Segue 7: Fall 08

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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.

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A Map of Greenwich

1:100

On my first trip, I came forward in time from the East Coast, then by boat from Tower Bridge.

We walked from the foot-tunnel mouth, a cupola of brick and copper, past the Cutty-Sark’s hollow scaffold to the hidden pier. The walkway’s narrow, one side drops to shale, her river grinding brick to sand. Up right: a music school. The strain of rasps and creaks leaps from a drone to air gentle concordance from grubby stateroom window-sashes. Back through the park are tumuli, Bronze Age barrows humped beside the palace walls.

Pleasaunce, the hunting ground of kings has sunk underneath the paths and park-railings of naval buildings. Wren and hellish Hawsmoors’ nests, pecked over by those two wigged capons in their infancy, were sculpted under nodding plumage. Hawskmoor never went to Italy, but drew the navel of the Empire from plans of ancient Rome and temples of Solomon.

An isoline-century away, the nave of the church collapsed under a German bomb in the blitz, the explosion heard in 1892 by anarchists targeting the Royal Observatory, who were caught like Fawkes, feathers drifting down, and pinned to the pages of Conrad’s Secret Agent,
(unpicked and set free a contour later
by a lonely Oklahoma bomber).

Do you see there the hill, and its crown,
the Astronomer Royal’s perfect circle?

It is to table the motions of the heavens
and the places of the fixed stars. It
came in over-budget, the opening chord
of that other monument to time,

the Dome. Light pollution smothered it
and railways de-magnetised the dials
till she shrivelled, somewhere in between
Blackheath’s sand and loam and seams of clay,

and Deptford, where an agent in the service
of her Majesty was stabbed beneath

a water-spotted boarding-house tapestry.
But still the still centre of the world

remains to the rest of us in the laser beam,
that straight line of green, un-refracted.

Meantime, on the jetty, secrets of future maps
passed from raincoat to raincoat under low-lit

lamps and wet cobbles. Whether chipped
in palm-sized steel or chanted to the beat

of hooves on wooden bridges, all secrets end
with a meeting, a splash, and a scurry.
Daisy Parente is 26. She lives and works in London, where she rides a clapped-out bicycle and spends more time thinking about gardening than actually doing it. This summer she has work published in Pomegranate and Fuselit.

About the Work

The two English poets that got me started, Ted Hughes and Simon Armitage, both come from a tiny part of a smudge of a country: Marsdon Moor in Yorkshire. I used to blindly believe that an almost blinkered relationship with place is the only way to write really good poetry. I reckon I got that wrong. Eva Hoffman, in her brilliant 1995 memoir Lost in Translation—A Life in New Language, writes about the Polish word *tesknota*, “a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing.” For Hoffman, nostalgia is ‘a source of poetry, and a form of fidelity.’ In my early twenties I migrated to Brooklyn, returning to London a couple of years ago. As these movements happened I began to see the idea of *tesknota* as the basis of writing. The gap between two places, between familiar and unfamiliar language, became painful and fertile ground, an area rich with new possibilities.

An American took me to Greenwich for the first time. We walked through the village and up to the Royal Observatory on a freezing April evening, and I was startled by the immediacy and clarity with which I saw the poem. For me, the mapping of Greenwich happened in three ways at once: I saw the place for the first time, I saw England mapping its Empire, and I heard the familiar voice of America, a new Empire, explaining my old home to itself. This trio of voices all spoke about one thing: time. I set out to write about the relationship between physical and temporal space, a sort of history concertina, folding and unfolding the sediment of the city and the anecdotal nature of colonial expansion. I think it was part of a real effort to come home to London. I was digging around in my country’s back yard.

The speaker of my poem is an American. Part of the exhilaration of writing “A Map of Greenwich” was the knowledge that I was really, for the first time, able to play with the poem’s voice. This was a new discovery for me., It’s probably a consequence of settling: I could suddenly inhabit the reason for a poem with confidence, and that appropriation gave me the freedom to write. Poetry is fiction after all.

Mind you, researching madly and writing at home, wherever that may be, is the only way you’re ever going to get anything done. Poetry is not— unless you actually ARE Simon Armitage—a way to make a living. It’s not even a way to be read, most of the time. Writing poetry in one’s twenties has no choice, quite frankly, but to be a reward in itself.

Daisy Parente on the Web

www.pomegranate.me.uk/poem408.html

www.pinznez.blogspot.com