1997

WHORL: 97-98

Creative Arts Society, Boston University School of Medicine

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Boston University
Editors Note:

Here we are with the third issue of the Creative Arts Society journal Whorl. Once again we are proud to offer you a sample of the wonderful art of Boston Medical Center students and colleagues.

It is exciting to be a part of a young publication like this because each year it really grows and changes. We have adjusted our production schedule to span an academic year so that students can contribute more easily during their first year at Boston Medical Center. And this issue includes medical staff and resident work, as well as a patient’s contribution.

Each piece was selected by committee evaluation anonymously, without regard to titles, experience or background. Our goal was to create a collection of pieces that represents the variety and quality that BMC members produce. We hope you will agree that once again we have met our goals. Please feel free to contact us with comments, suggestions and questions!

Dig in, dive in, flip through, feel around, wonder, ponder, wander Whorl '97-'98. Enjoy.

Margaret S. Lee
Franchot Van Slot

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whorl (n.)
1. A small flywheel that regulates the speed of a spinning wheel
2. Bot. An arrangement of three or more parts, as leaves or petals, radiating from a single organ or node.
3. Zool. A single turn or volution of a spiral shell.
4. One of the circular ridges or convolutions of a finger print.
5. Archit. An ornamental device consisting of stylized vine leaves and tendrils.
6. A coil, curl, or convolution.

-American Heritage Dictionary

Cover photo by: Domenic Screnci, D.Ed.
The Creative Arts Society and Whorl would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to:

**Dr. Barry Manuel and The Alumni Association of the Boston University School of Medicine**

without their generous efforts and support, this publication would not be possible.

We would also like to thank the following for their invaluable contributions:

**Domenic Screnci, Danny Madigan and Jennifer Gyles**
from the **Educational Media Center**

**SCOMSA and the Office of Student Affairs**

...and Everyone who submitted their exceptional work.
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Thanksgiving in July

The woodland road
reaches back to the very
beginning of time.
Its warm musty smell
of salty earth
is wrapped in grass and pine.

Moss caresses between
my toes the bell buoy sings
in my ear and touches an
inner part of me that's lived
here all those years.

The sunbeams slanting
through the forest
warm the peat and bog
While siskins and
sparrows sing
in the lifting fog.

My feet squinch through soaking grass
I hear the osprey's cry
above the waves in Schooner Cove
that wash ashore nearby

Time moves on
all things change
and yet they stay the same

I plan to spend
ten million years
walking down this lane.

-John Noble, MD
Radiology
Foliar

I walk the fields
and forest roam;
and with each plant
exhale a groan.

ovate,
oval, oblong, linear

sagittate, acuminate;
mucronate, ariculate;
truncate, emarginate;
spatulate or undulate.

things to find,
put thoughts to
produce a strain too near to grief.
alas, it is but just a leaf.

-Harry Bohrs, PhD
Radiation Physics
A Sense of Closure

I.
Sometimes I wish my parts whole.
Not fractured like
our favorite sugar bowl,
Nor broken like
the unplucked strings of your guitar.

II.
The brown door swings open against the pink bathroom tile:
"Will you PLEASE HURRY UP I have to go
what the hell are you doing."
I thought this obvious
with an open book on my lap —
Reading.
A wavering look of disgust:
"Don’t you think it weird to be reading
reproductive physiology
sitting with your pants down in the bathroom."
The door slams shut with a thud.
Many things are weird.

III.
Sometimes I feel myself
becoming infectious:
An ear will itch, a hand quiver,
a sneeze escape my guard.

IV.
Days later, I face the brown door
from the opposite side.
What the hell are you doing?
"Go away ...
I’m reading."

V.
Once in a while,
the sum of my parts becomes whole.

-Johanna T. Fifi,
Medical Student
Defiance

Looking in my face, what do you see
am I the one you ache to be
does my power frighten you, causing you to flee
Or does it draw you near, letting thy soul go free
maybe I should cower, and hide like a ghost
While repressing all, that matters to me most
And if I do this, I shall die a coward’s death
While over me, none but worms shall fret
And if I should rise, like a fire blazing in the night
Know now all I do, is for justice and might
So let the heavens DECREE! My time has Come!
And let those against me... take cover and run.

