



the  
signal house  
*edition*

#6



*(in)nascence,  
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# welcome

Like love, companionship is often thought of as solely a romantic endeavour, the idea of a singular person with whom to share one's most intimate days. And yet the absences of companions in this remarkable year shows us the many ways in which companionship, like love, imbues our lives on a daily basis in myriad contexts through an array of connections: the shared workspaces of offices, library reading rooms, and coffee shops; the rows of strangers in a theatre held rapt by the cast and crew; the meandering walk through a gallery with a like-minded friend; the act of partaking in a delicious meal at a beloved local establishment.

Those experiences may be temporarily lost, but we are a resilient species. We have found ways to rekindle companionship under these current restrictive conditions: speaking with loved ones across great distances now that work schedules are pliable; seeking out corners of the natural world when the possibility arises; testing a new recipe across multiple households, or making a favourite one because it reminds one of home; finding the ways in which lives lived were delightfully intertwined, and still speak to today; discovering that there is more in common with your neighbour than just a shared view of the sky.

As we turn into the months of a difficult season ahead, we extend the torch of companionship through the pages of our journal to you. Come take our hand.

The Editors

# prophets in their own time: late music of bob dylan and patti smith

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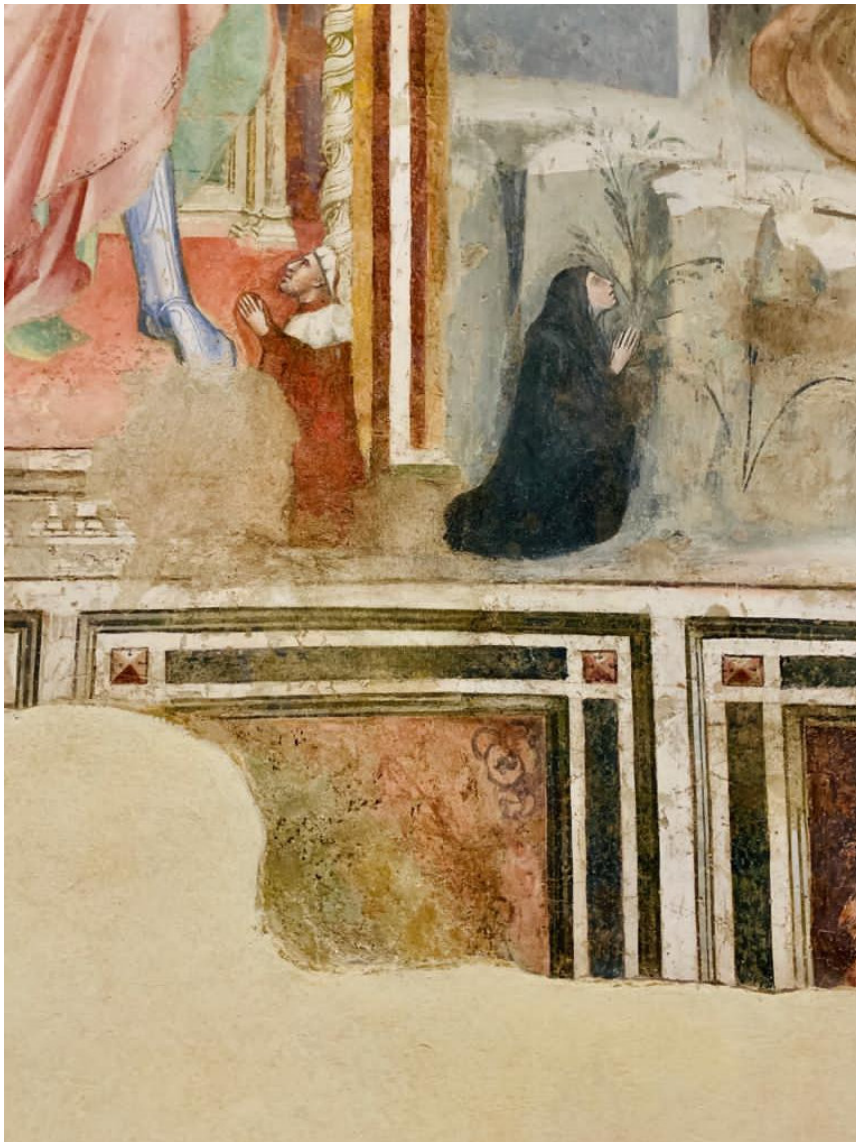
## ESSAY

kit brookman

We begin with death. Or, more accurately, with murder. *Murder Most Foul*, Bob Dylan's first original song in eight years (released on 27 March 2020 ahead of his June album 'Rough and Rowdy Ways') is a sprawling, circuitous track that begins with the assassination of John F. Kennedy and then swings through the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. There's no straightforward narrative, even if the political conclusions of the song are plain: "The soul of a nation's been torn away / and it's beginning to go into a slow decay." Kennedy's murder is both a beginning and a touchstone, with

Dylan returning to it throughout the nearly 17-minute track.

