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THE TREE: ITS MEANING AND ITS FUNCTION IN ART THERAPY

Mira R. Krol

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Art Education and Art Therapy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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## ABSTRACT

### The Tree: Its Meaning and Its Function in Art Therapy

Mira R. Krol

The tree is a universal symbol very well rooted in human symbolic history. The patient in this art therapy case study chose to draw images of trees. To gain better understanding of this therapeutic process, and especially of the tree representation symbolism, a definition, a Jungian psychological view, and an artistic consideration is presented. Furthermore, image formation, as an inherent part of the human experience, is examined.

Some form of the symbol of the tree has appeared in many different cultures and religions. Its meaning is basically related to life themes such as regeneration, death, and the Divine. In this paper the tree symbol is presented within a historical context to show its scope of existence and its importance in human history.

Furthermore, in the case study presented at the end of the paper, this ancient tree symbol was also brought about, spontaneously, by the patient in art therapy.

She used the tree symbol to work through some of her personal concerns and problems, as well as her relationship to the therapist in these sessions.

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## INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis began the day I met my patient Anna during my internship duty for Art Therapy. She was a 78 year old woman, a chronic patient who lived in a hospital setting. Although she had no apparent signs of senility, the staff nevertheless considered her unreachable. She was depressed and did not interact with the other patients or staff. She was in pain most of the time from a variety of physical ailments. She only spoke German and had little understanding of English or French. As a result, the hospital staff thought that Art Therapy might possibly be an ideal means of expression for Anna, since the nature of Art Therapy is more oriented to the process of image making and less to the verbal. I also found out later that Anna did not have an extensive education. Her life had primarily consisted of caring for her family: her life exposure was mainly domestic. Death had taken her husband, a daughter and a grandson. This resulted in an attitude of intense bitterness. Added to this was loneliness. The rest of her family lived abroad; there were no friends and no visitors.

As I worked with her I began to notice that the major theme of each of her drawings was that of a "forest". She drew trees. It was a totally spontaneous expression. She chose this particular symbol on her own with no suggestion

on my part. Her general emotional and mental state was one of depression. She frequently stated emphatically that her life was "all for nothing". She could not accept the death of her loved ones. She felt isolated and abandoned by all. As far as she was concerned there was no God. Nobody cared about her. She wanted to die and yet she did not want to die. In each subsequent Art Therapy session she would repeat that she had nothing to draw. She would point to her head and say "empty". Yet she would proceed and slowly begin to draw a tree. There was little verbal interaction between Anna and myself. In this case, the "image" did all the talking. This was a good example of the Art Therapy process. As session after session passed and Anna continued to draw trees, it became evident that she had chosen to use a specific symbolic imagery to work through her issues and problems. She had by herself reached and touched upon a hidden, unconscious spring that allowed her to pull forth an image - a visual representation emotionally charged for her - that could connect her to herself, to me, to her environment and to the universe.

Although Anna said most of the time "I don't know what to draw", inevitably she would draw her trees - her forest. Any suggestion that she draw her family, her feelings, etc., she resisted and refused to do. She pursued her own internal image. Through the entire therapeutic process she drew trees.

Having reached the age of 78 years, she had, one might assume, a body of internalized life experiences. Like dreams, these experiences had been stored in the mind's memory. It had seemed that the key to this code might not be readily available. However, by creating one meaningful symbol, she was able to trigger the memories and the feelings to work through some important unresolved issues. This became apparent in subsequent sessions. She was building a relationship with me. The hospital staff, as well, expressed that she seemed less depressed and participated in some common activities.

This thesis will present information about symbolism: its definition from a psychological and an artistic point of view. Also image making will be analyzed from within the context of its historical development. The symbol of the tree will be presented and its importance and meaning in human history including contemporary use. This information may allow for a better understanding of the case study which will follow the theory. The art therapy case study is an account of the interaction between patient and therapist through the symbolic representation of the tree. Poetry will be introduced in some areas of the text. Most of the poems will be about trees. They will be placed in appropriate positions where their mere presence may enhance the information being presented.

In chapter II of this thesis it will be seen that



throughout the history of humankind the tree has been used as a connection to nature and to the divine energy believed to control the life force. It is a most basic and universal symbol, a common theme among different cultures and at different times. It was seen as a manifestation of the synthesis of earth and heaven, fire and water - of dynamic life. It also symbolized the feminine principle - that which nourished, sheltered, protected and supported. An evergreen tree represented immortality. A deciduous tree represented renewal, resurrection and reproduction.

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are found in Eden. The former represents regeneration, the return to primordial state of perfection transcending good and evil, whereas the latter unifies good and evil. The Inverted Tree often represents the magic tree. Among various ideas it may indicate bringing knowledge back to its roots. In initiation ceremonies it may denote the death of the initiate. On funeral urns it depicts death. The Tree of Light or Heavenly Tree shines at night and indicates rebirth, each candle being a soul. This particular symbolic idea for example, is used by Buddhists at the festival of the dead or by the Christians in the Christmas Tree. In Shamanism and in myth various symbols of trees especially climbing them, express the effort to reach other realms and to obtain magical knowledge or powers.

