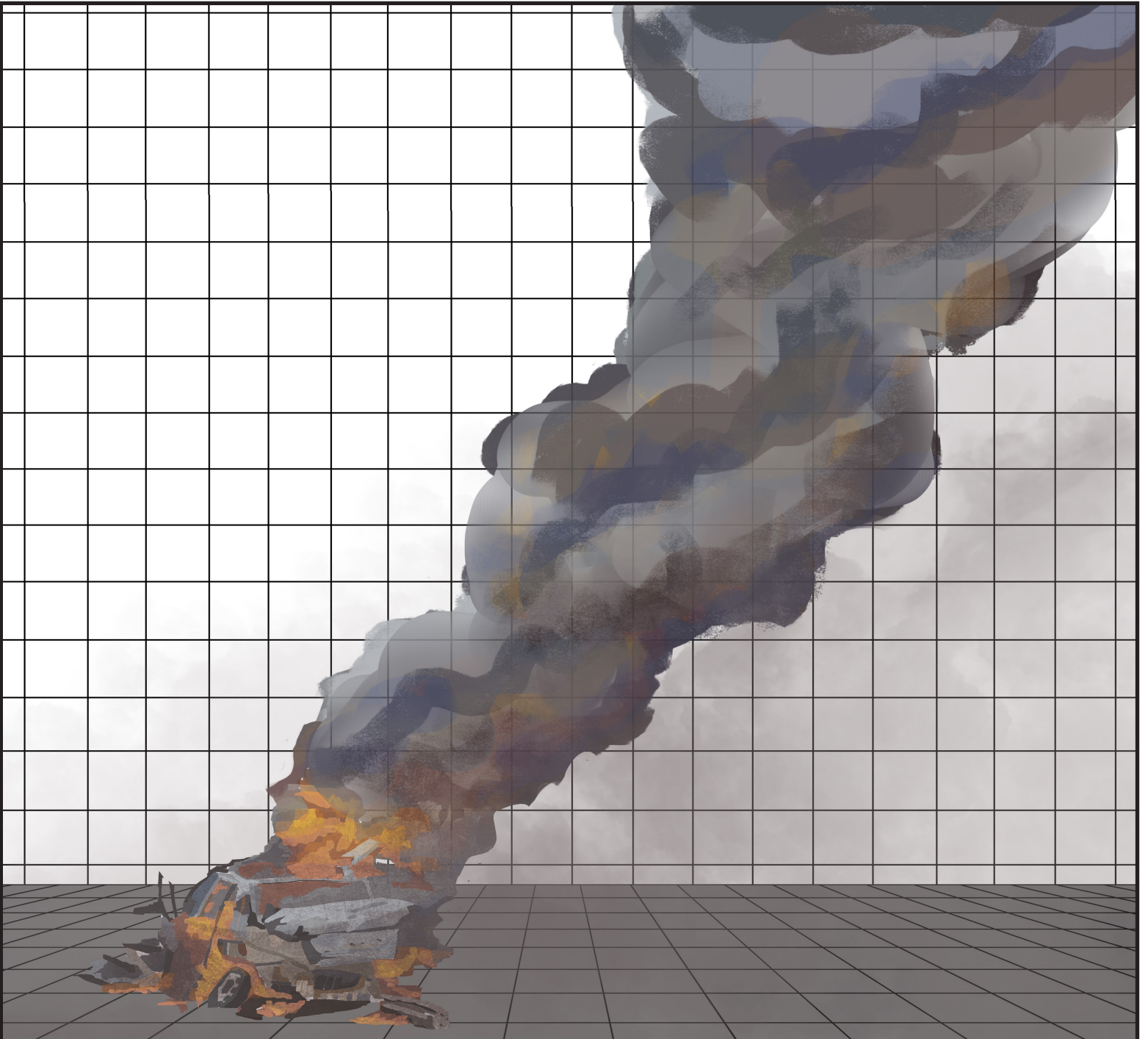


Look out! Look out!!!!
This week, the *Nass* is
about to crash and burn.

The Nassau Weekly



HEAD ON

November 6, 2025

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Volume 49, Number 16



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Trustees

Alexander Wolff 1979
Katie Duggan 2019
Leif Haase 1987
Marc Fisher 1980
Robert Faggen 1982
Sharon Lowe 1985

Dear reader,

I'm rubbernecking, realizing the distance between me and the blazing highway wreck is wiry thin. I look into the fire as if I can see into it, gazing at an ending rather than just melting metal.

There is always a source, someone or something before. Before the wreck, a tumble. Before the day, moon. Someone for whom I care deeply once told me that the key to good fiction is a strong sense of internal logic. The meaning: before the story, there is a world.

This week, Nass writers search for the rules and rhythm behind stories—the roots, blood, and fiery-hot insides that link our every step. They imagine an unpretentious amphibian world and the genetic ties between us and everything else; they search for meaning in a moonless birthday and in living with infinite shades of missing; they ask how Gazan priests can make homes outside Palestine and how we can reconsider our relationship with meat and pets. A pulse beats through their work, announcing a shared logic derived from a common past they are struggling to recognize. They gaze, and no matter where they face, the fiery wreck looks like a rising sun.

Take a step into the fire, past the carnage and metal scraps. Who knows what's inside?

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This Week:

Fri	2:00p-3:00p PUL Makerspace Making an East Asian Book: Japanese Paper Making	12:00p-1:30p Aaron Burr 216 Behind the Scenes: Brazilian Dictatorship and Documentary Filmmaking	Tues	4:30p-6:00p East Pyne 205 What is Anti-Fascist Theory?	6:00p-7:00p Labyrinth Books Althea Ward Clark W'21 Reading Series Authors Kaveh Akbar and Aracelis Girmay
Sat	2:00p-4:00p and 8:00p-10:00p Berlind Theater <i>A Moment of Silence</i> by Mohammad Yaghoubi	8:00p-10:00p Wallace Theater, LCA Graveyard Shift by House of Bones Theater Company	Wed	4:30p-6:00p Friend Center 101 Tanner Lecture: A Defense of Free Speech From Its Progressive- and Conservative-Critics	10:00a-8:00p Hurley Gallery, LCA the heart knows its own bitterness (Manifest): Exhibition by Abigail DeVille
Sun	2:00p -3:00p Tapling Auditorium, Fine Hall A Masterclass with pianist Shai Wosner	1:00p-2:00p Milbery Gallery, Art Museum Slow Looking Art Activity	Thurs	4:30p-6:00p Aaron Burr 219 Collateral Damages: Tracing the Debts and Displacements of the Iraq War	4:15p-5:30p Robertson 100 Dean's Leadership Series H.E. Andrzej Duda, Fmr. President of Poland and Dmytro Kuleba, Fmr. Ukrainian Min. of Foreign Affairs
Mon	4:30p-6:00p JRR A17 Capitalism and Its Critics: A History: From the Industrial Revolution to AI	5:00p-6:30p McCosh 50 A Conversation with Kimberlé Crenshaw and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.			

Verbatims:

Overheard on a group chat

Princeton student 1: "We're such fucking nerds."

Princeton student 2: "Dude, it's Princeton."

Overheard in Choi Dining Hall

Upperclassman: "You don't actually have to know anything to get a job."

Overheard at Sakrid

Patron: "My cousin just gave birth. And it ripped... to her ass."

Overheard in Dod quingle

Engineer: "I'm running an experiment in the apartment for a lab so don't be concerned if you see wires in the bathroom lol."

Overheard at NCW

Recent victim of 'playful' Bike Ramming: "Northern Europeans play too rough, like— he thought we were both having fun there."

Overheard in TriBeCa

Not-an-opera-person: "Sandra Oh is in an opera?"

Opera-person: "It's a speaking role."

Overheard in the Junior Slums

Someone who doesn't play around: "Has anyone told you that you are manipulative?"

Girl in boy troubles: "Well. Actually, yes."

Overheard in Firestone

Student who has been in the library all day: "I feel like I need to do something for myself for a change."