Instrumentally the cards are on the table quickly – rolling piano, strings sliding in as if from the corner of the room, light, shimmering percussion. Then a quick alliterative crack, "It was a dark day in Dallas," and we're off. The piano settles into something that seems as though it could go on this way forever, like the ocean, but it's also stealthily propulsive. Dylan's vocals are leading us but there's a strong wave at his back, and the simplicity and looseness of the arrangement allows the band to strike deep at the listener's heartstrings with the slightest of effects. The double bass is never far away; the sad, steady wake of the piano's wave.



After we leave Kennedy shot in the limousine, we're shown a mosaic of a particular experience of 20th-century America (The Beatles arriving, Woodstock, Altamont, The Who, even, a little perversely, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*). As a narrator, typically, Dylan is sort of there and he isn't. At six minutes in, he (or the song's narrator) finally says 'I,' and the

first person pronoun comes as a shock. It's also not quite clear if it's a first-person statement or if the narrator's ventriloquizing someone else. 'We', 'I', 'they' 'us' 'me' – Dylan flits between them effortlessly. The result is a kind of associative map of America that the listener keeps trying to stitch together even as Dylan keeps expanding it, and these glimpses

take on a cumulative power as the song progresses.

This reaches its apotheosis in the long sequence that ends the song, with Dylan calling on the DJ Wolfman Jack to play a selection of songs and artists it seems fair to assume are among Dylan's own touchstones. Out of context or in lesser hands this list might come off as nostalgic; an ageing man pining for the music that spoke to his younger selves. But framed by the retelling of Kennedy's death the roll-call takes on a weightier quality; it becomes an elegy for the death of an entire culture, for an America, or at least an idea of an America, that seems finally to have limped beyond endurance and fallen in the dust of a Dallas roadside.

In *Murder Most Foul*, Kennedy's murderers are plural. This doesn't necessarily read as a suggestion that Kennedy's death was the result of a conspiracy, it feels more like an acknowledgement that a culture has many killers – it's a big beast to hunt down, and it takes the concerted effort of a group of people. In the song, Kennedy is a symbol. The destroyers are real, and hard at work.

Elegy is something Patti Smith

knows a thing or two about. Her songs for the departed have been a constant thread through her work, from *Elegie* (about Jimi Hendrix) on her first album, 'Horses', to Kurt Cobain (*About a Boy*), to Amy Winehouse (*This is the Girl*), to Robert Mapplethorpe. Her song for the last, *Just Kids*, appears as a bonus track on her most recent album, 2012's 'Banga'.

The pinnacle of the album is the penultimate track, *Constantine's Dream*, a thunderous, terrifying babushka of a song that chronicles apocalyptic visions cracking open into denser and denser versions of themselves. The canvas is enormous – Smith begins at night, in the present, alone, sleepless, in the Basilica di San Francesco in Arezzo, standing in front of a bust of Saint Francis. By the time the song has finished we've swept through 15th century Arezzo, the Empire of Constantine, to the ships of Columbus advancing, doom-laden, through the Atlantic.

Here, Smith is less concerned with the death of culture than she is with the death of the planet. The song sets up a series of dichotomies (art/nature, spirit/material, individual/environment) that the narrator is torn between.

Human vanity, whether expressed as art or as the heady presumptions of imperial and colonial conquest, is here is a force of unbridled destruction. Where we're headed is a vision of the twenty-first century: "All of nature aflame, the apocalyptic night."

Instrumental layers stack up as Smith weaves new cables of narrative into the rope of the song, but her constant foil is Lenny Kaye's guitar, which scythes through like a screaming spirit. Vocally, if it feels as though Dylan is there in the room with you, Smith is singing to you from out of the desert. "Oh, thou navigator!" she snarls contemptuously of Columbus as the song whirls into its climax. It's not a line you can imagine Dylan pulling off, but that's beside the point. Both songs are steeped in violence – murder, warfare, blood, fire. But if both Dylan and Smith's primary concern here is the sweep of history, with vast energies that tumble human lives along like dust, they're also deeply concerned with those human lives, their fragility, their hard-won dignity in the face of overwhelming forces. The acknowledged frailty of Smith's narrator, and of Dylan's Kennedy, serve to remind us of this.

What are they saying to us? These two old, unwearied prophets sounding late alarms to a time that's already caught up to their telling? *Murder Most Foul* and *Constantine's Dream* are warnings, certainly, but also, in their way, they tell us to take hope – not for comfort, but as a matter of urgency. "Murder most foul" comes, of course, from the ghost of Old Hamlet, and what is the ghost of Old Hamlet if not a spur to action? If the hour has grown this late, we must be bold enough to reach for radical new possibilities and bring them into being. The time has come for new visions.

