

Fi V e (5) p o e MS

By Gre gg Shapiro

WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... *For a guy with a first name with five letters, one vowel and three g's, Shapiro has already suffered enough to be a staggeringly good, deservedly unstruggling poet of well or ill-pronounced provenance, authenticity and quality. (But what's in a name?) "From my pillow I silently count the exaggerated / intake and glottal expulsion of breath, that warps / walls, fogs windows, loosens floorboards, bubbles / dried paint on a consistent basis." Yes, you might likely need to be as OCD as he is to write this well...I have seen it too many times. Here's another symptom near the top of the scale: "I wait for change. Expect it to come. Waving / a flag, ringing bells. Recognizing me instantly. / I pretend to ignore it. Watch it suspiciously..." But no sense celebrating Shapiro's genius at his owned expense. He is, though, entirely delightful if you care to indulge each other...(Spacing is poet's own.)*

Seven yawns

From my pillow I silently count the exaggerated
intake and glottal expulsion of breath, that warps
walls, fogs windows, loosens floorboards, bubbles
dried paint on a consistent basis. Louder than any
of his sneezes or snores. More explosive than bombs.
Even the dog, who bravely navigates the hazardous,
gaseous landscape beneath the top-sheet and quilt
has had her fill. Flinging herself off the mattress and
wriggling her way under the bedframe where she can
cover her ears with her paws and dream of chasing
squirrels, peacocks and geckoes undisturbed.

Responsibility

I wait for change. Expect it to come. Waving
a flag, ringing bells. Recognizing me instantly.
I pretend to ignore it. Watch it suspiciously
from the corner of my eye. Call to it under
my breath. This has happened before. Memory

consumes me. I can't fight back. Pummeling
the air like a neurotic windmill. I talk fast,
like a speeding victim. Lips a blur, saliva
shining clear, then silver. Words are vitamins.
I set a trap. Think about animals who chew

off their limbs for freedom. Never look back,
they insist, never look. The second hand
is a constant reminder. Now is not the time
for nostalgia; the future, like a virus,
breathing down my neck.

Homeland Insecurity

First ask yourself, “whose homeland is this anyway?” Be careful not to do it in a way that arouses suspicion. Don’t suddenly start befriending the descendants and assorted kinfolk of native

Americans and other indigenous people. They are not as naïve as you have been led to believe. There is a poet who knows a poet whose relatives, including a few first cousins on his father’s

side, his widowed mother and nonagenarian grandfather, contend that Israel is their homeland. When, in reality, it is the north side of Chicago, the west side of Chicago and a town in Poland that

no longer exists on any map, respectively. Sucking your thumb won’t help. This poet knows a poet who sucked his thumb well into his twenties as a non-narcotic form of comfort and solace.

The prospect of escape from the crippling closet of home, the ever tightening grip of faith and family, the stunted liberation of sexual identity, compounded the addiction, undid expensive orthodontics,

and earned him a distinct reputation in some circles that usually doesn’t make its way into poems about social issues. Then a new leader was elected to straighten out the messes and mayhem

of the immoral old leader. He promised not to do any more harm to the air, the overwhelmed bodies of water, to the fragile surface of the planet or the culture. He knew a poet who knew a poet

who shared the dais on inauguration day and reminded a country drowning in debt and division of the currency of language, the high cost of ignorance and the immeasurable value of words.

Crazy at the Bat

Have you noticed all the turkey vultures? Wingspans wider than a Range Rover. Brazen as republicans, plentiful as evangelicals. Swooping and hovering, hovering and scoping.

They know the end is near, can smell it in the air like a home cooked meal prepared with love and extra spices. Mother Earth has been working out, preparing to flex her considerable muscles.

A tornado shredding Nashville or wildfire devastation in Australia is nothing compared to what she has in store. Having waited long enough, nursing her cancerous sores, she's about to go full Endora

on our irresponsible, greedy and sorry asses. Momentarily entertained by people singing on their balconies, serenading loved ones from a supposedly reasonable distance, the rainbow palette of face masks,

the Florida beaches overflowing with self-destructive spring breakers, mistakenly certain of their youthful immunity. In other words, she's planning to give batshit crazy a whole new viral meaning.

The Right Track

Prisoner of travel, I am between homes. Miles of tracks
ahead of me, spreading out like so many spit out, rotten
teeth. A smile rusted crooked. Scenery changes through
tinted windows. My eyes wander from pages of books,

magazines, taking in the hulking, silent mills and leaning
rows of towering corn. Red-vested men punch holes
in tickets, pass out pillows. I nod at Gollie and Isaac

and Acre Long. No such thing as fear of heights
this close to the ground. I dream of stillness, airless
landscapes. Floating, arms outstretched, feet paddling.
Next stop Pittsfield, then Framingham, then sleep.

THE POET SPEAKS...

AUTOR BIO: Gregg Shapiro is the author of seven books including the expanded edition of his short story collection *How to Whistle* (Rattling Good Yarns Press, 2021). Recent/forthcoming lit-mag publications include *Exquisite Pandemic*, *RFD*, *Gargoyle*, *Limp Wrist*, *Mollyhouse*, *Impossible Archetype*, *wards* and *Dissonance Magazine*, as well as the anthologies *Moving Images: Poems Inspired by Film* (Before Your Quiet Eyes Publishing, 2021), *This Is What America Looks Like* (Washington Writers' Publishing House, 2021) and *Sweeter Voices Still: An LGBTQ Anthology From Middle America* (Belt Publishing, 2021). An entertainment journalist, whose interviews and reviews run in a variety of regional LGBTQ+ and mainstream publications and websites, Shapiro lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida with his husband Rick and their dog Coco.