



Breakfast with Thom Gunn (Phoenix Poets)

Randall Mann

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Aubade

Those who lack a talent for love have come

to walk the long Pier 7. Here at the end

of the imagined world are three low-flying gulls

like lies on the surface; the slow red

of a pilot's boat; the groan

of a fisherman hacking a small shark—

and our speech like the icy water, a poor

translation that will not carry us across.

What brought us west, anyway? A hunger.

But ours is no Donner Party, we who feed

only on scenery, the safest form

of obfuscation: see how the bay is a gray

deepening into gray, the color of heartbreak.

Randall Mann's *Breakfast with Thom Gunn* is a work both direct and unsettling. Haunted by the afterlife of Thom Gunn (1929–2004), one of the most beloved gay literary icons of the twentieth century, the poems are moored in Florida and California, but the backdrop is “pitiless,” the trees “thin and bloodless,” the words “like the icy water” of the San Francisco Bay. Mann, fiercely intelligent, open yet elusive, draws on the “graceful erosion” of both landscape and the body, on the beauty that lies in unbeauty. With audacity, anxiety, and unbridled desire, this gifted lyric poet grapples with dilemmas of the gay self embroiled in—and aroused by—a glittering, unforgiving subculture. *Breakfast with Thom Gunn* is at once formal and free, forging a sublime integrity in the fire of wit, intensity, and betrayal.

Praise for *Complaint in the Garden*

“We have before us a skillful, witty, passionate young poet. . . . Randall Mann is both attuned to and at odds with the natural world; he articulates the passions and predicaments of a self inside a massive, arousing, but sometimes brutal culture. And he accomplishes these things with buoyant lyric sensibilities and rejuvenating skills.”—*Kenyon Review*

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