Image: detail from Legends of the True Cross by Pierro della Francesca, fresco in the Basilica di San Francesco, Arezzo.  
Photograph by Melissa Chambers.



# kokum

FICTION  
anita goveas

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Three hours ago, my dad brought a woman to my carefully planned Alternative Mother's Day lunch, and told me she was my real mother.

I was making kokum pork for the first time since my alleged mum died, the woman who brought me up anyway, so it wasn't the best timing. I'd been stood in the kitchen for a while, wondering if I'd marinated the pork for long enough. I'd ask (supposed) mum, but she'd only say, "some things you just know." And she's dead.

It's a Family Recipe, this one, so it's two lines of biro on a piece of paper torn out of someone's ink-stained unlined notebook.

*Prepare pork, chillies, onions, kokum. Leave to simmer until fragrant.*

What kind of onions? How do you prepare the pork? The rest you have to work out for yourself. Or make up for yourself. The ingredients have to be excellent, the proportions have to be right, or you get porky onion soup or tough meat. Which would be fine if I hadn't promised to make it for five Mangaloreans in varying states of motherlessness, all desperate for a taste of home, and my dad hadn't turned up with some boondi ladoos, a bottle of ginger wine, and a bombshell.

It definitely needs the right chillies, I know that much. The big fat red dried ones, crimson as dried blood, papery and silky. Spicy but not overpowering, rich and brooding like Amitabh Bachchan. She'd giggle when she said that, (supposed) Mum, a proper tinkly giggle. Most of the time her face was as calm and smooth as a duckpond. Now I know it had sharks in it.

I was already trying to make do without the big heavy pan, my sister got that. She's the one who did most of the cooking with apparent Mum, I did more of the eating. They'd bend over the cooker, whispering with their identical tilted ears and centre partings. She didn't look anything like me, this new mum. But then I don't look like anyone in the family, my nose is too pointy, my ears are too round. I asked Dad if he was really my dad, and he swore he was. He wanted to do pinky swear. But I'd been touching chillies and didn't really want to spread that pain around. Not yet.

I bought the pork shoulder specially, I usually get tenderloin for me. Don't need to eat the fat, mum (alleged) always said, it kept the meat tender when cooking but then she'd pile it on the side of her plate. I'd sneak a fatty piece, it was so sweet and slippery, melting on my tongue. She always knew, like magic. I worked out later I'd have grease all over my face, a tell-tale sign. I was never as good as her at keeping things to myself.

So, I asked if what he was telling me was that he'd had an affair. New Mum looked like I'd rubbed the chillies in her face, Dad spluttered like he always did when he realised things weren't going the way he'd planned. Maybe he felt safer telling me in the kitchen, it's the lightest, brightest room in the house. Sunshine-yellow walls, mango-lassi coloured tiles, a place where the cooks have always been welcoming, always been warm. I'm supposed to carry on that tradition, another Family Recipe.

The onions can't be sliced too thin, they're going to give you the liquid. The pork shouldn't dry out, that's an obvious sign the proportions are wrong, that the person making it hasn't got this recipe beating in their heart. It's a surprisingly delicate balance, the thinness of the onions, the amount of moisture the dish needs. Onions are something that're always there, but usually overlooked.

Apparently, so-called Mum thought she couldn't have children—cysts somewhere awkward, not unusual in her family. Dad had donated his sperm to a friend of a cousin of a cousin, a widow who wanted comfort who then didn't know what to do with an actual squalling baby girl. Not the legacy she'd expected, after all, for her much-missed husband. Dad's telling me all this while the test batch of pork is stewing, and the nutty, sour smell of kokum is filling the air.

The kokum is what really makes it, that rounded acid sweetness that can't be found everywhere. A taste of faraway home we can use to spice up our boring Hounslow lives. Some people cheat, put a little bit of vinegar in the pork in case the kokum isn't strong enough, doesn't add the sought-after depth of flavour. Apparently, most people don't notice. Coutinho's never do that, we'd know even if no one else guessed. We trust in the strength of our ingredients.

The test batch of pork was too dry. I didn't slice the onions thin enough or the pieces of pork were too big. Or they were the wrong kind of onions, I never thought to ask if that made a difference. I thought there would be time.



Then my sister was born anyway, like I'd relieved the pressure. She did the expected things, Mum smiled at her graduation, danced at her wedding, cooed at her son's christening.

The bombshell and my dad stood in my kitchen where my supposed mum had made this dish for me hundreds of times. For birthdays, exam result commiserations, first job at the travel agency celebrations. This kitchen where I had to cook for five people I knew virtually through a Facebook group. Something the woman I looked up to all my life would have done.

Or I never asked because I'm not sure she would have told me anyway. I always suspected that the open-hearted open-handed mum was a surface gloss, a face for other people. That Mum had always kept a piece of herself away from me, someone who always watched, who never whispered with her over the pot.

