



Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird The Public Domain Poems of Wallace Stevens

By *Wallace Stevens (1879 - 1955)*

Read by:	Alan Davis Drake, Winston Tharp and Ruth Golding	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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This collection of readings of 97 poems written and published by Wallace Stevens includes many of his better known works, including the “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”, which we have used as a title, as it aptly conjures the multi-faceted, abstract nature of his work and its way of seeing the world. Also included are other well-loved classics such as “Anecdote of the Jar”, “The Emperor of Ice Cream”, “The Snow Man”, “Peter Quince at the Clavier”, and “Sunday Morning”. The poems were originally published in magazines, most notably in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, and in *Broom*, *Contact*, *The Dial*, *The Little Review*, *The Measure*, *The Modern School*, *The New Republic*, *Others*, *Rogue*, *Secession*, and *The Soil*. Many of them appeared in *Harmonium*, Stevens’ first collection published in 1923.

Stevens is the quintessential Modernist poet, given to reflection and abstraction but resisting any kind of objective reality. In his view, reality is more of a dynamic activity, the product of the imagination shaping the world as it perceives and seeks coherence and understanding, with piecemeal and fluctuating results. He admired painters Paul Cezanne for his ability to reduce the visual world to a few key objects and Paul Klee for his use of imagined symbols, and sought a similar kind of verbal result in poetry. Accordingly, the poems abound in specific objects and rich visual imagery, which commingle with associated abstractions to produce a poetry that is “the Supreme fiction” that draws us to engage with a reality that resonates with truth, if only for a fleeting moment.

Wallace Stevens (October 2, 1879 – August 2, 1955) was born into a prosperous family in Reading, Pennsylvania, attended Harvard and then graduated from the New York Law School in 1903. He married Elsie Katchel in 1909 after a long courtship against the objections of his family, which resulted in a permanent estrangement from his father. A bust of Elsie by their landlord, sculptor Adolph Einman, became the model for the Mercury dime and perhaps the Walking Liberty Half Dollar. He practiced law at various firms before working as corporate counsel for insurance companies, eventually joining the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company as vice-president in 1916, where he worked for the rest of his life. Few people at the company knew of his world-wide reputation as a poet. In 1922 Stevens visited Key West on business and found a paradise to which he would return regularly and that served as an important influence in his later work. He reportedly argued with Robert Frost on two occasions at the Casa Marina and was knocked into the street by Ernest Hemingway in 1936 after picking a fight with him at a party. Stevens increasingly came to be seen as a key figure in 20th century poetry and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1955. He continues to be an important influence on modern artists and writers.