-Ikenna Obele
Medical Student
In the middle of Papua New Guinea in the Hunstein rain forest live a people called Bahinemo. Their culture is far removed from the modern world, such that they have no concept of measuring time, age or wealth. Status is based not on possessions, but on the strength of personal bonds. The Bahinemo have a name for individuals with whom they are closest: “leikim.” The expression is derived from the name for a vine found in the rainforest which is strengthened by becoming interwoven with another vine. The literal translation is “tangled vine.”

Leikim

Were we Bahinemo, clocks would need no faces;
Hours and days would drift as Hunstein mist through
Rain forest where everything achieves the
Lowest common denominator without even trying...

Are we one big division problem,
Struggling to balance equations with
Microwaves ski trips the latest pop tunes
Satellite TV computer chips?

Let’s be Leikim, weaving up against through!
Who cares what the laws of physics demand
If the weight we pair
Pushes us high enough

To transcend the rustling canopy -
A piccolo piercing dark orchestral foliage by sudden inspiration...
Have we shared spirits like Leikim in some former union,
As daffodils trumpet refrain of the seasons?

-Desh Hindle,
Office of Student
Financial Management
Yanomami girl in traditional funeral ceremony (rheaju) costume. - Clara Curiel MD, Dermatology Resident

**Begin Life**

*Begin life* when you feel it has come close to an end. We go along existing, moving *fast*, *quickly* to nowhere! Around and around!!!

-Alice Thompson, Patient
Snow Dance

A fine, white powder drifts lazily downward
From grey, talcum clouds to transform
The cold, barren January landscape
Providing welcome relief to the drone
Going like sixty
On a straight, black path northward.

Imagine smiling faces tossing confetti
To celebrate a new beginning.

As the white blanket thickens,
Rolling artifacts create a lively swirl
Of intermingling patterns
On the dreamy path ahead. Dreams ...

Of sailing ships tacking merrily out-of-sync
Thru a shallow layer of fog.

Of wafts of smoke licking and curling
Around haphazardly-thrown fireplace logs
Yielding to advancing fire.

Of the graceful, flowing undulations
Of a field of immature wheat
On a breezy June day.

Of sheets of fine, wind-blown rain
Skimming across gentle ocean swells
In an approaching squall.

Of the spreading and merging of wakes
In a canal full of motoring ships
On a hot August afternoon.

Of swishing skiers in a swift descent
On freshly fallen snow.

Of the twirling and weaving of white ballerinas
Dancing to an unheard melody.
The snowflakes enlarge and moisten.

One flake touches and gently clings to the glass—
A sparkling three-dimensional crystal poised
To continue flight at the next new gust.
All others seem in two dimensions—
Flattened, hugging, as if not wanting to let go.

A sudden dark shadow passes, then another.
The canvas is clean.
The dance floor empty.

-Donald Gantz, PhD
Biophysics
Lie Awake

Lie awake
In bed
At night
In this city

The piercing grind
of garbage trucks
The background hum
of urban crickets
Call rain and relentless
Sun

Its inhabitants conspire
to imitate Indians
Shouting, Shouting
Constantly through the night
Slamming dumpsters for
percussion

The next morning
I can feel it coming
Like a shadow
Around the corner
A thin cool
half-rain comes
down and greys
the kettle black
of this city

Through barred windows
Come tiny invaders
Fall among the
pigeon down and
aging cob webs
A stack of magazines
A sloping orange candle
The sharp clang of church
bells

This city is on fire
with sensation
And yet it has no life
No fight, no life

-Clint Pollack,
Medical Student
untitled by Myra Gartner, Research Technician
After

