

# TAKING SHAPE and other poems

By John Grey

*Poetry Editor Hezekiah Writes:*

*TAKING SHAPE: I suppose if you are transfixed by the first stanza, odds are you'll read on: Fashioning thoughts into images like patterns of dots—if you get the pointillism. '...all poked into place / by the tip of a brush.' And what happens when those little tittles on the canvas take flight? '...the broken rhythms of the restless.'*

*DEAR FIERY ONE: Who doesn't love to observe conflict in its domestic form with the benefit of distance? Take a light opera, add some soapsuds, and the sponsors will eat it up: 'Just hold the wheel. / Don't brandish it like a weapon.' Inflated debates in automobiles, yet. It gets even better than overhearing a hushed quarrel at the next table in a fine restaurant...heading for a rhubarb...*

*GALE: What a lovely name to blame on your parents. (Who could hold a newborn daughter in their arms and pronounce: "It's a Gale!?" ) 'her twisted mouth / more for balance than effect.' 'Toes...sucking on the teats of the morning.' 'Seated side-saddle on the bed,' Odds are I haven't captured your[italic] favourite line. There are so many. One's impression might be that he is a morning person, and she is nay-where-nigh. My scatological mind imagines 'First, a masterpiece. / Then coffee.' implies a foreday movement. But in my experience, women tend not to be that regular, nor is subtext my forte.*

*I find Gray insightful, inciting and delightful. No room for me remains: NEIGHBORHOOD ELEGY and A MUGGING mined each from the same rich vein. (Spacing is author's own.)HS*

## TAKING SHAPE

I imagine Seurat  
bringing light, scenery,  
living creatures,  
to life with infinite dots

Sailboats, a lake,  
dogs and umbrellas,  
bodies and their shadows,  
a man smoking a pipe,  
a girl clutching a bunch of flowers –  
all poked into place  
by the tip of a brush.

And then there's the raw scenery  
before me,  
a stretch of Maine coastline,  
waves and rocks,  
wind and cliffs,  
as chaotic as a world forming,  
its mean untenable,  
its dots scattering,  
refusing to be shape.

Seurat painted as calm  
as the scene before him.  
I must take on  
the broken rhythms of the restless.

And yet,  
no doubt his head swarmed  
with day-to-day conflicts.  
And my peace can embrace  
the madly agitated sea.

But Seurat's discord  
will not betray his masterpiece.  
My restful watch  
won't settle on one canvas.

## DEAR FIERY ONE

Ignore me.  
Watch the road.  
The white line in the middle.  
The ditch at the side.  
The animal that could come darting out  
of the woods at any moment.  
The traffic behind and in front.  
And those monster trucks barreling down the highway  
in the opposite direction.  
I know you're mad at me  
but no reason to take it out on the kid on the bike  
or the jogger in the orange shirt

or the old couple at the crossing up ahead.  
Simmer down.  
That's all this car asks.  
Just hold the wheel.  
Don't brandish it like a weapon.  
And take the bend slowly.  
Don't flatten it on the straightaway.  
You can't get back at me  
by knocking down a light pole  
or splintering a tree.  
Besides, you'll get over it.  
And better that we kiss and make up  
with the car in one piece,  
the front not squished,  
the air bags not ignited.  
Your memory must be short.  
It always happens this way.  
I say the wrong thing.  
You get a little angry.  
And the auto just happens to be at hand.  
And foot of course.  
On the accelerator as it so happens.  
Why not pull over,  
let me drive for a while.  
Your hostility can sear the passenger seat.  
My apology is a safer driver.

## GALE

An indifferent waking,  
she invokes a comedy,  
her thumb-twiddle  
taking on great importance,  
her twisted mouth  
more for balance than effect.

And then out pop her toes  
from the end of the sheets,  
flaked with red paint,  
wiggling like piglets  
sucking on the teats of the morning.

Her arms stretch wide  
as lungs retrieve some of the oxygen  
gone missing in the night,  
then knuckles rub eyes  
so vision can move forward.

She lifts herself up on her elbows,  
swings legs around,  
touches the floor gingerly  
like dipping feet in cold water.

Seated side-saddle on the bed,  
this is her first portrait sitting  
for the day.  
Sun warms to the task.  
Light is eager to begin.  
First, a masterpiece.  
Then coffee.

## NEIGHBORHOOD ELEGY

The cat was crushed  
beneath the wheels  
of a neighbors' SUV.  
The birds nest fell out of the tree.  
The young squirmed on the ground.  
The parents flew off.  
The mastiff from three doors down  
bit the bichon across the street.  
The fat guy in the blue house  
had a heart attack.  
Rumor has it, he was found  
with a knife and fork in his hands.

The guy who works at the hardware store  
drove hard into a pothole, lost a tire.  
Something howls at night.  
Folks say it's a coyote.  
I reckon it for a stray Basset hound.  
A rat was seen crossing the road  
just after dusk.  
Everyone's laying poison traps.  
The old abandoned Victorian  
was broken into.  
Fires were set  
but none took hold.  
Full moon  
bathes the neighborhood  
in a ghostly glow.  
But everyone's at ground level.  
There's no one on the moon to see.

## A MUGGING

Your face is hard against the wall,  
eyes, lips, roughed up by concrete.  
But that's nothing to the gun barrel in your back.  
Or the words out of the stranger's mouth.  
"Don't move."

You were always warned to do  
what a mugger says,  
that cash and credit cards  
are nothing compared to your life.  
But this is your first time  
putting that advice into practice.

Your knees tremble and scrape  
against the roughness.  
Your heart is in your neck.  
Those carpenter's hands  
are as limp and useless as a baby's.

Strange fingers reach into your pocket.  
An odd thought occurs to you.  
If you were a woman,  
this could also be rape.  
Alison is waiting for you at home this very moment.  
Your first time being robbed,  
and being glad it's you, not her.  
offers solace, then strength,  
then finally some dignity.

"Don't call the cops," the mugger says,  
before darting off into the shadows.  
You're left with no cell phone, no wallet,  
but most of your nerve  
and everything of Alison.

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *My poems are inspired by what is currently happening in my life whether it is a walk in the woods, something I read in a newspaper or book, travel, a piece of music I happen to hear. I try to be open to everything. While I've read and admired many of the great poets both old and new, I try not to let one particular writer influence me to any great degree. I typically let the sense of what I'm trying to say dictate the way in which I say it. Poetry's importance to me is the way it gets to the nub of its meaning quickly and honestly. I am a great art lover though no great painter and to me a poem is like a landscape, a portrait or even something totally abstract but in words not oils.*

**BIO:** *John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in That, Dunes Review, Poetry East and North Dakota Quarterly with work upcoming in Qwerty, Thin Air, Dalhousie Review and failbetter.*

