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The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life
Fanny Howe
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"All this is prologue to belief," concludes the author towards the end of this volume. Howe is Professor Emeritus at the University of California, San Diego, and winner of the Commonwealth Club Gold Medal for Poetry, and the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets. In this, her most literary accomplishment, Howe offers poetic images in essay format-brilliant probing into stark issues, life, thoughts, politics, and philosophy.

Even as she probes into literature and the lives of literary figures, Howe reveals her own soul in relentless exposure and deep meditations. One wonders what it might be like to be in a classroom with this exemplary mind. At the fore, she exposes layer upon layer of insight into the likes of Carmelite nun Edith Stein, French mystic Simone Weil, Thomas Hardy, Ilona Karmal. The essays become a classroom. Howe's fascination with twentieth-century social, political, philosophical, and existential issues catapult the reader into gutsy questioning of race, gender, faith, religion, and more. Howe's love for meaning gives little rest, and she insists on deeper understanding than mere reflection.

Readers may find themselves underlining a sentence here—"Probability is said to be an expectation founded on partial knowledge," a paragraph there—"Wanting to know is what makes me do things I don't want to do. Wanting to know how far I can go with what I know." At reading's end, the pages are vastly underlined with comments drawing attention to Howe's unique insights. Her offerings on purgatory, life, and work are hard bytes to fathom and best read singly, so as to engage this intense fierce thinker who brooks no dissent.

Her words are powered by the fuel of choice to live with passion, urgency, and demand for social justice with dark intense bold letters. "Pay attention!" is the message. There are beliefs, concepts, questions, experiences worth struggling, living, and dying for. This work is neither an easy nor particularly emotionally uplifting read. That is not its purpose. Nonetheless, those willing to venture into the depths of The Wedding Dress are invited inside Fanny Howe's

mind-stretching efforts in new directions and convolutions. Perhaps the reader's own ideas will become scrutinized accordingly.

The title represents the woman's hope and commitment: to relationship, to husband and children, to education, to God in spite of persecution, to a lover "who was a poem." Hope and commitment to life, to Spirit in the best, worst, and most bewildering of times-all prologue to belief.