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WHORL

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1995

# WHORL: 1995

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WHORL



1995

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# WHORL

Journal of Art and Literature

And now, a message from the editors:

Welcome to the first ever, spanking-new, super-chic edition of WHORL...

The purpose of the Creative Arts Society at BUMC/BCH is to provide a setting that fosters the development, expression, and sharing of art and creativity within the BUMC/BCH community as an important aspect of individual and group identity and health.

The purpose of WHORL is to give the aforementioned ideals expression, and to share these talents with our peers and colleagues. We thank all who provided financial support to the production of this journal. We respectfully thank all of the artists in the community who had the courage (and time) to submit their impressive and meaningful creative works.

As harrowing a task as editing is, we've made it out alive, with a product of which we're proud, with a few scars, and with a lot of traumatic memories of the muggy Boston heat. As this is our first shot at this business, we, in our selection of this magazine's contents, have tried to be as inclusive and as representative of the polyphony at BUMC/BCH as possible. Each piece was judged not only on its own merit, but also against our collective vision of an inclusive and professional journal. We therefore feel that we have fulfilled this compelling purpose of Whorl.

We hope you enjoy.

the editors

**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 fingerprint.
5. *Archit.* An ornamental device consisting of stylized vine leaves and tendrils.
6. A coil, curl, or convolution.

*American Heritage Dictionary*

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“The art of losing isn’t hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

“Lose something everyday. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn’t hard to master.”

-Elizabeth Bishop  
"One Art"

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## Sponge

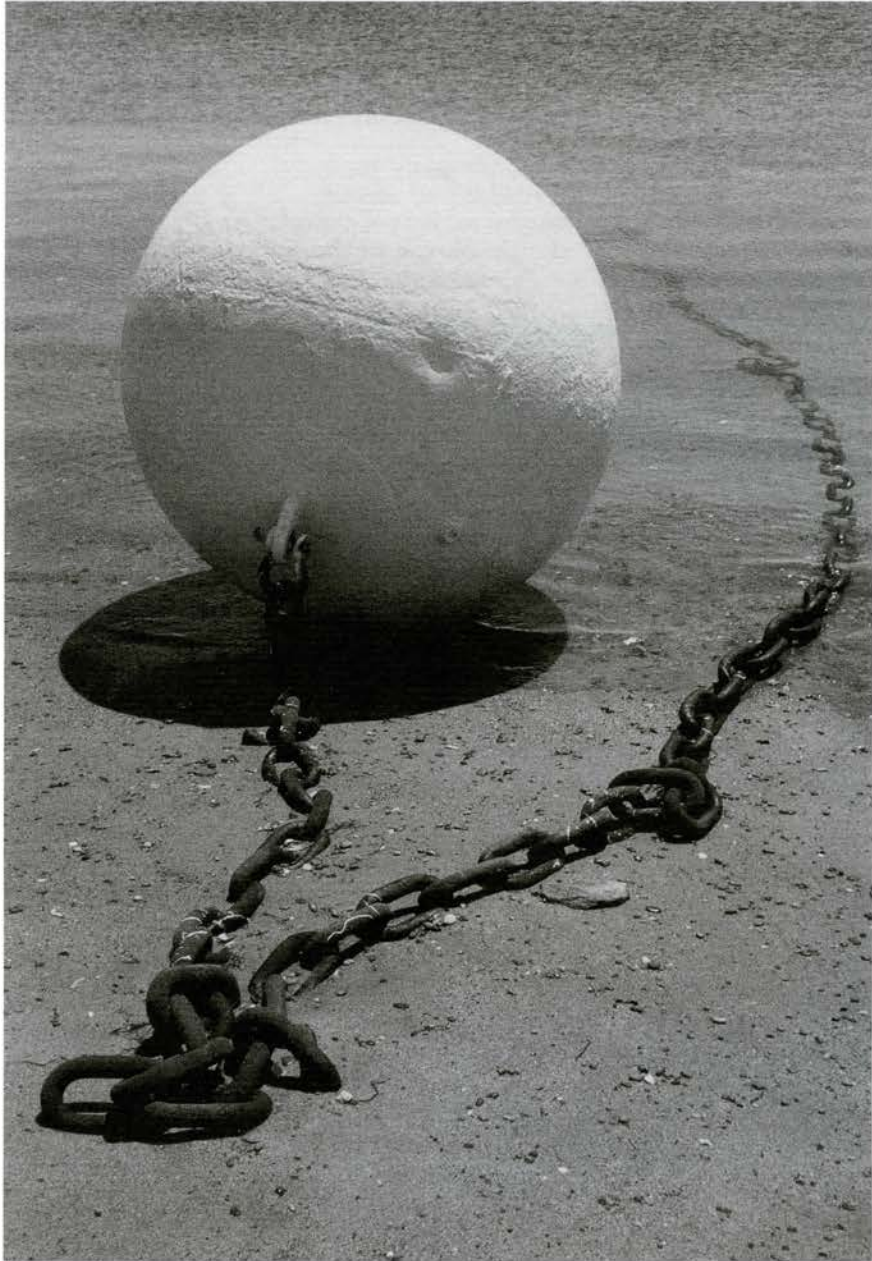
I come from green and blue  
I am pink and purple  
soft on your cheek with a hint of abrasion  
pores like eyes filled with water  
I'll think on it, watch me grow  
just don't let me dry out

push me gently, there,  
I yield to your question  
many thoughts are born of convolution  
a straight line can be boring  
at least look both ways when you cross the street

but even if you strike me, throw me  
run your tracks all over me  
I spring back up again  
pink and purple and perhaps a little blue  
I hold a lot of water still, salty and sweet  
touching all shores at once

