

## Book Review: Spenser's Boston, by Kasho Kumagai

Review by John K. Chidester, originally composed for the Mount Vernon News on February 14, 1995

Some books appeal to more than one kind of audience. One such title is an amazing little volume attributed somewhat questionably to Robert B. Parker, though most of its content was produced by a Japanese photographer named Kasho Kumagai. The title is Spenser's Boston, and it will appeal to almost everyone except library catalogers, who may end up tearing their hair trying to figure out how to classify it.

Is it a photography book? Is it a travel guide? Is it some kind of literary commentary? Is it perhaps even an oddball work of fiction? Spenser's Boston is a bit of each of these and, possibly, a few more. The Library of Congress's Dewey Cataloging Division has seen fit to classify it under "literary landmarks," though one is tempted to question whether that refers to Mr. Parker himself or to the singular features of Boston and its environs which figure so prominently in both his "Spenser" detective novels and in Spenser's Boston.

The book is mostly scenery, and someone glancing through it quickly could almost mistake it for a National Geographic article, except for its small, octavo size (picture books of this sort are more often published in the larger quarto format), its lack of objective text and its hard covers. Kumagai's photographs are divided into six sections, the first prefacing Robert Parker's "introduction," the next three reflecting, in order, the three seasons from summer through winter, and the last two taking in communities surrounding Boston and the area around Cape Cod. The color and black and white pictures, ranging in size from two-page spreads to not much bigger than a credit card, present an inviting, impressionistic view of Spenser's territory. They include candid scenes from Beacon Hill, Boston Common, Fenway Park and others, plus shots of the corpulent Mr. Parker in places Spenser might be found, doing what Spenser might be doing: pumping iron, drinking, watching a ball game, hanging out.

Except for two very brief sections at the end, the only text in Spenser's Boston is fiction of one of two kinds. The first is brief passages from Parker's Spenser novels, scattered among the pictures. The second is a unique "introduction," a 23-page section written by Parker specifically for this volume, in which Spenser himself describes a shopping, sightseeing and restaurant-hopping trip on which he accompanies two other familiar series characters, his girlfriend, Susan Silverman, and Rachel Wallace. A determined tourist (or Spenser fan) could probably use this section to conduct an almost self-guided walking tour of Boston and Cambridge.

The book finishes with a quick word from the photographer, describing his first meeting with Robert B. Parker, and a very concise "guide to Boston," with single-paragraph descriptions of 12 famous landmarks. For photography lovers, Boston-ophiles, Spenser fans and people who just like looking at pictures of paunchy mystery novelists, Spenser's Boston is a delightful treat.