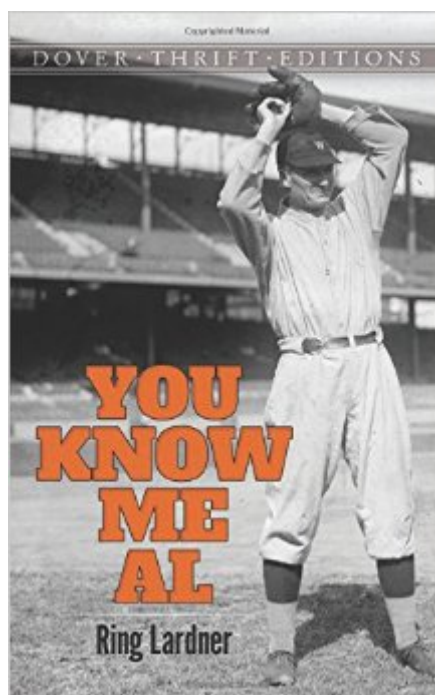


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You Know Me Al (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

In the early decades of the twentieth century, newspaperman and humorist Ring Lardner (1885–1933) made America laugh with his hilarious depictions of odd characters in the sporting world, Tin Pan Alley, and Hollywood. His first great success was *You Know Me Al*, a fictional series of letters from a popular baseball hero to his friend, slyly revealing the letter writer as a crude, conceited, semiliterate, self-deceiving boob. The letters, created while Lardner was writing a sports column for *The Chicago Tribune*, first appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* and were later published in book form in 1918. *You Know Me Al* reveals Lardner as a satirical master at the peak of his form: a fine albeit misanthropic storyteller with a superb feel for the niceties of characters and speech and a sure instinct for provoking laughter.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The travails of the boastful, blame-shifting, naive-unto-the-point-of-stupidity White Sox rookie first went into print 85 years ago. It's one of the miracles of 20th century fiction -- or a comment on the eternal childishness of America's national pastime -- that the bush leaguer's absurd confidences to a friend back home are still fresh and funny. "I have not worked yet Al and I asked Callahan to-day what was the matter and he says I was waiting for you to get in shape. I says I am in shape now and I notice that when I was pitching in practice this A.M. they did not hit nothing out of the infield. He says That was because you are so spread out that they could not get nothing past you. He says The way you are now you cover more ground than the grand stand. I says Is that so? And he

walked away." Yeah, this is clearly the same sport where the portly John Kruk turned aside a question a few years ago about conditioning with the Bartlett's-worthy, "We're not athletes. We're ballplayers." Lardner does more than get laughs at the expense of his dense protagonist, though. He gives an intimate picture of baseball in its first classic era -- the busher comes face to face with Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker and Walter Johnson with interesting results. But it's not a sentimental depiction of the age: Among those with whom the busher crosses paths is the famously parsimonious and autocratic White Sox owner, Charles Comiskey. The book gives a hint of the resentments that led his players to agree to throw a World Series (as they did a few years after Lardner wrote "You Know Me Al") and illustrates the indentured servitude that all but the best players endured before free agency arrived in the mid-'70s.

Ring Lardner was a newspaper sports writer in the early 1900s. He rode the trains with professional baseball players and joined in their card games. "You Know Me Al" is a unique set of letters from a fictional rookie ball player to his friend Al back home. The book contains real teams and stats, but is a fast-reading fictional look at the lives of players. With everything from front office negotiations with Comiski to on-the-field trash talk, "You Know Me Al" is a must-read for baseball fans who miss the game of yesteryear.

This book was a real hoot to read. I've always loved the language that revolved around the game of baseball. Ring Lardner does a credible job of creating this youthful prospect trying to make big in The Show. The format of writing letters gives it a touch a realism. The language and grammar of this semiliterates lend it a charm that is slightly reminiscent of Huck Finn. His delusional arrogance is more humorous than offensive in the long run. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the literature and journalism that surrounds this great American game.

Not being much of a sports fan, but for many years standing close beside one, I knew nothing of Ring Lardner until I visited Niles, Michigan, pursuing a story of my own. In a quaint hometown treasures museum, we discovered the local author gone national, with a first edition of "You Know Me Al" under glass. Intrigued, I purchased a modern day copy soon after for my sports fan, but I had to read it first myself. In full agreement with Virginia Woolf in the book's Introduction, I can say you do not have to be a sports fan to enjoy Lardner's humorous portrayal of Jack Keefe, a bush-league pitcher who writes frequent letters to his best pal, Al, about his adventures on and off the baseball field. The letters are filled with hilarious misspellings, misunderstandings, and general bumbings.

Jack may be a good athlete, but his mind, shall we say, is his least athletic muscle...All of which adds to the slim book's charm. Jack writes to Al about his fortunes and misfortunes in pitching, forever blaming others for his own obvious failures, never missing a chance to boast, thumping his manly chest with threats that he will beat up this guy or that for some imagined slight. His arrogance is in high form, but just about the time it approaches the point of no return, Jack charms with his naivete. One can't help but laugh at him again, much as one laughs at a child or a wildly bounding puppy. The letters are not just about baseball, however, but just as comically illustrate Jack's romantic failings, as he imagines Violet is ever so smitten with him, then decides to marry another, only to drop her for another, only to long for the first again, only to marry Florrie. With whom the threat of divorce comes up again and again in similar cyclings. Jack waffles with all decisions in his life: team trips, moving from one city to another, borrowing and repaying funds to the silent and surely most patient and near saintly Al. It is the lack of hearing from the other side that keeps me from adding a fifth star to this review. We have only Jack's view of himself and his world, charming bumbler that he is, and I found myself often wishing for Al's side in response. Nonetheless, this is a classic that can obviously be enjoyed even over a great passage of time since its original writing some eighty years ago, and with or without a penchant for sports.

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