I make friends with starfish  
to learn how to become more of me  
when I'm torn to pieces  
I study the ways of phosphorescence  
to match my darkness  
I am shapely, I am sandy  
I fit into many spaces  
find a use for me  
then I shall serve--for a price  
I will suck you up, absorb you  
and grow on to other waters  
green and blue  
pink and purple

-Margaret S. Lee



*untitled* by Domenic Scenci

## Dreams

Dreams are the refuge  
of fools such as me,  
whose words and actions,  
with dreams disagree.  
Dreams are the haven  
of cowards like me,  
who imagine the beauty,  
but won't make it be.  
Dreams are a Hades  
for sinners like me,  
who ask to be followed,  
but won't take the lead.  
Dreams are Paradise  
found and then lost,  
for those who can see,  
but won't pay the cost.  
Dreams are our memories;  
mine are bittersweet.  
Dreams are aspirations;  
mine stay incomplete.

-Jim Mealy

## A Romantic Imagination

"Imagine," I began,  
"strapped to a bed for a whole lifetime,  
immobile,  
unable to scratch at the face your own bullet  
sheared open,  
knowing in full tactile form  
the seam bisecting your forehead, your nose,  
your teeth,  
your chin."

You merely smiled,  
lit a match  
and burned yourself.

-Allan Lim

## Forbidden Fruit

the forbidden fruit is at its ripest  
when it is within reach  
for when it is furthest away  
it appears intangible

its skin is so soft  
its fruit so sweet  
but the branch it hangs from  
remains within, yet out of reach

and when we taste that fruit  
we can shut the world out  
yet its branch still hovers over our heads  
trying to remind us of a sin we created

but if sin feels so right  
it cannot be a plight  
for He is merciful and kind  
since He created our minds

that for moments become one  
together the world we will stun  
and continue to turn  
what may seem a rebellion  
into a beautiful relationship  
by two companions

so that fruit so soft and sweet  
hangs bravely from its branch  
and will incessantly be plucked  
by all who want to take a stand

against a society that has been molded  
by culture and religion  
that cements some minds  
against what they think is the forbidden

for these persons only see  
the blacks and whites of situations  
they are blinded by the greys  
for they fear retaliation

but for those of us who see the greys  
that open up other hues and shades  
we see the rainbows He created  
and reach for the gold in the pot He plated

-Tahia Lameer



*untitled* by Elizabeth Colburn

## Memory

I see days of denial amidst discovery  
I know I will know what it is to be lonely  
I expect to know melancholy intimately  
As I have known it before despite my joys  
Pensive afternoons with so much to be done  
And nothing I want to do  
Evenings curled into a ball of confusion  
Bouncing between nothingness and infinity

I know of future times, my head in my hands  
I foresee wet wrenching fingers  
Heartaches heaving  
All because I am human  
Destined to be wrong and foolish  
Equal inheritor of pain and pleasure  
Of dreams we don't wake up to  
Of longings always too long and far away to capture  
Trying to learn to be thankful anyway

I know I will wonder where time went  
Mornings may be better partner to other pursuits  
Not these private mutterings of a diffident daughter  
Of so many lazy days and anxious expectations  
Here I am looking ahead to you, my older Self,  
And knowing you will not be so different  
Heir to yet more moments of future memory  
Minutes to mark yet another day  
A few more breaths  
Of Life and Death  
Flying by as you lie there  
Trying to know the truth  
but sometimes wishing you knew nothing at all.

-Margaret S. Lee



"Bottle" by Tri D. Do

## Bumblebee Jar

I'm four--  
the drums  
are coming to town--  
shiny brass buttons  
on bright colored cloth,  
black leather boots.

Horses--  
heads pointed high  
with tall angry men.

"Can we go, please,  
can we go?"

Bands playing marches  
stopped at our side;  
flags full of stars.

Clowns  
with white painted faces,  
side-to-side walk.

"Oh, why can't we go?"

Alone  
in the weeds  
with my bumblebee jar--  
sticks  
grasses  
and stones.

"I know we'd a gone  
if I hadn't kept askin'.  
I'm gonna make my own  
parade  
when I grow up.  
Have one every day.  
I'll have a pocket full of  
donuts.  
Never feel bad again."

The bumblebees sort  
through the buzz in my  
head  
hiding secrets away;  
away in a place  
so deep inside  
there's nothing ever can  
reach--

not the drums,  
not the bands.

-Ray Wiesen

## Sisters

My sister's room is a burrow, a cave,  
with few sharp corners for all the piles,  
contours, shapes of a busy life.  
I step carefully, lest I break my ankle  
or disturb the formation of natural wonders.  
The walls are studded with shelves of jewels--  
I am like an explorer, a private detective,  
to see what she knows and take something away.

This is where she hides behind her door in the corner  
surrounded by words and sounds and pictures,  
Balanchine, Horowitz, Callas, Moffo,  
Graham, Monet, Einstein, Chagall...  
Her friends are such a brilliant crowd.

This is where she is everything at once without doing anything,  
no ballet at the banister, no arias in the kitchen, no medical books open, no concerts to attend.

