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Letter from the Editors

Snow trucks rumbling, winter wind whistling, cautious footsteps stomping and sloshing down slippery streets — all familiar sounds of the colder months that have illuminated an unfamiliar winter on the Choate campus. Even as day students moved in and livened up dorms, much of the student body still remains in isolated rectangles on muted screens.

Lost fall traditions like Club Fair, Harvest Fest, orientation events — harbingers of a more desolate winter — prophesied the absence of a normal Tis the Season and First Hurrah spent in cozy huddles near Archbold and sweaty circles in the dining hall. Life still hasn’t returned to normalcy: snowy sidewalks of downtown Wallingford lay empty of students on weekend nights, and the PMAC and Gelb theaters echo hollow without the usual plays and performances.

The same worries that clouded us for the past year haunt us still. Yet, in these foggy times, we hope you discover and continue finding hope in the creative arts. Sweeping paintings and waltzing poems line this issue’s pages; sparkling optimism stained with overwhelming dread, tentative hope underlined by darker truths. Despite the challenges we have faced so far and will continue to face in the upcoming months, we hope these pieces will inspire you to find happiness in the blessings we still possess. Dining tables reverberating with six-feet laughter, snowstorms frosting spindly trees and bequeathing icicle swords to cream-white awnings... there’s still beauty in the remnants of good things unmarred by the tragedies.

The Lit would not be possible without the support and guidance from our advisers, Dr. Siperstein and Ms. Ashford. We would also like to give our thanks to Ms. Nolan and Ms. Thomas in the copy center for their help in making every issue a reality. Finally, we’d like to thank everyone who has contributed to The Lit through submitting pieces, attending meetings, and voting every week. We hope you have a great rest of the winter season; let’s hope for a brighter spring when we defrost.
blue and gold from a remote location

it is 5:00 but the only lights I can see are the gold lamps across the street shining. The ice is blue and the snow is blue and the moon shines from behind me, but I don’t turn around.

I am safe and sound in my house and the ground is shaking over there, the golden lights are fading over there, but I still want to be over there with the golden lights and walk inside the brightly lit house that was home.

The ice is blue and the snow is blue and the lights are gold and I wish I could have sold this safety for those lights; I wish I could’ve told my mother that night that I wanted to leave and be with them, that I wanted to be free and see them in their glory even on the darkest of nights especially on the darkest of nights I need those lights
I need that home
that place waiting
now I am all alone waiting
where are those lights when I need them
oh right
over there

I have lost my gold and blue,
will I ever see them
Anywhere?

DAVID GARSTEN '23
this is how it feels when all else flies by

4.2195
When I was a child,
mamma told me dreams are a human’s wings.
They keep us dancing and fluttering to greater heights. She told me everyone’s wings,
no matter how big or small, are each person’s treasure.
Our wings were our resolve to rule our future.

6.3293
I was in fifth-grade when,
on my way home after school, I saw a rather old man,
roots fading out into the pale white of age
& face lined with gentle wrinkles,
They gave us life.
On Wednesdays,
when the bell strikes a half-day early,
I’d sit and listen to his wondrous tales of his travels in
the towering landscape of Dubai & the weathering snow of Hokkaido &
the wall of Beijing & the ruins of Inca.
He’d hand me the wooden handle of a yellow ice-pop
as I listened to his stories of touring the world with his wife.
Donned in my middle-school uniform, He told me of
how he lived on a lavish throne of ingots &
how his wife,
a beautiful French woman,
loved to stroll amongst the rows of roses &
how his two sons, born only a year after another,
ran to the stables each afternoon for a ride &
curled up against the green park bench, ragged blanket strewn over his knees.
It was strange that I never met his family.
how his family,
as joyous as any other could be,
lived upon the ivory pedestal of elites.
This week, he didn’t wait for me on that rusting park bench.
I never got to ask him where his family are & where his tower of coins is &
where his wings were &
where his dreams would take him next.
this must be how it feels when all else flies by
12.6585
At the end of eighth grade,
by the time our wings began maturing,
it came to me that my wings would never be as
tall mr. class president’s,
or as luminous as ms. popular’s,
or as thick as our homeroom teacher’s.
I think it also came to my parents,
whose wings were nimble and vast,
Last Wednesday, his eye sockets were more sunken, his blanket was colder, emptier, and his wing was
fainter to my sight than last winter.
16.8780
Mamma,
you gave me these dreams, yet
Would you still hurt me if you knew
that these wings don’t bring me to soaring heights,
of swoops and circles when I first felt the stutter of my wings.
It’s as if you’re grappling for me, trying to cut off my wings.
that my wings were smaller, weaker, and thinner.
We were in Phys. Ed after an hour
Just like this,
Just surviving is a small dream for me.
25.3170
Tirelessly I chase after metres & metres so that I can see the ending:
a paradise of dreams.
Such paradise, free of cowardly defilement, that you & I sought after.

