

THEM



No, not *them*—*THEM*. In last year's *The General Is Asked His Opinion and other sad songs*, Massachusetts master wordchef Omar Shapli concerned himself with the Bushco-Halliburton White House, bloodthirsty neo-con

ideologues, blog-happy dittoheads, talking-point-following fellow travelers, and the beleaguered troops stuck in the middle. *THEM*—a collection penned pre-Iraq War II misadventure and 2004 presidential-election downer—finds Shapli far more interested in what's happening on the ground he treads everyday, in the lives of people he knows and loves, in the weather (see the poised, pouncing personification on display in "Short Storm," as perfectly formed a piece as any he's composed). Some elements of the poet's idiosyncratic song remain the same—the topsy-turvy-tipsy approach, the on-the-fly linguistic coinage, the rhythmic enjambment driving home points that don't quite gel right away—but here the concerns are decidedly more everyday and at times essay-like, with stray thoughts or conversational shrapnel giving way to inspired digression that spins out like a disoriented running back with something to prove, breathlessly deep and desperate fast, in directions unexpected. Wherever Shapli's intellectually-bruising musings finally deposit you, you'll be glad you came along for the ride.

poems 1999–2002 by Omar Shapli

Stain

If time could begin with a bang then
whimper itself to extinction hard among the
pockmarked planetoids and vast dark cinders
that once were stars as they skid off and away
one from another till nothing's in sight of
anything (or wouldn't be if sight or light
had left any mechanism by which they
could be remembered), well then if time
could do that—start at one spot, then coast
to a halt coupled yet to the empty tender—why
grant it the dignity of immanence? Was this
dratsplatted coffeespill on pristine upholstery
ever a thing that was not going to happen?

Oh it takes time to do what there's
no time to do. Let the clock be a quirk of this
particular bubble of everything and hold us for
now in familial thrall, siblings to warthogs and
sandstorms and dying red giants, go what may.
Scrub stain, pay tithes—tomorrow's another day.

THEM: poems 1999–2002 by Omar Shapli. Release date: September 2007. First edition. 5 x 8.5. 75 pages. Paper. \$10.95. ISBN 10: 0-9789406-1-X. ISBN 13: 978-0-9789406-1-4. Library of Congress Control Number: 2007902636.

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