

THE  
WELLINGTON STREET  
REVIEW

ISSUE FOUR



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REVIEW



**Issue Four | December 2019**

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## *Letter from the Editors*

Almost a year ago, the *Wellington Street Review* was unheard of to everyone including us. Our fourth issue brings us through the full cycle of the year, and it seems both a long time ago and only yesterday.

Our fourth issue brings us from the 1600s through to modern-day Australia; from Devon to Flanders to dreams. When we decided on the theme *Epoch*, to be released on New Year's Eve on the final day of the 2010s, we had vague notion of new beginnings and decade-specific zeitgeist. As always, the range and imagination in the submissions we received has completely taken us aback. Tellingly, the spectre of climate change runs through this edition, more so than any other theme.

But whether you're reading this in 2019, 2020 or years into the future, best wishes to all of you for the next year, decade and all the time ahead.

## **Only In Sleep** | Michael Igoe

We run roughshod over them,  
those displays in faded tents.

A chance from the Zodiac,  
might set them all free  
resurrect their challenge.

But that only occurs in sleep.  
Awake, the chance of answers,  
permits a complete cosmetic,  
the sun embarks  
on a grisly journey  
arcs past you in torrents  
to confronts you at midday  
like an old man's time spent  
planning four days in bed.

## **For Lewis | J. B. Stone**

When Toni Doherty, a grandmother of seven,  
took the shirt off her back, bundling your sweet body away from the flames  
amid the crackles of my faith, a tide of relief, for a moment  
washed away in sea of viral video memento, a montage of everyday heroes

like Toni, who at the end, like so many of us, didn't want to see  
another innocent creature burn. I know you lost so much  
Ellenborough, When I read the news of the day  
When they put you to sleep, I knew my nights would leave me sleepless.

*In the poem, For Lewis this was written based on the same week of last Sumatran rhino went extinct in Malaysia, was the same week of the Australian Brushfires where many, many, many Koala habitats were lost as well. One of the most intense days a local, while evacuating rescued a koala who was caught in the flames. She named the Koala after one of her grandsons, as Ellenborough Lewis. Unfortunately, a day or two later personnel at a nearby animal hospital had to have him euthanized due to the excessive worsening of his burns would only have him living in prolonged suffering.*

## **At Twelve, My First Flood | John Grey**

The coffins aren't popping like corn  
despite what some kid at school says.  
Sure, the water level's rising  
and there's pressure from below old skeletons  
but the dead are cocooned  
in six feet of dense earth.  
They're not going anywhere.

It's the cars that float like coffins  
down Main Street.  
And it's everybody's trash,  
the bones of the way we live,  
that is swept up by new currents.  
Two days of solid rain  
and the river's overflowed its banks.  
The natural's out of order.  
But departed loved ones  
play no part in this catastrophe.  
Sure people weep...  
but over ruined furniture and carpets.  
It's a flood not an exhumation.

From our second-door window,  
we watch a disaster movie unfold.  
But it's not a horror show.  
That's for the hearts of the ones  
who have to clean up this mess.  
And our understanding  
is only what we see.

## **'Anyone for a drink?'- 1965, Regatta Hotel, QLD | Angela Costi**

Rosalie and Merle clasped their 'cold ones',  
forced their smiles, relaxed their chained  
ankles – a little, pretended to ignore  
the brewing of outrage and fear.  
Their beer had a balanced, bold flavour  
with a hint of bitterness,  
it wasn't that weak mix of spirit  
confined to the Ladies' Lounge.

The law arrived that hot day,  
blue uniforms sweating and quibbling  
about batons and saws,  
retreating and re-entering  
with troupes of specialist authority  
endeavouring to remember  
the exact section of what Act?

It wasn't easy for Merle to discipline  
the tremor rifling her body  
when the 'bag-man'  
who carried the system in his back pocket  
breathed a threat in her ear,  
but she was married to her vision  
of woman and man speaking  
about their day at the office  
together, at the bar,  
clinking their glasses  
to thoughts of work and life entwined.

Pauses of thought  
bought the women more drinks,  
and a chance to shift  
the spaces  
between public and private,  
gender and sex,  
culture and custom.

When the hammer came down  
like a judgement  
to smash the chain's padlock,  
two women were free  
to speak to wives, mothers, daughters...  
waiting on pub verandas  
for their blokes to finish  
shouting their mates.

*A photo of Merle Thornton and an interview with her in a book triggered an obsession to pen that moment in Australian history when Merle chained herself to the bar at the Regatta Hotel. In the interview Merle states: 'It was 1965. I should preface this by saying that I felt a sense of outrage when I first came to QLD at seeing women sitting in cars outside hotels with their children, waiting while their menfolk had a drink.' So Merle was railing about women not being able to drink alongside men. This poem has something of a bush ballad about it inspired by Banjo Patterson's sweeping narratives.*

## Obituary for the Canon | J. Sean Rafferty

*Acta est Fabula, Plaudite!*

It is with genuine remorse  
that we acknowledge the passing of  
the Literary Canon  
after a long painful life—  
well, painful for us at the very least.  
The cause of death was as grand and  
predictable as they always were.  
Found Thursday evening in their estate,  
deceased and rotting for quite a few decades  
now. Autoerotic asphyxiation.  
That is to say, their head was firmly  
shoved up one of their own orifices.  
Despite numerous University and critical bodies on hand  
to attempt resuscitation, (that is say, they stuck  
*their* heads up the Canon's orifice) that  
great literary body was announced dead at the scene.

We ask in this time of momentous mourning  
that you think of The Canon as it were in life:  
often white, primarily male, upper-middle class of course,  
a proud Anglo-Saxon protestant who'd not  
dare speak of religion, such a frivolous novelty,  
but was forgiven their prejudice all the same  
when they did. Although your grief may inspire you,  
we ask you please, do not send flowers.  
If one would like to celebrate this behemoth  
of classics, send instead verses from their most  
diligent students: Pope, Eliot, Yeats.  
After all we shall need something to blow  
our noses into at the funeral.  
A solemn, somber ceremony shall  
be conducted next Sunday, after which  
The Canon shall remain lying in state  
for the next decade or so in numerous  
Institutions of their teaching; First  
*Oxford, Cambridge*, of course  
and then on to the Ivy Leagues.