33.756
In the fall of my junior year,
they seemed to quicken the pace & close the distance. “That guy did that (a 1600 on his SAT)”
“That girl did that (captain of the math team, awarded top HS shooter)” the world tells me as it bashes me.
What is waiting there for me?

42.0500
In a jarring strike of twisted karma,
with a wrangled hoarse scream,
with my outstretched hand flailing in desperation,
my wings faded to the holly wisps in the canyon.
rather they beat furiously, hoping to make up for their falters, to keep me from falling into that creeping abyss?
It felt more real this time around: the falter of my wings.
‘hey old man, you can tell me your story now.’

LEYEE DAI ’24
swollen eyebags.
the hallow abduction of my childhood
i walk down a street like my own but
smaller.

a little girl asks me for directions
i tell her to go to her mother
i know what strangers do to little girls.

paper airplanes crash,
screams ensue,
i continue to walk

machine guns burst holes into sandcastles,
i continue to walk

funerals are as fake as Santa Claus
i continue to walk.

a little boy asks me what a strip club is
i tell him to go to his mother
i know what society does to little boys.

how to be little
poked and prodded
a child
what a malleable thing.

i don’t sleep
i walk the dream
as the dream plays me on a loop

Orville Amankwah '22
paris lust

I.
i feel your return
at the dead of night— the room has been dark for hours.
the moon, my old lover, dims. i wish for a cloud
to cover my eyes, as well.
i lay in bed, a glass statue, staring
at the peeling wallpaper.
the shower turns on with a shudder.
the closet door opens, then latches shut. the bed shivers, the blankets ruffle.
i reach blindly into the night's corpse, and touch the marble cold skin
of a stranger.

II.
no, i do not want to go sightseeing today.
i do not want to smile for photographs, because i am not happy. i know you are not, either.
we are in love,
but what if that is different than happiness?

III.
i wake not to birdsong, but to an impatient tap
on the shoulder. tap, tap, tap.
he is already dressed, already rinsed with fresh morning air. he has brought flowers,
and a heartstring. he clasps it around my neck
like a diamond noose.
white sheets turn to snow.
the glass chandelier dissolves into hundreds of soaring, gasping, screaming fires.
the clock ticks fast.

IV.
your accent follows me to the bookstore.
a poetry book, you'd said you wanted, to learn of love. well, i found one. i found many.
i buy them all.
it will rain tonight, the clouds say.
i return home, and we sigh until midnight.
V.
at moonlight's brilliance i awaken,
clammy from the warmth which has seeped into the black streets.
i wonder if all you are is a mirage,
because at night,
you vanish like dust.
VI.
the door peeks open at dawn's blush. the shouting begins.
VII.
sometimes you are beautiful, and sometimes you are like me: ugly. afraid. tempted.
our bruised fire,
kindled with jealous logs,
has been pulled down under, down to join the great, dark furnace below.
i hold the buds of withered flowers in my palm, crushing them,
before i blink into
the slouching velvet night.

