

Donahue's Sister  
by Thom Gunn

She comes level with him at  
the head of the stairs  
with a slight, arrogant smile  
and an inward look, muttering  
some injunction to her private world.  
Drunk for four days now.

He's unable to get through  
She's not there to get through to.  
When he does get through,  
next week, it will all sound  
exaggerated. She will apologize as if  
all too humanly she has caused him  
a minute inconvenience.

That sudden tirade last night,  
such conviction and logic  
—had she always hated him or  
was it the zombie speaking?

Scotch for breakfast,  
beer all morning.  
Fuelling her private world, in which  
she builds her case against the public.  
Catching at ends of phrases  
in themselves meaningless,  
as if to demonstrate how well  
she keeps abreast.

A zombie,  
inaccessible and sodden replacement.

He glances at her, her  
body stands light and meatless,  
and estimates how high he would have  
to life it to launch it  
into a perfect trajectory over  
the narrow dark staircase  
so that it would land on its head  
on the apartment-house mosaic of the hallway  
and its skull would break in two  
—an eggshell full of alcohol—  
leaving, at last, his sister  
lying like the garbage by the front door  
in a pool of Scotch and beer,  
understandably, this time, inaccessible.