

Misuko

by Shari Lawrence Pfleeger

I.

Having feared water all her life,
my mother now floats
between life and death.
Japanese Buddhists embrace Misuko:
humanity infusing a newborn
drop by drop
until the child is
whole
at seven.
My mother's oozing,
losing humanity
drop by drop,
mirroring our mortality.
She seems stuck,
dying more each day,
in my mind each day.
She becomes less herself.
I become more like her.
Strength, wisdom, tenacity:
gifts to me,
unappreciated until too late
to give thanks.
She knows that—has always known.
Now I know too.

II.

Familiar yet foreign,
like sounds in seashells,
her voice calm, comforting.
Though thumping clumps of soil
separate her world from mine,
her voice persists,
listening, advising,
shaping, smiling,
finally pleased.
No wave farewell
yet waves of feeling persist.
Water fears replaced
with her fearless fight for strength.
I remain at sea,
guided through the mists
with the rudder she left behind.