Then she opened all the windows;
swept the floors of their dust and sweat;
scrubbed them hard on her hands and knees
so each panel and tile would shine their approval;
threw out dead orchids and bought red roses;
lit new candles, vanilla and sage;
drank echinacea from her favorite mug
and ran seven miles to breathe the world fully.
That evening she nestled in a fresh summer blanket,
read Pablo Neruda and Sylvia Plath.
The stars stood by with an occasional quiver,
tiny points of beauty sprinkled deep in indigo,
while the moon's mood tilted in a sharp-edged smile.
That night she entered the bedroom again,
finding strands of his hair and his scent on the pillow.
She wept as if water could wash them away.

-Margaret S. Lee
Medical Student
Holocaust

Naked bodies running
like broken trains,
into the cold, dark night,
breathless and choking,
bare shackled feet,
hobbling in blind agony,
towards the exploding fields.
Freezing rains falling
on shaved heads,
mixed with crystal tears,
creasing acid-like, through
the raw, haggard faces, dripping.
making scattered pock marks
on the hard bloodied ground.
Empty eyes, unseeing, lifeless,
staring into the steel tunnel,
felt not the pain nor
the searing heat,
as the world exploded into,
a crimson sea.

-Steve Persad,
Facilities Management

Untitled by Ashley Ackerman, Medical Student
For S., On Our Anniversary

“I heard a funny story today,” she says.
She takes a breath
And,
Begins to speak.

I watch (and listen, too) and wonder how the telling
Makes her glow like a child gripped by discovery,
As though each unfolding yields the freshness
Of a new mystery, the anticipation of an explorer who
Steps upon the shore of an unfamiliar land,
The simple intimacy of a shared secret.

There have been occasions, though, when her narrative
Has faltered, and her gaze has grown distant, carefully
Scanning the horizon for something just beyond the
Edge of her perception, that eludes her like a thing
Long ago left behind, or still out of reach.

But then, by chance or by design, I succeed
In meeting her eyes, and in the renewed
Flare of life that I find,
In the radiant smile that follows –
Therein lies my earthly reward.

“Are you still paying attention?” she asks
- Skeptical of this ability in males –
I answer, truthfully, “Yes;”
“Right down to the very last detail.”

-Edward Lee,
Graduate Student
"Sleeping" by Keith Harrison, Graduate Student
Radio-Man

I grew up in a small mill town in western Pennsylvania—just on the Ohio border. I was the youngest of ten children, five brothers and four sisters. Certainly there was a sense of love in the family, but there was also no doubt that I represented just one more burden on an already overloaded system—the depression was just winding down and World War II was yet to happen. It seemed like everybody else was always going some place and the lingering question was “Who’s going to take care of Raymond?” Feelings of being ignored sparked continual plots to torment my “elders” in ways that would lead my mother to conclude that it was I, not they, who was being tormented. This gave me a false sense of power.

But the seat of power lay with our father. He was the true center of family concern. It was by his labor that we survived and it was by our attentions that he was able to keep going. What he wanted, he got. Everything would be the way he wanted it to be—no argument. Granted that many of his choices were influenced by my mother’s charm and guile; still, his decisions became concrete straight jackets around the family members. I saw myself as heir to this role. I was persistent and insistent with well tuned tantrums as my major weapon. With my mother this usually produced what I wanted. But, with my father, it only produced agony and grief for me in the face of his rigid sense of what was right and wrong. If I begged he would tell me to “get out of here;” if I cried, he would tell me to shut up or I’d get “something to cry about;” if I whimpered, he would call me a baby. Any display of anger on my part would be met with a rage from him that would “scare the hell out of me.” There seemed to be no way for me to curry favor with my father.

I have two early memories of my father—one is of the man sitting by his radio in the evening—pipe ablaze in a screen of smoke, beer bottle by the side of his chair. The other is the man at the supper table—elbows on the table, hands folded in front of his face as he chewed his meal—always in silence. My mother’s command was constant—”Don’t bother your father, he’s tired, he’s been working all day.”