What can one say of a classic?  
Truly a product of their time, their time  
ending roughly in the 1940s.

A staunch believer and protector  
of the literary caste system,  
only they were true literature.  
They are survived by their traitorous children,  
Modern, Contemporary and Alternative Literature  
As well as their illegitimate grandchildren:  
Free-verse, Graphic narrative, Erotica...  
I could go on but I shall spare The Canon the shame.  
Needless to say, these frivolous youths  
shall not be in attendance.  
We, the Canon's loyal followers would not allow  
Such bastardized riff raff through the doors!

The King is dead. May god have mercy on their soul.  
~~BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE WILL~~

## **We were never going to die | Ian C. Smith**

*'Only trouble is interesting'* - Janet Burroway

Cold December. A rental on the Kentish coast where I unscrew the meter to recycle some 50p coins but we still shiver, hiding ourselves away, my addiction to the magic of being elsewhere waning, Dungeness nuclear power station squatting on the horizon seen from the pebble beach where we walk alone, gulls' cries forlorn. Ramshackle tall buildings, perhaps bleak boarding houses, shadow the foreshore skyline staring towards France. Beyond our rear fence at the edge of Romney Marsh a miniature green passenger train whistles along a single track. Near the line a tethered billygoat crops weeds, nettles, eyeballing us, stench rank. The area of marshland across the railway we shortcut to New Romney's shops, stepping on pebbles like those on the beach, was once ravaged by the Black Death, and rife with malaria. Smugglers, *owlers*, for their nocturnal signals, prevailed in dark, dank villages, some now gone forever.

Twice, reminders of what turned out to be those indelible days, alerted my senses: reading Paul Theroux's account of travelling right around the British coast, his reference to that train rousing memories of its whistle's echo; and Michael Portillo's televised rail journeys crisscrossing Britain, also about the train, and the past, when I was both far from home, and yet home, born in England, partly growing up in Australia.

Eighteen months after setting out we moved to the coast, having researched an episode of a TV programme climaxing in my feckless family members' reunion following an age of separation. Deceit, tragedy, bad blood, bigamy, and shame enough to blood an Elizabethan play revealed, the deeper we dug the sadder we slumped, genealogical archaeologists mired in misery. The sun seemed never to shine on those Spartan days, security in havoc, when our wardrobe consisted of whatever could be stuffed into backpacks, yet we were briefly buoyed by our achievements culminating in a frisson of glamour at a London television studio.

I can't stop wondering how I would fare if I could burst back through time to land in the midst of winter on that beach in the throes of overseas days, Channel wind ruffling my hair, almost broke, collar turned up on my sailor's pea jacket I wore constantly, an unmoored man on a moor with anchor motifs on his buttons, the brilliant red lining keeping me warm instead of lurking unworn, unseen on a hanger, no more cold wind for that coat now, no gulls' cries, coat as memento. Despite humdrum comfort, why these echoes like tinnitus, this unease?

## Joan Again | Stephen Mead

It wasn't a dark dream which crept over me,  
not like my mother warned, but a real war  
& what had to be done. No,  
how in the heavens could I possibly escape  
the prophesy which chose me, though,  
when it came, that's what I desired,  
to be useful, in love with the land,  
the people, swamped, not the bloodshed,  
not the blood.

I saw no one as enemy really, in the beginning,  
before accusations. I saw only suffering  
& tried hard to listen for an angel's voice.  
Long through nights it wailed, whimpered  
of potential stakes, & yet even while paying heed  
to go on was my part, the part which meant lead.

My god, but I hated the violence, the triumphant waste,  
as so many fell & fell thinking *we are right, we are right*,  
convinced of that on both sides.

Were they then? Are they now?  
Lives lost in cannon's fire or hand to hand,  
face to face, the combat of swords, even the one  
which I carried, slaying no one, though arrow-pierced  
& advancing high as a rippling, a certainly torched  
& tattered flag.

It can yet be found, that riddling belief,  
purely symbolic in the stones, the pellets flung  
through headlines. You know the names,  
the territories & how many are coming forth?

How I would like to place my ear on each wrist  
to hear the priceless booming heart  
& have that humble echo amplified.  
The I'd return to who I was  
before all the wars & the voices, I confess,  
the voices deaf deaf & blind to the outcome.

(Recorded as sound-collage, not in print)

## The World's Greatest Uncle | Pongwut Rujirachakorn

I thought our leader must really love music and singing, as he recently released the seventh single for citizen which he had claimed to genially write the lyric by himself as usual though someone always said that he was hiring a professional composer to do the job instead. The new release was called 'Diamond Heart'—telling the bravery stories of soldiers protecting our country from the mischief threat and simultaneously salutes our military government which sacrifices their comforted life to work for everyone. Still, my all-time favorite was the first single—'Give Back Civilized Happiness'—Uncle Udom had released one week after the coup. The most pleasant thing was the government broadcasts every song regularly every week in their own TV program—'Freshen Country up 4.0'—on Friday evening; Now, I hoped Diamond Heart would be aired frequently in this program, so I could memorize and sing along perfectly in every verse and chorus like previous songs.

My mother adored this show; I could say her was the big fan; on the contrary, Uncle Chan despised it. I called him 'uncle' although we didn't relate by blood. Practically, he would be my stepfather if only Mom has married him. However, we lived in the same house and he normally took care of me so I respected him as the father. But there also another uncle that I had respected too, Uncle Udom, our present leader. I watched him on TV every Friday during my leisure time. Besides, it was the only program my mom approved. I couldn't watch cartoons because Mom had thought they were nonsense and could turn me to a bad kid, but I'd always had Uncle Udom.

I had been learning a lot from his program: our culture (It was preciously valuable and better than any place in the world.), our regulations (Everyone should strictly follow the government rule.), our suitable manner (Youngers respected the elders, Uncle Udom and his comrades took care every citizen like parents had a responsibility to their kids.), etc. Uncle Udom told us completely everything about how to behave as a good citizen. No harm would happen if we followed his path as Mom had said to me. My grandmother cherished the show too. She praised Uncle Udom as the greatest leader Thailand ever had so far. I agreed. Basically, because I just turned ten last month, the only leader I had known was him. That was too bad I had never met him personally; the closest I had ever got, taking the picture with a life-sized cardboard cutout of himself on Children's Day.

