

Spring 2010

PRISM

diversity. dialogue. difference



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Letter From the Editors

Dear *Prism* readers:

For the first time, we would like to thank you for welcoming us into your dorm rooms and homes. This is both a first for us and a 2010 first for the magazine. As you may have noticed, Prism is on its way back from a semester-long sabbatical. We've taken some time off to reorganize, rethink, and refresh the magazine's approach. We'll be updating our website and starting next semester with new submissions and new angles!

Why is it so important that we've come back? In the face of the plethora of publications on this campus, we felt the need to step back and to reevaluate Prism's purpose. With this issue we hope to reassert ourselves in the interest of our unique mission: to promote "dialogue, diversity, and difference".

No other literary magazine on campus focuses on travel, culture, and identity as much as we do. No other literary magazine invests as much in diversity of perspectives and diversity of experience. We exist to provide you, Princeton, with a venue for your wanderlust, for your introspective exploration, for your cultural curiosity, and for your photo essays on the Amazonian mud pig.

Prism is a celebration of how different we all are, and how beautiful those differences are. Prism is a celebration of Princeton. Thank you for celebrating with us.

Sincerely,

Katherine J. Chen '12

Shannon Togawa Mercer '11

Editors-in-Chief

Got an opinion or comment about the *Prism*?

Want to get more involved?

Contact us.

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Note: All images with the exception of CinCin Fang's drawings are untitled.

**Interested in Writing for
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Send us a query!
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Cairo

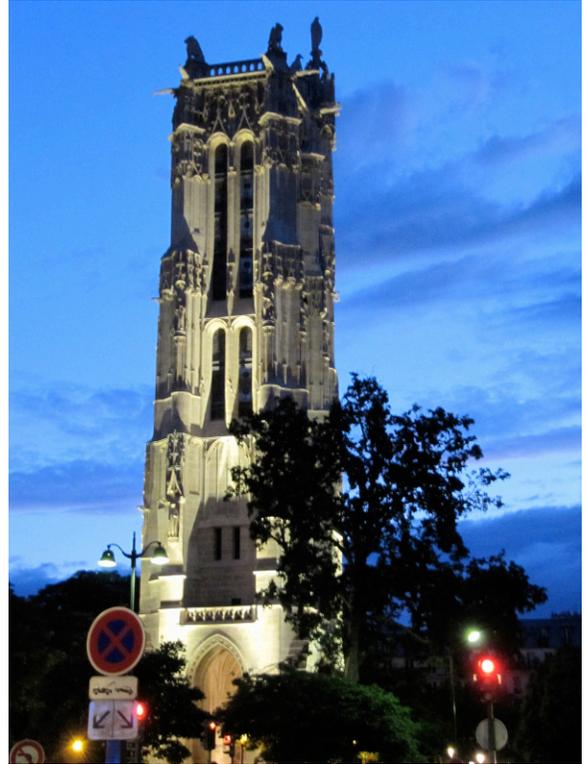
by Shannon Togawa Mercer

It rests high on her rib cage,
pregnant;
a city with lights so bright
and bulbous, bursting;

A plum, with skin
dirty-purple, juicy, thick;
and ready –

to overflow
with quilts and coin scarves,
to implode when the soggy Nile air decides
to cave in onto itself and crawl
into that black-warm womb.

Tan-skinned and serpentine
time bomb, smelling of meats
and beans and
red and yellow spice rubbed
on and massaged.



Photograph by Lauren Zumbach



Photograph by Alexandra Hsu

Upasuaji: Surgery, or Splitting

by Morrow Dowdle

I stood at the head, where,
In our country the anesthesiologist
Would ordinarily have taken position,
Her body draped in graying sheet,
Face uncovered so that she could look
Down into her own viscera,
Which she would at some point do
In a buckling of agony.
These were doctors trained for surgery,
Forced to commit butchery;

It came down to the same story:
Government can't be bothered
For resources, insisting upon moral
Vacancy in the communistic.
My first day in the operating theater
The surgeon admonished me for wasting
One square of gauze,
Then told every other doctor and nurse
What I had done so that the shame
Permeated as fully as the blood
Of the hysterectomy at hand,

Seeping through my Goodwill scrubs.
They didn't like it any more than I did,
A belly filleted open, fluid filling up
The bowl of an open abdomen.
The windows were ajar for hopeless relief
In the unfinished concrete octagonal room,
Temperatures approaching three digits
While flies floated in on yawns
And took up the sanguine buffet.
I took her face between my hands, one
Epidural and a relaxant all that could be

Spared against the sensations of skin
Being split, organs wrenched, facia
Tearing like spider webs.
As the scalpel made its first descent,
She began to sing something of a hymn.
I only knew because of the occasional
"Yay-soo" distinguishing itself from
The Swahili still falling short
On my ignorant ears.
It was the only time in that country
I ever felt gratitude
Towards damned colonialist religion.



Photograph by Alexandra Hay

Motherhood: Constraint or Empowerment?

by Janie Qi

In the eyes of the Western media, Japanese women have quite a bit of catching up to do. Western journalists tend to place Japanese women and American women side-by-side and demonstrate that Americans enjoy greater opportunities in fields like the workplace (Fackler 2007). The implication here is that Americans and Japanese are in a competition toward expansion of female horizons, and America is winning. A quick comparison seems to show that Japanese women live in confining roles as mothers and wives, while their American counterparts mostly reject socially defined roles (Mathews 1992: 98). Such a representation leads the casual Western observer to agree that Japanese women are indeed “behind” American women. Is this picture accurate?

