

TRISTAN TZARA

TERRE SUR TERRE

DESSINS D'ANDRÉ MASSON

TROIS COLLINES

Contingent
Paris 60

FOUR NEW POEMS

by THOM GUNN

KNOWLEDGE

Worst with the torturers was the yearning look
With which they gazed into their victims' faces.
It meant more to those geometric places
Than the frown of one pretending that he took
Payment for disobedience, or the lines
Of ingenuously taking another's grin.
Or the grants of him reverting to a man
Who tore at sinews as if they were vines.
The tortured yearned as well: for the disfigure,
Active and whole, of those bleak torturers.
Each clenched his courage when the pain got worse,
So at times the pairs of searching eyes
Met, wavered, fired, and for an incredible show
Moment of moments seemed to understand,
It was that each asked this, on either hand,
—Have you yet learned how much you want to know?

THE GODDESS

When eyelids meet her on
her way upward, they gently
turn together in the dark
brook. But naked and searching
as a wind, she will allow
no hindrance, none, and bursts up
through potholes and narrow flues
seeking an outlet. Unfettered
by fire, rock, water or clay,
like after a time reaches
the soft abundant soil, which
still does not dissipate her
force—for look! shrewy thyme
reeking in the sunlight; oats
breeding, breeding in their nests;
and the soldier by a park
bench with his groutous collar
up, waiting all evening for
a woman, any woman
whose dress is tight across her
as a bark in moonlight.
Proserpina! it is we,
vulnerable, quivering,
who stay you to abundance.

FROM AN ASIAN TENT

(Alexander thinks of his father)

Father, I scarcely could believe you dead.
The pelts, for trophies, and halved skulls that you
Drunkly hooked up while the horse still bled
I pulled down, and I hung the flaps instead
With emblems of an airy Helios blue.
You held me once before the army's eyes;
During their endless shout, I fired and slid
Down past your forearm to the cold surmise.
Your plumed shoulder made between my thighs.
This happened. Or perhaps I wish it did.
Remembering that you never reached the East,
I have made it mine to be the obscurest temple;
Yet each year look more like the man I feast
Choose to resemble, bully, drunk, and beast.
Are you a warning, Father, or an example?

KURFÜRSTENDAMM

Once their Sunday ambitions
—getting blind drunk, for example,
or a visit to the Zoo—
are out of the way,
they extend themselves
as if they had
just woken from long sleep.
Alert and rested,
they move across the dusk
in a great warm peace,
and recover the visible,
distinguishing
a ham from a shoe,
a tree from shops,
a thing from a wish.

The world gains on them
detail by detail;
small of curled sausage,
a withering in small parks—
and they are treading
between recognitions
when a light rain
tampers with the evening.

FUNDACION
JUAN MARCHE
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Thom Gunn, whose latest book of poems, "My Sad Captain," has been getting enthusiastic reviews, is one of the youngest and most intelligent of the writers who made their names in the fifties. He was born in 1929, the year before Ted Hughes. His father was a journalist and his education conventionally middle-class: a London Public School, National Service, then a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took a First in English and edited "Poetry from Cambridge."

Cambridge, in fact, made him; it was there, he has written, that "I quickly grew up after hearing someone suggest that Edith Sitwell was a bad poet. It struck me that one poem was perhaps better than another, huge possibilities became apparent, and I stopped wanting to imitate a lot of famous but godlike writers." The result was "Fighting Terms," published soon after he graduated, a remarkable fusion of emotional power, intelligence, and sense of literature. But the restless, critical impudence with literary platitudes which helped him towards his poetic originality also directed his life. His motto might well be the title of one of his best poems, "On the Move." From Cambridge he went to Rome, then to California, where he came under the decidedly sobering influence of Yves Winters. He moved to Texas and then returned to California, where he now teaches at the State University at Berkeley.

On one level, he has become the poet of the "shook-up," Marlon Brando ethos. And he dresses accordingly, in the best "Wild One" style—black leather jacket, jeans, cowboy boots—even when lunching with his publisher at the Travellers' Club. But beneath this improbable disguise he retains the manner of the Cambridge intellectual: diffident, sensitive and passionately involved in the tradition of English literature. His bushy American exterior, in fact, has helped him to remain English without submitting to grinding English conventionality.

