



Dark Sparkler / Amber Tamblyn

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Amber Tamblyn , Diane di Prima (Forward)

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The lives of more than twenty-five actresses lost before their time—from Marilyn Monroe to Brittany Murphy—explored in haunting, provocative new work by an acclaimed poet and actress.

Amber Tamblyn is both an award-winning film and television actress and an acclaimed poet. As such she is deeply fascinated—and intimately familiar—with the toll exacted from young women whose lives are offered in sacrifice as starlets. The stories of these actresses, both famous and obscure—tragic stories of suicide, murder, obscurity, and other forms of death—inspired this empathic and emotionally charged collection of new poetic work.

Featuring subjects from Marilyn Monroe and Frances Farmer to Dana Plato and Brittany Murphy—and paired with original artwork commissioned for the book by luminaries including David Lynch, Adrian Tome, Marilyn Manson, and Marcel Dzama—*Dark Sparkler* is a surprising and provocative collection from a young artist of wide-ranging talent, culminating in an extended, confessional epilogue of astonishing candor and poetic command.

Actresses featured in *Dark Sparkler* include:

Marilyn Monroe
Brittany Murphy
Dana Plato
Jayne Mansfield
Jean Harlow
Dominique Dunne
Sharon Tate
Heather O'Rourke
Bridgette Andersen
Shannon Michelle Wilsey
Judith Barsi
Peg Entwistle
Carole Landis
Anissa Jones
Susan Peters
Barbara La Marr
Lucy Gordon
Sirkka Sari
Li Tobler
Thelma Todd
Samantha Smith
Lupe Valez
Taruni Sachdev
Rebecca Shaeffer

Dark Sparkler Details

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From Reader Review Dark Sparkler for online ebook

Sheida says

This was ... a weird one. I'm not a fan of poetry (as I've said over and over again) but I've been taking an online poetry workshop in an attempt to better understand it and either that's helped or this was way better than my previous forays into modern poetry. Sure, the concept, while interesting at first glance, gets a bit repetitive after a while and a lot of the poems sound like they could use a lot more work but overall, I liked the imagery that the author's managed to create and I loved the spooky yet tragic feel the book had. This made me excited to read more poetry (though not excited enough to get higher than 3 stars)!

Melody Vig says

Loving these poems! I won this book and was lucky to be a first reader. Just like the author suggests, I am anxiously googling and obsessing over the women I am reading about in this book.

Whitney says

Amber Tamblyn's third volume of poetry, *Dark Sparkler*, examines the lives of actresses who died before their time (sometimes long before their time). Tamblyn covers a wide range of actresses - from Sharon Tate to Marilyn Monroe, from Brittany Murphy to Peg Entwistle - and includes an epilogue of more personal poems about the "business." Interspersed with her poems are original pieces of artwork by the likes of Adrian Tomine, David Lynch, and Marilyn Manson.

I'm definitely a fan of poetry, but I had never read anything by Tamblyn before and I had no idea what to expect - would this be the work of a spoiled Hollywood actress trying to forge a bond with these former starlets? Simple, rhyming lines? Just plain bad? Luckily, my worries were completely unfounded. *Dark Sparkler* completely blew me away. Tamblyn has an immensely strong grasp of metaphor and uses it to her advantage. Her prose never stumbles and she never pulls punches in this complex and haunting collection. Each poem is a portrait of a woman's life - sometimes the portraits are expansive, sometimes they're simply a snapshot, but they are all breathtaking. This book is absolutely wonderful with artwork that perfectly matches the tone.

In the foreword to this volume, Diane di Prima suggests that readers first take in *Dark Sparkler* how they normally would: read it straight through, pick out poems here and there, whatever works. Then, she instructs us to follow our curiosities...look up the women whose stories we're unfamiliar with (or the ones we already know)! Read their biographies, look at their photos, find interviews, do anything that strikes our fancy. I took di Prima's advice, but only partially. I couldn't stand the thought of waiting to finish the book before I found out more about Taruni Sachdev or Rebecca Schaeffer or Bridgette Andersen. I wanted to know them the way Tamblyn seemed to in her verse. I wanted to understand these words and stories. Once I read about one of these actresses lives, then I'd reread the poem and see what new dimensions the backstory brought to the work. Of course, the poems in *Dark Sparkler* can stand on their own, but we don't necessarily have to leave them on their own.