Another student: "What are you thinking?"

Same tired student: "Sleep."

Overheard in Small World

Friend discussing another friend's disposition: "I feel like you are a very chalcant person."

Friend being discussed: "Really? I take myself as someone who isn't non-chalcant at all."

Interjector: "Guys! You are talking about the same thing!"

Submit to Verbatims

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

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 by 10 p.m. on Thursday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!

Passenger Announcement

By MOMO SONODA

A soft chime. The PA system exhales with a crackle before speaking.

Good evening, passengers, and
welcome aboard Flight QTR955.
Please ensure your seatbelt is securely fastened.
Stow all carry-on
memories beneath the seat
or within overhead compartments.
Pack lightly—heavy luggage may slow ascent.
As we prepare for takeoff, take one
last look out the window.

This is the moment
before memory begins—
Daily messages become weekly,
become monthly.
You start replying slower,
leaving one blue tick unread.
Avoiding video calls because
Bahasa doesn't flow the way
it did when you used to sit at the dinner table,
watching shadows pass through
the wood-slatted garage door, itching
to ask the next person to open the gate
"Sudah makan belum?"
You'll revert to saying
"my homestay parents"
instead of *"my parents,"*
as if family has an expiration date.
As if life below were just a story to be retold.

You once called this place home.
You learned how to order *kopi*, apologize,
and disappear among strangers.
You memorized the rumble of motorbikes,
of bumps in the backstreets.
You made friends you promised to visit,
though we know *"visit"* is polite fiction.
You wonder if the baristas at your favorite coffee shop
will notice your absence tomorrow—
one less hot matcha latte to make,
one less smoked beef croissant to warm up.
If the pull-up bars in the park
will imprint shadows of your fingers in its rust.
If the next person to live in your room
will keep the curtains drawn—
the ones on the window facing into the kitchen—
or crack them open like you did, just
enough to catch the shadow of movement
of someone to share *ayam geprek* with.

At landing, have your passport ready,
its blank pages to be inked
with dissonant stamps.
Remember, customs cannot
process yearning.

When you tell them what it was like—
how you learned to dream in another language—
they will smile, ask if the food was good,
and call for the next in line.

You will tuck your stories away
(of rain that drummed down on
the hood of your flimsy poncho,
making cold tap water warm
against your skin; of Gojek drivers
who wordlessly switched
the AC on when the sweltering
heat caused your glasses to fog up)
Like contraband you've failed to declare.

We will be dimming the cabin lights shortly.
Look out once more, if you must:
Watch the city shrink to
winding roads and tin rooftops,
and the room with the window
that faced only inside.
Soon, it'll fold itself beneath the clouds.
You may close your window,
shut your eyes, and sleep.
But don't count on a good rest.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are now
entering a zone of turbulence.
Return to your seats
and fasten your seatbelts.
Dream of autumns
where leaves don't fall,
group chat planning a Friendsgiving
that you won't be back in time for.
Dream of winters
with a glaring sun,
the only Christmas tree basking in
the fluorescent shimmer
of a Disney-themed mall.
Dream of springs
where rains bruise,
do April typhoons
bring May flowers?

in Progress

Remain calm—this moment will pass.
Your dreams are just the Malarone,
or so you'll tell them when they ask
how your flight was. If you say
the plane shook,
and rattled, and sobbed,
they'll smile,
half-pity, half-I-told-you-so,
and say, *"Thank God
I never had to do that."*

Now, return your seat into upright position,
fold your regrets into your tray,
and ensure your memories
are properly stowed beneath
the seat in front of you.
We remind you to check the seat pocket
for anything you've left behind:
a language you almost mastered,
a bucket list with its empty checkboxes,
the you who thought coming back
would mean normalcy.

In a few minutes, you will feel
the soft jolt of arrival.
Do not mistake it
for belonging;
the air may smell familiar,
but it has forgotten your name.

Checked baggage from Flight QTR955
will be available at Baggage Claim 7.
Like you, some items
may have shifted in transit.
Report any damages to the nearest counter,
though replacements are not guaranteed.

So take your dented suitcase,
load it into the car you no longer drive,
onto the slow pulse of the 101,
and to the house that doesn't quite look
like how it did in your memory.
Bask in the familiarity of your bed —
memory foam with silk sheets.
When your body wakes
before dawn in one city,
chasing daylight halfway around the world,
you'll remember:
you carry two clocks within you.
Neither is set quite right.

On behalf of the flight crew, we thank you

for loving something that could never stay.
This is Flight QTR955, departing for home
(though for you, by now, "home" is plural).
It is an honor to carry you between selves.



shit in my blood

On veins that hold biology and memory in their skin-deep fault lines.

By WENDY WANG

I was thinking about what's in my blood and it's mostly genetic stuff but also a wasteland if you've read T.S. Eliot so if you're curious here's not all just some of the shit in my blood:

1. 55% plasma, mostly water carrying salt & proteins, tranquil medium that shapes time and space, the osmotic normalcy we take for granted
2. 45% cells, red and white and platelets and probably some mysterious thing my sixth-grade bio teacher never explained before the classmate who caressed his hairy forearm got him fired and stayed friends with his son
3. so much water, even though i cried until my throat drowned a summer pool, swallowed the concrete tiles during those chlorinated swimming lessons, tasted the lifeguard's sunscreen and celestial sadness boiling into blood
4. 7% protein, from chicken and protein bars and every prehistoric ancestor who ate someone else's great[^]34 grandparents then called it zeitgeist
5. 1% miscellaneous, sugar and fat and hormones and nicotine and backyard trash and administrative sins rotting under star stickers underneath our dining table, the illegitimate birth of my dad in Rome, the excommunicated priest known as my grandpa, the way my daughter already writes me emails asking for a new credit card
6. yes, that trace of nicotine, offered by a french man at an open air bar; i punched him for saying ni hao, he kissed me to apologize and exhaled smoke in my face then said "t'es si, si belle," and we ate pasta like angelic thieves and i said i could recognize you in either heaven or hell
7. iron, now let's get real dirty and talk about BLOOD, someone once told me period blood "mixes back into your circulation" and now i picture it as a private sabotage coming home, gorgeous and impolite and endearing, a rogue current blushing through the body, morphing into the red in lipsticks and colognes and someone else's pulse on my neck
8. snail blood and other accidental carnage, since i have stepped on more snails after the rain than i have been choked, the sound so soft in its immediacy, a shell's surrender weaving my guilt into the watery air of a city with 100% humidity, yet i never wrote poems about it, only kept walking
9. my mother's paranoia dissolving like salt into plasma causing the membrane to shrink and crinkle and wrinkle and wrinkle yes we adored those little star stickers still underneath our dining table and when i decided thirty minutes before the 16-hour flight to become employable again i slid under the table and she just asked if the stars were still there
10. officially known as hemoglossia, the site where language breaks down because look i only swear in English and only learned to do it right quite recently so that means i can really speak it now though i still can't swear at all in my native language but that's okay! i also wish i would never have to hear moans in chinese again, translate your pleas or stop
11. someone would have to say fuck language, right? my high school calculus teacher's silence, sticky like platelets and toxic like clots around my vessels and the bitcoins he mined on school computers and from graves my friend hexed who was burned on our school's building then granted a new life in the ER
12. a rehearsed FirstKiss aesthetic, practiced in mirrors to look as cinematic as *Amélie* and realizing oh that might not be me, not necessarily, so then i asked my younger brother if we could kiss and so *that* was my first kiss, with grape cocktails on our underage lips, our knees pressed against the cracked wooden floor, the taboo experiment that made me believe, for a short while, that those philosophers were right—what was aesthetic was indeed ethical
13. the EXIT sign burns either red or green but never Christmas, never that impossible harmony of colors resembling a forbidden romance, just the ugly sans-serif stretching at the end of the hallway, the other side of the theater, WHAT AM I DOING HERE? oh RIP Thom Yorke, you would've loved me, we could have been the coolest creeps together
14. enough embarrassment to strip naked just to offset it, the girl in third grade who smelled like vanilla and clean laundry and Shenzhen clouds probably wanted me more than i understood, and even now i still picture kissing her just because i couldn't have gone back and so i could stay a coward in this horrid present moment
15. the specific shade of green of the tote bag belonging to a professor who carries the air of libraries and the Seine to wage war, without realizing, against the ridiculous part of me that once wanted to marry someone in private equity, that i ended up making ruinous eye contact, all my Lufthansa fury flickering inside it, with this tall gorgeous man in academia, *GOD you are so devastating and you will never know*
16. the sound of chess clocks in a near-empty arena, the click that once crowned me a national champion now just counting down to my losses to a machine, the piano lessons i fled to as if those five sharp signs would have made me win that earlier match, the 9-year-old girl who could destroy me and whose two pigtailed disappear every time i run to her
17. parasites, meaning rumors i repeated once a backpack i stepped on once showers i keep taking to feel less evil though i remain a sinner with that hospital wristband from the day i bit into someone's lips and sucked out too much blood and even my mom says i am no longer a human being i know—