Our father was the unchallenged commander-in-chief of the family radio. Nobody but our father was ever permitted to touch that radio. Once in a while, more out of sheer insanity than simple curiosity, one of us, the three youngest children, would toy with the idea of touching the radio, but it never happened. The radio was a mahogany cabinet model with speaker mounted near the floor; the innards above this and the dials and display near the top of the cabinet. There was a fliptop compartment above the dials. Our father’s pipe rack and tobacco sat on a cloth place mat on top of the radio cabinet. A picture of the Lord Jesus completed the altar adornment. Nothing in, on or around the radio was to be touched by anyone except “Radio Man.” Near the radio was a reclining chair with footstool. The footstool had a removable top with a tray containing the most secret papers of our father. Like the radio, no one except our father was to touch the chair, the footstool or its contents.

Our father always arrived home for supper at 5:28. He entered by the cellar door and appeared in the kitchen, silent and prompt, at 5:30. I always wondered what he did during those two minutes alone in the cellar. Up until 5:28 the kitchen was a bustle of activity with our mother preparing the evening meal, refereeing the 10-factorial-way disputes among the children, giving advice to those in need, directing the setting of the table and pausing now and then to say a few beads of her ever present rosary.

At 5:28 our father’s car drove into the driveway. When the engine turned off, all kitchen activity ceased and the house became a scene of peace and order with anywhere from 6 to 11 bodies gathered around the table. (Part of the table setting process was a decision to add the middle leaf to the table when the total expected attendance exceeded 8.)
Our father entered the room and sat at the head of the table. A plate of softened butter was just to the right of his plate. He sat down without a word, made the sign of the cross and said a blessing (the long form). He helped himself to the evening meal and the others followed in turn, roughly by age with an understanding that the youngest children had to wait until the older ones were finished serving themselves.

The meal was eaten in silence except for occasional instructions from our father. "Pick that up off the table," he would scowl at one of the younger children who had dropped a piece of food. "Finish what’s on your plate before you get anything else." "You’re not going anywhere until you finish that." "Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about." Eventually our father left the table and eased off-on down to the cellar. I learned that if I dawdled over my food long enough, my mother would eventually absolve me of the chore of finishing what was left on my plate—by now inedible pulp. It wasn’t that she was any less strict than our father, rather her anxiety demanded that she clear the table, clean the dishes and get everybody out of her kitchen.

I really can’t remember what our father did after supper in the winter time although I do remember his fixing things from time to time. In the summer, sometimes in the spring and autumn, too, weather and length of days permitting, he would be out in the garden or the yard—digging, raking, mowing, changing the face of the property to the delight of our mother. To the best of my recollection I read and studied after supper and do not remember ever joining him out of doors. The other thing that I remember quite clearly is that our father often returned to work after the evening meal—especially from the period of about 1940 to 1947 and perhaps more so in the winter—when I was between the ages of six and thirteen. It is entirely possible that our father returned to work most evenings—I do remember that he was always on call. As a machinist, a tool and die maker, he was responsible for much of the machinery of the steel mill where he worked. (To this day I have only the vaguest idea of what the term “tool and die makes’ means.) They worked the mill around the clock and he was often called back to repair some piece of machinery. I also remember that he was frequently involved in developing a new machine and getting it to behave properly—during these times he was always required to return to work after supper.

