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Letter from the Editors

As the cold wind blows and leaves infect our campus like an unnamed virus did not so long ago, we welcome the changing of seasons with open arms, and say goodbye to a fantastic summer, looking forward to the many months ahead.

Despite the incoming burdens of classwork, and for our precious seniors, college application season, spirits are high at the Lit. We kicked off the term with blind sketching and acrostics under a picturesque sunset, and followed it with a collaborative poetry writing session which inspired many a laugh. We painted rocks and leaves and spooky art as October came to a close, only to get right back on our feet for a Deerfield Day tie-dye extravaganza and the Launch!

Every submission we received this term reminded us of the creativity of Choate students who we had lost contact with over the summer. Photographs, paintings, poems, stories, and songs revitalized our fall spirit. We are so grateful to those who dedicated their limited time to the Lit, whether through attending meetings, submitting work, voting on pieces, or just spreading wonderful creative energy across campus.

Our '22-'23 masthead worked hard to produce the fall issue, and the future looks bright for what has become, and will remain, the most creative publication on campus. We are proud to present the 2022 Fall Edition of The Lit, an issue that embodies the essence of our school through the eyes of some truly talented students.

The Lit would also like to thank our advisors, Dr. Siperstein and Ms. Ashford, for their constant encouragement and guidance. In addition, we would like to extend gratitude to Ms. Nolan and Ms. Thomas for their help in the Copy Center, making every issue of The Lit possible. And to our subscribers, benefactors, and patrons: thank you for your never-ending support.
treading water

love me like a mime loves to talk, communicating in its absence a naked love, sink or swim, like how a cat winds its way through the streets of Italy by-the-sea, smelling of basil leaves heaped on pieces of delicately strung salami and even sourdough, free but fed and loved. Juliet balcony shut away, cry me a room of tears until I can stand in the waves and swim out with you in one arm. Breach out like beached whales on beaches and remember that the fields of the world can only hold so much water, so much love.

GIGI CHEN ’24
ghost

i say goodbye to you like it’s a prayer and i use your name in vain as if it’s a sin i don’t remember where home is
but i remember it smelled like you.

i don’t believe in ghosts
but i think i’m haunted
because i find you in every song
i listen to and every person i meet because nothing will be as good as you

i haven’t learned how to be myself when you are not a part of me
i don’t know where to put my hands.

i miss you like smouldering brush misses a forest fire,
like how a marionette
misses its strings,

like how a lonely child misses silence at parties.

i don’t know where you are
and i don’t know whether i should mourn you yet
or whether i should still remember
the way you used to smile at the moon.

i don’t know whether i should remember you at all.

i don’t want to talk to you. don’t be a stranger.

Harper Marsden-Uren '26
Suffocating in Rose-Colored Darkness

cypress leaves clog his nose
he chokes, he sniffs, he's
falling into a whale's
deep throat
a popsicle
chug the juice of him
chug it, chug it, chug it, chug—

kool-aid on my hands, what have i done?
i have forgotten.

rose petals swim before my eyes
open

knobby wooden elbows break, crack, and splinter,
tangle his hair, interweave his soul and
his mind is torn open by them
his scalp is as sacred as
a nail.

a singular nail, they push it toward him,
he smells the rust
and he is thrust into the
gizzard of an owl
he prowls at night in his dreams he fights
and cowers
in this scene he lights a candle tower
wax melting on his face
the furry pelt of a disgraced tiger
he imagines in the fire
burning, crisp, baked,

admired by his friends who chased him and then
chug the nail,
chug the pop,
chug the river,
chug the—
stop.

he awakes in a fit
of blue cloth
so soft

he knows that they want him to fear them
he sears them
into a neuroplastic bind
he hears them
in his mouse-shaped mind
where he knows they will find
him, dead with no sign of struggle
some ichor, some rose-colored nectar of the gods
which let him sob
he bobs in a river
knife opened up his liver
the mob takes him nearer to the edge
of the river of the cliff
then stops.

please, they say.
let me take your soul into mine
damaged
ripped apart
can i have it?