The bonus about strangers is they can't tell if you're lying to them, if you're crossing your fingers to say the kokum has gone mouldy, and there will be no dinner. Dad tried to stay after I told them to go, planting his flat feet until actual Mum pulled him by the elbow. She didn't look surprised. I made myself a big steaming bowl of khichdi, no-one taught me, I learnt the recipe off the internet. The garnish made it. The kokum puckered up my mouth, but rolled like silk all the way down.

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Hangover Day on Costinela's Balcony in Bucharest,  
Viktor Hübner, 2014

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*We encourage submissions from individuals from backgrounds and identities underrepresented in art and writing, particularly with regard to race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability. We welcome works translated from other languages into English where both writer and translator hold rights. Contributors retain copyright of their work. Please note, we are currently unable to pay contributors.*

*We read all the work sent to us and aim to respond within two months if we feel there is a place for it in the journal. As we are a small team, we do not respond to each individual submission.*

*submit work*





# lake naivasha, kenya

PERSPECTIVE

andy raine

---

It is dark on the road to Lake Naivasha. Proper dark. No streetlights or ambient urban glow. *Are we there yet?* is the repeated soundtrack from our two children in the back after two hours of potholes and passing cars with their high beams defiantly fixed in place. Children dart across the tired dirt roads, nearly too quickly for my reflexes. A dazzle of zebras off the side of the road – the perfect collective noun.

We arrive. The house is glorious; a rambling nine-bedroom yellow house

on the bank of Lake Naivasha in the Great Rift Valley. Built in the style of an Austrian hunting lodge, we read. It has its own 2000-acre wildlife conservancy, and Ernest Hemmingway, Evelyn Waugh, and Winston Churchill have all reportedly stayed here. I don't see any fences. *That sound was definitely a hyena.*

Friends crowd the dining table, and a roar of welcome matches the fire. Our young children immediately fold into the frenetic gang of kids from multiple nations and disappear into the inky evening. I pause on the thought of no fences. What is the collective noun for happy children who do not want to be anywhere else in the world? Probably not 'frenetic gang'. *A content? A fortunate?*

The next morning, we wake to birdsong. There is a dog-eared birdwatching book here, and after two years in Kenya I can now decipher its codes and abbreviations. Hornbills, hawks, and starlings. Bee-eaters and rollers. I am now a bird person. A birder. I wasn't one before moving to Kenya.

A lazy breakfast in the rolling garden. We've all gathered here for our friend's 40th birthday. A shimmering lake. Blue sky. We are in an amphitheater of volcanic hills. Acacia trees, fish eagles, submerged hippos offering their flickering ears, impalas, two giraffes, all within eyesight in our fenceless patch of the world. Our children are elated. I notice my four-year-old son has become exceedingly polite. *Did you know there were hyenas last night Dad and would you like me to chase them away for you?*

My favourite podcast at the moment is Outrage and Optimism. It's a weekly round-up of what has made the hosts feel either outraged or optimistic – or both – that week in the climate change story. Every episode helps me edge a bit closer to mentally dealing with this crisis. The hosts recently interviewed the American actor Ted Danson, and I learnt that he and his friends started the Ocean Conservancy back in the 80s – a global NGO that I respect. I work in this space and had no idea.

Ted sagely offered his life work's conclusion about the need for all humans to acknowledge our spiritual connection to each other and to the planet, as well as to be led by science. Only then (Ted suggests) can we really make inroads into addressing our increasingly dire environmental

challenges. Science and spirituality. I lap it up.

And in the present? Lunch in the garden. Another impossible blue sky. I share Ted's idea with my wife, who (like me) works for the UN. She designs communication campaigns on climate change, to shift attitudes and change behaviours while trying to stay positive. She says something about how that introspective, philosophical stuff plays well for people like me but is counter-productive when we push it to the middle Americas of the world. To people that swing elections, the people that matter right now in the final runway to an historic Presidential election. The difference between outrage and optimism. *Please more about new clean jobs and economic recovery. Please less philosophy*, she says. She is probably right. Still, Ted Danson. My new spiritual hero.

That afternoon, while my family go on a drive, I take advantage of an uninterrupted solo kip in a king-size bed. They come back to share an excited tale of a baby giraffe not more than two hours old, its umbilical cord still attached, placenta hanging, gangly legs. Protective mother. My six-year old daughter and her new six-year old friend make increasingly garrulous giraffe bottom jokes. They are trying to both impress and out-do each other. An adult says something about the danger zone for the giraffe and risk of hyenas in the night. Both children stop. Soon after, it's time for the birthday cake.

Saturday evening is fancy pants – that's the theme. There are candy cane stripey pants, silvery plas, luminous green pants, floral wax pants from Benin, my purple pants, and regular shorts. My wife's sunburn from the afternoon meant a long dress. Meaningful speeches. There is another feast. There are cocktails mixed with the care of a chef. There are stories and questions, and new friendships. We dance on a springy wooden floor around a hearth (the fireplace is so big it needs to be called a hearth). Parents of the youngest are summoned periodically by baby monitors and return. *Is that a hyena again?* Suddenly, it is 2AM. I'm ready for bed.

