

Subject of this week's fever dream: post-colonial cuisine, scrapbooking, and sexual fantasies of our lord and savior Jesus Christ.

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Dear friends,

Wildfire haze has made this summer season one for spectating. Two hundred and fifty American years came and went, a milestone received passively, if willingly. In our first issue of the semester, I am happy to report that new contributors refreshingly shift our focus elsewhere.

Something about summertime makes me want to use lots of words that start with the letter s. It's a sticky season, a sweet season, a time for serendipity and salaciousness and sports and the sand.

Subject of this week's *Nass*-induced fever dream: post-colonial cuisine, scrapbooking, several mentions of the Lower East Side, and sexual fantasies of our lord and savior Jesus Christ.

Sanctimoniously,
Sasha Rotko, EIC

Masthead

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This Week:

OPEN HOUSE

THE NASSAU WEEKLY MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7
POE FIELD @ 5 PM



Verbatims:

Overheard on the Lower East Side

Crowd, chanting: "Raise her dosage! Raise her dosage!"

Egalitarian: "I wish psychiatry was also democratic."

Overheard in Midtown Manhattan

Underworked intern: "Sorry, had to go hit my boss' vape."

Overheard at the National Mall

Pool reflector: "Who knew swamps were so costly."

Overheard at Move-In

Concerned empty-nester: "Even pretty girls have STDs."

Overheard at a resort pool

Mother: "I've only ever known non-binary women. Never a non-binary man."

Daughter: "Mom, you can't say that. That's not how it works."

Overheard in Williamsburg

Scared pedestrian: "Watch out for the Hasidic kids. They're deadly on scooters."

Overheard in Jordan

Forward thinker: "You know grandma's liberal but even I have concerns about her BBL."

Overheard in Bushwick

Liberal: "What are we going to do when Azalea Banks converts to Islam?"

Overheard in Copenhagen

Asian: "All people eat here is whole wheat toast."

Overheard in Copenhagen

Patriotic Dane: "Have you tried this Danish drink? Very Danish. It's called yerba mate."

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

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Exercises in Scrapbooking

On Bolivia, and the practice of pruning one's memory.

BY ANNABEL THOMAS

I spent nine months in Bolivia, and I don't know how to write about it. I don't know how to explain it, either, not to the sea of well-meaning acquaintances who ask impossible questions like, "How was it?" and not to myself.

[My homestay at night. Brick walls bristling with green and brown shards of broken glass to discourage intruders. Doña María's spasmodic coughs, which entered my room through the foot-long gap between the door and its outsized wooden frame. Darkness punctuated intermittently by the yellowish light of passing cars. The cries of the neighbors' baby when he woke up hungry, or was jolted from a nightmare.]

I spent nine months in Bolivia, and there I learned many things, including Spanish, how to wash clothes by hand, the utter incommunicability of everything, the situation of women's rights in Cochabamba, and the importance of scrapbooking.

I entered Bridge Year already determined to scrapbook. Several alums of the program had advised me to do so, and beyond that I thought it would be conducive to my two main goals for the year—Self Discovery and Collecting Interesting Stories to Tell My Progeny. But once I reached Bolivia, keeping a scrapbook became a necessity. I was thrust abruptly from a life that at least loosely followed convention into one that was totally inconceivable to nearly everyone I knew. My friends and family did not share, and could not not comprehend, the most everyday parts of my life in Bolivia. As a result, each thing I did seemed very precious and very singular. I felt an extraordinary pressure to remember as much as possible. Scrapbooking became a safeguard against my terrifyingly fallible brain, an archive of otherwise forgettable moments.

Two months ago I returned to the United States. Already, Bridge Year feels estranged from my life: a string of static, disconnected scenes.

[Buses with cracked windows that,

due to some distantly concerning mechanical issue, tilted too far to the right as they drove. Interminable night buses full of snoring passengers whose limbs spilled out into the aisle. Buses with air conditioning and Mennonites. Buses populated by an ever-rotating cast of vendors who boarded and unboarded at unmarked junctures, selling chicken with rice or the cure to colon cancer. Buses that wended along mountains; buses that squeezed between mountains; buses that sputtered over mountains. Buses surrounded, invariably, by an endless sea of mountains—awkward, hulking things, carpeted in green, and round in the strangest places. Above them: the stars, innumerable and dim.]

[That festival in Tiataco where hundreds gathered to celebrate their dead with games and dancing. Children darting over the hard earth, candied apples sticking their fists. Around them: carob trees, their thick branches curling upward like fingers, the grove like a hundred hands lifted in supplication to the flat sky.]

[The horizontal moon, suspended over the mountains like a shallow bowl from which the stars spill out across the sky.]

A scrapbook cannot contain everything, or even most things. To me, scrapbooking became practice at paring down the world, at choosing which bits of reality to keep and which to discard. Each kept object was memorialized, creating a collaged narrative of my life, of myself.

And then there are the images in negative, which I remember only as absences, things already forgotten. [Spare words in Spanish. The texture of the sidewalk outside my favorite corner store. The face of the street dog who walked me to work. The weight of cutlery.]

If we are lucky, we get to hold onto the scrapbooked details; often we keep nothing at all.

I spent nine months in Bolivia, and I don't know how to write about it. I can't help but feel that in trying to, I am documenting things already half-lost to me—and that the act of writing, like scrapbooking, only distances me

further from the thing itself. I try to write, and I excise my own memories; I omit details; I smooth out a vast, complicated reality into a single narrative. Someday, I worry, these Arial-font simulacra will be more real to me than my actual memories.

I hate the idea of it, but I am unable to write about anything else; my words circle a geographical center like water circles a drain. I have unfinished business; I excavate the past unceasingly, overturning the same patch of earth in search of something still unknown to me.

That same compulsion often leads me back to my scrapbook, too. I take it out from where it's stowed in the bottom drawer of my bedside table, and I comb through it looking for clues: there, underneath the baggage claim check (BOG to LPB, 20 Aug 21:25). Between the disintegrating leaf of a carob tree and the green teabag packet (Mate-cito, Calidad Superior, Cont. Neto 1.5g, PRODUCTO BOLIVIANO). In the crinkles of the foil wrapper of the single chocolate egg I managed to find during my homestay family's Easter egg hunt. Or among the forty-odd pages of similar things, glued or taped into the warped pages of my gray book. But it—whatever it is—eludes me. I am left only with a sense of loss, an absence I feel but cannot name.

My mother (herself a writer) visited me in Cochabamba at the end of May. She was enthralled by the minutiae: [convoluted bus routes, dark tangles of telephone wire, my homestay sister's shorn head]. "Are you writing this down?" she asked me constantly. "You should write this down!"

I am still trying to follow her advice. But all of my jotted observations and essays and crumbling scraps of things are not enough. We approximate what we can; the rest, unpasted or unpasteable, falls noiselessly through the gaps between pages, the gaps between memories, the gaps between words.

For the Nassau Weekly, Annabel Thomas chronicles an attempt to chronicle, deftly navigating the sinkholes of memory to grasp at the few still-aboveground items that improbably remain scrapbook-able, and, thus, remembered.

Lego Pictures

BY JOEL GRIFFIN



I picked up LEGO photography as a hobby a few years ago, and these are some of the photos I have taken, themed around the 501st Legion Clones.

Nass Recommends: The New Museum

Returning to a Lower East Side home for contemporary art.