David Garsten '23
hooves and nails

nothing alive can tell me what i wish to know, not when the moon is hollow and round like sadness and not round like the bright warm fullness that moths flock to. there is nothing to be found in the expanse of the sky; it means more than gnats on a midsummer evening, more than the deer, startled wood edges and cartilage antlers that they are, hooves wearing through dirt and worn in return; it means thought and pavement and the buzzing of a brain that will never be rid of.

and under the burning electric white of a lightbulb and the obtrusive silence of the air conditioner, a subdued cutting.

click.

once, i dreamed of the tack-trip-thump of hooves darting against unbridled weeds, a viciousness in its false reality, the hunch forward of wild haunches and ears twitching to a wealth of sounds—the webbed start of a frog’s croak, the snap shut of a baby bird’s beak after its screech. when i have to clip my nails i allow myself to imagine the shorn scratch of cloven keratin wearing against rock and parch-dust terrain, instead of a fear of brown grit and sodden dirt against unworn finger pads—there is a shame in their clean tenderness.

clip.

clop goes a metal horseshoe against leaden pavement, a gravity that rings out. everything alive is buried in beastly black eyes, somewhere unreachable, unknowable. somewhere else, i drag a nail through loose soil, grasping on to that space in between earth and that conscious urge to clean, to pick out the crescent compact muck and return them to slivers of white empty moonlight.

Gigi Chen '24
Brewing Deep Brooding

I wanted to write a poem about my skin,
But I was afraid it would be skin deep
Or so deep you’d drown in melanin

You, who glorifies tans bordering on orange
Hoping for a shade that would make people wonder
Is half and half the new mixed?

I got angry that day, my fury hiding in my eyes—
Not that you’d notice my melanated gaze—
It’s not that deep, you said

I laughed. I slip back to minstrelsy—
the disposition of another happy-go-lucky,
wide-eyed, funny-looking negro

I carried on, holding my anger just skin deep
My skin, like a civil war—
As if bloodletting would cleanse its impurities

Sticks and stones don’t cut as deep
As words, like a dagger dipped in ignorance...
I cannot afford to let words hurt more than skin deep

You carried on, oblivious,
If you noticed the flush of my cheeks under six—
Layers of skin, maybe ... just ... ambivalence

I noticed you paused when I said nothing,
Wavering between two worlds... breathe
The expense of your pride weighing twice the weight of mine

Your words clawed at my skin – my affliction –
Your negligence, ignorance, made me weep
Bruised and purpled, the pain was only skin deep

Noah McBride ’23
flowers need rain

seven nights a week i dream of you
i woke up this morning remembering
my dream, which is unusual, goes like this:

hidden under the ferns and the oaks and the redwoods there was a flower,
cloaked by the shade of trunks and the scent of other flowers.
you are this flower, and i am a second flower, and the rain falls from the sky, and
we are watered, and
you cry onto my shoulder, in the dream.
i feel the tears move down my neck like salty rivulets of blood,
nourishing me,
leaving behind a red mark,
a heart tattooed onto my skin.
a flower grows only when it is watered, and

after you leave me,
you cry, the rain falls,
but nowhere.
the tears fall nowhere. taken by the air,
they feed only the worms and the ugly dirt.

under the gray and dreary sky the weeds grow,
but the flowers shrivel.
my petals flinch and collapse.
they need their rain.

never have i felt more helpless,
i am
void of rain
of life

life is hurt

water is healing

your tears fall, somewhere else, alone.

and this morning,
at six am,
i woke up,
and i had been dreaming that you were crying on me.
i had been dreaming the way a flower dreams of rain.
i woke up,
and my arm was wet and salty.
i tasted it, but the tears were my own,
and a flower that sheds water with no provocation is a diseased flower.
the flowers,
like roots,
need to share their water,
and their tears,
and their hurt,
for water is healing.
yet your tears fall, you fall, uncaught by me, alone.
i am being watered by nothing, now.
i wake up to find you gone.

David Garsten '23
sweet

i mourn those moments catalogued, careful calcify sweet: in whom’s arms will these weighty memories purify sweet?
these human eyes ring hollow, see naught but edges and limits— would you consider opening them: see the world damselfly sweet?
belief through blind eyes is a naive glint refracted tenfold
golden on gold to adorn, neck-slope jaw-scatter, your junior high sweet.
when i in tangled sheets roll to her sunside-manner mattress, she springs from my light-well thoughts:
panther spry sweet.
dappled sunlight leaves me on the streets of vienna waiting for the edges of marble, jewel-eyed fountains, glorify, sweet.
the carnival is a shriek—from steel, from pavement, from sun, from child. in so much sugar who could down that high, sweet?
will those soft edges blur the pain, i never have the courage to ask,
with dull blade, of bearing child: a bitter anguish turned bird’s eye sweet.
you’ve got tears dripping down cupid’s bow crevices, of cupid chubby cheeks, why then, must you always be like this, child, oh won’t you even try, sweet?
the granite counter, however drab, is a hot flash against hip bone: laughter, scarlet skin, elbows knocking, lipgloss done honeypie sweet.
canary in the coal mine and worries curdling, left in the dark for far too long, yet that quick cringe away from light—all you'll do is deny, sweet.
blooming light streaks across the night, a fright left for your mind to decide, however so, i must warn, for the end is nigh, sweet.
writing ghazals with nothing but overcompensations of overexaggerated, even half-imagined memories:
here i bid you then, goodbye, sweet.

