*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

Saturday afternoon of shows and many other episodes that marked the undoubtedly light-hearted, happy and, at the same time toughening life of young Richard. The episodes he retells do not follow a foreseeable succession: he starts with afternoons spent at the movie theatres, the trips to Coney Island and his first crushes, his love for swimming, the sweltering summer nights, sports, the ferry-boat trips to Manhattan, school life, religious education, photography, and ends with a listing of other favourite pastimes (music, riding bicycles, riding trams in a peculiar way and other entertaining occupations). The description of the events is quite amusing and many are the episodes that provoke laughter. The classes at P.S. 142 (that is Public School 142, the school young Gambino attended for nine years) and religious education classes (60-62) provide the setting for many misadventures. Among the many school anecdotes, a "moving" commencement speech shines: the principal warned the students of the dangers outside in the Philistine world they will have to brave. A parent, writes Gambino, who did not know the English language well asked him if the Philistines were a baseball team. «"The Philadelphia Philistines" I answered. She nodded, satisfied». At religious education the Irish nuns took care of their pupils: "If it [a sin] is on your soul, unconfessed, when you die, you go strait t' Hell, for A-ternity! And no gettin' off!" was one of the favourite warnings to the children. These verbal exploits are the salt of this book: they show the reader the dimension in which Gambino can potentially give his best ("It's not the heat, it's the humility" says one of his characters during a hot summer day as Gambino carefully notes), when, as in *Red Hook*, free from the constraints of documentary evidence and pedagogical goals of his previous works, he can liberate his vivid writing style.

There are limits in structure and in language. Readers accept that memory is selective, but with *Red Hook* Gambino presents a succession of episodes difficult to piece together as a story. The episodes seem a succession of felicitous moments trapped in a sometimes awkward unfolding of events, not clearly connected one to the other. For example, Gambino devotes many pages to his passion for swimming, shifting from the local swimming pool to the ocean, to tell about the hot summer nights in Red Hook, then returning to sea storms without a clearly motivated reason for moving back and forth. His memoir is a succession of funny episodes, vignettes which justly represent the author's life as a "Brooklyn Eaglet" but, because of the deep nostalgia that spills from his pages, do not succeed in portraying the larger picture we would like to see, a story capable of capturing the larger experience of the Italian-Americans in Brooklyn. More than the weakly connected succession of episodes (after all we must recognize that what he wants is to tell the Red Hook of his memories), it is probably the language, Gambino's strong point, that paradoxically deprives the book of such a possibility. Gambino certainly likes embellished sentences, metaphors, flowery similes, but as he cleverly employs them he often falls prisoner to clichés, awkward comparisons and transitions, and worn-out punch lines that blunt his otherwise brilliant prose. As examples, the "How many New Yorkers does it take to change a light bulb? It is none of your business" line is funny, but it is repeated too many times in the short book; the girlfriend's swimming style so different from the "flailing about like a duck

with a hernia” style peculiar of so many other beach-goers pushes the imagery too far; “When you learn to tie knots while wearing winter gloves, you know how to do it” stock phrase has an “epic” connotation that overrides the ironic tone he wanted to describe the tough-to-learn life skill (he is writing about scouts) that should ennoble all of its practitioners.

Perhaps the limit of this memoir is what makes it strong and unique. Maybe it is the felicitous image of the lemon ice young Richard needed so much on hot summer nights, that he cannot rid himself of its taste even today, that shapes his writing (“I’d give a month’s income for one of the lemon ices of my memory, pits and all”). He remains too close to the funny reminiscence and, while he is obviously happy to do so, by remaining so faithful to his goal to remember the happy days, he yields to sterile nostalgia and fails to bring readers into his voyage other than the people who lived their youth in those same years.

Gambino is clearly a writer with a style, as we see in the brand of humour that surfaces throughout the text. In *Red Hook* he moves freely in his recollection, tracing and describing events that, in his words, contributed to shape him as a man and as a writer. When Gambino asks how those events contributed to shape him as a man and as a writer, he writes that we should figure it out by ourselves, falling again (it is the last page of his short memoir) in a cliché that makes his otherwise brilliant booklet taste like an exercise that always takes the easy way out of a situation that could warrant a longer reflection. But after all Gambino did what he liked, and even if his solutions avoid laborious answers, he succeeds in giving his readers a very enjoyable read.

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Diego L. Bastianutti. *Per un pugno di terra / For a Fistful of Soil*. Magenta (Milano): Associazione Culturale ‘Zeisciu’ Centro Studi, 2006. Pp. 239. ISBN 88-87405-18-2. \$30, 17.

An established scholar of Italian and Spanish literature, formerly of Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, Diego Bastianutti’s passion for literature has taken on a more actively engaged dimension over the last ten to fifteen years with his emergence as a talented poet who writes with equal confidence in English and Italian. His previously published volumes of poetry, *Il punto caduto* (1993) and *La barca in secco* (1995) were critical successes and boded well for this new direction. Equally impressive was his translation, *A Major Selection of the Poetry of Giuseppe Ungaretti* (1997), which garnered him the John Glassco Translation Prize of 1998, awarded by the Literary Translators’ Association of Canada. A member of the Canadian federation of poets, he remains a regular contributor to the local poetry scene in Vancouver where, for example, he reads his work at The World Poetry Reading Series at the Vancouver Public Library, and, more recently, was invited to the Istituto Italiano di Cultura’s twentieth anniversary celebration of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers. *Per un pugno di terra / For a Fistful of Soil*