One particularly intriguing way to approach this question is through a focus on reproduction, since at first glance, there is apparent clarity in the “behindness” of Japanese women in terms of reproductive control. Specifically, the Japanese are far more constrained than their American counterparts in their access to sophisticated prenatal diagnosis (PND) tests (Ivry 2006). This situation seems to highlight Japanese women’s lower degree of control over reproduction, yielding the usual conclusion that the Japanese suffer from binding circumstances, with few options during pregnancy.

A closer analysis of the parallel situations, however, reveals that American women are in fact much weaker agents of reproduction, due to perceived separation between mother and child during pregnancy. This contrast is established using social constructs of a woman’s reproductive powers and not approached from a biological standpoint. Such a focus is justified because the “competition” as discussed earlier between Japan and America, which lies at the core of the present discussion, is a race toward social progress. Unlike their American counterparts, Japanese women possess a strong bond between mother and child that enables them to hold great influence over reproduction. By looking through the contexts of prenatal diagnosis, care, and abortion in Japan and America, it becomes clear that the seemingly limiting role of motherhood actually embodies empowerment for Japanese women. Exploring this issue will generate important implications for the goals and direction of the American feminist movement.

For a clear understanding of the argument, an outline of prenatal diagnosis along with its surrounding circumstances is necessary. Prenatal diagnosis (PND) technology, which originated during the 1970s, is the umbrella classification of various tests, including amniocentesis, alfa-feto-protein (AFP) maternal blood screening, and obstetric ultrasound. These tests screen the fetus for genetic or chromosomal abnormalities, among which Down syndrome is a prominent example. Overall, PND is standard during pregnancy for American women, with non-invasive screens like the triple marker test fixed as part of routine check-up during the second trimester. In general, it is rare for American ob-gyn’s to reject outright the practice of PND. They usually suggest invasive PND tests as potential options for pregnant patients over 35, since the chances of a woman carrying a child with genetic abnormalities increase with age. When PND tests find aberrations in the fetus, American women often terminate the pregnancy (Ivry 2006: 442-444, 448). Hence, PND screening can be considered a common instrument used by American women to select the children they give birth to, and in this way the technology can be interpreted to represent their enhanced reproductive control.

In plain contrast to their American counterparts, Japanese ob-gyns tend to avoid or gloss over the issue of PND during discussions with their patients. In fact, strong sociopolitical barriers exist against widespread use of PND in Japan; the country’s influential disability movement and the negative legacy of eugenic practices during World War II have constructed a public opposition to the selective abortions that usually accompany PND. Abortions motivated by the existence of genetic aberrations in the fetus have in fact been legally forbidden by the Maternal Body Protection Law since 1996. Additionally, costs for PND tests like amniocentesis are kept high by the disability movement’s strong impacts on the Japanese government in hindering financial support for use of PND technology (Ivry 2006: 445, 463). The outcome of these various factors is that it is difficult for Japanese women to undergo PND procedures, and those who do take advantage of the screenings do so secretly. If a Japanese woman wishes to abort the fetus because of positive PND results, she must substitute more politically correct reasons in the place of genetic problems. In so doing, she separates her

honne, or genuine feelings, from her tatemaie, a more acceptable public presentation (Ivry 2006: 457-458). Clearly, the scope of PND technology is much more limited in Japan than it is in the United States.

Superficially, then, these distinct circumstances surrounding PND that women face in Japan and in America fall neatly within the blanket perception that American women are ahead in the race of female empowerment. Restrictions on PND availability inhibit Japanese women from fully exercising reproductive freedom—in particular, the control over their own bodies as well as over the characteristics of their future children. Moreover, Japanese women must disguise their attitudes toward children who possess certain characteristics so as not to appear shameful in the eyes of society. Because PND procedures are

more commonly employed in the United States, it should logically follow that American women enjoy greater reproductive power than Japanese women.

An analysis of the assumptions surrounding PND, however, helps generate a different conclusion. PND testing has been linked strongly in the public mind with selective abortion: if a woman undergoes PND and discovers genetic aberrations in the fetus, she will most likely terminate her pregnancy (Ivry 2006: 442). Indeed, there is a socially pervasive message that women should choose to abort the fetus after receiving unfavorable PND results (Asch 1999). When such a notion permeates a social atmosphere, choosing an anomalous course of action requires a conscious justification. Here, the dominant pattern is for a woman to give up upon discovery of “defective” qualities in her child. This situation evokes the image of a baby lottery in which a woman gets unlucky and so has to try again, hoping for better luck the next time she becomes pregnant.

Because American women often give up on their children when disabilities are uncovered through PND, they reinforce the idea that maternal effort can make little contribution to the characteristics of the child. In this representation, is it not the case that PND technology erodes the reproductive power of American women? This question does not seek to address biological aspects and concentrates instead

on a social idea of the reproductive capabilities of a woman; such an approach is appropriate considering that empowerment itself is largely a social construct (Peterson and Hughey 2004: 533). PND as it occurs in the United States reduces the American mother to a vehicle whose function is to deliver her “ready-made” baby (Ivry 2006: 459). Maternal contribution is left unacknowledged and undermined—the mother is powerless in contributing to the characteristics of her offspring. PND technology has therefore diminished American women’s perceived impacts during pregnancy. As a result, there is a separation between mother and child during the American model of pregnancy, and the female body is objectified as a housing chamber and a delivery vehicle.

Unlike their American counterparts, Japanese women have not strongly adopted the notion of genetic determination as applied to unborn children. Instead, the Japanese generally see unborn babies almost as blank canvases, as creatures to be perfected through diligent effort on the part of the pregnant women (Ivry 2006: 459). In this way, pregnant women hold important power over the outcome of reproduction.