BY MANNIX BEALL-O'BRIEN

The Lower East Side is a bear-rug of a neighborhood: a once-vibrant arts community taxidermized into an endless string of vanity boutiques. As one passes twee establishments like a lifestyle-brand café selling 200-dollar plastic shirts, it's hard not to wish for a great flood to wash it all away. It is completely uninhabitable during an NYC heatwave. Delirious and aimless, my party stumbled into a striking building that seemed to tower above the surrounding row houses: a building that looked as if someone bulletproofed the stacked blocks of a toddler. For all we cared, it could have been built on a fault line. It was like the air itself ushered us through those doors. Fortunately, that chance encounter with generous air conditioning led to a real day of culture.

The New Museum is Manhattan's first institution dedicated exclusively to displaying contemporary art. For almost a decade after its founding, it was a museum without a permanent address. First envisioned as a place entirely for the works of the living, it took an AIDS crisis for that rule to even slightly waver. While its focus has since expanded, its service to emerging ideas remains intact. As it grew into a tall cast-iron building, it matured into a temple for the surrounding counter-culture. Now, although it resides in a veritable architectural feat, the New Museum feels like the only record left of its neighborhood's scrappy art scene of yore. Recent renovations have doubled gallery space with a glass building that juts from the gray tower like crystal from a host rock. As it turns out, I had accidentally caught the tail end of its grand reopening exhibit, *New Humans: Memories of the Future*. This impromptu trip was far and away one of my favorite museum-going moments of the year,

and one of neighborhood-redeeming magnitude.

As I wandered through sections named "Homunculi," "Dream Machines," and "Prosthetic Gods," I could just feel there was something special about the show's curation. Artistic Director Massimiliano Gioni describes the exhibit as interrogating the "similar conditions of technological transformation...between the 1920s and today." Throughout the gallery, striking piece after piece captures how artists process the upending implications of "progress," whether in conversation with the conveyor belt or the chatbot. Works like Jenna Sutela's "HMO Nutrix" (a fountain filled with artificial breast milk) or Anicka Yi's floating "aerobes" (jellyfish-like robots that stalk visitors from the sky) have since stuck with me just as much as the Francis Bacon across the hall.

It's no secret that significant swathes of Gen Z have the neo-classical taste in art of an arms dealer. One of the many things I loved about *New Humans* was the foothold afforded to that audience by organizing halls around these looming paradigm shifts. Room themes like "Reproductive Futures" connect visitors to transgressive works by embedding art within their unprocessed anxieties. By daring visitors to say their 6-year-old could make "HMO Nutrix," this curatorial philosophy centers the utility of art in a world of CRISPR baby startups. Although the artists it typically displays aren't breaking Sotheby's records (yet), its embrace of tech feels nothing like a funhouse or Exploratorium. From robots to video art, and readymades to paintings—this museum is filled entirely with pieces that deserve to be mulled over. The New Museum has convinced

me it's not novelty or gimmick. This transgressive temple to contemporary art returns groundbreaking artistic experimentation to a neighborhood that has long been mined for parts.

Mannix Beall-O'Brien *makes a new case for visiting the newly renovated New Museum in New York City's Lower East Side... we knew you'd need to hear it from the Nassau (New-ssau) Weekly at the start of a new school year..... v (Greek letter "nu").*

tonsiled

BY EOJIN PARK

the slug of your body lies dead upon the floor; it squirms for a funeral without a casket.
I make a bad Schrödinger joke: my cat died but did it ever exist?
should I put a box over it? this is an empty plot for you.
no, there's no point. no rise towards denouement.
you're already dead, torpid climax, I know.
but endings are important. there is never a prolonging,
yet this dialogue must continue; swiftly, before the monsoon season,
tape our bones' corners into roundness, no edge, while our mouths run agape with moss.

Venetian Ceruse

BY EOJIN PARK

Into a new hide I slip and stand; I can't heed this branded waterfall.
I've withstood another drowning, but I am oyster-shut and clammy:
no more, no more hurt. Mechanisms for torture, miniscule good.
Still I live by perfection's principle, worship every follicle,
administer deathly roses and rub salt all over my pores.
Sand in my nose, feet in watered jade, aural smoke threaded in every feature.
Your portrait is flawless as ointment, my modern Venetian ceruse:
I'll rub the lead in all the more, brighter than your brush-stroked face.
Each treatment makes me immaculate; a step closer to you.



On Health, Colonialism, and What it Means to Eat

On fried, sweet, post-colonial Indonesian cuisine.

BY KONGYANG ZHU

During my Bridge Year experience in Indonesia, there's one word I'd hear over and over again every day: makan, meaning to eat. Sudah makan, have you already eaten? Makan lagi! Eat more! After stuffing a spoonful of whatever is in front of me into my mouth, my reply is the same every time: enak, *tasty*! Enak sekali, *very tasty*!

It's considered polite to say that you enjoy the food. During orientation, our instructors warned us that expressing dislike of a food is frowned upon; if it's really not to your taste, you can say saya suka sedikit, *I like it a little bit*, and your ibu¹ will understand your feelings about the food. We were also warned to be careful about expressing preference for something—if you ate a couple of chip packets from a specific brand, those crisps would become a staple on the living room table for the rest of the year.

To share and compliment food is a common kinship-building tradition across a wide variety of cultures, and the verbal act itself is a familiar practice. However, living in an environment with a foreign tongue—both linguistically and gastronomically—encourages a curiosity about the contents and act of such communions, as well as their historical origins. Hence my observations regarding food in Indonesia: as I participate in the daily rituals of eating and talking about eating, I developed a curiosity for the formative relationship between its national diet and the various histories that contributed to its present state.

As the most common topic of conversation, food remains the most accessible window through which to observe Indonesian life. Each morning, as I step

out of the shower, the cool water forcibly turning on my sleep-addled brain, my ibu would turn from the dining table towards me and smile, beckoning me for sarapan, breakfast. At the university, my Indonesian language teachers will rant passionately about snakefruit and Javanese pastries when we're supposed to be learning the seven meanings of the ber- prefix; my NGO coworkers often greets me with fried cassava and hot tea; my taxi driver always starts the conversation by asking about my favourite Indonesian dish. In the evening, when my ayah² greets me at the door, he'd always ask makan malam? *Ready for dinner*? If my ibu finds me lounging on the couch, she'd gesture toward the living room table, where jars of saltine crackers and cookies line up as treats for future guests. It feels like the most important thing for them is that I don't go hungry. It's nice to be cared for, I think, even if it's overwhelming at times when I fend off my ibu's advances by circling my palm on my stomach while emphasizing that saya kenyang, *I'm full*.

Having lived in Asia for the majority of my life, being pressured to eat until you're filled to the brim was not a new experience. What surprised me were the comparisons in diet and cuisine: though the year has opened my palate to enjoy many new textures and spices, the aromas here have reminded me warmly of home the moment I've arrived—the scent of garlic and chopped scallions frying in the pan is recognizable to anyone who frequents night markets on Chinese streets; the thin, flat noodles used for kwetiau happens to be my mother's favourite Cantonese order, though my region favors salt over sugar. Whenever I eat bapao, I'm reminded of the piping hot char siu pork buns I used to grab from convenience stores before running to school. Some hundred years ago, Chinese traders sailed to Indonesia for trade, and through settlement had woven themselves into the

grand tapestry of Indonesian culture—a thread that threatened to break many times in history³—woven by people who I had never and will never know; it is this thread that, decades later, speaks to me through a whiff at the stall, a steamed bun in my hand. Now tell me history is an irrelevant subject to our lives. Tell me how you can separate the economic from the cultural, the cultural from the political, the political from the personal, and still attempt to articulate a true story.