"Why have you still obsessed with this shit show? It keeps brainwashing people, especially children. I'm sure they plan to turn them to be their future slave," shouted from uncle Chan, making me averted from the program.

"Don't be ridiculous, Chan. And sit down. You make Nid scare," Grandmother warned him sulkily.

"It's all propaganda. Don't you guys ever noticing?" he angrily grumbled and shook his head.

“Shut your mouth! Or else you will be caught to ‘attitude adjusted’ at the military base for sure. The leader is better than all those politicians; he was the general, the brave warrior, so he won’t lie. He’s a decent man.”

“Decent! Listen to yourself. This ‘decent’ leader of yours has framed many people and thrown them in jail, used the military court to dictatorially punish, just because they choose to stand up against him and all his corrupted government. One of my friends has been accused of arranging the satirical play they don’t like. After the armies raided his house, he has disappeared into thin air, no idea he still lives or dies. Is this the act of a decent man?”

“That’s because your friend disrespected him and betrayed our country. Enough. I won’t listen to this crap anymore.” Grandmother banished him, but left the room by herself instead. Uncle Chan turned to me and asked,

“Nid, you won’t believe all of his lies, will you?”

“Is it a lie?” I replied lightly with a question, completely confused. Mom and Grandma had said Uncle Udom always told us the truth, but Uncle Chan said the opposite. Who should I believe then?

Maybe, my indecision had made Uncle Chan frustrated; he looked disappointed and left without saying anything. Sometimes I thought he was jealous that I seemed to favor Uncle Udom more than a family member like him. Oh! Uncle Chan, you shouldn’t compare yourself with a celebrity like our leader.

\*

Next day, I heard Uncle Chan told our neighbor, his friend—whom he had mentioned to us yesterday—was dead: drawn in the river not far from our village. His corpse didn’t look good I heard some details about the wound in his stomach which had been cut open and stuffed with concrete and tied to make it sink. I didn’t see with my own eyes because Mom would never allow me to do such a thing. But, listening to adult’s gossip was enough for me; it sounded really scary.

Did I tell you Uncle Chan worked as a journalist? He was. And I thought not a good one. I always heard the argument by Mom that he should find a new job. This one was not paying all our bills and foods. Grandma said he had been working for the disrespect media and should be ashamed. I questioned them in that evening, could it possible that Uncle Udom murdered that guy? *Absolutely not*, they answered, added the guy was bad to the bone as the villain in the movies. *He deserved to die, it was just karma.*

“Like everybody said on Freshen Country up 4.0, if you’re not supporting the leader, then you better get out of the country. The land will be higher without the weight of traitors holding us back,” Grandmother reviled.

On the same week, Uncle Chan criticized our leader about a rude manner: Uncle Udom had just thrown a banana peel to the group of journalists that asking aggressive questions about his policies at the parliament. *No one with a civilized mind would behave like that*, he claimed. Surely, Grandma disagreed; said Uncle Udom was just genuine, not pretentious as all the politicians. *Nevertheless, they deserved it, asking dumb questions like that*, she added.

I still enjoyed the show, which seemingly, a big hit. They extended the air time, added specifically contents about children and pre-teen. Uncle Chan was apparently grumping as usual. He thought Uncle Udom was elaborately trying to hypnotize children. *This's pop-culture juggernaut in bed with tyranny. What they do is boosting the dictatorship's image*, he murmured irritably. Although, this time I didn't definitely listen to him, in my opinion, it was better; catchier; and funnier; there were a lot of teen stars and celebrities appearing as a guest on the show. Even Prangcher, captain of the famous girl group I had idolized, also came and worked as the temporary host, promoting government education policy so it would definitely good. No way, Uncle Chan could be right.

\*

One day, Grandmother and I went to the local market in the late afternoon. We met Aunt Jit, she was not my real aunt also, but in here, we called every familiar face like this—as the same family: Uncle or aunt, brother or sister, regardless of we weren't biological relatives.

Anyway, Aunt Jit told Grandma she had hoped her son—Brother Joe—to become one of military force, explained that this was the brightest career path: big salary and a chance to be a minister in the future. There was no other career better than this. Although I didn't know thoroughly, I thought the uniform was the coolest.

Unfortunately, Aunt Jit hadn't a chance to tell us whether Brother Joe had gotten the job in military force because a month later, the fresh market had surprisingly gone out of business. The day I and Grandma acknowledged what was happening, she had disappeared left only the empty stall. I thought, as the owner of a vegetable vendor, she was necessarily to pack everything before closing. We were forced to switch to the other fresh market, making us wandered around for a little longer, hearing many sellers mumbled the economic hadn't been in good shape. No buyers meant no sellers. So every day the vendor in every market seemed to be close down one by one.

Uncle Chan insisted the unfortunate incident had happened because the military government, each day our leader and his comrades were richer and richer while civilians were facing the recession and hard life.

"Damn you, democrat lunatic. I preferred the leader Udom more than any politicians so either you get out of my house or shut your withered mouth!" yelled impatiently Grandma.

A few months later, Uncle Chan's journal was apparently closed down also. He was suddenly unemployed and was gradually grumpier as time went by, criticizing Uncle Udom every chance he could find someone listens to him, which rarely, stoked his hatred. Of course, Grandma stood at the opposite side, defended our leader would do whatever he can to protect the nation; his military government was like a country's strong fence.

"Then why they aren't deployed at the border when the terrorists attacked the villagers? Why did they choose to situate themselves in the parliament instead? I have told you they've lied. The submarine, the tank, the corrupted money, that all they care, not citizens like us."

Grandma didn't believe Uncle Chan, as usual. Until she went to the hospital and the doctor informed that she must pay for pills and treatment by herself soon.

"But, why I couldn't use a healthcare benefit anymore?" She asked faintly.

"It's the new regulation from the government. From next month onwards, patients must pay for their treatment. No more medical supports." The doctor informed.

"But..."

