

This week, the Nass buys  
out the whole damn store,  
baby! And we're all the  
better for it.

# The Nassau Weekly

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Dear reader,

Some say that we're facing an "attention crisis," with social media algorithms destroying Gen Z's focus. Well screw that. I'm already bored. The educated older generation, unable to accept their own inability to regulate big tech, have perverted the valid fear of attention-fracking into a conversation that too readily falls into cultural paranoia. We're reinventing our forms of literacy, restructuring our relationships with screens and words. Is that really such a big problem?

This week, Nass writers show that they can go fast and go slow. They jab us with striking poetry and witty vignettes on free will, reflect on the subliminal urges behind souvenirs, and report on changes in education funding. Yes, the ubiquity of phones and advertisements is turning our brains into mush. But when the conversation around "this generation's attention-span" spills into alarmist ideas about our "work ethic" and "critical thinking abilities," it might be valuable to ask: who is so afraid about Gen Z's focus? And if not reels, what do they want us to concentrate on and why?

But hey, I'm boooooored. Computer, give me ads, everywhere, and then give me paywalled fail compilations. Make the world so fast and so fun. Please, don't ever let me slow down.

Xoxo,  
**Frankie Solinsky Duryea, co-EIC**

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## This Week:

By Amy Başkurt

If your post-fall break week needs a little more vibrancy, Princeton's arts scene is here to intervene. Between the scent of marigolds, the hum of the Mander organ, and a few existential poems, this week's events offer a bit of everything to overcome this October malaise.

Flowers, candles, and the faint scent of copal: join the **Effron Center's annual Día de los Muertos celebration** on the first Monday after fall break. Expect Aztec dance, poetry by Vania Gutiérrez García,

and a communal altar at the center of Chancellor Green Courtyard. Bring an offering—or just bring yourself (Oct. 21, 4:30 p.m.).

Poet **Ellen Bass** graces Labyrinth Books with a reading alongside Princeton's own creative writing seniors. Come for the verse, stay for the existential clarity (and maybe a cookie) (Oct. 21, 6 p.m.).

Finish off Wednesday with a little organ-induced transcendence at the University Chapel. **Nicole**

**Keller** takes to the Mander organ for a program that promises thunder, grace, and a few goosebumps along the way (Oct. 23, 7:30 p.m.).

A quick detour into the world of creativity with **Crafternoon: Leaf Art** at the Commons Library Curiosity Studio in Briger Hall. Come make your own art inspired by fall leaf patterns. Who knows? You may just leaf with a new hobby (Oct. 24, 12:15-1:15 p.m.).

If you needed something

to look forward to after break, this is it! Midterms are temporary; good art and memories are forever.

Email Amy Başkurt at [ab7955@princeton.edu](mailto:ab7955@princeton.edu) with your event!

For advertisements, contact Ellie Diamond at [ed7627@princeton.edu](mailto:ed7627@princeton.edu)

## Verbatims:

**Overheard on Prospect**  
*Girl en route to Charter:*  
"I'm looking for any semi-tall, semi-skinny white guy... it doesn't matter actually."

**Overheard by Nassau Hall**  
*Orange Key tour guide:*  
"Yeah, the Martinez brothers are from here."

**Overheard in Rocky dining hall**  
*A girl speaking about large polarized sunglasses:*  
"When I see guys wearing those sunglasses, I think they look like flies. Like flies with really big heads."

**Overheard in Tiger Tea Room**  
*Student:* "Coffee is not that scary."  
*Mormon-coded student:*  
"Yes it is, it's a gateway to addiction."

**Overheard in 2D**  
*Philosophy student:* "Associate with your manhood, it gives you privilege... gay guys tend to have that problem really bad."

**Overheard in Frist**  
*Exhausted senior:* "I thought the fire alarm was my alarm, so I just kept trying to sleep through the noise."

**Overheard in Joline basement**  
*First-year still getting the sense of things:* "I think my laundry's been in the dryer since Monday, but I'm too scared to check."

**Overheard at Terrace**  
*Girl in Ivy:* "Going to Terrace for dinner is just like doing an ethnography."

**Overheard on Prospect**  
*Student totally being hazed:* "This feels like hazing."  
*Frat bro:* "It's not hazing, it's just...tradition."  
*Hazee:* "That's not better."

**Overheard on Firestone C-Floor**  
*Senior who took a gap semester and whose thesis is due in November:* "That's not fair, your book has pictures."

**Overheard outside of Princeton Nails**  
*Exhausted BSE candidate:*  
"It took everything in me not to hold the manicurist's hand while she was painting my nails."

### Submit to Verbatims

Email [thenassauweekly@gmail.com](mailto:thenassauweekly@gmail.com)

## About us:

The *Nassau Weekly* is Princeton University's weekly news magazine and features news, op-eds, reviews, fiction, poetry and art submitted by students. There is no formal membership of the *Nassau Weekly* and all are encouraged to attend meetings and submit writing and art. To submit, email your work to [thenassauweekly@gmail.com](mailto:thenassauweekly@gmail.com) by 10 p.m. on Thursday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!

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**Join us:** We meet on Mondays and Thursdays at 5 p.m. in Bloomberg 044!

# On Souvenirs



What does it mean to buy a souvenir, for both gifter and giftee?

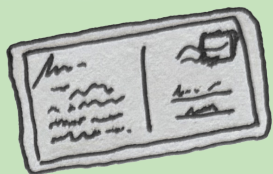
By CLAIRE BEELI

"I'd save every day like a treasure and then Again, I would spend them with you"  
- Jim Croce, "Time in a Bottle"

In Berlin this past summer, I tried not to buy too many souvenirs. I passed over a pink T-shirt rhinestone "BERLIN PRINZESSIN," a pendant necklace that was supposedly a shard of the Berlin Wall, and thousands of pieces of DDR memorabilia at sidewalk-side stands in the more touristy areas. I allowed myself a postcard of the TV Tower with a huge cat swatting at the ball on top, a print from the Berlin-set film *Wings of Desire*, and an "I ♥ BERLIN" shot glass. This collection, I determined, was tasteful.

When it came to purchasing souvenirs for others, however, I wasn't so selective. One of my sisters collects magnets for her college dorm fridge, so I had to get her one, a golden Victory like the statue in the main thoroughfare of Mauerpark. And then I found a silver-and-abalone bracelet in a Kreuzberg *Flohmärkt*—it would be rude not to buy something that so obviously evoked her. My other sister surely needed a handmade Japanese bowl with little polar bears painted around the rim, and my best friend had to have a pair of gold starfish earrings. A hot pink lighter in a souvenir shop had my college friend's name inscribed on it. For my dad, there was a silver keychain with a tiny mountain goat, and for my mom, a box of German chocolates.

I didn't buy these things all at once.



The purchases happened when I came across something that reminded me of the person and, in a bout of homesickness—*Heimweh*, in German—I needed to buy the souvenir to prove I still thought of them while away. The souvenirs gratified me as much as they did the receivers. I could take the train and the bus and walk down the tree-lined suburban street to my dorm, wrap up the bracelet I bought for my sister, and remember that her world, not this one, was my real life. I would go back.

Without the souvenirs I couldn't tolerate the weightlessness of living alone and abroad, as though I might spin out with the push of a breeze off the Spree River, momentum alone, blasting through opera houses and cafes and techno clubs into total illogic, absolute meaninglessness. The solidness of these objects anchored me to the bearable, sensible reality of the people I loved.

*Heimweh* has an opposite, though: *Fernweh*, which translates roughly to "farsickness," or the desire to travel. In Berlin, I felt pulled in opposite directions by *Heimweh* and *Fernweh*. Buying souvenirs gave me a sense of location and heft; I could dissociate the trip from reality by externalizing it materially. It resolved my homesickness without compromising my ability to experience new things. Vertigo at the top of the TV Tower became a miniature trinket version, something I could hold and coolly inspect. When that externalization of experience was with the intent of giving it over to someone I loved—if I bought the mini TV Tower for my grandmother—I became even more insulated from the reality of the experience because I could focus on my homecoming. It was material proof that soon I would be home, and I would hand the ceramic miniature to

my grandmother, and she would perch it on her mantle, and Berlin would be as a dream. They made me, in a way, at once both home and abroad.

This is not unique. There's the Japanese tradition of *omiyage*, usually regional food products or handicrafts, as an apology for their absence. Filipino *pasalubong*, similarly, is usually food shared with relatives, and it's meant to express renewed gratitude for the traveler's loved ones upon their return home. These purchases ground the adrift traveler.

Souvenirs are also memory deposits. One buys a souvenir while traveling to pin down the moment of purchase, as though the look or feel or taste of that object, in some future moment, might transport the buyer back to that trip. They are an attempt to defy the transience of travel, to preserve the feeling of a moment in an object. In that way, they satisfy *Fernweh*.

To me, souvenirs represented the moment of the trip; a fulcrum to scales that could tip either way. They could collapse the time between the moment and a loved one, or between the moment and future moments of reminiscence in the other. I bought souvenirs for my family in part because I couldn't stand the perfect balance of scales—*Heimweh* and *Fernweh*, home and abroad, past and future—that threatened to strand me in the raw present.

In Berlin, while I bought that abalone bracelet, I felt real joy. The sunshine was glorious, and I was on a great date at a flea market, and the present seemed to unfold into a limitless future with the



ease of summer turning into fall. It was exactly like every moment I've ever been really, truly happy.