Most evenings I remember his coming up from the basement with a bottle of beer in his hand. He’d head straight for his armchair, fill his pipe from the canister that sat atop the radio and settle down with the evening paper. He always read the whole paper; it was not something to be shared. We knew what was in store for us and we waited with growing anticipation. Eventually he would fold the paper and set it beside the chair. Then he’d sit up and reach over to the knobs on the radio. For us the evening was about to begin. “Fibber McGee and Molly,” “One Man’s Family,” “Jack Benny,” “Suspense,” “Mr. and Mrs. North,” “Mr. District Attorney,” “Allen’s Alley,” “Amos and Andy,” - all of those wonderful radio shows of the ‘40s. Each night we would gather around the footstool, stretched out on the floor, while the commander deftly selected the best of the evening. We had absolutely no say in the selections or when “show time” began or ended. The commander always moved the dial to the next station five minutes before the current broadcast ended. He did not want to miss the opening of the next show and would always tell us that the ending of the current show was not of interest—he knew how things got resolved. At 8:55, just as Mr. District Attorney was about to tell us how he had figured out whodunits the commander would start searching for the 9:00 presentation of Fibber McGee. Never in all of my childhood did I ever learn how a radio broadcast ended. Someday I am going to get recordings of all these shows and find out exactly what happened. The other mystery was the beer bottle. It always appeared by the footstool and seemed to last the entire evening. I never did know if it was one single beer bottle or a procession of bottles whose march was cleverly hidden from my innocent eyes.
My father passed away in 1976. A few months earlier I had paid a visit along with several of my brothers and sisters. One morning while my father was resting on the front porch—he was unable to move under his own steam—I made eggs Benedict and bloody Mary’s for all “us kids.” I assumed that he would not be able to join in. At some point I went out onto the porch to see how he was doing. He asked me what we were doing. When I told him, he wondered “How come you left me out?”

-Ray Wiesen,
Office of Information Technology
Dreams

Eastern sky dawned the patient breath of a giant Buddha
I woke up this morning on my mother’s bed
The wake of her wars left a sense of direction
I have nothing she needs but need to speak her tongue

I came days ago to my mother’s house
Language once a tune to hum in hesitation
But with a guitar for company and these tomes for guidance
I learn old lines anew, the shape of my name
And draw out the character of a modern morning calm

I am rising to a brighter room
Pained that I am slow but pushed by pain
Working through the furnishings of this family
From days before I was born into my mother’s being
Borne to realize the women I might have been, the daughter I am

I follow the glow of sandalwood incense
From a box marked Tae Yang in shiny gold strokes
A fascinating trail of fine ashes and scent
Fly to other dimensions, where I want to go
Searching for my future in pieces lit by Time
Whose language of Truth is most difficult to decipher
Seeking secrets of Life and the equality of opposites
Medicine from young hands and ancient sacred souls

10-3-97 Seoul, S. Korea

-Margaret S.Lee,
Graduate Student
Three Endings

Few engines purr across the heavy boards, laid down years before this night. Above, a dance of concrete and steel wires Extends from this bank across the water.

Long smooth lines that stretch themselves thin over the dark waves of Acheron. Extend, reach, and end in a sharp edge that touches—connects my feet to immortality.

But as I end there, you must start your journey back. Back over the same deep water I have traveled, you must walk to your birth, supported by the steel bridge, wooden planks, and sturdy arms I molded for you.

You shift along, hand upon iron railing, looking up at the stars. Waiting for love. But love won’t move for you. Love is at the other end of this unsteady stroll. Slide along the sharp tier and pierce love is waiting still.

In the dark, this play-action takes place. And side-glances give us away for who we are: strangers more afraid of beginning than ending. No Cerberus stands in our way tonight. Only we restrain ourselves from life.

Across the river, the dim rays begin to stir from behind the sleepy heads of trees that rise to greet the unveiling of the daylight. And the unfailing bridge refreshed by an arduous night.