Audrey Lim '23
eggshells and broken glass

i'm walking on eggshells, or perhaps broken glass.

was it something I did, or something from the past?

we tried to suppress and lay it to rest.

is it a matter of trust or was it all just a test?

my loyalty looms, my fear concealed, as we fight for this love, your true colors revealed.

we uncover old wounds, we thought we had healed.

i put my guard down, i lowered my shield.

as for this fate of ours, i'm afraid it's unsealed.

i'll fight till my lungs give out, that much is true.

but for a life of lust? ...or are we calling it love?

who was i without you?

Alyssa Wall '23
Dissonance

everyone i’ve always been and everyone you’ve never met simmers underneath my skin. i wish they would all evaporate. but if i were to eclipse him, them, in her favor, then the lashes on my lids would fall to my face, long and lonely, and the slope of my shoulders would be sweet but heavy. there are days when the press of my chest comes too soon against my arms, when the wrong curves and planes and shapes of my body are worn like an old shirt that never quite fit right. there are days when my mind whistles in the places height or angles were never given, sees the emptiness as wastelands, and aches to fill in the cavities until i no longer look like a “good girl”—just someone unrecognizable, unburdened, and triumphant. but the body in the mirror is closer than she appears; she is woven into my sinew, and the days i love her hurt more than the days i wish i bore no trace of her. sometimes my greatest fear is that i owe the girl i sometimes, never, always am my identity. that she is not just an offshoot of my fluidity, but the foundation for it. perhaps these fears are the resounding screams of a society that is encumbered by my existence, but they linger in my gaze when i glance at the mirror, faced with inherent proof of an oppression only my body inherits.

Jessica Zhao '23
we are the hazy glow, the inky clamour of the city; the blinding chromaticity rises with each passing day
to match the bustling of the masses, burning out smoky nights that seek to drown and muffle.
neon signs—still-flaring fallout from lux-light of years past, a fading craft suspended in cracked limbo
above passerby. the burning glare of them chases drooping eyelids into darker alleys, ghostly impressions
of where-what-when's from just seconds before. rejecting the bounds of ambient occlusion for a deep-
fried saturated glow, they overhang the grime-sodden tracks of road, cyberpunk blurs of luminosity.
neon is an art form insofar as the depth and dimension it creates for the streets; a handcrafted illumina-
tion of what lies beyond the doors of many a store—commerciality is a webbed net over the criss-cross
hopscotch dynamics of culture.
lights lie upon the undergrowth of the city, a squashed layer of materialism and rushed hours in between
the charcoal cigarette roads,
burden of the night sky
placed onto the shoulders of a concrete jungle.
*opulence and soot.*
tendrils of light snake upwards, breaking through the canopy of buildings, flashing,
a beacon through the night to rival the stars.
of course, where the stars are white chrome hues—a candid combination of all hues we see in addition to
the unknowable
(wavelengths of time and distance and space of which we cannot perceive let alone traverse);
the skyscrapers of our insubstantially glinting skyline break them down into
elements we better understand, singular points of color:
red green blue magenta yellow cyan hue saturation value forced astigmatic view of the world, tilt away
from the shards of light,
fall back into the night,
vertigo-axis-of-tilt onto the pavement.
stars shine without purpose—or perhaps beyond a purpose we should seek to comprehend—whereas we
retreat to the short-lived city of our stone-bleached minds each evening.
the night: suspended prisms of light, a macrocosmos unattainable and unknowable blanketed and
muffled so far above. farther than the present, therefore irrelevant to what small realm of ambition our
weak-willed grasp can sustain—
a towering prowess in reach, ever-expanding topographical mirror sleek vertices.
but before that—