GIGI CHEN ’24
Do you see this *black* body?
Smiling back at you from cheek to cheek.
White pearls piercing through the night, the *black* hue of my skin
Like midnight on display–
And those that say they’re a little a bit afraid of the dark

Haven’t yet met my black art.

My *black* skin bleeds red. Red paint that spells out
In bold the stories of my ancestors
Red that dripped down their thighs as they waded in the dark of the water,
Crept through the bush of the night, to freedom.

Freedom.

You can’t tell me my *black* body ain't American.
My existence is in opposition to a system that deems me just another creature of the night.
But I keep up the fight.
Keep up the charade because some people just don't understand much about *black* art.
Much about the red pain that matches the freedom you claim our soldiers bleed for.
You don't know anything about freedom.
About how my body, a constellation, tells a story.
That story passed down from generation to generation,
Stars added to this blackdrop.
A figment of your imagination, you’re not entitled to a reservation
For when I frame this body against a backdrop.
So don't tell me you know something about *black* art.

It’s a lil deeper than skin deep.

What you think you see is an imitation,
A copycat of *black* china imported from a British colony.

My *black* art is more than what you’ll ever see. And this, black body, is more than what you’ll ever be.
66F Cloudy, 8AM, 0% Chance of Rain

a little more than a drizzle,
not enough to pour.
a loud screeching i’ve gotten used to—
are they crickets?
this early in the morning?
i thought they only came out at night.
the rain picks up, now louder,
one bird calls out to another,
a rich "merp"
quickly overshadowed by
the high-pitched chirping of a third.
i can’t see them—any of them.
i can only see the trees.

water falls from the sapling above me
onto my head like a thousand tiny plastic balloons
which burst and suddenly
an egg falls from her nest and i catch it,
and return it,
in my thirty-second daydream.

the flowers in front of me are stiff and unmoving in the wind.
they’re like sunflowers, but white around the edges.
they look like eggs.

it’s really only the birds who i can hear
until my dog returns from her walk,
leashed.
and they are the only animals:
invisible,
or chained.

i cannot see an animal without grasping it;
wild animals do not exist,
anymore,
for me.
a mosquito lands on my leg.
i swat it away, and accidentally crush it.
oops.

the trees are green but silent. the earth doesn’t respond.

David Garsten ’23
The Widow Can't Smell

During the time in which I searched for the King in the land beyond the river, while the crone was still young with my rain, I met a man with a deep black beard who clearly did not belong. His smooth face wore only lines of white chalk, not the deep crinkles that come with age. He was young in that place and he knew me; from the metal in my ears and the color in my eyes he knew me; he was that young.

"Are you the one who can close his eyes and count the stripes of a moving zebra, just with his nose?" he asked me.

"I am."
The man wore a silver chain, diamond-patterned, before he gave it to me carefully.

"My wife buried me with this necklace. Can you smell her?"

"I can."

"Can you find her?"

"I can."

And so I took the necklace and resolved to find the man's wife. After I had returned the King, I sniffed at the necklace and found the widow's scent, which was a yellowish-green color, like the edges of a leaf which a fox has marked as his own.

I found the widow in a hut in the forest in the mountains of rain. There was no one outside so I looked through the window of that wooden structure and I saw the young man, who I had met only days before, but I didn't smell him. I knew something was different then, because I should've smelled him. He poured five small lemons into a pot sizzling with rice, and ohhh, that smelled good. But it didn't smell like the young man. I called out to him but he didn't respond. I touched him, I pinched him, I slapped his face and called him names, but he didn't respond. Because it was not the man who I had met but a pale reflection of him; it was a rddardaka, an imitation.

The widow entered the hut at sundown and kissed her husband's imitation, bringing a chicken, sliced. I entered the hut at sundown and kissed the door's shadow, bringing the truth. She did not listen to me when I told her her husband was dead.

"My husband is right here," she said.

I showed her the necklace and she kicked me and scratched me and expelled me from her house with such violence, while her husband's imitation watched silently through eyes which did not understand. She thought I was a thief. I am occasionally a thief. But not this time.

