

CETERA

#1



THE THINGS
THAT SURVIVE US

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Artwork by Jon Negroni

INTRO

Survival often arrives without notice. It appears as habit, as memory, as a room you once lived in and can still navigate in the dark. The poems in this issue begin from that understanding: what endures after us frequently differs from what we intended to leave behind, and its persistence carries a subtle authority of its own.

Across these pages, poets return to the afterlife of experience —the way love continues beyond proximity, how grief reshapes space, how language keeps speaking long after its first moment has passed. Houses hold arguments. Bodies carry inherited histories. Landscapes maintain their own records, attentive to our presence and our passing. Survival emerges here as a condition of continuity, an accumulation of traces that gather meaning over time.

Read together, these poems reveal endurance as intimate and unruly. It lives in gestures, in syntax, in sustained attention. Each piece remains open and ongoing. Some things persist by continuing to exist, asking to be noticed, and inviting us to stay with them a while longer.

— Jon Negroni, Chief Editor of *Cetera Magazine*

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METES AND BOUNDS

I, Colin P Punt, son, brother, daydreamer, and coward

Hereby certify that I have surveyed, mapped, and considered a parcel of land, located in that sea of grass, described as follows:

Commencing at the place of my birth,

Thence twenty years south, which is the place of beginning.

Thence north to the backwater where we used to sit and fish until they built the dam and the water came up higher than the tops of the trees.

Thence east to the old baseball we found in the tall grass.

Thence north to where we had our first picnic and you cried when you got yellow mustard on your new dress.

Thence east to the other side of the cemetery gate that still stands, even though the fence fell down years ago.

Thence north, where I told you that meadowlark songs are my favorite sound in the world.

Thence east, to the field where we laid out an old quilt to look at the stars, but fell asleep instead.

Thence north to where we laughed to think how many Corneliuses one family could have.

Thence east to where you can hear the curious whir of pheasant wings that always startles you as they race into the air.

Thence southeast to where you told me the story of your grandma and how she never learned how to ride a bicycle because her family was too poor to ever buy one.

Thence south, which I thought was a straight line between your house and mine, but you said it wasn't because the earth was round.

Thence southwest where you laughed when I called a petrified dried-up cow pie last year's model.

Thence northwest where you got mad that I couldn't remember the name of the flowers you had pointed out to me just last Saturday (it was penstemon cobaea)

Thence north to a point where you told me you kissed Drew

Thence northeast to a point where I told you I kissed Sarah.

Thence east to the place I told you I was moving away.

Thence southeast to the place where you told me you weren't coming with.

Thence northeast where you told me you sometimes thought of how we would grow old together and sit on our front porch while our border collies played in the yard.

Thence a few wandering steps—not enough to count but enough to mention—in an unknown direction back to the point of beginning.

Said parcel contains some number of acres, a larger quantity of square feet, even more memories, and the bones of old Dutch settlers,

More or less,

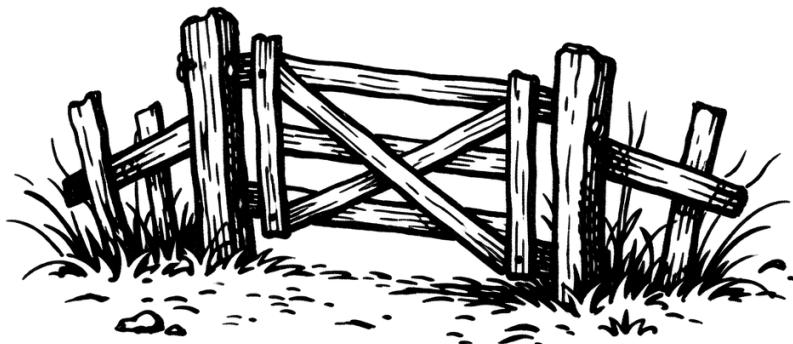
And is subject to all easements and rights of way of record or usage,

Though not by the Yankton Sioux who were driven off years ago,

Or that one part of my heart that I thought would never leave this place but did.

Exclusive of wetlands, but inclusive of red-winged blackbirds.

When Colin Punt isn't envisioning the future urban form as a city planner in Wisconsin, he enjoys reading books, riding bikes, and messing about in boats. His work has appeared in Mayday Magazine, Midwest Review, and Pasque Petals, amongst other publications.



NUMBERING THE SLANT

Yuo*

It begins with a kind of slant.

Birds without wings. Roots
thirst for the sky. A shared
argument against the wind.
Architectures have their own
way of standing. I have
my father.

