son in the audience to feel far away from his or her homeland. Everybody. So they can grasp the sensation of being out of place that this woman lives with" (46).

Libro intenso e lirico, *A Friday in August* piace perché al di fuori degli schemi della più tradizionale letteratura italo-canadese e perché il lacerante problema del *misplacement* è affrontato in maniera indiretta e sottile, non di rado con tono lievemente ironico. Avverso a ogni forma di "narrativa prefabbricata" D'Alfonso preferisce seguire percorsi diversi, evitando soprattutto di fornire ai propri lettori risposte certe e conclusioni definitive. *A Friday in August* è un romanzo dolente, misterioso e magico.

PAOLO CHIRUMBOLO
McMaster University

Antonio D'Alfonso. *Gambling with Failure*. Toronto: Exile Editions, 2006. Pp. 290. ISBN 1-5509-6656-1 \$ 19.55

Gambling with Failure is an autobiographical text that reaches well beyond the traditional parameters of autobiography. In it, Antonio D'Alfonso draws from his own experience as publisher, editor, writer, filmmaker, poet, critic, translator, and teacher to present readers with an extended reflection on what he calls the *Italic* culture. Critically engaged with this concept for decades, D'Alfonso offers readers a definition that is both dynamic and inclusive, without being inordinately vague. An *Italic* culture, as he understands it, encompasses all things Italian without regard for national, linguistic or political borders. Adamantly opposed to cultural parochialism and isolation, D'Alfonso proposes the adoption of an embrative attitude that values the cultural and psychological over the geographical or linguistic. Only then can the *Italic* be conceived as an International Italian.

In addition to promoting the universal recognition of an *Italic* culture and identity, the collection of twenty-two short opinion pieces and four interviews offers broad guidelines for how the members of the *Italic* community (and especially those in the public domain) can prevent its demise. If it is to continue to grow, the public voices of the *Italic* cultural community—intellectuals, opinion leaders, the media, universities, artist—must invest the culture with specificity, even a specificity that admits contradiction and paradox, openness and diversity. In other words, its speakers need to define cultural parameters that are flexible enough to serve as a point of reference to its extremely diverse community. According to the author, they have a responsibility to provide the *Italic* cultural community with the tools—books, music and art—to educate future generations.

In fact, when discussing his own role as a writer and, more specifically, as an Italian-Canadian writer, D'Alfonso claims to "write to transform society" (113). Such a transformation can take place only if there is an exchange between writer and reader, an exchange prompted by the writer who wants to seduce his readers. Self-defined as a "writer of social and cultural commentary" (150), D'Alfonso often steps into the role of critic, providing readers with long (and, at times, tedious) lists of categories of writers and their social positions. Most often replete

with examples, these lists are surprisingly exclusionary for someone who so loudly professes inclusiveness.

Oftentimes, D'Alfonso's literary experimentation does not move beyond the list. *Gambling with Failure* is an odd, but accomplished, mix of literary styles and genres. The author moves easily from literary portraits to snippets of conversation, numbered summaries to short journal-like entries to detailed guidelines for writers and publishers, navigating the reader through a maze of critical reflections on all that is Italian and all that has to do with writing. One thing missing from this generic mélange of theoretical speculation is any traditional presentation of criticism. D'Alfonso rarely supports his arguments with secondary sources and, when he does, it is from works of literature that he draws his material and not from the readily available body of cultural criticism. His is a passionate, informed, but not overtly scholarly engagement with the cultural issues that have impacted him both personally and professionally.

As a sustained attempt to define his public self, *Gambling with Failure* is an indispensable reference source for anyone wishing to examine D'Alfonso's wide-reaching artistic production. It will also appeal to readers interested in questions of ethnicity and, in particular, the complex cultural crisis of the *Italic* culture and identity. Although bleak at times, especially in its assessment of the current predicament of Canadian publishing, *Gambling with Failure* does offer an occasional optimistic thought to those who look hard enough for it. This may have something to do with the fact that, as D'Alfonso says, a "book is a blossoming of hope" (164).

NANCY PEDRI

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Len Gasparini. *The Broken World: Poems 1967-1998*. Essential Poet Series. Toronto: Guernica, 2005. Pp. 250. ISBN 1-55071-210-1. \$20.

With *The Broken World*, Len Gasparini offers his readers a unique and disturbingly honest glimpse of the world as he has come to know it through travel, love, and loss over the course of a palpably rich and passionately tumultuous life (imprisonment, multiple love affairs, four marriages, and – if one intuits correctly – more than a few children). The collection is comprised of 194 poems selected by the author from the verses that he composed and published in ten separate volumes between 1967 and 1998 (some of which have been revised for the present edition), and that he deemed most worthy of preservation. The content of his poetry may be loosely divided into four categories: artistic and/or scientific depictions of nature, most often of trees and birds (his father was an ornithologist); scenes, both physical-geographical and social, of North American cities, towns and landmarks, and of the people and activities that animate them (or once did); commentary, now profound, and at times philosophical, now cursory and cynical, on humanity and its ills; and finally, personal and confessional pieces detailing his childhood, family, and surreal relationship history. A few examples from the various categories