

POETRY

Remember the rape outside Drumheller  
at fifty below?  
Canadians are hardy

Beware, my love,  
in an eternity of cold  
My death makes me more active

Like certain American poets such as David Ignatow, Everson engages a quotidian reality through the expressive gestures of idiomatic speech. His syntax, therefore, is not as careful, nor is his "analysis" of reality as polished as Norris's, or Connor's, even. Yet through his poems we have a habitable space in which we can visit, catching ourselves in the traffic of the moment or snatching views of another time and another place. His poems are filled with Canadian landscapes, especially so in recent years, given a chronological arrangement, and though they sometimes wear their learning clumsily, as in *Report for Northrop Frye* or *Raby Head*, they more often move easily and gracefully.

We can conclude with two Americans, who carry the foregoing spatial and aesthetic tendencies almost to an extreme. Harold Witt's book, part of a long sequence-in-progress called *Winesburg by the Sea*, and like Sherwood Anderson at his weakest, contains spaces that remain suffocatingly local. Witt's putative way out of the local is to create typical characters. Twelve of these thirteen poems present small-town personages, feebly imitative of E. A. Robinson's. The thirteenth poem presents the town where they presumably reside.

it wasn't as if we'd never been around—  
only that we knew there was no place quite like  
our BEST IN THE WEST!  
SEE BOWER'S MUSEUM!  
WATCH US GROW!  
99 and 44/100ths percent  
pure American town.

The people don't come off much better than the town, and suffice it to say the native strain of American regionalism is not advanced by this slim volume.

Bill Knott is without cohesive place or syntax; any of these poems is typically his and typically mindless.

You lie back on a gull's lunges of incense  
Clothed in a glancing lair  
Of submissive purple jungles  
Muzzled by a flagellant species of hair  
Homaging your profile in 3 squirts of deadend

Whose jade masseuses  
Blow tendrils of halo  
Over the clandestine mirror-limp cattle

Perhaps I may be excused if I do not quote the next four lines of this poem. Instead you may profit from the complete text of the "statement" on the back of the book: "I consider *Nights* my first and only book. The other books (including *Auto-necrophelia*) with my name on them are, like the patent-office, full of garbage—*Bill Knott (1940-1966)*." Rumor has it that Knott's habit of giving his birth and terminal dates together originated when he realized he could no longer face the horror of a poetry reading he was scheduled to give. Somehow his inability to face himself or maintain an attitude (let alone a self) does not prevent him from discovering new births and new excuses for more poems, most of them depressingly alike. Reading these poems, to transpose one of his own similes, is like being locked in the patent-office for a year. An invention that never ventures into the world, never dares to complete itself, produces no syntax, not even the parataxis of Doyle and Nuttall, but only the prototaxis of idiocy.

The best poems in these eight books are often those that most securely create new places. Though no safe equations exist linking spatial imaginativeness with poetic accuracy, the poet is one who "gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name."

CHARLES MOLESWORTH

#### UNA VOCE POCO FA

*Voices*, by Antonio Porchia. Translated by W. S. Merwin. Big Table.  
\$2.95 paperbound; \$4.95 clothbound.

"After one has read an episode, one remembers the gestures and the actions, not the feelings." In this passage from his diaries in 1944, Cesare Pavese, reacting to another writer's work, points to what I would begin to write of Antonio Porchia. On a single reading Porchia's work is piercing; in recollection the emotion is inaccessible. The memory of our gasp, or of however we respond to internal earth tremors, remains.

Nothing that is complete breathes.

Suffering is above, not below. And everyone thinks that suffering is below. And everyone wants to rise.