Another day, I rode the S-Bahn, the Berlin commuter rail, late at night. The car was packed with people: a pretty young couple sat across from me with a toddler giggling up at them, a thin old man in a bowler hat read a creased book across the aisle, and a group of college-aged Brits laughed loudly and sipped beers, their fingers hooked around the silver stanchions. And I was alone.

I was in *Nighthawks*, that lonely painting, stranded in the bluish cold while others dined in the yellow restaurant. There was no one I loved for a thousand miles in any direction, and no one who loved me. I knew that was impermanent, but reality had no bearing on the freezing hollowness that billowed through me. It was exactly like every moment I've touched real grief.

Each time I feel total joy or grief, I think: *It has always been like this*. Every real joy is the same blinding light, and every real moment of grief the same claustrophobic dark. Each time I touch one thread it's as though I can feel it running alongside me, through my fingers like wind outside a car window. The normal spectrum of feeling is bounded by the threads. And I am there, waiting to tap back into the light or dark—oblivion either way.

I imagine an analogousness between the role of the souvenir and the thread metaphor that haunts my happiest and saddest moments; the one may be better understood by comprehending the other. Both store a concentration of feeling. Both can annihilate time. The thread of joy collapses all moments of real happiness into one another such that I cannot distinguish between those moments, and all memory of any other state is obliterated. The souvenir collapses the time between the moment of travel and future moments of remembering. Both create a shining, totally absorbing continuity.

I stare at the *Wings of Desire* print above my desk. A coiffed, dark-haired man in a long overcoat gazes down over Berlin from the edge of a tall building. Translucent wings branch from his

back. The world is black and white and I am again in the historic cinema. The orchestra is warming up, and my heart with it. It doesn't matter whether I've been away from Berlin for a week or a decade. The threads and the souvenir are latent, impervious to the weathering effect of regular experience, squirreled away from time. They are ready whenever you are.

I want to imagine what it would be like to bottle every moment of pure joy in my life, to be able to just reach out and grab hold of some material token that could instantly elevate me to total elation, like an über-souvenir. A Monet-printed hand fan, a Brazilian Carnival mask, a novelty beer stein—the object itself would be secondary in importance to its infusion with every good and beautiful moment I ever had.

I don't think it would be enough. Like any trip, there would come a moment of interruption. A few minutes while your friend is in the bathroom at a restaurant, a trip alone on the train, something to break immersion. I imagine it would be very lonely.

Still, maybe it's worth it to try as hard as you can to hold on to happy moments just for yourself. They're like a rainy-day fund of happiness. To hold onto whatever joy you're lucky enough to feel, however, only to give it to someone else, is an act of stunning generosity. It lifts time from your shoulders. It feels like allowing someone to slip their hand into that forward stream of life and touch, for a moment, the sum of all your joys.

My class was on critical theory, so I read Baudrillard in Berlin. He wrote that the existence of a simulacrum, an exact replica of a thing, renders both the original and the simulacrum inauthentic. It would follow that the creation of the souvenir renders the actual experience inauthentic. He takes an example from Borges: If an emperor were to create a life-sized map of his empire replete with perfect detail, it would cover the territory and make the land itself as inauthentic as the replica.

In the case of the souvenir, however, even Baudrillard would agree that it

retains the charm of a poor copy, what he calls the “poetry of the map”—the creative and interpretive differences between the real thing (the land) and the replica (the map). This is part of the beauty of the souvenir. Its purpose is to hold fast to something as abstract as a memory of a certain day in a certain place, and that memory's expression again becomes abstract in the physical form of the souvenir. An Eiffel Tower keychain has little to do with the actuality of being in Paris, and even less practical purpose to the purchaser. Part of its charm lies in how far off it is from the real thing. In the work of remembering, we have pictures and videos for verisimilitude. Souvenirs are about holding on to a feeling we know, deep down, was ephemeral.

The gift-souvenir, however, makes an experience belong to two people: the person who bought the souvenir and experienced the thing but also the person who was thought of. I gave my sister my joy, that day in Berlin, by bringing her home a silvered piece of it. She wears it every day.

My grief I keep for myself, stored in crinkled tickets for three-hour German operas I couldn't comprehend, a red bandana from my grandfather, a shoebox of old letters under the bed. These things, I avert my eyes from. There's a lyric from “Here's Where the Story Ends” by The Sundays: “It's that little souvenir, of a terrible year, which makes my eyes feel sore.” One day, maybe, I will be brave enough to let them carry me far enough into my grief to sit through its eyesore-ness, to better understand its shape and my own. One day, I might be brave enough to show it to someone else.

Brave, because gifting a feeling to someone is a little like letting someone graze the distilled threads of your joy or grief. It's a little like telepathy. It's a little like falling in love; changing the meaning of your life by sharing it with someone else.

*This week, Claire Beeli indulges the Nassau Weekly in an examination of the souvenir—and in a way, delivers us a souvenir of her own making. Like an Eiffel Tower keychain, but way better.*



# Vignette on Lychees

“When she closes her eyes, the sun remains a white spot in her vision, and she can romanticize the eye damage.”

BY MIRA SCHUBERT

Giovanna lies sprawled on a lounge chair beside the pool, clutching a plastic bag of lychees. Her fingers interlace over her stomach; her nails are chipped crimson. The blue latex mattress, blaring block letters “PEPSI” written on its side, does not prevent the bony rods of the chair from pushing into her back. Indifferent, she gazes toward the sun. The sun gazes back at her. Not unlike the rods, it embeds itself into her—more specifically, her pupils. When she closes her eyes, the sun remains a white spot in her vision, and she can romanticize the eye damage: before her blindness, Isaac Newton’s, and before his, Galileo’s.

A toddler leaps into the pool, limbs flailing like those of a puppet. The body drops and the boy’s head lurches upward, mouth agape, before the water produces a sickening crack that drowns his cry. The resulting spray soothes Giovanna’s rosacea skin. Then, that whistle of the redheaded lifeguard—the one with the freckles, who hates all of the children except for the group of girls that swims on Saturdays. Bikini-clad, they aren’t quite teenagers—still ripely pubescent. Their lively squeals are frequent to the lifeguard as the litter swathes itself in sunscreen, eyes roving over each other’s bodies for sunburn. The lifeguard whistles, sharp and dagger-like, but quickly the act becomes useless and swallowed by noise. This

clamor of the poolgoers weaves its way around the poolside until words jumble and lose meaning.

Contentedly cornered by identical but deserted poolchairs, Giovanna reaches again into the plastic grocery bag and produces a lychee. The coral ridges of the thing’s skin give way to her thumbnail as she pokes, revealing pearly flesh. Pinkish rind lodges itself under her fingernail; juice runs down the side of her wrist, winding over the creases made by her movements. This lychee is plump. It reminds her of the round face of the redheaded lifeguard, and of the sun, which is still lightly seared into her vision. She places the fruit into her mouth, savoring it and carefully maneuvering her tongue so as not to bite down on the seed. Another crack emerges from the pool and Giovanna sucks on her lychee, lips puckered. When there is no meat left and the seed exudes a bitter taste, she spits it out. Rolling it between two sticky fingers, she examines its hairs—its short and tangled eyelashes. Then, she tosses the seed into the pool. It lands in the water with a negligible splash. Giovanna remains reclined among the clueless bystanders, feasting.

*Mira Schubert takes the Nassau Weekly poolside; first, she draws us in, then spits us out like a lychee seed. And hey, we’re grateful!*



# H.R.1's Local Impact: Beyond Higher Ed

*H.R.1, known by many as Trump's "One Big, Beautiful Bill," promised higher taxes on college endowments and has pushed private universities like Princeton to cut budgets this fall. But looking beyond the university, some of the bill's greatest impacts will be felt by New Jersey's public education system.*

BY LUCY MCWEENEY

**J**UST A WEEK AFTER the first day of class for the ten schools of the Westminster Plainsboro Regional School District, Superintendent David Aderhold is already trying to plan out the district's budget for next year in the face of devastating budget cuts from the federal government. Aderhold, it seems, attempts to do so between a long school day and picking his daughter up from soccer practice. The district, less than a 20-minute drive from Princeton University's campus, serves as a particularly large public school system in central New Jersey, encompassing both Middlesex and Mercer counties.

Aderhold, who is entering his 13th year as superintendent for the district, oversees 9,000 students, 900 teachers, and 1,500 staff every day. As president of Garden State Coalition of schools, which encompasses 90 school districts, Aderhold also leads advocacy work in the West Windsor, Plainsboro, and Princeton public schools. He has served on two Governor task forces, and is now president elect of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators.

"I've been fortunate to be in the room where a lot of conversations have happened over the last decade," Aderhold said. Now, as the district gears up to navigate massive funding cuts to his student's health and education, he must lead many of those conversations himself.

**FORMING THE CORE OF** President Donald Trump's second-term agenda, H.R.1 was passed by the 199th Congress and signed into law in July. A comprehensive budget reconciliation law, it introduces extensive changes to tax policy, health care, immigration, and environmental regulations.

With exceptions of colleges with fewer than 3,000 students, H.R.1 will raise taxes on college endowments, pushing

private universities to seriously cut budgets this fall. Princeton's endowment tax is projected to raise 8% in the coming year.

The bill also significantly alters federal student loans, ending the Grad PLUS loan program for graduate students and setting a new lifetime borrowing limit for undergraduate and graduate loans at \$257,500 per person.

Within the ivory walls of Princeton University, the conversations surrounding these budget cuts largely center on the immediate impacts felt among the students: reduced Frist Late Meal hours and layoffs for many student jobs.