"If you ask me. It must have been the new expensive submarines and the tanks the military just brought. The government has cut the national budget for health care supports then adding to the Ministry of Defense instead."

This time Grandma didn't defend Uncle Udom. She was quiet all the way home. Finally, I heard she mumbled to herself.

"He must have had a good reason. Yes, it must be."

\*

Uncle Chan's new job was an online journalist. He said it practically the same only change from print platform to online, adapting for surviving. All the people who had shared the exact ideology invited him to work with them, surely, he accepted. At least, now, he wasn't a grumpy, unemployed man so I guessed everyone was happy, including Mom.

One day, I was back from school and noticed a strange vibe. Uncle Chan was alone in the house and acted differently than any day. It occurred to me he looks serious and sad than usual. Ultimately, he said he wants to discuss something to me—like an adult.

"Listen to me, Nid; you shouldn't believe any words the authorities have said, okay?"

"What do you mean, Uncle Chan?"

"They're not a good man. Unlike your mother and grandmother, I know the truth. Actually, they might know it either but stubborn then chose to deny it." I didn't understand

but I keep my mouth shut, didn't want to upset him. "The military has taken advantage of political chaos to control us, spread the lies, although they are the real villain."

"Then why Mom and Grandma loved Uncle Udom?"

"They had been hypnotized by propaganda: making them hold a grudge against the politicians, the democracy, even the concept of using their right to vote. These things used to be good and normal in this country, but after the coup, they have forced dictatorial to be the new normal, promoted it as the way to bring peace. The leader and his force made sure it would have been like that because they could control everything, every way even neutralize the opponents"

"Uncle Chan, I don't understand."

"You're a child, Nid, still have a chance. Promise me one thing, when you grow up, run as fast as you can away from this place. There are future and hope, just not in here," his voice was trembling made me scare.

No, I didn't afraid of the dystopian he had described. At the precise moment, I didn't believe for a bit. In Uncle Udom's TV program, our leader assured the government had a 20-year national strategic plan ahead—the future is here—not anywhere else. Grandma told me the only thing I must do was being a good kid, obeyed the elder, and we would be fine. Uncle Udom dedicated himself to us; he couldn't be a bad guy like Uncle Chan tried to accuse him.

One week later, Uncle Chan was arrested by the military. They came to our house in the late evening. I confused and scared, crying. Mom comforted me; said Uncle Chan had violated the law; something about violations of the Computer Crimes against the government. He wouldn't come back for at least three years or maybe more for slander. Anyway, while hugging my mom very tight, I momentarily felt relieved.

Grandma was right all along. Uncle Chan was the real villain. I felt sorry for him; it was like the twist ending in a movie: sometimes bad guy conceals themselves near us.

*But our country and our family would be better without the one with a bad attitude like that, Grandma said.*

Thinking of Uncle Chan, I decided to forgive his foolish. Trying to look on the bright side, after this entire incident, I might have a chance to meet Uncle Udom one day because in the end every villain would be slain by the hero.

## Hole Mill Inn | Sam Barbee

Branscomb  
– Devon

By eventide, stars crawl  
the horizon at Branscomb-by-the-Sea.  
Miles into a valley,  
waits Hole Mill Inn, a Tudor cottage:  
ivy supports stone walls,  
and roses prop banisters  
around a slate verandah.  
A stream spins a water wheel.

Our host informs me:

*We have a fox  
out there. He filched the rooster.*  
Our children rollick with white geese  
and downy chicks tumble into a pond.  
The gander drags himself over dew  
to protect them, hip failing him,  
wingspan still wide, but  
the proprietor picks him up  
and pens him:

*good old fellow  
gets stuck in the flowers –  
makes a mess of them, you know.*

Downstream, eel and trout cut water.  
My children brave the bog,  
mud to their ankles,  
and pluck glowworms and newts.  
I kneel on grass beside the gander  
to witness his world from a granite stoop.  
He honks to summon his flock  
and they return to his domain.  
Lilacs and geraniums nod  
as slugs emerge onto stones.  
I call out as children  
venture into the bramble.  
Moon powders the garden.

## **You Can Never Go Back | Glen Sorestad**

Within me still, the child that will not leave  
would have me return to a little farmhouse  
surrounded by thickets of aspen trees.

Who could deny there is idyllic charm,  
inviting pastoral appeal in such a scene,  
one to conjure memories, aching and warm,

a benchmark for other places I've been  
to be measured against? What I do know  
is that oddly tinted light by which I've seen

this place or that, how the wind will flow  
across this hill and down, or how the sky  
renews itself daily, there and there, just so.

The child in me always wonders why  
return is not an option. No matter how I try,  
each answer comes out sounding like a sigh.

## Satanic Verse | Maggie Mackay

My new husband calls  
for public prayers and fasting.  
Covens act in cahoots,  
conspire to kill us both  
by raising of storms,  
casting of a cat's severed corpse  
into the North Sea.  
Hunts rage through the land  
for women working together  
in league with demons.  
Against such assaults of Satan  
my husband wages a crusade,  
first the North Berwick Witches  
burned at the stake,  
others drowned by tides.

*This is one of a set of 'Anna' poems were inspired by a workshop at Riddle's Court in Edinburgh which was run by Glasgow Women's Library. Queen Anne was a significant figure in Scottish and British history. She was a strong character who brought the education and elegant culture of the Danish court to her new land.*

*I live in Dunfermline, the ancient capital of Scotland where she resided at the Palace and where her son, Charles I was born.*

## **Fromelles – 19 July 1916 | Rob McKinnon**

Horrifying noises of the battle  
screams of orders  
voices of other soldiers  
barely penetrated his consciousness.

Head pressed against the sandbags of the parapet  
he was terrified.

Haunting thoughts of his sweetheart  
begging him not to enlist  
pleading with him that it was not his war  
but succumbing to the pressures  
of other boys and townsfolk  
who were seduced by calls  
to fight for King and Country.

Father's stoic handshake  
backslapping encouragement to give them hell  
Mother's tearful hug  
imploring him to keep safe  
recruitment, training,  
the boat trip and Egypt  
before being deployed,  
all seemed like an instant ago.

Entering no man's land  
he met massacring enemy fire.