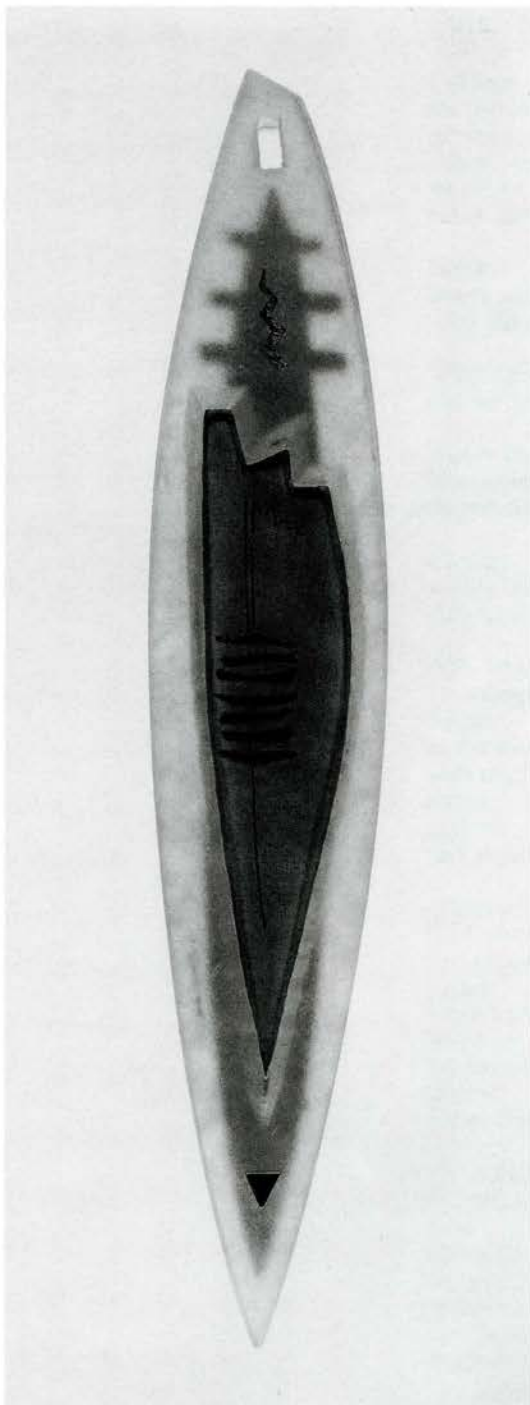
This is where she cries when something hurts  
and I hear her through the wall, not knowing what to do.

Sometimes we talk here, her lazing on the covers,  
me on the floor  
competing for space with her clothes and books and satin slippers.  
How little time we share now,  
unlike the early years.  
Today I take her books and albums in hand  
and follow her just to know where she's going.

I think I understand her but wonder if I do,  
wondering if she weeps and I write,  
wondering which is more futile, which is more freeing.

I have four of her books to read today,  
two mere snacks, but two will be heavy with  
knowledge for my heart, tears for my intellect,  
questions for my pen  
and gratitude for my sister, who lives next door  
even when I am here alone.

-Margaret S. Lee



"Cloisonne Enamel Pin" by Lori Messenger

## Insomnia

That night in the metro  
 I held my lens flush  
 against glass  
 and photographed the dark.  
 You clamored, expecting lightning  
 but my sterile flash  
 responded.

"It would take a million years  
 for you to catch up to me,"  
 I thought. "You'd waste half  
 realizing my worth, and the  
 other half--I'd let you  
 catch your breath." If only  
 we could do something about time.

Sit by the window  
 and let the summer rain in...  
 Pandora's box was no container  
 of ill  
 but a vacuum that ate our sanity  
 like fruit,  
 belief in gods  
 left us to roam  
 about for a quick fix,

backrooms and quarter film-booths,  
 meaning on the store shelves...  
 "I was looking for you," was the  
 first thing I'd said to you.  
 Hearing that was simple and  
 sufficient--

When we emerged from the earth,  
 you stood atop a heap of debris,  
 played King of the Mountain  
 until I fell on my ass,  
 the dirt filling our holes,  
 and lightning cracked the world  
 in half. How inadequate.

Hands on your knees and panting,  
 you appeared a mound of  
 impressionistic grains,  
 laughing as you scooped mud  
 over me  
 and over

-Tri D. Do



"Imagination" by Tirsit Mogues

## The Scent of a Woman

The path to ecstasy is by the scent of a woman,  
the small of her back, and a touch, soft and stunning,  
divine by all that is beauty to behold.

A woman's hand, the shape, the feel, a doorway  
to unimaginable pleasure, cunning and mysterious,  
a fool to no man and his petty games.

The strength and power of her heart and soul  
abide to nothing, every movement graceful,  
every breath, to die for.

How I long to feel a woman by my side,  
when each moment comes to pass as the  
days and nights would pass in heaven.

To have lived but for a single day in love with  
the scent of a woman  
is to have held my own hand not far from the touch of God.