and now, and evermore— a rolling nautical landscape, of blistering winds chasing down
the backs of battened sails, a deep-sea port of maritime-silk-road trade, whirlpools of industrialization an
affliction on the jade green sea.
instead of space we reached for the sea. instant gratification—stretch out and feel the
sea’s greeting just a moment later, watch the silk-shaken waves break against the jut of
the ports
—pelagic-spray-cry amidst the ventriloquous sea-whipping wind—
(rancid plastic litter and grimy marine rot ever-present and ever-reminding).
we run from obsidian glass and concrete towards the sea, slick light pouring onto the surface of the
ocean,
warbling reflection lapping at the horizon. crawling up and away from the metropolis of the city to reach
for the dampening crevice that separates sea and sky, dawn smudges her rose worn fingers against the
south china sea, a restless ocean.
as always, the sea must return to the ebbing effluvium effervescence of our fragrant harbour, crammed
island of canned light.

---

1- ‘hong kong’s night’. hong kong directly translates to ‘fragrant harbour’
beach in pourville

life, when you start out, is this big white canvas in a glimmering art studio, and every laugh, every whisper, every heartbeat is a spot of paint, large or small. there’s a number of different colors too: red when he makes you laugh, yellow when you write a poem, grey when you blink tears away. and moments before you die, your painting is complete, abstract or impressionist, depending on the person. my painting is impressionist, i know. that’s life. you know monet? his paintings could be people — breathtaking from afar, but shattered when you step closer, closer to the crooked edges of people’s lives, twisting and contorting and leaping into spaces unexplored. monet knew people, really knew people. nothing is as it seems. some people forget that, i think, as i resume my stepping closer to the Beach In Pourville.
The Forest

the forest is closing in on us, they say.
we watch as the vines creep closer and closer,
as each dusk the sun sets at an earlier time.
you will be taken in the forest, and you will die.

the panther will get you, they say.
you will watch as it bites, as the blood flows,
as the life in you goes and goes
into the forest, and you don’t get to say goodbye.
you will be taken in the forest, and I will cry.

the demons will eat you, they say.
you will be dead as they take your remains, as they feast on your body,
as they depart from the sky,
as they feast on your body and you die.
you will be taken in the forest, and the demons will fly.

the night will blind you, they say.
the night will blind you, as you lay
in the darkness and are taken
by the forest and are killed
by the panther and are eaten
by the demons who stalk you at night, and one day
we will find you in the forest dead by the panther’s hand and the night’s allowance,
eaten by the demon’s hand and the allowance of ashmedai,
and we will say,
he deserved it, for doing what he did.
and we will teach your brother a lesson on your flaws, 
and you will forever be gone from our world, by a panther’s paws, and 
we will bury you and think of you no more. 
don’t go into the forest, 
please.

DAVID GARSTEN ’23

ISA TURRI ’23
As I Lay Dying

I dare not dream -
Even when the leaves are lush -
The bark is smooth -
And the air smells like Peppermint.

I dare not hold faith -
Because my Throat is hoarse from protest -
And my Lung punctured through by a new twig -
And they wouldn’t spare me a little carrion.

I only pray they chirp lower -
My little ones, perching high over my head -
Where they smell spring and summer -
I taste Spite and Venom.

And I only beg they hear me closer -
My little ones, guileless like I once was -
What they mistake for Lullaby -
Are the warning Screams as I lay dying.

Jacqueline Zhang '22
In the slick heat of summer
In the slick heat of summer
As the gnats embed themselves on our sticky arms
And the ants hold court under our feet
We link hands and trace our bodies on the pavement

We lay with our sunburned backs on the boiling tar
Blissfully discussing our vices
We shiver from the quickly cooling heat
And run inside with clammy hands of chalk

Caroline Huber '21
BATHHOUSE CONCERTO

i. the steam births dragons into the perfumed air.
polished floors, smooth panelled walls — a box. suffocate or breathe.
the bath is hot, too hot, i say to the attendant. too hot.
she shakes her head, signaling, no.
she walks over to me in my square bath, wriggling in the tinging, stinging water.
i expect her to tell me to stop squirming, but she touches my hand,
turns skin to ice.
dragons hiss and leap.