I am selfishly grateful that part of the culture I call home is alive and well there; culture, like people, is rarely isolated and fixed in place. But what differentiates between a culture and diaspora that emerged as a result of trade and integration, and a culture whose method of entry was racist violence at its purest form? How does a decolonized nation reconcile with a past so thoroughly etched by the direct and indirect influences of a colonizer culture? How does the tapestry of culture survive and evolve even when burdened with additions that, though woven in harshly and unnaturally, has already become part of the art?

The answer is again articulated with a culinary example. It didn't take long for me to observe how Indonesian cuisine is not particularly healthy. This is not meant to be a generalization: sayur asem (vegetable soup) is a specialty here, and it's almost always present on the dinner table, mostly in the form of a clear soup with sweet potato leaves and bits of chopped corn. Next to the vegetable dishes, however, almost everything is deep-fried, or sweet, or both. Fried tempeh, fried eggs, fried pieces of dough; fried rice is often had for breakfast; lunch is always either a fried chicken drumstick or fried fish. There are so many kinds of fried street snacks that there's even a word for it, gorengan, literally meaning “fried thing”. Not to mention the overwhelming sweetness of everything: the sugary pitchers of es teh cooling in the fridge, the gula aren

1. Ibu is a common Indonesian term of address for adult women, though it formally means mama. Here, I'm referring to my homestay mother.

2. Ayah is the Indonesian term for father.

(palm sugar) present in cups of coffee, the deep-fried banana drizzled in caramel and matcha sauce that my ayah brings home after work. Everything is incredibly delicious, of course, but I soon became worried about the nutritional consequences of consuming such a high amount of oil and sugar.

What I've read on the Internet about nutrition tells me that this amount of carbohydrates and fat and sugar are bad for me—yet this is what people eat, and, as I remind myself, I am here to live as people live. Yet these reminders often fail to silence the alarms ringing in my head. Each time someone offers me something fried and sweet, a dilemma occurs: accept, and I will be forcing myself to eat something I know to be bad for my body; refuse, and not only am I being impolite, but I am refusing the experience I joined Bridge Year for in the first place.

It is not difficult to find evidence to demonstrate that diet, like most aspects of culture, developed as a result of specific historical conditions. Colonialism is unsurprisingly at play: 19th-century Dutch colonial administration on Java island implemented the *cultuurstelsel*, which forced villagers to choose between using their land to cultivate export crops like sugarcane and laboring in a government plantation for sixty days each year. As a result, the Jakarta Post estimated that sugarcane exports “accounted for a third of the Dutch government’s revenue”. Excess sugar was available in cities such as Yogyakarta, where the Sultan’s sugar factories were located, which built the foundation for the essential sweetness of Jogja cuisine. Even now, a preference for sugar is deliberately engineered by multinational food companies that benefit financially from sugar addiction: for example, Nestlé was famously exposed for including large quantities of added sugar in baby food, specifically for versions sold in lower- and middle-income countries, cultivating a taste for sugar from infancy. The preference for gorengan tells a similar tale: the extractive economic system that the Dutch colonial government implemented in Java was a major

cause of widespread poverty. Gorengan was popularized in response to material hardship: since fried foods require minimal technique to make, are cheap to produce (especially with palm oil, another major Indonesian export product), and can stay intact for longer in the warm and humid climate, fried foods became a central part of the modern Indonesian diet.

I find it difficult to reconcile the opposing worldviews: that I should enjoy the delicious cuisine and appreciate its significance in Indonesian culture (which I do), and that I should celebrate a culture that would not have manifested the way it did without colonial exploitation and the conditions of poverty colonization creates. In the aforementioned reflection about health, a similar pair of statements arises: that food at its core is nutrition and fuel for my body, and that food is fundamentally a vessel for connection and care. To be frank, I don’t know how to resolve these two sets of contradictions—how to view cuisine as both culture worth celebrating and as evidence of injustice, and how to understand food as both crucial for physical health and for building community when the aims feel opposed to each other.

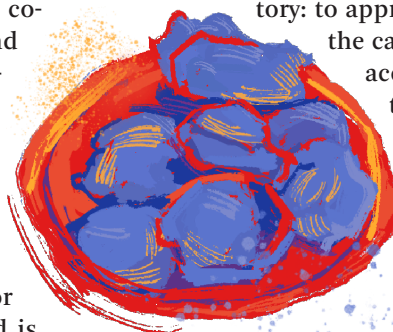
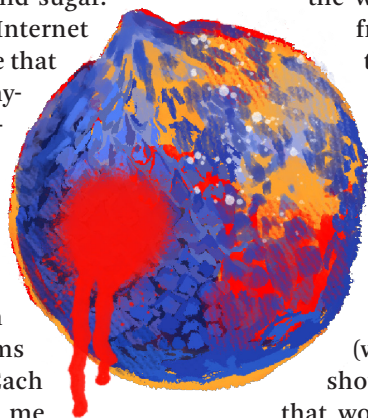
I can, however, try. Perhaps it is wise to start with the easy part, how food has always been, and will always remind me of, connection, care, and kinship beyond blood, a love language written in scents and tastes, bite by bite. Food is the physical link to memory of a specific place and time. When I say that I miss home, I am missing the hundred-year dessert shops lining old streets and the roasted geese glistening through the restaurant window. I miss my Canadian friend when I remember the pots of curry they cooked up with their father’s recipe, the potlucks I’d host with friends post-exam, the softness of dough pressed between my fingers as I wrapped dumplings on the dining table

with my mom, letting flour smudge all over my arm.

I wholeheartedly believe that nutrition is a valuable science. Yet, before social media influencers decreed food as only chemicals with moral worth—protein as good and carbs as bad and oil and sugar as evil entities to be avoided at all costs—food had always existed naturally as the most significant receptacle for friendship and memory. I can agree with the nutritional benefits of a balanced diet and observe that I am not immune to the modern internet’s chronic obsession with health. More importantly, if I’ve chosen to come here to live life differently, I have to lessen the control that my previous mantras have on me, however appealing they may be.

The same goes for its colonial history: to appreciate food as it is and the care it contains, I have to accept that historical context, however well-researched, can never tell the whole story. It is no surprise that history is mostly unjust. Most of what we come to accept as natural today was the direct or indirect consequence of dominion and exploitation, and yet recognizing the influences of exploitation on a culture does not devalue it. After all, culture is essentially what survives. The survival strategies that individuals adapted in times of exploitation, the strategies that developed into the celebrated and loved culture of gorengan—it is resistance in the basest form. Behind the culture, there exists a terrible history, and maybe it is a futile exercise to separate that culture from the violence it has endured to become what it is today. But maybe the exercise itself is misguided: after all, we are in the here and now, and people find joy and belonging in their food, and this is the most important part of this story. A people’s history can be characterized by dominion, colonization, violence, and all these intrusions leave permanent scars—yet what matters more, I think, is that they are still here.

Before I finish my pondering, I hear myself being called for dinner, the only meal where most of the family tries to



eat together. As I maneuver my fingers to pry the fish skeleton from the catfish, I catch on to the banter across the table: to my right, my homestay sisters tease each other about their spice tolerances while scooping spoonfuls of sambal onto their plate. To my left, right beside my homestay brother, who is focused on shoving handfuls of steaming hot rice into his mouth, I watch as ayah listens attentively to ibu describing her incredulosity at the vendor for reasons I lack the vocabulary to understand, his hands breaking the shrimp cracker apart. As the meal continues, the sisters decide to make creamy pasta tomorrow and make plans to go shopping for cheese and sausages. Ayah tells

my homestay brother to eat more vegetables, who reluctantly obliges. Amidst the conversation, I bask quietly in the warmth of the meal and company. How lucky it is that I get to share this meal with strangers kind enough to invite strangers into their home. How lucky am I, I think, to have met strangers who chose to love strangers.