Looking beyond these walls, however, it is clear that some of the greatest burden from the bill will fall on the students just down the road at Westminster Plainsboro Regional School District, and in the public elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the state.

**THOUGH THE BILL IMPACTS** public school systems across the country, New Jersey's upcoming gubernatorial election creates greater uncertainty about the implementation of the bill in the state: the next governor of New Jersey will have a say over how many of the bill's policies will go into effect.

As Superintendent Aderhold said, "November's election could change a lot of things."

While many of the outlined policies have yet to be fully implemented, changes in Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Title I, and more pose serious threats to the success and longevity of public school systems and the children within them.

**WITH AROUND A THIRD OF** New Jersey's child population currently enrolled in the state's Medicaid program, federal cuts outlined by H.R.1 could strip many of their health coverage, impacting children within and outside the school system as access to regular

check-ups, immunizations, and other health services become more difficult to afford. The bill—which will go into effect after the 2026 midterm elections—will cut federal funding by around \$1 trillion over the next 10 years, shifting costs to the states and introducing new work requirements and more frequent eligibility determinations.

NJ FamilyCare, through which individual children and families qualify for medical insurance through Medicaid, offers comprehensive health coverage, encompassing doctor visits, hospital services, and prescriptions, depending on the recipient's eligibility category. However, now that the state is predicted to lose approximately \$3.6 billion in annual federal Medicaid funding, about 20% (350,000) of current NJ FamilyCare enrollees are projected to lose their health coverage.

Princeton Professor Heather Howard says a major part of Medicaid's value for the state's children comes even before they show up to school. Howard is also co-director of the Global Health



Program and previous New Jersey Commissioner of Health and Senior Services.

"Medicaid is vital to kids' health and to kids' readiness for school," she said. "Undermining this sort of foundation that Medicaid provides for kids' school readiness is really concerning."

The ability of children to access the services provided by NJ FamilyCare is

essential for preparing them for the school year, ensuring children's health before they enter the classroom. Come next October, however, children whose families rely on NJ FamilyCare could be entering the school year without their regular check-ups or vaccinations.

Regarding the bill's cuts to Medicaid, Howard said, "I don't know that it's going to lead to a closure of a hospital in Mercer County, but generally, less money for hospitals means less outreach, less programming, and less money for the federally qualified health centers in the county."

Beyond preparedness for schools, though, the Medicaid cuts may have more direct impacts on the school districts themselves. Across the nation, Medicaid is the fourth-largest federal funding source for K-12 schools, supporting over \$7.5 billion of school-based health services every year.

When a student qualifies for Medicaid, their school district can bill the program for the services they need during the school day. Aderhold, the Superintendent of Westminster Plainsboro Regional School District—who oversees around 9,000 students, 900 teachers, and 1,500 staff—emphasized the importance of health care costs as a funding source of the district. With less funding from Medicaid helping hospitals and health care systems offset lost revenue, Aderhold said, "you're going to see exorbitant health care costs."

The district uses a School Health Insurance Fund, which now has gaps. Aderhold explained that his budget for health care "went up at \$4 million," and his "ability to raise taxes went up

at 3.6 million." Aderhold already had a \$400,000 deficit before putting any money elsewhere in the district.

Now, he said, their School Health Insurance Funds have increased around 14%, seven times their state allowance, which sits at a 2% increase. This means a substantial rise in the cost of providing health coverage for school employees, with states unable to make up for such drastic Medicaid cuts. Thus, there becomes a greater likelihood that many public school districts will cover less of the premium costs for their educators and staff, shifting more of that burden onto the employees and their families.

Julie Borst, who serves as Executive Director of Save Our Schools NJ Community Organizing and works on child education and family policy advocacy, emphasized the impacts of cuts to the Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI), which is a Medicaid reimbursement for services in schools, like occupational physical, and speech therapy.

"With Medicaid being chopped to the way it's going to be, we're going to feel this," she said. "It's going to be felt all over, and I would say probably most especially in the specialized schools for kids with disabilities."

**H.R.1 ALSO SHIFTS THE** eligibility requirements and funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). States must now contribute to the cost of SNAP benefits for the first time and can respond by limiting enrollment, modifying benefits, or even withdrawing from the program.

Because children in SNAP-participating households are automatically considered eligible for the free school breakfast and lunch programs, these new requirements could hinder access to meals.

As Howard described, "We know that if the family is under a greater risk of food insecurity, clearly it will impact the kids. These are wraparound services, and they're all interconnected."

Peter Chen, a Senior Policy Analyst at New Jersey

Policy Perspective, noted how the state will have to include "much more onerous requirements: for applying to SNAP. 'The administrative burden of simply completing all the forms is enough to drive many people off of the program,'" he said.

The Wildwood Public School District, the only urban school district located in Cape May, serves a roughly 75% non-white population, with around 63% of the students identifying as Hispanic or Latino. According to Superintendent John Kummings, who has served in the position for 12 years, the district's free and reduced lunch rate consistently falls between 80%-90%. Because enough students qualify for free and reduced lunch individually, the district qualifies for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), meaning all students are given free breakfast and lunch daily.

But the potential upcoming decrease in SNAP participation could make the district ineligible for CEP and thus no longer be able to offer universal free meals. Kummings said, "It'll then become an economic issue for the school district, because we can't subsidize breakfast and lunch."

"We're still waiting for things to kind of pan out and get some guidance," Kummings added. But, he does know these cuts could have an "almost global impact for our local population."

**HOW MANY OF THE H.R.1** policies will be implemented is yet to be seen in New Jersey, as the state prepares to elect a new governor. One of the main questions the state's next governor will have to determine is whether or not to implement the outlined federal education scholarship tax credit program, which provides a tax incentive for donations to nonprofit Scholarship Granting Organizations.

According to Chen, however, these tax credit programs are essentially school voucher programs, which provide scholarships to send eligible students to attend private or religious schools instead of public schools. Because voucher programs lack a lot of public support, he said, positioning the program as a tax credit serves as a work-around. "The harmful effects are seen





in reducing the amount of state funds that are available to fund public schools properly," he said.

Executive Director of the Paterson Education Fund Rosie Grant voiced her opposition to this outlined tax credit. Grant, who works on community engagement and advocacy in the Patterson public school system, also runs after-school programs throughout the year that have now lost funding. "I'm not against choice, but I am against pulling money away from educating all kids and using it to educate some kids," she said.

Borst also emphasized that these scholarships rarely cover the full cost of a private school tuition. She said, "This idea that this is the high minded thing of 'we're helping poor children go to private school because they're going to get a better education,' is nonsense. It never covers the tuition."

Still, it remains unclear whether this program will actually be implemented in New Jersey. Gubernatorial Democratic candidate Mikey Cheryl has voiced her opposition to school voucher programs, while Republican candidate Jack Ciattarelli has placed charter school growth at the forefront of his education platform, using Florida's school voucher program as a model.

As Borst argues, New Jersey already sees hundreds of millions of dollars come out of the public school system in order to pay for parallel systems as this tax credit program would. "We should not be doing that, because those parallel systems are not educating everybody," she said. "The purpose of public school is to educate everybody."

**ALREADY-STRUGGLING** public school systems will now face even tighter budgets, forced to navigate fewer teachers, larger class sizes, and more.

Kummings reflected on the current status and future of the Wildwood Public School District with the impending cuts. Having already made staff cuts last year, Kummings said the budget will only become tighter. "We're already approaching the skeleton crew and are in survival mode," he said. "So how you're going to educate kids fairly and equitably is kind of a mystery if we're going to

experience those levels of cuts."

Outside of the regular school day, after-school programs face some of the most devastating cuts, many of which have already been shuttered for the current school year. According to Grant, The Patterson Education Fund has consistently run after-school programs in the district, which for the past five years have been funded by the 21st Century grant, a federally-funded program for after-school activities.

The state of New Jersey has previously received \$11 million for the 21st Century. Now, Grant says, the funding for this year has dropped to \$4, forcing the organization to stop their after-school programs. Now, she said, "These 200 kids have nowhere to go after school."



Likewise, a 21st century grant funds all of the after school and summer programs for grades 3 through 12 in the Wildwood Public School District. Along with the fact that these programs provide dinner to the students, Kummings said, "There's a lot of enrichment that happens within those programs. It keeps students out of trouble. A lot of them don't have a lot of resources at home, so they're able to use school resources and complete projects, homework, etc."

Now, as the district is forced to reshape their budget for the next year, Kummings said, "We're not going to find half a million dollars a year to be able to run those programs."

Though each respective school board doesn't vote on the budgets for the 2026-2027 academic year until March, school districts are beginning conversations about what that budget

will look like now. The challenges districts will face under such extreme cuts is at the forefront of Aderhold's mind as he looks to build the budget for the Westminister Plainsboro Regional School District. "Schools and states are going to have a real reckoning when it comes to finances for the way we build our budgets" he said. "I've been building budgets for 17 years. I don't have a solution either."

While individual districts look for solutions in regards to these cuts, states like New Jersey must also aim to make up for lost federal funding. In regards to health insurance, Chen argued, "The focus should still be on trying to expand coverage, and the state will have to have put complete resources, state resources, to help fill in where the feds have left off."

But many think it may be impossible for states to fill this gap. "I think the money is too big," Borst said.

"The feature and the bug of federalism is that these are partnerships between the state government and federal government," Howard said. "States have built in constraints because they have to balance their budget, so they just cannot make up the money like the federal government can."