-anonymous

## Let Me Play the Voyeur

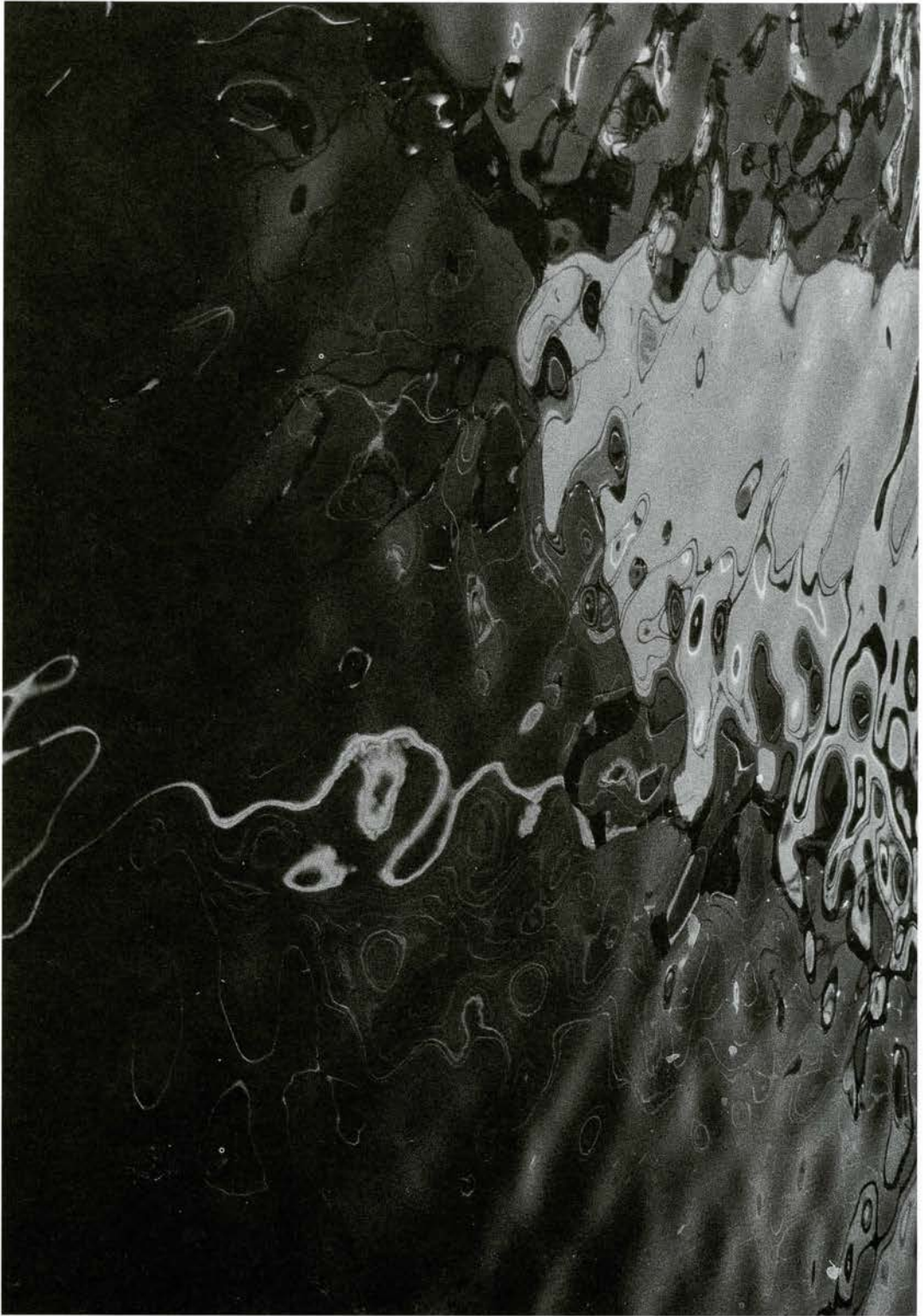
Violence is her art,  
rabid waters against the barrel-chest of shores,  
asps from realized shadows,  
a rustling breeze not unlike soft breathing on a lazy day.  
Arms aflutter, knees undulated and undulating,  
neck and head at play  
in a fluidly struggling dance,  
she is as symmetrical as a dying quadruped.  
Her frame, the anorexic one that I prefer,  
effects a prayer of release.  
So I comply, as is proper,  
lids like shutters over the cornea of each eye  
as she is catalogued.

-Allan Lim



*pencil sketch by Priya Kothari*

This is an illustration of an East Indian dancing girl. She wears a traditional folkdancing costume.



*untitled* by Ray Wiesen

## Mystic Turtles

I come here in search of turtles.  
They elude me, wise to the sound of my morning run,  
no time for a stranger; they know what they know.  
But I want to ask what they know,  
the secrets at the depths of still water.

I'm prepared for them to snap at me,  
slow and deliberate in movement, for  
urgency is a tug-of-war with illusions,  
no words to match a question when  
Wisdom is often a sneaky silent thing.  
To seek the mystics is a test of patience;  
to come away without an audience is my exercise of it.  
Maybe they know it's better for them,  
better for me,  
to not appear  
so that I keep running, keep coming here,  
keep looking.

I imagine a misty morning on a pebbled shore  
when I have run a thousand miles  
and finally understand how the sun returns each day to the world  
all different yet the same,  
when I come here just to be alone and in love with Being,  
I imagine that will be the morning the turtles appear.

I will ask nothing,  
they will say nothing,  
and all will be content.

-Margaret S. Lee

Muscae

*latin for 'flies'*

“Like old Roman flies that never  
knew when to give up the battle,”  
all is vanity where the heat’s  
concerned, and then this old optician...