In the Japanese quest for better children, then, the less technologically advanced method of prenatal care, which refers to the mother’s rearing efforts directed toward her unborn child, is the principal method of choice. After pregnancy is discovered, Japanese women each receive a boshi kenkō techō from local national health insurance, directly translated as Mother-Child Health Handbook. These booklets disperse extensive advice related to pregnancy and child-rearing, functioning as important instruments for prenatal care. Maternal contribution is a key element of the experience of pregnancy for Japanese women (Ivry 2006: 446, 448).

To be fair, it is not the case that American women completely eschew prenatal care. The book *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* is the “bible of American pregnancy,” serving as a pregnancy guidebook to a wide audience in America. Hence, it is a sort of an American equivalent to the boshi kenkō techō that is standard for pregnant Japanese women, and *What to Expect* contains content relating to prenatal care such as recommended diets (Kantor 2005). However, the book does not include a major interactive component

“ Unlike their American counterparts, Japanese women have not adopted the notion of genetic determination as applied to unborn children. Instead, the Japanese see unborn babies as blank canvases...”

that emphasizes the intimate connection between maternal health and fetal health like in the Japanese handbook, which requires heavy participation on the part of the mothers—countless measurements and pieces of medical information must be meticulously recorded (Ivry 2006: 448; Kantor 2005). In this way, the Japanese handbook strengthens the notion of mother and child as a fused whole. What to Expect offers its purchasers exactly what the title suggests, what mothers can expect to happen during their pregnancy. The Japanese handbook instead begins as a booklet with many blank spaces and eventually becomes a unique record of the mother's efforts during pregnancy. These booklets, compared side by side, can exemplify the contrast between the Japanese image of the baby as a blank canvas and the American image of the baby as a being that has already been made complete.

The concept of the moldable baby is further reinforced by Japanese ob-gyn's, who represent the most important figures of guidance for women during pregnancy. They stress—to the point of obnoxiousness, as some admit jokingly to Ivry—the value of activities like weight maintenance, prescribed exercise, chattering directed to the unborn child, and strict diet regimens on the part of the mother (2006: 446). Japanese women and their ob-gyn's believe that the mother's actions will directly impact the health of her fetus. Japanese mothers, therefore, are highly powerful “makers” of their children (Ivry 2006: 458-459).

The Japanese concept of a solid connection between mother and child is so strong that it pertains even to abortion, a seemingly ironic area of application. Abortion is, after all, precisely the severing of the mother-child bond. The procedure has been legal in Japan since 1949 and remains a predominant method of contraception among Japanese people (Ivry 2006: 445). While the procedure is never considered a pleasant one, it is nevertheless ethically accepted by most Japanese (LaFleur 1992: 136). Most importantly, even when a Japanese woman undergoes abortion, the bond between mother and child is publicly acknowledged all the same, both by the woman and the Japanese society. The aborted fetus is commonly represented as mizuko, literally “water child,” whose death can be openly mourned at temples. There, small mizuko jizō statues are erected, representing both the aborted fetus and the

jizō—a bodhisattva usually depicted as a monk—who will take good care of the child. Rituals revolving around these figures, as well as memorial services, are held to wish for the wellbeing of the mizuko and to relieve the severe pain felt by the couple as a result of the abortion (LaFleur 1992: 8, 23, 217). Such an avenue for mourning and continued relationship affirms the mother-child bond before and after abortion.

Additionally, the customs surrounding mizuko support the notion of Japanese women holding immense power over reproduction. The picture representations found in temple advertisements portray all mizuko as identical beings with zero variation, with almost indistinguishable facial features (See figure in LaFleur 1992: 139). Such depictions emphasize the idea of unborn children as blank slates, over whom mothers hold indefinite influence. Moreover, many parents believe that the child conceived in a future pregnancy is a reincarnation of the originally aborted fetus—the mizuko has returned to the mortal world (LaFleur 1992: 26). Seemingly, unborn children begin as interchangeable blank slates who only gain their uniqueness through maternal contributions during pregnancy.

In America, abortion is a highly divisive issue and provides a clear manifestation of the separation of mother and child. The basic principles at the core of the conflict are the fetus' right to life and the mother's right to her own body (LaFleur 1992: 211). In this moral debate, mother and child are pitted against each other. Pope John Paul II, who is a key pro-life proponent, explicitly criticizes abortion as an unethical act. Life begins at the moment of conception and must be respected; it “is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth...from the first instance there is established...a person, this individual person with his characteristic aspects already well determined” (John Paul II 1997: 22-23). Implicit in this declaration, then, is the portrayal of a child as a ready-made life, prescribed by God. The pregnant woman cannot and should not exert control over this already complete human being.

On the opposing side, pro-choice activists advocate a woman's right to do whatever she wants with her body (LaFleur 1992: 211). By concentrating on the woman and her body, emphasis appears to be placed on a woman's identity as solely a woman, not a mother, to

The Japanese concept of a solid connection between mother and child is so strong that it pertains even to abortion...

discount the idea of the fetus as a fully fledged child. As part of a woman's fundamental rights, she should be permitted to remove an undesirable object from her body. Within the structure of this argument, then, the fetus almost seems to be a foreign and harmful contaminant that needs to be quickly eliminated. In the pro-choice side of the debate as well, mother and child are clearly separate. Therefore, both sides of the discussion erode the connection between mother and child.