The food on the dinner table is neither solely a colonial product nor stripped down to nutrients and calories. It is, before all else, dinner with family, because that is what people themselves understand meals to be. I think everything goes back to treating people as people, and here, that means to treat food as food, to not only observe

but, more importantly, to participate. To reduce someone to their historical circumstances, to only understand someone through the lens of analysis, is to deny them personhood and their narrative of their own life, while denying myself the honor of participating, however briefly, in the narrative of that life. What a privilege it is to be a part of someone's story. What a privilege it is to eat together. What a privilege it is to eat.

Kongyang Zhu is a contributing writer for the Nassau Weekly.

Fiction

The Elephant in the Hungarian House

"Uma sensed someone approaching—a short man, old enough to be her grandfather, in an all-white ensemble. 'Would you like to dance with me?' he asked with the forward politeness of a smooth talker who knew how to get his way."

BY LOLA HOROWITZ

On a smoggy summer night at a quarter to nine, while the other gussied-up city girls ran to catch downtown trains, Uma had nowhere to be.

She could have been sawing at a medium-rare steak and swirling a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon at an al fresco bistro on the Lower East Side, had her dinner date, a lean-jawed trading intern, not stood her up. There was never even a reservation to begin with. That news might have been less humiliating had the host not announced it apathetically, with California vocal fry, as a mound of bubble gum rolled around in his slack mouth.

Meandering across 82nd Street in snakeskin mules and a wasted blow-out, Uma felt forlorn. Couple after couple, young and old, hand in hand, moseyed past her on the sidewalk, seemingly steered in her direction by Satan himself. She had been counting on the trading intern to steal her away

from her lackluster desk job and borderline monasticism. Companionship in one's twenties was scarce nowadays. The next time Uma would slip on a pretty dress and perfume herself would be Christmas Eve brunch with her sister in Oregon.

The trek back to her studio was hampered by the stench of a distant campfire as smoke from the Canadian wildfires blew through the city. The sky had been shrouded in an apocalyptic orange haze earlier that morning, and while broadcasters attributed the air quality to climate change, Uma now saw it as having foreshadowed her miserable evening.

Maybe that's why her date never showed. He was asthmatic and hospitalized.

The flags mounted on the façade of the red brick Hungarian House were tangled around their poles. Uma had always been in love with No. 213—a charming middle class home from the Civil War, with its wooden Italianate-style cornices and hideous iron balcony. Standing at only two stories, it was significantly shorter than its neighbors. Uma peeked between the curtains, beyond which were bookshelves, an oxblood chesterfield sofa, and two European men smoking while engaged in a contentious conversation. Uma envisioned herself between them, hosting a dinner party with her faithful husband



and some close friends.

A pair of steel cellar doors ahead of Uma flopped open, and out sprung colorful soul music and a man in an orange zoot suit shimmying up the stairs. Uma was half expecting a conga line of similarly fashionable people to follow in his wake, but the man ascended solo.

Noticing her lingering, the man said, with a gap-toothed smile, "Had you come sooner, honey, I would've saved you my last dance."

"What's going on down there?"

"Go see for yourself." He tipped his fedora courteously to her and hailed a parked taxi, the driver of which was snoozing behind the wheel. When twin spears of light shone from the car, she noticed the man's two-toned shoes and sweaty forehead.

Uma's apartment building was on the horizon, she was a stone's throw

from a steamy shower and reheated leftovers, but the Hungarian House cellar beckoned to her. The doors were thrown open, and it was impossible for Uma not to feel the fatefulness of her situation. She had stumbled across an opening to a life she had only ever fantasized in passing. Uma could have gone in through the front door, in daylight, with some proper invitation, with all the ceremony that such an arrival seemed to demand, but she was impatient. The only way inside the Hungarian House, however undignified, was underground. Invitation or not, she would finally be behind those red brick walls.

Uma's moodiness petered out as she followed the soul music down through a dingy, peeling tunnel, hotter than the current Canadian woodlands, which eventually led to a low-ceilinged, cavernous venue bursting with Motown and movement.

She balked at the frenzied scene, edging back towards the cellar doors, but a gaggle of arriving guests in headscarves shoved her farther inside.

Hundreds of swing dancers in 1940s attire commanded the floor while a live band performed a Martha and the Vandellas song onstage. Partners twirled, rocked, and dropped low. Feet bounced, playful and inventive. Uma stuck to the outskirts of the venue, mesmerized by the leggy mob and vulgar bodily contact. A panic of conservativeness overcame her. Compared to this underground riot of loose, springy, sure-footed dancers, she felt prudish and inexperienced.

Uma sensed someone approaching—a short man, old enough to be her grandfather, in an all-white ensemble.

"Would you like to dance with me?" he asked with the forward politeness of a smooth talker who knew how to get his way.

Uma surprised herself with the eagerness of her nod. Had she held off a moment longer, maybe a young stud would have sought her out.

The short man led Uma deeper into the dance floor, the heart of the chaos. During a transition from Motown to jazz, she told him humbly, projecting over the din, "I've never danced swing before."

"Girls always say that, and then they turn out to be naturals."

"I'm an elephant in heels."

"Don't worry. The man leads. You just follow."

Her dance partner, who Uma would later come to know as Rick from Pasadena, California, placed one hand on her mid-back while the other clasped her own. The drummer set the tempo with brushes, then the pianist slipped in, and suddenly Uma felt the hand at her mid-back nudge her forward, then back, steering her uncomfortably. She made the mistake of glancing down at Rick's lace-up brogues, hoping to anticipate his next step, but she only confused herself, awkwardly turning right when he went left.

Occasionally, Uma's hand on Rick's right shoulder would slip to his upper arm, just below the shirt sleeve, where his sun-spotted skin was covered with blonde hair, damp from dancing.

"When did you learn to swing dance?" Uma asked, distracting herself from his pilosity. Given their proximity, she kept looking over his shoulder, avoiding a face-to-face chitchat.

"Decades ago. Truman was president," Rick answered, "This was always the cool sport for me. Followed me to every city. In any corner of America, even on the bayous of Louisiana, there's always a swing dancer, and they'll show you a good time. I recognize some of the faces here. They bounce from speakeasy to speakeasy, West Coast to East Coast, like storm chasers but for big bands."

Rick spun Uma and she felt like a little girl on a carousel.

"You've moved a lot?"

"I've lived my entire life out of a suitcase."

"What do you have packed?"

"Enough for today and tomorrow!"

They shifted apart into a side-by-side promenade to travel across the slippery dance floor.

Rick said, "Folks these days are so uptight and no-nonsense. Planning eons into the future, getting married in their twenties. Whatever happened to the free-wheeling Kerouacs? Are you going to get somewhere or just going?"

Uma wasn't well-read enough to appreciate the reference. Rather, she became aware of the weight against the Hungarian House's beams and joists around her.

"When I'm older, I'm gonna live in this house," Uma admitted, hoping it answered Rick's ambiguous questions.

"How old is older?"

"I dunno. Fifty?"

"You're ready to settle so soon?"

"That's well over twenty years away."

"And for twenty years you'll be expecting the road of your life to end at 82nd Street."

Uma resisted Rick's guiding hand. They stopped dancing. Couples whirled around them.

"I'm not settling just because I have a vision for my future."

"C'mon," Rick said, embarrassed, nudging Uma back into a groove. "We're causing congestion."