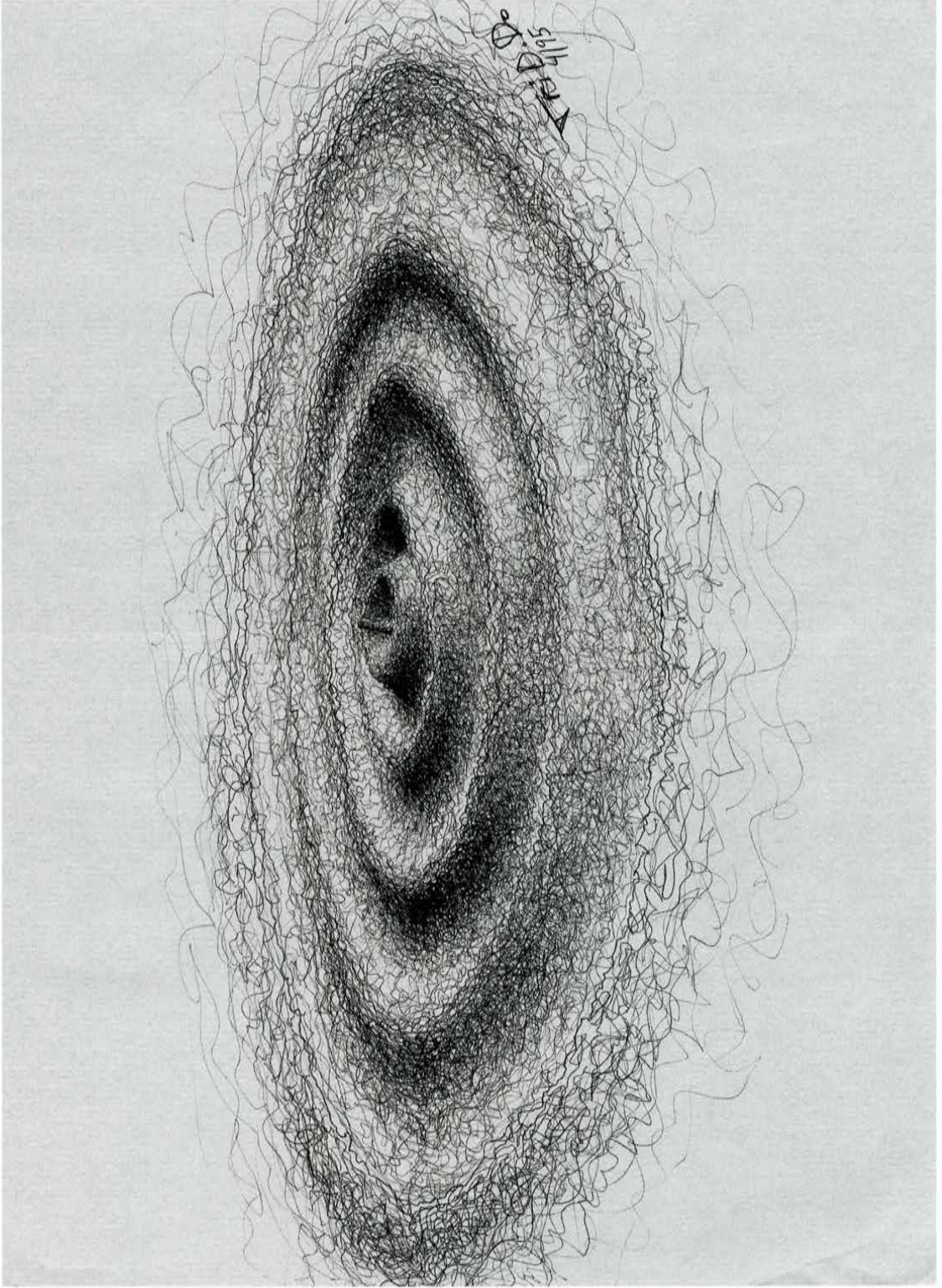
He’s trying to explain that what  
I’m seeing is, in effect, “Optical.”

After I’ve ventured forth with my  
visions of sea-horses, microscopic  
unicorns, irreverent mares,  
glass slides and cover-slips,  
pond water, and amoeba,

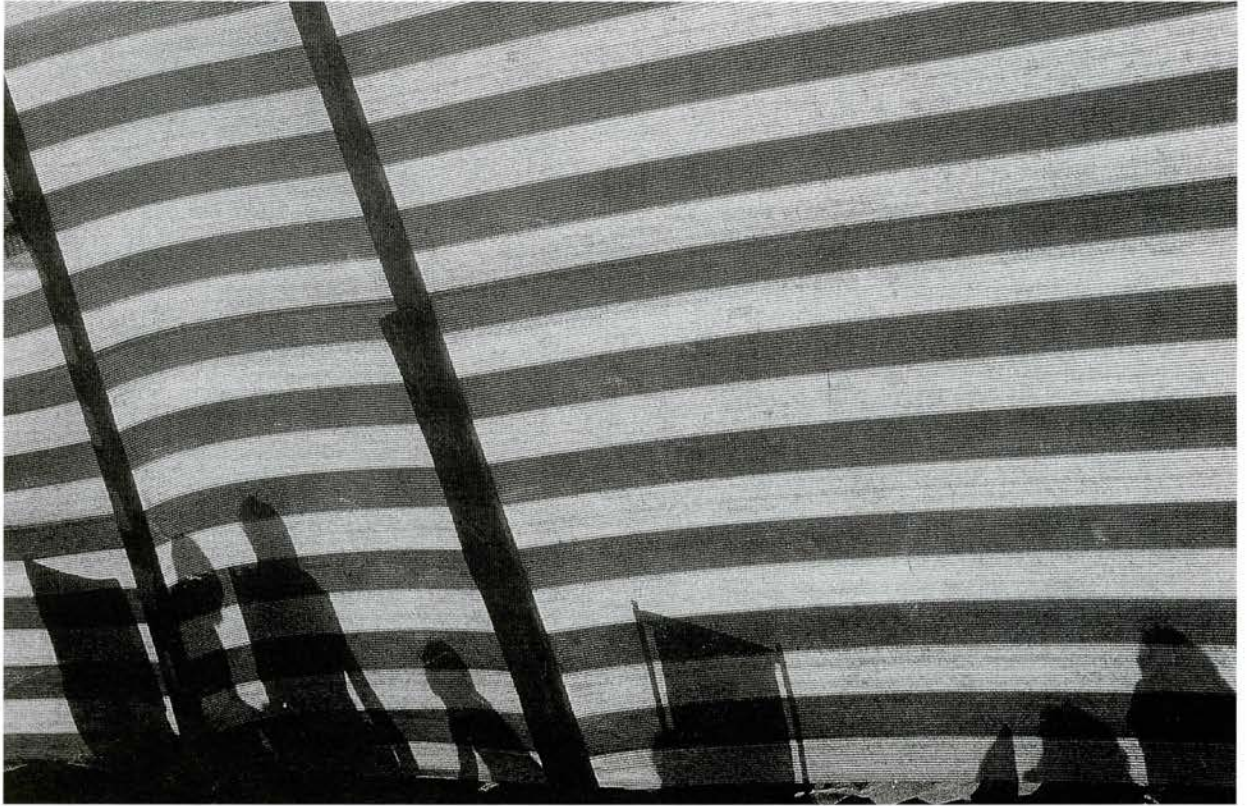
he grabs my face in his fat hands  
and breathes, “It’s Optical...an  
**Illusion**, that is. Cellular debris  
floatin’ around in your head,” and then  
he holds a clumsy wooden box to  
my head to gauge my eye pressure.