i KNOW i am a parasite myself because

all this shit, literal and metaphorical, keeps cataloguing bad choices like stamps on a passport and i've read too much Ottessa Moshfegh to reintegrate into this normal world which honestly isn't that bad but i need to sort all this data and sterilize the bloodstream so let's start over again:

1. 55% plasma, but it's actually 97% mundanity, random shit i may have invented just to keep you entertained
2. blood red for the art of it, injury as punctuation, an old voicemail i neither listened to nor deleted, a box of chicken nuggets buried behind a stained page that greasy fingers once pinched
3. coagulant syntax, the academy that taught me to be bearable and shut up and read micro-expressions and place parts of speech where they should land, the way i shuffle tarot cards and deal myself justice over and over until it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy
4. ambiguous toxins, *i like my men gagged*, a gym-floor one-liner dropped like my arms abandoning a 30-pound dumbbell, an ultimatum aimed toward nobody in particular, just to scare off men to the extent that they themselves choose the bear
5. profanity in my second language as a shield to the horrors of the first,



even when i confessed to my priest and therapist, i said the dirtiest things to both, i have never used deodorant in my life, i only produce odor deep inside my livers, one of which is donated to save a child who was dying from too much Advil and cocaine

6. those EXIT signs blinking again and again because i do need to exit at

at 4 in kindergarten or at 8 during a school shooting in California. i am still mostly water and so many random words. i inherited parentheses and commas and whispered sorry's and thank you's and still wonder if some greater deity would ever want me romantically.

this is but a geological fault line under my skin, sediment rising in a cloud of setting powder, the confessions leaving me mortified & safe & hollower than i imagined. i've set the wasteland on fire and all it does now is stink. if counting meant control if prayer was just punctuation if mom you're reading this if i keep gagging my men if every Gauloise i've burnt to its butt if every envelope of pig blood i've mailed to my grandpa if every chess match i've ever lost could all count as redemption, i might as well stop counting.

some point, perhaps not now, *then when?* you ask, i say *i don't know baby, i don't know*, maybe after i finish calculating this one section of this one segment of this one line

7. so there is shit in my blood and i might have given up trying to make it pretty since i lost my childhood

Wendy Wang *smells blood in the water, and strikes the Nassau Weekly at just the right moment.*

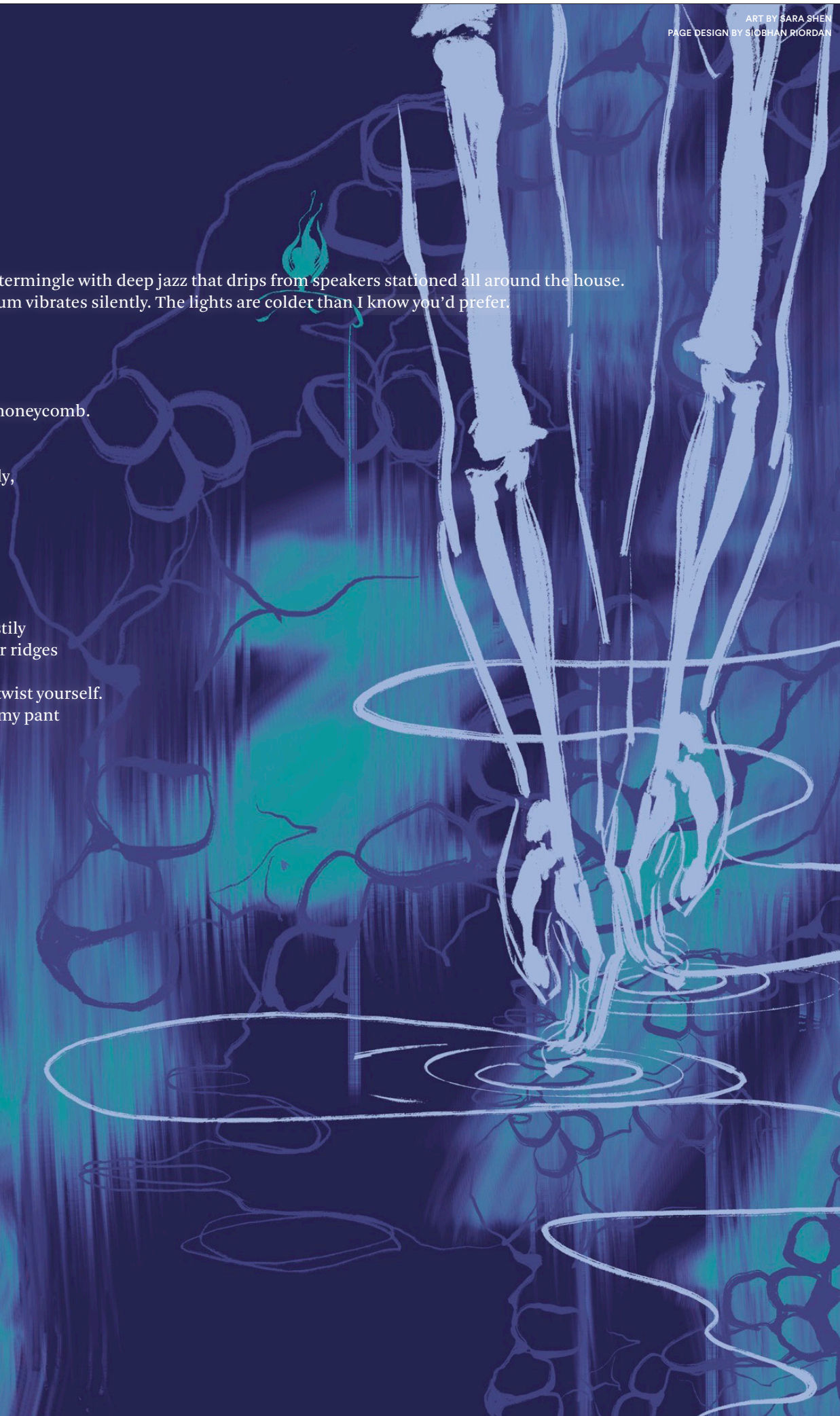
Jazz

BY MIRA SCHUBERT

We are in assembly. Voices intermingle with deep jazz that drips from speakers stationed all around the house. Something beneath my sternum vibrates silently. The lights are colder than I know you'd prefer. But I've got candles at home, with molten wax that oozes down far beyond the little sphere of gleaming honeycomb.

We become shoved together – and, not unwillingly, we give in. Our limbs loosely swinging in small ellipses.

The bone of my hip jerks to the right, the way your thumb flicks hastily once or twice over the familiar ridges of a lighter. Your body reflects mine: you twist yourself. But the faux leather fabric of my pant contours your bare thigh.



Moon, where are you?

A Nass writer ventures into the forest in search of moonlight's source.

