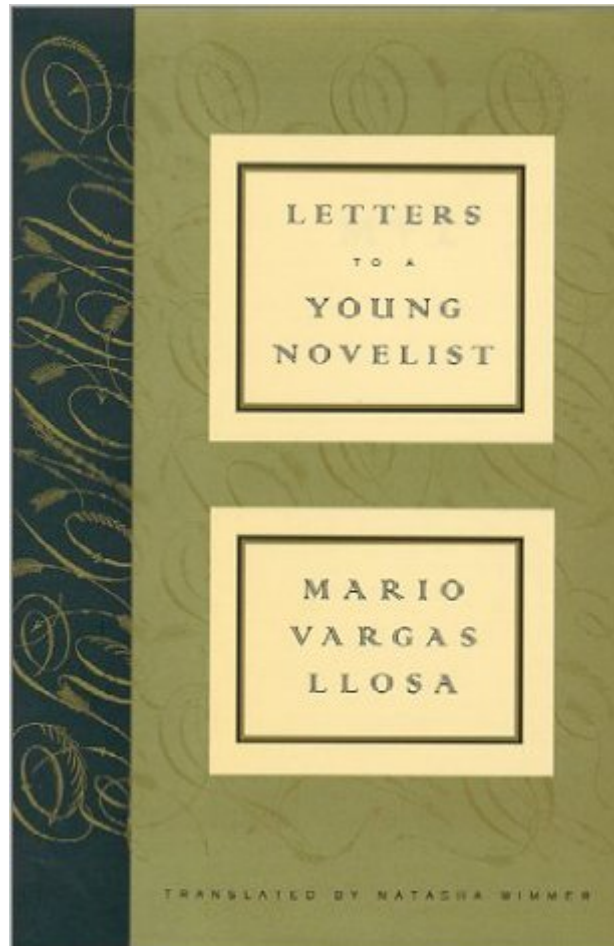


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Letters To A Young Novelist



Synopsis

A literary apprenticeship in eleven letters, by the internationally acclaimed master of the novel In the tradition of Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet, Mario Vargas Llosa condenses a lifetime of writing, reading, and thought into an essential manual for aspiring writers, revealing in the process his deepest beliefs about our common literary endeavor. A writer, in his view, is a being seized by an insatiable appetite for creation, a rebel, and a dreamer. But dreams, when set down on paper, require disciplined development, and so Vargas Llosa undertakes to supply the tools of transformation. Drawing on the stories and novels of writers from around the globe -- Borges, Bierce, CÃ©line, CortÃ©zar, Faulkner, Kafka, Robbe-Grillet -- he lays bare the inner workings of fiction, examining time, space, style, and structure, all the while urging young novelists not to lose touch with the elemental urge to create. Conversational, eloquent, and effortlessly erudite, this little book is destined to be read and reread by young writers, old writers, would-be writers, and all those with a stake in the world of letters.

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Customer Reviews

This book is written as a series of letters to an anonymous, aspiring novelist. Obviously it is fashioned after Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet", and although somewhat cheeky, the style and tone of these pseudo-letters fit Mario Vargas Llosa's objectives in writing. Unlike some of the mainstream writing tutorials that are around, this volume, although slight in page length, has genuine and truly original insights that will help your writing tremendously. For example, whereas

most writing instructors teach you to stick to one point-of-view, Vargas Llosa says one of the most unbending rules in fiction is that no novel sticks to one kind of point-of-view, that it subtly changes. There are equally startling and persuasive directives regarding spatial and temporal matters in fiction. The book is fun to read as well; only a novelist of Vargas Llosa's caliber can dismiss many of the so-called 'classics' and not seem vindictive and/or crazy. To fully understand this book (although not totally necessary), a reader should have at least a passing knowledge of the writers and their works that Vargas Llosa invokes as examples. i.e. Proust, Flaubert, Robbes-Grillet, etc. If you are an aspiring writer, chances are good that this wry book will be an indispensable guide. Highly recommended.

"Letters" is an adroitly written instruction book for beginning writers. Incorporating an imaginary correspondent, Mario Vargas Llosa writes a series of letters to a young protege sharing his years of literary experience and outlining the principles that make a novel. It is an interesting vehicle for an instruction book and it works. Most books of how to write are overloaded with superfluous detail and have the annoying tendency to be academic in the approach to writing. This book is breezy, conversational, loaded with brilliant insight and fun to read. Sighting loads of examples from classic and not so classic novels he brings to life essential topics of style, voice, time, point of view and other narrative tools that the masters of the novel have incorporated for hundreds of years. Many of the novelists Vargas Llosa cites for his many examples are unknown to me and he has roused my interest in reading their books. Alas, many of them are not translated into English (at least not that I can find on). But that does not diminish the satisfaction derived from reading this diminutive book. His best advice to any writer is to be a great reader. An example he has clearly followed himself.

This is an elegant, erudite reflection on fiction writing as passion and philosophy. Like a caring, older companion, It offers the aspiring novelist much in the way of encouragement and inspiration. But be warned: it is not a how-to manual focusing on a workshop-type approach to producing fiction. Instead, it invites the reader on a journey through the often lonely and troubling pathways that all writers inevitably have to navigate. Stimulating and rewarding.

In this short but entertaining and enlightening little book, Mario Vargas Llosa discusses the art of writing fiction. As the title states, it is divided up into 11 letters ostensibly written to an admiring young novelist. This is not so much a "how-to" writing guide, with step-by-step instructions on improving one's craft and abilities. Though it addresses many of the same subjects (Style,

Narration, Time, etc.) it still, to some degree, feels like it touches on something deeper, within the writer himself. It's hard for me to say exactly what that is at this point, several months after I finished reading the book, but suffice it to say, at the time I had a distinct feeling that I was not only reading about how to improve my writing, but myself as one who desires to write. In this regard, I found the book extremely encouraging. The style is warm, open, and friendly. No sense of arrogance, no put-downs, no bitter cynicism or sarcasm. Go live and love life and bring that to your writing. And more importantly: write, write, write and do not stop. I enjoyed reading this book, not only because it was full of helpful advice, but because it made me feel like writing is something that I can do and have as much right to do as anyone else, including seasoned and published authors. It's easy to fall prey to the notion that we aren't as worthy of writing because we aren't as talented, practiced, capable or whatever as the greats but it isn't true. Anyone can write and we should all strive to improve ourselves and our writing. This book mentions several ways to do just that but there are many more. The best and only way to figure them out is to sit down and start punching out word after word after word. If I knew an aspiring writer who needed some advice and encouragement, I would give him this book. Definitely recommended.

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