiciones. Respecto a Rilke su amistad epistolar duró nada menos que treinta años y las cartas ofrecen un testimonio único del afecto que se profesaron.

Es una pena que en pleno siglo XXI muchas de estas mujeres fascinantes (junto a Lou Andreas-Salomé podríamos citar a Alma Mahler, Clara Schumann o George Sand) aún no hayan sido reconocidas como se merecen. Esperemos que esto cambie algún día.

Amy says

Whenever I want to learn about a creative or inspirational figure, I feel that autobiographical revelations, especially those related unintentionally such as through personal correspondences, are the best way to try to

understand that creative figure's mental state. Rilke and Andreas-Salome have a continually evolving relationship that significantly impacts both of them in the development of their love lives, expectations of life and friends, and literary skills/style. They were extraordinary people, and this insight into their lives is extraordinary as well.

John Nez says

It's interesting to read the other comments about Rilke's letters. Why? Because I read them for years... long before there was any internet, where strangers can so freely make sense or nonsense of them. I was all alone and reading Rilke's letters were a mild entrancing addiction. I remember one winter when I had nowhere to go at Xmas - reading them all alone in a downtown public cafe.

Rilke can be insanely romantic in a way, and his whole life was a bit of a tragedy. So I find it amusing to see the different reactions of various readers to my longtime book companion...

Rilke is ineffable...
