

Children of Earth and Sky

The gaze of our ancient stars
is reflected in little lights.

All along the river, waves lap at their wax-
paper walls of green and pink and blue.

Cold dark tongues are lust
after the little flame hidden within.

Lanterns alight from boatmen's poles
as cranes from heaven float to earth.

One hundred children dance between
fire and water,
mother and father.

Drifting after the glow
through a star studded door

My father's wish is green,
caught in currents beneath its boat.

The waves grope for its dying warmth.

Wooden walls fold paper ones,
prow pushing them down deep.

Where Dragon Prince sleeps,
a little carp returns to his claws.

My mother's wish is blue,
weaving its way downstream.

No hull will take it while its wick burns lower,
lower—till the flame engulfs its walls.

In high heaven's jaded halls,
a little crane returns to the warm arms of her queen.

The lantern is flickering in my hands

As in my mother's, small and shaking

amidst river-spray and sweat.

She tended her little candle till it became a bonfire.

And what is there to do with it now but burn?

My wish bobs downstream, passing

into the inky black of night that merges sky and sea.

Into the land of immortal stars, watching from above.

Our little lights are reflected in their gaze.

“One-Eye Tom” and the Fourteenth Star

The Chittenden name is familiar to many Vermonters. The Chittenden family has been involved in state politics since before the Revolutionary War and was critical to the foundation of Vermont, leaving an indelible mark on the state’s law and history. Thomas Chittenden — the family’s ancestor in the state — led Vermont to independence and then to statehood as the fourteenth member of the Union and the first state admitted to the Union after the Revolutionary War. His extraordinary journey would elevate him from a humble justice of the peace to positions of distinguished civil and military leadership. Chittenden’s most enduring legacy, however, is largely unknown. The Vermont Constitution, which he helped to draft, outshone all other contemporary charters in the scope and magnitude of the legal protections it afforded. In order to understand the magnitude of this jurisprudential achievement, however, it is necessary to become acquainted with the man who first conceived of it.

Thomas Chittenden was born in East Guilford, Connecticut in 1730 (Doyle 30). According to many, he lacked the polish and charm that usually characterize politicians. His enemies described him as a “low, vulgar man who was clownish.” Others derided him for having lost an eye early in life, calling him “one eye Tom” (Cengeri). He was, nonetheless, a “shrewd, natural politician from an early age” (Cengeri). He advanced swiftly through the ranks of a local militia and within a few years had risen from being a justice of the peace to a colonial Connecticut Assemblyman. But in 1774 Chittenden was persuaded to leave his life in Connecticut for the promise of greater land and freedom in what was then known as the New Hampshire grants (Doyle 7-8). Ethan Allen — another Vermont Patriot — sold Chittenden the modern township of Williston.

In 1777, Chittenden was invited to help draft Vermont’s Declaration of Independence and the nascent Republic’s constitution. Less than a year later, Chittenden was elected Governor of the Vermont Republic by the legislature. Over the course of the next decade and a half, Chittenden — who served as Governor for 19 years — also negotiated with the Continental Congress to ensure Vermont’s place in the Union (Doyle 29-30). Congress was not responsive to Chittenden’s overtures, as it did not recognize Vermont’s independence. New York and New Hampshire each claimed the Republic as their own, but they were constantly fended off by Ethan Allen’s Green Mountain Boys.

In an attempt to force Congress’s hand, Vermont entered negotiations to join British Canada as a province (Smallwood 108). Chittenden’s seemingly brash maneuver paid off: Congress ultimately gave in, allowing Vermont to join the Union in 1791. Chittenden continued to serve as governor until his death in 1797. Throughout the Revolution, Vermont had lent its military support to Patriots across the Northeast. The Green Mountain Boys’ seizure of cannons from Fort Ticonderoga and their transfer to Boston, where they were used to force a British surrender, was critical to the war effort. So too was the bold plan to invade Canada from northern Vermont. While largely unsuccessful, the incursion so frightened British military leaders that they never again considered invading the nation via Canada. The Revolutionary spirit of Vermonters was memorialized years later in J. Greenleaf Whittier’s poem *The Song of the Vermonters*, 1779 :

“[...] come traitors or knaves

If ye rule o'er our land, ye shall rule o'er our graves;

Our vow is recorded—our banner unfurled,

In the name of Vermont we defy all the world!”

