

Winter 2007

# PRISM

DIVERSITY. DIALOGUE.DIFFERENCE.

*A Special Prism Poetry Edition*

**INSIDE:**

**A Prism Exclusive Interview with former Merrill Lynch  
C.E.O., Stan O'Neal**

***Also: Photography, Prose, Translations and More!***

# The Prism Team

## Editor-in-Chief

Karolina Brook '10

### Editing Staff

Ting (Hedy) Bok '11  
Karolina Brook '10  
Bilkan Erkmen '11  
Tao Leigh Goffe '09  
Jacquelin Hedeman '11  
Claudel Leveille '10  
Shaina Li '11  
Rachel Lieberman '10

### Layout Staff

Tao Leigh Goffe '09  
Adrian Gallegos '11  
Shaina Li '11  
Sydney Egan '11

### Business and Admin

Karolina Brook '10

### Webmaster

Andy Chen '09

## Contributors

### Authors

Ting (Hedy) Bok '11  
Kortenay Gardiner P'97  
Tao Leigh Goffe '09  
Ting Gou '11  
Jacquelin Hedeman '11  
Courtney Hopen '08  
Chenxin Jiang '09  
Marissa Lee '11  
Claudel Leveille '10  
Natalia Naman '08  
Eleni Papargyriou PD  
Shannon Togawa Mercer '11

### Art and Photography

Bilkan Erkmen '11  
Tao Leigh Goffe '09  
Kaitlyn Hay '10  
Jun Koh '11  
Shannon Togawa Mercer '11  
Sian Miranda Singh OFaolain '08

### Advisory Board

Janet Dickerson - VP Campus Life  
Makeba Clay - Carl A. Fields Center, director  
Paula Chow - International Center, director  
Rachel Baldwin - Asst. Dean, ODUS  
Maria Flores-Mills - Assoc. Dean, ODUS  
Paul Raushenbush - Assoc. Dean of Religious Life  
Patricia Fernandez Kelly - SOC Dept.  
Daphne Brooks - ENG/AAS Dept.  
Bruno Bosacchi - Engineering Research Staff  
Kathleen Crown - Mathey College, Director of Studies  
Pat Caddeau - Forbes College, Director of Studies

Got an opinion or comment about the *Prism*?

Want to get more involved?

Contact us.

[prism@princeton.edu](mailto:prism@princeton.edu)

<http://www.princeton.edu/~prism>

## Letter From the Editor

### *Dear Prism-ers*

It truly is amazing what a different perspective one has after having gone through the experience of freshman year and then watching a new batch of fresh-faced, round-eyed individuals going through the same experience. Coming back as sophomores, I think all of us would agree that it is remarkable how freshman from all over the country and all over the world go through the exact same unsettling feelings we did, the panic of the Writing Seminar, and simply the general adjustment of college life - and yes, it is rather comforting having the confidence that we've gone through that experience, and that it is now past. To all the freshmen, I just have this to say: it really does get only better.



In spite of all the work, college is about finding out who you are. This semester has been a rather creative one in terms of poetry, photography and fine art. Poetry, I've always felt, is one of the most transparent ways to express yourself. It also leaves you the most vulnerable: the more abstract your poem, the more open to interpretation the words you choose to put on the page, and ultimately, the more one can read into the poem and make decisions about who the poet is as a person. What I can say, after reading this selection of poetry, is that Princeton truly has a collection of brave, diverse and inspiring people.

So during these cold months, curl up indoors with a cup of hot chocolate and your copy of *Prism*, and soak in the poetry. Welcome to the Poetry issue of *Prism*!

**Yours,**

*Karolina Brook '10*

*kbrook@princeton.edu*

**Editor-in-Chief**

# Contents

**04** “Drinking”

*Jackie Hedeman '10*

**06** “Black and Blue Blood on Wall Street”: a Prism Exclusive Interview with former Merrill Lynch C.E.O. Stan O’Neal

*Tao Leigh Goffe '09*

**10** “Seeing the Cracked Dirt, One is Reminded of the Yangtze”

*Ting Gou '10*

**11** “Translations”

*Chenxin Jiang '09*

**12** “So that I can see you better”

*Hedy Ting Bok '11*

**13** “February in Harlem”

*Natalia Naman '08*

**14** “Bonneti’s Defense”

*Courtney Hopen '08*

**14** “Butterflies”

*Claudel Leveille '10*

**15** “Pain”

*Kortenay Gardiner P'97*

**15** “Travels”

*Shannon Togawa Mercer '11*

**17** “Footnote on a Song by John Denver”

*Ting Gou '10*

**17** “BFF”

*Natalia Naman '08*

**18** “Man Eater”

*Marissa Lee '11*

**19** “Asian Eyes”

*Shannon Togawa Mercer '11*

**22** “Burglar”

*Ting Gou '10*

**25** “Wedding”

*Shannon Togawa Mercer '11*

**25** “The Seamstress”

*Courtney Hopen '08*

**26** “Mademoiselle On God”

*Eleni Papargyriou PD*

Interested in Writing for Prism’s Spring 2008 Issue?

Send us a query!  
*prism@princeton.edu*

# Drinking

*by Jackie Hedeman'11*

Charles was a choirboy. I didn't believe in anything. Often, when I was older and had learned to roll seven-year-old cognac around my tongue and over my molars, I felt that if I were to believe in something, it would be the brown stickiness at the bottom of the glass the next morning.

Charles would do what he could; our hands would meet around a glass and he would give a gentle tug. But he was tired too – we had both been on our feet for eighteen hours – and on most nights he would join me for a glass. Our knees would meet under the table, shaking as we tapped our toes to the same rhythm.

That is what happens, when you have lived with someone for twenty years.

A certain number of people knew that I drank. There was Charles, of course. He knew even before I did and, as I later found out, considered closing the bar, and moving with me to the country for good, to raise sheep. But our friends were in Paris; we had built a nest. What would two men with a sheep farm do? In the end, Charles abandoned his plan, which never really was a plan in any case, but an idea, a sacrifice, something that he was willing to do for me.

Of the people who knew for certain – my brother, his sister, our waitress, his mother – only one had ever said anything to me. One Wednesday Sandrine arrived early, at six, one hour before we expected her. I was behind the bar flipping through the book where I penciled in the names and addresses of our suppliers. The man who sold us our chickens was retiring and it was going to be difficult finding someone else. Our cook, the one who lasted for six months, had recommended his cousin's shop and we had gotten very good birds from him for five weeks until Charles told him the joke about the Algerian and the hot tamale. We were forbidden to come back.

Sandrine pulled the door shut behind her and flattened the spokes of her inside-out umbrella before nodding in my direction, chin first, "Evening."

I greeted her and returned to my morose

study of butchers and farmers we had known. She wrung out her coat and shook her umbrella once or twice onto the floor. I had long stopped trying to encourage outdoor umbrella wringing. "In here, it is dry," she would say. "Not anymore," I always replied. "Could it be you're afraid to get wet?" she would ask me.

Now Sandrine startled me by leaning up against the bar with her forearms perfectly flat on the wood. She had ballerina wrists and only the vaguest dusting of hair. "How are you?"

"Tired of these people," I said, fanning the pages of the book and shoving it back on its shelf. "The ones who haven't left the business are either too much in demand or Charles told them a joke."

"They're all Africans?" Sandrine asked incredulously.

"No," I said. "Some of them are white, some of them are women, and some of them are men."

She smiled. "I see."

"One thing you can say about Charles's jokes is that they have a universal appeal." I reached for a wine bottle and a glass. "And you can either take them seriously or move on. It's all part of his act."

She eyed my glass. "May I join you?"

"You're about to work."

"So are you."

"I don't have to carry trays."

"I came an hour early."

Not defeated, but unwilling to put much more energy into this discussion, I lifted down another glass and poured. She took it and held the stem like an adolescent; all fist no wrist. I wanted to position her hand, to splay her fingers, to teach her how to lift it.

She saw me watching her hand and misunderstood. "Were you saving this bottle for the two of you?"

"No."

She had scooted the glass awkwardly across the bar, as if intending to pour the wine back into the bottle. Now she pulled it back and tapped her fingers, plink plink clunk clunk, along the bowl. "Where is he?"

"Napping upstairs."

Sandrine nodded and slurped her wine. I cringed involuntarily. She said, "I did that on purpose." She ran her fingers once more down the side of her glass. "How much do you drink each night?"

Startled, I blurted, "How much do I—? What?"

