

## The motorcycle poet at 46

**Thom Gunn's reading tingled no spines**

By OAKLAND ROSS

Square-toed black boots, skin-tight blue jeans, a weathered denim shirt with rolled-up sleeves and a black leather jacket — Thom Gunn at 46 still dresses the part of the motorcycle poet.

He has a long, black panther tattooed on his right forearm. It was drawn there, he says, by the same artist who sketched tattoos on Janis Joplin's private and public parts.

But, despite his clothing and despite the insignia on his forearm, Thom Gunn ain't getting any younger and none of the poems he read before an audience of 75 sleepy students and professors in Stedman on Monday was about motorcycles or street fights.

**NAKED ON THE ROCKS**

They were about fertility, families naked on rocky beaches, the life cycle of a cherry tree and the joys of being a dog in New York.

Gunn, a member of the English department at the University of California, stopped off at York on his way home from the poetry festival at Hart House held last weekend. There, he had joined Margaret Atwood, Irving Layton, Earle Birney, Anne Hebert and a cast of dozens, mostly Canadian, for a few days of poetry reading

and shop talk.

But at York, he had the stage to himself.

There was little in Gunn's reading to arouse base emotions or tingle the spine. His manner was low-key, diffident, almost apologetic. Between poems, he nervously adjusted the position of the lectern. He tried sitting out in front on a table for awhile, then moved back.

**DIM AND WARM**

The light in Stedman 107 was dim; the air was warm and a trifle stale. Several prominent York English professors fell asleep and stayed that way.

It was not an exciting performance.

The one poem that brought the audience briefly to life was entitled Yoko, an ode to the pleasures of being a dog in New York, romping through the streets with one's master: "Joy, joy. Being outside with you, my bowels empty!"

**THINGS FAMILIAL**

Many of his poems reflected a concern for things familial. "Three" (a title for which Gunn apologized: "At least it's better than 'Poem'") was about a father and mother and their son basking nude on a beach. The son was happy and unconscious of his naked-



Thom Gunn at York on Monday.

ness; the parents had to learn theirs.

**BOY'S INVITATION**

"Rites of Passage" had a primitive tone; it concerned a boy's initiation into manhood as he turns brutally against his father. Although the boy was the centre of consciousness of the poem, Gunn's reading seemed more fatherly than filial.

Gunn's stage patter fell flat. He mentioned a reading he once gave at Cambridge while he was drunk. But since he couldn't remember anything about it, it wasn't much of a story.

He assured the audience that he is not in the habit of giving drunken readings, "like some of the poets I know". Only Irving Layton laughed.

At the end of the reading, Gunn was subjected to the ignominy (familiar to all students who have ever presented a seminar paper) of having to mumble "Well, that's it" before anyone realized that that was it. Only then did the audience clap.

**AUTOGRAPHS**

Several members of the audience approached Gunn after the reading to ask him questions or to

have copies of his books autographed.

Gunn was paid \$100 for his reading at York. He was paid \$200 for his appearance at the Hart House festival, and last week the University of Minnesota put up \$300 for him to read.

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**

"The most I've ever received for a reading was \$1,000," he said. That was at a festival sponsored by the Library of Congress a few years ago. They'd want to pay that much, I don't know. But who am I to refuse?"

And that was it.

**Classes now forming for an****LSAT****WEEKEND REVIEW COURSE**

- \* intensive preparation for the separate parts of the test by specialists in each area
- \* seminar classes (max. 20 students)
- \* proven curriculum (exclusive rights to the AMITY TESTING INSTITUTE's program)
- \* be prepared when you write the Dec. 6th LSAT

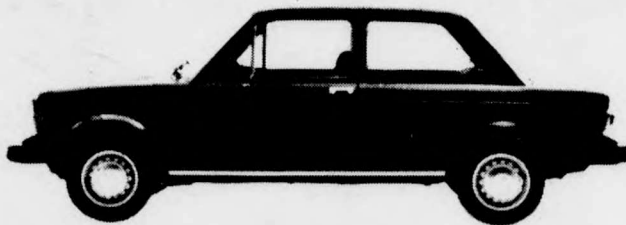
**CALL 532-7700 (24 hrs.)**

**THE LAW BOARD REVIEW CENTRE**  
The 1st Canadian Review Centre

**THE PERROQUET**

Friendly meeting spot at night and great lunching at noon! Everyone dances to live evening entertainment followed by nostalgia music (great for reminiscing) played on a classic old juke box. It's a great new night-place for both.

THE BRISTOL PLACE HOTEL • 950 DIXON RD.  
AT TORONTO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT • 677-9444

**CHOOSE THE CAR THAT LETS YOU BE YOU****128** 2 DOOR SEDAN

Test drive yours today  
at your home  
call

**FIAT****TONY COLANGELO**

York University Representative

Mon. &amp; Wed. 4 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Saturdays - 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.

at 264-2588 or

755-5869, 759-8463 (leave message)

**FOR THE CONSERVATIVE!**

Standard equipment includes:  
• 4-SPEED TRANSMISSION • FRONT DISC BRAKES • BRAKE EQUALIZATION SYSTEM • RADIAL-PLY TIRES • RECLINING BUCKET SEATS • 4-WHEEL INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION • UNITIZED BODY CONSTRUCTION • FLOW-THRU VENTILATION

**FOR THE SWINGER!****X1/9**

Standard equipment includes:  
• 4-SPEED TRANSMISSION • 4-WHEEL DISC BRAKES • BRAKE EQUALIZATION SYSTEM • RADIAL-PLY TIRES • RACK & PINION STEERING • MID-ENGINE • UNITIZED BODY CONSTRUCTION • ELECTRONIC TACHOMETER • FLOW-THRU VENTILATION

**SCARBORO FIAT & ALFA**

O/B REPUTATION TUNING SERVICES LTD.  
2540 EGLINTON E. (EAST OF MIDLAND)  
264-2588