

## "I Love You" Letter

Ayn Rand, 1948

May 22, 1948

Dear Ms. Rondeau:

You asked me to explain the meaning of my sentence in *The Fountainhead*: "To say 'I love you' one must know first how to say the 'I.'" *This is why I'm writing...in response*

The meaning of that sentence is contained in the whole of *The Fountainhead*. And it is stated right in the speech on page 400 from which you took that sentence. The meaning of the "I" is an independent, self-sufficient entity that *does not* exist for the sake of any other person. *"I" means this ↑ and not ↓ this*

A person who exists only for the sake of his loved one is not an independent entity, but a spiritual parasite. The love of a parasite is worth nothing.

The usual (and very vicious) nonsense preached on the subject of love claims that love is self-sacrifice. A man's self is his spirit. If one sacrifices his spirit, who or what is left to feel the love? True love is profoundly *selfish*, in the noblest meaning of the word—it is an expression of one's *self*, of one's highest values. When a person is in love, he seeks his own happiness—and *not* his sacrifice to the loved one. And the loved one would be a monster if she wanted or expected sacrifice. *"Love" does not mean this ↓*

Any person who wants to live *for* others—for one sweetheart or for the whole of mankind—is a selfless nonentity. An independent "I" is a person who exists for his own sake. Such a person does not make any vicious pretense of self-sacrifice and does not demand it from the person he loves. Which is the only way to be in love and the only form of a self-respecting relationship between two people. *So all together, it means this ↑*

*Note: One of the biggest problems in our culture comes into play when we misunderstand each other's messages, both verbal and nonverbal. Usually when we are then asked, "What did you mean?" we simply repeat our message verbatim, without giving it much thought. Ayn Rand's letter gives us a structure that promises to help us come to a place of clarity in countless moments such as these. She parses her message, showing the reader exactly how to decode what she means. In this classroom exercise, students are asked to use the foundational structure of Ayn's letter—its focus on her calculated explanation of what her words mean, what they do not mean, and on what she is trying to convey overall—to craft their own "What Do I Mean? Well . . ." essays.*