THOM GUNN

“The Man with Night Sweats”

I wake up cold, I who

Prospered through dreams of heat

Wake to their residue,

Sweat, and a clinging sheet.

My flesh was its own shield:

Where it was gashed, it healed.

I grew as I explored

The body I could trust

Even while I adored

The risk that made robust,

A world of wonders in

Each challenge to the skin.

I cannot but be sorry

The given shield was cracked,

My mind reduced to hurry,

My flesh reduced and wrecked.

I have to change the bed,

But catch myself instead

Stopped upright where I am

Hugging my body to me

As if to shield it from

The pains that will go through me,

As if hands were enough

To hold an avalanche off.