As if nothing eventful has occurred, I ask,  
“Where did that monocle come from?”  
but I keep thinking, as a sort of prayer,  
*Thank god he didn’t find the flies.*

-Tri D. Do



"Subthreshold Potential" by Tri D. Do



*untitled* by Angelo Gallina

### Sit Up and Dance

Come sit up and dance  
 the circus' in town  
 with trailers and tents;  
 men up at dawn  
 with colorful arms,  
 hands caked with chalk--  
 and those eyes.

Eyes full of men catching ladies  
 who fly through the air,  
 of fiery tigers  
 whipped through a hoop,  
 of carrot haired clowns  
 dressed in lollipop suits.

Come sit up and dance  
 your brother's arrived  
 with boys dressed in blues;  
 eagles in red  
 on starch laundered whites--  
 and those eyes.

-Ray Wiesen

## On the Tombstone of Mother Earth

In time we may discover ourselves again  
 As so long ago a man and woman were  
 Equals in a relentless struggle to  
     Survive.

A strong and powerful world has since been stripped  
 Of life, a life that was harsh and unyielding  
 From which strength would seem to spring  
     Eternal.

We have turned on one another, together  
 We have turned upon our land, the same land that  
 Has allowed so many days and nights to pass  
 Before our very  
     Eyes.

Time is all that we have left to use, as for-  
 Gotten as the world on which our survival  
 Began, as lost as the need for some unwanted  
     Chore.

Of all that is the glory we behold in  
 The skies above our heads, the soil beneath  
 Our feet, that most precious gift of life has been  
 Left for naught, tossed aside like so much that has  
 Outlived its own wonder and  
     Delight.

But not tonight.

Tonight, a lonely tear falls upon this earth  
 As a reminder to us all that ours is  
 A world that feels, a world that hurts, and a world  
     That lives forever.

-Ben Sigmond



"Tree" by anonymous

## In Sickness There is Health

by Ray Wiesen

My name is Ray Wiesen and I'm a recovered alcoholic and manic-depressive. The youngest of ten children, I come from western Pennsylvania. I have no relatives here in Boston, and sometimes the loneliness is very stark--especially around the holidays. One of my sisters told me that a cousin of ours, now living in eastern Ohio, was a poet like myself, and she suggested that I get in touch with her. This past Christmas I followed this advice and phoned her. Now good friends, we talk on the phone, write and share our poetry. The first time I talked with her she told me something that I had not known--that her 17 year old daughter had been killed by a drunk driver a few years earlier. I thank God every day that I was not that drunk driver. She asked me if I would record my story; she said she would transcribe it for me. This is my story.

I grew up in a home where alcohol abuse was common. My grandfather on my mother's side had a problem with alcohol and depression. I can remember my mother telling me a number of times that when she was a little girl, her father would come home from work and she'd never know whether she was going to get a hug or a slap across the face. She could never relate this to anything she had done that day. For me this is a very familiar image; on both the receiving and giving end. (It doesn't have to be a physical thing, emotional will do.)

I had two brothers who were self-admitted alcoholics and who died at relatively early ages. Alcohol had been a problem for both of them since their teens. They did not want to live. In my early drinking career, they told me that I was an alcoholic. I told them that they were crazy; that I wasn't an alcoholic, that I just had a mental illness. This satisfied me, if no one else. (Later I came to realize that alcoholics, as well as many people close to them, qualify as mentally ill.)

I grew up in steel mill country. A male in that culture was certainly allowed to drink. When one drank, one was expected to be responsible for his drinking. I learned the first part about being allowed to drink, but I never learned the second part about being responsible. I picked up my first real drink when I was about 15 years old. (As an altar boy I had been emptying the wine cruets in the sacristy after mass since about age 10, but I got into some white lightning at 15.) I found that it did something very, very special for me. It took away that hurt inside; that hurt that comes from a lifetime of being too close to too many people who had been affected by alcoholism. It allowed me to be what I thought was a man. Many years later, when he was dying, my father told me that I didn't need to drink, and that he wanted me to be a man. I thought he was crazy too. I didn't realize that he was telling me something other sober alcoholics would tell me later on.

From the very beginning my drinking was something that was most important to me. I was an excellent student in high school and very popular with my fellow students. I was, however, very confused--wanting to be among the class leaders on the one hand, but drawn to the drinking crowd on the other. Every time I took a step forward in self-respect, I'd do something that put me two steps back.