But Chen hopes states like New Jersey will look to more innovative solutions in the face of these cuts, such as raising taxes for those who can afford it. "I'm hoping some of the traumatic and horrible changes that will be wrought by H.R.1, especially as time passes, will galvanize folks to think differently about family affordability and what society owes each other," he said.

Likewise, Grant hopes the coming months and years can be a time of rallying around public schools as community hubs as rising above the party politics. "It is our responsibility to hold the people we love accountable, in any relationship," she said. "And so that's what I'm asking. Rise above the blind love for the person, and let's talk about how we hold our leaders accountable and how to fight for our children."

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*This article was edited and fact-checked as part of the Nassau Weekly's journalism section, Second Look. Please submit corrections to [thenassauweekly@gmail.com](mailto:thenassauweekly@gmail.com).*

# Submarine Story

"He reached out again to the metal, which seemed to bend out towards him too, its soft surface embracing his hand once more. The chain rang out again in the cold, cutting wind, which swirled around him."

By NATHAN MYERS

A red sign with a glaring skull warned of land mines in the dunes. The dunes ran for a half mile, alongside gray craters. Beyond them lay a frothing shoreline. But from the dark edge of the forest Aaron saw only the submarine. Aaron knew the old rotting submarine struck a sea mine decades ago and had beached. The blast had torn open the stern, leaving an ugly wound in its steel surface from which its metal guts spilled forth onto the gray sand. And Aaron could not stop looking at it. The wreck called to him, even from half a mile away. It was so beautiful yet so alien that he felt, overpoweringly, that he must see it, and touch it, up close. And so he began to walk toward it.

"Aaron."

Hearing the voice of his father, Aaron stumbled to a stop ten paces from where the sand began. He knew he should not be walking out there. And yet as he turned to face his father his eyes lagged behind his head. The metal carcass sparkled brightly under the cloudy sky. It was studded with sharp salt crystals and carpeted by soft algae and now seemed to him so close that maybe if he just leaned over he could reach out and brush it.

His father huffed. "Aaron, land mines. Come on. It's not safe out there."

Aaron, having dragged his head back at his father, had to squint to see the man. Even just ten steps away, his father's normally imposing figure had suddenly become a shrunken miniature. Aaron blinked, but the small outline of his father still bled into the edge of the forest, a forest which now in his eyes looked small and distant too. He could barely make out the features of his face. Aaron easily turned back

toward the enormous submarine, which now, though he knew it still lay half a mile away, consumed his entire vision. He took another firm step into the cold sand. He relished the sight. The conning tower, adorned with a bent crown of antennas which danced in the gusts of wind, soared into the sky. "Can't I just... take a look?"

His father's reply came all muddled. It didn't matter, anyway. And then he was running through the pitted sand, where the thin rusted rods of mines stuck up here and there, half-buried like teeth. *That did matter*, that strange, dizzying, beautiful wreck. He had to see it up close. It called to him, pulling him closer, magnetically, like a piece of metal had been embedded in his chest. And then he was right in front of it.

The submarine smelled like blood, dead fish, and wet salt. The normally deep, booming shout of Aaron's father was now nearly imperceptible. That whisper was no match for the cold constant winds which sounded through its flaky rust holes like air through a flute. It was no match for its rhythmic heartbeat, a length of chain, long since detached from its anchor, banging the side of its monstrous hull. Aaron reached out and touched the gritty, salty metal.

And it was warm. And soft. Softer than metal should be. His blood rushed to his hand. In a moment his body was numb everywhere except for his hand which he thought had never been warm, not until now, not this kind of warm. Then it was hot. It was so hot that it blinded every other sense. He felt his heart push more blood, faster, each beat landing in time with the vibration from the chain which now thrashed the side of the wreck over and over as the wind blew against it, a wind which no longer whistled through the little holes but screamed so loud it cut new ones. And in the scream he heard his name, echoed, over and over again.

Aaron only touched the broken-down submarine for a moment. His father, having sprinted after him, seized his arm and ripped him away. They shouted at each other, but his father—whose grip was firm, calloused, and inescapably cold from years of work—simply

dragged him from the old ship.

The chain struck the hull, much quieter now. Aaron heard it even as they crossed the dunes the same way back in silence.

"Dad, I swear the submarine said my name, it said, *Aaron, Aaron.*"

His father did not speak.

"But dad, it said my name. And it was hot, and it said my name."

Aaron's father paused, both of his big boots balanced on one little footprint in the sand. "I ought to never let you come out of the goddamned house." He steadied his balance by moving one boot to the outline of another footprint in the sand. "That imagination of yours is just trouble. For you and me both..."

His father's voice cracked and he trailed off, but his cheeks and ears still burned a feverish, uneven red. Aaron stopped talking. They resumed their slow walk. He rubbed his hand on his shirt, but the salt clung, gritting under the skin.

~ ~ ~

That night Aaron awoke choking, with salt on his tongue and his palm slick with spit. His sheets smelled like brine. Wind and rain pelted the little window of his little dark room, and droplets licked the inside edges of the thin wood frame. He lay there and listened to the rain. And his heart beat rhythmically, almost outside his chest, like the chain.

Aaron came to his feet and grabbed his glass from the nightstand, rinsing his mouth with water. He opened his window partway and spat it out. But his mouth still tasted of salt and now he could swear he could hear the chain, distant and quiet but also discernible, and crisp, making its way directly into his room along with the rain which now pooled on the windowsill.

Aaron shut the window, mopped it with a rag, went back underneath his brine sheets. But he could not sleep, lying there in the dark, still tasting salt, and now metal. He could not sleep, listening to the wind and the rain and that chain, distant, quiet, but most certainly there. He lay there, his eyes burning the ceiling, for half an hour. At last he resolved to try rinsing his mouth again. He reached for his glass but it was empty.



He stood up, pulled on his shirt, and padded his way down the creaking steps outside his room.

Downstairs near the kitchen sink where Aaron filled his waterglass, the door to his father's workshop stood half open, swaying back and forth on its hinges, blown by gusts of winds from within. Aaron set his glass at the edge of the sink, crossed the room, and looked inside. His father had left a window open, through which now the moonlight, wind, and rain poured in. Aaron stepped inside the dark room.

Aaron hated coming in here. His father built metal bodies from scrap. There were piles of half-made figures, with ribs of bent rebar and joints bolted from scavenged hinges. Some were small as dogs, and some loomed twice his height, as tall as men. Some were hooked to the ceiling. As Aaron walked through the cramped room, his shadow mixed with theirs, lying across the floor like a second set of bodies.

On the bench by the window, on top of a pool of collecting rainwater, lay a plate of curved steel, studded with sharp salt crystals. Aaron touched it with his finger and felt the grit grind his skin. It was the same as the submarine's hull. And it was strangely warm.

When he let go he shivered. Above him another figure dangled from a hook, unfinished. It had carefully bent iron rods for bones; it had hundreds of wires

like capillaries which ran from its hands and feet into its hollow chest, where, unconnected, they danced in the gusts of wind. In the darkness he thought he saw the faintest motion in its empty eye sockets.

The top drawer of the bench was half open. Inside were sketches, on bright white paper, which sponged the water from the open window. Aaron slid the heavy wooden drawer further open. There were hundreds of pages. Silhouettes of machines shaped like men, their black ink bleeding in the water; rough figures crossing a field, their metal hands lifting up rods out of sand; maps of the coastline covered in dots. And then there was another page, off to the side of the drawer. It was different. Written in red. The figure was rendered with incredible detail, on yellowed paper with frayed edges. And it was smaller, younger, like that of a boy.

"Aaron."

His father's voice, low and sharp, came from the doorway. Aaron turned around, startled. His father's eyes glinted, and his large hand gripped the door-knob tight.

"You shouldn't be in here."

Aaron pointed to the window. "I didn't want it to get wet."

His father crossed the cluttered room in three strides and slammed the window shut, placing his large frame between the desk and Aaron. "Fine. But go

back to bed." He paused. "Now."

So Aaron went back upstairs, back under his brine sheets. But he could not sleep, still tasting salt and metal. In the distance, muffled, again, he heard the faint rhythm of the chain.

~ ~ ~

At dawn he went back. The wind had blown over the little red sign, whose skull now glared only at the mud. Gulls circled overhead. Aaron found the footprints he had left the day before undisturbed and still dry, though the sand around them had melted into mud. They led across the dunes to the submarine which once more reached out across the half-mile stretch and invited him closer. He heard its voice again. Aaron. Aaron. He stepped into the footprints one by one, small foot into small hollow, fitting perfectly, until the submarine was all he could see.

"I came back," he whispered, though he had no sense of speaking. *Aaron. Aaron.* "Yes, I'm back."

He reached out again to the metal, which seemed to bend out towards him too, its soft surface embracing his hand once more. The chain rang out again in the cold, cutting wind, which swirled around him. *Aaron. Aaron.* "I'm here!" he yelled at the metal, "I'm here!" he yelled again, his calls drowned out by the screaming winds. But his hand did not grow warm, like before. At once he felt his freezing body, his wet shirt blown tight to his ribcage, which was cold and hard, like steel. *Aaron. Aaron.* "Why won't you listen to me!" he shouted, but the metal chain merely beat louder and the winds blew harder. It was cold. He needed to go home. He removed his hand from the salt-gritted metal which no longer clung to his skin. *Oh, Aaron...* He took a step back, but his bare foot caught on a thin, rusted rod, a tooth half-buried in the sand. It clicked.

Then Aaron saw light, blinding, roaring, exploding up and through the sand, and warmth, warmer and more complete than he had ever felt before. He could not think. Then he felt nothing at all.





