



The Contemplated Spouse: The Letters Of Wallace Stevens To Elsie

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The Contemplated Spouse gathers in a single volume the 272 extant letters written by Wallace Stevens to the woman with whom he shared his life, Elsie Viola Kachel. Written over the span of twenty-five years, the correspondence reflects Elsie's evolving relationship with Stevens, initially as his friend, then as his fiancée, and later as his wife. Taken collectively these personal letters from one of America's most important poets reveal aspects of Stevens's personality that his poetry discloses more obliquely. Most significant, they demonstrate Stevens's devotion to his wife through years of an uneven and often distant partnership. Stevens wrote to Elsie for more than five years prior to their marriage, and for more than twenty years he wrote to her as his wife. The couple spent much of their married life apart as he traveled for business and vacationed without her. Even when living in the same house, the couple often operated in separate realms. Their camaraderie, however, rekindled in Stevens's final years, and Elsie remained an important source of inspiration. Stevens's earlier, more intimate letters, though never free from his internal censor, foreshadow the poems he later published. Incidents he describes in his pre-1913 correspondence recur throughout his canon. His later letters, penned after his marriage, comment on the geography that would surface in his poetry - the Carolinas, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Key West. The collection is augmented by editor J. Donald Blount's introduction - an overview of Stevens's life and his relationship with Elsie - and extensive footnotes to the letters that provide essential information about Stevens's references.

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