Young children never sleep in. Sunday morning is a slow breakfast, rich Kenyan coffee, and lazing by a stone pool encased by jacaranda trees and bougainvillea. Purple and red. The sky remains impossibly blue. The drive back to our house and two dogs in Nairobi is relentless. *Are we*

*there yet?* returns, but with less commitment. Tomorrow I have a call with my team at the UN to plan a global judicial symposium. It's on the role of judges in addressing climate change. I send them the link to the podcast. I ask them to listen to it.

Image: [altered]: [elcarito](#)





# hush the sea

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POETRY  
yaiza canopoli

this is the flood:  
the heart of the sea, the wave of the hand —  
the placid gasp in the mouth of a shark.  
take a leap into the current,  
the violence like a promised land.

this is the heart:  
the tide that engulfs, the salt that becomes —  
the dry lips that crack in the rabid breeze.  
behold the bruised eye of the storm,  
the gale around, inside, within.



this is the gasp:  
the wail of the crash, the hush of the ebb —  
the legs tearing towards the ocean floor.  
open the mouth and breathe new air,  
the chest bursting with ancient gold.

this is the mouth:  
the tongue that savours, the tendril that chokes —  
the oxygen that holds me like a claw.  
let the briny eyelids rise high,  
the storm brewing: within, within.

this is the shark:  
the blood in the maw, the hunger inside —  
the me that holds the oxygen is now.  
bare starving teeth to hush the sea,  
and wield the tempest like a scythe.



kevin kling

interviewed by  
clare muireann  
murphy

**Clare Muireann Murphy:** *When The Signal House asked me to do an interview, they told me I could interview anyone I wanted. I had to pick Kevin Kling. Kevin and I met onstage at a storytelling festival in Tennessee. I was walking away from the stage as Kevin was setting up the next act, and his skills as compere, his way of making the audience pivot from the sacred to the profane on a hairpin, made me stop in my tracks. We've been friends ever since, but every time we talk I know there's more behind the story. He has jumped trains, ran away with the circus, been protected by gypsies, died and returned, fallen in love with Ireland, speaks a little dog and some horse and a few phrases in cat, and has been in performance, writing, on stage or near stage with*

*a pen most of his life. So here goes, I get to ask everything I want to know...*

**CMM:** Kevin, I've seen you perform to 30 people and to 5,000 people. What's your earliest memory of performance, yours or someone else's?

**KK:** Even as a kid I noticed that art bursted from people, finding the easiest way out, a painter's hand was always moving, a singer's breath took on the rhythms of the world and a dancer's whole body got to move. Our grammar school held two assemblies every year, one was a visit from NASA, where an aerospace engineer described the wonders of space travel, highlighting the event by dipping a grape into liquid nitrogen and then smashing it with a hammer. This led many to the space program. The other event was a dance piece called the Snow Princess. I had seen dance on TV but never thought it was real, it looked too perfect. Then the snow princess danced up and down the aisle and as she spun past I saw dark leg hairs poking out of her white tights. This wasn't perfect, this was a real person, and a modern woman. The NASA guy came back every year and we never saw the snow princess again, but she had already awakened in me a yearning that would not quiet.

My earliest performance I remember was in a production of *La Petite Chapeau Rouge*, (*Little Red Riding Hood*), in a first grade French class. I was originally cast as forest vegetation but an hour before the performance we found out that the Wolf had moved to California. I assured the teacher I knew the lines, the show was a hit, and my career was launched. That Wolf taught me that at all costs never let your under-study get the stage. That same teacher wrote in my grade card, "Kevin has no understanding of the material but I'm not worried about him."



**CMM:** As storytellers I feel a great responsibility to my audience to take them safely through the journey of the myth or the story. You're more than a storyteller, you're also a writer, an actor, a poet. What do you feel towards your audience?

**KK:** I feel a great responsibility. We are all trying to learn something beyond ourselves. Storytelling is what we have left of ritual.

A storyteller, like a good teacher, doctor, pastor, needs to be on the journey with you. The audience and the teller need to get something out of this, the losses and triumphs, experience the peril. Borges said, "The relationship between a storyteller and a listener is like that of [the] taste of an apple. Is the flavor in the mouth or the apple?"

Nabokov said a good story should. "Educate, entertain, and enchant".

Walter Benjamin said there are two types of storytellers "the farmers and the seafarers". The farmers tell us how we belong, the seafarers tell us what exists outside our comfort zone. We need them both, the nest and the vastness, the safety and the risk. Resiliency comes from belonging but our power comes from how we navigate beyond our realm of comfort.