# Narrativization

“Behind my chest-thumping bravado and my snarling, reactive solipsism, it was apparent that I had reached a nadir: consumed by my own suffering and all of my ineffectual attempts to ‘better’ myself, I had begun to lose fundamental parts of myself.”

By SOPHIE O'CONNOR

Pauline calls late at night, long after I've brushed my teeth and put on my pajamas. The background audio of the call is loud; I can hear her roommates talking and cooking, and the faint sirens and cars of New York behind that. “Where have you been?” she says. “How is France? What's going on?”

“Not much,” I respond. “Have just been busy.” Echoing in my ears is the last time we spoke, my muffled sobs ringing through the room and the memories of my first ‘heartbreak’ crawling up my neck.

“Anyways, I have to go,” I lie. “We'll talk soon.”

The last time we spoke had been a week earlier, just after I'd gotten off a very different phone call with a very different person. He and I were separated by thousands of miles, but still curiously poised between friends and something a little more. In retrospect, it is apparent that, despite my wishful thinking, this arrangement could never have lasted any longer than it did: our finish, then sudden to me, feels laughable now, inevitable even.

I had gone out that night, after his call, to the *café terraces* in Aix with my friends, looking for a celebratory finale, an Irish wake for those days of waiting, fettered to both a boy and myself. Upon finding nothing to be different at all, I was devastated. I hoped that this conversation would operate as a mystagogue, and that after my cathartic, painful initiation, I would be among the select few “in-the-know.” What I would know, I couldn't precisely say, but my

fantastical aspirations convey my problem in and of themselves. I envisioned this call as my moment of rebirth, where these grotesquely childish yet completely abstract flaws that limited me would wash away with the scalding and holy water of his words.

This end to our relationship—as we knew it—was foreshadowed by a text of his: “I think it's worth discussing if how much we talk makes sense.”

I agreed, asking if we could call later. He had hit a nerve: much of my nascent adult life has been defined by my sense of romantic otherness, this notion that I have somehow done something gravely wrong and ultimately rendered myself unappealing to the entire male species. This ideology, so ingrained into the whole of my thoughts, reactions, and perceptions of the world, eventually transcended into an axiom of my entire being, fundamental to and inextricable from my identity. And yet, the agony of waiting for this call promised respite: I sat in anticipation of some preordained closure.

In the aftermath of the call, the world back in America became completely illusory, a hazy world of baseball and hot dogs and also many things—really just one—I wanted to avoid. Here in France, with *pétanque* and baguettes, I could get away with unanswered messages and unfulfilled promises to call and assurances that, Yes, I really am fine. I could read a book and actually wash my hair and claim it to be self-love. However, behind my chest-thumping bravado and my snarling, reactive solipsism, it was apparent that I had reached a nadir: consumed by my own suffering and all of my ineffectual attempts to “better” myself, I had begun to lose fundamental parts of myself.

Yet I stayed obstinate in my ways, spinning intricate belief systems, praying and chanting that only when I loved myself that others would love me. So I did as this belief system prescribed and held it tight like a talisman: I went on my walks and deleted TikTok. When that was unsuccessful, it was

journaling, then meditation, and soon I had worked my way up to sun-salutations. Unfortunately this was simply the postponement of the inevitable; I still found myself remarkably alone at the bar, my body anchored firmly on that cushioned stool, waiting for life to grant me the change I desperately wanted.

I was seeking some form of narrative fulfillment. So addicted I was to this illusive idea of *change* that I had begun to impose plot points, my own twists in the story that would induce character growth. I held truths that I expected life to disrupt. In the absence of disruption, they grew attached to me, my knuckles pale against my familiar and destructive “convictions.”

It seems obvious to me now that I was furiously attempting to assign symbolism to these events to escape the truth—the truth being, that if this call was not a catalyst in and of itself, then it was simply just painful. Even further was that I would have to break out of my comforting, familiar self-pity—if I could no longer rely on exterior changes, I was going to have to create them myself.

In this *narrativization* of my life, I lost any and all senses of agency. The problem with narrativization is that it is addicting: it is far too easy to fall prey to divine plots than to force change from your own actions. To do this kind of self-storytelling is to be the metaphorical dog on the porch: unable to go in and yet tied to the house, and thus, left waiting, frozen in the cold.

*Sophie O'Connor rips the Nassau Weekly from the narrative for a second, showing us the more fruitful truth to be found in reality.*



# AFTER YOU

"I push myself through the moment in search of you."

BY PARKS MORELAND

Carefully, I slip the film over my eye. It beeps three times before I repeat the process for the other. I wrap two bands around my wrists, connecting them through a pearlescent wire to the nodes against my scalp, my ears, my nose, a skeleton of want. I select a number projected from the band, take a breath, then another.

My last attempt to find you drained the system, nearly broke it entirely. *This time will go better, I think. It will.*

Grandma, I promise we will meet again.

I stumble into a state between my world and your constructed one, a computerized voice calling out instructions. *MEMORY LOADING. AWAIT RELOCATION.* The lights shift, and the normalcy of my apartment morphs into a series of disgruntled shapes. I slip further into the past, further into you.

I enter the rave inside your mind, knowing I'll see you there.

#

Imagine, I say that I love you again. I speak with the luster of a supernova ready to burst, as a toddler telling their feelings without second thought. Color it however you like—in the gray-scale paintings I've always loved, in the lurid abstractions you gravitated toward near the end. It hardly matters. I blink strobes into the darkness, their brightness blinding. The room assembles brick by brick, person by person. Most resemble blurs, unimportant to the simulation. I take a step forward, then again, feeling my way through the crowd as if entering from the periphery

of the scene. Only one individual concerns me.

*Grandma!* I call, my voice a fleck of mismatched paint against the repetitious room.

*Grandma!* I call again. As if responding, the cavernous space trembles, the music a glitch.

*Don't announce your presence too loudly,* I tell myself. *Don't distort the rendering.*

I push myself through the moment in search of you. As one melody transitions into another, the crowd shifts. Peering over a shoulder, I spy an expanse of muted color, encircling a body clearer than the rest.

It's you, Grandma. It must be, focused as you are within the moment. Mom always said that you walked with rhythmic sway, that when you danced gravity itself bended to accommodate your motion.

The speakers wail as I narrow the distance between us, traversing across the dented concrete. My shoulders bump against others swaying back and forth. *Sorry,* I mumble, as if they understand. *Excuse me, excuse me.* Pillars sprout from the floor, impeding my progress further. I glance around to the pixelated faces left unrendered, their features shifting with each passing second. The strobes quicken their pace, which I

attempt to match. Every step brings me closer but never close enough, relegating me to simply a dot in the crowd.

I fall for the you before me, young and jubilant, stolen from a better year, a year I could not witness. Tears kiss my cheeks before evaporating into fractals. Sweat envelopes my arms, oddly realistic, a sheen of oil weighing me down. Struggling forward, I scream your name. Once, then twice. As if you could look this way. As if you could exchange a word. As if you would even recognize my face, the features so unlike they were years ago. I break through the simulation, undressing illusion and confusing it for reality. A buzzing blankets the pulsating rhythm, magnifying with each passing second, as I sink beyond sensation.

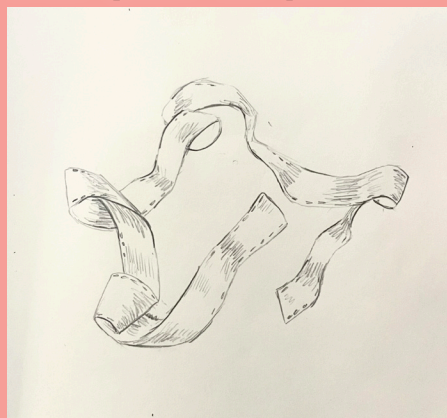
*EMOTIONALLY OVERHEATING. MEMORY ENDING.* The words slice through my mind like a mantra.

*No!* I say, all breath. *No, not again.* The words keep repeating. The buzzing grows sickeningly loud. As it plateaus, the rave collapses, industrial walls folded upon themselves, dancers lost within the rubble of time. You, lost within the rubble of what you once experienced. Strobes bleed from monochrome into the feverish fluorescence of a living room light, transitioning back to reality, rendering me an afterimage.

#

The disc unspools itself from my cornea, buzzing. I detach it completely so that it rests in my palm, blinking red, hardly the size of a nail. Again, I broke the moment with interference.

I learn with every foray that memories are delicate things. The workings of the mind don't like to be caught, contained, but it was all we could do to remember you beyond sinew and muscle.



See, you began to deteriorate quicker than assumed. At first, it was scientific vernacular galore—hippocampus, cortex, amygdala, something about long-term memory encoding and extraction. We pretended to know the meanings, and I watched Mom jot down each to memorize later. Semantic and episodic, procedural and emotional. I was only a child, but even I tested the foreign syllables against my lips, hoping to replicate them as deftly as the doctor.

When the medicine reached its limit, we tried the radical. It wasn't salvation, but something closer to revival. Mom signed a form, then another, waiver after waiver giving a burgeoning company access to your innermost impressions.

A month later, we received the most vibrant memories made manifest. We gawked at the intricate system, at the complex instructions, all while your mind unraveled further. By then, I had learned that each scientific word was synonymous with ruin.

