Gustav Mahler and Alma Maria Schindler were married in 1902. The bride was twenty-one and a half years old, her groom a few months short of forty-two. Apart from their substantial age difference, it seems to have been the very disparity of their intellectual and social backgrounds that drew them together. Mahler was attracted to Alma by her beauty, her alert mind and emotional intensity. Though aware that he possessed by far the broader outlook, he trusted in Alma’s ability and willingness to learn from him.—from the Introduction

Once the stiffness of unfamiliarity has been softened by a few months of marriage, Mahler’s style of correspondence with Alma is generally simple, direct, and astonishingly down-to-earth. In a manner akin to that of his musical style, he spikes his language with witticisms and double-entendres, colloquialisms and quotations from librettos and classical works of literature.—from the Preface

This profusely illustrated collection of Gustav Mahler’s letters to his wife Alma is more comprehensive than any previous edition; it contains 350 letters, 188 of them until now unpublished. Since 1995, when the German edition of this book was first published, two events have served to expand its horizons: the publication in 1997 of the complete text of Alma’s early diaries, dating from January 1898 to March 1902, and the publication in 2003 of a catalogue of all Mahler letters acquired from the Moldenhauer Archives. With the aid of this new material, the editors were also able to revise the dates assigned to many of the letters. Commentaries and annotations throughout the book have been corrected and expanded annotations included. The editors’ introduction provides a biographical context for the correspondence that follows.

My Personal Review:
This collection of 350 letters and telegrams from composer Gustav Mahler to his wife, Alma, illustrates the good and bad points of a fortunate and unfortunate marriage.
It is a very fortunate marriage for lovers of Mahler's unique and beautiful music. The music might never have been written had he not married his idealized image of a one true love. Alma was not his inspiration—it was his idealized view of her that, despite her behavior, kept him going. She did not understand, or even enjoy his music, but she did enjoy the celebrity position of being married to the greatest conductor in a world that worshipped music. Fortunately, Mahler was never able to bring himself to see her shortcomings. He had made up his mind that superficial beauty (at least in Alma's case) equaled virtue, and he projected virtue onto everything that Alma did.

It was an unfortunate marriage in that, at the age of 22, marrying a man nearly twice her age, Alma had not had a chance to develop character and direction for her own life. She very much enjoyed being in the spotlight of fame, yet she had never earned any of it for herself. After Mahler's death, Alma continued this pattern of getting into the limelight by "hooking-up" with famous people. She married, or had affairs with architect Walter Gropius, artist Oskar Kokoschka, novelist Franz Werfel, composer Alexander Zemlinsky, and various others.

While this behavior kept her in the top circles of Viennese society, it simultaneously prevented her from ever doing anything notable on her own. It was an unfortunate marriage for Alma. It was what she wanted, but with it, she ceased all personal growth. It was "A Fortunate and Unfortunate Marriage."

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