*As an Australian, the legends of the ANZACs have loomed large in our national ethos but if I had of been in the same situation, whether that was at ANZAC Cove, Fromelles, Villers-Bretonneux or any battle in any war, I know I would have been petrified.*

## The Summer Day | Tracy Gaughan

after Mary Oliver

I read somewhere that you had died, Mary. I do not know if you had planned it this way,  
or whether you feel it was perhaps too soon? Maybe you had intended to stroll idly  
through those lush pulsating fields; feed the grasshopper once more  
or visit the black bear. What else? Maybe the swans – that wedge you saw, moving white  
and firm and shrill across the afternoon sky - were singing for you?

When a pain maybe, sudden as a sniper's bullet,  
brutal as a land-mine discharging in the chest, caused your heart to stop?  
My friend Aiina would have understood this. She could have related.

The first time she read *The Summer Day*, she learned it by heart  
and recited it for her father, right before never seeing him again.  
He had planned to be home by sunset. She kissed him on the cheek.

It was warm, she said, like flat bread from the oven.  
Days later, before leaving Aleppo, she left a note on the front-door for him,  
for her father, telling him all about her plans.

They drove in convoy toward the border and violently as your pain Mary,  
a white pick-up rammed straight into them. Bam! One boy died.

They were told to get out and kneel-down in the grass.

They did not know if the soldiers had a plan.

When one moved his jaws up and down and asked her what her name was,  
she asked him what it was he planned to do with his one wild and precious life.

When he shot her uncle, she knew.

He fell hard she said, like an oak in Massachusetts. It was a sound she would never forget,  
although she had planned to. Because her mother screamed, he shot her as well;  
right between her enormous complicated eyes.

Her mother knew exactly what a prayer was  
but she wasn't paying attention, and nobody blessed her.

Aiina had planned to forget that too.

She asked me once if I thought the dead could be disappointed.  
Because in those first weeks without their mother, she and her sister were so hungry,  
they ate whatever they could find. That included grasshoppers. Big ones.  
They snapped their wings off and chewed them like candy.  
She asked her sister once, what it was she had planned to do with her one wild and precious  
life. Her sister told her to shut-up. *Plans are the pleasures of privileged poets, not Syrian  
orphans rummaging in Turkish rubbish bins. They don't even know we're alive*, she said.

Now you're dead, you will never know that Aiina lived, nor how hard she tried  
to answer your question. She knew this much: that if she ever made a plan again,  
Allah would laugh all over it. Even the best made ones go wrong.  
She knew this too because her sister always talked about having a plan B.  
And while we make plans, John Lennon said, life happens.  
So too - as you and I and he and she know - does death.

As it goes, Aiina's one and only wild and precious life, was the blueprint for a lonely house.  
The rooms were always empty. Guests made plans to come but never arrived  
and the summer day, Mary, was always coming to an end.

*Link to original Mary Oliver poem:*  
<https://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/133.html>

## Before the Concert | Rachel Tanner

It's the day before my 10th birthday & I'm watching *Blue's Clues* while lying on the floor of my mother's living room. My dad walks in smiling and I shoot up like a geyser, hurling my body onto the TV's power button before anyone can see what I'm watching since 9-almost-10 is too old for a children's show. It's Sunday - not my dad's day to pick my brothers and me up for a week at his house. I'm worried about what this means. The last two times my dad showed up here on days that weren't his, it was because somebody had died.

I wonder who's dead this time. I wonder if this death will interfere with my birthday. I consider what tactics I will use to convince my parents to let me stay home and watch TV on my birthday instead of go to someone's funeral. I think funerals are unnecessary. If funerals are for the living, which is what everyone says, then why do we spend the entire funeral talking and crying about whoever died? Funerals aren't for the living. I'm alive and I hate funerals.

I wonder if I'll at least get to see my cousins at the funeral if I can't talk my way out of it. I remember the scanned and printed copy of a children's book my parents gave me to prepare me for my grandparents dying. Half the words and pictures weren't visible because the scanner they used wasn't very good, but I got the basic idea. People die. Mom wanted me to know that death was a big deal but she didn't want me to freak out. I don't understand how those things aren't mutually exclusive. You can either fully grasp how huge death is OR you can be totally chill about death. You can't do both. Death requires freaking out. Dead means gone. Dead means nothing happens to you ever again. Dead means no more ice cream. But on the other hand, dead also means no more boring funerals. Maybe being dead wouldn't be so bad? I wouldn't have to deal with going back and forth between my mom's house and my dad's house if I were dead.

My dad hands me a small ornate box, no wrapping paper. He says *Happy birthday!!!!*, still unsure how to handle these divorced birthdays. He doesn't know how to raise a girl, but he's trying. He took me to see the movie *Spice World* a few years ago in theaters even though he didn't know any Spice Girls songs. There's a scene with bare butts in it and we both giggled at the cheeks displayed across a 50 foot screen.

*Look inside the box!* my dad says impatiently (or excitedly?) so I open the box and pull out the paper strips he'd crumbled inside. *PAPER!* I say. *I'VE ALWAYS LOVED PAPER.* (This is not a lie. I own at least seven sets of stationary.) He waits for me to read the paper. I don't quite understand what it says. Something about NSYNC. *I already have the "No Strings Attached" album, but I wouldn't hate having two copies! That way I could keep one copy at your house and one copy at mom's!* (I learned this trick from my older cousin Beth. Be

gracious when you're given something you already have, because the giver might not know you already have it. Beth is smarter than me by ten billion percent, so I live by her rules. Would she be at the funeral?)

*It's the "No Strings Attached" tour dad says. We're gonna go to it. Three tickets. I've never been to a concert before. I've had NSYNC's two albums on repeat since their respective release dates. Lance is my favorite, but JC is a close second. One day I'll walk down the aisle at my wedding to "That's When I'll Stop Loving You." I listen to the albums over and over. I listen and I listen and I listen and I listen and I listen.*

*So...no funeral?* I say. Dad looks confused. He tells me to find a friend to come with us.