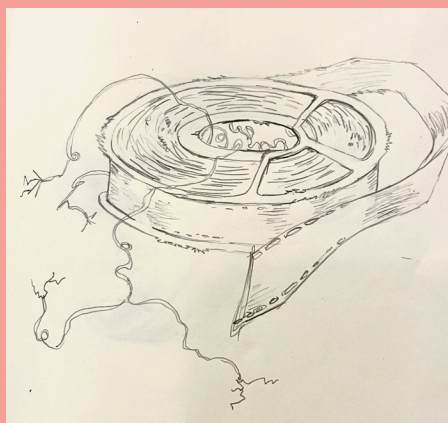
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Wrong is embedded into my marrow, transferred from you onto my mother, and perhaps eventually onto me. Time will always find a way to circle, to land me back in a hospital room, in the world of wires and wishes.

*Mom*, I say, the overhead light flicking on at my voice. *Remember me?*

She nods, smiling. I sit on the bed and pull a set of crumpled coloring pages and colored pencils off the bedstand. As I did with Grandma, I give Mom blank sheets for her to somehow convey the ineffable. Lately, I've printed scenes from movies she starred in. I rip the papers in half, so I fill in one side and she does the other. The result is a dichotomy, one side perfectly colored within the lines, the other a scattering of shapes.

While we work, I hum a melody off-key. Mom tries to replicate it, but it comes out a jumble.



*That's wonderful*, I say, hardly even a lie.

Mom never had an inclination for music as Grandma did but possessed her own talent for acting, neither of which I carry myself. I've always loved drawing, so I draw anyplace I can. Every visit here earns nothing besides a growing collection of paper, every piece a marking of disaster. Her capacity for memories shrivels by the day. After the extraction, it seemed to decline at an even faster rate.

At least she doesn't have to witness her own unraveling. She doesn't know bodily inadequacy. She doesn't know the amyloid levels, the dissonant dementia. She stops humming the melody, interrupted by a vast cosmic void.

She doesn't know.

#

I enter the rave inside your mind, crying tears like fallen stars.

Maybe, the cycle continues endlessly. I choose a memory, live it briefly, and return to reality with hopes to chase that high again, surfacing in and out of moments like a technicolored swim. The disc unspools, and I grab it hastily. While the rave remains the repeated nexus between you and I, sometimes I venture beyond. I swing into the gravity of a holiday party, or the aftermath of a vehicular collision, or the funeral of a close friend. I stumble once into the day you discover your pregnancy. That week, I think about nothing else.

I visit celebrations, arguments that oscillate between love and hate,

philosophical and artistic conversations—anything your brain thought relevant. I even occasionally find myself in some of the later memories. I relive my first birthday, my first word, important events that I've misplaced. They increasingly lack coherence, vital pieces, as if observed from afar. By watching myself grow older, I watch you grow frailer. I suppose it's only lineage, cut in places and branching in others.

Now, I watch as Mom's own roots weaken, wondering if this is what she felt watching the disease consume you.

In my head, you are well. I make myself believe it. You are not alive but somehow remain a glistening speck inside the abyss. You carry a survival stretched through spacetime.

#

You, drifting inside a pale-white skin.

You, a spectrum broken into shards.

You, nothing but neurological failure.

By the end, I could hardly recognize your face, just as you could hardly remember your own name. In the hospital room, we sat and stared at the irrelevant. I spoke rudimentary words you marveled at, colored disheveled drawings that would fill the hospital window. In one memory, you forget who I am. Even without it, I recall the incident clearly. I looked at you incredulously. When you asked again who I was, I turned to Mom, who turned away. She begged you to repeat each syllable. *Don't you remember?* she asked. *It's not so difficult*, she said, repeating it to your bewildered eyes. *Just try*. We smiled as you did, as you tried until a semblance of light returned.

Foolish us, knowing it would extinguish just as fast.

#

*Mom*, I say. *Mom*. Her eyes flutter open, relearning the geometry of the



hospital room. *Remember me?*

She nods, her gaze imperceptible. I wonder why I even ask. If she didn't, what could I reasonably do? However many times I wish, I can't control her body. I bring a small glass of water gingerly to her mouth, dabbing her lips dry afterward. She hardly remembers how to swallow. She hardly remembers the purpose of water. Her body has surrendered itself to total somatic reformation.

Back in my apartment rest her memories, a system supposedly better than yours, an experimental run from the same company that reduced the procedure cost. The same technicians from before met me personally, offered condolences and commitments. What I wanted was a cure. So many advancements made every day, yet the body still implodes. I almost didn't sign the waiver, but I couldn't bear the consequences. I couldn't let an entire life dissolve. I simply couldn't.

I kiss Mom tenderly on the cheek as I imagine she once did to you, just as you once did to her and she once did to me. Hanging from the ceiling is a canopy of drawings and colorings. Playing from the screen is a rerun of a television show. Coming through the speakers is a crooning ballad from a bygone era. A convergence of three lives, three loves.

*I love you, you know?* I say. Perhaps she'll understand eventually, in this space or another.

I pretend the three of us dance again, each to our own melody. A pulsing rhythm, a piano chord, eclipsing our broken ends.

#

Scenes bleed one into the other, their colors mixing like complementary swaths of paint. A laudable recital follows your college graduation, your wedding vows following the day you realize your illness.

In one, I observe from the back of an auditorium as you watch the opening night of a production. Mom skips across the stage, and you restrain yourself from clapping. A tear touches the

corner of your eye before she even says a word. I find an empty seat, directing my gaze between the woman on stage and the woman in the front row. The plot weaves inconsistently, splinters in your memory, but I hardly care. When Mom shouts the final line, you're the first to stand and clap, the last to sit. The memory breaks as you approach the stage, tenderness on your tongue.

Perhaps ends are another sort of beginning. The curtain shrouds the stage, but the show continues on through others.

The first memory I entered was your last. It landed me inevitably in the hospital room, Mom and I circled around your bed. She talked about an acting gig she was considering, whether your worsening condition would force her to decline it.

*I want to*, she said, more to herself than me. *But I can't*.

Your eyes opened then, a smile cresting your lips. *Go*, you said. *Go into your heart, dear*.

Just as quickly as you said it, you returned to your hapless state, but the sentiment continued well beyond. It became a source of private inspiration between Mom and I. She would tell it to me as I was growing up, just as I would say it to her.

It would be years into my adulthood before I would discover the origin of the phrase. I don't know what inspired this first foray into your past, what luck brought me these words specifically. Perhaps it was a turbulent dream, a bout of boredom, a found photograph. Perhaps it was nothing that substantial. It was simply a beginning, an end. A branch of life.

#

Imagine, the strobes dim in a maelstrom, leaving you beneath their spotlight. In this universe, I draw penitently to the black hole. Shock, stupor, something like a doctor saying your brain would soon be stardust, something like you asking when you'd finally die, something like a biochemical technology startup illuminating the detritus that

still remained.

*I'll get through this*, I think. *I'll remember you again*. I'll remember even if it takes unraveling who I thought you were, who I wanted you to be.

I enter the rave inside your mind, shedding the world behind me like a past life.

Yet, a singular desire lingers. I can feel it tapping against my marrow, even with the pulse wrapping itself around me. I trace the beating of your heart, one body connected to another, as it directs me.

Ahead, a flicker of light cleaves the monochrome. The shade is you, I know. You wind through inebriated strangers, and I do little but follow after you, finally finding my way forward. I do not run but approach as though you were asleep, unprepared to wake. How easily I could stop here, discard these memories, convince myself of an alternate dimension, pretend our galaxies lie so far apart that not even light-years connect us.

But I cannot. I cannot because I remember the first time Mom surfaced into a memory, into the rave. It collapsed inside her head, and her body repeated the motion. I remember her screaming, her wailing, me clawing against her skin to disconnect the wires. How after, she relegated the memories to the back of a storage bin, pretending they never existed.

I remember because I understand what it means to not, to watch memories fracture into oblivion.

Amidst the meteor belt that is the dance floor, I run into your arms. *EMOTIONALLY OVERHEATING*. I pinch a lump of cheek, traversing your unwrinkled skin with care, finding what I never had the opportunity to know. *MEMORY ENDING*. Even as the world buzzes, I cling tight to you, whom I loved and love and will forever love.

*MEMORY—*

I tell you my name and we begin anew.

*The Nassau Weekly continues on through Parks Moreland.*

# ON ALIENATION

A late-evening lecture, meta-glasses, and an increasing distance from everything.

BY OLLIE BRADEN

This semester, I have precept at 7:30 p.m. on Thursdays. Our preceptor, Jane, has instituted a no-tech policy: we must handwrite our notes and print our readings. She stands at the head of a long wooden table in a room that is far too small for the amount of furniture in it. Periodically, she stands to scrawl an insight across the chalkboard. The chalk squeaks; I sometimes shiver, imagining that a hundred years ago people were in this room doing more or less exactly the same thing.

Outside the illusion shatters. In Firestone, they've put up these signs that say, "free yourself from your phone!" and offer the option to rent a Yondr Bag. Without these, we apparently cannot resist treating our phones like fifth limbs. Halfway through a three-hour seminar, I itch to check my texts and emails. My Google Calendar, pre-programmed days ago, tells me exactly where to go and when. I semi-regularly enter a fugue state lying on my bed scrolling through Instagram Reels. At what point do I become a cyborg?

Over dinner, my friends and I try to figure it out: we talk about the extent to which everything is changing, and

whether we ought to be scared or excited. One says that he is excited about Meta's AI glasses, and the promise of increasingly immersive simulations. He thinks it would be good to go to Switzerland without having to buy a plane ticket. "The point of life," he says, "is to experience-max."

"Right." Mustard dribbles from my burger, the mosquito bite on my ankle burns; I imagine a machine that could perfectly replicate these sensory details. "But, you know, does it matter that it's fake?"