Until I started drinking daily, during my senior year in high school, I was at the top of my class. After I started drinking on a regular basis things began to slip. I was still a very good student, but I would rather drink than do anything else in life; and I was still only 18. I don't think that there was any responsible person around to tell me that I had a problem or who could suggest that there was something I could do about it--not as there is today with public awareness of alcoholism and its effects on the family. I had to go another 30 years before I could understand that **maybe** alcohol was my problem and **maybe** I could do something about it. I had to participate in hurting other people, just as I was hurt--with battered dreams, broken promises, bitterness and resentment. By the time I was 18, alcohol was telling me where to go and whom to be with; it was telling me how to begin mistreating my mother with insolence, lying about my activities, irresponsibility, keeping late hours without any explanation of my whereabouts; alcohol was telling me how to devalue all those things I loved in my life, and to do what alcohol said. It told me that it was more important than the girls I loved so

much, the books I loved to read, than all the activities I had enjoyed. Alcohol became my number one passion, and anything that interfered would have to go.

I entered the seminary in my late teens and was a devout student, but it was the same old struggle between alcohol and a life of prayer and study. I could not take responsibility for my own life and stay with it. People who trusted me and worked with me were all to soon discarded because I was ashamed to tell them of my inner conflict and alcohol's incessant conquest. I went on for some 15 years--drinking and thinking that I knew everything--going to graduate school, getting a Ph.D., becoming a scientist, understanding how the world works. The only thing I couldn't understand was Ray Wiesen. I didn't know anything about Ray and I felt that the world was controlling Ray--that he had no choices, that he had no life aside from trying to be what other people expected him to be.

When I was in my mid-30s, what had been a life long depression became worse. I knew there was something wrong with me--perhaps I was too bright to be in the situation I was in. I was a creative person and my creativity was being stifled. I couldn't admit that while this may have been true, I was afraid to make any changes. I was afraid to do anything that didn't have the backing of all those around me. I had become so insecure and dependent that I could not function without an inordinate amount of support. So I started going to see a psychiatrist for my depression. I did not tell the psychiatrist about my drinking. I simply told the psychiatrist that I was depressed and that I was under a lot of pressure. He gave me valium. I believe that he gave me valium because I did not tell him the truth about my drinking. I discovered that alcohol plus valium was much better than alcohol alone. I started to take valium in the morning and alcohol at night.

A few years later my mother died, and that was something that I couldn't handle. I mentioned that I was youngest of 10 children. My mother almost died when I was born. My mother's mother did die when my mother was born. There was a tight bond between my mother and me. When I saw my mother laid out, I sat by her and cried for 2 or 3 hours. Nobody could get me away from her coffin. I really feel that I couldn't accept what was happening because I felt that I had failed her. I loved the person she was, but I hated those characteristics that had become so dominant in her as a result of her own battle with the alcoholics in her life. In the next year or two something changed in me and I began to feel very depressed in the wintertime and in the summertime I'd be highly elated. In the wintertime I could do nothing, I couldn't even go into a grocery store to buy something. I couldn't work. I could drink and that would help for a little while. In the summertime I would exist on a few hours of sleep a night. I was just crazy. I thought it was fun. I thought maybe the winter depressions would go away and I could have the summer manias all the time. That would be great.

In the summer of 1976 somebody got hold of me--a therapist. She said "You know, Ray, you may be enjoying yourself in this and having a good time, but if you ask your wife and children, you may find a different story." I quickly ran away from her, but she planted a seed in me. Within a few days I entered a mental institution. It wasn't entirely my idea because I was under a lot of pressure at work and from my family. People thought that I needed psychiatric help. So I came to the hospital with that same old story--that I drink once in a while, that I have these problems. I was diagnosed as suffering from bipolar disorder and they started me on lithium. I was in the hospital for two months. With lithium, things did get better for me. I felt better. I wasn't as depressed. I wasn't as manic. I continued to drink because, by this time certainly, I had no choice about drinking or not drinking, no matter what they gave me--I needed alcohol. It was my life. The doctors would say "Now that you're on lithium I suppose you drink less than you did." And I would say "Oh, yes, yes, I drink less." So this went on and I didn't know then--I didn't realize--about the erosion of trust in my family. I thought that I was sick and they were well so they were taking care of me. They were strong and I was weak, and that's the way it's supposed to be. I didn't have any idea that anything was happening to them. I didn't see that my children were starting down the same path that I had started down as a child--that they were beginning to adopt certain unhealthy behavior patterns and attitudes in response to my sickness just as I had responded to the sickness in my family of birth. For instance, they began to hide because they never knew how I would react to what they had done. They became obsessed with my health and lost sight of their own well-being; they became confused about whom to trust.

For about a year and a half after my first hospitalization things went pretty well. I was reasonably stable, I was reasonably comfortable. Then in 1978 I lost my job. I couldn't understand this, but it did give me chance to stay home and drink. Unfortunately my wife soon got laid off from her job and that ended the bliss.

I got a new job. At the time I didn't know much about stress, and it didn't occur to me that starting a new job would be a difficult thing. I started to get manic again. Then one day I decided that what I really needed to do was to get rid of Ray; that he was the problem. This led me back to the hospital. In the following four years this became a pattern. Every six months or so some crisis, a big change, would occur in my life and I would decide that the way to resolve the conflict was to get rid of myself and I'd end up back in the hospital. It still did not occur to me that this represented a problem for my family. I could see that they got angry at me, and that would make me angry, but I couldn't understand why they got angry at me. In my mind I had no control over what was happening to me; I couldn't do anything about it. I was taking lithium and I just couldn't do anything more. Alcohol was keeping me alive, and if others couldn't understand that, then they needed help. (Whenever one of the hospital staff brought up the topic of alcohol, I would make a hasty retreat.)