A comparison between Japanese and American women has so far been constructed regarding the bond between mother and child during pregnancy, illustrating that the connection is significantly weaker for American women than for their Japanese counterparts. From this picture surfaces the conclusion that American women exert little perceived influence over their children during pregnancy. Japanese women, on the other hand, represent far more meaningful agents of reproduction, because they are powerful molders of their children. The important labor involved on their part during pregnancy and their significant influence are much emphasized and appreciated. In this way, the claim that American women are ahead of Japanese women is discounted in the aspect of reproduction.

One may indeed argue that outside the context of power over reproduction, the presented contrast of mother-child connections during pregnancy simply confirms the constraints that Japanese women face relative to American women. Reproductive power that is concentrated in Japanese women derives heavily from the socially sanctioned role of motherhood expected of all Japanese women. The ideal of the *ryōsai kenbo*—"good wife and wise mother"—has been advocated since the Meiji period (1868-1912) to promote a clear division of labor between the sexes and improve Japan's efficiency in development and modernization. After World War



Pastel by CinCin Fang

II, the relevant discourse underwent a transformation to further proclaim that childrearing and nurturance is intrinsic to all women (Borovoy 2005: 79).

Strong political, economic, and social factors in Japan currently keep the "public project" of motherhood firmly rooted (Borovoy 2005: 146). One example is the government's *shufu hogo seido*, or "housewife welfare," encouraging women through financial support to raise their children at home instead of working. Businesses combine forces with the government to keep women at home by providing healthcare, housing, and pension coverage for full-time mothers as incentives (Borovoy 2005: 74). Caring for family is widely agreed upon by

the Japanese as specifically women's *ikigai*, or "that which most makes one's life seem worth living" (Mathews 1995: vii). In this broader context, then, it can be claimed that the value of pregnancy as an endeavor and the influence attributed to Japanese mothers are simply expectations of motherhood. A woman is defined by her child, so that her contributions during pregnancy are naturally demanded in this social framework of childrearing.

For American women, the separation of mother from child during pregnancy can be seen as an approach to emphasize control over body instead of control over child. The goal of American feminists is to transcend reproductive functions. In this way, women can distance themselves from mother-centered tasks and roles to pursue gender equality, "defined as equal access to employment, autonomy, and self-cultivation" (Borovoy 2005: 24). American feminists essentially seek transformations in women's *ikigai*, so that it need not be defined along any gender-specific boundaries (Mathews 1995: 103). During the 1970s, the American feminist movement had firmly advocated women's exodus from their domestic confines to work and be able to financially support themselves (Borovoy 2005: 9). The landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling on abortion took place around the same time, in 1973, and the emergence of PND technology also occurred during this decade. These developments can be viewed as feminist progress; they have expanded women's reproductive horizons, so that women can have greater control over when to reproduce and what kind of child to give birth to. The situation thus presented seems to place American women ahead of their Japanese counterparts again.

Is it necessary, however, for women to reject and undermine their reproductive potential in order to empower themselves? Japanese women have historically expanded their scope of engagement in domains outside the home by accentuating their responsibilities as wives and mothers, especially in dealing with problems that matter to housewives, like bettering the community and protecting the environment (Borovoy 2005: 7, 143-144). Motherhood as an ideal does not need to be eliminated to make way for progress. The separation between mother and child as witnessed in Americans is an adverse outcome of working too hard to veer away from image of women as reproductive agents. Proceeding down this trajectory means further devaluation of female reproductive efforts.

After all, isn't such a reduction in fact a backward step for the feminist movement? Women

should not be discouraged from expressing pride in and deriving fulfillment from the taxing work involved in motherhood. Ultimately, it is not important to judge precisely whether the Japanese or Americans are ahead of the other in the overall race. Rather, the discussion serves to highlight a useful principle to keep in mind. Women, in their efforts to liberate themselves and broaden their range of opportunities, must at the same time be careful not to unwittingly trap themselves elsewhere.

Parsifal

by Anson Clark

Is the beatitude warrior Wagner's snake?

I toil everyday for you, Lord.

I cleft you, Lord, as I succumbed to madness.
Shards of my very existence drawn away to
those dark magnets that choose poor metal
at will. I dwelled in shadows, an absinthe of
showers
that drenched-spirit my downward gaze. Too
dark.
Too dark.

You cannot seize the chalice, you must earn it.

I cut myself today, to create bliss in darkness;
Taking vows of indecipherable bells that ring
inward to the dark black mass cream moon.
The stars bright holes in the sky; looking inward,
perplexed, fixed in this frame of reference.
To drop the celestial sword onto the burning
deck;
The madman sailor, his nature's cull.
All I wanted was to hold the cup. To have it full
of holy water, steaming down the sides.
The hero stands naked before the flame. I can feel
the cold on my hands, the shaken bones.
King Amfortas is injured. He shook shock-driven.
The grail tale disappeared for some years.
Out of place.

I remember the red-haired girl. She picked lilacs
in the birth of spring, drank amber nectar from
a wooden cup. Is that a faint-haze before my eyes?
Death's scythe fell, tearing branch from tree
as summer stammered its baking hell.
And I sang amongst the skin as bones.
No sound just soft, wet murmurs of souls,
who once smiled at the scent of baked bread,
who climbed a tree in youthful exuberance,
who collected shells on some faraway shore,
the sea-waves folding like freshly pressed sheets
that your mother used to wash and iron.

I, too, collected daisies in the field and sang the
song of Eros, playing the strings of the harp with
the twitches of my smiles. I, too, liked girls, but
I know nothing. The mass of people at the edge
of midnight – should they remember everything
for this might be the end? People never came
out of these places. Whispers jolt the brain.