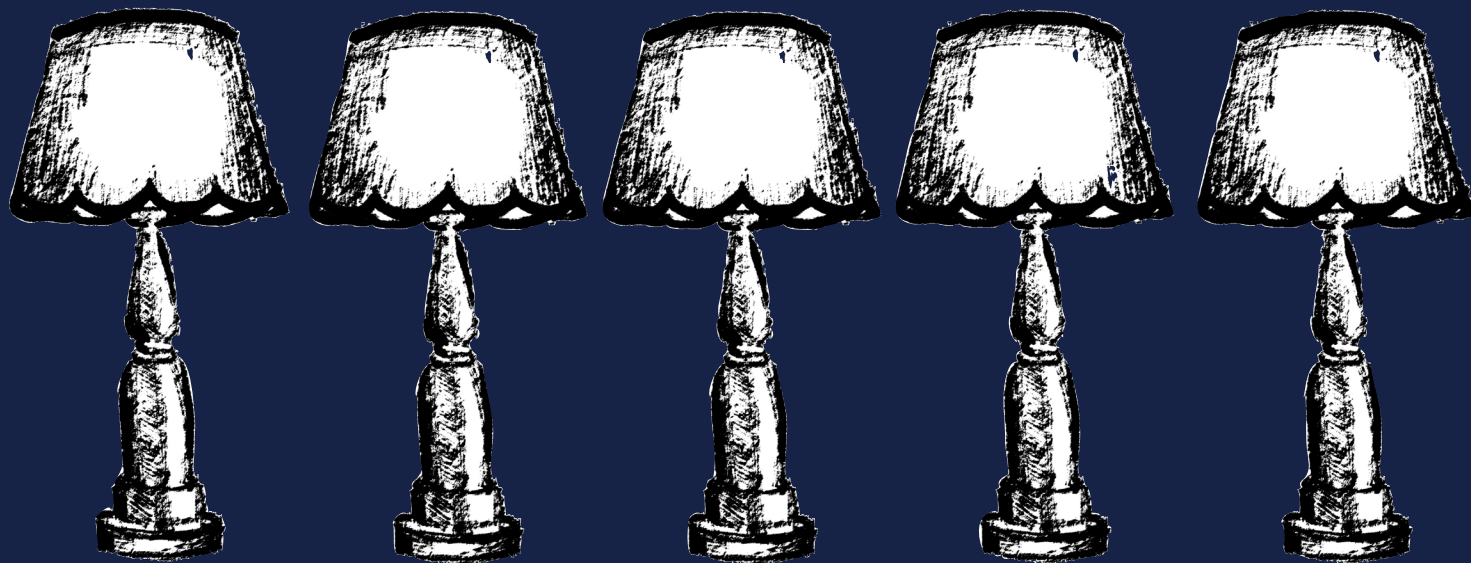
He stabs his fork into a piece of pasta. "Sure, yeah." He's nodding, considering. "I guess it's probably not quite as good as real Switzerland. But if you could have ten almost-real experiences for the price of going to, like, one actual place, wouldn't that be better?"

What is an almost-real experience? We can wonder about what aspects of Switzerland can and cannot be artificially simulated, but that gets away from the real question; what I actually want to know is, is there any value to authenticity in itself? If we can recreate Switzerland perfectly inside a pair of AI glasses, is there any reason to still go? As much as I feel that the answer is yes,

ON ALIENATION

if pressed, I can never quite articulate why. Our language, our conversations, do not seem to make space for the abstract inherent value of Switzerland if there is any, no matter how much I wave my hands trying to gesture at it.

But the utilitarian way of looking at the world—where Switzerland is equal only to the net benefit of being in Switzerland—is relatively new to its position of absolute intellectual dominance. This is a change in our collective thinking, perhaps the inevitable result of increasing secularization, coupled with or caused by what my history professor calls a "rationality fetish." Now that it is no longer acceptable for the intellectual to point to a higher power, truths about the world must be discovered through reason. It is no longer en vogue to suggest that something might matter just because it feels important. If we cannot put proper words to it, it does not exist. Under these constraints it's very hard not to accept the utilitarian conclusion: things are only good





insofar as their outcomes yield some sort of net happiness, and bad if they lead to net suffering.

Under this framework there is nothing to be said for “inherent value.” Things matter only because of their tangible effects. So honesty, for instance, is not important in itself—you should lie about things that people don’t want to hear, unless you think the truth will be revealed somehow and hurt more later, or that it can productively change the situation to make someone happier. The notion of “rights,” that is, some set of things that people deserve or do not deserve to have, just for being born, is incoherent—there are only laws made to maximize happiness, by balancing safety and autonomy. Nothing is beautiful, only good to look at; if a tree falls in the forest unheard, it doesn’t make a sound. And whether something is “authentic” is an absurd consideration, a distraction from or at best a different way of getting at the utility question.

I find this to make perfect logical sense, but—and utilitarianism tells you to discount this, but I am going to try to sit with it for a second—it often feels wrong. For instance, at dinner, although all my friends can get behind the Meta glasses, they are unsure about a hypothetical Neuralink brain chip that makes you smarter. They want to say that the human mind is somehow sacred, and that there is some virtue in organic intellect. But if Switzerland is just the experience of Switzerland, if intelligence is just the experience of intelligence, then why does it matter where either of these things came from? The glasses or the Earth; a piece of metal or your mind; isn’t it all the same? Isn’t it?

Maybe not. Last week Jane ended class by writing the word “alienation” in big, swooping letters across the board. “Can someone tell me what this means, alienation?” she said. Someone raised their hand and explained that during the Industrial Revolution people who had been artisans, who made hand-crafted products from start to finish,

became factory workers playing one small part in an assembly line. They had no control over the end product, which was always the same—you could go to a store and look at fifty identical lamps and be completely unable to tell which of the fifty you had or had not been involved in creating. Alienation, then, was the sense of being distinctly separate from your end product, such that the meaning, the dignity, of the work was stripped away.

I did, in that moment, feel a kind of boundless gratitude that, for now, my primary tasks consist of reading books and writing essays. Once a paper is done it is a record of some kind of self-making: I know where each word has come from; I remember reaching for it. Of course they are not all like that—there is the paper you write in some sort of glorious wood-paneled room with sun filtering through the windows and a cup of coffee, and there is the paper you type up frantically on a plastic table, in the half hour between class and your next recruiting call. (Substitute paper for whatever it is that you love to do, and then whatever you do only to achieve some desired end result. Interestingly they’re sometimes the same thing in different forms.) I don’t mean to overinflate the importance of aesthetics, but I don’t want to underinflate it, either, because maybe you have to have a certain amount of love for the process to really own the product. Maybe beautiful things are a way to connect to the experience of making, to own your creation, to no longer be alienated.

Does that matter? The utilitarian consensus is that there is no inherent value in ownership; that maybe it is good to write in a nice room, but only because it might make us feel happy. The tragedy of the Industrial Revolution was simply that people were shifted to

worse jobs or no jobs and so they suffered, so they were sad—but this can be measured up against the amount of things that were produced and the amount of people that continue to benefit from them. Probably if we do the math on this, the outcome is a net good. Recently, the utilitarian consensus has also been toying with the idea that if you are here at Princeton dedicating your time to improving your academic writing, one day ChatGPT will be consistently able to write something better, and you are probably better served by building your network. Perhaps the next revolution in industry has arrived, rocking the foundations of knowledge work, and your knowledge only mattered when it was the sole way to access or articulate profitable ideas. Now there are robots for that, so how will you pivot; how will you continue to add value to the world; the market, I mean?

In that little room where we have 7:30 precept, though, Jane seems to see things differently. Her eyes are sparkling while she rolls chalk between her palms; she is parsing through ideas, poking at thoughts as though it’s the most beautiful exercise, worth something apart from the grade and the degree. “Exactly,” she says, “alienation is about dignity, about feeling that what you do and what you are matters.” She pauses. “So you could say—and this is reductive; I’m oversimplifying, but we’ve been talking about modernity, and maybe the question of modernity is just this. Alienation. How do we ground ourselves; how do we come back to Earth?”

Ollie Braden *takes the Nassau Weekly back to the surface, back to the process, back to what really matters...it’s good to be back. “Back to back to back to back to you!” - Charli xcx*

# Free Will?

By ALBA MASTROMATTEO, MANNIX BEALL-O'BRIEN, TYLER SCARBOROUGH, AND ALEXANDER MARGULIS



*Alba Mastromatteo is from Ohio in a suburban town that has so little to do it inspires nothing but roundabout musing of what the meaning of life is. She spends her time staring at blank walls in conversation with herself surrounded by corn and miscellaneous alpaca competitions.*



*Mikhail Grosse, overlooked runnerup for the national oedipal poetry competition. Enjoys hiking and work friendships.*

What is silly about free will is that it doesn't do much. Sometimes we perceive this power over our lives through the actions we choose, but this power is not as expansive as it feels. The idea that our actions comprise our futures rather than some predetermined fate gives us the illusion that we have control over where we will end up. But our future is intrinsically dependent on people or things outside our control. We can't really do anything.

I am a firm believer that the idea of free will cannot exist on its own. I mean, it can, just not with any sense of internal peace. People have to adopt a sort of "what happens, happens" mindset to survive. Freedom comes from the connection of these two ideas. You need to know what you can't control and let go of it. That, for me, often means pulling that obsession out of the tight, white knuckled vice grip of my mind. Obsession will do nothing other than have you staring at your ceiling at 3 a.m. wondering about the infinite scope of the future. I would know. This was me the last few nights... the last few years.