Favorites:

"Sharon Tate," "Peg Entwistle," "Jean Harlow," "Bridgette Andersen," "Samantha Smith"

Hannah says

No one is more skeptical than me when it comes to actors-turned-writers (I'm looking at you, James Franco). But I was really, happily surprised by Tamblyn's style. The poems are visceral, the imagery is surprising and evocative, and the styles of the poem vary in interesting ways. I loved that I could read up on each actress in the book as I read, giving the already strong poems many more layers of depth and meaning. You can tell that Tamblyn put a lot into this book. I'm definitely planning to check out the rest of her work.

Anita Dalton says

My reaction to this book is one of my typically long, circuitous discussions. If you have the time, you can read the entire thing [here](#). If you'd like a shorter snippet, here you go:

This collection reminded me in many ways of Mikita Brottman's short story collection, *Thirteen Girls*. I found myself curious about all the women in this collection, as I did when I read about the women who fell to serial killers in Brottman's penetrating look at victims and the ways they are remembered. The titles of the poems are the names of the women they are about, and there were enough stories of women and children whose sorry tales I knew before reading this book to ensure I felt the power of the poems Tamblyn crafted to portray them. Seeing the most troublesome parts of their lives depicted in poetry forced me to rethink my attitudes towards some of the people Tamblyn wrote about.

For instance, "Lindsay Lohan." Her poem is blank, an expanse of empty page under the title. At first it seemed almost like a joke, a jab at this crash-and-burn starlet's lack of gravitas in her current role as media laughingstock. But upon reflection there was so much more involved in leaving the page empty. She's still alive, still crashing and burning, and there is no sense that there will soon be an end to the wreckage of her life. As much as she is mocked in the press, she's had the sort of life that should inspire empathy. But that doesn't happen. Many people look at her and see a clown, a rich white girl who squandered all her chances, and there is some truth in that, but it's not the sole truth about her.

Amber Tamblyn's a few years older than Lindsay Lohan but they had similar beginnings – both had roles on soap operas when still children, and both began to get roles in movies geared toward younger audiences. How did Lohan end up a joke and Tamblyn end up still working, albeit writing and producing as much as she acts? Lohan's shitty parents, determined to make a buck off their kids, played a role, as did the company young Lohan kept. Few made it out of the early-era Paris Hilton mob unscathed. Factor in drugs, mental illness, and a complete inability to keep addiction and illness under control and you end up with Lohan. Tamblyn's parents knew more about the entertainment industry, and she was shaped by counter-culture influences that while embracing the entertainment industry still kept an honesty and authenticity about their lives, the sort of authenticity that makes hanging around with Paris unappealing.

It's often a thin line that separates those who rise above and those who sink down and even her relatively fortunate background didn't save Tamblyn from being hit on by James Woods when she was a teen. Knowing she and her friend were sixteen, James Woods evidently tried to lure the two to go to Las Vegas

with him. She told him she was sixteen but that didn't deter Woods. James Woods called Tamblyn a liar but she hit back harder, and interestingly he shut up when she did. After she refused to give any sort of quarter to his response that she lied, he likely thought the better of continuing the dialogue because the fury she unleashed upon him was both beautiful to behold and resulted in other actresses joining the #metoo revolt in his name, notably Elizabeth Perkins.

If Lindsay Lohan ever spoke up about the men whom her parents essentially sold her to in order to reap the rewards of her fame, would you care? Would you laugh? Would you think she was embellishing the story? She's now essentially a yacht girl, and if you don't know what that is, go look it up and ask what kind of shit must happen for an actress who started off so strongly, who had talent and beauty, to end up living such a life. By leaving that page blank, Tamblyn lets the reader construct their own poem about Lohan...