While he gave his unflinching support to the American cause, Chittenden’s greatest contribution to the American Revolution was the Constitution he helped draft, which defended the rights of the common man to an extent never before seen. It outlawed slavery; affirmed democratic principles; and guaranteed rights to property, self-defense, freedom of speech, right to assemble, and trial by jury. As John McClaughry of the Ethan Allen Institute wrote, “The Vermont Constitution’s Bill of Rights is a splendid manifesto of 18th Century liberalism” (McClaughry). In 1797, the year Chittenden died, Vermont’s Constitution guaranteed more rights than the Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution also created a novel and now, unfortunately, extinct, body known as the Council of Censors. The Council was a group of 13 men whose duty it was to ensure that the executive and legislative branches of the state government were acting in the best interests of the people. The Censors were also tasked with proposing revisions to the state Constitution (McClaughry). The Council proposed such novelties as proportional representation in elections and women’s suffrage several decades before they gained widespread political attention elsewhere. Indeed, the Council advocated for women’s suffrage fifty years before the Nineteenth Amendment became law. While the proposals of the Censors were often ignored, they inspired public debate and encouraged all Vermonters, not just legislators, to think

critically about their government and the rights they held dear (National Governors Association).

Thomas Chittenden may not be well known outside Vermont, and his legacy may not inspire the same fanfare as that of other contemporary legal minds like Jefferson or Madison, but he should be remembered for his unwavering commitment to building a state of liberty. Even his epitaph attests to this devotion: "Out of storm and manifold perils rose an enduring state, the home of freedom and unity." As America rapidly approaches the 250th anniversary of her founding, we should celebrate Chittenden's work to fight for the rights and livelihoods of the common man, his legal acumen, his jurisprudential genius, his single-minded dedication to the realization of that ambition which has characterized the American Experiment: the dream that all people should live in "peaceful liberty."

Central Pacific

Central Pacific

You would think they were trying to make it all the way to back to Guangdong
by the fervor of their words and their dogs.

Where the boats stretch for miles and the streets are hungry.

And the ferrymen speak with half of the mouth shut.

But the bearded man only speaks in tent cities and sloppy pay-stubs.

And too much dynamite to know what to do with,

other than perhaps send a few poor bodiless hands home across the sea.

I've been eating redwood root and pond water too long to care about an extra dollar a month.

Today we were sent into the mountain until the pale of limestone was smothered in its every brightness;
a true dark. Our shoulders burned with the iron and detonator wire.

Like ceaseless calligraphy dissolving into the black of the Pacific, just off Angel Island.

Like a hundred and a thousand men who could not bear to live here nor there.

We buried them without coffins, or sometimes without shoes, or sometimes

we just pushed them deep into the rock and went back to burying ourselves too.

Application Form

Application Form

(in which I am forced to check my own legitimacy ☰)

I am forced to reduce who I am down to a single category —
words that you have deemed do not exist.

I feel for Sisyphus, rolling his burdens up that hill
only to be thwarted at the very top, destined to begin
anew & fail & begin & fail
for the rest of his eternity.

Will my eternity be
my identity submerged into submission?

I am not White
yet all you give me is that little box:
“White includes Middle Eastern” & “White includes Arab”

White people do not get targeted as terrorists in airports.
White people are not asked, “What are you?”
White people are not asked, “Where are you from?”
White people are not told to “go back to ‘where you are from.’”
White people are not asked if they know how to speak English.
White people are not expected to speak another language.
White people are not “other.”
White people are — not.

White people are not excluded from four worlds, destined to hover, never truly belonging

to any of them.

I am not White.

