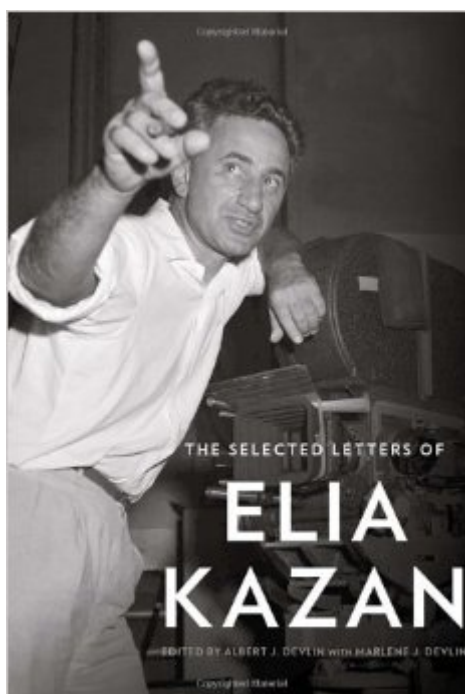


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The Selected Letters Of Elia Kazan



Synopsis

This collection of nearly three hundred letters gives us the life of Elia Kazan unfiltered, with all the passion, vitality, and raw honesty that made him such an important and formidable stage director (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Death of a Salesman*), film director (*On the Waterfront*, *East of Eden*), novelist, and memoirist. Elia Kazan's lifelong determination to be a sincere, conscious, practicing artist resounds in these letters fully annotated throughout in every phase of his career: his exciting apprenticeship with the new and astonishing Group Theatre, as stagehand, stage manager, and actor (*Waiting for Lefty*, *Golden Boy*) . . . his first tentative and then successful attempts at directing for the theater and movies (*The Skin of Our Teeth*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*) . . . his cofounding in 1947 of the Actors Studio and his codirection of the nascent Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center . . . his innovative and celebrated work on Broadway (*All My Sons*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *J.B.*) and in Hollywood (*Gentleman's Agreement*, *Splendor in the Grass*, *A Face in the Crowd*, *Baby Doll*) . . . his birth as a writer. Kazan directed virtually back-to-back the greatest American dramas of the era by Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams and helped shape their future productions. Here we see how he collaborated with these and other writers: Clifford Odets, Thornton Wilder, John Steinbeck, and Budd Schulberg among them. The letters give us a unique grasp of his luminous insights on acting, directing, producing, as he writes to and about Marlon Brando, James Dean, Warren Beatty, Robert De Niro, Boris Aronson, and Sam Spiegel, among others. We see Kazan's heated dealings with studio moguls Darryl Zanuck and Jack Warner, his principled resistance to film censorship, and the upheavals of his testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. These letters record as well the inner life of the artist and the man. We see his startling candor in writing to his first wife, his confidante and adviser, Molly Day Thacher they did not mince words with each other. And we see a father's letters to and about his children. An extraordinary portrait of a complex, intense, monumentally talented man who engaged the political, moral, and artistic currents of the twentieth century. Â

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Customer Reviews

What this book has, which no other book devoted to Kazan does, is a collection of his very different voices. In his autobiography, he was talking to an imagined general public. In this collection, he is addressing single people and summons up a different voice for each relationship. In one letter he will be flattering Jack Warner. In the next letter, he will be telling someone what a jerk Jack Warner is. There have been a lot of comments about what the letters reveal of his sex life. What was most particularly interesting to me, however, were the letters to the various writers with whom he worked. There is a particularly startling letter chewing William Inge out for complaining about a film deal. In some letters, he makes slighting comments about gays. In the letters to Tennessee Williams, however, he writes with great and seemingly sincere empathy. And always, he writes as if to justify himself. He spends so much of these letters either indicting or proving a case to establish why he is right about one thing or another. He alternates between pure idealism and cynical manipulation without recognizing these extremes within himself. For all of his extraordinary understanding of human nature, which made him a great director, he seemed to have little objective understanding of himself and his own contradictions. A riveting read.

For a period of around fifteen years, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Elia Kazan was one of America's preeminent film and stage directors. In contrast to the standard, shallow entertainment fare of the time Kazan challenged audiences with productions that questioned societal norms, incorporating heightened levels of psychological realism. As a patron of the Stanislavski "Method," Kazan had a dramatic influence on the craft of acting. However, his friendly testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952 forever made him the bane of liberals and reaffirmed in Kazan's mind his role as the "outsider." Toward the end of his career Kazan largely focused on projects, films and novels, that held a deeply personal meaning. The Selected Letters of Elia Kazan offers the reader great insight into the mind of the director as he rose from his humble beginnings in the Group Theater to national prominence. Included are close to three hundred letters,

ranging from extremely personal notes to his wife to mundane communications with stage designers. In his correspondence with collaborators and associates (Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Budd Schulberg, John Steinbeck, William Inge, Lee Strasberg, Clifford Odets, Marlon Brando, studio heads, film censors, agents, producers, writers, etc.) Kazan can be the sweetest friend or a fierce defender of his artistic vision. The commentary provided by Albert and Marlene Devlin is excellent. Kazan's 1988 autobiography was a marvelous testimony and confessional and Letters is a much appreciated, unvarnished supplement. This book is not something you'll read in a couple of days. It's like a fine scotch; to be sipped and relished a bit at a time. Students of Kazan cannot be without.

Another book I had a hard time getting through, a bit boring now and then, but I did speed read it

A very clear insight into the mind of a great director. Some of my friends have a hard time buying it - reading it even - in view of Kazan's to them (and to me) unconscionable naming of names to McCarthy's House of Unamerican Activities Committee which resulted in the ruination of many innocent lives in the creative community at the time of the great Commie scare. But if the history of American theater and movies during the mid twentieth century concerns you, read it by all means even if it means borrowing it from the library.

An excellent technical view of a great director's methods, thoughts and opinions. A good companion piece to Kazan's excellent autobiography, "A Life."

This book centres on letters from Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, Vivian Leigh, and the list goes on . This book gives you great insight into the films of the master. He stands as one of the greatest film makers of the 20th century, and a great theatrical director as well. His politics interfered with the appreciated of his art for over 40 years, but he was still given a lifetime achievement Academy Award in recent years despite his politics. This speaks to the brilliance of his film contribution. This book will not disappoint!

A treasure in the American theatre.

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