Every other weekend I go with my friend Jenny to a swimming pool in town. Jenny, her mom, and their neighbor Jennifer all pile into the van before coming to pick me up. I know the pool is in town but it feels far away. I don't care much for swimming but those van rides to and from the pool are everything to me. We blast NSYNC louder than my parents ever blast anything and we sing along, even to the dirty songs like "Digital Get Down." *I hate "It Makes Me Ill"* Jenny says one day on the way to the pool. *Justin Timberlake is a singer, not a rapper. He needs to stop trying to rap.* I like the song but I conclude that she's right. From that day forward, I vow to always skip that track when I listen to the CD. There are only four of us in a giant van with giant music blaring and I feel stronger than I've ever felt.

*That's shitty music* my brothers always say. *No. You're shitty* I say back. I walk around our neighborhood with my bulky portable CD player. It's one of those fancy anti-skip ones that costs like a zillion dollars. It still skips. I attach a basket to the front of my bike thinking I can listen to NSYNC while I ride my bike to school. It doesn't work. I eat gravel every time I try, and nobody but Kevin cares. Kevin sits behind me in class and writes my first name with his last name all over his paper. I assume this is a normal thing for friends to do. He finds out from Christine that I love NSYNC and he hums their songs near my ear sometimes. We play tag at recess and he gets annoyed when I tell him I get to miss school the day after the concert. I ask him if he wants to go to the concert. I know dad said only a girl could come with me but I don't care. Kevin says his parents would never let him hang out with a girl. *But my dad will be there* I say. He says it doesn't matter. Says his parents are the strictest in the world.

He tells me this at this top of the standalone slide at the very edge of the playground. We wait together in silence for what has to be fifty years before he shrugs and slides down. I stay for another few minutes, sitting down but looking out at my classmates. I take inventory of which girls told me no already. I wonder which of them actually asked their parents for permission and which of them just didn't want to hang out with me for an

extended period. Kevin climbs back up the ladder behind me and pushes me down the slide, laughing.

I eventually ask my friend who lives across the street from me to go with me and she says yes. I'm not excited to go with her. She's one of my best friends but she's never heard an NSYNC song and has never wanted to before now. But she doesn't want me to go without a friend, so she agrees.

Her name is Amanda and she pretends to be as excited as I am. We have a lot in common, but she hates pop culture. We ride bikes and build fires in the woods behind my house. We make a fort out of broken tree limbs and keep blankets hidden there. We pretend the old man who lives next to the forest behind a long, gated driveway is a killer and our stories are so convincing that pretty soon we both start to believe he's dangerous. We crush up daisies with flat rocks and dot sweet scent behind our ears, claiming this is exactly how people in the early days must've made perfume. We eat different things we find in the forest just to test our stomachs. None of it tastes good. We find out poison ivy doesn't bother my skin. We find out poison ivy severely bothers her skin.

I buy her a magnifying glass from our school's book fair so she can help me be a detective after I read *Harriet the Spy* for the third time. Instead she uses it to light ants on fire. She tells me this is why they're called fire ants. She's a year older, so I'm sure she's right.

On the day of the concert, I choose my concert outfit carefully. A pink shirt with an ironed-on Winnie the Pooh face underneath my green overall shorts with the pink flowers on them. Kevin told me that I looked cute in this outfit once, so I decide it's fancy enough for NSYNC. I stick my favorite tube of lip gloss in my pocket.

My dad picks us up from my mom's house. I sit in the backseat of the car with Amanda. I've never been in an actual taxi, but this is how it is on TV. Dad is our driver. Amanda and I quickly run out of things to talk about and the road lulls her to sleep. I'm too excited to nap, so I take my anti-skip portable CD player out of my bag and listen to the songs we'll soon be hearing live.

Eventually we arrive at the stadium and everything looks brighter yet further away. I'm staring up at the stadium, open-jawed, trying to take everything in. Nothing is registering. Nothing that's happening makes sense. I must be back home and dreaming. This isn't real. It can't be. I've never been to a big city and this is the biggest place I've ever seen. Is this what New York City is like? Is New York City a stadium?

My dad somehow manages to get us inside and into our seats, about midway up on the right side. We're far enough away from the stage that we brought binoculars, giant and heavy hanging from our necks. Almost nobody else is seated yet because we are so early. Dad asks if we're hungry and we say no, but dad convinces us that we'll need energy for the dancing. (When he says *dancing*, he emphasizes his meaning with a dance example in which he moves both closed fists back and forth across his body, shaking them like he's holding salt shakers. Amanda thinks it's funny. I don't think it's funny.)

The three of us trek back down to the tables and booths full of NSYNC merchandise and food in the breezeway under the stadium. Amanda and I settle on pizza. Dad settles on beer. We eat the pizza standing up and dad takes a picture. We walk around for a while and dad convinces me that no, I don't need an NSYNC t-shirt or poster, mostly because I'd have to carry it around for the rest of the concert. Neither of us knows what size shirt I wear anyway.

Eventually we go back to our seats and the concert starts. We're surrounded by people. Everything is so loud. My dad brought earplugs for himself, because he knew he couldn't handle all the screaming girls. I don't remember who opens the show, because I'm too antsy about the main band. I'm nervous, like I'm about to meet them in person. NSYNC finally comes out. Amanda and I put our binoculars on the ground so we can dance. We jump up and down. We scream. I have never been this happy.

## St Swithin's Grave | Stuart Rawlinson

Six-foot when standing—St Swithin of the Venta.  
His coffin now cracked, clumsily in thirds.  
A pious life's promise, plundered through worship,  
Adoration, respect and a relic's protection;  
Disinterred from the churchyard, last requests unheard.

Deep in December dark waters rise;  
The quiet Bishop quickened from his forsaken rest—  
Colourless and cold, the coffin takes float  
Below Romanesque vaults and cold rows of pews:  
His ship's short voyage. (Strange port in a storm)

No rain god required: in rage, Swithin swore  
Forty days of rain for veneration's sin  
From Saxon skies, sharp and unforgiving.  
Now the English examine each and every word,  
Putting ink on velum, promising peace.

In the Cathedral square, Christmas shoppers  
Feel the first spots of rain.