In the spring of 1981 I was in the hospital, and the doctors didn't want to let me out. They said that the only way out for me was to go to marriage counseling. I wouldn't do that. Their position was that I could just stay there. Well, it wasn't too bad because I was working half the time and getting paid full time. I'd stay in the hospital. I'd go to work and leave early and get drunk and go back to the hospital. That seemed to be fine with me. It was certainly better than what I was used to. But finally I agreed to go to marriage counseling. My wife and I sat down with a counselor, and the first thing the counselor did was to ask my wife how she felt about all of this. I was shocked to hear my wife say that she couldn't stand it, that it had been misery for 21 years and that she wouldn't be around and that she was leaving. I said that this sounded good to me. Now I could go home and she wouldn't be around and I could drink more and things would be better. So she left and I went back home and my daughter was there and I thought that things were wonderful because now I had more freedom and I could drink more at night and I could go to work late without feeling guilty. The fact that my daughter stayed in her bedroom and I stayed in the rest of the large house represented, to me, that my daughter had a problem. Certainly I had nothing to do with this.

What happened next requires a little introduction: a few years earlier my daughter had been in school in North Carolina and she became ill. My wife wanted me to go to North Carolina with her and spend some time with our daughter. I did not want to go because I was afraid that it would restrict my freedom to drink. I could not go down there and be around my wife and daughter all day and night and still be able to drink. I just could not 'not drink' for a week, not even a day. I stayed home while my wife made the trip. Something similar to this was about to happen.

One Saturday I had my golden retriever out in the yard and I was drinking as usual. Somehow the dog had disappeared and I called the police and they said that somebody reported having hit a big dog out on the highway nearby. So I put the down the drink and I went over to the area they had mentioned and I found my dog in a ditch beside the road. I carried her back home with the help of a friend and I buried her in the garden. I thought about this and I realized I was able to put down the drink for someone in distress, for someone I loved. Somehow, under the right circumstances, love still had an influence.

Shortly after this I called the Paulist Center in Boston and said that I knew somebody who wanted to return to God and wondered if they had any suggestions. They told me about AA and not to drink, but I didn't want to hear any of that. So I continued to drink. Then in December of 1981 I was feeling very rejected and I was drunk and tried to asphyxiate myself. My daughter found me in the garage and she pleaded with me to stop drinking and to get help. She called a neighbor and he told me that I was trying to kill my daughter more than I was trying to kill myself. I couldn't understand that. I said that I was sick with a mental illness and that I needed the alcohol. Others said the alcohol was the problem and that if I could quit drinking I would get

better. I felt that hate and that hurt come up in me...others telling me that I didn't know what I was doing, that the very fiber of my existence was in doubt. I went to the hospital. I was totally beaten.

The worst day of my life had to be the next day when I woke up in the hospital. I felt trapped, unloved and not at all understood. I was alive, but not wanting to be. I could do nothing about it. My wife came over. She was very angry because I couldn't see that I just couldn't drink. I thought she should pity me. The doctors told me that my problem was alcohol and that I needed help for that problem. I still could not see this. I could not understand this. I said I was manic-depressive and I drank some--my problem was manic-depressive illness, and if that is taken care of, I will be OK. I am doing all I can about it. It's the doctors' problem.

Finally I gave in and agreed to give 'not drinking' a try. I didn't drink for two and a half months, but after that I realized it would be OK if I stayed away from alcohol when I was under stress. It was OK to drink at other times. I never stopped to think that it was alcohol and the things I did and thought when I drank that put me under stress. I concluded that I would be OK if I only drank when I was happy. So I drank. The first evening I was happy and it seemed to be OK. The second evening I realized that I was very stressed, but I also realized that I was going to have to drink. So I wrote myself a contract that I would drink, but that I wouldn't get drunk and that I wouldn't think of killing myself. I did get drunk, but somehow I did not attempt suicide. I was walking a tightrope, but staying alive. Then one day, after about a week, I was coming home from work and I saw my daughter's car and my wife's car parked in the driveway. I knew something was wrong. But what? I went into the house. Their looks told me what was wrong. They said to me, "You have a choice. You can have us or you can have alcohol." For me that was a very difficult choice. I thought hard and finally said that I'd stop drinking. Secretly I reasoned that I could have both if I played my cards right. It never occurred to me that I was about to have neither. I ended up in an alcohol treatment program. I spent seven months in a five week program because I just didn't want to live without alcohol and nobody in the facility would take responsibility for my release. While in the treatment center I found the opportunity to drink again and the situation with my family deteriorated to the point that I no longer had a marriage. I no longer had the trust of my children. I eventually was divorced. I lost the high-paying position I had had and eventually was laid off from my company.

It took me a long time to understand that my problem was alcohol. In the first two years of sobriety I was beset by depression and confusion, but stayed with people who also were trying to go without booze and somehow I managed not to drink. After about two years I began to see that my problem was alcohol and that I could find peace by staying with others who wanted to live. The person I saw after two years was a person who did not have to drink, but he was a person who was still very immature and very confused about himself. It took about three more years of therapy before I could see a person whom I began to love, a person who wanted to live and who sought a good life.

I have a good life today. I am a poet and a writer and earn some money doing secretarial work. I take care of myself. I live along and enjoy life. I have found a way to life that suits me: "Less is better than more; take what you like and leave the rest; leave a little on the table; do what you can; the less the better; to be left alone, but not left out." Nine years ago I would have said that my children wanted nothing to do with me; were afraid of me, were in despair of my ever getting well again. They were afraid to get close to me, they did not want to get hurt again, they didn't want to get pushed anymore. I have good relationships with my children now. Oh, I don't really know what to do in many situations, but I do know love and I know how to love. We are kind to one another and tolerant of one another. We are there for each other. Tell me if you know anything more important than that.



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