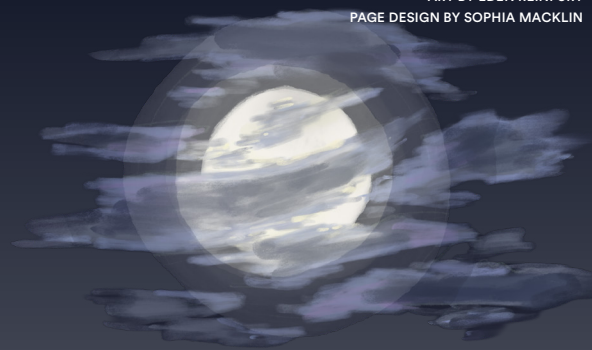
By LIVIA SHNEIDER

On my birthday there was supposed to be a full moon and I'm sure there was under the clouds but I got out of bed to see it and couldn't find it. I looked up on google where the moon was supposed to be (southwest) and looked there but all I saw were gray murky clouds with honey-like light spilling from the cracks of clouds in the shape of tree roots. Almost like lighting, but stagnant, just the light of the moon undercovers—taunting me. *I'm here but you don't get to see how beautiful I am.* I walked, nearly ran, and made large circles in the green lawn; an open field enclosed by what any sane person would think to be trees, but I could not see and so not confirm. Searching: I ran south to north, east to west, north-east, to south-west. And still no moon. I stopped my wild-goose chase. The cold air of night and damp grass climbed up my pinstriped pajama shorts. My bare feet were now covered in grass and dirt and all things natural. In the dark the sensation of nature was violating. In the cold, I became scared. Slowly, my focus revealed their bodies. They looked like monsters, lit only slightly by the moon's spectral glow. I saw their fangs, their claws, sometimes they even had wings. The tree monsters began to move. Branches snapping, small coos from their monster children begging

for motherly-attention. I am not their mother; and you know how bears get with their young. I must go home now. I couldn't see the ground beneath me but still I ran. Ran as if there was something chasing me because I believed that there was; my middle school PE coach—the one overweight and never shaven—used to say, *run through your feet if you want to get anywhere.* So I did, then I felt the ground beneath me. The field was hilly, wet and sometimes sandy. With each step my feet became colder and I still hadn't reached home. I could no longer feel the grass or the sand or the wet. I slipped. I stumbled. My knees buckling, falling down a large grassy green hill. It was not a beautiful fall, nor a dramatic one. In the light it would have been simply embarrassing, but here, covered in darkness, was safe, at least from other people. I sat. Knees pressed to my chest, hands in the dirt. My knee was bleeding. I couldn't see it but I knew it felt cold and wet too. The smell of metal filled my nose then mouth—I swallowed, relishing in every breath that confirmed I just might be real: I could see the leaves on the evergreen. And I sat there. At the bottom of the hill for just a while. No one was there to see me tumble, but I know I did. *If a tree falls in the forest and no one sees, did it really fall? But what if a tree sees you fall?* I looked up, the biggest tree of all before me; he didn't seem to care. I guess that makes me the tree; an inanimate, third-party, witness to my own fear of the things you're not supposed to be afraid of anymore. But anyways, I'm not a tree. So I went down to the grass.

I felt ants crawling in my pajama shorts, up my neck, in my hair. It itched, but I didn't. So I sat—grass on my ass. I wonder if this is what I had in mind for two decades of life. I looked for the moon one more time, she still didn't show. I made my birthday wish—it's always too hard to think that quickly when everyone is waiting for a piece of cake. I can't tell you what it was but I closed my eyes and pressed my hands together until a coherent thought of desire formed—the universe needs good syntax too. I parted my hands and opened my eyes to more darkness. It was time to go. I walked indoors, my eyes adjusted enough to see a path. Once home I looked around: limp party streamers, half-eaten cake (that now only spelled “app/rth da”), gifts unwrapped (I wonder if any of them actually know me), a gift I bought for myself (I wonder if I know myself), and champagne (popped and drained). Blades of grass stuck to my feet. I bent over to pick them away, recalibrating for the indoors. In doing so, I looked down at my knees: I was never bleeding. Stuck to my knees, the ones that harbored scars from what adults always called signs of a happy childhood which was now, evidently, over, was only mud and maybe what would be a bruise tomorrow. But I smelled blood. I swear.

Livia Shneider *grabs the Nassau Weekly by the hand and takes us in search of the moon...we can't see her, but she's probably hiding up there, in orbit, laughing at us puny humans. Classic moon!*



Letter to my cat (human nature)

A Nass writer wonders: how to live, how to be, and how to eat?

BY SASHA ROTKO

I wake up in the morning and then I put on my bathrobe and then I go to the bathroom and I take off my bathrobe and I take a shower and I am naked in the shower but the hot water feels like my bathrobe. When I really feel naked is when I get out of the shower and the water leaves my skin in droplets or is sopped up by my cotton towel. When I really feel naked is when my wet hair is stuck in the shape it was in while up in my towel and my body is dry and my bathrobe is off. But then I put back on my bathrobe and I brush my teeth, clothing my teeth, and I put on my creams and no, I am not naked, not anymore. And then I go back to my room and I get dressed and nobody is there this whole time but I am acutely aware of my body because I see it in the mirror when I take off my bathrobe and put on my clothes and, like a violation, like an intrusive thought, after it's gone its afterimage sticks in my brain and I can't get rid of it until I look at what I'm wearing for a long while such that when I leave my apartment the body I see when I imagine what I look like to others walking around is the one I last saw in the mirror and not that naked body with the water droplets drip drip dripping off of me, cold air coming in on me like a sphygmomanometer which is just a fancy word for a blood pressure machine.

One time I was babysitting my dog at home and I was sick so I wanted to take a bath so I ran the bath and my dog who I suppose was lonely decided to come upstairs with me and he was standing there looking at me and the bath and I didn't know what to do because

I shouldn't shut the door because he might get anxious and though he was on Prozac I worried about his panic attacks but also I had to get in the bath and I couldn't get in the bath unnaked but I couldn't undress in front of my dog. I didn't know what the feeling was, if I wanted to protect his innocence like he was some human child, until I read Jacques Derrida.

Derrida:

I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment.

Whence this malaise?

I have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety that comes of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. The impropriety of a certain animal nude before the other animal, from that point on one might call it a kind of *animalséance*: the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant. The gaze of a seer, visionary, or extra-lucid blind person. It is as if I were ashamed, therefore, naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed.

A reflected shame, the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself, a shame that is at the same time specular, unjustifiable, and unable to be admitted to. At the optical center of this reflection would appear this thing—and in my eyes the focus of this incomparable experience—that is called nudity. And about which it is believed that is proper to man, that is to say foreign to animals, naked as they are, or so it is thought, without the slightest inkling of being so.

Me:

What really is the difference between you and me, my cat? To be naked, that is to say to be ashamed, that is to say I care what you think, that is to say I think you can think, that is to say, I will kill you and eat you for food anyway? Well, not you, but something like you. Something with your nervous system, something with your ability to perceive and conceive. I suppose so. I guess I will sit down at the dinner table with my fork and knife and call my cow steak, call my pig pork, call my deer venison, call my chicken chicken—

We don't seem to care much about chickens, do we? Chickens are not protected under federal animal welfare laws. You can kill a chicken any way you please, you can torture it, you can burn it alive. You can electrocute it but not enough to paralyze it and numb its pain, and then you can make like the Queen of Hearts and not really mean it when you say "Off with your head," and try to execute it with a guillotine-like

machine but fail the first second and third times you try. And when it is finally done and dead, you can de-feather it and make it rotisserie or fried in the form of “fingers” or “tenders” and eat it all, eat all of the suffering it felt in its short life, which was contained to a cage. And in that cage, what was it fed? Chicken. Male chicks who could not hatch eggs, ground up live and sprayed all over the coop like water from a sprinkler. Good feed. That’s what you get, in a red and white bucket. I was going to say, “It doesn’t look like flesh anymore,” but when you bite into it it really does. Those fibers, that sinew, this flesh. Language, powerful enough to convince you that this isn’t a body. When you eat an animal is it like taking communion? Is this eucharist one that doesn’t have to be transubstantiated but already is the body and the blood? Do we better remember the sacrifice? To consume—to digest—to understand, it follows. To eat an animal—to consume it—to digest it—to understand it. It becomes a part of you. All that suffering, a tapeworm in your shadow colon, eating away at your shadow sustenance. And so you eat more.