Charlene Nelson says

I really loved this collection of poems and the unique way Amber told these stories of deaths of many young women actresses. The artwork, which goes along with each poem is very descriptive. I recognized most of the named women and enjoyed the way Amber tells their story and leads you to their cause of death. She has a way of bringing the reader into the moments before these talented women's lives ended and you get caught up in the highs and lows of what is lost. Many of the young women left us before they had realized their full potential, so who knows what they could have contributed to the movie world or just the world in general. There are some question marks for a couple of the actresses that only time will tell how their lives will end. The paintings/drawings that are throughout the book matches the particular poem that they are next to. The one for me that seems to be the most gripping is the one for Sharon Tate painted by Marilyn Manson. All I can say is wow! I also found the one for Peg Entwistle, painted by Russ Tamblyn gave me a real sense of the moment she fell to her death; David Lynch's was also powerful. Each painting and the poems give you something to truly think about and seem to capture the true spirit of the written words on each page.

Samrat says

These really didn't work for me. They didn't feel personal. Many of them were written in the first person, but since so many of them followed the same basic facts - young woman, thrust into fame, under pressure, struggles with the cruelty of celebrity, takes life or is killed by partner) - they all kinda blurred.

Imagine you find a picture on your friend's dresser. You ask them about it and your friend tells you a story of one of the most intense days of their life. You write a poem about it. You remember some of the visual clues and relay them. But you weren't there. You don't have the actual visceral experience of the day to color it. When I read your poem I don't know enough of your friend to fill in the gaps.

The imagery wasn't striking, for the most part, and much of it seemed either too generic or disjointed. And it seemed like the transformative power of visualizations was the intent, so when they failed to engage, they just didn't have enough substance to compensate. I just felt like the poems half-told a lot of stories that only make sense when you commit to a Google search. And I tried for a few but couldn't find enough context to be satisfied.

My favorite were the angry ones and the ones that carried a good rhythm, lilting or throbbing. These seemed to be the least specific to a single individual and the ones that captured experiences Tamblyn had known herself.

My exposure to poetry is limited but these pieces were a far cry from the intensely autobiographical and emotional work I enjoy at poetry slams. It seems like it was cathartic for her, though, which is swell, and obviously it's worth reflecting on how the media uses women.

Natalie says

So I got this book because I never heard of it and she was supposed to be a speaker at a reading festival in my area. I like how she tried to give each actress her story and it's clear this book took a lot of research. With the exceptions of Marilyn Monroe and Sharon Tate, who I only know of because of how they died, I had never even heard of any of the actresses in here. To see this many young actresses all gone, many not known to me and probably others and all dying tragically is very heart-wrenching so I think it's wonderful that Tamblyn chose to write these poems for them. It's like giving them another voice. And Marilyn Manson's artwork for the Manson murder: well-done. It was actually my favorite picture in the book, it presented the image of what happened quite well. With that being said even though I like the topic, I did not find her writing itself to be that great. There were moments when I felt that it was excellent poetry and moments when I wondered why she wrote the poem at all because it didn't flow well, it was hard for me to decipher the imagery and relate it to the actress etc.. With that being said I give this work 3 stars.

Nidah (SleepDreamWrite) says

Been trying to read a little more poetry. This one I kind of like. Some of the names I heard of and others I looked up. Interesting read.

Halley Sutton says

I've got a lot of feelings about this book, so bear with me Goodreads. (Or hide my reviews! Whichever.) It's a very interesting idea for a book, recounting the stories of all the actresses who died young, particularly given Tamblyn is an actress. (I'd feel some sort of bad for putting that up front instead of the fact that she's a writer and a good one, except that it's entirely up front in this project, it has to be, there's no other reason that this exists.) It did bring up some small uncomfortable questions of intersectionality and privilege of veneration even in death--clearly these women were chewed up by the Hollywood machine and spit out but how many other women who weren't famous, or beautiful, or white, have a book of poetry dedicated to them? That said, that isn't Tamblyn's point or aim, I think, and I do believe that not all books have to address all things. I'm just registering it because it kept creeping up on me as I read. /soapbox

The writing was uneven to me--sometimes very good, sometimes needed an editor. Not entirely sure what the personal poems at the end of the book were doing, why were those enclosed? Like I've spent 100 pages reading about dead actresses, then suddenly it's about the writer's marriage. Which were fine poems! Just like...maybe a different book.

Okay one last thing--I think the most interesting part of this project is the idea that the path to Hollywood fame is littered, LITERALLY CROWDED, with the bodies of women who died young, sometimes because of, or in service to, or related to, the search for fame in Hollywood: why would anyone choose this route? I think that's what I was most interested in and I didn't entirely get it from Tamblyn--the tension between her passion for acting or the lifestyle of whatever it is that draws someone to this, and the fact that many of your forebears did not survive this quest.