In one form or another the symbol of the tree has found

its roots in many cultures and religions: for example, the Buddhist, Celtic, Chinese, Hindu, Persian, Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Christian, Scandinavian, Sumero-Semitic, Teutonic. What they all have in common is that the tree makes a statement about life, be it here on earth or above in heaven. The tree attempts to explain our thoughts and feelings about nature and the universe. Through the symbol of the tree we need to feel that there is an order in, and a reason for our existence.

Although stripped of a lot of its deeper meaning and function in the past, the tree symbol has survived into contemporary times. Charles Koch, Emmanuel Hammer and Karen Bolander have presented the use of projective drawing as a tool for diagnosis. This testing includes the use of the symbol of the tree. It represents the person. It may show feelings about the self image, relationships, traumatic events and more.

This thesis will analyze the tree as an established symbol within the collective human history and experience. Also we will study this symbol as it becomes a means for my patient to communicate and possibly come to terms with some of her personal concerns.

## CHAPTER I

### SYMBOLISM

#### A. Definition:

The word "symbol" comes from the Greek work "SYMBALLO" which means to throw together, join or unite. The ancient Greeks had a custom of symbola, which consisted of signs of recognition between a host and his guests. (Schlesinger, 1912) A tablet was broken as a sign of hospitality. When they met again they joined the broken pieces together and this served as a sign of recognition. Thus a symbol originally was a secret sign of recognition since only the host and particular guests held the pieces that would fit together to make the meaningful whole.

Recorded history suggests that early symbols are not specific individual creative expressions that are traceable to gifted individuals. Rather they are anonymous in origin. They are expressions of humanity that reach into prehistory. Fingesten, (1970) says that with time most symbols have developed more than just one definite meaning and have also become vulnerable to various interpretations. Perhaps at one time, far back into prehistory, when people lived in small, isolated groups, they created certain symbols investing them with specific meaning and ritual. As their numbers increased and they mingled and communicated with

other groups, they must have shared their ideologies as well as their symbology. As humanity developed it was inevitable that the original symbols evolved - possibly losing their original importance and meaning. As long as the belief in the effectiveness and the power of a symbol exists the symbol will be kept alive. However, as soon as faith is lost in the concept and the symbol representing it, the symbol and concept become inactive. Nevertheless, they may maintain their historical value.

It is a tendency of all symbols to petrify or evaporate, and either process is fatal to them. They soon repudiate their mystical origin, and forthwith lose their religious content. (Dear Inge, p. 5, 1948)

Thus, according to Inge, it may happen that the original concept, along with its symbols, becomes obsolete, no longer useful in the application of modern life ideology.

Fingesten (1970) examines closely different classifications of symbols. There are symbols with a definite identity between form and idea. This group of symbols does not require great leaps of the imagination or intuition from the symbol to the concept, since the connection is obvious. Man can see, feel, or experience that the flame is heat, or blood is life. Other symbols may need the imagination to bridge the space between symbol and concept, for it is not an obvious connection, and one might not be related to the other at all. An example of such a symbol would be the anchor which represents salvation or the

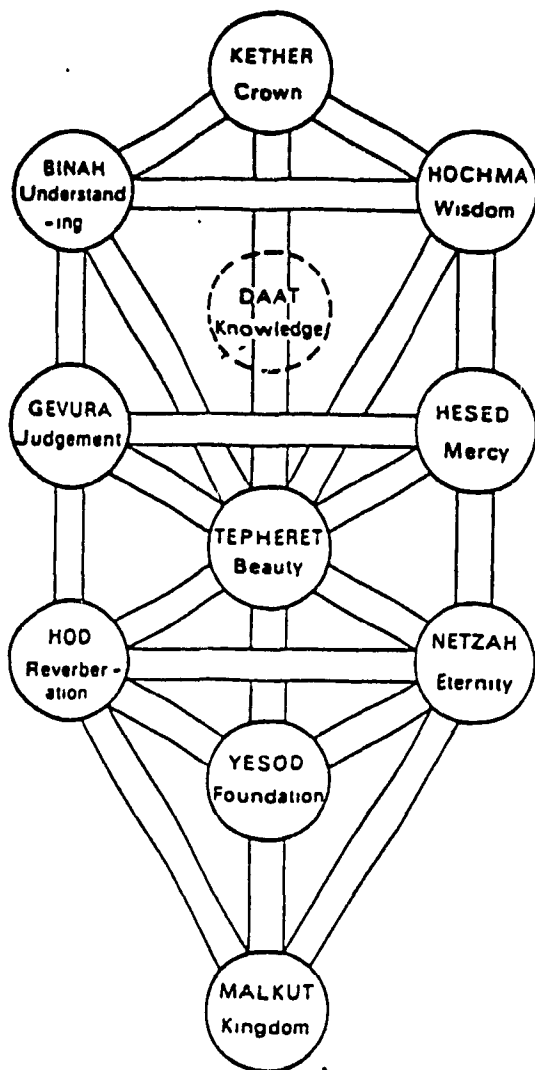
fish which represents Christ.

