Wallace Stevens is a major American poet and a central figure in modernist studies and twentieth-century poetry. This Companion introduces students to his work. An international team of distinguished contributors presents a unified picture of Stevens’ poetic achievement. The Introduction explains why Stevens is among the world’s great poets and offers specific guidance on how to read and appreciate his poetry. A brief biographical sketch anchors Stevens in the real world and illuminates important personal and intellectual influences. The essays following chart Stevens’ poetic career and his affinities with both earlier and contemporary writers, artists, and philosophers. Other essays introduce students to the peculiarity and distinctiveness of Stevens' voice and style. They explain prominent themes in his work and explore the nuances of his aesthetic theory. With a detailed chronology and a guide to further reading, this Companion provides all the information a student or scholar of Stevens will need.

John N. Serio is Professor of Humanities at Clarkson University, New York, and editor of the Wallace Stevens Journal.
# CONTENTS

- **List of contributors**  
  page vii
- **Chronology**  
  x
- **List of abbreviations**  
  xvi
- **Introduction**  
  JOHN N. SERIO  
  1
- **Wallace Stevens: a likeness**  
  JOAN RICHARDSON  
  8
- **Stevens and *Harmonium***  
  ROBERT REHDER  
  23
- **Stevens in the 1930s**  
  ALAN FILREIS  
  37
- **Stevens and the supreme fiction**  
  MILTON J. BATES  
  48
- **Stevens’ late poetry**  
  B. J. LEGGETT  
  62
- **Stevens and his contemporaries**  
  JAMES LONGENBACH  
  76
- **Stevens and romanticism**  
  JOSEPH CARROLL  
  87
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Stevens and philosophy</td>
<td>Bart Ekckhout</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Stevens’ seasonal cycles</td>
<td>George S. Lensing</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Stevens and the lyric speaker</td>
<td>Helen Vendler</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Stevens and linguistic structure</td>
<td>Beverly Maeder</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Stevens and painting</td>
<td>Bonnie Costello</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Stevens and the feminine</td>
<td>Jacqueline Vaught Brogan</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Stevens and belief</td>
<td>David R. Jarraway</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guide to further reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTRIBUTORS


BART EECKHOUT is the author of *Wallace Stevens and the Limits of Reading and Writing* (2002). He has guest-edited two special issues of the *Wallace Stevens Journal*, one on ‘International Perspectives’ (2001) and the other, with Edward Ragg, on ‘Wallace Stevens and British Literature’ (2006). He teaches at the University of Antwerp in Belgium.
ALAN FILREIS is Kelly Professor, Faculty Director of the Kelly Writers House, and Director of the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing at the University of Pennsylvania. His books include *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (1991), *Modernism from Right to Left: Wallace Stevens, the Thirties and Literary Radicalism* (1994), and a new edition of Ira Wolfert’s *Tucker’s People* (1997). He has just completed a new book, entitled *The Fifties’ Thirties: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry*, 1945–60.

DAVID R. JARRAWAY is Professor of American Literature at the University of Ottawa and is the author of *Wallace Stevens and the Question of Belief: Metaphysician in the Dark* (1993), *Going the Distance: Dissident Subjectivity in Modernist American Literature* (2003), and many essays on American literature and culture.

B. J. LEGGETT is Distinguished Professor of Humanities at the University of Tennessee. His books on Stevens include *Wallace Stevens and Poetic Theory: Conceiving the Supreme Fiction* (1987), *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext* (1992), and *Late Stevens: The Final Fiction* (2005).

GEORGE S. LENSENS is Bowman and Gordon Gray Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Wallace Stevens: A Poet’s Growth* (1986) and *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons* (2001).

JAMES LONGENBACH is the Joseph H. Gilmore Professor of English at the University of Rochester. He is the author of three books of poems, including *Fleet River* (2003) and *Draft of a Letter* (2007), as well as five critical books, including *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things* (1991) and *The Resistance to Poetry* (2004).

BEVERLY MAEDER teaches at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. She is the author of *Wallace Stevens’ Experimental Language: The Lion in the Lute* (1999).


JOHN N. SERIO has been editor of the Wallace Stevens Journal since 1983. He has published Wallace Stevens: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography (1994) and, with B. J. Leggett, Teaching Wallace Stevens: Practical Essays (1994). He has also edited Poetry for Young People: Wallace Stevens (2004) and created, with Greg Foster, an Online Concordance to Wallace Stevens’ Poetry (2004). He is Professor of Humanities at Clarkson University.


LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS
CHRONOLOGY

1879 Born October 2 in Reading, Pennsylvania, the second son of Margaretha (Kate), a former teacher, and Garrett Stevens, a lawyer and businessman, whose other children included Garrett, Jr., born December 19, 1877; John, born December 9, 1880; Elizabeth, born July 19, 1885; and Mary Katharine, born April 25, 1889.

1885–1891 Although raised Presbyterian, attends Lutheran grammar schools and studies, among other subjects, French and German, which he continues to read throughout his life.

1892–1897 Takes classical curriculum at Reading Boys’ High School and, after being held back one year due to illness and low grades, graduates with merit, having won prizes for writing and public speaking.

1897–1900 Attends Harvard College as a special student in a three-year, non-degree program, taking most of his coursework in English, French, and German languages and literature. Publishes over thirty poems, short stories, and sketches in the Harvard Advocate and Harvard Monthly, often under pseudonyms, and serves as secretary of the Signet Society and president of the Harvard Advocate.

1900–1901 Tries his hand as a reporter in New York, working for the New York Tribune and World’s Work, a monthly magazine, but finds journalism unfulfilling.
1901–1903 Persuaded by his father, enrolls in New York Law School; clerks for W. G. Peckham, a New York attorney, during the summer of 1902; graduates in June 1903.