Also was not a huge fan of the Lindsay Lohan poem. I read in an interview that Tamblyn said she left that page blank because that isn't her story to write, but if that's true, then don't give her a page at all. Use your own name. Including her in a book about actresses who died before their time is implicitly objectifying her as being part of that club, even by leaving the page blank. (Also, it felt a little "Look how artsy I am, can you hear the gasps when I read this out loud?" which is not an aesthetic I'm into it, just my personal opinion.)

This review might have been meaner than I meant it to be. It's a beautiful book, like physically gorgeous, and the writing is good.

Drew says

5+ out of 5. In the introduction, Diane di Prima suggests that as you read you might get curious about the women referenced here. I can attest that, indeed, you will. You will read this collection and you will wonder about Peg Entwistle or Laurel Gene. And you will google them. Just like you'll google Amber Tamblyn, because you will want to see that she is, in fact, okay. And you will take comfort in that - comfort in the knowledge that not all stories have an unhappy ending. It's the same reason we're okay with and not laughing at the fact that "Lindsay Lohan" is a blank poem.

Hope. And maybe a little love, too. We idolize and we lionize and we devour these women - but maybe, just maybe, this is a collection that'll make you pause before we do the same to the next young girl fresh off the bus with dreams of being a star...

Full review TK this week.

Victoria Chang says

I would give this book a 2.5. It shows promise and I was attracted to the idea of Amber writing poetry. It's stronger than James Franco's book, but the real test was whether the author could convince me to have a stake in these poems and at the end of the day, almost. Amber has potential as a poet and should keep on working at it. She seems like a deep and thoughtful person living in a really weird and sometimes horrible industry. So glad she is writing poetry!

D.A. says

There's something both magical and lurid about this compendium of Hollywood actresses, many of whom were lured by the dreams and wrecked by the cruel business of the Tinseltown star factory. Tamblyn knows the industry better than most, a second-generation actor whose performances brought her leading roles in television and in feature films; she grew up in entertainment and sees it from an inside perspective that is

haunting and illuminating. The meat of this provocative and fascinating collection is a necrology of starlets and extras whose quest for the limelight brought heartbreak and tragedy. Peg Entwistle, the famed fateful lass who jumped from the Hollywood sign, Jayne Mansfield, Thelma Todd and Frances Farmer are but a few of the ghosts who get to speak from beyond the grave in this surreal re-imagining of a kind of Spoon River Anthology. One of the best poems in the collection comes from the frighteningly convincing voice of Sharon Tate's unborn child, slain along with Tate by the bizarre murderous members of the Manson Family. The entire staging of this book, with artwork by such luminaries as Marilyn Manson, David Lynch, and Tamblyn's actor father Russ ("Riff" in the Oscar-winning "West Side Story"), colored pages, high-end graphic design and a meta-narrative informed by Tamblyn's own rocky relationship to success in Showbiz, is pure Hollywood, and it works in so many ways to capture the glam and the sham and the fascinating world of celebrity. It's more than that, though. It's rock solid poetry, energetic and bursting with surprise at every turn. "I'll be the girl they say pink things to/ so weightless she arrives by ghost." This is a sparkling, ambitious (in all the right ways), unapologetic rip down the center of the silver screen. Out steps our star. Wow!

Alyssa Lentz says

This is one of the most gripping collections of poetry I've read in a while. I'm so impressed with not just the cohesive nature of Tamblyn's book, but the way each poem feels so specifically personal and haunting. You'll spend a lot of time on Google getting to know these women and their stories, and feeling a whole range of emotions fresh every time you read the next poem. Highly recommend.

John Lamb says

I am positive I can't give anything higher than 2 stars to book of poetry that contains this line about Brittany Murphy: "A pill lodges in the inner pocket of her flesh coat." Flesh coat? Eek. Inspired by the tragic ends of young actresses, each poem tries to be insightful but feels more exploitative than anything. Proof: one poem is told from the perspective of Sharon Tate's unborn child . . . as Tate was being murdered. No thank you.