I read his hands as a map
of the Southern soil. The same way
that light becomes weight
on the shoulders of trees.

Qilou, he says, a word
for what passes. An architecture
from the last century in Guangzhou.

Lia*

It casts a peculiar shadow—deliberate,
a kind you could walk beneath, like walking under
the skin of leaves.

Father knew the bricks of Qilou
from his old habit of drinking beer with co-workers under the shade of light,
the entangled forests of concrete,
or carrying the weight of bricks
on his eyebrows as a form of wrinkles
dissolving into cash. And later

the 1,456 km distance measured
only by train tickets, thirty dollars,
fifteen hours, the dissolution of
a slant rhyme between North and South.

At first language, then birthday
blurs into the horizon
Qilou dissolved into tears
when father spoke the failed dialect.
Ba yuo si yi?
which means August 11th.

My birthday.

Sa*

I see the wheat field reflected
over the old buildings melting in water.

Canton and Guangzhou
sharing a similar pursuit of gold,
yet my father's beer bottles
endure that elapsing, tendering light. In his youth, he'd turn that light into
harvest, with his trumpet ripening
our wheat.

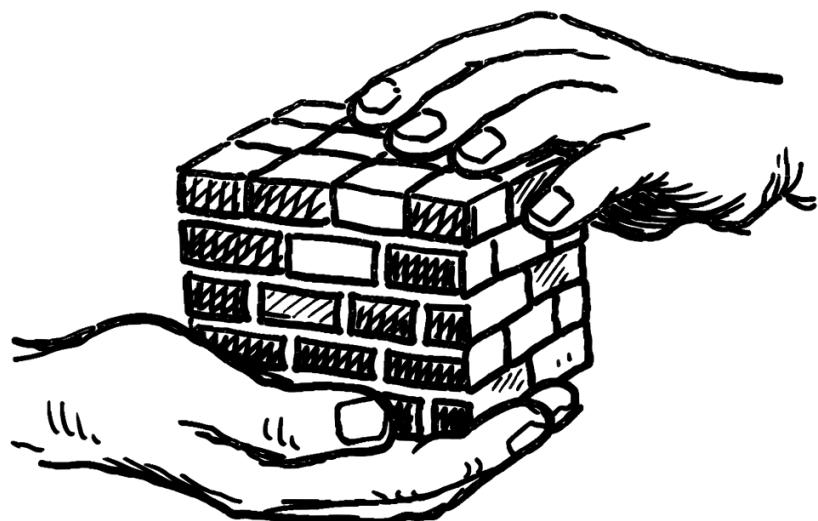
The shadow I still reach far
now performs its slow algebra.
In the dialect, in the long train ride,
on the ridge or the river bank,
in the lingering smell of smoke,
father:
a solution dissolving in the field.
Outside the material world.

Now the glitters of cigarette ash
freeze you back into human forms.
Our heartbeats grow
to precipitate into a
new slant rhymes.
Beyond time or thoughts, it beats:
You meet me now in the ghost of swathed wheat.

Translations:

Yuo, Lia, Sa, Se, in Henan Dialect, correspond to One, Two, Three, Four in English.
Ba Yue Si Yi means August 11th in Henan Dialect.

Linlang Zhao is a writer, poet, and artist from a migration-based family. Her background as an immigrant informs her creative exploration of continuity, change, and belonging. Her work can be found on Stepping Stone Magazine, and in her free time, she enjoys writing and drawing.



LAST FRIDAY

side-by-side Mr. on the right Mrs.
on the left we rocked in once regal chairs
backs bowed bare oak peeking out
our hands rested close body heat mingled.

The worn front steps swayback treads
led to a paint cracked weathered deck
Williamsburg blue rust red, sunshine yellow
handrail balusters sporting a peeled paint smile.

Coffee cups steaming we talked flower beds
edging & mulch vegetable kinds and such
heirloom tomatoes, radishes lettuce, & cukes
Heliotropes for the butterfly folk.

Went for wraps on the sunny-cool morning
across the old welcome mat middle worn out
from the tread of our feet leaving a 'We'.
Shawls in hand foot out the door
she's slumped in her chair still — not asleep

On another cool morning potluck dishes arrive
bunches of flowers posed on buffet and floor
fragrances lingering ghostly mourners mingling
closely in islands of drear.

My black pinstripe suit dust on the shoulders
trousers grown a bit long old black bow-tie
Florsheim wingtips smooth leather soles

once danced her across the hard wood floor
quick-quick slow-slow smooth in our turns
cheek to cheek Old Spice and Shalimar.

