

The Erotic Spirit: An Anthology of Poems of Sensuality, Love, and Longing.

Sam Hamill, editor.

Shambhala Press, 2003.

210 pages, \$16.95 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Reginald Harris

In *The Erotic Spirit*, Copper Canyon Press founding editor Sam Hamill has collected a global, century-spanning group of poems that celebrate desire and physical experience, love, and loss expressed in the body. While many well-known poets are included, from Sappho to Marvell, the true value of this rich gathering is Hamill's choice of lesser-known poets and works. Roman epigramist Paulus Silentiarius celebrates an older woman's beauty, "Your autumn outshines a mortal spring, / your winter warmer than a summer sun." American poet and student of Indo-European cultures, Maurya Simon extols "Shiva's Prowess" in ever more dizzying heights: "His wide neck taut with cords of rolling muscles, / his chest an orchestra, his heart a ship's hull." Moving work by anonymous authors from indigenous cultures is also included, breathtaking in its simplicity.

Many of the poems are as much concerned with "spirit" and the beauty and suffering of lost love and separation as it is with the "erotic," ecstasy being both a sacred and secular experience. Hamill has filled *The Erotic Spirit* with the intensity of small moments, the joy lovers feel in little things about the beloved. A number of the poets focus on objects representing their lover so intently they become fetishes, like Yuan Chen's "Bamboo Mat":

I cannot bear to put away
the bamboo sleeping mat:

that night I brought you home,
I watched you roll it out.

This is a collection to be read slowly, leisurely, savoring each of its jewel-like pleasures.



All the Poems of Muriel Spark.

Muriel Spark.

New Directions, 2004.

130 pages, \$13.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Anne C. Elguindi

Although better known for her novels and short stories, Muriel Spark says in the introduction to *All the Poems*

of Muriel Spark, "I have always thought of myself as a poet." Spark's dry humor and deep intent fill these poems, which cover a wide range of technique and tone. Included is everything from a strict adherence to form (villanelles, sonnets, even a rondel) to a twenty-one-page, surreal (and sometimes violent) narrative to a light-hearted poem about a tea machine that eventually tires of making tea for its owner and instead demands the roles switch: "What the hell, / I've stood this treatment long and dumb; / Mr. Chiddicott, the time has come / For you to make the tea instead."

Spark's earlier works, written during the 1940s and 1950s, are distinctly careful. These poems must be unpacked and the meanings still seem deliberately vague. The early poems are also peppered with elevated language ("orgulous," "postprandial," "syringa") that would seem out of place in Spark's recent poems of 2002 and 2003, which are much more colloquial and accessible.

Although Spark's work encompasses a wide range of style, it is united by an emphasis on the rhythm and sound of the words, and many of her poems develop through repetition of words and structure in a theme and variation design. Her work is also united by two central concerns: dialogue and the forgotten individual—a stranger standing on the street below, the people who appear in dreams then get left behind when the dreamer wakes, and even the three Wise Men, whose own power comes into question once their deed is done.

As in all collections, some poems work better than others, but there are some true gems to be found in this one.



The Man Who Loves Cezanne: Poems.

Dabney Stuart.

Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

62 pages, \$15.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Cy Dillon

Back in 2001, Dabney Stuart told me he expected this to be his last book of poems. While I hope he changes his mind, it must be admitted that this collection is a fitting testament to a writer who has focused relentless energy on creating and teaching poetry for over forty years. While perhaps not as powerful a collection as *Settlers* (1999), the thirty-three poems confront questions of memory, family relationships, aging, and the role of the writer with Stuart's absolute control of language and image. Witness "Light Touch,"