-Johanna T. Fifi, Medical Student
Angel Cake

Angel cake
Sky blue shooters
Cool breeze
My girl's low hum
talking somewhere in the house

La Bahia Dos Todos Santos
This ebullient city
by the bay
by the lumpen mountains
by the pearl blue ocean

Digs, fly on the beach
yards between
pounding footsteps
A gull cries
Stop
the motion
Stop
to listen
*The shhh of the ocean waves*
*The pounding of your heart*
*The breath in your soul*

Children shrieking, far away
The infinite waters
trickling, bubbling
each to its tiny tunnel
Beneath the thick
of the beach
Into the body
of the earth

Below

-Clint Pollack,
Medical Student
The year is 1997. I am forty-two years old. My name is Walter Miggins. I am The Germ Killer. I guess my story begins twenty years ago this coming April with the birth of my first and only child. He was beautiful. Strong. Healthy. Perfect. And yet as I basked in the joy of his being, the smallest thought began to trouble and grow inside of me. I had created another person. But it took no great sacrifice. It was no wondrous accomplishment on my part. It was simply - how else can I describe it? - an abomination.

That same year I became a scientist. Young, ambitious, and seeking to make a difference, I set out with a vigor. I was a virologist in a world of virulence. I was a solver of problems. I was going to cure the whole world. I loved what I did and I was good at it. My work was exciting; my studies of viruses, viroids, and prions fantastically successful. I was the Germ Killer.

I have cured a dozen diseases. I have developed drugs for treatment, drugs for prevention, and drugs to eradicate contagion. I have developed viruses that kill viruses, viruses that cure people, and viruses that boost the yield of livestock. Medical journals count the lives I have saved in the millions. By all standards I was a great achiever.

Still, as I felt the joy of my purpose and the elation of my success, that troubling something grew. With every life I saved. With every disease I cured. What had I done? Why did I let it continue? How could I question what I had done?

I didn't want to know my confusion or understand my pain. I ran from it. I denied it. But it grew more powerful and began to possess me. My work faltered. I didn't believe in it. I couldn't bear to have my son around me. Phenomenal guilt consumed my every thought. I started sleeping in my car. I walked on the beach in thoughtless agony. I found myself strangling a dog for licking my hand. Such is the rage of confusion and I knew then I had lost control. Something was taking possession of my mind and I had to know it. It was time to give into the truth that I had refused to accept.

Of course I knew what it was all along. I just didn't want to accept it. The viruses I killed - they were the cure, not the disease. That was the truth to my lie.

When my son was born what had I done? I had brought one more human creature into a world where there were already six billion. There were now six billion and one. Six billion and one people to absorb, exhaust, and annihilate our only home. Six billion and one to take life indiscriminately and render the planet a wasteland. God, what guilt.

When I cured a disease what had I done? I had saved thousands of people so that they might continue to besiege the world with their parade of malice and greed, threatening the survival of every species, even our own. Already you can see the planet is starting to cook, the ozone is shot to hell, the oceans are poisoned. Why? Because of me. Wrapped in my blanket of morality and accomplishment I furthered the survival of a species determined to destroy all others. I could not take this truth. For the lives I have saved, I am an arch-criminal and enemy of the planet. I have betrayed nature. I have betrayed what I truly believed in. I have betrayed myself.

I was like this for some time. Lost. Not knowing what to do. Deny it again? How do I continue? My conscience simply waging war against itself. Perhaps if I had forced it I could have convinced myself that my last twenty years were good and right and just after all. I may have convinced myself that one man can't make a difference; that my self-conceived objections should take a back seat to the established laws of society and ethics. But I couldn't do that anymore. I wouldn't do that
anymore. It was already clear to me what would have resulted. Like a Pyrrhic victory over myself I may have won this war but I would have lost my soul.

Nine months ago I pulled it all together, though. If overpopulation is the root of every global problem and if I was duty bound to solve those problems, it was incumbent upon me to eliminate overpopulation. I realize that this was no great inspirational leap, but it set the stage and focussed me to the task at hand.

Now, clearly I knew that I couldn’t just pick up a gun and start killing. First of all it’s illegal (though I didn’t really care much about that) but more to the point you’d only be able to take an insignificant amount out with you. Most weapons of mass destruction were just not available to me and obviously it would require killing the planet as well.