I worked for a while at a children’s occupational therapy farm where there were chickens, rabbits, and horses. The children would arrive eager to play with the rabbits. The horses were too large to dominate and the chickens had feathers, not fur. But the rabbits did not like to be pet or picked up, something about vertigo. The chickens were the loving ones. I often did my chores with one perched on my shoulder and when ill (in the body or mind) I liked to hold those red and grey things in my arms, so warm, feathers softer than any fur, pillows, really. The chickens liked to be held, often protested when I tried to put them down, yearned to be touched. I know this yearning, we all do.

The difference between the animals we keep in our houses and the animals

we keep in the farmyard is the fact that the animals we keep in our houses probably wouldn’t taste very good. They are too lean.

Consider David Foster Wallace’s *Lobster*:

The basic scenario is that we come in from the store and make our little preparations like getting the kettle filled and boiling, and then we lift the lobsters out of the bag or whatever retail container they came home in ...whereupon some uncomfortable things start to happen. However stuporous the lobster is from the trip home, for instance, it tends to come alarmingly to life when placed in boiling water. If you’re tilting it from a container into the steaming kettle, the lobster will sometimes try to cling to the container’s sides or even to hook its claws over the kettle’s rim like a person trying to keep from going over the edge of a roof. And worse is when the lobster’s fully immersed. Even if you cover the kettle and turn away, you can usually hear the cover rattling and clanking as the lobster tries to push it off. Or the creature’s claws scraping the sides of the kettle as it thrashes around. The lobster, in other words, behaves very much as you or I would behave if we were plunged into boiling water (with the obvious exception of screaming).

A student at the farm asked me once why people who say they love animals eat animals and I didn’t know what to tell her. Maybe we eat them to eat our shame for having eaten all their friends. Maybe we eat them because they don’t look like carcasses in shrinkwrap in the grocery store freezers. Maybe we eat them because they taste good, or because everybody does. None of these reasons are good reasons. I love my dog, I don’t eat animals.

Sometimes I am playing with my dog,

and suddenly we both freeze and are looking at each other and both know that whoever moves first loses the game. Who is entertaining whom?

Derrida cites Michel de Montaigne:

Taking a man to task for “carving out their shares to his fellows and companions the animals, and distribut[ing] among them such portions of faculties and powers as he sees fit,” he asks, and the question refers from here on not to the animal but to the naive assurance of man:

How does he know, by the force of his intelligence, the secret internal stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he infer the stupidity that he attributes to them?

When I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me?...

The 1595 edition adds: “We entertain each other with reciprocal monkey tricks. If I have my time to begin or refuse, so she has hers.”

What to say about our relationship? I feed him. I walk him. We sleep in the same bed. Sometimes he lies on the couch with me and I watch television and he watches nothing. He does nothing all day, unless I give him something to do. Easy to think of this sentient creature we bred for obedience and other desired traits from another sentient creature as dumb, easy to say we are superior.

Derrida cites Jeremy Bentham:

It is in thinking of the source and ends of this compassion that about two centuries ago someone like Bentham, as is well known, proposed changing the very form of the question regarding the animal that dominated discourse within the tradition...

“Can they suffer?” asks Bentham simply yet so profoundly.

I think this is the wrong question. The problem with the initial form of the *question regarding the animal* was that we could not answer it. The initial question was, can they reason? Do animals have that classic attribute of *logos* that Aristotle used to distinguish us from bees and ants so long ago? We cannot answer this question. We can ask, but they will not respond in a way that we can understand or even endeavor to. We are discerning when it comes to which animals to eat (their bodies) but undiscerning when it comes to which to respect (their minds, none). We say “sit” and they do, we say “stay” and they do, but we are somehow certain that, because they do not speak to us in our language, they cannot think like we do.

What is an animal rights activist to do with this notion? Is one supposed to be taken seriously demanding respect to be doled out equally to man and (non-human) animal? No. The animal rights activist—Peter Singer—is to change the question to something we can answer, to something an MRI can answer. Can they suffer? Basically, how much do their nervous systems resemble ours? Very much, it turns out. We may not have fur or tails but if you slice us open we are all sort of the same. We have the same organs in similar arrangements. The same fibers, sinew, flesh. Same nerves, same pain.

Can they suffer? Yes. If we suffer, they do. We make them suffer.

But can they think? Roadblock, detour, turn around, tires screeching on the asphalt—can’t get away from that question fast enough. We can, we can think. That we know.

Derrida:

It follows, itself; it follows itself.

It could say “I am,” “I follow,” “I follow myself,” “I am (in following) myself.” In being pursued this way, consequentially, three times or in three rhythms, it would describe something like the course of a three-act play or the three movements of a syllogistic concerto, a displacement that becomes a suite, a result in a single word.

If I am to follow this suite, and everything in what I am about to say will lead back to the question of what “to follow” or “to pursue” means, as well as “to be after,” back to the question of what I do when “I am” or “I follow,” when I say “*Je suis*,” if I am to follow this suite then, I move from “the ends of man,” that is the confines of man, to “the crossing of borders” between man and animal. Crossing borders or the ends of man I come or surrender to the animal—to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself.

When you think about suffering—when suffering—it follows to think about nature. I think about nature often. Something *natural* is something defined as made without the intervention of humankind, but to some extent humanity was made without the intervention of humankind. Humans evolved by nature, *naturally*, it follows, what could be more natural than humanity? It follows, what could be more natural than human civilization, if the parts of our brains that guide us toward civil life are natural in themselves? Why draw this line at human intervention? That is to say we are above nature, to turn something natural into something unnatural. Basically, aren’t we all nature, which is to say, isn’t this all nature, which is to say what’s more natural than this mass extinction?

I suppose natural is naked. Naked is natural. What does it mean for me to get up in the morning and put my clothes

on? What does it mean for me to be paralyzed with my dog standing on the threshold between the hallway and the bathroom, unable to decide whether or not to take my clothes off and get in the bathtub? When the earth was still naked, all the animals lived in peace. This is a myth. When the earth was naked, the animals were all killing each other. When the earth was naked, there was violence. When the earth was naked, there were ice ages and climate changes and mass extinctions. *But there was balance*, you say. *Before humans, there was balance*.

The argument:

Humans have taken the balanced natural world and with their greed have taken over, have dominated in ways that are unnatural. Now the earth is not naked, not natural, and is in danger.

Mine:

The earth is fine. The earth has been molten lava before and will be molten lava again. Not fine? Us. Not fine? The idea that human civilization might die out at some point soon, that humans might be living on a planet that resembles our ideas of the “apocalypse”.

Samuel Scheffler:

Humanity itself as an ongoing, historical project provides the implicit frame of reference for most of our judgments about what matters. Remove that frame of reference, and our sense of importance—however individualistic it may be in its overt content—is destabilized and begins to erode. We need humanity to have a future if many of our own individual purposes are to matter to us now. Indeed, I believe that something stronger is true: we need

humanity to have a future for the very idea that things matter to retain a secure place in our conceptual repertoire.

Not fine? Our minds, knowing that our behavior contributes to this future; whether or not we “care” we contend with it, we feel this guilt. But oh, the earth is fine.

We are saying things the wrong way, asking the wrong questions, drawing the arbitrary line between animals that deserve to live and deserve to die at their ability to speak our human language when we cannot even speak it well enough to articulate what is really going on here. To eat or be eaten? To eat, in order to not be eaten? Language to express discernment, though the language is not the discernment itself. Oratory was invented for dubious matters. To orate, which is to say to misconvey.

Me citing Sarah Kay:

Humanity has long consoled itself with the belief that it has sole mastery over language—and therefore, mastery over everything.