"Drink. Each night," she said calmly.

I didn't answer. Instead I said, "I always switch to coffee at eleven."

"With a little something?"

I leaned across the bar, my forearms mirroring hers. "What do you want?"

She sipped her wine. "Don't kill yourself."

I was stunned. "But I don't want to."

"You don't have to want to," she said. "Just don't do it. I like this job." Then she gulped the rest of her wine at an alarming rate, turned, and picked up her coat and umbrella.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I don't need to be here for another twenty minutes. I'm going to wait in the Tabac." And she left.

There were others who had an inkling of my drinking: the cook, the tax man who always took the table by the window and ate alone or with a newspaper, the parents of our American goddaughter, Ludivigne Alentour and her fourth husband.

Once, early on, Charles and I were drinking together, before it came to be a tension dance in the knees and in the pressure of our elbows on the table and the longest we could go without saying something. It was Monday, noon. The bar, the first, cramped bar by the Palais Royal, was new and we were toasting it by sitting under the awning and turning away people who wandered over, thinking we were open.

"This is the life," Charles said.

"It is," I agreed, the sun and the happiness draining me of anything more observant. I stroked our dog, Günter, behind the ears. He was a German Shepard.

"I'm so glad we found this place," said Charles contentedly, looking up at our façade and its new paint job.

Suddenly fond, I whispered, "I'm so glad I found you."

He kicked me gently under the table. "Of course I meant you. You know what I meant." He poured out the last of the wine and we clinked glasses.

"To good food, good wine, a good life."

"Good food, good wine, good life."

Charles believed in everything: plane crashes, extraterrestrials, love at first sight, the lottery, God. I

believed in that toast, I suppose.

When I stopped drinking, when thin tap water, Orangina, black coffee, and the occasional flute of champagne at New Year's became my way of life I can't say that I did it for him or even for us. Most couples couldn't survive what I did. We could because of our bar, the good life. No, when I quit it was for me. I didn't like the look in his eyes. I missed the taste of other things. I missed sex. By the time I stopped, Sandrine had left us to care for her new baby.

I was proud of her, for putting family first. Charles was irate, and made jokes about its paternity.

I think that she would have been proud of me, in the end.

Jackie is a freshman from Champaign, Illinois. She is a potential English major and spends her free time comparing herself to Cyrano de Bergerac.

To help you get rollin'  
we've got 48 projects  
and a fleet of cars!

VOLUNTEER!

WWW.PRINCETON.EDU/SVC  
FOR THE KEYS TO SERVICE

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
PRINCETON, N.J.  
Student Volunteers Council

SVC

# BLUE BLOOD AND BLACK BLOOD ON WALL STREET

by Tao Leigh Goffe '09

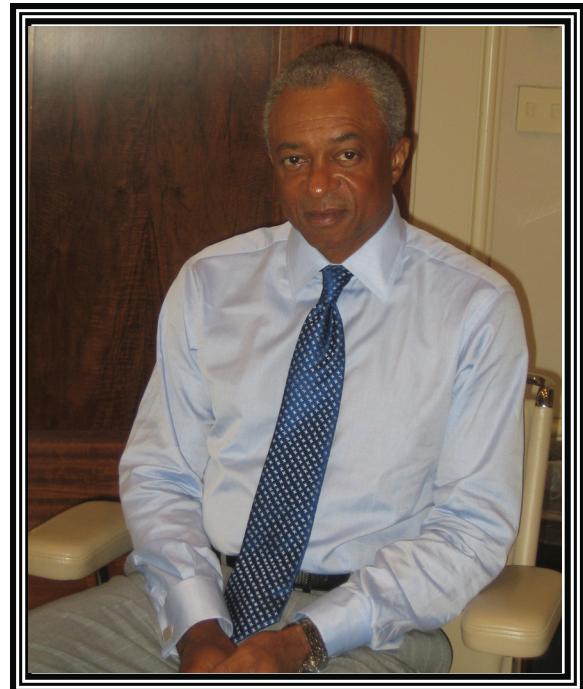
It takes some people a lifetime to make it to the top of the world of big business and high finance. I made it to the top in 54 days, 5 hours, 10 minutes and 36 seconds.

What I really mean to say is, while working as an intern this past summer at Merrill Lynch, the world's largest investment bank and stock brokerage firm, I got permission to take the elevator from the lowly 2nd floor - where I spent dull days shuffling papers, making name tags, scanning documents and doing other mindless chores dumped on interns - up to the top of the North Tower of the Merrill Lynch building where the firm's chief executive officer has his offices. It's here, in this tangle of buildings at the World Financial Center complex in the Wall Street area, the Masters of the Universe, the Titans of Trade, the people who determine whether your parents' humble investments in this stock or that bond will go up or down, dwell.

In these buildings, the Heart of Darkness and Heart of International Capitalism, you can bump into the heads of American Express and Dow Jones. You

“You won’t be able to get to see him” said one of my eight bosses.  
“He’ll cancel...”

can bump into the heads of big name accounting firms like Deloitte and Touche. You can bump into the partners of venerable old blue blood law firms like Cadwalader, Wickersham, and Taft. You could also, if you were lucky, bump into Merrill Lynch C.E.O., E. Stanley O’Neal, the first African-American to head a Wall Street bank and one of only five African-Americans to head a Fortune 500 company. I, somehow, managed to bump into Stan O’Neal, and somehow managed to convince him to let me come up to his offices and quiz him about his life and how, despite all, he’d made it to the top of the world of big business and high finance. “I work for the venerable Princeton magazine, Prism,” I told O’Neal, “and I want just 15 minutes of your time.”



O’Neal agreed to the request happily. Fifteen minutes is exactly what Stan the Man promised me and 15 minutes is exactly what he gave me. It might seem like too brief a time to cover a life as compelling as O’Neal’s, but time, as they say, is money and I estimated that the 15 minutes he said he would spend talking to me wasn’t without its cost for Stan O’Neal and for Merrill Lynch. The firm pays him roughly \$48 million a year. This means 15 minutes of his time adds up to around \$15,385.

“You won’t be able to get to see him” said one of my eight bosses. “He’ll cancel,” said another. “I haven’t even met Stan O’Neal,” another boss who’d been with Merrill a lifetime moaned.

Stan the Man didn’t cancel. He would see me at exactly 2:10pm in his office, he said. I wondered why the meeting was set for 2:10 and not for 2:00 or even 2.15? Did 2:10 have some kind of numerological significance for the CEO? Was the head of the world’s largest financial services company a secret numerologist? Not wanting to arrive too soon, yet not wanting to arrive too late, I jumped on the elevator at 1:50pm and for the next ten minutes or so went up and down and up and down the 32 floors of Merrill

## Prism Exclusive Interview

Lynch's North Tower.

The elevator was a world in itself. Jam-packed with people on the bottom floor, it thins out workers as it ascends. For the most part, those who get off on the lower floors have less importance at the company than those who got off on the middle floors. Those who got off on the higher floors were, by and large, the big bankers that make the money that once made the Merrill the most profitable such company in the world.

Those who got off the elevator on the very top floor, the 32nd floor, were the executives, the strategists like Stan O'Neal, who took the credit when everything went right and lost their jobs when things went bad.

There's a lot of chatter in these elevators. I heard one intern tell another, "I was in the elevator the other day and I couldn't believe it. There was Stan O'Neal and he said, 'Hi.' He was just leaning up against the elevator wall. He looked very cool." Other interns, too, seemed to be fans of this black man who grew up picking cotton and corn on the farm of his grandfather—a former slave—and living in shack without running water or inside toilets in Wedowee Alabama. It's not hard to see why Stan would have fans. After all, his is a classic rags to

riches story. Born dirt poor in the segregated South in the 1950s, his family eventually moved to Michigan and to the promise of prosperity on the assembly line at the General Motors plant in Flint. There O'Neal attended the General Motors

Institute, which is now Kettering University. He seized his opportunities and before long had become a low level executive at GM. It wasn't until 1984, when he was aged 33, that O'Neal made the move that would make his name, the move to Merrill Lynch. Along the way he, of course, attended Harvard Business School like all those who hope to one day rule or perhaps own the world.