In my own community, as the farmer, I serve as a reminder of what's funny, sacred, edible. Resiliency is defined as maintaining one's shape, our shape is fortified when we are part of a family, faith, community. When we share laughter, loss, triumphs and hardships it makes us stronger. If we gain resiliency in belonging then we find strength in challenge, stepping beyond our comfort zones. So, in an evening of stories I'll also venture into the unknown, ...ask us to re-examine our values, heroes, beliefs, are these still valid or is it time for change?

As a seafarer I am the interloper, entering a community that is not my own. My first task in that case is to discover how we already know each other. What clay do we share? What questions? And when we get to "And Because of you I'm not alone" then we can get to work, and that's when the evening shifts. From connection to confrontation to compassion.

The Ancient Greek word for stranger was the same as guest.



**CMM:** You and I have often talked about mystery. We talk of John O'Donohue and his great living relationship to mystery all around us. For me it keeps my work alive and my relationship to stage alive. Can you tell us a bit about your relationship to mystery.

**KK:** Yeah, this topic has led us into a decade of discussion that I would hate to punctuate. Some people need to follow a light and some of us find solace in mystery. Thomas Merton said he could never follow a god he could understand. That's the point. You can put a hat on it but you can't bottle it. (I might need the rest of the time I know you to answer this properly, and even then I'm hoping for reincarnation for what I know will come to me later).

**CMM:** As an artist I feel like I am in a living friendship with all the artists who have gone before me. Their words and images accompany my doubt, support my ambition, and remind me when I am lost. Who are the ones you keep company with across time and space?

**KK:** Seriously, you know giving me this question is like what a laser pointer does to a cat.

Voltaire, Shakespeare, de Cervantes, Hildegard of Bingen, Isaac Babel, Gaston Bachelard, Jeanette Winterson, Calvino, Twain, Gogol, Al-

len Poe, James Baldwin, Steinbeck, Darwin, Flannery O'Connor, Louise Erdrich, Rumi, Hafiz, Mann (Emily and Thomas), William Goyen, Dante, Chaucer, Vonnegut, Ionesco, August Wilson, Dorothy Parker, Black Elk, Lao Tsu, Pushkin, Kafka, Spalding Gray, Barbara Tuchman, Hugo, John Berger, Walter Benjamin, Plato, Virgil, Emerson, Chekhov, Swift, Molière, Beckett, Joyce, Yeats, Flann O'Brien...

I could keep going...playwrights, poets, short stories, spoken word, history, biographies, ...It feels like a man I heard about from Donegal who was known to have the most outlandish vocabulary, "Well, don't know about that", he said, "But I do hope to go through this life without repeating a word twice".

If, as scientists say, the universe was all one ball and then exploded into shards then I figure the more shards we collect the more we understand. Curiosity may have killed the cat but so far it's only dinged me up a little bit.

**CMM:** The Irish and the Minnesotans have a lot in common. A deep relationship to weather is one. Why is weather important to you and where else have you come across that relationship to weather?

**KK:** Living in Minnesota the weather is a constant topic. There are many ways the weather can lead to your demise. This leads to sense of humor. In the winter we live by the adage that if you're in pain you're OK but if you're feeling fine and all is right with the world seek help immediately that's hypothermia talking and you don't have much time.

One time I was in the outback of Australia and I was telling stories about ice fishing, an activity we do here in Minnesota where you walk out on a frozen lake, drill a hole in the ice, drop down a line and try to catch a fish. I was telling them in hopes it would blow their minds, but they were laughing like a bunch of Minnesotans. Everyone completely got the absurdity and humor. I asked how could they possibly relate, and was told, "you have to understand, mate, our weather can kill us too,

only from the other end of the thermometer”. I think weather and humor are directly related. Humor is not universal, it’s very specific to family, faith, community. If you laugh with someone you are related. Weather.



**CMM:** I’ve heard you talk about hopping trains, catching boats, running away with the circus. What’s the fastest thing you’ve ever caught?

**KK:** A glance, and in it, recognition. I’m catching something I have already noticed but this time I know it. Caught. But it starts at the speed of light. Image. Particle and wave, dreamer and dream, perception and perspective. My wife says humans are good at two things: humor and hitting a fastball. I think both of these are applicable here as well.

**CMM:** Where’s/When’s the loneliest you’ve ever been?

**KK:** Not sure if I’ve ever been lonely, I’ve been alone but lonely as in feeling in exile, I’m not sure I’ve actually had. Charles Bukowski said “When you have no one to get you up in the morning, or to wait for you at night, or to tell you what to do, is that freedom or loneliness?” So I guess I was free a few times, once in London on Christmas, it was terrible, not London, being free.

**CMM:** Do you remember what it was like when you died?

**KK:** I remember near death very vividly. I’ve known people that have had a similar experience and they saw a light. I didn’t see a light but I was headed for an amazing sense of peace and was given the choice to follow the peace or to return to this plane of existence, where it was clear there would be consequences. And there have been.

