

crankiness, his pride, and his quirky circuits of intellect, may prevail by his fancy, by his healthy self-mockery. This is, of course, only one aspect. Berryman's "conversion" to God is a lover's quarrel, not dogmatism; and he remains aware of society and of other poets (there are poems to Frost and Dickinson). But, in all, it's absurd not to say irreverent to "sum up" in a short note like this. Berryman lives.

*Concurring Beasts*, by Stephen Dobyns, Atheneum, 76 pp., \$3.95.

This, Stephen Dobyns' first book, has been chosen as the Lamont Poetry Selection for 1971. Precisely one-third of the poems—18 of 54—appeared originally in *Kayak* magazine, that persistent preserve of neo-surrealism; all the poems conform almost exclusively to that poetic mode. Dobyns rarely raises his voice, mutes it with casual contractions and obsessive mid-line periods; indeed, in many of the poems no admitted "I" exists, so often what remains is only the eye of a distanced observer. Because of these ways, the surreal images glimmer but don't flare. The publisher's blurb speaks of Dobyns' "control," of his "elegant intellectuality," of his poems as "arresting" and of a *particular* kind. Despite what seems to be a fine and complex talent, Dobyns' poems fit the jacket copy far too well: over-

controlled, hyper-understated, repetitious—too often they flatten all the possible ferocity of the surreal and become simply dull.

*Nights of Naomi*, by Bill Knott, Barn Dream Press, unpagged, \$2.50.

With this book, Bill Knott (1940-1966), a.k.a. St. Geraud, a living suicide, disowns all his previous work as "like the patent office, full of garbage." Why "like the patent office"? Isn't that where inventions get registered? Were the earlier poems just garbage or garbage because new? Is Knott once more grimly pulling our legs, as he does about his "suicide"? Who can tell? Though the earlier poems turned on weird images they were realized with confidence and were organically accessible. These most recent poems are certainly new for Knott. The strange pictures remain but the accessibility is almost gone. Is Knott a latter-day metaphysical who lacks a metaphysics? He does by violence yoke disparate elements together, but most often the *insistence* is *all* that seems to make order; the poet seems engaged in a desperate holding action very near the edge of coherence in all its senses. That he can still joke about his own confusion ("I'll be here tomorrow but I'm gone today") suggests a possible opening toward salvation, but that doesn't make the joke any less depressing.