We should be naked when we bathe under
waterfalls, the water warm. The shale

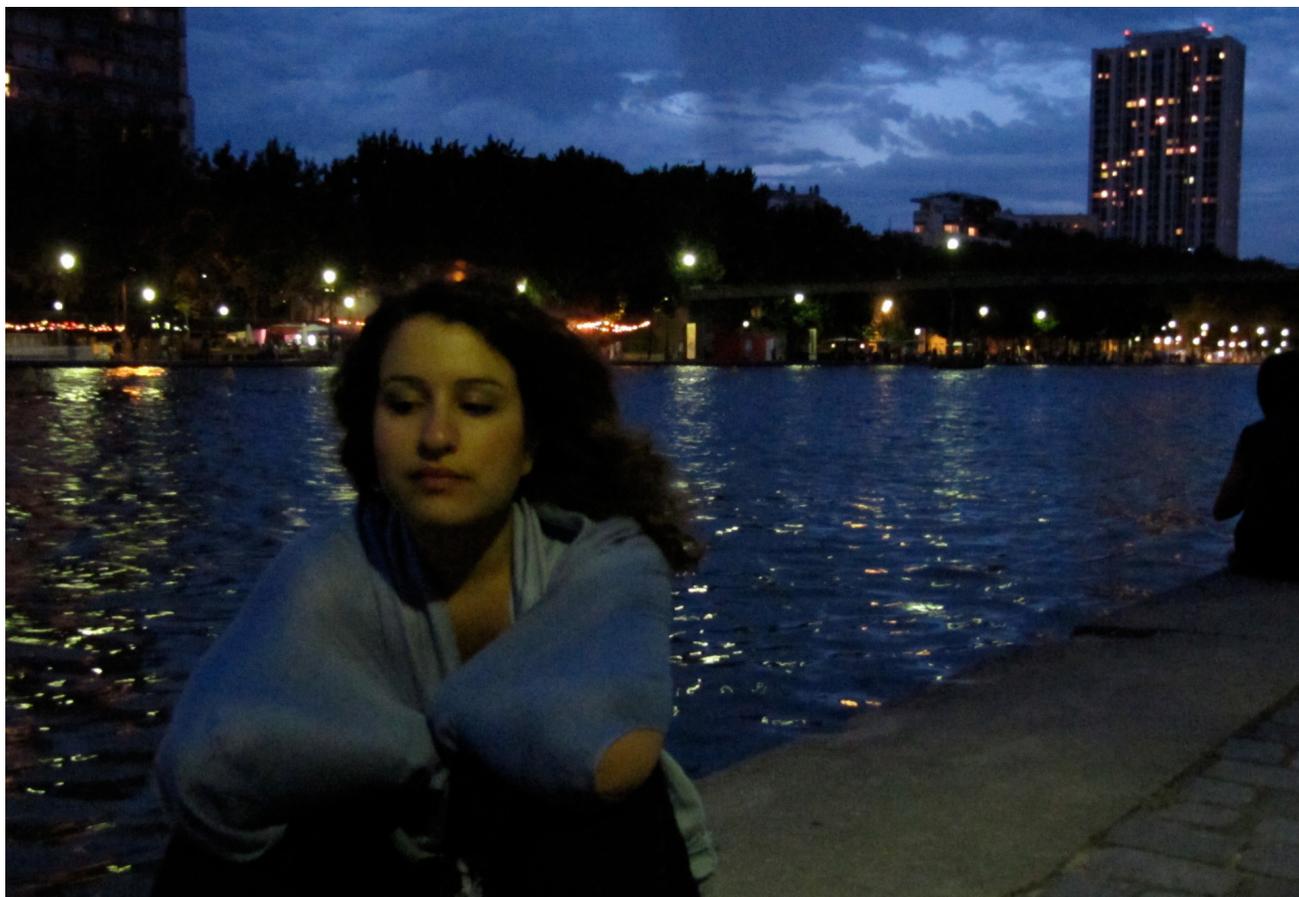
intermingling with the naive toes.
We should be naked when we touch
our loved one, the skin slowly pressing,
their skin retreating then pushing forward
like rising bread.

Only rain should shower, with each droplet
a fully formed mark of nature (no mark on a
shirt).

The very thought of it turns children into
misshapen adults, butterflies into masks stained
with shrieks. The bolt's steely hiss slammed shut.
Lock – *why are they locking the doors?*
The vapour fell Lord into a thorny cup.
And the people fell like slabs in a quarry.

When surrounded by strangers we should
be wearing clothes. Arbeit macht frei.

Photograph by Lauren Zumbach



Parsifal

by Anson Clark

“My body pierced by the holy spear – the embarrassment, the shame. I see faces in the mountains and snakes slither across the World Tree. I fall down into the lower world, the realm of Erleg Khan. The spirits battle and all is carnage. I lost my buyan many years ago. Now I travel as a pilgrim – I hear the sacred song Unshuu.”

The slow ebbing of the oceanic tide is how Qorchi viewed the last few moments of his troubled life. Blood oozed from his mouth as he lay wretched on the unforgiving steppe. The horse he had fallen from had bolted and his recollection of the fall was clear. A hyena had leapt out of a bush scaring his trusted horse, who raised its front two hooves high in the air, causing Qorchi to fall backwards.