Me:

We say language is inadequate, but we are not its masters, and therefore (it follows), we do not have mastery over everything.

The reality is, what I’m trying to say is.

Me citing Yiyun Li:

Words may fall short, but they cast long shadows that can sometimes reach the unspeakable.

Here are the words:

We all suffer from a special kind of anxiety that presents us with the right questions. But we have no answers, so we ask other questions. We ask, can they suffer? The truth is bright like the light of the sun. We can’t look straight at it. We cannot touch it. We cannot even get close. But it is there and its rays shine all over our world, everything the light touches.

Here is the shadow:

How to live? How to be? To eat animals or not to eat them? We can practice thinking through, but that is only one way to be. Logos is either not solely human or not necessary for living—see the cat—and beware the conjecture that conflates these two. And yet innate in human beings is our endeavor to understand, our greed, our desire to comprehend and apprehend. A God who demands to be believed in created us in His likeness—we demand to be believed in. We demand that if the earth is dying, it will be because of us. We demand to insert ourselves where nature is because we can, because the power of insertion lies in the power of dubious oration, authorial intervention, philosophy is fiction, but that is what we do.

The truth:

We follow nature.

Human nature in human terms. Life is entertaining each other with reciprocal monkey tricks and believing we are each the master. Life is comparing the air to a sphygmomanometer and believing that means something.

We wear clothes, and we can take them off but then we are naked and therefore ashamed—we are plagued by conjectures and our ability to make them—to the point where we cannot see things for what they are, including ourselves—but are we not to try?—so we aim at the truth of how to live and how to be but can never discern—this is not nihilism—this is optimism—it all matters in the sense that we must try to live in the sense that if we do not try what else is there to being human—to believe in our smallness like some believe in God—and yet to try to be big—that is our nature (we follow).

Sheep in sheep clothing. Life is wearing clothes. And (more to follow)

Reflections Inspired by “David”

Loss and belonging at Lorde’s show in Philadelphia.

BY SOA ANDRIAMANANJARA

*Why do we run to the ones we do?
I don’t belong to anyone*

It hits me on a Tuesday in September that I don’t belong to my own life. Nothing has ever engulfed me—nothing has ever outstretched its arms and held me tightly to itself. Every memory, place, person, everything has wrapped me in a loose embrace that I can easily fall out of but still keep the sensation of its touch. I realize this in Philadelphia, standing in the nosebleeds of a sold-out arena, drowning in a dark blue light. It feels like I am seeing Jesus, but I am really just seeing Lorde.

The Xfinity Mobile Arena is dramatically cold. I’m wearing a white button-up as an ode to Lorde’s outfit in the “What Was That” music video, but I wish I had brought a jacket. It’s the first concert in a while that I haven’t been in the pit, and the absence of others’ body heat is loud. The last time I wasn’t in the pit was also at a Lorde concert, during the Solar Power tour. Lorde was headlining “All Things Go,” the local D.C. musical festival. I stood on an outdoor balcony with my best friend Audrey, and we screamed “Aiyiyiyi!” when Lorde came out. Today, some people are topless, simply covering their breasts with gray duct tape, like Lorde did in the “Man of the Year” video. I wonder if they’re cold, too. The audience here feels sad—unlike the last Lorde concert, the audience does not buzz with drunk giggles. Clouds of smoke don’t blow over my head. Seems like everyone’s sober. Last time, everyone wore bright, sunny colors. Today, I’m with Grace, a girl I went to high school with, who ended up at Princeton, too. I’ve always liked Grace, but we weren’t close in high school. Last time, I went with Audrey, who bought a ticket for me without asking because she knew I’d want to go. The audience looks dark today, or maybe it’s the deep blue that pours over us all. Maybe it’s too cold to be excited. Maybe

it’s because it’s a Lorde concert, and we are all here to cry.

For the past three months, Lorde’s new album has echoed throughout my life. I played her in my car—my beautiful teal Mini Cooper Francesca, which my parents are probably going to sell—in my room, on my long walks around my neighborhood, where I tried to memorize each house in case they looked different when I came back. During “David,” Lorde steps off the stage and descends into the pit, where, clad in a glowing jacket, she struts across the floor. The audience, enthralled, parts for her, and all I can think is that I am seeing Jesus part the Red Sea, until I notice the hundreds of phones that have been whipped out to snap close-ups of Lorde’s face, and I remember I am really just seeing Lorde walk through a pack of Philadelphians. Lorde faces a cameraman whose job it is to make sure that her every move gets projected onto enormous screens on either side of the stage. I stare at her face on the screen as she sings, “Said, ‘Why do we run to the ones we do’ I don’t belong to anyone, ooh.” I thought “David” would be the song I cried to, but I have no urge to, anymore. I can’t see anyone else crying, and my friend, Grace, wears a wide smile as she clutches her chest and dramatically echoes Lorde’s every word. I don’t cry because suddenly “David” does not belong to me; it’s Lorde’s song. Lorde has been God to me, but to herself, she’s simply Ella Yelich-O’Connor. She wrote the song about herself, about her own life, about being groomed, about her own thoughts, and I’m just a fan who has occasionally wept to the song in the shower. If I acknowledge this truth, I fear that I’ll have to acknowledge the entire truth, which is that I am here now, without the past, and I have nothing holding me down. I’m frozen, hypnotized by Lorde’s lyrics. “I made you God ‘cause it was all that I knew how to do,” she continues. Lorde is taunting me—*think about everything good. Think about everything you had.*

“But I don’t belong to anyone,” she finishes the verse.

Think about everything you don’t have anymore. I accept her challenge.

1. My high school friends. We went to an all-girls school that had a uniform of a blue plaid skirt. For the last seven years of my life, I rotated between two plaid skirts. I had more skirts in my closet, but I never wore them because they were too long, and I didn’t want to roll my skirt an exorbitant amount. For the last seven years of my life, the one object my friends and I all had was this plaid. Our school wrapped around our waists. So many memories in those skirts—getting frozen yogurt after school, sitting in our principal’s office together eating Lifesaver mints, writing the names of the fallen soldiers—everyone who left our school—in the senior lounge. I know some of my friends gave their skirts to our school’s uniform thrift store. I still have mine, but I’ll never wear my plaid skirt again.
2. My parents. I am unleashed now. I have a mom, but now, I don’t have a mother telling me to get back home before midnight. I can get home—my dorm—whenever I please. I can get a tattoo now without my parents’ approval. Their disappointment might still engulf me.
3. Friends who share the same small world made up of all the same small places. D.C., as a teenager, is very small. Everyone knows everyone, and everyone goes to the same places. When we got froyo, we’d joke that our heads needed to be on a constant 360 swivel, ready to see whoever was soon approaching. I used to spend weekends at Compass Coffee, reading and doing homework. I never needed to ask anyone to come with me because I could guarantee you that my friends in the nightmare biology class would be there, huddled together over diagrams and term lists, and they’d always insist that I pull up a chair. I am no longer part of this orbit.

People will not expect to see me at Compass Coffee. People will not expect me at Yogitopi. If I show up, I will be an anomaly. My presence is now a shock to the teenage D.C. world.