After the grievers alone on the
porch one rocker empty the other
one not went for some coffee cross
the old welcome mat bare in its center
ended with 'me'.

MF Charles reads/writes poetry in Waverly, Iowa. His lyric mainstream poetry is flavored by nature personified and introspection. Poetry's myriad ways to combine words and cadences to express ideas and emotions was the seductively creative leap that he was seeking. Thus, a poem provides a chance to produce an affect in his reader. He has been published in 13 literary journals including Talon Review, The River, and The Stray Branch.



I CAN TELL

I can tell he's on the phone with his mother
because he speaks soothingly, like a dog trainer
with a particularly difficult client—
hushed, with a hidden uncertainty, and long syllables:
“Heeeeey, Maaaa.” Down girl. He's apologetic
for the things he can't control—
the return of her gout, the background
racket of the train—and what he doesn't say,
but is sorry for too,
is being here, with me,
and not under the blanket in his childhood bed
with his feet dangling off the edge.

Harper Obstfeld is a poet from Orange County, currently suffering through New York winter while pursuing her MFA in Poetry at Sarah Lawrence.



SAUCE WITH CREAM AND MUSHROOMS

The water is beginning to boil
and I am cutting mushrooms into little pieces.
Their smooth brown caps yielding but stable as their
earthy odor fills the room.

It is dark outside at the edge of the city.
No lighted skyscrapers to keep me company, just
the glowing red eye of a crane -
a steel dinosaur guarding the building site across the street.

The mushrooms are being heated in the pan,
the pasta softens slowly.
There is hissing and bubbling in the air, and still
that scent.
Of forests I have never been to and
depths of soil I would not survive.

I turn off the music; I listen, my breath
catches in my throat.
Nothing. The neighbor's TV through the wall, quietly.

The mushrooms sizzle accusingly and I
silence them with cream and some
cheese with herbs.
A small offering to the creatures that are my food:
Take this milk - take these herbs -
let me remain who I am.

I look out of the window as if to ask
the red eye for help. Through my reflection,
dark and tense, I see the dinosaur become dragon.
Steel to feathers to scales. The threat of fire
is imminent and I close the curtains.

Alone now with my meal.

The pasta is ready and I scoop it
into the pan, cooking it in the sauce
for the last streak of softening.
The fusilli spiral into multiple embraces
with the mutilated gods.

This is not meat, but it is a
massacre.

I devour,
I revere,
I revel,
I ritualize.

In the midst of life
there are mushrooms inside me.

Ro Novak is a reader, writer, and researcher from Germany who lives in England, where he is working on a PhD in English Literature at the University of Sheffield. He writes various texts in various genres but avoids extensive biographies. Website: ronowak.com



REMEMBERING THE WIDTH OF A SPOON

That bitch behind the looking-glass
was looking rather well
(but you were wasting away).

(You) could have been a contestant, in a previous life,
on some glitzy game show but
all you'd managed to get around to in that one
was donning the mask of myriad manifestations
of the madonna-whore.

Do you remember the first time you realized
why addicts said they're sick when they're withdrawing?

Do you remember tallying the number of people you'd slept with as a way to pass the time?

You do;
in the strange sort of way you sometimes remember your dreams –
fuzzy and vague –

One was in the summertime in a cauldron bath.
One was like counting sheep.

Micke van Zyl is a South African writer and poet based in South China. Her work has previously been published in Meow Meow Pow Pow Lit.



WAVES

Part of me wants to follow
a wave as it slides
back into the sea. I half
believe in Atlantis. Maybe
it would lead me there.

Who am I fooling?
I can't even swim, water
up around my knees.
A paraglider cloud
overhead. I hear kids
maybe fifty feet away,
a spoon beating on
a tin bucket.

When I leave the waves,
I listen in case
one calls to me
before I head back
to the boardwalk's arcades
and French fries in a cup.

*Kenneth Pobo (he/him) has a new chapbook out called *Dindi From Yoopsconsin* (Bottlecap Press). His work has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Amsterdam Review*, *Nimrod*, and elsewhere.*



BEFORE THEY WITHER

I long for the
warmth of
summers past

when we skipped
rocks, made wishes
from dandelion
dust

but now I am
a lone shadow
crossing to
a muddy bank

where leaves
are already
turning crimson

final showcase
beauty before
they wither
away

Erin Jamieson's (She/Her) writing has been published in over 100 literary magazines and nominated twice for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of Net. She is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including Fairytales (Bottle Cap Press) and a historical novel, Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams (Type Eighteen Books).