ii. i can see the garden from here.
i am in my room, sitting on the glass balcony.
mid morning sunlight dances with the distant mountain.
the sweet, cherry flora hum. the spits and spats of the baths downstairs are muffled
by the blue-winged magpies in the bushes
and golden cages.
legs crossed, clad in silk robes, hair tied.
a hot drink slides down my throat.
they have good service here.

iii. the elderlies are watching the pianist’s eyes,
sliding side to side and sighing to the gliding music.
clouds roll, and knock into the mountain and damp hills.
the staff lets the pianist pack up his books and go home,
because storm rain is music enough, they say.
live piano and rain is good for customers, but sometimes no noise
is a quenching sound.

Audrey Lim ’23
outsider music

here's a tape. I carved it out in voice and scratched on the plastic with the rusted, snapped strings of my father's guitar. I remember his watery bloodshot eyes and smoky breath as he threw it into my body, and I regret not asking him if they were tears.

and he said:

this is my life, the last mahogany candle sparking under monotonous LED lights, and like a vampire I have sucked the treasure of the placenta from its wooden womb. it is yours now. make wonders with it, and I will smile like I have never done in the living.

treasure it. keep it close. it lasts forever inside you. when the world succumbs in snow, when the cabin's Christmas lights flicker away and all you have left to sustain your misty breath are distant memories of hymns and foggy halos, play it for me. sing it for me. you'll know how to harmonize beautifully.

come home, come home
ye who are weary come home
earnestly, tenderly, I will be calling
        calling, O sinner
                come home

Athena Liu '23
(The following piece is a work of fiction. It includes references to and descriptions of abuse. Please make the best choice for yourself as to whether you would like to read the piece and remember to take care of yourself.)

Insomnia

Sometimes you need more than just air to be able to breathe. The shivering in the cold punctured by brief bouts of sunshine helps a little. When you look at someone’s face for too long they cease to exist. You wonder if you ever even knew them at all. It's too cold outside but my cheeks turn pink when I step through the door. The ideas swarm too fast and then I think I caught them but they flew through my fingers like leaves in the wind instead...

My father’s footsteps. I freeze in my bed. I'm not doing anything. My thoughts are a mess. But I still freeze. He's skipping steps. This could be bad. It's always bad. My eyes move like lighting over everything in my room. Nothing seems too out of place...SHIT. I scramble. The window I have until he launches his invasive presence into my room is thin. Thoughts don’t come. I’m almost there. Almost. I twitch in horror as I see the door crack in slow motion, the light catching his beady black eyes showing through the increasing opening. I’m falling backwards from shock. I was almost there. His mouth curls into a snarl in front of my wide eyes. I should be ready for this. I shudder. Uncontrollably. I watch the door wobble and become fuzzy under my tears. They’re quiet, of course. Nothing else. All for nothing. All for my stupid mistake. I listen for everything now. I vow to listen for everything. Anything. Anything to avoid that. My hands shake. I rock back and forth, tiring myself out so I can finally sleep. Only to go through the cycle again.

Ava Gizzie '23
Blackout poetry from the First Five Pages of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Ice was a village of twenty houses, built on polished stones. The world every year would display an untamed beard, a public demonstration of the turbulent confusion behind life. A telescope could look an arm’s length away, a burning sun put a pile of dry hay and set it on fire by the sun’s rays. A weapon of war these coins magnifying gold coins burned in hopes of life. Hours on end the government crossed mountains for the solar war. The rainy season shut up and spent entire nights without paying attention to anyone. Bewitched at lunchtime, devastated by imagination, please be frightened by a seizure of rage.

David Garsten '23
Patrons
Dana Brown
Mark Syms

Benefactors
John Dubel
Catalina Grau
Literati
Rachael Lin Wheeler '21
Orville Amankwah '22
Reagan Bajus '22
Wesley Boatwright '22
Honor O'Donnell '22
Tobi Oyinloye '22
Yuko Tanaka '22
Elton Zheng '22
Margarita Blackwood '23
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Adia Decker '24
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