As he lay there, weak, insipid with

Photograph by Alexandra Hay



soon be in heaven, reunited with his beloved son. “Time to wake up,” he thought. Now that he had begun to wake up, children would stretch their arms in anticipation of the new day. The lark would shrill in the cold. The buds would glisten. The herdsman would beckon with his whistle. The yak would rise from his dewy bed and lick the air. Qorchi knew that he would join the famed archer Erhii Mergen amongst the stars. And he would drink from the chalice, because it was his birthright.

All the Chin woman had done was defend her husband; she was a patriot to her cause as much as Qorchi was a patriot to his. Qorchi had been around long enough to know not all recognised the mandate of Eternal Blue Heaven, or how Koeke Mongke Tengri had blessed the Mongols with the commencement of the great Khan’s reign. How also blessed they were for housing every religion conceivable in their kingdom. Qorchi’s own mother had been a Nestorian. He then thought more about the Chin woman and how her spit, her very body and soul, had scarred him.

From that day on Qorchi had felt disfigured, the spit corroding the skin of his right cheek like rust debases metal. Before he killed the woman for her impudence, he asked her what her name was. “My name is China,” was the biting reply. For that alone, she had to die. But was she right? Were the Mongols vicious killers and the Chinese innocent lambs guilty only of grazing on the greenest pastures? Qorchi began to doubt. Why did God place his race on such barren land – a never-ending canvas of hard, unloving earth? But then he thought what beauty there was amongst the skeletons of life. How the sky stretched for eternity. How the biting wind told stories of brave warriors who daily committed mighty deeds. How the winter frost danced before the incredulous eyes of the peasants. God loved all the children of the earth, but in different ways.

As his sight grew dim, Qorchi heard a voice. He did not know whether it was merely



Photograph by Alexandra Hay

his own, that of an angel, or God himself. The voice told him he was going on a long journey. He could not look back; the past was dimming. Qorchi felt a sudden sharp pain. He asked the voice why men were given life only for it to be snatched away when things still needed to be done. The voice answered that he was only returning to a state he had experienced before – the state before the opening of the eyes in the womb. The voice declared that this was a more blissful state than life itself, for there was no greater democracy than death itself. “In death we are all brothers,” the voice calmly declared. “But all of my achievements will become nothing,

for what are achievements if I am not there to experience them?”

“You are not competing against yourself,” the voice assured. “You have nothing to prove, for in death all are equal. This life is merely a dream, and we would not enjoy the dream if we experienced it forever. You will wake up in a new place. The branches on the tree, the grass on the ground, the wind and the breeze will all be there. The king will be injured no more. And you will be joined by your son and wife, for there is no concept of time, no before or after. Your wife will be asked whether she will join you in the place you will soon inhabit and she will reply, ‘I’m already there.’”

Qorchi began to hallucinate. He saw a Bon rainbow traverse the sky and felt like an empty cup, a cup he could not grasp. But somehow the sensations made sense. The prophet forgives the prostitute and rides into town. Some see him ride like a king, his head held high. Others see him dutifully enter, chagrined by all the attention, a pure ascetic. And the large stone that lies in front of the cave rolls to one side revealing.... Qorchi felt naked before the flame.

He thought that people should be naked when they bathe under waterfalls, the water warm. The shale intermingling with the naïve toes. He thought that people should be naked when they touch their loved one, the skin slowly pressing. Their skin retreating then pushing forward like rising bread. He thought, “This is how I have lived.” Qorchi now knew that shadows came from the light. Not knowing whether he was a vital part in the grand scheme of things or just an insignificant insect, he hoped for a science of logic, nature’s dialectic explained. Qorchi then felt a chill overtake his spine. “I’m so afraid. I feel so small.”

“You are merely becoming a child again.

You are experiencing the same innocence, the same sense of wonder.”

“Will the Chin woman, the woman I killed for defying me, will she be there? Will she forgive me?”

“People tend to find the God that they deserve,” the voice calmly declared. Qorchi then felt bitter. “I was only a soldier performing my duty. Is the tree punished for giving cover and shade to a criminal? Is the water punished for drowning an innocent, unspoilt boy?”

The voice answered, “Does the rose deny its thorns?”

Blood spluttered from Qorchi’s mouth. “If I die, then all will wither. All will be drowned in waves of disfigured terror. There will be no world once I end for I am the center of my universe. All will be nothing for I will not be there to experience it. My end will be your end.

The world surrounds me. Once it is pierced from within it will become nothing, and the past will become nothing, and the present will become nothing, and the future will be nothing. All will cease. Everything will...”

Qorchi realized that he was confirming his own damnation with such talk. Why was life so complicated? Why was he so good yet so bad? Qorchi did not know whether he would wake up in heaven or hell, or simply wake up on earth.

“Earth awaits us all,” the voice ebbed like the bending river.

He saw a vision of Tonpa Shenrab Miwo and thought to himself, “Dagpa, I renounce you. Salba, I know you. Shepa – who are you?” He sensed a shadow holding a cup to his mouth, his ami a red point of light. Qorchi then felt a shadowy cloak move up from his toes to his neck.

“I have one last question. If...”