These were only fleeting thoughts. I knew right away what my plan would be. I mean, I am The Germ Killer.

I set to work immediately. I have worked feverishly for months and now I can say that my job is done. All that remains is to watch and wait for the glory to be manifest as all my other successes have in the past.

Until now I have been using my knowledge to make people healthy. My success has been mankind’s success. Until now.

Finally at forty-two years old I have accomplished what I set out to do twenty years ago. And though I got lost along the way now my success is complete. I have transcended the common. I am God. I have given back life and future to every species on Earth. I have killed the germ. I am The Germ Killer.

“Yes I guess you could be right, Walter.” my colleague said to me last year. “Maybe if there was a button you could push to just erase five or six billion people a lot of problems could be solved. But what’s the use thinking about it? There’s no such thing. And more importantly even if there was, no man could take that kind of responsibility. A maniac would be put to death for trying it. It’s wrong to end people’s lives. It’s unethical. What right does anyone have to decide the value of another’s existence? Besides, in another two or three hundred years we’d be back to square one again.”

The coward! The simp! I talked with him calmly, exploring logical arguments. And the whole time I suppressed my fury. His approach: the problem’s too big so let’s do nothing. I wanted to grind my red-hot cigarette tip into his pasty-white-never-scratched jowls and listen to him cry. Give me a man. Not this intolerable craven vomit of a worm.

But I realized that he spoke the word of the slave. And all the slaves like him spoke the same. He was highly intelligent and yet his life was ruled by a non-existent being. He asks how one man can judge another’s worth when he believes in God and society; institutions dedicated to the greed of the rich when children are starving. This world buys the soul and robs the blood of the defenseless. And his voluntary slavery perpetuates that horror. I, on the other hand, am a master, not a slave. I am the Germ Killer.

He is right about one thing though. If you kill them all they will come right back. Only a balm, not a cure. “How to have a lasting impact?” I wondered. “How to keep the numbers of man controlled forever?”

In my career I have filled stacks of notebooks with information. They are covered page to page with drawings of proteins and RNA and DNA interacting with one another. Protein A sticks to DNA, then Protein B sticks to Protein A, then Protein C sticks to both of them. Proteins are always circles and RNA is a line. DNA is a double line. It’s ridiculous. Nothing but a bunch of lines and circles strewn across the page connected by arrows. Thousands of dollars are spent to figure out if Protein A actually
does stick to the DNA or if, just maybe, Protein B sticks first. It’s silly. A whole life’s work can be condensed to one stick figure drawing in the corner of a page - and that’s for the lucky ones. It’s silly but if you understand those figures you have an immense amount of power - like no other man has ever known. Silly Power is what it is and doesn’t that explain our whole society?

Well some of us collect silly power and some of us use silly power. I used it. I used the awesome silly power of virology to stop population growth altogether. And I haven’t killed anyone. No more madness. No more sickness. No more environmental toxicity, deforestation, ozone hole, etc., etc., etc.

What did I do? Well I’ll tell you now that it doesn’t matter anymore. I went to my refrigerators and pulled out all my favorite little viruses. I took the ones that the immune system can’t see, the ones that change all the time so it doesn’t matter, and the ones that not even I could cure. I grabbed some that were air borne, some that were sexually transmitted, some spread by insects.

Then the beautiful part. I engineered my viruses to knock out the genes required for reproduction - without interfering with anything else. I chose delightful little genes to destroy. And since we live in an enlightened age I made sure to cripple genes in men and women equally. For women I killed a gene for a glycoprotein in the zona pellucida that is the receptor for the sperm cell - hence no fertilization. I disabled a protein that inhibits the cellular reaction of the egg’s membrane so that it thinks it already has a sperm and refuses to accept any more. For the men I interrupted the sequence that codes for the acrosomal hyaluronidase enzyme necessary for dissolving the membrane for fertilization. I even blocked the development of the sperm’s tail with a cute little cytoskeletal mutation.