Finally, dizzy from going up and down, up and down in the elevator, I emerged at the 32nd floor at exactly 2:01, 9 minutes early. The security guard pointed me to the waiting area. 2:10 came and went and no Stan O'Neal. 2:15 arrived and passed, and still no Stan O'Neal. Then, at 2:20 I was summoned into his conference room by his factotum. I waited here for another five minutes and passed the time admiring his view of the

Statue of Liberty in the distant Hudson River. I also admired three very interesting framed items on the conference room walls. Three of the items were photographs; one of George Bush; one of Bush, his wife and Stan the Man, and one of Stan and Bush shaking hands and smiling. The fourth item was by far the most interesting of the group. It was a letter George W. had sent Stan in commemoration of his birthday. O'Neal was so moved by the gesture, and determined to let others know he had friends in the very highest of places and wasn't the cool, austere, loner so many in Wall Street liked to say he was, that he had it framed in a fancy picture frame. It made me wonder if Stan and George were such good friends, why there only one framed letter on the conference room wall? Bush had been in power for seven years so shouldn't there be seven letters or something like it? Oh well, I guessed Stan was one of George's newer friends. Before I knew it, the great man had entered the room and sat down. Nervously, I greeted him and put my first question to him.

**T:** Some people have said that the only color that matters on Wall Street is green. What do you think about that statement?

**E:** Hmm... I think that generally speaking it is true. I mean it is one of the things about working in markets is that everything in

some way, shape, or form is reduced to economic value. It doesn't mean it's the only consideration but economic value is always front and center in every single discussion and transaction interchange, idea merger it is a currency that we work with. You can reduce most anything in a commercial context to dollars and cents and that's what we do. When we facilitate dollars and cents we facilitate them in trading and that helps them in value or enhances value in the process. Having said that, I think the implication of the question is do people of color face additional challenges in this industry and I think the answer has to be yes.

**T:** So have you ever been affected in any way by...?

## Prism Exclusive Interview

**E:** Honestly I mean I have had...I was born in the segregated South in the 1950s and I lived in Alabama until I was 13 years old and where I grew up black and whites were separated by law, school systems, water fountains, movie theaters. So I think I know something about something about sort of racial divides in this country. But I can honestly say however that since I've been at Merrill I don't think I've ever been impeded in the opportunity to. I mean I've had extraordinary opportunities to do a lot of different things.

I have had some clients in my career where I think there were conceptions, preconceived notions, biases, prejudices that were obvious and most instances you are able to work through those or overcome them. In a few they become impediments and you have to decide what you're going to do.



Some people have criticized Stan for not doing much for black people. But that's not completely fair. He made sure that students for HBCU's like Spelman and Morehouse, and not just Ivy Leaguers, get coveted internships at Merrill Lynch each summer. He's done other things, as well, but frankly doesn't want to pigeon-holed with the race thing.

O'Neal is partly of European and of Native American ancestry but doesn't make a big deal out of it. His wife, if it matters, is white and his two children are comfortable with being mixed race. They know little, if anything at all, of what it means to be black in America. Stan's a long way from the shack without inside toilets and running water he grew up in Wedowee, Alabama. But he hasn't forgotten where he came from. There was talk that he had employed a voice teacher to get rid of his Southern accent, but that doesn't mean he's distanced himself from his kinfolk. Stan has financed the education of many of his nieces and nephews and even some distant cousins, as well. He gave his brother a job at Merrill Lynch even

though he admits to feeling a growing distance, a chasm really, between him and siblings that have not risen much above their working class origins.

**T:** What sort of advice would you give to college students who see you as a role model?

**E:** I'm not sure. I guess I would say at least from my own experience, there is no substitute for hard work. Values are something that have to be unchangeable. You have to sort of understand

what is important to you because there will be no shortage of opportunities to compromise. There will be temptations. There will be pressures. There will sometimes be ambiguity around choices. And quite often the only thing you can come back to is what do you really think is important in life and try to hold on to that.

**T:** So that's especially important in college?

**E:** I think it's true. It certainly has been more true to me in my personal life than it was to me at college. I think the world gets increasingly complicated over time than less so.

**T:** So what's playing on Stan O'Neal's iPod right now?

**E:** I don't know. I would be. I would probably be embarrassed to tell you. I can't think of what I have on my iPod that... But I like a lot of old R&B. But I also like and most of the stuff is rock, R&B, some jazz, and even some collection of songs from musicals. So it's a fairly eclectic.

**T:** So which artists in particular?

**E:** Oh don't do that to me.

**T:** So how do you think that the Stan O'Neal years at Merrill will be remembered?

**E:** Well that's my biggest hope. Well look, I've done everything that I think is right that was the right thing to do. I made some mistakes for sure. I had to make some difficult decisions in a number of circumstances especially in the beginning.

## Prism Exclusive Interview

I think that all comes with responsibility and leadership. Others will have the judge what they think of all that. I am reasonably comfortable that I have done my best.

But the interview wasn't over though O'Neal thought it was. I saved my best question for last. In the end, the thing most people – by this I mean the 100,000 people who work at Merrill Lynch - wanted to know about Stan the Man was not how much he earned, nor which fancy neighborhood he lived in, nor how many exclusive country clubs he belonged to. What most people wanted to know, but were too afraid to ask, was what the 'E' in 'E. Stanley O'Neal' stood for. One person I knew insisted it stood for 'Eugene.' Another thought it stood for 'Egbert.' As it turns out, Stan hadn't intended that his name Earnest – he was named after his grandfather, a former slave - be a secret, at all. I wasn't so decided to ask him about it at the end of my interview and not at the beginning so he couldn't storm out of the room and cancel on me.

**T:** Everyone wants to know what the E stands for in E. Stanley O'Neal. So what does it stand for?

**E:** Oh, really? Well it's nothing exotic, I'm afraid. It stands for Earnest. That's all.

**T:** Oh, well!

On a serious note, it's worth saying that when I sat down for my face to face with Stan O'Neal in the summer of 2007, he couldn't have known then that only three months later he would be forced to resign in shame after being blamed for causing the worst losses in the history of the 93 year old firm. Stan would argue he made more money for the company than he lost in his time there. Others – the shareholders in particular would disagree. Whatever the case, Stan the Man himself left Merrill Lynch much better off than when he arrived there. His Golden Parachute, as the big pay-offs failed executives are given to simply go away by their old firms, was almost a record at a reported 161 million dollars. So, Stan got his money and I got my 15 minutes with him, or perhaps I should say I got my 15 thousand dollars worth because that's exactly what 15 minutes with a former Master of the Universe costs.

Tao Leigh Goffe '09 is from South London but now lives in northern New Jersey. She is a concentrator in religion who enjoys photography and fencing.

*"Princeton in the service of the imagination"*



## LEWIS CENTER FOR THE ARTS

*offering courses and sponsoring events in*

Creative Writing

Dance

Film and Video

Musical Performance

Theater

Visual Arts

and the

Princeton Atelier

*For more information about spring courses and upcoming events, visit our new website at:*

**[www.princeton.edu/arts/](http://www.princeton.edu/arts/)**



## PROGRAM IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

The Program in Latin American Studies (PLAS) at Princeton seeks to **inspire** and develop knowledge and experience of Latin America and the Caribbean across the University and far beyond. PLAS supports a broad range of **research** and teaching, amid a broad array of lectures and cultural **events**, student-led ventures, **internships**, exhibitions and conferences.

**Undergraduates** take part in the Program while fulfilling their departmental major requirements. A certificate of proficiency is awarded to seniors who complete an interdisciplinary study of Latin America, including Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean. The Program encourages and supports undergraduates and **graduates** to conduct serious field research. Students can apply for a number of different **grants** to travel to Latin America and conduct research.

PLAS explores Latin American issues of contemporary and historical significance via lectures, colloquia, conferences, readings, **concerts** and film series.

To find out how to become a Latin American concentrator or for more information on our grants and **events**, stop by our office or visit our website at [www.princeton.edu/plas](http://www.princeton.edu/plas)

*Celebrating 40 Years of Latin American Studies at Princeton University*

309-316 Aaron Burr Hall  
Princeton, NJ | 08544  
Tel. 609.258.4148  
Fax 609.258.0113  
[plas@princeton.edu](mailto:plas@princeton.edu)



# SEEING THE CRACKED DIRT, ONE IS REMINDED OF THE YANGTZE



Photo Credit: Jun Koh '11

by Ting Gou '10

From a distance they looked like sparrows' nests,  
the ones we used to knock down with bright  
pebbles  
the size of tangerines.

Or giants' footsteps, sunk into the mud  
after a thorough soaking and later  
dried, rich as melting chocolate.