*A poem about the history under our feet, as people rush around with their lives, oblivious to it.*

## Careers Week | Rodd Whelpley

*An ode to the early '70s and the Midwestern factories therein*

Years before anyone noticed the belt was rusted, before us, our big brothers, our teachers, our moms and dads owned up, saw for themselves how, like phantoms in the dawn, jobs could mist into atmosphere, we children (except for trouble makers – *you*, Franky Tapia, and *you*, Clark Bennet) sat in rows, alphabetical, crayoning fourth grade pictures of what we'd seen the day before –

When busses banded us past the TrueTemper, (some still called it the Fork & Hoe) took us, instead, to the Hi C bottler, where we covered our eyes with snorkel-mask goggles, then banded ourselves two-by-two to wander the assembly line, like one hungry caterpillar, watching fifty moms and dads press grapes into cans – and Tommy's cousin, who recognized Tommy, even in those crazy safety glasses, leapt quick from his station, sprinted past steel tanks, past pulp collectors running at head turning speed, so we, the teachers, the workers, the foremen all had eyes on him when he burst into the fishbowl breakroom, ripped from its tacks that calendar with the picture of that woman with those naked, creamy jugs not soon to be forgotten. Which, somehow, signaled a jarring end to the field trip, the plant manager loading six family-sized cans of juice on the first kids in line, handing an opener to another, mouthing over our heads somewhere in the vague direction of Mrs. Nichols a silent "I'm. Sooooo. Sorry."

And this is how Careers Week starts, with touring and coloring, with grape-juice mustaches, and pounding each other right on the vaccination scar, saying, "How about a nice Hawaiian Punch?" Eventually, dividing up, scrawling our pertinent information between smelly mimeographed lines on employment applications for our classroom factories building macramé and paper crafts. And John Fitzgerald Kennedy Putt knowing he's topped us all – listing as his only reference: GOD.

Wednesday, the room – our town – has sparked to life, the

sounds of conversation and commerce, prosperous wafts of British Sterling from the corner where Jeff Pasqualone (like his father) eschewed the time clock, opened, instead, a barber chair to compete with Ruthie Parson's beauty shop. The whole room abuzz, bookmarks and greeting cards step-by-stepping through the process of interchangeable parts until finished, spilling off the line.

Then, like adults, we let it go to ruin in all the human ways.

First, Joey Perrico ("Never the most *athletic* of boys," I would later hear a teacher say) sat for five minutes, his hand in a dish of Palmolive, a practice we had learned from Madge the Manicurist on TV commercials, and Ruthie had the gall – and Joey the nerve – to let her coat his nails a stunning blueberry pearl, which brought catcalls – *Sissy. Girl. Nancy.* – raining down upon them, which Battle-Axe Nichols completely ignored, choosing, instead, at that very moment, to pull Frank and Clark from the factory floor, confront them with their pictures, their crude (but not inaccurate) interpretations of the calendar girl. She sputtered as if whispering, except loud for all to hear: "You two will never be nothing. You better hope the army will find some use for you."

And so, Thursday, back to lessons, in our beat-up, spine-cracked books we read: "Someday a man will land on the moon." And we laughed, because we'd seen it all before. And twice last year, when we'd called in from family garages our scruffy-faced brothers, interrupted their installation of eight tracks and subwoofers into their Chargers, their Corvairs and El Caminos to see on our snowy Zeniths these men in puffy suits, weightless, jump and tumble, pull what they said was orange soil from the Sea of Serenity that they claimed could be volcanic. My brother nudged and pointed, said to me, "Hey creep, some day that will be you. On Mars." But I could only wonder how many pages the application for a job like *that* could be.

Gene Cernan and Jack Schmitt – their images flickering to

earth like a dream – moon buggied, singing past Cochise Crater in a rover they would leave parked somewhere in a lunar valley. Abandoned – and as idle as soon would be the worn-out presses at the Fork & Hoe, the stained-beyond-salvage vats sitting empty in the cob-webbed shell that once was Great Lakes Canning. Surely, another mission will make use of it. And the moon car – only 22 miles on it – fitted with a newer, better battery will turnover at first crank, run as true as the day it rolled off the line, the last workman trotting beside it, wiping smudges from its windows. Yes, the folks at NASA know for sure they will be back. The rover will run again, because the moon is not Akron or Canton or Cleveland, not Pittsburgh or Youngstown, Pontiac, Saginaw, Gary, Flint, Detroit. This reflective orb is independent of the air, six flags claiming it solely for America. Surely, a boy like me will go back to the moon.

There is no oxidation  
on the moon.

## Rival Poet | Cathy Huang

Should our world be sundered by Hell below and Heaven above,  
I'd wager that the two of us would be side-by-side amongst the chaos,  
writing down all that we see on our little parchments,  
dipping our pens in the same inkwell.

You would write about the angels, I know you would.  
Fairies and summer roses are always sparkling in your eyes.  
But I'm afraid my thoughts drift to darker things.

Should I gather together the pretty words of all the poets,  
from every university and every stage,  
I think I'd have just enough to weigh equally  
the work you do in a single night.

Should we ever speak without reservation,  
I think we'd both find that golden timeless rhyme,  
the end to conquest, an ambrosia of words  
in the stirred air between us.  
But we clip our conversations  
and the phrases unspoken rot away and disappear.  
Yet even amputated, I still come away from you  
with all these final acts, soliloquies,  
quartos, and sonnets,  
tumbling out of my imagination.

Should we ever speak of the night on the empty stage,  
after the actors and audience had cleared—  
I don't think we could.  
You may need to invent the words for the sight of us,  
laying on our backs and talking to the world,  
allowing the other to eavesdrop.  
I could not fathom your shoulder so close to mine, our long hair mingling together.  
So you talked of strange philosophies  
And I wondered on war and time  
As we lay in the footprints of tragedy and comedy both.

Should I ever tell you that I hear your voice  
when I read beautiful poetry  
or try to write it

I would hope you say the same.

Should we ever return to that night, I would never sit up and remark on the passing time.  
I would never send you away.

Should I have only a hundred words to carry with me,  
through every play and conversation and lover's lament,  
to last me my whole life through:  
I'd give each and every word  
to you.