She wrenched her hand free from his hold. The feet of a woman being flipped over her partner's shoulder came arching through the air, within a hair's breadth of Uma's shoulder. The crowd of swing dancers sewed themselves together between Uma and Rick. She was glad for the intervention. Who was he to tell her how to live? If Uma let loose à la Rick and began serially dating dozens of corporate America interns, a different boy each week, she would derive no pleasure from her hasty companionships. Rather, it was Uma's inner life, her retirement in the multimillion-dollar Hungarian House as a middle-class woman with no Hungarian descent, where she became truly spontaneous.

Tired and clammy, Uma claimed a spot along the wall again and took off her snakeskin mules. It wasn't long before a tall bachelor gave her a once-over and offered to sweep her off her feet. Much to her own surprise, Uma politely turned him away.

The band slowed into a B.B. King blues ballad. Bodies curved into one another. Uma surveyed the expanse of swing dancers, those strangers under her roof. The appeal of the Hungarian House, it seemed, was that New York summer nights would bring unsought folk to the foot of No. 213. They would run wild like rats in her cellar. During Uma's civilized dinner parties, she would feel their revelry through the floorboards, and later, in the dead of night, she would hear them still. Before the pair went off to bed, Uma and her husband would sway in the living room, in love and a little wine-drunk. Two bodies curved into one.

Lola Horowitz illuminates a future from the smoky haze of the present—miraculously, one where you can live in the Hungarian House even if you aren't Hungarian. But you obviously still can't Nassau if you aren't Weekly.

SI DEUS NOBISCUM, CONSUME EUM (if God is with us, consume him)



On erotic fantasies of Christ.

BY LIVIA SHNEIDER

Contemplate Fra Angelico's *The Crucifixion*; depicted is Jesus nailed to the cross, clothed in nothing more than a translucent sheath thinly veiling his groin, which Angelico rendered discreetly yet rather graphically. His naked torso reveals his chiseled abdomen. His blood, fresh and red, continues a feeling of youthful vibrancy, even fertility, as is fitting for a man only thirty-three years old. His skin is clear and pale, unburnt or blistered. He is more beautiful than he ought to be after spending hours nailed to the cross.

Around him, saints, demarcated by golden halos, fall to their knees, praying for their Messiah, weeping in despair. They are clothed. Covering all but their heads and hands. With knees pressed to the hard soil of the fallen earth. They are clothed. Yet, Christ is naked.

The saints were the first to fall to their knees in reverence to Christ. Like the saints, the pious of future generations would too fall to their knees—not before Christ, but rather, before his image. This painting of Christ's body was a cult image; a vessel for prayer, an object of devotion for the faithful: it hung in the San Marco Monastery during the 15th century. The monks of San Marco, like most others, took a vow of celibacy, relinquishing human sex to pursue a

closer relationship with God. In prayer, they revere his body, closing their eyes, whispering, "What has passed our lips as food, O Lord (*Quod ore sumpsimus, Domine*), may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity... May Your Body, O Lord, which I have received, and Your Blood which I have drunk, cleave to my innermost being...

Amen." In devotion, through communion, they consume him, taking his blood and body in their mouths. This routine of piety falls closer and closer to the physicality and emotions of desire present in mortal sex. They are covered in garbs of modesty; they forsake the mortal sins of sex, and in doing so open their body and soul to a new form of sexuality: that with Christ.

One might equate the substitution of sex with Christ with Jacques Derrida's discussion of masturbation. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explains that masturbation provides a replacement for copulation with the partner (or mother)—allowing the subject to affect themselves with the "chimera" of presence. This "dangerous supplement," as Derrida describes it, "leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it toward its loss or fall, and therefore it is a sort of lapse or scandal (scandalon). It thus destroys Nature." Masturbation "destroys Nature" or the full experience of sex, denying the masturbator true intimacy with another and affecting their ability to do so in the future. Such destruction is to be regarded as a "scandal"—a shameful, corrupting act.

However, it seems the act of supplanting sex is not shameful in itself. The pious, too, substitute Nature—good ol' martial copulation—with something else. Instead of auto-eroticism, their

supplement is Christ. This supplement interacts with Nature differently: In *Sexuality, Marriage, and Virginity in the Early Church*, scholar David G. Hunter speaks of "nature" in gender and sexuality in 5th century Christianity. "Christian writers developed new notions of human 'nature' that decentered binary categories such as 'male' and 'female' and relegated all sexual activity (heterosexual as well as homosexual) to an ancillary, even 'unnatural,' aspect of the human person." Celibacy, then, afforded an escape from the norms of a monogamous, conservative, religious lifestyle. Amma Sara exemplifies this: in an early Christian anecdote, she transcends humanity by abstaining from sex, marriage, property, etc., thereby gaining "a level of spiritual discernment that enabled her to adopt a 'male' role in ancient monastic society." Her sexlessness, paired with her renunciation of other "earthly" effects, effectively functions as genderlessness; her sexual purity afforded her avenues for power in the human world as well as the spiritual world. Hunter explains, "Female monasteries offered a viable alternative to life in a patriarchal household and new opportunities for the education of women and the exercise of female leadership." Monasteries functioned similarly for men, offering institutional support for the celibate that individuals might normally find within a marriage, allowing the celibate to comfortably establish a close relationship with God. Rather than a rejection or degradation of the heterosexual patriarchal norms of society, celibacy garnered real-world, as well as spiritual power, through a kind of genderlessness.

While Hunter and Derrida might not mean the same thing by Nature, both use the term to define a moral, pure, human existence. Christ, as a supplement, functions inside nature to ascend past its traditional conventions, rather than decay it, as masturbation might. The pious are then allowed to virtuously exit "the good path," assuming a position outside of Nature or a religiously

endowed societal order.

But what is left for the rule-abiding married couple who copulate? Even within a marriage, Christians cannot escape the filth of their conjugal duties. In the *Acts of Thomas*, Paul interrupts a married couple during intercourse, urging them to “raise spiritual children rather than worldly offspring.” Here Paul marks a distinction between “worldly offspring”—biological children—and “spiritual children”—the couple should they choose to pursue a closer relationship with God. When the bride listens to the prophet, “She... [sat] unveiled and unashamed,” implying there was shame to be had before her biblically approved intercourse: shame for devoting herself physically to the lesser creature that is man. The Bible positions sex and reproduction within a holy union as an obstacle to the faithful’s spiritual proximity to God. Paul argues this more explicitly, advising that within marriage, couples should take moments of abstinence to deepen themselves in prayer: “husband and wife should not renounce sexual intercourse except if they agree to do so for a limited time devoted to prayer.” Even while abiding by the structures of the Bible, there is something “unnatural”—decrepitably “worldly”—attached to the act of sex. Those who have physical sex are pulled away from their relationship to God, almost as if a conjugal relationship is a form of adultery in relation to a primary relationship with God.

Zupančič speaks to this in *What is Sex?*: “Even the ‘purest’ sort of procreative sexual copulation is connected with sin. Or, as Saint Augustine has famously pointed out: Sexuality is not the original sin (the latter refers to the original pair’s disobedience when eating from the tree of knowledge). The eating of the apple was not explicitly sexual, but rather a bite from the “tree of knowledge.” The human couple may never escape the knowledge that sex is sinful. Knowledge in the structure of religion is subjective, malleable to the orienting force of desire. What we know as sexual in human relations—bodies, knees, whispers—do not, somehow, apply to the individual’s relation with Christ. Sin, then, circumscribes to a subjective definition of sexuality, one that only regards physical acts between mortals. Sin is what we know to be sex,

even if other things replicate sexual desire.

