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).

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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

of verse suffice to reveal the depth and breadth of the collection, as well as the nature of poetic genius particular to the author.

"Rain" (189), inspired by Pacific Rim National Park in British Columbia and modeled after Gabriele D'Annunzio's "*La pioggia nel pineto*," is one of the most elegant and intriguing poems in the collection (lines 7-12):

There is rain
on the cloud-topped Douglas firs,
rain on the red cedars
with their thin stringy bark,
rain on the hemlocks
encrusted with lichens,
rain on our faces, our sylvan faces,
rain on our hands which are bare.

Like D'Annunzio's masterpiece, Gasparini's poem is iterative and paratactical in structure, and the metre of "Rain" echoes the sublime cadence of the "*La pioggia nel pineto*" ("Rain in the Pinewood"):

*Piove sui nostri volti
silvani,
piove sulle nostre mani
ignude,
sui nostri vestimenti
leggieri,
su i freschi pensieri
che l'anima schiude*

The word "sylvan," the description of rain on bare skin, the image (which occurs later in the poem) of a human form emerging from bark, and even the syntax of clauses such as "hands which are bare," all find their source in "*La pioggia*." Yet, the presence in "Rain" of adjectives such as "stringy" and "encrusted," which stand in contrast to the dignified rhythm (and D'Annunzio's elevated vocabulary), are contributing factors, among others, to the slightly disruptive note that strikes the reader's consciousness and reverberates ever more pronouncedly as one progresses in one's reading of the poem, ultimately daring one to question whether Gasparini's poem is less an homage to greatness than a parody of "literariness." Initial doubt is cast by the fact that elsewhere the poet has successfully employed a more lyrical vocabulary. The suspicion is further deepened by the knowledge that the poet is a man who enjoys a good and often singular laugh, as "Kafka's other Metamorphosis" attests (30):

Franz Kafka had a nightmare
that he was a butterfly brooch
fastened to the low-necked dress
of some whore slurping cabbage soup.
He suddenly fell kerplunk
into that bowl of boiled kraut.
He did not drown but awoke

as a pale green caterpillar
 and was gobbled up. *Mein Gott!*
 The whore contracted syphilis,
 and had a chancre the size
 of a chrysalis on her twat.

The most obvious statement one could make about Gasparini's poetry would be to say that the subject matter he treats (nature, love, childbirth, and family, on the one hand, adult entertainment, nymphomania, and prostitution on the other) and the lexicon by means of which he does so (from Latinate and scientific terminology – if not direct quotes in Latin – to vulgar expressions in a base vernacular – as evidenced by terms such as “bogos” and “hardcore,”) span a wide spectrum from lofty to pungently crude, but often to great effect, with the language mirroring or suiting in a verisimilar manner the subject or object it describes.

Gasparini's style (necessarily) varies as dramatically as the register of language he employs to craft his verse. Sometimes the variations appear within the same poem, through juxtaposed verse, such as to be observed in the following excerpt from “Artist's Model” (40), which progresses from humorously raw and provocative, to lyrical and sensuous:

*When you shift the weight
 of your gluteus maximus
 from one leg to the other,
 I can hear the nylon susurrus
 of your thighs
 scissoring
 your voluptuous mons veneris.*

*I could possess your essence
 by painting you;
 but heaven it would be
 to paint your essence
 in my mind
 while possessing you.
 Art has an alternative, too.*

The curious and entertaining marriage of camp and kitsch is Gasparini's definitive stamp as a poet, revealing his education “in the school of hard knocks” (251), and recalling his self-description in “Cold-Water Flat Blues” (18): “My only resources are a zip gun that shoots verbs;/ a shiv that stabs aesthetically; and brass-knuckled metaphors.” His numerous lyrical tableaux are equally a hallmark of his style. “Detroit Nocturne” (69) furnishes a laudable example of Gasparini's powerful use of imagery; it also bespeaks the poet's affinity for the visual arts, and for painting and photography in particular:

*From a tenement rooftop
 a black boy watches*

*the total eclipse of the moon
and spits watermelon seeds at the stars.*

The Broken World was published with the support of the Canadian Council for the Arts, and the poems indeed reveal the author's dual cultural heritage – Canadian (he is from Windsor, Ontario) and Italian. The volume opens with a poem entitled "The Photograph of My Grandfather Reading Dante," a loving description of the poet's maternal grandfather who would routinely sit in a rocking chair after dinner with a copy of the *Divine Comedy*. In the introduction to the collection, Gasparini acknowledges that the first poetry he remembers hearing as a child was Italian, and that it was the poetic rhythms and the sound of his grandfather's voice that had appealed to him (13). His dedicatory poem to Toronto's current poet-laureate Pier Giorgio di Cicco ("*Il sangue*") is revelatory of his experience as an Italian Canadian, as well as his aspirations as a poet: "Strangled by a spaghetti stereotype,/ an Italian is supposed to lay bricks. /You build poems with the stars" (123) The author's compassion for his fellow journey-men past and present, specifically those issuing from minority or underprivileged contexts, or situations of disempowerment, is striking. One witnesses it clearly in pieces such as "Tekahionwake" (145), a poem dedicated to the former Mohawk princess whose ancestral abode on the Grand River has since become an Ontario museum, in which the poet asks: "How many war-painted braves/would have broken their arrows/just to hear you singing?"

Len Gasparini's intention in publishing *The Broken World* was to gift "a poetic image of reality in rhymed verse, blank verse, and free verse" (13). He has succeeded brilliantly.

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Richard Gambino. *Red Hook. Confessions of a Brooklyn Eaglet: 1939-1955*. Toronto: Guernica, 2005. Pp. 88. 5 b/w photos. ISBN 1-55071-189-X. \$ 12

Red Hook is a historic Italian-American neighbourhood in Brooklyn, New York City, and also the departure point for the many adventures of young Richard Gambino, the author of the eponymous slim memoir here reviewed. Gambino, author of two widely known, yet controversial books (*Blood of My Blood*, 1975, an anthropological and historical study on Italian-Americans, and *Vendetta*, 1977, the account of one of the most violent episodes of racial discrimination against Italians in New Orleans in 1891), reminisces, constrained only by the limits of his selective memory, about his young years and his Italian-American community. With *Red Hook*, Gambino abandons the historical reconstruction of *Vendetta*, but also the pedagogical and more overt anthropological tones of *Blood of My Blood* to engage in a sentimental unearthing of his little big adventures.

His memories bring his readers back to a time when a lemon ice cost a nickel, an Andrea TV set (brand name) proudly boasted "Made in Queens, NYC", when the Air Cooled Gloria Theater could keep kids occupied for a whole