



BROWSE

 **Dog Star by Harold Enrico (review)**

Scott Slovic

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REVIEW

[View Citation](#)**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

80 Western American Literature Almon's territory is the wide horizon between his native Texas and his home in Canada; there he pauses to listen to those obscure and ancillary voices singing songs that are too often ignored. STEVEN PUGMIRE University of Washington Dog Star. By Harold Enrico. (Vancouver, B.C.: Cacanadadada, 1990. 77 pages, \$12.95.) "Ich habe schon den Totengeschmack auf der Zunge," uttered Mozart shortly before his death. The sixty-nine-year-old Harold Enrico, too, seems to have had the taste of death on his tongue while preparing the forty-nine (mostly) morbid poems collected in Dog Star. Though extraordinarily eclectic in form, the repeated theme of these lyrics, some as brief as seven lines, is the inevitability of death. Enrico approaches this idea from a variety of perspectives, displaying a full spectrum of moods. Early poems in the collection, such as "Dog Star" and "Embers," defy casual acceptance of death; old age is described as a time when "Embers smoulder in the spinal cord," occasionally "bursting into flame" with "a passion to live life over again." Indeed, this passionate clinging to life underlies and outlasts even Enrico's poems of despair; "Time," in the poem by that title, is portrayed as "the mongrel bitch" whose

progeny have all “succumbed to accident and disease,” but several pages later the short narrative “Morels” recounts a mushroom-hunting trip to the woods and concludes with the participants “smack[ing] [their] lips over the taste of earth.” Other poems, however, show desperation, frustration: “I crave another body. This one will never do,” cries the human speaker in “Kontrapunkt,” envious of the lightness of birds. Later poems in the collection progress from uncertainty to philosophical acceptance; in “The Pathway,” a vivid forest trail suddenly “drops off into empty air,” but in the final poem of the collection, “Notations,” Enrico envisions the self as “a handful of dirt and seeds,” the source of new life. The best poems in *Dog Star* derive powerful images from the poet’s experiences outdoors in the Pacific Northwest. Less satisfying are the abundant internationalisms (the distracting allusions to and quotations of European poets and artists, such as the Mozart phrase quoted above, which is the epigraph to the book’s fourth section); these seem unnecessary efforts to universalize human experiences which are inherently universal. There are also too many poems weakened by excessive abstraction, Modernist crypticness, and the incoherent jumbling together of loosely related scenes and images. Still, all in all, *Dog Star* is a vital expression of aging. SCOTT SLOVIC Southwest Texas State University ...

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STEVEN PUGMIRE

University of Washington

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