

by the same author

FIGHTING TERMS
THE SENSE OF MOVEMENT
MY SAD CAPTAINS
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TOUCH
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JACK STRAW'S CASTLE
SELECTED POEMS 1950-1975
THE PASSAGES OF JOY
THE MAN WITH NIGHT SWEATS

essays

THE OCCASIONS OF POETRY:
ESSAYS IN CRITICISM AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY
SHELF LIFE

Thom Gunn
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COLLECTED POEMS
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ff

faber and faber
LONDON · BOSTON

Philemon and Baucis

love without shadows – W.C.W.

Two trunks like bodies, bodies like twined trunks
Supported by their wooden hug. Leaves shine
In tender habit at the extremities.

Truly each other's, they have embraced so long
Their barks have met and wedded in one flow
Blanketing both. Time lights the handsome bulk.

The gods were grateful, and for comfort given
Gave comfort multiplied a thousandfold.
Therefore the couple leached into that soil
The differences prolonged through their late vigour
That kept their exchanges salty and abrasive,
And found, with loves balancing equally,
Full peace of mind. They put unease behind them
A long time back, a long time back forgot
How each woke separate through the pale grey night,
A long time back forgot the days when each
– Riding the other's nervous exuberance –
Knew the slow thrill of learning how to love
What, gradually revealed, becomes itself,
Expands, unsheathes, as the keen rays explore:
Invented in the continuous revelation.

They have drifted into a perpetual nap,
The peace of trees that all night whisper nothings.

Odysseus on Hermes

his afterthought

I was seduced by innocence
– beard scarcely visible on his chin –
by the god within.
The incompleteness of youth
like the new limb of the cactus growing
– soft-green – not fully formed
the spines still soft and living,
potent in potential,
in process and so
still open to the god.

When complete and settled
then closed to the god.

So sensing it in him
I was seduced by the god,
becoming in my thick maturity
suddenly unsettled
un-solid
still being formed –
in the vulnerability, edges flowing,
myself open to the god.