URSA MINOR

Six months before his final heart attack,
my Grandfather stopped to stare
at the night sky.
His fingers traced the shapes and the outlines
of the Big Dipper, and the Plough,
joining the stars that made Orion's Belt.
Sometimes, when walking through the inky blackness
I stare at the stars,
who haven't aged a day,
and think of him.
Maybe one day,
when his great-grandson
is allowed to stay up later than the Sun,
he will watch someone else's fingers,
trace the outline of the stars and the planets,
that we all dream of visiting, one day.

THE LINE

Watched by the furious eyes of the King Salmon,
the fly waits, tethered to the fishing line.
The Salmon, Sovereign of his stretch of the river,
does not expect the fight that is about to happen.
Lazily, he swims for it,
his heart beats,
as the cruel metal hook
cuts through his lip.
Traces of blood cascade through the water.
The Fisherman feels the bite,
his line becomes taut,
as sinewy muscles piston away,
shortening the line,
as the fish is dragged,
into alien air.
Water splashes down,
as the fish makes one last effort for freedom.
In seconds, the line is reeled in,
and lying on the grassy bank,
the last thing the King feels
are the gentle fingers
of his killer,
removing the fly.

Ben Macnair is an award-winning poet and playwright from Staffordshire in the United Kingdom.



DIMINUTIVE WILDERNESSES

He was my best friend in 2nd grade
and 3rd grade and maybe 4th grade too. I don't remember
when it happened exactly, but he had a sledding accident
at the bottom of that hill we called Bunker Hill
in somebody's backyard, and I don't remember
why we called it Bunker Hill or who came up with that name,
and it may have been the other hill,
the adjacent hill, the one we called Devil's Pit,
and it's possible it wasn't even somebody's backyard
but one of those diminutive wildernesses
that grew between the backyards and the houses in my one and only
childhood. But he was my best friend
and then he had that accident and then
he was in the hospital for a long time because I think he broke his neck,
which was something people said, like careful you don't break your neck,
but I think he really did and I don't
remember visiting him in the hospital and I don't
remember what happened to him after that—
I think he may have gone to another school,
a school for kids in the hospital
or a school for handicapped kids, and I think I remember
seeing him once in one of those neck braces—
I think they call it a halo brace—it was screwed to his head,
but I could be imagining that because what I imagine
has completely overgrown what I remember,
the way a diminutive wilderness will overgrow
and swallow up a house where no one has lived for years.

Years later, I googled him and found him online.
He's an orthopedic surgeon now with a thriving practice
and gray hair and a neat beard in that photo of him on the hospital website.
And I emailed him through the website
and asked him if he remembered me.
I reminded him that we were best friends in the 2nd grade.
I asked him if he remembered what happened exactly,
how we had lost touch and wasn't it good to be in touch again?
But he didn't reply.
But I didn't give up because I had so many questions,
because we were best friends, so I emailed him again
and asked him about the sledding accident
and if it was what inspired him to become an orthopedic surgeon,
and he didn't reply again, and after a third email and no reply
I called the hospital and left a message for him.
I finally got a reply. It was short.
He said he preferred not to engage with me.
He used the word engage.
I was puzzled, angry, hurt.
I tried to remember what happened but I couldn't remember.
And now I think it's possible that maybe I abandoned him—
I mean after the accident I don't remember but I imagine
that maybe I didn't know how to be with him,
because he couldn't come out and play,
because he was in traction and he couldn't move,
because he had broken his neck,
which wasn't just something people said but something that happened to people,
and maybe that freaked me out and maybe I stopped
calling him, and maybe I stopped being his friend.
I really don't remember.
But I imagine he remembers.

(first published in B O D Y)

Paul Hostovsky's poems and essays appear widely online and in print. He has won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, and has been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, The Writer's Almanac, and the Best American Poetry blog. Website: paulhostovsky.com



Special thanks to all our poets who submitted to our inaugural issue.

Here are some closing thoughts from the editors.

Survival rarely takes the form of monument. It settles instead into gesture, into the quiet tilt of attention that shapes how a room is entered or how a name is spoken. Memory travels less as story than as angle — the inherited slant through which the world comes into view.

A field gives way to foundations. A voice becomes cadence within another voice. Constellations hold their pattern even as their distances widen. What endures gathers within language, within the body's repetitions, within the subtle choreography of care that outlives intention.

Reading offers a brief assembly of these continuities. Meaning passes from page into pulse, from line into the texture of thought.

The world turns, and what has been carried finds new ground.