Or perhaps they were crisscrossing  
tire tracks, caught when the soil  
was still wet, photographed.

But they were not rivers,  
these reddish lines,  
not mountains, not pools,

not the estuary leading to the sea,  
a place we have been to once  
and can never go back.

Ting Gou is a freshman from Atlanta, Georgia who enjoys music, words, sleep, and sushi. According to her Creative Writing application, she is majoring in Undeclared. In addition to Creative Writing, she hopes to obtain a certificate in American Studies.

## Davis International Center

*"A Place for Us All"*

**243 Frist Campus Center  
609-258-5006**



Join us at our

- Thursday Ethnic Lunches**
- Luncheon and Dinner Discussions**
- Speakers Program**

Participate in our

- Host Family Program**
- English Conversation Partnership**
- Cultural and Social Events**
- Festivals**

For more information please visit  
[www.princeton.edu/~intlctr](http://www.princeton.edu/~intlctr)

To receive a weekly events bulletin via email,  
please send request to [intlctr@princeton.edu](mailto:intlctr@princeton.edu)



Art Credit: Kaitlyn Hay '10

# TRANSLATIONS

by Chenxin Jiang '09



Photo Credit: Shannon Togawa Mercer '11

## 下江陵

朝辞白帝彩云间  
千里江陵一日还  
两岸猿声啼不住  
轻舟已过万重山

## DOWNSTREAM

Morning, leaving the pied clouds of White mountain –  
A day is all it takes to sail a thousand miles down river.  
Before the echoes of monkeys' cries fades,  
This little boat floats past looming mountains.

- Li Po (701-762)

- 李白 (701-762)

Chenxin is a Comparative Literature major from Hong Kong. She sings with the Glee Club, and is a member of the Brown Co-op and the Manna Christian Fellowship. This semester she is studying abroad at Worcester College, Oxford.

## 鸟鸣涧

人闲桂花落，  
夜静春山空。  
月出惊山鸟，  
时鸣春涧中。

## BIRDS IN THE CREEK

Idly watching cassia flowers fall,  
This still spring night  
On a deserted mountain.  
Startled by a climbing moon,  
Birds shriek. Their cries echo  
From the limpid creek.

- Wang Wei (701-761)



Photo Credit: Shannon Togawa Mercer '11

# SO THAT I CAN SEE YOU BETTER

by Hedy Ting Bok '11

I was convinced that orange and blue do not make grey  
or purple, but you said, 'put orange in orange, and blue in grey.'  
you said, 'make a small whirlwind in water, and see if it's not the same'  
you said, 'what a sweet and shiny ring'  
you said, with such conviction, never staring out of the window.  
The sun ray is shining through your white collar,  
your eyes run into an eclipse, chasing the blocks outside.

Tickets? they must be somewhere, somewhere.  
sorry, I just grabbed a stranger's hand on the handrail,  
They charge the same price, you say.  
does the ticket say where to get off?  
It does not matter, you say,  
my seat is very warm, very fitting  
A boy asked for a plastic bag underneath.

Aren't we lifting up soon?  
If you want to count the clouds,  
a heater will make us warmer,  
As soon as we get there,  
you can play the drum, make good your promise  
and we will throw the luggage away,  
strip the red strings, locks and stickers,  
leaving only our carved initials there.

If an old woman gets on,  
we can give her our places,  
and find new spaces, close to the track  
where we can hear the forward rattle, then a shuffle  
leaving us all grappling with each other.

Then we must sway with the bends,  
right when right, left when left,  
I only need to follow your stubborn shoulder.  
This is why I bought you the bright white collar shirt  
white feels softer, so different from those handles.  
Sorry I can never stand up straight,  
when leaning on you, guessing why you do not look out  
your stare on me burns, you know?  
Yes, that is why I know,

yet what do I do when I cannot hold onto you?  
I dance around with that watery ring.  
If I do not put it on,  
the cut on my finger can be forgotten  
I can forget how it slashed,  
now that it is well covered,  
by a drop, a crystal, or a diamond



Art Credit: Kaitlyn Hay '10

Hedy Ting Bok is a freshman from Hong Kong or Shanghai. She is going to major in whatever she is terrible at which might include Mathematics, Astrophysics, or Chemical Engineering. At the moment, Hedy is studying Latin and busy being a Facebook addict. As a loyal Bloomberger, she only sleeps in her own room and never spends time in the prettier colleges like Whitman.

# FEBRUARY IN HARLEM

by Natalia Naman '08



Photo Credit: Jun Koh '11

1.

Every finger crisping,  
crackling in the frost's bite,  
unhanding bricks and uncradling chain links  
as the sun sidles behind the tenement.

The ivy loosens her grip  
but only just enough  
so the underbellies of each vein  
can take a deep breath.

2.

tit tit tit tit tit tit  
Little finch or sparrowbaby  
hipping down the sidewalk,  
gliding every hop or so  
on the iced lemon cake.  
Each time the basketball pounds  
the cracked concrete,  
the finchbaby tits.

3.

He sucked my second finger  
mhmm mm mm

like he could make milk  
come out under my nail.

I know yo maaaayn  
don't work his tongue like this!  
mhmm mm hm

I thought of the three bears.  
The taste of my fingerprint  
like curry or bay leaves.  
His breath like tea steam  
as I rocked in my seat.

How hot my nutmeg porridge  
the morning he came knocking—  
he knew the porridge was steam.  
Did he know the oats were stale?  
hm hm hm hm

Did he know them oats were stale?  
Only one bowl in that pot  
and not for him neither.

Natalia Naman is a junior in the English Department with a certificate in Theater, Creative Writing, and African-American Studies. She is the co-Artistic Director of eXpressions Dance Company and loves to dance, choreograph, sing and write songs, plays, sitcoms, and poetry (duh). Her hometown is Columbus, GA.

# BONNETI'S DEFENSE

*by Courtney Hopen '08*

The night Montoya plays shot-glass chess  
is the same Friday that Fagan the Irishman pays  
a visit to the Queen in Buckingham. The 9th of July  
is a night for games, as Montoya downs the best  
of the wine from his dark opponent's pawns,  
and Michael Fagan gossips with the blood  
still running down his hand where he's cut it on glass;  
ten minutes he chats and the Queen fakes her calm  
while Montoya tries pass after pass  
and the man in black feigns Bonetti's Defense.

Courtney is a senior from Hollywood, Florida. She is an English major with a certificate in creative writing. In her free time she enjoys cooking things in her wok and putting on post-rock musicals for charity.



Photo Credit: Shannon Togawa Mercer '11



Photo Credit: Jun Koh '11

# BUTTERFLIES

*by Claudel Leveille '10*

A butterfly.  
What beauty can behold?  
Look upon one,  
In a trance,  
Enchanted by its entrance.  
I, mesmerized by the graceful motion,  
Which is similar to a peaceful ocean,  
No commotion.

A natural feeling,  
Spring, the living season,  
Vibrant, the colors...  
The wings they flutter,  
Graceful, and smooth as butter,  
I melt.  
the intoxication...  
My unrequited fixation,  
The flap caresses the air,  
I stop and I stare,  
A butterfly,  
A Butterfly  
Entered here.

Claudel is a sophomore, currently pre-med, but subject to change. Planning to major in psychology or in the humanities. He currently resides in Queens, NY.

# PAIN

by Kortenay Gardiner '97

The carnal opposite of pleasure  
When it remits, divine relief  
but not now  
what is this, punctuation? An ellipsis  
during which the cosmos chatter?  
Am I possessed?  
The hearth within me is lit, my mind  
attentive,  
I join the human chorus.  
Straining to transcend; to see the light a  
bout de tunnel\*.  
But held down and tortured,  
my eyes fill with starlight.  
Shackled  
I cannot rise, but instead I plunge to the  
core.  
I am there.  
An uproar of souls, minus their bodily  
woes, still  
In Pain beyond measure:  
Haunted.  
“At least,” I assume-  
“We will rise again.”

\*the light at the end of the tunnel

Kortenay was a Comparative Literature major specializing in Caribbean/Latin American studies at Princeton. She is now pursuing English graduate work at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida.

# TRAVELS

by Shannon Togawa Mercer '11

I have seen the wind-tossed sand dance up and  
down my feet  
Accompanied by the slow  
Ebb and flow  
Of the water,  
Compelling  
In its graceful return to defeat  
From victory

I have seen the blood-red sun,  
Under which I have laughed at strange things  
And marveled at the flowing lines that graced the  
pages consuming me,  
I have been  
Up and down those streets.