I've had a few conflicts with free will myself. I learned that my hip sockets are too shallow by some strand of DNA that coded itself into me and

screwed me over for the rest of my life. (Without my consent might I add.) It tore cartilage and left me with the need for two surgeries, over a year of recovery, and a possibility of never dancing the same again, something I've done since before I gained the ability to form memories. Don't get me wrong, I haven't stopped dancing yet. I grasp at exercising my limited free will over this out of my control phenomenon. I claim the only sense of power that I can. Desperately. And I cry as I walk up and down campus realizing I don't remember what my hips are supposed to feel like, what the world feels like without that buzzing pain in the back of my mind.

~~But I've tried to let go~~ I've let go of wondering what my life could be without this axe hanging over my neck. I don't have any of the answers I need.

I have to let the cosmos or the universe or whatever higher being you believe in tug on the strings of humanity from beyond the clouds. I put my choice out into the world, and it being out there is all I have power over. I choose to dance, and whatever happens, happens. Or at least that's what I tell myself.

## **Free Will: the Bakhtinian perspective**

There is a common misconception that stifles most Free Will debates before they can even begin. Far too many assume that a refutation of Free Will requires belief in dogma or predestination. It does not. The only father that need control us be the literal one: the progenitor. Only by rejecting nurture, or coming close to it, does one realize the irony in the phrase 'breaking the cycle.' Free will does not exist because our development isn't a matter of parenting style, but the same grotesque renewal at the heart of every spring equinox.

At the end of his shifts, my father would follow a strict routine. By the time he finally returned the cab to the taxi lot, he would have already bought his communion wafers and wine: a bag of plain Utz potato chips and a 10-dollar Pinot Noir named 'Prophecy.' I knew this was ritual, but it took a while longer to realize just how much I was participating. My father would be reborn through me, just as his father was through him.

I tried to avoid it. That if I swore off his festive chaos, I would somehow exempt myself from the prophecy in motion. Yet hurriedly picking up the wrapping paper left over from one of his surprise gifts only delayed the inevitable. Whatever part of

him demanded constant celebration fascinated me: no matter how 'unsustainable' I felt it was. Couch-side retellings of his prime would play out eerily similar in my life, just as it had in his. This persisted even as his shifts got longer, and our interactions limited to the impression he left on the furniture. Everything from aesthetic sensibilities to names of friends — the coincidences continued. Without him ever needing to teach me, we shared the same secret appetites.

My father was thin and clean-shaven for most of my life, but one day he seemed to swell with a wild grey beard and a truly round belly. He announced that as I finally became a man, he was transforming not into a senior but a 'seenager.' I understood completely. He had become the pregnant hag: brimming with as much new life as he was losing. Every 'uncharacteristic' impulse of mine made sense. As he enters a wintry twilight, I find myself on the cusp of a renewing spring. We are as individual as regenerating cells. Claiming to break the generational cycle is as ridiculous as saying you won't be changing seasons. We lack agency the same way an arm does; free will does not exist because we are but parts of a collective body.





*Rosenberg Scopes-Monkey is an anarcho-posadist-primitivist, in that order, and another thing; don't print in the papes that I got pissy, I'm not pissy. As a leader in the hand-model labor-rights movement, his famous catchphrase, "if the glove don't fit, you must-a quit," was famously stolen by Kanye West's former stepdad or something.*



*Finn Delmar Baycroft is a freelance writer and a 4x winner of the prestigious North Atlantic Harpoon Games. He lives on a small farm in Nebraska with his wife and their four barracudas.*

Neil DeGrasse Tyson argues that there's no such thing as free will. Everything leading up to your life at this point, the concoction of quarks and chemicals in the air, what you ate for breakfast, all weaves the universe of your decisions into a predetermined conclusion. I think Neil DeGrasse Tyson is a fugly tool who can't keep his mouth shut, so I do believe in free will. I will oppose every musing of the enemy without hesitation or condition. Stupid idiot. He crawls on his knees every night in prayer that he can be cloaked in the fleeting aura of one Carl Sagan.

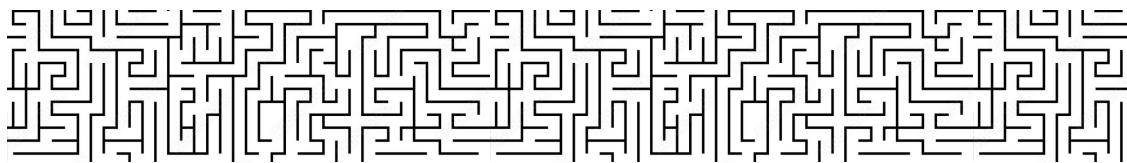
Remember when he tried to cheat on his wife? No? I do. Probably more than she does. He should have stayed voice-acting for that daft suckling pig in Gravity Falls. Maybe then he could prove some use, wallowing in the muck of avarice. Maybe then I could have gone vegan, like the metalhead who makes my refreshers and *Spirited Away* want me to be. No pig products, I say, so that I

may never invite his putrid pork belly or—god forbid—that of his squeaking offspring into my pure flanks of flesh. That wasn't real, though. Cartoons are made of coloring books. No need to give up your pig milk, everyone.

I don't believe in flat Earth (cuck shape, my email's on the website) or anything, but his diss track response to that flat earther was useless. His poor nephew had to pen that for him. Probably because Neil has never thought before speaking. Pre-NWA flow, post-NWA self-importance. During-NWA need to go solo and condemn everyone involved.

Did you know he named his child after one of Pluto's moons, after declaring Pluto isn't a planet? That's crazy. I would never name my kid after some thing hanging around the guy I killed. The world does not need another Jackie Kennedy.

Free will, I say. Bill Nye can go fuck himself, too.



### **Discourse on the Orca**

It is thirty feet long. It weighs 10 metric tons. It is a beast of sleek, varnished beauty. It has been known to torture its prey, skinning cetatians alive before ripping out their tongues. Twice it has managed to snack on a moose. It is the belle of the ball, the star of the show, the notch-finned prince of the ocean. It is the orca, and it has free will.

Director Simon Wincer said as much in his oft-misunderstood opus, "Free Willy." Unfortunately, in the years since the documentary's release—it was filmed in 1992 on a budget of just 380 million USD—Wincer's sweeping narrative has been hailed not as a sobering indictment of contemporary metaphysics but as a childish, crowd-pleasing blockbuster. This is a mistake. Above all, Wincer's film was a warning: if we are to free ourselves, we must first free Willy.

To understand why this is the case, we must return to Jesse, the orphaned, homeless, dipso-maniacal subject of Wincer's work. The boy finds solace in the wide, two-toned eyes of Willy, the film's titular orca: the whale, Jesse sees, is unmistakably alive. It can think. It can choose. In this fragile moment, the orca bridges the oceanic gap between theory and praxis. Wincer's masterful direction allows us to see what we have always

known to be true: the orca has stories to tell, secrets of a remote and pelagic world. It is only waiting for us to ask.

Even if some cinema-goers (myself among them) could follow Wincer's argument, most Americans were all too willing to avert their eyes. Year by year, we continue to ignore the glaring autonomy of the orca. We deny it a mind. We deny it a soul. Wincer, of course, has tried to recapture our attention. Twice before his untimely death at the beak of a frenzied octopus, the director returned to the story of Willy the whale. Sadly, neither *Free Willy 2: The Adventure Home* nor *Free Willy 3: The Rescue* could break through the bleak, staticky, nomological noise of our culture. Also, they did much worse than *Free Willy 1* at the box office.

And so here, now, on the thirty-third anniversary of Wincer's masterpiece, we are left with a world far worse than he could have ever imagined. The creatures we call "killer whales" have begun to believe our lies. They doubt their miraculous freedom. They jerk and flail in the water. They bash themselves against the hulls of our ships. The Jesses of our time find in the eyes of the orca something vast and sad—a sheen, a cataract, a fog hung low o'er the open sea.

*The Nassau Weekly got schooled on free will, so we're feeling...conscious. Aware. Does the footnote section get to have an opinion on free will? Oh, I'm hearing that we don't. Oh well.*

# Atlas Atlas Atlas

BY VIHAAN JETLEY

Tired, exhausted, spent.  
Atlas fails, his shoulders relax,  
the mighty stone slips,  
and goes tumbling.

It scratches the land,  
denting the mountains,  
before crashing into western sea.

He stands there trembling,  
covering his head.

—

He waits a day.  
But the sky isn't falling.

Liars! he sneers,  
stretching his ruined arms upwards.

He treads down to the desert city  
excited to start his life anew.  
But where it once stood,  
he only finds sand.

He goes north,  
but there is only sand.

So he turns and goes south  
But there is only sand.

His eyes scan the horizon,  
but everywhere, there is only sand.

He staggers, cries,  
curses the gods.  
But the sky isn't weeping.

The dry wind  
heckles him relentlessly,  
conducting the sand into  
a cruel symphony.

Determined to find  
the world he once loved,  
he searches.

At last, he finds a city,  
hoping to end his life  
without illusion.

He enters the gates,  
but only finds buildings built  
at strange angles, people  
spitting sounds he  
cannot comprehend.

So Atlas flees,  
he desperately tries to find  
that world he knew,  
but that is buried beneath the sand.

The world has moved on,  
casting those who did not run after her  
into nothing.

In the end,  
there is only sand  
piling at the bottom of  
the hourglass.

Itself it is worthless,  
oh, but don't dare despair!  
What will *you* conjure with it?