This only works because knowledge and fantasy function differently. Zupančič goes on to quote Lacan in his *Seminar XX: Encore, On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–1973*. He writes, “Christ, even when resurrected from the dead, is valued for his body, and his body is the means by which communion in his presence is incorporation—oral drive—with which Christ’s wife, the Church as it is called, contents itself very well, having nothing to expect from copulation. In everything that followed from the effects of Christianity, particularly in art...everything is an exhibition of the body evoking *jouissance*—and you can lend credence to the testimony of someone who has just come back from an orgy of churches in Italy—but without copulation.” Instead of sex, the pious perform communion, an incorporation of the body of Christ into theirs. They substitute the action of sex with that of eating Christ’s figurative body, but the drive that pushes this movement—the desire to consume and incorporate that is present in human sex—continues to be satisfied; it does not disappear. Lacan uses communion to bridge his larger point, asserting, “If copulation isn’t present, it’s no accident.” At the core of all sexual experiences, Lacan supposes, is fantasy—sexual relationships always function past the secondary human that copulation is performed with. A partner cannot be separated from what they represent, from the lens through which their partner becomes attractive. Moreover, as sexual relationships are structured through religion—its laws—even godly sex may never be separated from the knowledge of sin. Sexual fantasy that exists with another human, then, will always include subconscious guilt. In a relationship with Christ, guilt dies, but the fundamental fabric of human sexuality—fantasy—is amplified. A fundamental aspect of faith is fantasy: believing in Christ without evidence of his existence. Take our earlier topic, communion: one must imagine they are consuming the body of Christ while eating a cracker. The foundation of faith, then, is the same as human sexual relationships. To supplement Christ with sex is not a perversion of religion but

a natural extension of its foundation. Christ is the first and only constant object of fantasy; human objects are secondary.

Knowledge, then, is only of a physical body (your partner’s or your own) and cannot be applied to pure fantasy. Thus, the structure that created sin in the first place has made a caveat to ascend itself: by fully submitting to a fantasy relationship, one can remove oneself entirely from sinful aspects of sex that subjugate humans in the earthly world; the pious can assume a role that exists outside of their gendered social capacity and is still sanctioned by religious institutions that guide collective morality on the whole. But for what goal?

Christ’s body—the worship of his near nudity in cult images—evokes pleasure beyond that of simple enjoyment. Lacan uses the term *jouissance* to invoke an excessive, somatic pleasure that exceeds the symbolic order and yet is produced in display and contemplation rather than through the act of sex. This fantastical sexual exploration allows a full enjoyment of humans’ sexual reality, resulting in the continued obsession with Christ on the scale we see today. This is the manifestation of *jouissance*. But *jouissance* is institutional. The celibate reap the pleasure of life beyond the confines of ordinary life. In committing to God, they transcend regular human structures, feeling enjoyment from a freer, yet socially accepted, lifestyle.

Christian celibacy, then, does not repress sexuality so much as reroute it into sanctioned forms of erotic fantasy centered on Christ’s body. In refusing copulation while preserving desire, Christianity reveals what Lacan insists on all sexuality: that fantasy, not physical union, is what structures enjoyment. The sin, then, was never sex itself but the knowledge of sex. Without desire, the psychological desire will not become legible enough to threaten the sanctity of the fantasy. Perhaps heaven is not an effect of the afterlife but rather *jouissance*.

Livia Shneider expertly regales the Nassau Weekly with an analysis of sexuality on a detour... I do think we might have taken a wrong turn at the last intersection, look at the GPS... rerouting... rerouting...

Tape Recorder Seance

BY SAM WORTHINGTON

Whether or not I press play, the tape rattles on; some days, I just hear it in my mind—wandering about by the side of the road, looking, out, out, for a nice place to sit down and witness the reservoir's slow metamorphosis into sludge.
Other days? No. Other days, I pull out The tape recorder with its flimsy Plastic wheels that spin With wild disregard for instruction, Set it on the table, turn out the lights. I notice the bathroom light is still on. I can't be bothered to get up.
 There's me And the box of projected light and the stagnant air that comes with empty rooms.

I press play. A man is speaking, with an older voice than mine.
 He says that he is going to share a poem about his father.
 "My father... he wasn't a difficult man, he just was remote in many ways.
 I don't know why; I don't think he could do anything about it.
 One thing he liked to do...
 He'd come in for lunch and close off all the curtains and all the light
 And just sort of lay there in the darkness and listen to music, classical music usually. And when I'd come in he'd just sorta tell me to leave.
 "This is my time to be alone kid, get outta here."

He rambled through his memories like this for some time, and it became apparent that at some point he had transitioned into the poem, but

I didn't know where the beginnings and endings of the dream were. There were faces projected into the darkness:

The tired smile of a checkout clerk I met in a poorly placed coffee shop off the side of I-95. It was past 1 in the morning. I know I had needed to get somewhere, and somewhere fast,

But I can't make out the details now.

The young woman behind the counter was handing me my coffee
 There was someone else in the store,
 And she had a gun, and my first thought was
how down on your luck must you be to try to rob this store?
 And my second thought was
I suppose this is it, this is the end of my life, a witness to a crime that would reward 50 bucks. My third thought was
why is my jacket wet?

I saw then that this other woman had fired the gun at the checkout clerk. The clerk went slack. Dropped the cup. Spilled the coffee on me

As she hit the ground dead. The woman with the gun looked at me. Her eyes
 Were sort of puke colored. She was opening her mouth, but there wasn't a story to find.

I left. Quickly, I mean, I guess I worry about dead strangers sometimes. I mean, sometimes on long drives I wonder what her voice sounded like.
 I mean, she must have said something to me, like "here's your coffee" or "good evening" or "get outta here," but I've started to realize I'll never really know.

The poet's voice continues, "I think that Martin Plunkett has led a more interesting life than I, and it will be certainly reflected

In his early death. But he won't care. That's one thing none of my students ever learned from me. None of them take care of themselves.

They read that romantic poetry and they really believe it. For all I know it's true: that's how you really find your poems, in cafes and sinking ships... cemeteries." The tape cuts. Somewhere along the way, the poetry was lost. I don't know Martin Plunkett. I lay my head against the table, reach feebly for the machine, press record. I conjure up a letter Addressed to the dead man living out his life on repeat Inside of the coiled plastic dream: "Once,

on the night of Ozzy Osbourne's death, we found a dead butterfly, sat in the grass, and looked up at the sky. *Remember?* I told you the starlight made me feel like I'd live forever. You nodded,

Or at least I thought you did—it was dark—and said that for you it felt like you were close
To death. The sound of crickets whirled about us, and I thought of all the people

I have tried to save from themselves. You told me that before he died David Bowie called each of his friends for hours and asked them how they were doing. He didn't tell them he was dying

Then he died. Sometimes a goodbye becomes a goodbye
Only after they're gone. Crickets. "Tragedy clings desperately
to old poets like a tattered

Shawl" you said. I paused for a long time. Here is what I didn't tell you then. I've been here before. It was years ago, and I saw what I see now:

A bright light and the universe coalescing around me, but I can't remember who I was with or what we talked about."



Goodbye, Golden-Green Leaf!

A Nass writer on leaving—a place, an identity, and Sanna, an endangered Cypriot Maronite language.