4. My ex-girlfriend. I cannot call myself hers because I don't belong to her anymore. I don't belong to my fantasy that she could be someone—someone to take to the bakery on Sundays, someone I was terrified to lose, someone who wasn't embarrassed to fart in front of me, someone I got naked for, someone I introduced to my parents, someone whose absence was supposed to destroy me. Mercifully, I will never again beg for her. I will never beg for her to tell me how she feels. I will never again let her tell me I exhaust her. I have so many questions for her—how's your dog, do you think of me ever, does your younger sister still bully you, did you ask your mom to stop wearing my perfume like you said you would if we ever broke up, how is your day going, do you regret anything, can I still come to your mom and her boyfriend's wedding—but I don't care enough about the answers to go searching for them. I heard she still talks about us. She voluntarily wrote and read aloud a piece about me during her English class. The last text she sent me, she told me I was the most lovable person, and I wonder if that's how I came across in her writing. I don't miss her enough to think about her as much as I do.
5. Minorhood. I turn 19 in two months, and 18 hasn't hit me. I think I still look the same as when I was 17. The American court system does not see me the same. If I decide to buy a ski mask and a machete and then rob a bank, the courts have to send me to adult prison. "Charged as a minor" doesn't exist anymore. Juvy doesn't exist for me anymore. The facade of youth doesn't cover me anymore; my mistakes are real. I wonder if I still get second chances. I was really happy in

June. When I go back to my room tonight, my mom won't be across the hall. She will not ask me how my concert was. I look around the audience. If this were a concert at the Anthem or Capital One, I would know at least twenty other people in the audience. Now, I don't know anyone except Grace here. I know I'll be happy again, but I don't know what's going to make me happy here. I feel naked; every safety blanket has been ripped off me. Lorde is on the opposite side of the arena from the stage. The blue light is now black, and the only white light is on Lorde. She crawls onto a small platform that rises just above the heads of the audience members; she says something about how awesome the night has been, and then she plays a surprise song. Grace grabs my arm and screams along to "A World Alone." My chest is heavy, and I touch my cheeks to remind myself that I am here, not there.

I count five things I can see, four things I can touch, three things I can hear, two things I can smell, and one thing I can taste. All I taste is my own mouth. All I will ever belong to is myself, even though I will desperately crave more.

The final song Lorde plays is "Ribs." The last meeting we had as a senior class, our 91-person grade ended up in a circle, swaying together and crying to "Ribs." The first play I directed, I used "Ribs" as the exit music. My ex-girlfriend said she hated that song. Lorde belts out "I want it back," and as thousands of voices echo her lyrics, I can no longer ignore that aching, unfulfilled desire for what I will never have again—all that I don't belong to anymore. My old life really is not eternal, so I cry.

Soa Andriamananjara takes the Nassau Weekly on the journey of growing up, through the portal that is Lorde (who, by the way, is kind of like a prettier Jesus).



Three Years in the Shadow of Gaza

The Maher family escaped death, but what does it mean to rebuild what they've lost?

BY SAMUEL KENNEDY

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF the bombardment, Janette Maher imagined she and her family were adrift on Noah's Ark. She, her two parents, and her three children had taken shelter in the funeral halls of St. Porphyrius Church, one of three churches in Gaza. The church, which stood as a historical safe zone during Israel's routine air strikes on the Gaza Strip, housed about 500 Christians within its compound. As bombs fell around them, the survivors ate, prayed, and sang worship songs together.

When she was fortunate enough to get cell reception, Janette would send updates of the situation to her husband, Hanna Maher. Hanna, the only protestant pastor in Gaza, had been visiting Cairo for two weeks for a conference when the air strikes began. He was trapped in Egypt, separated from his family.

On October 19, at 10 p.m., as Janette was preparing to sleep, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) struck one of the church's buildings. She and her children watched as those around them dug through the rubble, trying to save any survivors. They were forced to heave the debris in pitch dark—Israel had blocked access to electricity in the Strip. Wails echoed in the funeral hall throughout the night. Finally, in the morning light, the corpses had been recovered. In total, 18 people died in the strike; among the dead were six children.

Weeks passed, and winter loomed. The church was running out of food. After finally receiving permission from border security, Janette decided to flee with her children to Rafah. This was an immense risk: She would be traversing a 40-kilometer trek across the front lines of an active warzone. Maher, terrified for their safety, waited on the other

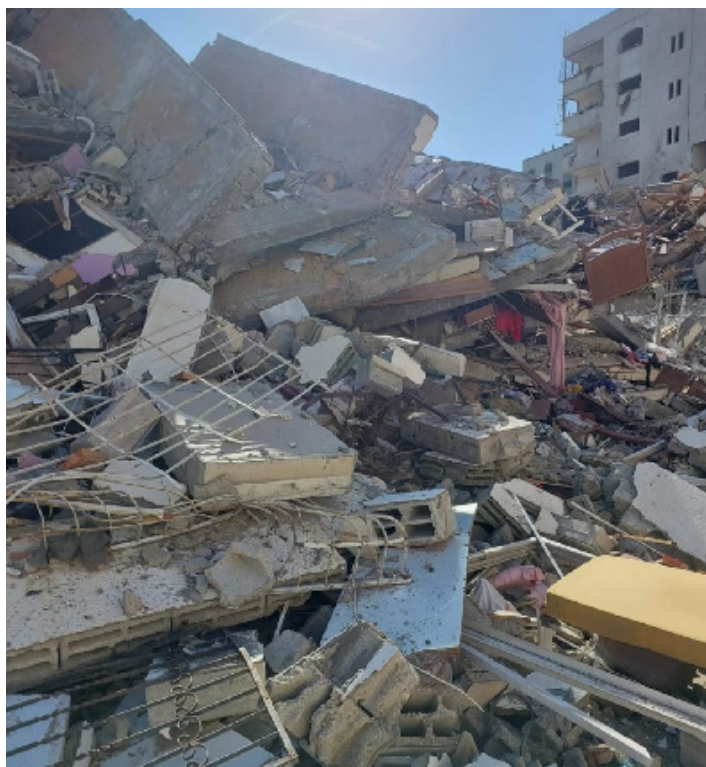
side of the crossing, searching for the faces of his wife and children amid the crowd. When they finally reunited, he was overjoyed to see them safe.

But trauma followed the children. "They saw Israeli tanks, they saw Israel attacking people, and people dying around them. They cannot forget that, I think," Maher said. "When they play, it's really violent." Maher showed me a family photo taken moments after they reunited. Only the children are smiling.

Timothy, the youngest, points a finger gun at the camera.

ON SEPTEMBER 14 OF 2024, Hanna Maher was stopped at the border checkpoint of North Sinai with 80 thick blankets stuffed into the back of his car. Armed guards took his ID, which revealed both his religion (Christian) and his occupation (Pastor). Then, they ordered him to exit his car and took him inside the checkpoint. They led him to a





concrete room, which, covering hardly a square meter, was more akin to a closet.

Time passed. Maher called out: “Give me my ID, and I’ll go back.” The young men guarding the checkpoint refused. Desperate, he tried lying: “I didn’t even want to go to the North.” Maher’s case had been reported to their superior; he was at the mercy of the Egyptian bureaucratic machine.

“God’s word is like a fire inside me, so I cannot be silent or stay,” he said, resolutely.

When Maher pleaded for water—after two hours of detention in the room—the guards ignored him. Maher was only permitted to enter North Sinai after he called the pastor of a nearby synod, who negotiated directly with the guards’ superior.

This was not the first time Maher had encountered complications at the North Sinai border. For every week of 2024, he drove aid supplies from his flat in Cairo to the city of El-Arish, 45 kilometers west from the Egypt-Gaza border crossing. The region has a history of Islamist terrorism, so security is tight, especially for Christians. “They say: you are a pastor, this is a fundamentalist area, so maybe you’ll be killed... for your safety, you cannot go,” Maher said. Then a smile crept up on his face.

“But we have three ways to the North, so I change the way, and it works.”

In the wake of Israel’s ground invasion of Gaza, El-Arish was the first stop for any Palestinians who were allowed entry into Egypt through Rafah Crossing. Over the next 12 months, more than 100,000 Palestinians entered Egypt through Rafah. These were, ostensibly, the lucky ones: either through foreign citizenship, foreign connections, or severe illnesses, these were the privileged five percent of Gaza’s population allowed an escape from hell. But arriving on the other side of Rafah Crossing was not the end of their arduous journey. Many traveled to El-Arish with just the clothes on their backs. Like Maher himself, they had lost homes, savings, and loved ones to Israeli bombs.

Each week, Maher ran a one-man, guerilla aid operation. He campaigned for funding and personally delivered everything: blankets, food, clothing, and even soccer balls, to the Palestinians who found themselves stranded in El-Arish. Work in that region is difficult and dangerous for a Christian, but he persists.