You will know  
When my eyes are closed - that I am envisioning  
the mountain tops  
With clouds above them  
Higher than my dreams  
They open  
And in chilling disguise  
I go on with life

My pictures speak  
In colors that neither you nor I have ever seen  
Or are willing to replicate  
With water and ink

Lay down your head tired traveler,  
Your pilgrimage has ended here –  
Listen to the stories of the places I have been  
With fist-clench hands, tilted smile and open ear.

Shannon Togawa Mercer is a freshman from the islands of Saipan and Guam. Having come to Princeton bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, she was quickly forced to acclimate to the harsh realities of college life: cold weather, small dorm rooms, and homework over Thanksgiving holiday. She hopes to become a Physician and make her way back to the Mariana Islands but for now she is entertaining herself by playing volleyball, chasing squirrels, and staying warm.

## Photography



Photo Credit: Tao Leigh Goffe '09



Photo Credit: Tao Leigh Goffe '09

# FOOTNOTE ON A SONG BY JOHN DENVER

by Ting Gou '10

From the refrigerator bought when we first bought  
this house  
my dad humming holds up a

small reddish lichee and for some strange reason  
my hearing him sing John Denver's "Country Roads",  
a tune he first heard in Beijing as a student in 1983,

made me hear him say, "Isn't this funny?  
I just realized a minute ago how much  
a lichee looks like a strawberry."

Back in 1983 I wonder if he'd ever heard "Country  
Roads" as I heard it, from  
a travelling man and his sister visiting a nursing home, and  
their guitar,  
or if he'd even heard about West Virginia then,

that, if he had, if he'd known that twenty-some years later  
the blue ridge mountains would still be as far  
away from him as strawberries are from lichees,  
or that when his only daughter listens

it would be with one hand on  
the door (what could he be asking for)  
to the place where strawberries and lichees grow  
under many suns.



Photo Credit: Shannon Togawa Mercer '11



Art Credit: Kaitlyn Hay '10

## BFF

by Natalia Naman '08

the dance of learning secrets.  
the burdens of allegiance.  
oh the claustrophobia  
that always  
follows  
loyalty.  
a leak in the steel basin.  
I cave in while you drain.  
one day I will overflow  
and they will  
come to  
know you.

# MAN EATER

by Marissa Lee '11

Things do not happen  
randomly, thoughts are constricted  
你为什么不听我呢？为什么?  
Kan saya telah beritahu ingatanku?  
Your scent ignites my inner flame  
and I burn like fire to all who  
知道我的想法, 知道我表  
代的方式是很简单的。  
Saya sedang hilang dalam  
kenangan saya tentang kamu.  
I have struggled to keep each  
of my thoughts to myself,  
可我无奈, 我需要帮助。  
Kesakitan dalam diriku  
is too great! too fathom  
但我还是收着我苦言  
You can pervade my arms  
but never can you pervade  
pandanganku, ku akan  
跟着你,彷彿在等待  
新的开始,和你在一  
bersama-sama tetapi  
I am still standing for  
bags packed and ready  
可你的踪影都不出现  
Saya telah hilang  
My mind in shatters  
I weep, not for you  
tetapi untuk diriku  
我是个含蓄  
的女孩  
All I can do  
is climb each  
arduous step  
一层层地向着前进, 寻找一个美好的地方。  
Sigh... Like the droopy leaves of a willow tree  
静,永远对我来说是个美好的地方。  
Signifying the existence of you and me.

seduce me  
in mismatched garb  
so elegantly collected  
it could pass for fashion  
while I lust after your  
2¢ ruby slippers  
and run my fingers  
through your androgynous hair

use me like a cigarette  
light  
sup  
then discard  
doomed to travel the haggard streets  
harassed by the Surgeon General

cloud me with your gibberish  
until there is no difference  
between beautiful and attractive

make me feel like  
I've got a:  
truly brilliant  
certifiably unique  
excessively polished  
DIAMOND

and once our luscious curtain falls  
do me the honor  
of pretending like you didn't want those  
roses  
after all

Whisper  
Whisper

Photo Credit: Jun Koh '11

Marissa is a freshman from Chicago, Illinois. She is a Staff Writer for The Daily Princetonian. She has enjoyed writing poetry since elementary school.

# ASIAN EYES

*by Shannon Togawa Mercer '11*

In search of  
My inner  
Asian eyed anonymity,  
That blanket  
I fold daily  
In servitude  
Gratitude  
Solitude

So,  
You pass me on the street  
And see the white  
Exterior  
The Anglo,  
The jaw line,  
And chin  
And don't think.

Closer  
Come closer  
And see  
The angle of my eyes  
The thin lips  
The yellow undertone  
Next to rosy  
Ruby red  
Cheeks that glow  
When teased

The small hands  
Thin ankles  
Dark hair  
The inner  
Inner  
Inner  
Peace

Cheeks that glow  
When teased

The small hands  
Thin ankles  
Dark hair  
The inner  
Inner  
Inner  
Peace



Photo credit: Jun Koh '11

## Photography



Photo Credit: Kaitlyn Hay '10

## Photography



**Electricity**, Photo Credit: Sian OFaolain '08  
Imizamo Yethu, a township in Hout Bay outside of Cape Town, South Africa.



**It's So Sympoh**, Photo Credit: Tao Leigh Goffe '09

# THE BURGLAR

by Ting Gou '10

My grandmother once told me that fingerprints don't lie. We were each born with different sets of them—ten tiny swirls on our hands, five on each if we're lucky—and nothing in the world can change them. That's what I was contemplating one sunny morning in her first floor apartment.

I was coming to visit.

I could still feel her energy in this place and the stories.

Walking on the floor makes me smile; the hard, sturdy plane that always holds a person upright never gave away. And it won't. I'm sure it won't. I'm not a child anymore, but I feel the pulsating stories like light from the rosy glass panes separating the garden and the indoor porch where I used to build fantastical cities with my cousin. An imagined breeze from the market street outside the garden grazed my face, bringing sight and forgiveness. On one of the glass panes, the sunlight struck, turning it stark white. I can see the fingerprints there...

My grandmother walks out from the side room, her bedroom, to the living room in the middle of the apartment. I like to imagine her daily morning routine. Did she walk out of her bedroom in a white robe with pink roses on it, like American

grandmothers, groggy with heavy sleep, or did she float? Did she, I suppose, see much of a separation between the dark state of slumber and bright life? In my ten years in the United States, I wonder about her essence. I walk to the front door, now; I touch the iron bars, there to create a barrier between the homeowner and the stranger. Things like these are necessary. My grandmother goes to the kitchen to wash her face, to put breakfast on the stone stove. Click. She turned the gas on. From the door, I watch her take eggs from the refrigerator. Did she pause and hold them in her hands? She cracked them on the stone masonry one by one. It felt so good to hear an echo of her life after these years of wondering. The kitchen possesses one lonely window above the sink; so different in texture from the stone it seems to be painted. Indeed, it is painted, but not by hand, but by the morning sunlight, floating in with the beats of communist drums, the drums of the military exercise area adjacent to the apartment complex. I feel the cotton of the shirt on my back as I walk to the window. I feel her hand cradling me as a child of few years. What did she say to me? How can I translate them into English without losing their meaning? She

whispered in my ear, when the dragon-lord threw down his thunder, to not worry. I don't think I believed her then, but I think I calmed down.

I kick my worn-out Newbalance sneakers on a stone block that I had not noticed on the way into the kitchen. I look around me. Emptiness. Except for my thoughts. My mom, who had come with me on this visit, is at my aunt and uncle's house on a street in this large city. I am here all alone, because I had asked to see this apartment, this place where I had grown up in, by myself. When I was here, I was never alone. My grandparents made lunch—why were they always cooking?—in the kitchen.

In the mornings, my round-faced uncle from a family in northern China pedals his bicycle through the iron gates of the complex, down the short and wide lane, to the door. He has a strange accent. Because my family spoke three dialects when I was little, I struggled to pronounce Chinese words. I remember this scene clearly: I was standing before a dressing mirror in the bathroom. Guests occupied the room outside. Some relative said that I confuse "sweetheart" with "peanut", because they sound very similar in Chinese. Angry, my four-year-old self cried, "I'm not a peanut, I'm a peanut!" Laughter. I smile. I put my hands in my l.e.i jeans. My mom

should be coming in a while, and I want to leave. To get out of this apartment, this translucent place of memory.