I am Brown —

the brown of dust rising from Yemeni mountains &
the brown of sand swirling across Egyptian deserts &
the brown of adobe birthed from Mexican canyons

I am Brown —

I am the brown of Ibb & Cairo — the brown of the ghetto of Abagayya — the brown
of Chicana when the U.S. stole Texas from Mexico — I am the brown of the California
fields where my grandparents met picking cherries & the brown of the dunes of Wadi
Rum & the brown of the ancient Roman ruins outside the car window — I am the brown
of the gingerbread houses that cover land beyond time & rhyme & reason & I am the brown
of the slaughtered & the brown of the people who knew truth before the settlers — I am
the brown of my family's American dream & the brown your spray tan hopes to achieve &
the brown of the fallen leaves beneath my feet — I am the brown of the graves of my
grandfathers & I am the brown of the turab1, one grandfather's namesake & I am the brown
the other's shepherd ancestors who left him nothing but a name tread upon — & I am the
brown of nostalgia & I am the brown of this blood — spilled & congealed past vibrance & I
am the brown of beginning & I am the brown of these nations & I am the brown of my people
& my prophets & I am brown, I am brown —

I am.

I am my people & my country & my bones

& —

not or

— &

I will not choose wrong — I will not choose one

I will not erase parts of myself to better fit in your box

It squeezes in on |me| all sides being pressed by the urge to conform

I will not.

I am bigger than a checkbox &

I am so much more

than a single checkmark .

1 "earth" in Arabic

Tiger Stripes

As an impressionable 13-year-old, overflowing with hormones, and therefore an excessively angsty outlook on my privileged life, I found respite within the voices of Victorian women. One specific story my mother offered me, perhaps as a token of empathy, instilled in me a new sense of autonomy. *The Awakening*, written by Kate Chopin, is a 100-page or so book about a housewife who continuously longs for more, and once she gets what she desires (an affair with a younger man) her whole sense of independence is taken right from under her. She realizes that she will never hold control over her own life, bound by society, and takes her own life by stripping off her clothes, walking into the ocean, and drowning. By committing suicide, she reclaimed all that had been taken from her.

It had not resonated with me before reading this story, that ultimately, I have control over my breath. Throughout the dawning of my womanhood, I had felt that I was just a vehicle for change and the whiplash would never cease. But even then, I controlled my lungs.

I was a competitive cross-country runner, so I knew, "If I let my breath get out of control, then everything else does too." When I veered too close on the edge of nausea, I'd compose my breath to a deep, slow rhythm, and regain that authority. During 5ks, I had control for approximately 24 minutes. My mind and my body were the sole factors in me getting a shorter time, or beating that one person. Even so, the moment I crossed that finish line, and reentered the world, legs shaking, sweat everywhere, and vomit climbing its way up my esophagus, insecurities consumed me. "Why is this fucking uniform so tight, everyone can see my gross body", as I for a post-game picture I wonder, "How is it possible to be this sweaty, I feel like I'm the only girl here who looks like they're about to have a heart attack", or when I see other girls happy and talking with their teammates, "God they're so skinny, I feel like an elephant compared to them, my thighs are huge".

I feared being too assertive, or more commonly stated, bitchy, when I sent emails or spoke during class discussions, always adding in exclamation points to prove my jovialness. And yes, I laughed at a man's joke even when it's not funny, and I stick out my chest a little to ensure I'm still desirable, but not begging for attention.

The books about female emancipation were confined to my mind and the discussions I'd have with Ms. Jessa Rowen, ever the enabler. I recall once we read *Machinal*, a play written by Sophie Treadwell in the 1920's. My teacher offered, "Maggie, would you like to read for Helen Jones? The main character?" Of course, I delightedly said yes, but little did I know this meant living through a lifetime of Patriarchic trauma and eventually having my character die by electric chair. Suffice it to say, that is quite a handful for a 14-year-old. But even afterward, such a mind-altering experience could not prevent the mask that would slip on if a man jokingly said "Go make me a sandwich" or if I could feel their eyes burning into the slightest bit of cleavage my pubescent self could have.

I let my breath become a fleeting creation, and as my body changed, I stayed behind. Never embracing the process of metamorphosis, but willing myself into a perfection completely outside of what was possible. Hosting an altar of skin and bone women, praising godliness as big boobs and a flat stomach. I craved the assurance that when I passed a man on the street, he'd think, "She's beautiful". Nothing more, nothing less.

For god's sake, I am a lesbian! I have never once in my life felt attraction to a man, except that one time in middle school when I had a crush on a guy a foot shorter than me with long hair. I never said I didn't appreciate androgyny. I was actively making myself complacent to the violations all women before me have endured. I thought I had to choose: to be well-liked and uncontroversial, or stand up for myself and become abhorred.