## Contributors

**Michael Igoe** Chicago, now Boston USA. Numerous publications in journals online and print. National Library of Poetry Editors Choice Award 1997. Recent: [cabinetofheed.com](http://cabinetofheed.com) [dreamnoir.art](http://dreamnoir.art) *Avalanches In Poetry Anthology* @ Amazon. [poetryinmotion416254859.wordpress.com](http://poetryinmotion416254859.wordpress.com)

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**J.B. Stone/Jared Benjamin** is a neurodivergent slam poet, writer and reviewer from Brooklyn, now residing in Buffalo. He is the author of the micro chap, *A Place Between Expired Dreams And Renewed Nightmares* (Ghost City Press 2018). His work has in or forthcoming in *PANK*, *Five :2: One Magazine*, *Crack the Spine*, *YES Poetry*, *Riggwelter*, *Maudlin House*, and elsewhere. He is the Reviews Editor at *Coffin Bell Journal* and the Founding Editor at *Variety Pack*. You can always check out more of his work at [jaredbenjaminstone.com](http://jaredbenjaminstone.com). He tweets **@JB\_StoneTruth**

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *That*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Thin Air* and *North Dakota Quarterly* with work upcoming in *Qwerty*, *Chronogram* and *failbetter*.

**Angela Costi's** poetry collections are: *Dinted Halos* (Hit&Miss Publications, 2003), *Prayers for the Wicked* (Floodtide Audio and Text, 2005), *Honey and Salt* (Five Islands Press, 2007) and *Lost in Mid-Verse* (Owl Publishing, 2014).

An award from the National Languages and Literacy Board in 1995 enabled her to study Ancient Greek drama in Greece. In 2010, she received funding from the Australia Council to work on an international collaboration involving her poetry and Japan-based Stringraphy Ensemble. Her formative languages, Cypriot and Greek, influence her poetry. Both her parents are from Cyprus, migrating to Australia to escape poverty and war. Her poetic lens is drawn to urban existence, highlighting those moments of connection among routine and struggle.

**J. Sean Rafferty** is a redhead, a godfather and an eejit. He is an MA English Lit student at Ulster University and his work has previously been featured in *Gravitas*, *Sage Cigarettes*, *the Alcalá Review* and *Capsule Stories*. When not losing games of pool he, sometimes, writes stuff.

**Ian C. Smith's** work has appeared in, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Antipodes*, *cordite*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Southerly*, & *Two-Thirds North*. His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy, *Ginninderra* (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island, Tasmania.

A resident of NY, **Stephen Mead** is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. He is also grateful to have managed to keep various day jobs for the Health Insurance. In 2014 he began a

webpage to gather various links to his published poetry in one place,  
<http://stephenmead.weebly.com/links-to/poetry-on-the-line-stephen-mead>

Based in Bangkok Thailand, **Pongwut Rujirachakorn** is a Chinese-Thai fiction writer who published novels, short story collections, and numerous anthologies. He received several literary awards from his home country including the Thailand National Book Award and PEN Thailand Center Award. Some of his works had been translated into other languages. Currently, writing his English novel along with short stories to introduce the sense of Thai literary scene and mirroring the cruelty of junta government to an international readership.

**Sam Barbee's** poems have appeared *Poetry South, The NC Literary Review, Crucible, Asheville Poetry Review, The Southern Poetry Anthology VII: North Carolina, Georgia Journal, Kakalak, and Pembroke Magazine*, among others; plus on-line journals *Vox Poetica, Sky Island Journal, Courtland Review* and *The Blue Hour*.

His second poetry collection, *That Rain We Needed* (2016, Press 53), was a nominee for the Roanoke-Chowan Award as one of North Carolina's best poetry collections of 2016. He was awarded an "Emerging Artist's Grant" from the Winston-Salem Arts Council to publish his first collection *Changes of Venue* (Mount Olive Press); has been a featured poet on the North Carolina Public Radio Station WFDD; received the 59th Poet Laureate Award from the North Carolina Poetry Society for his poem "*The Blood Watch*"; and is a Pushcart nominee.

**Glen Sorestad** is a Canadian poet who has been publishing his poems in many parts of the world over the past half-century. He is the author of over twenty books of poetry and his poems have appeared in over seventy anthologies and textbooks, as well as being translated into eight different languages. Sorestad lives in Saskatoon on the South Saskatchewan River.

**Maggie Mackay** loves family and social history which she winds into poems and short stories in her MA portfolio and in print and online journals. One of her poems is included in the award-winning #MeToo anthology while others have been nominated for The Forward Prize, Best Single Poem and for the Pushcart Prize. Another was commended in the Mothers' Milk Writing Prize. Her pamphlet 'The Heart of the Run' is published by Picaroon Poetry and the booklet 'Sweet Chestnut' published by Karen Little in aid of animal welfare. She is a poetry pamphlet reviewer for [www.sphinxreview.co.uk](http://www.sphinxreview.co.uk)

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**Tracy Gaughan** is a writer and workshop facilitator from Galway, Ireland. She presents the popular arts show 'WestWords' on local community radio and recently completed an MA in International Contemporary Literature and Media at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

**Rachel Tanner** is a queer, disabled writer from Alabama whose work has recently appeared in *Barren Magazine*, *Tiny Molecules*, *Blanket Sea*, and elsewhere. She tweets **@rickit**.

**Stuart Rawlinson** is a Brisbane-based writer, focused on poetry and currently writing his debut novel. Stuart's poems have been published in various publications, such as *Black Bough Poetry*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine* and *Bluepepper*. He writes a literary blog at [stuartrawlinson.com](http://stuartrawlinson.com) and is active in the poetry community on Twitter at **@mrsturawlinson**.

**Rodd Whelpley** manages an electric efficiency program for 32 cities across Illinois and lives near Springfield. His poems have appeared in *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *The Shore*, *2River View*, *Star 82 Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Barren*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, *The Chagrin River Review* and other journals. *Catch as Kitsch Can*, his first chapbook, was published in 2018. Find him at [www.RoddWhelpley.com](http://www.RoddWhelpley.com).

**Cathy Huang** is a young writer based in Southern California. She loves insects and earl gray tea and exclamation marks!

## **Call for Submissions**

The *Wellington Street Review* will open for submissions on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 for our March issue.