I feel guilty. This place should not be empty. The image of my grandmother is no longer here. I do not want to think about her now. Maybe that's the reason she's not here. Such childish thoughts.

What's that noise? The clear ringing of a bell. Bicycles. Bicycles in the street. People who are moving, doing, being. Shopping for fresh chives, straight from the soil. And Chinese cabbage. Except they're not labeled or called here as such. Just cabbage—White Vegetable. Diet of a common man, who wears anything but l.e.i jeans. I see the garden behind the enclosed patio. Though not rich, my family's still well-off compared to everyone else. I shudder, thinking that the government allotted this place to my parents. Who owns it now? How can a place, with gardens and wooden floors and stone stoves, subject itself to ownership? How can people be owned by things that are no longer there?



Razor Wire, Photo Credit: Sian OFaolain '08

## Prose

I walk towards the garden. It's not so much a garden as a plot of concrete slabs, and, I guess, negative concrete slabs where polygons of soil poked through. Single-handedly, my grandparents had removed the hard agglomerate rock to make room for plants to grow. Where are the picks, the wheelbarrow, the random iron bar used to pry out the concrete now? Most likely, they lie in my first aunt's house, or my other uncle's. My mom's older sister—my first aunt—and her younger brother—my other uncle—have their separate apartments in this city. Since when did the tradition of the all-inclusive extended family dissolve? In social studies, we learned that Chinese people often lived in extended families, but I suppose that we're the exception. We have nuclear ones, ever since my grandparents died. Though my grandparents' deaths did not cause the family to separate, it did seem to have stolen a sort of spirit from the household.

As I opened the glass and screen doors to the garden, they creaked. I rarely find time to call my aunts and uncles. I'm so busy. So uselessly busy. I touched my hair. It was greasy and smelled of noodles. I needed to wash off the grime of car exhaust. Maybe I'll do it when my mom comes to pick me up. I only have an hour more. One hour left to think. I sit down on the concrete stair. I strain my eyes upward in order to stretch a neck muscle.

Concrete walls surround the garden; bars stretch across from the top of the wall to the building. Criminals need to be kept out. One did get in, however. I remember my mom or some relative telling me that a burglar pried out one of these bars. I see the gap there now. Beyond, I see smog. I hear bicycles in the street, the soft clicking noise of spokes striking past each other and the screeching stopping sound. Though I can't see it, a farmer selling chicken on a stick is passing by. Sesame and chicken. With Chinese spices. The gap left by the missing bar opens up a rectangle section of sky, and I'm glad it did. The burglar years ago had opened a part of the sky to me, the granddaughter of the intended victim. The burglar didn't steal anything or hurt anyone, thank God. I remember I was attending a gathering when my mom's little brother told us a family story. Apartments don't come with cages on windows, but the owner on the first floor always bought them. When I was listening, I would imagine those hideous things which would be the first thing to greet a person in the mornings. Then, the person living on the floor above gets nervous that a burglar might climb on the cage to his window. So he buys a set of metal bars. The person living on the higher floor purchases cages. It continues to all seven floors. Straight up, cages. I laugh quietly to myself. If the first floor just trusted the burglar to not break in, no one would need cages. But the human spirit needs self-assurance. Insurance policies are expensive. Cages cost less.

I sometimes feel trapped. Between choices. Should I practice the piano, or should I do homework?

Someone should take care of the plants in the garden. Down the left side, potted plants aligned tenderly give audience to my choice.

My grandmother had a rock carved in the shape of a mountain in a terracotta dish; the dish's shape resembled those used to serve food in Chinese restaurants in the United States. But of course, in China, in side taverns where the owner serves you simple dishes, the serving dishes are rarely matched. The family running the restaurant probably lives upstairs, and the dishes sometimes run out and they have to use some of their own. My mom admonished me to never eat in one of those restaurants. I can see the confusion and curiosity in the little boy's eyes as my cousin, aunt, and I pass by his family's restaurant. He had the same eyes as the boy from the vegetable farmer selling White Vegetable right outside our apartment complex, the boy who had pointed at the balloons with smaller ones inside that my cousin and I were holding. He cried to the woman who was stringing green beans, "Look! Look at that!"

The woman said, "Why are you looking?" and the boy returned to his idle playing. Their wooden stand was next to the empty spot number fifteen, I remember. The number, his eyes, her snapping tone. I remember those details that day. The rest is lost to memory. That remark had made me feel special. I realized that I was privileged, and I wanted to smack that boy for pointing it out. I can't remember anything that happened in China after that day. It's as if I was no longer observing because I had found where I belonged. But I don't belong anywhere. I had wanted to belong, and when I had, I felt trapped. The burglar...he belongs among the criminals, but when I place him there, I, in turn, become trapped in my views towards him. I will no longer be free to see him as a whole person. I belong to school and society, but something in me just refuses to be categorized.

I look at the missing bar. The emptiness resembles the missing concrete slabs that allowed plants to grow. An understanding began to grow within me. The burglar might have been in desperate need of money. He didn't know that a couple lived here. Risking his own freedom, he pried loose one bar. When he descended into the garden, he landed in front of the window panes. The man felt the rose and turquoise and goldenrod glass searching for a loose pane, for something to give. Carefully, I stand up. I imagine standing at the place where the burglar, in one moment, paused and placed his bare fingertips on the window. My mom told me that he had crawled into the garden—like some type of snake I imagined him—but I do not believe that now. The setup of the cage and the garden was not possible for a man to crawl in from above. He must have jumped with the swiftness of the decision right then, right there falling on him, knocking the air out of his thin windpipe. Why must we all own things? I put my hands in my l.e.i. jeans pocket. The sun floating above the garden, like a bowl of chicken soup, marked noon. Light illuminated the concrete potholes on the walls. Memories of this garden...how I picked three-leaf clovers, those tiny, squishy plants; how I asked my smaller cousin to play ancient Chinese imperial court with me; how I watered the stone in the misplaced terracotta dish and waited for moss to grow. The mountain will grow new vegetation...an old Chinese proverb.

## Prose

I don't want to be here, but I am here.

The burglar is a person. He is no different than the rest of us; he's no different from me. It's almost noon, and the street outside calls with the noise of bartering people and fresh, live chickens and geese struggling to stay alive and the faint smell of fish. How long have I been lingering here? An hour? Ten minutes? For ten years I have searched for my grandma. Now, in this garden, I know why. I walk up the two stone stairs to the glass door. She was so much a part of my childhood that I am her. Did she think deeply when walking up these same stairs in the morning? The screen door squeaks to allow me entrance. The room is cool. The smell of pine resin rises from the floor. As I look out through the windows, I realize that the garden, too, smells of pine resin. The air outside is cool. I realize that I can only see a part of this apartment at any given moment, that I sometimes project my view of others on them. Doesn't the homeowner judge the stranger through the iron bars before allowing him in? Maybe my grandmother wasn't any of the things I imagine her to be. Maybe the fact that she once existed and impacted my life and now is gone is enough. I'm afraid of sitting on the sofa. I'm afraid of existing and belonging here, because at this moment I discovered that my grandparents have died.

I remember walking up the mountain in high spirits with my aunt and uncle, two cousins, my mom, and my other uncle and his wife, who I am not close to. It was a joyous occasion. The sun was shining, as it is now. Geese quacked and Chinese cranes ascended from mossy, emerald dunes. My feet in sandals felt the asphalt of the road. When the cranes were high in the sky, feathers gracing the effulgent sunlight, steam still rose from the dewy grass. In waves and waves—sheets of rain called back. I feel the dampness on my cheeks now.

We were there to visit my great-grandmother's grave. My mom once told me that she was a rich woman left bankrupt by a gambling husband.

After he died, she raised my grandmother by herself; my grandmother was her only child, though she had others who had died tragically in her womb. Her grave, one among many others in a straight row, seemed massive to me, befitting a woman who had never had any disease, except for her glaucoma, which killed her. She died the month I was to be born, but I think she saw me before she died.

My grandmother seemed to have no disease. I was surprised when she was diagnosed with cancer. One time when I visited her, it was at the hospital, and she asked me whether I was taking care of her garden. Her sentimental voice startled me, because I didn't know that she cared about the garden. I don't remember my reply, but I know a strong emotion stabbed me. I'm sure it's guilt; I had not taken care of the garden. I thought that she expected too much of me to accept responsibility for something that was, and still is, hers. But now I realize she believed I was strong enough to take care of it, like my great grandmother, and had wished to see me strong. I had wanted my grandmother to be strong for me. Why can't we stop projecting dreams on each other? I drink in the pine resin. I belong here, in a place of no belonging.