I met a woman once who said she crossed over and made it to the pearly gates. She was about to step through when she saw a “no smoking” sign. She said she couldn’t go through with it. And returned to earth. She still thanks smoking for saving her life.

**CMM:** When has a landscape moved you outside your expectations?

**KK:** There are too many to count. It's like the land turns into an emotion. The outback of Australia for certain. The boundary waters canoe area of northern Minnesota holds a special place in my heart, and Lake Superior, Gitchee Gumi.

There's a piece on the Isle of Skye that took me out of this plane of existence. Make that two places on Skye. The first is on the coast and I've been there six times and each time something shoots through me, vertically, an energy and I'm connected with my ancestors. I keep going back because I don't believe it happened and then it does again. The second place on Skye was where a friend of mine and I were looking at a lake. It was so pristine and beautiful and then the wind came up and the lake blew away. It was actually a cloud below us and a valley suddenly appeared. That was up in the far north of Skye.

**CMM:** What word do you love carrying around?

**KK:** One of my favorite books is by Italo Calvino. *Six Memos for the Coming Millennium*. In 1985 he was writing six lectures on the upcoming new millennium and the six words that he saw as leaders into the next era. I think of them a lot because when 9/11 happened so many of my words about the future changed on that day. My six words still keep changing... "resiliency", "landscape", have lasted. It's a fun exercise to update my list. It always opens what I hold dear and what has fallen off. Some words I keep for what they conjure, "family" and "love", some for power, "yes" "no", some are time sensitive like "truth", "compassion" and "beauty". I keep peoples' names for how they make me feel. I'll have to think more than this, I really love words, and their meanings, and where they came from, and the why and way of them. They are like a clay pot, it's not about the pot, it's more about what it holds.

**CMM:** Family comes up again and again in your work as a source of inspiration and comedy. You celebrate them constantly. Which family member played the greatest trick?



**KK:** My dad was a trickster but he often was on the receiving end of his own tricks. Like the coyote and roadrunner his tricks weren't on purpose he just led with too much enthusiasm.

We were the last family I knew to have a color TV. Every year we watched Wizard of Oz when Dorothy goes from Kansas to the land of Oz everyone else's TV went from black-and-white to color, ours went from black-and-white to black and white. We begged and begged and finally one day my dad said 'OK, I'll get us a color TV", so he left the house and but came back with a sailboat. He said he saw it on the way and couldn't pass it up. We were so excited we never said a word.

Another time he and my mom went to get us a family car, all three kids were teenagers and it was crowded in the back of the Ford. So, he went out to get a station wagon and came back with a brand new 1967 Mustang. I remember we all knew we were going to learn to drive in that mustang. We went to church, took family vacations, with all three teenage kids jammed in that tiny backseat, but I don't remember anyone ever saying a disparaging word.

My brother is the true trickster. And he's good at it, like scary good. The first one I remember was when he was a kid. We had a parakeet and one morning my brother found the parakeet on its cage floor, it had died overnight. He knew our whole family would be so upset. So, he wrote a tiny suicide note and put it next to the bird, like it was the parakeet's idea.



He is a great whistler, we would be driving with our family, my brother and I in the back seat, and he could replicate a police car siren, he would even change keys so it sounded like the patrol car was approaching. My dad's head would be on a swivel looking from a mirror to mirror and turning back and forth but never finding the oncoming cop.

One time we were at a bar in a town down south where one of my cousins lived and there was a group of guys next to us. One guy was bragging that his car was the fastest car in town. My brother said, "No, it isn't." Everyone turned, and my brother said in fact he could run faster than that guy's car. So, they made a bet and everyone emptied out of the bar and onto the street. They drew a line and the guy pulled his car up and my brother said, "now I get to choose how far we go." The guy said "It's not going to matter, you don't have a chance." So, my brother said "10 feet." The guy said "what?" And my brother said "10 feet." Now, you actually can outrun a car in 10 feet easily, the car won't even get going in that amount of space. But the guy was trapped and even his buddies had to nod and say "yeah you did say that." So, they dropped the flag and my brother ran 10 feet and kept going then yelled to me to "start running", he knew our lives were in danger and we did, we ran down the street of that town laughing so hard I could barely run.

I think my favorite though, is my neighbor Ralph. It was Christmas time and one of my neighbors was going on vacation over the New Year's holiday. He asked Ralph if he would watch his house, and Ralph said he would. When the guy was gone Ralph put a sign in his yard that said, "leave old Christmas trees here". It became a place that people could dump off their old Christmas trees. When the guy came back from vacation a week later there was over 100 Christmas trees in his yard.