1903–1904 Works as a law clerk for Peckham, who befriends him and takes him in late summer 1903 on a seven-week hunting trip to British Columbia.

1904–1908 Admitted to the New York bar in June 1904, visits Reading and meets Elsie Kachel, born in Reading June 5, 1886; begins a five-year courtship, carried on mostly in correspondence. Struggles as a lawyer in New York, moving from firm to firm.

1908 In January, secures a position with American Bonding Co., initiating his lifelong legal specialty in the insurance business. In June, sends Elsie “A Book of Verses,” composed for her twenty-second birthday. Becomes engaged to Elsie at Christmas, despite family objections to her lower social status.

1909 Composes “The Little June Book,” a collection of poems for Elsie’s twenty-third birthday; marries Elsie on September 21 in Reading, with no family members in attendance; resides in New York with Elsie until their move to Hartford, Connecticut, in 1916.

1911 Father dies in Reading on July 14, and Stevens attends the funeral.

1912 Mother dies in Reading on July 16, and Stevens attends the funeral.

1914 Joins the New York office of Equitable Surety Company in February as a vice president. Publishes minor poems, including two poetic sequences, “Carnet de Voyage” and “Phases.” His return to poetry stimulated in part by his financial stability and by the company of writers, artists, and musicians – including William Carlos Williams and Marcel Duchamp – who gathered regularly at the New York apartment of Walter Arensberg.
1915
Publishes first mature poems such as “Peter Quince at the Clavier” and “Sunday Morning.”

1916
Joins the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company and moves permanently to Hartford. Specializing in surety bonds, travels extensively throughout the United States, visiting places such as Florida, Oklahoma, and Minnesota, which often form backdrops to his poetry. Wins $100 Poetry prize for verse drama *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*. Wife’s profile serves as image of Mercury on the American dime through mid-1940s.

1917
Does not attend sole performance in October of verse play *Carlos among the Candles* in an off-Broadway theater in New York.

1919
In May, Mary Katharine, his youngest sister, dies in France while serving as a Red Cross volunteer during World War I.

1920
Does not attend the only performance of *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* by the Provincetown Players in New York in February. Wins Levinson Prize from Poetry for group of poems, “Pecksniffiana,” in November.

1921
Submits “From the Journal of Crispin” for the Blindman Prize, sponsored by the Poetry Society of South Carolina, and receives first honorable mention from judge Amy Lowell. Revises the poem as “The Comedian as the Letter C.”

1923
In September, shortly before his forty-fourth birthday, publishes first book, *Harmonium*, with Alfred A. Knopf. Takes first extended vacation with Elsie, traveling to Havana, the Panama Canal, the Gulf of Tehuantepec, California, and overland back to Hartford.

1924
Holly Bright Stevens, his only child, born on August 10 in Hartford.

1925–33
Claiming the new baby and work consume his energies, virtually gives up writing poetry.
1931 Harmonium reissued by Knopf in a revised edition (three poems were deleted and fourteen – most composed before 1924 – added). Initiates lifelong relationship with Parisian bookseller, from whom he also purchases paintings.

1932 In September, moves to 118 Westerly Terrace in Hartford, the only home he owned, located near Elizabeth Park.

1934 Named vice president of Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company in February, earning, during this year of the Depression, $17,500 (based on the Consumer Price Index, equivalent to $264,500 in 2006 dollars).


1936 In February in Key West, gets into a fistfight with Ernest Hemingway and breaks his hand on Hemingway’s jaw (the two make amends and conceal the cause of the injury). In October, Knopf publishes trade edition of Ideas of Order. Awarded The Nation's Poetry Prize for “The Men That Are Falling.” Alcestis Press issues a limited edition of Owl's Clover in November. Delivers lecture “The Irrational Element in Poetry” at Harvard in December.

1937 The Man with the Blue Guitar and Other Poems published by Knopf in October. Older brother Garrett Stevens, Jr., dies in November in Cleveland, Ohio.


1941 Presents lecture “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” at Princeton University in May. Initiates genealogical studies that preoccupy him for the rest of his life.

1942 In September, Knopf publishes Parts of a World. In October, Cummington Press publishes a limited edition of Notes toward a Supreme Fiction.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>In February, Elizabeth Stevens MacFarland, his last surviving sibling, dies in Philadelphia. Delivers lecture “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet” at Mount Holyoke College in August.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>In August, against Stevens’ objections, Holly marries John Hanchak, a repairman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Presents lecture “Description Without Place” as the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard in June. Esthétique du Mal published by Cummington Press in a limited edition in November. Elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in December; inducted the next year in May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Presents lecture “Effects of Analogy” at Yale University in March and at Mount Holyoke in April. Reads paper “Imagination as Value” at Columbia University in September.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>In September, receives Still Life by Pierre Tal-Coat from Parisian art dealer, inspiring him to write “Angel Surrounded by Paysans.” In November, reads “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” at the 150th celebration of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences in New Haven.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1952

In June, receives honorary doctorates from Mount Holyoke and Columbia.

1953

*Selected Poems* published in England by Faber and Faber in February.

1954


1955


1963

Elsie Stevens dies on February 19 in Hartford.

1992

Holly Stevens dies on March 4 in Guilford, Connecticut.
Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Wallace Stevens are taken from *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose*, edited by Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997) and cited parenthetically in the text with page numbers only. Other works will be cited with the following abbreviations:

*L*  

*SP*  

*SPBS*  

Other works by Stevens may be found in the Guide to Further Reading.