BY ILIANA SKORDI

*Land of the lemon tree, of the olive
Land of the embrace, of the joy
Land of the pine tree, of the fir
Of the brave men and of love
Golden-green leaf thrown in the sea.*

— The unofficial anthem of Cyprus, from “Chrysoprasino Fyllo” by Mikis Theodorakis, lyrics by Leonidas Malenis

The panoramic view unfolded before me like a familiar opening shot of a Hollywoodian film. Pentadactylos’ peaks were adamant and pristine, a five-fingered monster of antiquity and modernity. A flag plastered on its fifth and largest peak stood out like a sore thumb. It was familiar to me—the flag that turned the moonlight into a neon sign proudly inviting you to a casino on the Vegas Strip, and in the day exuded an unmatched flamboyance of patriotism and tacky historical significance.

I saw this every day of my childhood, and the magnificence was never lost on me.

The mountains are majestic. I tuck them away in my phone’s flimsy camera the way you press a leaf between the pages of a book, before I can forget. Pentadactylos darkens the way a photograph develops in reverse: sharper first, then softer, then only outline. I already know the picture will look flat later, in a city I have not yet learned to walk in. I take it anyway. I tell myself it may be the last time I ever enjoy the spontaneity of this view, the sunset unfolding with an impressionistic blur before me.

It is often difficult to part with things. It is the most difficult when they



The forgotten, enclaved grandparents of Kormakitis, photographed around 1980. My great-grandfather, then 75, is pictured here.

have exuded an unmatched constancy throughout your existence on this little, fragmented island in a ‘geopolitically-valuable’ position in the heart of the Mediterranean, as the public school textbooks of lore like to remind Cypriot schoolchildren ever so often.

The island has been passed between empires like an heirloom nobody quite wanted: Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Ptolemaic, Roman, Byzantine, Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman, and finally British, until independence in 1960 and political turmoil in 1974 turned Nicosia into the last divided capital in Europe. Conquered, Conquered, Conquered, ‘British-Empired’ (classically), Divided, Republic?...Even the half a dozen wives of Henry the Eighth would be jealous.

It is even harder to leave the last divided capital in Europe without a thought about what will happen to the communities you leave behind in a state of infinite flux and uncertainty: Greek-Cypriot, Turkish-Cypriot, or the often-forgotten minority communities, the “in-betweeners,” inhabitants of the cultural no-man’s land that are the constitutionally recognised minorities in Cyprus. Even more does it hurt when you leave behind an endangered language spoken by fewer than a thousand.

You can guess where this is going. It must really hurt for me, then.

In Cyprus, I belong to the Cypriot-Maronite minority, a community once populated across 72 villages, scattered like pinpricks on our rocky terrain; now only four remain. My village is Kormakitis, the largest and most well-known of the four, the ‘capital’, if you wish. The elders who stayed, over the years, who watched the village empty around them, I often think about as the ‘forgotten grandparents’ of Kormakitis. Always so close, but so far away.

I am the first Cypriot Maronite, to the best of my research, to attend Princeton in the history of the University and the Cypriot Maronites, and I do not take this responsibility lightly.

A great-aunt did not take it lightly either, though for entirely different reasons. At a farewell gathering, over coffee thick enough to read fortunes in upon completion, she asked me what I would tell the “Americans” I was. “Cypriot,” I said. She frowned, as if I had answered a math problem with a recipe. “Maronite,” she corrected. “First Maronite. Then Cypriot. Then, whatever else you want.” My cousin, from

across the table, offered a third taxonomy entirely, and for twenty minutes my identity was passed around the room like a plate of 'loukoumia' (traditional Cypriot sweets), everyone taking a piece and dusting the woven tablecloth with powdered sugar. No one agreed on the flavour. Twenty minutes is a long time to hold a plate. I said nothing, which is what I do when I am boiling inside.

But I have thought about it endlessly since. My grandfather, who speaks Sanna (the endangered language spoken in Kormakitis, formally known as Cypriot Maronite Arabic) the way other people breathe, did not join the debate. He only said, in that language of fewer than a thousand speakers, that I should come back. That, at least, required no translation.

Perhaps to be an in-betweeners is precisely this: to be a loanword, declined differently in every mouth, and to remain somehow whole regardless.

Trace the map of Cyprus with your finger and you will find the whole argument written in relief. In the north, Pentadactylos, where legend insists the Byzantine hero Digenis Akritas, defending the island from Saracen raiders, gripped the ridge to vault himself across the sea to Anatolia, and left the print of his five fingers in the rock. Hence, "Penta-dactylos." The 'five-fingered' mountain and beautiful sentinel of my childhood. A man protecting his island, holding onto it so hard he carved his grip into it. I understand him better every day. In the south-west, Troodos rises darker and gentler, older than

any of the empires that came to name it. Byzantine monasteries have been tucked into its slopes for a thousand years; the saints painted on their walls have faded to a rust-red that could be mistaken for the mountain's own colour bleeding through the plaster. All pine resin and cool air, it is where the whole island retreats in August to remember what breathing feels like.

And in Troodos sits Platres, a village that collects writers the way other villages collect saints. On one taverna wall, a plaque commemorates George Seferis, Greek Nobel Laureate, who complained in his poem "Helen" that the nightingales of Platres would not let him sleep. Imagine that: a man honoured with the highest prize in literature, undone by birds. Cypriot nightingales, in fact. A few streets away, the old Forest Park Hotel boasts that Daphne du Maurier stayed there while writing *Rebecca* in 1938, that great English novel of a haunted, unreachable house. I find it deliciously improbable that Manderley was partly conjured under Cypriot pines, amidst nightingale song. Perhaps I am myself a reincarnation of that unreliable narrator, identity-in-flux, ready to embark on her journey of Bildung.

'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again,' the novel begins, and I already know the shape of my own version: 'Last night, I dreamt I went to Kormakitis again.' The dreamer in *Rebecca* can never return to her house; it has been engulfed by flames at the sleight of hand of the cunning Mrs. Danvers. I intend to have better luck.

rest.

I think of the morning I was shadowing at a modern clinic in Nicosia and my own grandfather, walking-stick in hand, shuffled in through the sliding doors, entirely by coincidence, blinking at the fluorescence, and then at me, standing there in baby blue medical scrubs two sizes too big. He looked at me as though the future had arrived early and was wearing his granddaughter's face. I have not forgotten that look. It is, I think, the entire job description.

Behind that look sits a much longer story. There is a joke among Cypriots that the island has never quite been ruled by us, only leased, always to larger tenants. The Assyrians and Egyptians took the deposit; the Persians, Ptolemies, Romans, Byzantines, Lusignans, Venetians and Ottomans all took their turns; the British handed back the keys in 1960 and left their red pillar-boxes standing at street corners as a parting gift. They left something more consequential, too. It is said that a British officer, in the early 1960s, drew a ceasefire line through Nicosia with a green chinagraph pencil, and the border still runs where he drew it. The Green Line. My city has been divided by a stationery choice for longer than I have been alive. And now, of my own volition, I am the one leaving; the pencil line stays where it is. I do not pretend the ironies resolve. I only carry them, along with everything else.

What I take with me is what cannot be conquered. I take a language spoken by fewer than a thousand people, a great aunt's taxonomy of self, a grandfather's instruction to come back. I take the "loukoumia" and the loanwords, the nightingales of Platres and the print of Digenis' hand in the rock. I take the sunset over Pentadactylos, sore-thumb flag included, because the mountain outlasts the flag, and the leaf survives the sea.

Last night I dreamt I went to Kormakitis again. In the morning, I packed a bag.

Iliana Skordi is a contributing writer for the Nassau Weekly.



Relief map of Cyprus: Pentadactylos runs along the northern coast; Troodos rises in the south-west.