Photograph by Alexandra Hay



Rosemary Kennedy / Al-Nakba

by Vanessa Boren

Drink to the copper
Drink to the steel
Drink to the copper on teeth

Light up the folding
Light up the fever
Drill to the skull and the sex

Hollow the almond
Ball out the cap
Cleave all the tangles and fibers

Take up the knife blade
Still pleasing the membrane
Now white, now ash, now bone

Ink up the plane
Satisfy doubt
Mark crosses on both of her temples

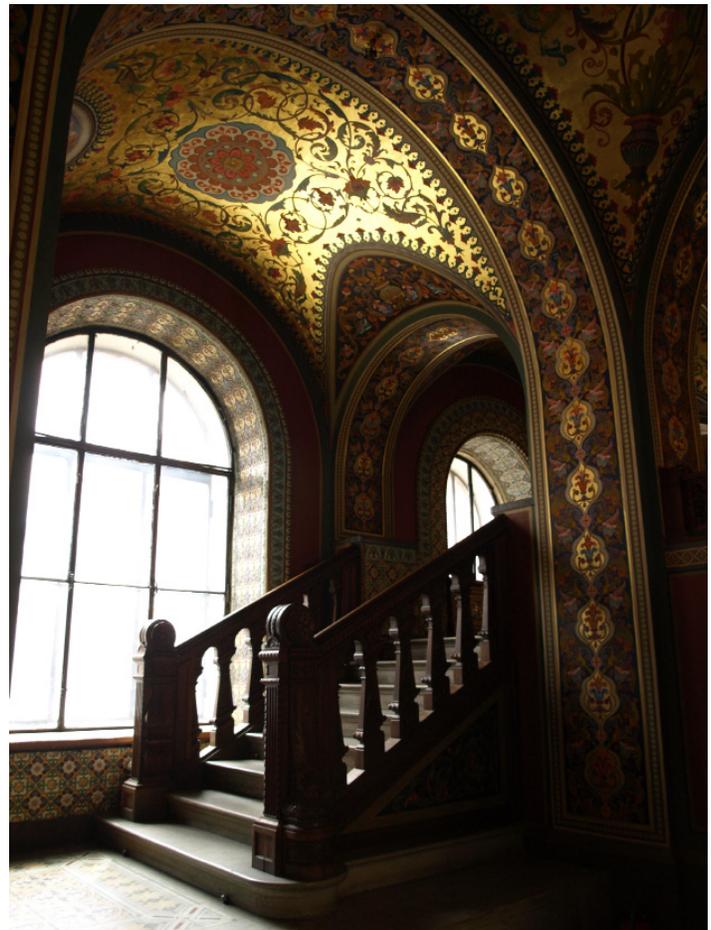
Master to Master
To Master of Israel
Master to sweet Sulamith

The End of Is

by Henry Rounds

We wish the logic of arithmetic
Sublime illusion in the shimmering world
As the heat holds the wavering horizon.
Geometry of life lost in abstraction,
The enlightened stumble as blind, aware
Answers do not lie but rise in darkness,
Flaming phoenixes ablaze in shifting sand,
Created from vacuum, the truly divine.

Rebirth without death, shedding the givens,
Mental plastic within the higher functions.
Fools expect the world to budge, fitted
Delusion to a weakened mind pleading
For comfort in stability. Revel
In each seismic toss as you delve deeper,
Living the split of mutable construction,
Perfection in chaos as IS no more.



Photograph by Alexandra Hay

My Mother's Dreams

by Katherine J. Chen

My mother sat in front of a mirror
smearing on her rouge.
She looked like a female Pagliaccio,
desperate to see her name
in bright lights above
a tower of pearls.

Coffee rings circled her eyes
in the pictures she took with her
to a rundown theatre
that smelled of bourbon and sweat.

The purse she once passed off
as alligator skin – she wished she could
take it all back now,
the lies, the creeping
truth that no matter how much rouge
she smeared on, she had no hopes
of Hollywood, of stardom,
of trading her virtue for even
an understudy role.

She stood on the stage,
doe-eyed and pale.
The egg she saved for breakfast
did nothing for her oily hair,
or the skin men recoiled at when
they held her hand at night.

Her tongue could not form long words.
She stumbled when they called
her plain and stupid.
They asked her how long it took
for a country bumpkin to travel to Shanghai.

On her way home, she wished
her father was a policeman
so he could knock the knees
out from under those men.

Her eyes saw red when she came home,
the rouge became blood,
her skin a riverbed of red,
her body a comet rushing to Earth
from the balcony
of a seventh floor apartment.

Fine Lines by CinCin Fang



A Little Possibility

by Faisal Ahmed

The simple possibility that
I might bump into you
and not suddenly recognize
your now unfamiliar smile
comforts me
in a twisted way.

Yesterday afternoon,
that creek by Alexander Road
had the possibility of becoming
the Ganges.

This morning,
the voluptuous D&R canal behind Lake Carnegie,
turned on by spring fever,
was groaning like the Nile.

Sorry! I am prone to exaggeration
when I see no possibility.

But wouldn't it be wonderful if
the creek turned into the Ganges?
And the canal into the Nile?

Possibility is
the low-income country version of
hope.

An overused campaign promise.

We all need it sometime.
I need it now.

