

Segue

online literary journal

SARAH JANE BARNETT



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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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Rescue Story

Two men stand in a bush clearing, one
in a bright orange cycling vest. His whistle
swings on a red string—a divining rod.
The other tilts his face to the gash of blue
through the dominant and co-dominant trees
of the canopy, which he also knows as the overstory.
His skin pulls tight across his jaw. They should have
called the authorities. There's three hours until sunset, says
the older man—her father—who drops to his haunches
to rub the cold campfire ash to a smear
between two soft fingers. He sighs and looks around.
He is an accountant and his lover a barrister,
and they'd been too long—too achingly selfish,
and now the trees are starting to darken.
They beat through the layers of wet undergrowth
with old ski poles, looking for the outline
of his daughter's tiny boots. We move with them, with desire
for an ending, but they cannot see the sun,
and whether it will set this way or that, and the younger
man's cellphone reception has dropped
to one bar, but the car park is that way—right—
behind—right?

Lamb

The wool is as soft as a girl's hair. The teeth scaled white. The mouth open to welcome visitors. That morning he'd carved the mannequin to shape: a rounded barrel with legs curled under its breast, the head like an oil can. The gentle lamb at rest. Without familiar sheep features—the heart nose and velvet spoon ears, the quiet watery eyes—it could be anything. A shetland pony or a donkey. He pulls its dark fleece from the bath with two long tongs and starts to scrape away the fat. The sun streams through the high window of his workshop, heavy with smoke and tanning chemicals. He begins to shape the skin. With every animal he tries to help it become its best. He polishes until he sees himself in their eyes. It's all about how you sew the mouth shut, his father used to say. The animal must look like it's smiling.

Statues

The petite Grecian woman bent over the well
is to stand beside the front door; the matching

Grecian man sits opposite; a gift from her husband.
I don't like him: he is badly cast and his white pockmarked

hands pour a bucket of nothing into nowhere.
Perhaps from a distance the pair seem graceful.

I imagine water, and the woman watching
continents of clouds slide across the well's surface. The man,

if he were kind, would look to the curve of his wife's back,
see her hand's small efforts, before hauling his own bucket

to the fields where only that morning
he'd planted radishes, and carefully soak the tilled earth to black.

For their sake, I hope they are labouring
in the mild evening, out of the heat of the day,

that they're able to talk of family business
in a language that only the two of them know.

Is this what my neighbour
sees from her kitchen window? A man and a woman,

their deep comings and goings. Or does she see two figures
frozen in a moment of emptying and emptying?

Author Notes

Sarah Jane Barnett is a writer, tutor, and book reviewer who lives in Wellington, New Zealand. Her first collection of poems, A Man Runs into a Woman, was published by Hue & Cry Press in 2012 and was a finalist in the 2013 New Zealand Post Book Awards. Her work has appeared in various publications including Sport, Landfall, Best New Zealand Poems, JAMM, Trout, and Southerly (Aus). Sarah is currently completing a creative Ph.D. in the field of eco-poetics at Massey University, New Zealand.

About the Work

These poems are part of my doctoral thesis, which looks at how we imagine (and write) about the non-human world. I'm interested in how poets use the non-human world in their poems as symbols for human concerns, so that is what the work stemmed from. The hardest part in writing these poems was to avoid becoming polemic. I wanted them to highlight the way we internalize stories about the non-human world, for example nature as something to be saved, or nature as wilderness, and how that changes the way we interact with the natural world. I resolved the challenges I had with these poems through a feedback process with my doctoral supervisors and through dogged revision. While not everyone has a supervisor at her disposal, I think the process of feedback from other writers is essential in growing as a writer.

I am not sure that I can sum up what the craft of poetry is for me. It certainly has to do with making language spark and feel like it's new. I want my poems to make readers confront something in themselves. I want them to surprise me with what language can do. While writing is a solitary activity, poetry is always in dialogue with poets and poetry that has come before or poetry that is happening right now. In this sense I want the poems to be in dialogue with (to respond to or bounce off of) the work of other poets working today.

Sarah Jane Barnett on the Web

theredroom.org/

hueandcry.org.nz/index.html