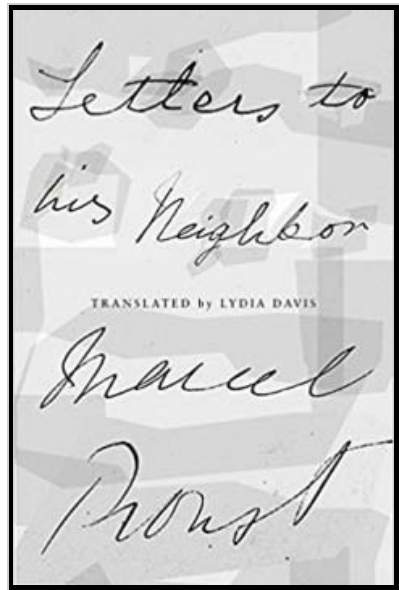


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 Letters to His Neighbor



Letters to His Neighbor

by Marcel Proust, Lydia Davis

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Published: August 22, 2017

★★★★★

Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: Marcel Proust's genius for illuminating pain is on spectacular display in this recently discovered trove of his correspondence, *Letters to His Neighbor*. Already suffering from noise within his cork-lined walls, his poor soul was not ready for the fresh hell when his neighbor Dr. Williams married a widow with small children. Chiefly to Mrs. Williams, these ever-polite letters (often accompanied by flowers, compliments, books, even pheasants) are frequently hilarious—Proust couches his fury in a gracious tone. In Lydia Davis's hands, the digressive brilliance of his sentences shines: "Don't speak of annoying neighbors, but of neighbors so charming (an association of words contradictory in principle since Montesquiou claims that most horrible of all are 1) neighbors 2) the smell of post offices) that they leave the constant tantalizing regret that one cannot take advantage of their neighborliness." Proust makes fine distinctions among his auditory torments: "The valet de chambre makes noise and that doesn't matter. But later he knocks with little tiny raps. And that is worse." Lydia Davis has written a generous translator's note, tracing much of what we can know about Proust's perpetually dark room; she details the furnishings as well as the life he lived there: burning his powders, talking with friends, hiring musicians, and, most of all, suffering. *Letters to His Neighbor* is richly illustrated with facsimile letters and photographs—catnip for lovers of Proust. With an Introduction by Jean-Yves Tadié and a translator's note by Lydia Davis

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About The Author

Marcel Proust, Lydia Davis

MARCEL PROUST is arguably the most admired writer of the twentieth century.

Lydia Davis is a finalist for the 2013 Man Booker International Prize.

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What We Say

This amusing little bon-bon of a book contains some two dozen letters written by Marcel Proust to his neighbor upstairs. They charm, irritate and delight but are so slight in nature it's impossible to imagine anyone other than a devoted fan of

Proust finding them of interest. Since I am indeed a fan of Proust and read all 4,200 pages of his masterwork (and never fail to take advantage of the opportunity to mention that fact), for me this book breezed by. Surprises abound. For example, who knew Proust could be succinct? (Some of his letters are quite brief.) On the other hand, I'm not surprised in the least that Proust is a difficult neighbor, apologizing ever so profusely while he complains for the thousandth time about the noise of a neighbor's servants or workmen or countless other indignities. Could not perhaps the neighbor's servants ascertain when Proust's servants plan to beat their rugs outdoors and time it so all are beaten at once? And the ever-ailing Proust wonders if perhaps they could ask the workmen to do nothing on Friday because Proust is daring to venture outdoors that evening and it will take an entire day of tomb-like silence for the great man to even consider the hazards of a dinner engagement without faltering at the start. Again, it's all quite amusing and his letters entertain, especially in the nimble translation by Lydia Davis. Maybe if we read the responses of his neighbor this very brief work might feel a bit more substantial. But as is, it's a minor amusement that cannot bear the scrutiny of standing on its own. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

Proust whining rhapsodically about the sounds of frolicking children on the other side of his bedroom wall, as translated by Lydia Davis — what's not to love here? - **Evan Lavender-Smith HTMLGiant**

Everything great in the world comes from neurotics. - **Marcel Proust**

Literary people know that at the sentence level and the word level Lydia Davis is the best there is. - **Michael Silverblatt Bookworm**

A sensitive and direct translation. Lydia Davis does us a great service in bringing back Proust. - **Claire Messud Newsday**

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