Segue

online literary journal

CHARLES
Coté
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Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between January 1 and April 30 (closed May through December), and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read our submission guidelines.

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Shrink’s Winter

After Ricardo Reis

Each thing, in its time, has its time
and Shrink feels cold this winter,
    the slush in the streets,
    yellowed patches of dormancy.
All day he sits by a heater
waiting for night to fall, his wife
    to greet him in the evening,
    their uncertain hour together
sitting by the fire, wary of each other
because this is their hour of wariness.
    It’s not safe to have this conversation,
    to tell you how I feel.
And if she tells him her secrets
(which is a darkness to his thinking),
    if she speaks them in fits,
    reluctantly,
let him remember his own indiscretion,
the fabrications he told back when
    his stories were omissions
    spoken cruelly,
or of the weeds in his parents’ garden,
his desolate raking around the flowers
    while his father, unconscious
    on the couch, watched TV.
And so his love sits now by the fire,
a smoldering pyre of locust, sits like a phoenix
    while Shrink picks at loose threads
on his sweater,
restless in the rest of this moment,
the inside of this moment,
while he thinks of what
    they once had, and outside
there’s only winter.
Shrink’s Math

If two halves make a whole, then he had to halve her, to fill the whole of his heart. But what did they halve if not each other? He’d been halving all he could take; she’d halve no more to give. And still, it was never enough, so he’d halve a lover too, one he’d hope would make him whole again, give him at least a halve of what he didn’t halve at home. This only made the whole much bigger, at least by one whole halve of itself. If one plus one is too much to halve, and one times one is one too many halves, then one divided by one is a halve over a halve. They’d halve to halve each other.
Shrink’s Elusive Moon

follows lonely and bored,
envis the condo parking lot
where once he made out with her,
where once she made time
to make out with him, the man
in the moon grown tired
of his years, his seasons of attraction
to the sea, wave upon wave
wearing down a firm resolve
to blame his sorrow on the sun.
Just like the moon to hide
its darker side, to fuse
its grief—a fatal loss of kin,
the orphaned moon—and she
in his car’s backseat, him wanting
more than she could give,
eclipsed by a star of his own
making, the moon to soothe
his disillusionment, to prove
that he was up
against it, so condolences
to the moon
with its phases,
its waxing and waning
gibbous or crescent
for its first and last
quarter, the moon, hardly
new and rarely full.
Author Notes

Charles Coté is the author of a chapbook (Flying for the Window, Finishing Line Press, 2008) and is working on a full-length book of persona poems called Shrink, some of which appear in this issue of Segue. His poems have also appeared in: Upstreet, Salamander, The Cortland Review, Free Lunch, Identity Theory, Blueline, Modern Haiku, Connecticut River Review and HazMat Review. He studied social work at Syracuse University and is a psychotherapist in private practice, teaching poetry in his free time at Writers & Books in Rochester, NY.

About the Work

The Shrink persona evolved out of my struggle to write about my profession without divulging confidential information, to find a way to fashion a container for the suffering of others, which in reality turns out to be a way to contain my own anxiety. Physician, heal thyself! The first Shrink poem I wrote, simply titled “Shrink,” linked the subject of my chapbook, the death of my eighteen-year-old son from cancer, with my work as a psychotherapist, imagining Shrink in his office on the anniversary of his son’s death. When I shared that poem at the Palm Beach Poetry Festival with my workshop leader, Gregory Orr, he encouraged me to develop Shrink’s character and let the poems go wherever they would take me, to not censor the work in any way. “Shrink’s Winter” pays homage to Fernando Pessoa’s persona, Ricardo Reis, one of four distinct voices he employed when writing. As a therapist, the gap between one’s professional and personal life can be quite wide as the HBO series In Treatment so accurately portrays. I could say things behind a mask, a persona, that I’d be hesitant to say directly. In this case, we see a melancholic Shrink trying to connect with his wife, and yet falling short, a stark contrast to the help he offers his married clients by day. “Shrink’s Math” heightens this dramatic tension by exploring the implications of intimacy, how two halves rarely make a whole, an idea that fascinates me both as a therapist and bewildered spouse. This poem started as an exercise with homonyms. In “Shrink’s Elusive Moon,” we get an existential perspective: No relationship can fill that void, no matter how ideal. Shrink is moony, or in Jungian psychology, a puer, an adult child dealing with his mother complex, or at least that’s what Shrink’s own shrink might say. I’ll leave it up to you, the reader, to decide whether that assessment is correct.

Charles Coté on the Web

charlescote.blogspot.com/

www.bostonliterarymagazine.com/win08interview.html

www.poetrymagazine.com/archives/featured_poets/199603.htm

www.cortlandreview.com/issue/36/cote.html

www.identitytheory.com/verse/summer_2006.php