@ 2008 Segue online literary journal
ISSN 1939-263X

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Issue 7 Fall 2008

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Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between August 1 and April 30 (closed May through July), 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.

Segue
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CONTENTS

Flora 4
Her Morning Gargle 5
Gretel to Naive 6
Frigid Air 7
Magic by Design 8
Accessories 9
Author Notes 10
Flora

The agency in the colony opens
its exotic petals each morning
in fertilized homeland. Eyes stretch
a map as far as they and sea.
Snagged peninsulas sag to sharpen
a point for possible escape
though the sensual fish nets harness
a lust to please deep into farm country.
An ocean marinades and pickles
to inject a collusion cargo,
domestic animals, and a hint
of wild goose. When the paddies
and bogs produce mock ceremonies
with a smile, when legs sing without string,
longitude and latitude disappear.
Raw materials relax into the flow of things.
Arms put down and all embrace,
if ever loaded onto the trunk.
With inner resource, the island
reinforces the charts and oral description;
accommodation lacks hip movements.
Even sand spits enjoy their lot.
Evolutionary biology suggests
organs may not have survived
for original desires. However,
the flowering remains suspect.
Her Morning Gargle

Pickled in an intimate language
and encumbered in a pool
formed by stage lighting
without the cool cucumber fins,
whispers, amplified, stay within their lines.
Big girls feign death in a voice box
and douse themselves in vinegar
in the hops that someone nails it shut.
Before saturation boys don’t stand
a chance. Cores with motored mouths
order breakfast, battlefields, and all
the gears to line up for a smile.
If wrestling words pinned leading men,
the ten-year-old rat nest would have
Sir Lawrence Olivier dissected
and still under a glass case.

Sponges in their wild habitat
study salt and spit back some
other body’s deep thoughts.
Crisp energy drowns one thread
at a time until silk raises its flag.
The short story draws out a flowing curtain.
The petite echo chambers
protect with a distant father air.
The fight for a genuine larynx
settles sediment in the barrel bottom
where angling jaws place their hands
as though they own it.
Gretel to Naive

From ladle to grave her mother’s apron
blindfolded her while the Hansel young boy
in his father’s voice reassured
the peek-a-boo heroine of her
good fortune by telling horror stories
of what she was missing.
The parental faces parse par’s parcel
for the comfort of community.
Buried beneath the foundations
of other people’s houses, the intimacy
once possible for each cookie cutter character
never blossoms. Protest drives
up and down the avenue in a backhoe
merely excavate the expressway
to apartments waiting for bitterness
on different sides of town. On this late date,
the manicured front lawn tickles toes.
Frigid Air

Two huskies pulled the bride
over glacial lace and across the tundra grate
deep into the middle of no one. The throbbing
monotony senses ice castles and clowns:
mush, mush, and mush.
The global positioning units rolling
in two facial sockets congratulate the rest.
Before the prick and goose
down, generations of women
and a picture book fluffed
swan feathers and lined a mold
with fresh linen to ready the sledge.
Female breath that steam trunks hold
after the age of ten, fill with costumes
leaving behind a warm outline
that promised a whole. The snowshoes
and roseola nose, forcing a laugh,
coordinates skating on thin mirrors
and actress paint. Dwarfs and hunters
own their own igloos and side-by-side
comforthers. Angel powder and puff
applications complete 0, and rescue
another question mark with isolation.
Magic by Design

Over mammary glands and hips,
the flesh chador dissolves the person
peering through the coiffure.
The old secret formula brand new.
A veil of skin melts the particular
and potential from the good senses of men.
Testosterone city saves the sin of knowing
for carnal examinations. Curves'
pores, texture, and fashion
stitch size to its power,
and a father gives away a fetish.
Dog owners and cowboys
understand their animals.
Dermatological hijabs bear
responsibility for exposing anything
other than sweetheart and bitch,
robe the spectrum in a baby-talk
shadow. Stoned into a squawk
the vanishing character beneath
nape and legs surrenders it scarf
to the release of brawn.
In order to remain a virgin to awakening
the burqa broad vaporizes the psyche
 guilty of embracing its dream.
And so a frontier’s man again moralizes
drinking water’s reflection into tribes.
Accessories

Where woman have been a luxury for man…
—Adrienne Rich

Having purchased luxury for the passenger seats of their life journeys, the young drivers speed off as though warrantees came with the navigator of nothing. On the crowded highway boredom’s sun and rain glancing off the precious goods requires the sweep and visors of distraction. Raking money into the backyards, arranging toys at the peripheries of property, at first the fun seems real. Then, the many dollars tickling cause calluses until vaults crush the vital V-8s of subtle perception and agony expresses itself by infliction. Of course the poor and defenseless masses pay first and a great price, but then possessions go through re-evaluation of their financial and accommodating worth. The leather upholstery now carries wrinkled cow hide satchels emptied of their prestige and giggles. Either another gift to blunted sensibilities comes along for the ride and Cubic-Z’s long face to the adventurer’s grave stays at home steaming curtains or the excessorized safari loses its caddy.
Author Notes

Rich Murphy has had three chapbooks published and has a book of poems, The Apple in the Monkey Tree, coming out this summer by Codhill Press. His poems have appeared in Rolling Stone, Poetry, Grand Street, The London Magazine, Trespass, New Letters, Confrontation, Aesthetica, The Argotist, West 47, foam:e, and Creature Magazine. His most recent essay appears in Reconfigurations: A Journal for Poetics Poetry / Literature and Culture. He teaches writing at VCU.

