



Entering History: Poems

Mary Stewart Hammond

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Lyrical narratives that chronicle a long marriage, rich with wit, dark irony, and poignancy.

In her long-awaited second volume, Mary Stewart Hammond chronicles a long marriage with sharp wit, dark irony, and poignancy. As James Merrill says of Hammond's poems, they "brim with what the whole world knows."

Entering History opens on a middle-aged couple, modern-day travelers in an ancient setting. The collection follows their relationship through time and place, combining the personal and the historical in stories of the family's siblings, a daughter, and the very different marriage of the poet's parents.

The marriage poems share the intimacy, erotic playfulness, irritations, worries, and angers that are part of an enduring love and a long marriage. In "Portrait of My Husband Reading Henry James," the poet paints her husband using syntax and language that evoke James's. In "Venasque," the wintry village, perched on the edge of a cliff, serves as a metaphor for the existential crisis facing the couple.

"Lines composed at Beaufort, South Carolina, a few miles above Parris Island," about the poet's brother, moves back and forth between the Civil War and the preparations of troops for today's wars. In "Jacob and Esau with Sister," two brothers, in a transaction as old as oral history, highlight its consequences in the twenty-first century. "Anniversary" is a heartbreaking elegy for a third brother who kills himself.

Hammond reaches into the past and present of the American family, closing *Entering History* where it began, with the couple in bed, now older, harkening back to the bed they shared when they were newlyweds. These powerful, beautifully crafted, lyrical narratives give depth to an examination of life's joys, sorrows, laughter, and tragedies.

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