Your Voice Used to Be

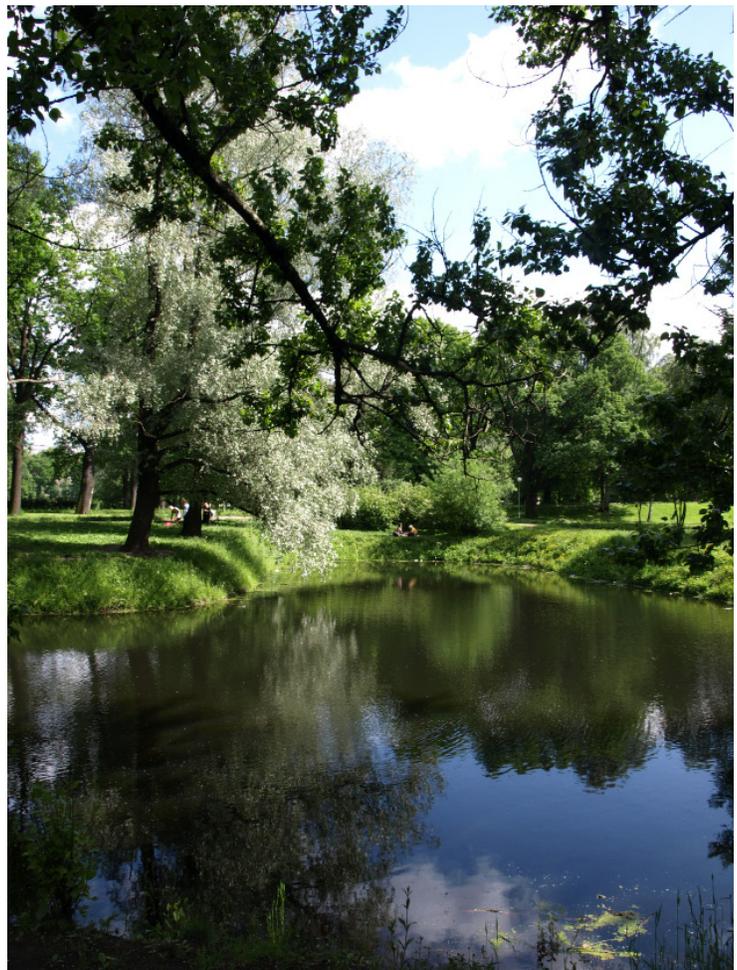
by Shannon Togawa Mercer

as thick as water as you rushed
your air-bubble words over the surface
of my skin;
testing my pores –

as tight as stockings, taut
and stretched over little-girl legs.
Nude, the color of beach.

Meanwhile, I have perfected the art
of wading through rice paddies;
I lift my arms.
I balance on one foot.
I reach for hot channels of vapor
and finger the steam-born shouts.

Photograph by Alexandra Hay



Growing Stories

by Ann Gong

“When bombs fall into a field of wheat,
it smells like a freshly mowed lawn.”
He looks through me,
as if he’s hidden himself somewhere
deep inside.
He reminds me of when
geese passed overhead, sliding between
the sheets of crisp cut autumn air
like black ants falling out of formation
or shifting lines of thought.
If I could,
I would add myself to the end
of the V’s left leg
and follow the ghosts of his memories
into his one-sided smile.

Touch

by Shannon Togawa Mercer

The waxy landscape of this girl’s face
had texture – like a cake of soap
and, expressionless, it turned.
The surface of enormous fortune, a map onto
which I could
x-marks-the-spot until my tired eyes said:
“enough is enough”
and I sat down to sleep.

Or, it had texture – like a field of red hard clay,
sun-baked and uniform under the wind
touch;

like the bullet ridden wall that I visited in
Spain:
the one with proof that Franco existed,
the one surrounded by the blue and yellow
balloons,
the one that I ran my hand over.

Dialogue Muted

by Henry Rounds

we silently speak
perhaps with one voice
a matter of time
and challenge of choice
the walls could breach
if only we reached
but pride holds us fast
and stifles our speech

is duty to guess
and know the other
to see her no less
beneath all banter
and perceive her true
without illusion
that will make you rue
honest effusion

or is feeling to shout
from your captured core
while laying cards down
to shatter to bore
the lingering stasis
and yet save passion
at risk in dry talk
but sturdy in action

perhaps we speak out
and find in reward
no shadow of doubt
each other adored
or silently widen
that deepening sore
fester and deaden
‘til neither want more

Contributor Bios

Faisal Ahmed

Faisal Ahmed GS '09 is from Bangladesh and studied Finance at Princeton. He now works as an economist at the International Monetary Fund.

Vanessa Boren

Vanessa Boren is a mathematics concentrator and a member of the class of 2010. Her research interests include history and philosophy of science, psychology, measurement, and applied ethics. Her pleasures include music, food, and words.

Katherine J. Chen

Katherine J. Chen is a sophomore English major pursuing a certificate in Creative Writing. She is an unabashed workaholic.

Anson Clark

Anson Clark graduated from Princeton in 1999. After a start in the world of big business, he is now training to be a psychiatric nurse in the UK. He is reminded of Princeton every time he watches "House" on TV.

Morrow Dowdle

Morrow Dowdle balances a dual career as a poet and a physician assistant, and finds the interplay of art and medicine complex but inspiring.

CinCin Fang

CinCin Fang is a junior in the Operations Research and Financial Engineering department. She has always been interested in creative art-making, and hope you are too!

Ann Gong

Ann Gong is a senior from Redmond, Washington. Her motto in life is "net happiness."

Alexandra Hay

Alexandra Hay is a sophomore from the beautiful south shore of Long Island, New York planning to pursue an individualized program of study in English and Architecture. Her interests include cities in literature, interior design, and photography.

Shannon Togawa Mercer

Shannon Togawa Mercer is a junior, a Politics major, and hails from the island of Guam. She has insatiable wanderlust.

Janie Qi

Janie Qi is a junior MOLE from Northern Virginia who also happens to be a bit of a Japanophile.

Henry P. Rounds

Henry P. Rounds is a junior at Princeton.

Lauren Zumbach

Lauren Zumbach is a freshman from Chicago and a potential Political Economy concentrator. In addition to photography, she enjoys exploring new places, running, and writing for The Daily Princetonian.

Photograph by Alexandra Hay



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Thanks!

~the prism staff (prism@princeton.edu)



“Mother & Daughter” by Khang Nguyen '07 (Ha Long Bay, Viet Nam, Summer 2006)

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