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Still, leaving an integral part of your identity behind on a golden-green leaf floating like a shattered raft in the Mediterranean (that everyone, literally everyone, wants a piece of) feels like ripping out a chamber of your own heart, or tearing a corner from a golden-green leaf and letting the sea take the

The Freedom I Found In “No One Lasts Forever”

On the one enduring truth—everything changes, everything ends.

BY DESIREE OKONKWO

Our existence is predicated upon ceaseless transience—a constant of transformation that Charli xcx’s most recent album, *Music, Fashion, Film*, addresses in the final track, “No One Lasts Forever” featuring acclaimed body horror director David Cronenberg.

I try to steer clear of contemplating my mortality, as I assume most young adults do, because reducing the reality of my impermanence to a far-off future is easier than confronting it head-on. Though after listening to “No One Lasts Forever,” I am unable to skirt around the squirm-inducing idea of mortality. And once I stopped fearing the fact of endings, I gained a new form of freedom.

It is still difficult to let go of moments, memories, and relationships, but it is easier when I remember that they never existed to be enjoyed forever, even if that was always my hope. I can only control how I decide to remember every ending in my life, and my willing forfeiture of control is more empowering than feigning influence over the inexorable.

The final verse of “No One Lasts Forever” articulates this feeling through Charli’s outlook on her public perception post-Brat stardom:

*That’s why I’m not scared of anyone
‘Cause nothing’s gonna last forever
But you need to discover that feeling
Of the crushing highs and lows of ego
Where one minute you know you’re the worst
And the next minute you know you’re better
Than everyone in the room
But know that nothing’s gonna last forever.*

By claiming that she no longer gives weight to other people—their expectations of her, their opinions of her, or their possible superiority over

her—Charli is done being inhibited by things she cannot control. She does not bend to the whims of people around her because her art’s importance is to reflect how she feels and to make her feel. This parallels my forfeiture of control over permanence and is bolstered by David Cronenberg’s interlude about experientiality, where we both conclude that experience supersedes deathlessness.

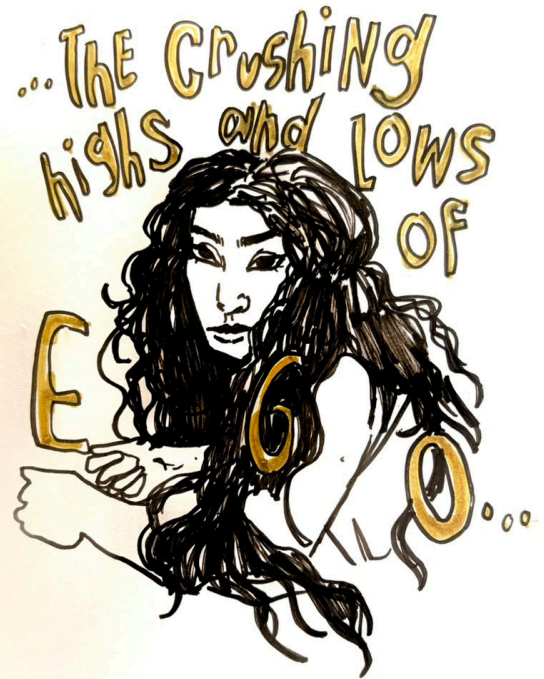
In the interlude, Cronenberg discusses his near-death experience with Charli: what he contemplated in what appeared to be his last moments, and how, notably, he did not think of art. He found that “as [he] was lying there on the sidewalk, [he] did not think about art at all. [He] thought about people... [he] wasn’t thinking about art as endurance.” Continuing, he shares his belief that there is a futility in attempting to create art that lasts forever because even immortal artists die experientially.

Art can be appreciated after someone has passed and can immortalize them in our culture, but we must acknowledge the unignorable fact that, as Cronenberg repeats until the song ends, “they are dead, they are gone, no one lasts forever.”

While Charli and Cronenberg examine the ephemerality of art in the context of artistic careers, I posit that art here serves as a metaphor for life itself. I think that as young people, we have this idea that an endeavor is not worthwhile unless there is a sense of permanence attached to it. If we are not laying the foundation for something larger, it is meaningless. At least, I did.

I thought relationships were pointless unless they resulted in marriage; friendships were fickle if they did not follow us into every stage of our lives; and careers were unsuccessful if they lacked stability and continuous upward mobility.

Yet in repackaging legacy as something aspirational in every avenue of our lives, we lie to ourselves that immortality can be achieved through experience. If our interpersonal relationships seem ceaseless, then life itself is. By pretending we do not die a little bit every day, in



every ending that occurs for the entirety of our lives, we let ourselves believe these falsehoods about forever because we would be directionless without them.

These falsehoods felt so real to me in my final month of high school, and I let them become my compass amidst all of the change so I could chase away the truth of my friend group’s impending separation. I hung out with my friends nonstop, neglecting school for the first time to prioritize my last moments with them in my hometown. I longed to cement myself in their lives in a way that was unalterable, important, and unending because if I did, our friendships would carry meaning.

Now, as we pack for our schools scattered across the country, each in our separate homes, about to embark upon our separate journeys, I see the fruitlessness in what I had attempted to accomplish. I was trying to freeze every frame of our friendship instead of simply savoring the sensation. I thought that I would be satisfied with savoring each morsel of each moment with them, but those moments could not last forever. Our friendship, in its current state, may not last forever, but that does

not mean it is not valuable. When I am dying, I doubt I will applaud my friendship's ability to sustain itself through desperate facsimiles of memories; I doubt I will view friendship as "endurance." Instead, I hope to treasure how I felt and the beauty of that experience.

I am definitely not the first person to declare that life is meaningful only because it ends, nor is Charli xcx. Though, we affirm that this concept must be actively remembered when we are experiencing the "crushing highs and lows of ego" in a career path as volatile as art, or just entering a new stage of young adulthood.

It is convenient to believe that nothing is going to last forever when you are enduring hardship. You yearn for life to fly by in its fleeting fashion to escape the undesirability of the present, but sometimes, your friends moving miles away will fly by, too. Sometimes life's characteristic transience will disappoint, but there is freedom in that truth. We can embrace oblivion, truly experience every little death, and relish in the reality that we do not last forever, as David Cronenberg encourages in his interlude that "oblivion is freedom."

Desiree Okonkwo *finds existential inspiration in a Charli xcx song—and who among us at the Nassau Weekly hasn't? Listen to "I Got It" (ft. Brooke Candy, CupcakKe, and Pablo Vittar) and try to tell me that you don't come out feeling like you got it.*



Equinox

BY NILUFER BEKTAS

Lightning and thunder reassert themselves in static blinding booms. *Boom.*

Storm shorts out the grid, so together we hunt for batteries.

In the sudden blackness, I scour and squint until you become a soundwave streak of yellow twitching unlike an insulated wire. Jagged nerve. Warm.

Salt crust spills from our cheap, plastic shelves and our coastal souvenirs shatter and the wallpapers creak and our sun bleached postcards wither and the floorboards whimper as shale and kelp and seashells and dried salt scratch at it addictively.

I stumble. *Boom.* And flinch. Look. A *real* wreckage.

I wonder if it will ever be quiet. But, you know what I *am* sick of — your / your / your / low-tide apparitions and apprehensive sea retreats. So, once August finally comes around again,

at least make your hand a fist when you hit me. Our quicksand love—mire—muddy undertow is not fearless. So, come on, *come on*, erode me. Be a real entropic beast and don't satisfy yourself by lingering like some low voltage current.

Trace my imperfect silver shame with your lips until I am renewed gold until you remember precisely where home is.



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art by Raven Reid

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