About the Work

Reading and listening to the conversations in literature, psychology, history, and philosophy have been of key importance to my writing because I have always been interested in ideas. I have approached writing poetry sensitive to metaphors that can be turned into ironic language that I might use. From there I take the language seriously so that I might have “fun” with it. I am interested in writing ironist poems, driving concrete surfaces to address oblique possibility’s express ways, giving direction to the distant relations to call attention to lost relations and family resemblances. Unresolved irony is my guide, and I try to bring unity around interrogation, commentary, or narrative that remains open at its close.

Postmodern/post-avant poetry has little use for beauty because harmony and justice are suspect. In fact, the difference between modern poetry and postmodern poetry may also be attributed to modern poetry’s putting forward the sublime as “missing contents” at precisely the right moment among beauty. The exercise is supposed to be a Wittgensteinian therapy perhaps. Usually the sublime moments are meant to substitute something transcendental, a oneness. Postmodern poetry ignores beauty and form to attempt to put forward the unpresentable. One is sublime while the other is aporia. Postmodern poetry is interested in Wittgenstein’s ladder.

The sublime relies on the ability of the poet to overwhelm the reader and for the reader to empathize with the persona. The reader is set up by the poet using the elements of beauty to encourage empathy and build contrast to what is to come. The sublime is where the poet brings the passion and compression of language in an attempt to say more than what can be said, to attempt to go beyond language and thus overwhelm the reader standing in the persona’s shoes.

The pleasure comes from a combination of the reader seeming so unimportant and insignificant and yet somehow a part of the sublime’s overwhelming experience. Romantic poets made great use of the idea of unity in the sublime. This oneness makes simple Emmanuel Kant’s notion that the experience of the sublime is the victory of reason over sensible being.

Postmodern sublime or aporia is different because the reader faces a gap, an abyss, something open and unresolved that inspires suspicion, doubt, and difficulty in choosing. Aporia is a suspicion of all frames reminding the reader that there are no frames except for the ones that are made, that the only conventions we have are the ones we make.

The poem is not going to lead the reader to a sublime moment but challenge the frames of the familiar, the beautiful, the harmonious at every turn of phrase. So when the familiar or conventional performs as a frame, aporia emerges. The frame promises convention while aporia disturbs. There isn’t an intimation of a transcendental oneness. Instead it attempts to present
something unpresentable, perhaps the gap between fragments, the gap between signifier and signified. The postmodern poet’s text, like the philosopher’s text, isn’t influenced by rules that the poem is investigating.

The paradox suggested in irony is the tool that frustrates easy reasoning toward resolution, keeping the problem, the frame, the poem open. The effect reminds the reader of the limits of language that the medium isn’t going to pretend it is something it isn’t. This kind of sublime is another kind of overwhelming, the overwhelming of the apparent absence of meaning or what David Shapiro in his essay “The Mirror Staged” refers to as “deferred sense.” While aporia is the overwhelming of limitation, it is also the overwhelming of possibility; because if it reminds the reader of limits of convention, it reminds of freedom also, the freedom of possibility. This is its pleasure. Using aporia is not a one-time shot in the poem but a regular reminder of the limits of language and using those reminders to further the poem. The regularity of aporia in these kinds of poems may also be seen as recognition of the sublime that is ever-present. For Nietzsche’s cosmic dancers every moment is sublime in touching down and leaping again: Now, now, now.

The six poems for Segue are part of a larger manuscript titled “Voyeur.” They are examples of my ironist poetry. My chapbook Family Secret from the manuscript was published by Finishing Line Press. The book-length manuscript is a collection of poems on gender politics. I noticed that men’s poetry has rarely attempted to understand a woman’s sensibility. I was attempting to understand the dynamics of that sensibility in these poems, while also attempting to see the various power dynamics of gender relationships, heterosexual and homosexual.

“Her Morning Gargle” for instance was a reaction to The Scarlet Letter’s and Adrienne Rich’s notions that women do not have a language or at least a public language; they use men’s language. I at first see the grown woman pickled in silence or perhaps what men call intimate language. (What is intimate and for whom? Who made that word?) In the poem I am playing with pickling language, the before and after of the process, always recognizing the relations in ironic statements.

Gilles Deleuze reminds us that philosophy and art have long been in conversation, and so in this postmodern age art initiates and replies. In his book Ideology of the Aesthetic, Terry Eagleton suggests that the philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno coaches: “art may thus offer an alternative to thought, which…has become inherently pathological. All rationality is now instrumental, and simply to think is therefore to violate and victimize…Emancipatory thought is enormous irony…” Because theory and art are matters of a conversation, poems may use irony and the family relations of ironic statements to skate the concrete surfaces to address oblique possibility.

Try Your Hand:

Using concrete language, list ironic images around a topic, theme, or idea. Do not connect them and avoid making each elaborate. When you have a dozen ironic images, use one common topic, theme, or idea and begin composing in a direction that lends itself for continued writing. Draw on the other images and connect what you find would be effective to the poem’s direction. Use new ironic images if needed. Unresolved irony should be the guide. Bring unity around interrogation, commentary, or narrative that remains open at its close.
Rich Murphy on the Web

www.snreview.org/0206Murphy.html

www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/0602/poem_30700.html

www.webspawner.com/users/richmurphy/index.html

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