This burden entered my life, and subsequently, my breath began to falter, at the end of my 6th grade year. I got asked out by a boy for the first time. Middle school "askouts" are like playing a game of telephone. My friends getting word from his friends on the situation at hand, hushed conversations, and already circulating rumors. Everyone's stomach fluttered at the idea of love, even though we wouldn't learn what that was for a long time.

The Disney movies I'd watched when I was little never mentioned the feeling of dread associated with relationships. Lungs tightening, nausea ensuing. It was my first taste of male validation and the first high I had ever felt. Wrapped up in the words "I like you" were the sentiments that I was pretty enough, agreeable enough, worthy enough. So I clung to that euphoria and said yes. After riding that wave for the rest of the school day, it eventually crashed and slapped me with the truth. I never liked this guy, in all honesty, he kind of grossed me out.

Suppressing my feelings was easier than hurting him, or explaining why I didn't like him. Diffuse, diffuse, diffuse. I grew up in the church and was taught to kneel, submit to God, and keep my head down. The Bible is nothing if not ever filled with contradictions, so, by doing this, I broke the 9th commandment in the Bible, thou shall not lie, or whatever. Trust me, Catholic Guilt is a very real thing, so, my facade of interest in this boy lasted a mere 24 hours, a great first relationship in my opinion.

Telling this kid my actual feelings felt the same as when I had to return a puppy my family got. The glossy dejectedness glimmered in both their eyes. He cried and my chest constricted, restricting my airway. That Summer, he texted me incessantly, saying "You broke my heart" and "You can never be forgiven". With each malicious word he threw my way, I lost a sense of power. I grew small, regressed, and let myself be talked over and took arguments without rebuttal. Together, I forgot the resistant voice in my head, and put her in a box, letting the dust collect.

As I persisted through puberty, I stopped getting butterflies at the sight of boys, and yet insecurity about my body became all-consuming. The first thing I did when I saw another woman was compare her to me. Were her thighs smaller than mine? Was her hair nicer? How about her teeth? I picked apart others like Frankenstein's monster, praising the ideal image of the female form in my head. Then again going against the 10 commandments, coveting bodies I could never have.

These toxic cycles of thought began to further manifest in physical forms. The mirror became my haven for self-degradation, picking apart every issue I had with my form, fixating on the skin of my stomach, or fat on my face. I held myself to a constant standard of perfection, and yet I'd consistently get an F, another flaw would always appear, even if I fixed the previous one.

So one night, when I was soaking in my searing hot bath, letting scents of rose and lavender surround me, creating a shrine of sorts to my own body, I'd pray for my fat to melt away. To wake and be inside the body I wanted, or was taught to crave. I had this insatiable need to feel beautiful, and yet the standard of attractiveness was so obscured from me. I was a child, am a child, and bones can't move no matter the amount of workout I do.

That same week, it seemed that I received the antithesis of my prayers: for the first time, I discovered some stretch marks on my butt.

I first identified the feeling that rushed through me as heartbreak, as I failed myself yet again. Nothing new to that. But it transfigured, as I let myself be seen by my own eyes. With the abrupt change, I didn't have the time to develop an intention for what I disliked about myself. Instead, I felt my veins course with vigor, unblocked, as if a floodgate was finally let up. My heart opened, and enveloped me, providing sanctuary for my mind and limbs, discovering safety within myself. I felt unconditional love for my body, and as much as I tried to disdain it, I could only feel pride for the tiger stripes I developed. I let myself breathe and gave space to finally question why. Why I hated what I hated, and why I praised what I praised.

They were simply living proof that my body and mind alike are not subjugated by change, but emancipated. It was exhausting hating every change that occurred within me, as humanity's essence is the fluidity of our body and soul. When I forgo the concept of the male gaze, or anyone's for that matter, and disregard the fear of God staring down at me, judging me for everything I'm worth, I create space to love myself. I take off the metaphorical corset of my Victorian idols and strip bare. Embracing my flesh, fat, and muscle as it is not a mere extension of myself, but the building blocks of my life. Welcoming change for the sake of my own wellness, above all else. I will always have immense affection for my tiger stripes, moles, cellulite, and wrinkles as they fade and grow, they all fit within my own boundless standard of beauty.