My mom will be back in less than an hour. Amidst one of these bicycles will be hers coming to take me somewhere to eat, to visit, to live, to be. To see China again before going to college. To feel eyes on my back and to crack sunflower seeds in tea houses. To watch bootleg movies and shop at extravagant underground malls.

I see the fingerprints there, on the glass panes separating me and the garden. No one can go back to his past. I respect the burglar who saw this separation and turned back, leaving behind a patch of sky. After toiling to remove the bar, he realized that he did not belong. My mom will come in less than an hour. That is a fact. I sit down on the sofa and look at my hands.

### Community-Based Learning Initiative

Want to take your research out of the classroom and into the community?



Want your research projects to promote social action and influence real communities?

★ The publication in your hands ★  
grew out of a CBLI project.



Partner with a non-profit organization on your course paper, junior paper or senior thesis!

Curious? Check out [www.princeton.edu/~cqli](http://www.princeton.edu/~cqli) for more information, call 258-6986 or email [cqli@princeton.edu](mailto:cqli@princeton.edu).

# WEDDING

*by Shannon Togawa Mercer '11*



Wedding Celebration, Photo credit: Sian OFaolain '08

# THE SEAMSTRESS

*by Courtney Hopen '08*

The sunlight slants across an emerald door  
revealing chips of paint like dragonflies  
and there, within, a woman sews a dress  
with silver seams. Her scanning eyes  
catch every thread—she snips the lonely dawn  
away to strains of “Afternoon Delight”,  
“Get Close” by Seals and Crofts, the wail  
of Queen, the pipes, and Maxine Nightingale.

She sews her daughter’s school into the seam,  
her mother’s groceries, the failing car  
and like the nuns in San Jacopo di Ripoli  
who set the type for books that started wars  
she’ll know the dress, and leave the wearer free  
to float like pollen under city stars  
and dance to “Love Machine” and drink her days  
like Clear-Fire vodka, as long as she pays.



Photo credit: Jun Koh '11

# MADEMOISELLE ON GOD

*by Eleni Papargyriou PD*

Mademoiselle was waiting at the bus stop smoking a mint-flavoured cigarette. With her free hand she smoothed the ridges on her blue chiffon-trimmed skirt. Legs? She could not complain. Hers were thin, the Japanese style; unfortunately, God had not made her much taller either. The tip of her left shoe almost fitted a hole in the pavement, so she kept trying. Finally, just as she had decided to fill the hole with chewing gum, the Oldsmobile's breaks squeaked in front of her.

With Ben she did it to Connie Francis, to bossa novas, to Bobby Vinton and then to the sound of the needle scratching the rim of that forty-five. Wrapped in his baseball towel she quickly repainted her lips bright red in front of his shaving mirror. Then she lay down again and let him pierce her belly button with his thick index finger. He pressed his palm against her shaggy belly and said thoughtfully: "Marilyn is curvy". Oh, Marilyn. Marilyn would sprinkle drops of Holy Water No 5 over her immaculate pale flesh before going to sleep. Mademoiselle didn't mind that much. She had given up on meat, then on shakes, then on fruit, then on air. Wasn't it Saint Antony after all who had said that we should not be seduced by the fullness of the stomach? Her stomach was lying comfortably in the sumptuous space between two visible sets of ribs. It was tiny! It was minuscule! It was the size of a bean, she happily admitted to herself.

In the summer they would go on a cruise down the East coast. She would wear a black elastic bathing suit with a red ribbon round her waist. V-A-C-A-T-I-O-N in the summer sun, on a ship's deck. The night sky would be a starry vault and the August moon would coat her eyelashes with stardust. Then the ship would hit a rock and the motley crowd of bathers would be transformed into a panicking flock of sheep. The happy people de beigneurs, they would all drown immediately because they would have stuffed themselves at dinner. All, except her and Ben, they were bless-ed She, because she was so light she could even float in her bathtub, and Ben, because he was muscular and could do anything. Now, dear coast guard, pull me from the shipwreck. This whirlpool seeks to swallow me like the open mouth of a sea beast. Jonah kept flickering in front of her shut eyelids. Jonah had white whiskers and a beard so long it almost covered his nakedness. Or so she imagined because the picture actually showed him half in the water fighting the waves, while a cartoon whale opened her daunting jaws, exposing a yellow fence of teeth. The wind blew his beard against a background of dark



**Photo credit: Jun Koh '11**

blue clouds, so she could see his bare chest and it was the chest of a child. Jonah in her book was as skinny as she was.

In the water Mademoiselle had seen the northern star and it had twinkled. Or it could have been a distant lighthouse. Either way, it was a sign. As she was pulled from the sea she felt the sudden urge to reward her saviors with one of those

touches of hers no one could resist. She changed her mind as she noticed a thin thread of salt water streaming down her elbow and that elbow trembling relentlessly. They had been given blankets, but she was still cold, so she cuddled up against Ben as they lay down on the lifeboat's deck. The ground still shook from time to time as if rocks hadn't stopped colliding, her teeth were rattling, a piece of the moon was missing.

\*\*\*

Mademoiselle was waiting on the train platform near the main campus site with her hands in her coat pockets, steaming away cold air through swollen nostrils. One of her front teeth had begun to chip. She had tried to feed coins to the soda machine, but it kept swallowing them and she would get vexed and start banging it with her clenched little fist. Finally, just as the machine had started belching out bottles, tens of them, Buddy's front wheel dug the mud in front of her.

With Buddy she did it to Charles Mingus, 'Salt Peanuts', Erik Satie and then to the sound of the needle scratching the rim of that thirty-three.

"Let's pretend we are in Piccadilly", he whispered. Then she imagined them rummaging each other in front of something that looked like a winged angel standing on one leg. Buddy, where is Piccadilly? As he was trying to incite second helpings, she sadly observed dry patches of mud on her trench coat that was hanging on the back of his desk chair. Not so fast, Buddy. But Buddy was pedaling zealously in the rain forgetting she was sitting at the back. Oh, it didn't matter that much. On Sundays she hopscotched her way down from church to meet him: eve-ry-y day it's-a-getting closer, go-i-ing faster than a roller coaster, love li-i-ke yours will surely come my-y way. She was light as a wing and the hill seemed almost green. It was already February and it had been very wet that year. She unbuttoned her pink cardigan and let it hang from her shoulders, then she floated down the slope. Buddy, Buddy Holy. The angels flapped their wings ascending the vault to the church belfry. She finally took his hand off her belly button and he immediately started fingering the mark of her appendix cut. She let him, anyway. In thirty minutes maximum he would ask her to leave because he would have to finish an essay on a guy called

## Prose

Lou Cretius. She knew it because his palms had begun to sweat, which always happened when he had to finish an essay, which happened at least twice a week, which annoyed her slightly; the sweaty palms that was, not the essay.

Buddy was a genius, he knew so many things. He could win the Green Valley quiz show, no doubt. The studio would be sparkling in bright pink. Buddy would look very serious in his dark cashmere suit. He would be calm and confident in contrast to the other contestants who would sweat and bite their nails. Buddy would know all the answers. The presenter, Mr. Homme N. Potent would be so ecstatic his newly polished teeth would almost blind the audience; he would look like Tony Bennett. Last question for the thousand bucks. Buddy had to think for a while. A while longer. Seconds passed and each made the audience's hearts miss a beat. Mr. Potent's smile had frozen into a deadly mask and his perfect curls suddenly looked very tired. Then Buddy would fix his gaze on her sitting in the front row. And then the blessing would come to her and her lips would shape the silent sound of two words. Shawn Crates. For one moment, while the curtain descended from the ceiling, she knew something and this was better than nothing.

\*\*\*

Mademoiselle was waiting on her porch, carrying a pile of school books. She put them down on the white wooden planks for a while, then started to improvise a new mash potato move Sheila had shown her in the canteen the day before. In the glass window she noticed how badly her hair needed colouring; blond tufts had begun to pop underneath her dark locks. Her face was covered under a thick layer of pressed powder, her eyelids were stitched to the sides of her temple. She raised her arm instinctively and waved as the motor of the convertible sounded down the alleyway.