There was no getting back into the widow's house and so I returned to the river and lay with the crone, who had started to age again but still it was more pleasurable than the last time. Once more the river fish surrounded me; once more the yellow child asked me if the Itaki had let me pass.
"This time she smelled like cinnamon," I said. I located the young man and told him where to find his widow. He had asked nothing more from me but where to find her.

"Why didn't you bring her to me?" he said. "I can't."

The young man packed up all his things and readied to leave the land beyond the river. "She doesn't need you anymore," I told him. I didn't have to tell him that. All I had to do was find her. He became angry with me. He threw the payment in my face and said, "you don't deserve nearly this much."

The young man ran past me and I didn't stop him because he had already paid me. Let fate amuse itself how it will. I followed the young man as he ran through the purple fish. As his face emerged from the river and the smoothness shriveled. As his skin faded from the pure gold of that other life to flesh, to rotten flesh, to dust which scattered in the air. All that was left of his spirit ran to the hut on his two invisible legs, leaving a trail of dust behind. I could only find him through his smell. A rotten smell.

The spirit ran to the hut in the forest in the mountains of rain and saw his wife and his imitation and he watched them for eight days, and I watched him for eight days. On the ninth day, after his wife had left, he attacked the imitation. It was truly a miraculous fight to spectate, for they were well-matched. The fight carried on for days in the invisible world which the widow could not see. The imitation fell ill in the world which the widow could see, and she attributed it to the dust which had been floating outside the hut for the past week, and she was right, although wrong. The imitation's spirit was surprisingly strong, filled with the purpose instilled in it by the widow. But the husband's true spirit took over the imitation's body eventually, the body which had been created by a magician. And the body recovered, and the widow was glad, and they lived content. And the widow did not notice a difference between her true husband and her projection of him.

Now, the magician who had helped the widow animate her husband's dead body arrives at the hut. The magician had repented and vowed to never again work against death. The magician tells the widow her own story. He had saved the memory of it in a glass bottle somewhere. They watch it together. A young woman, distraught, starves outside the magician's door for days before he opens it and agrees to help her out of respect for her persistence. The young woman breaks down and asks for her husband, now a year dead, to return to her; that is her first wish. Her second wish is to forget, just forget. As for her third wish, she forgets about it because of her second wish. The magician and the widow watch this memory years later, and the widow then kills the body which the magician had made and animated, which now contains her true husband's spirit, although she thinks it contains only the imitation. Now she lives in grief again and she searches for another magician to help her forget. I can help her find one.
On Statehood, Food For Thought

Democracy,
The best meal we’ve had since Magna Carta.
Some suggest a fifty-star meal is the best taste of freedom you’ll see,
But don’t forget there’s two more stars we need to see.
Or we cannot manifest our founding fathers’ destiny of sea to shining sea–
I don’t see why Statehood doesn’t run down our throats like water–
Can't you see, It’s easy to digest
The American disease that carries every armed Washingtonian across the sea
Abreast in declaring democracy is the epitome of hard-pressed progress
I mean I can attest,
I, too, was a little stressed about switching from the kid's menu
But I know a little something or two about service
Sit you down and serve you a la carte, don’t be nervous, we don’t usually riot
We all know America is not on a diet
Greedy as green greed can get
I can’t understand how your greed does not beget 700,000 calories
We are, in our own right, a full-course meal.

I know what a fifty-two-star meal tastes like
And yes, it tastes like freedom.

NOAH McBRIDE '23
red spoons of aged ice

ey they accumulate on the radiator next to my desk
ey every night i take an ice up to my room
ey at eight
ey or nine
ey or ten
ey i take a spoon with it.

ey this sheds light on three important things:
ey one, that i am forgetful.
ey two, that i am repetitive.
ey three, that i want to spend the least time with my parents as possible.

ey harsh truths make for great poems and
ey this is the harshest truth of all:
ey my parents are aging. this should be obvious but it is not.

ey my mother no longer remembers what i told her
ey only three minutes ago.
ey she doesn’t understand the simplest context clues.

ey my father ages less, but even he
ey has his moments
ey of confusion and unpointed anger.

ey they bicker with each other and with my sister
ey i can no longer bear the bickering,
ey and the forgetfulness, and the repetitiveness.

ey so i climb the stairs and shut the door, and they ask me,
ey why do you stay up in your room all the time,
ey and i say, why do you think, in that sarcastic bickering tone.

i am aging too. ANONYMOUS '2x
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