“I feel something from God inside me,” Maher quotes the book of Jeremiah: “You prophets who do nothing but dream go ahead and tell your silly dreams [...] Isn’t my Message like fire?”

“God’s word is like a fire inside me, so I cannot be silent or stay,” he said, resolutely.

Almost a year since escaping from Gaza, the family was only beginning to heal. “I just wish I could bring my kids past this difficult time,” Janette said over a breakfast of boiled eggs and milk. “We struggle to send them to school.”

“Sometimes I feel like Job, who lost everything, and doesn’t understand why it happened,” Maher’s voice cracked as he broke into tears. “I obeyed God to go to Gaza. Why did all this happen to me?”

In February of 2025, Maher and his family received the papers necessary to move from Egypt to Australia. The nation had opened its doors to thousands of Palestinians who fled from Gaza. With time, his children have displayed improvements in their mental health. They like Sydney, and there is a nearby community of Palestinians they can interact with.

It was an incredibly difficult decision to move. Maher continues to try to work as a pastor, although he has found some difficulties. “It takes a lot of steps to become a pastor here,” he lamented. “But I am working on it.”

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.

E p i l o g u e

By **SOFIA CIPRIANO**

In August, you were real and unreal.
Lying on the floor in sticky heat,
I wrote lines to you in my head,
Crossed them out.

As summer slipped I sensed the shape of you in fever dreams.
I told my friends it's like living with a ghost.

Counting the days until October,
When your edges came into focus.

Thinking of you is holding a good thing in my hands
I wish I could fold myself up and put myself in yours
You could put me next to my letters and read me at your pleasure.

I want to pin the different shades of feeling,
And map them with criss-crossed red threads.

This is an attempt.

**

The day before we said goodbye, I re-read White Nights
And thought about the midnight glow of the Charles Bridge,
About dreams and miracles and selfless love,
About closing the book.

You asked me many questions, but not enough.
Now I take refuge in the clean untouched corridors of my mind—
Take my solitary way.

I ask myself:
Did you want me as a stepping stone, a data point?
Did I want you as a teacher, muse, savior?
How productive is it, to locate the place where feeling starts?

No answer holds all the facts—
The feeling spills over.

I am hopelessly delusional and relentlessly analytical:
I put poems in spreadsheets; I mean my metaphors literally.
I sort my life in quarterly cycles of enchantment and disenchantment.

I ask myself:
Had I not asked you what, exactly, you thought love was, would we be in it?

When I think about you I poke at the joints between words.
I want to flood your mind with light: perfect knowledge of you.

I should have asked you:
Do you conceive of yourself as a fixed entity?
What does your family do for Christmas?
Do you usually dream at night?

**

Before I met you, my mind was a cacophony:
Curtains singeing, billowing out black smoke
Thinking, constantly, that I wanted my mind back, like it was before.

*...their eyes how opened, and their minds
How darkened; innocence, that as a veil
Had shadowed them from knowing ill, was gone...*

Last spring, reading Paradise Lost,
I thought about experience and knowledge,
And wondered if this was my new mind-shape,
If the suffocating would be perpetual.

Now I think the dust has settled.

**





On the flight home the sun sinks, glows red—spectacular
And the Adirondacks stretch out to me in soft embrace
And the shimmering cityscape over the Jersey turnpike—
Inexhaustible variety of life, thrumming. Initials sealed in concrete.
Tied to it all still: an umbilical cord.

Your country saps color from the sky,
From my cheeks on the long walk back.
Flush from the warmth of your bed, fading—
I press my hands to my face.

I never told you why I was so ready to leave Prague:
I started to get a clawing feeling in my throat, tightness.
This has happened to me, whenever I stay in a place too long,
Ever since I left New York.

Maybe there are infinite shades of missing:
Missing people, places,
Versions of yourself.

I ask myself:
Will I ever be unhaunted?

On the plane I hold a slim red volume of Anne Carson.
When her lover left her,
Her heart snapped in half and floated apart.

I realize I feel unsplit—
But one day *unbelief* started:

She used to know she had two hands
But one day she *awakened on a plane of people whose hands occasionally disappear*.

I awakened and I can't hold on to anything—shapes slip.

What she pins: Love is an epistemological crisis.
Experience re-scaffolds hearts and minds

And disappears hands.

**

At home it is bright blue and crisp, cool wind and crunchy leaves
I wake up to swallows swooping, swerving.
Your shirt still smells like you.

In the kitchen my father makes me coffee
My mother strokes my hair
My sister wants to go apple picking.

I wrap a red scarf around my neck,
Pull boots on.

Looking out the window on the drive,
I hope your here and now is good
And your sky is clear.



Notes: *Take my solitary way* is a paraphrase of the last line of *Paradise Lost*; *Inexhaustible variety of life* is from a description of New York in *The Great Gatsby*; *Swallows swooping, swerving* is from an especially ecstatic passage in *Mrs Dalloway*. All Anne Carson references are to *The Glass Essay*.

Frog Story



By MATTHEW PICOULT

First, imagine there is a frog world. A frog world where frogs ride frog bikes and drive frog cars—and every once in a while there's a frog motor accident, but the frogs move on and the frog world keeps spinning. Imagine the frog housewives in their frog kitchens. They cook frog meals and tend to frog children. Frogs have jobs and they work daily and have fun on the weekends. Some might have gone to frog college after frog high school. Maybe they have a frog president with a frog cabinet and a frog government. Do you think frogs are democratic socialists or not? Frogs have free speech and peaceful protests often—they like to know that their frog voices are heard.



Now, imagine the frogs are in your home. They live inside your cabinets and make bread on your countertop at night. Some of the frogs pour the flour and others crack the eggs. And when they put the pan in the oven some frogs might burn their frog limbs. Maybe they get a few extra worms for their frog worker's compensation. Maybe all the frogs are there in their own frog world—taking one frog day at a time. Once, you saw a frog slip underneath



the basement door but he was just running home from work to his frog family. He carried a small briefcase and wore his very own pair of corduroy frog trousers. Perhaps his frog wife had already fixed his supper—flies, because worms have too much cholesterol. After dinner he wraps up his little frog child in a leaf and kisses her goodnight on top of her little frog head. He retires to bed but lies awake. He wonders what would've become of him if he never went to frog college, never took the frog office job—if he left his old frog pond and saw the wider frog world for himself. He was once a large-eyed tadpole with even larger dreams. But now he's a frog and he has to take care of important things like his frog retirement fund or his frog credit score. After all, no frog wants to be five years old and still hopping around ponds like a deadbeat.

Now, imagine you live with the frogs and they accepted you as one of their own, would you accept them as your own kin too? You share a frog-brewed beer with a frog stranger as he divulges his frog secrets. Maybe he fought in a frog war when young frog men were shipped over-frog-seas to die for the glory of their frog nation. They used lily pads as their bases of operation and

made tactical advances into enemy-frog territory. Some frog villages were destroyed in the frog-fire but they had to keep fighting. Lots of frog blood was spilled, but eventually the frog generals said that they had won the war and sent all the frog soldiers back home. The frog stranger lost his hind leg when he stepped in a booby-trapped shrub so he can't leap anymore. Now he lies on a bed of cattails as he shows you his frog-medals: a spotted green heart for his wounds in action, the presidential medal of frog-dom for his bravery.

Now, imagine you are a frog and you know that all your frog flesh and frog blood is shared with your frog brothers. What kind of frog would you be? What would you do if your own frog brother wronged you? Would you scorn him and hide among the milkweed in a dark corner of your pond—or learn to forgive for the greater good of the frog world? Frogs are interesting characters—they are passionate and altruistic and look forward to holidays. They are opinionated and amicable and sometimes they wish to make more of their frog-selves.

Sometimes a frog takes another frog's life and has to go to frog jail. I don't ever want to go to frog jail.

The Nassau Weekly gets a glimpse into the realm of frogs through the eyes of Matthew Picoult. We're happy to report that it's not all that different. Also: ribbit.