With this one she didn't do it to anything. "You old devil," she said to him, holding his face in her hands. Instead, they spent the afternoon in her room playing board games. Everything in Mademoiselle's room was pink; she had a pink chest of drawers, a pink pair of curtains and a matching pink duvet. Oh, and a bouquet of pink roses in a vase. He always came in a big black coat and sat on the bed, looking like an ink blot. They played checkers and he won. He became so excited that he had to lie down for a few minutes, his heart was pounding. Then she would crawl up next to him on the pink bed and they would watch the changing shape of clouds from her attic window. She smoothed his wrinkles and whispered to him tenderly "You, old viper". Half asleep he told her to search his coat-pocket. She found a little ring; it was topped with a gray pearl that looked as if the whale had spat it out along with her undigested Jonah-meal. She tried it on her finger. "All things remain in God," she thought.

When Jonah found himself in the whale's mouth he knew he was screwed, because it was so dark that he had no idea which way to go. The right way would be towards her teeth, so that he could jump out when she opened her mouth. The wrong way would lead him down her throat. Jonah knew he had a fifty percent chance of success. He trusted God would help him. Jonah took his chances and lost. His cane sank into that tongue as he trudged down towards the whale's smelly tonsils. The whale felt ticklish. Then he reached her throat; it was so slippery he had to sit down on his bottom and let himself slide into the hole. The whale couldn't hold it any more. Someone was playing tricks on her, and, God, it was so funny! The ocean suddenly felt

like a fairground. Dolphins leapt out and performed a double loop. The sun was shining on their backs and thin ocean spray sparkled in the air. The whale opened her mouth and had a big laugh, ha ha ha! Jonah saw light gushing in and a huge wave came and carried him out of the whale's body into the open sea. Jonah looked up at the sky and thanked God, but decided to hold a little grudge for that wrong fifty percent.

Then the old devil and Mademoiselle would play Snakes and Ladders. His piece was black, hers was – unsurprisingly – pink. They threw the die and kept chasing each other on the play board. When they reached a ladder they could climb up. Snakes, on the other hand, would thwart them back to the tip of their tail. They played so fast they were soon out of breath. Mademoiselle was on square 94, six squares before finish. She had to get a six, she had to get a six, oh dear God! On square 97 a big rattlesnake opened his jaws. Mademoiselle kissed the die three times and prayed. Alas, a three – God was slow today – made her unceremoniously slide down to square 37. Rattlesnakes are too long, unlike the old devil's face that beamed with a smile, as his piece landed on winning square 100. "You wicked, wicked man," Mademoiselle said, but in a voice that sounded a little tired and just a tiny bit spiteful.

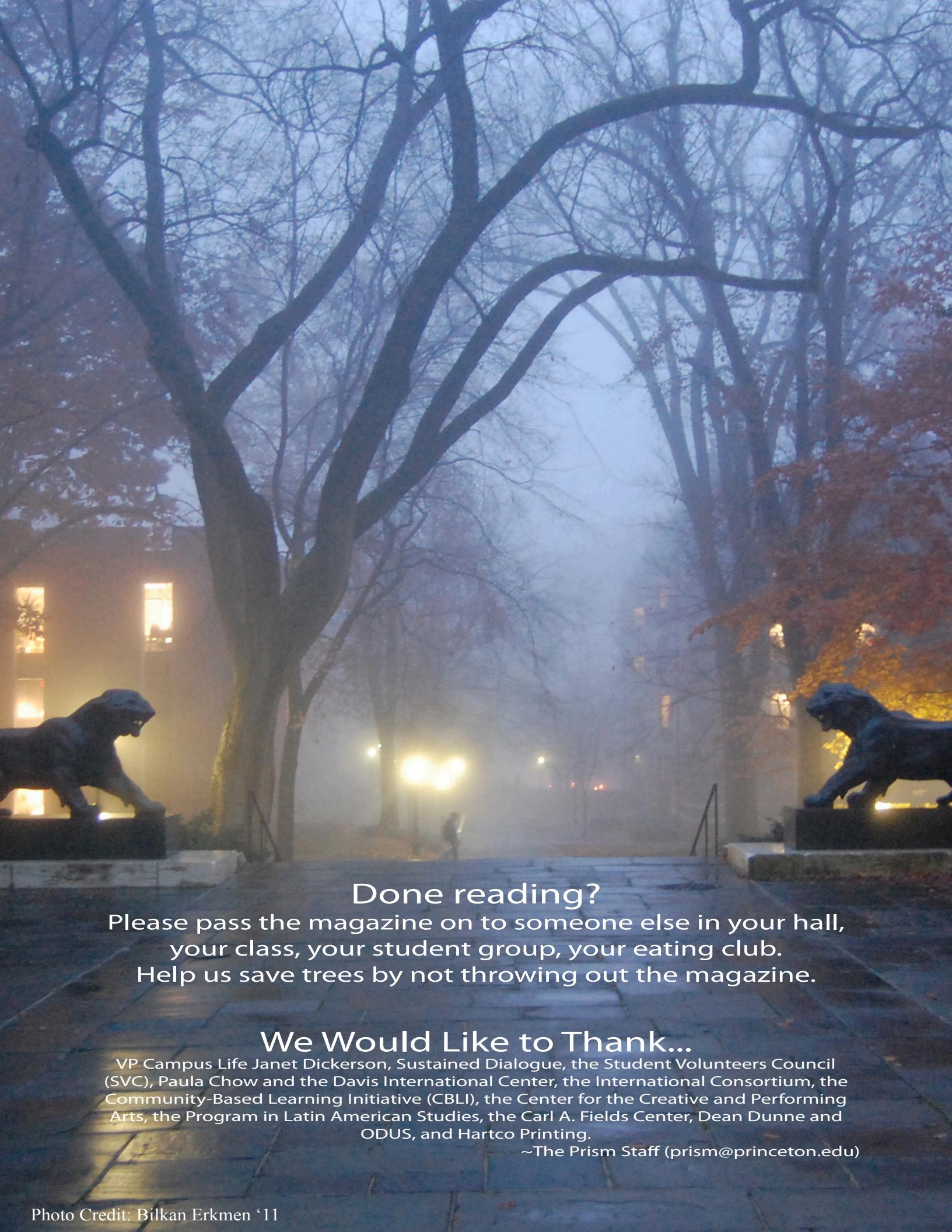
But her worse game was definitely chess. His black knight trotted mercilessly on her scanty army. Her queen let out tiny shrieks as she ran away stumbling over her long frock. The black knight waved his sword and slashed her panicking pawns in half. The old white king had locked himself in the tower and refused to move. The black army was coming closer. The remaining two white soldiers started lifting up the bridge to protect the castle and their king. But it was too late. "Check," said the old devil, moving his queen with a hand where veins popped up like strings. Mademoiselle looked at him venomously. Then the phone rang.

Can you tell who is phoning from the way the phone rings? Mademoiselle swore she could, because it sounded like a chorus of crystal bells. She picked up the receiver and a smell of strawberries oozed through the holes and reached her nostrils. "Is that Mike? Or Gabriel?" It didn't really matter. He would come to pick her up at 7.30. She had to wear something white, a white dress maybe. He would be wearing a white tuxedo and a pair of wings. She should not be late. She put the phone down with a smile.

The old devil had sunk in one of the corners of the pink bed and looked alarmed. "I am cold," he said and tucked himself in his big black coat. She wasn't sure what to do. "Don't be late" had said the sweet voice on the phone. "Such opportunities come once in a lifetime". The old devil had begun to shrink into her pink pillow. She looked at the pink clock on the wall. It was 7.10. Then she looked again at the black coat.

"I have time for one more game," she said.

Eleni Papargyriou is a postdoc from Thessaloniki, Greece, working on a project on poetry and photography. Her activities include teaching literature, taking bad photographs of friends with her new camera and observing people in train stations. She doesn't like airtravel. Before coming to the US she lived and worked in Oxford, England.



## Done reading?

Please pass the magazine on to someone else in your hall,  
your class, your student group, your eating club.  
Help us save trees by not throwing out the magazine.

## We Would Like to Thank...

VP Campus Life Janet Dickerson, Sustained Dialogue, the Student Volunteers Council (SVC), Paula Chow and the Davis International Center, the International Consortium, the Community-Based Learning Initiative (CBLI), the Center for the Creative and Performing Arts, the Program in Latin American Studies, the Carl A. Fields Center, Dean Dunne and ODUS, and Hartco Printing.

~The Prism Staff ([prism@princeton.edu](mailto:prism@princeton.edu))