I fiddled with a lot of systems. These were just some of my favorites to give you the idea. I mixed and matched these different kinds of hits with different virus coats and made a whole bunch of the little suckers. I grew them up in my shakers and fermenters and distributed them all over the world. The air borne type were easy. I just mailed letters to heavily populated areas (with no return address, obviously), and left it up to the little guys to do their work - they’re pretty good at it you know. The sexually transmitted guys were a little more difficult. I joined sperm banks. I volunteered to draw blood and added my own ingredients. Some viruses I dropped into high volume food packaging plants. I found lots of ingenious ways of getting them around. Almost scary how easy it was. I mean what if some nut-case had wanted to deliver a dangerous particle to the community?

I’m sure you see the beauty of my plan though. It fills me with joy. Nobody dies. Nobody knows. Nobody thinks to look. When an individual dies there won’t be three to replace him. Fertility drops to zero. All because of my little jewels. Multiple infections will make it impossible for even those who can afford treatment to become fertile.

Think of it. No arguments over abortion. And if robbing a sperm cell of its chance for fertilization is a form of homicide, then every teenage boy alive is a mass-murderer and should be put in jail long before me. Hell, I bet there’ll be a ton of people beside themselves with joy. All the pleasure they want - no risk of pregnancy - and none of that irksome loss of sensitivity.

Perhaps it is artificial to generate these viruses. Perhaps it is artificial to limit growth like this or to block the emergence of a higher evolutionary species springing from man. Perhaps it is artificial to play god like I am. But I know it is no more artificial than what I had been doing before - keeping people alive when they should be dead. It’s certainly no more artificial than health advances, light at night, or artificial insemination. Live by the sword, die by the sword.

It took three months to make all those babies (or anti-babies if you like) and set them loose to do the Lord’s work. Six months have gone by since then. I must say that the first two months were depressing. I guess I’m impatient. Still, at the end of that time I could see results. At the end of four
months it was undeniable. Now, almost every major hospital around the world reports drops in birth rates between ninety-eight and ninety-nine percent. In only six months! some countries have been a bit slow to respond, being particularly moral or healthy or out of the firing line, but they’re getting there.

Not only that but I have calculated that by now, based on my methods and transmission times that this drop in fertility is a result of less than 2 hits per individual. Not even counting for the fact that they mutate spontaneously, my work is going to be at least fifty times more effective. And the most beautiful part? The birth rate has already dropped below the death rate.

I’ve succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. I’ve done it. I am the Germ Killer. Finally my life has true meaning and I’ve realized every dream. There will never be a cure for my little friends. Sure some may be immune to most of them. They will go on to found a new perhaps more aware race of mankind (albeit less fertile). And what if I’m wrong and the species goes extinct? Why, all the better. How many other species has man done it to? I guess it’ll just be his turn. Live by the sword, die by the sword.

So my work is done. My people, which are life in any form, are saved. There is no more need for me. The struggle of consciousness is over. And that’s what it’s about. Trying to increase consciousness, trying to ignore it, trying not to lose it. But now there is nothing greater that I can do with my existence. And as I put down my pen, I lift the barrel of my shotgun to my lips, and softly deposit my brain on the stack of papers behind me.

-Franchot Slot,
Graduate Student
Sounds

A tree fell in the forest,
but did not reach the ground.
I listened very closely,
for the echo of a sound.
It lay in the arms of others,
who refused to let him fall.
They buckled from the strain,
as they tried to keep him tall.
They looked to the graying sky,
and gathered in its rain.
It fell from their leaves like tears,
voicing their inner pain.
Still they would not let him go.
They’d rather bear his weight;
As if it somehow would delay
his inevitable fate.
A tree fell in the forest,
but did not reach the ground.
I listened very closely,
and heard a mournful sound.

-Jim Mealey
"You can take it with you" by Paul Mange Johansen, Graduate Student
The Creative Arts Society
Boston Medical Center

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