**CMM:** Where would you go if you weren't here?

**KK:** Back to Skye. I can't believe that place is for real. At your house! With you and Matthew and a wardrobe! Anywhere. I love to travel to meet new people which often are the same people. My brother is the

opposite, we can't get him to leave the state, or even his house. He always says, "I would go somewhere but it would be here." I get that too. I feel so lucky to live where I do, you know that, and you also get connection to a land.

**CMM:** Which body part needs to be celebrated more?

**KK:** That's a tough question, some of them like to be recognized and others just want to be left alone. I usually celebrate one after it's done a particularly good job. I've taken to celebrating my arms, one for what it's given me, and the other for what it's giving me. I try to be kind to them all, and even if I don't know all their names I do remember all their birthdays.

**CMM:** What animal has taught you the most?

**KK:** I'm pretty sure it's dogs. Dogs are like training wheels for nature, a connection to our wild selves. They are great guides into parts of ourselves we don't remember. We had a dachshund who had the most can-do attitude in the most can't-do body I've ever seen. When you told him "no" he heard "try another way".

Horses have taught me how to read without words. When I was in the hospital after a motorcycle accident I saw crows, both in my dreams and out the window, I was worried because I know crows are harbingers of death, messengers to the underworld. A friend of mine is a shaman and he said that I had it all wrong, "Crows take away the things we don't want. So, the next time you see them load them up with your fear and they will fly away with it." So ever since then I've taken my fear to the crows. They seem happy to bring it wherever they go with it.



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Image credits, from top to bottom: Laughing Clown, c.1900 (Buddha Museum), Stained Ivory Netsuke of a Wolf with Severed Head, c. 1870, signed Tomomitsu (Olympia Auctions), Netsuke: Boat with Dutch, c. 1700s (VAN HAM Kunstauktionen), Carved Ivory Netsuke of Fish, date unknown (Eastbourne Auctions), Netsuke Representing a Dog, Edo period (Cristina Ortega and Michel Dermigny), An Ivory Netsuke of a Bird, Meiji Period, signed Ranichi (Lot Art)

# contributors

## ESSAY | **KIT BROOKMAN**

*is a writer and theatre director based in London. Recent work includes The Stones, Whalesong, and Close. His plays have been performed across Australia, the US, and the UK and his writing has appeared in journals including HEAT, Southerly, Harvest, and Westerly. His audio drama "The Empty Cage" can be found in Issue #3.*

## FICTION | **ANITA GOVEAS**

*is British-Asian, London-based, and fuelled by strong coffee and paneer jalfrezi. Anita was first published in the 2016 London Short Story Prize anthology, and most recently in The Ilanot Review and Little Fiction. She's on the editorial team at Flashback Fiction, and an editor at Mythic Picnic's Twitter zine. Anita's debut flash collection, Families and Other Natural Disasters, is available from Reflex Press.*

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## PERSPECTIVE | **ANDY RAINE**

*is a curious environmentalist who loves nature, people, big dogs, and cold beers. And lots of other things. He is an international environmental lawyer and has been working for the United Nations for most of his career, with postings in New York, Bangkok, and now Nairobi. Before that he worked for law firms in London and Melbourne, with adventures and volunteer stints in between in Cambodia and Kenya. His purpose and passion is to do whatever he can to support humanity to transition to a clean, just, and sustainable future. He and his wonderful wife Josie have two young children - Stella and Harry - and two big dogs - Tusker and Scout.*

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## POETRY | **YAIZA CANOPOLI**

*is a writer based in Singapore. She likes to talk about queerness, the ocean and the evils of capitalism. When she's not busy reading, she can often be found playing video games or obsessing over tropical fruit juice. She also likes to explore nature and is often inspired by the green spaces in and around Singapore*

## INTERVIEW | **CLARE MUIREANN MURPHY** [interviewer]

*has told stories worldwide since 2006. She has performed in more than 20 countries to audiences of 5 to 5,000 people, and her audiences include President Mary Robinson and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory team at NASA. Her work ranges from science-stories like UniVerse to socio-political pieces like The King of Lies to her beloved Irish mythology. She also teaches, trains and speaks publicly on the Power of Storytelling.*

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## INTERVIEW | **KEVIN KLING** [interviewee]

*is a storyteller from Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has performed throughout the world including Off-Broadway, The National Festival in Tennessee, the Cape Clear Festival, and Beyond the Borders. He has written five books and been published in The Blue Nib Magazine. He is most proud of his work with Interact Theater, a company of performers with remarkable abilities..*

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**COVER ART | SARA SCHNECKLOTH** is our featured artist in Issue 6. Sara's studio practice is motivated by the question of how science, imagination, and the body, inform one another through the activity of drawing. Her work has featured in over eighty exhibitions throughout the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Norway, and France, and her essays on the embodied nature of mark-making and the drawn gesture are widely published. With degrees from Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin, she is an Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina, co-curates the Svalbard Seed Cultures Archive, and directs Drawing Canyon, Sage, and Sky, a workshop series based in rural New Mexico [website](#)



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