Further, according to Fingesten (1970), sometimes visual symbols of abstract concepts have a tendency to develop into allegory. The following is an example of an allegorical scene that has been transformed: the Enlightenment of Buddha under the Bodhi tree, protected by the naga (hooded serpent). There is present an anthropomorphic symbol (Buddha), as well as a zoomorphic symbol (the serpent) and the Bodhi tree which is a dendropomorphic symbol. These symbols together replaced the earlier symbol of the wheel of the law, throne, mountain, etc. In earlier times Buddha was never portrayed in his bodily form. His presence was indicated by a symbol such as his foot-print or the throne upon which he sat or even the sacred tree associated with his enlightenment (Sir John Marshall, 1955).

The above process of symbolic progression could apply mainly to the civilizations such as that of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome as well as the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian cultures (Fingesten, 1970). The records of these symbolic schemes may be found in the artistic representations, visual or otherwise, of these people. They encompass their beliefs, impressions, and points of view that were tied firmly with their religions and philosophies. The Judaic and Islamic religions cannot be included in this process because it was forbidden to use representations of

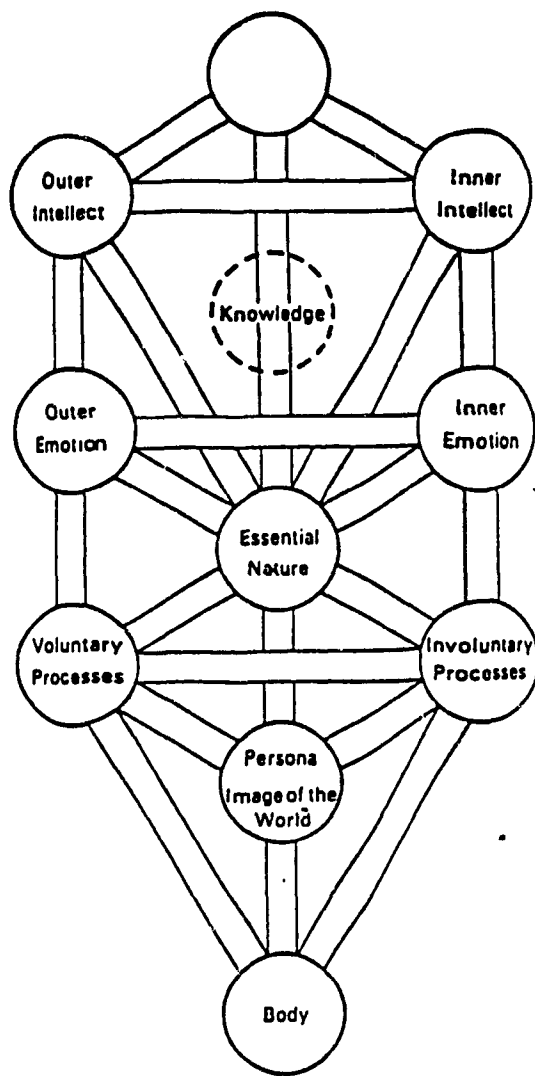
men and animals other than for a decorative or illustrative purpose. Thus they developed rather schematic word and symbols.

A good example of this process would be the Cabalistic Tree of Life. The Cabala elucidates the inner teachings of Judaism. Halevi (1972) explains that the Tree of Life is an "analogic" tree in that it illustrates the idea through the structure of a tree. However, it is never illustrated as an actual visual image of a tree. The tree represents creation and an extensive formulation in an objective diagram, of the principles functioning throughout the universe. It concerns itself with the flow of forces of the realities of the Divine "downward" to man's physical world, and back again. It demonstrates a structure of laws that govern the universe and the interactions of these laws. The Cabalistic Tree of Life is a model for every function man can conceive. This representation of human experiences is a complex, extensive body of symbolic vocabulary dealing with cosmic principles, and all aspects of phenomena. The following are two diagram illustrations of how the Cabalistic Tree of Life is applied to some situations (Halevi, 1972).



Tree of Life

(Halevi, p. 12)



Tree of Man

(Halevi, p. 36)

Man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate. (Tillich, p. 41, 1957)

Early humans have used their symbol formation ability to "explain" and manifest their being and existence. They left a priceless legacy that unfortunately has lost a lot of its meaning and relevance to our daily life. There seems to be little room for the past in the automatized, impersonal,

profane, and urbanized society of modern times.

Many psychologists recognize that man has an inner life that manifests itself in symbolic forms, especially in dreams which are outside of conscious control (Wadeson, 1980). Although not always directly understood, dreams may be explored adding great meaning and value to an individual's life. Although the symbolism may be common and even universal, the experience itself is subjective. Dream experience indisputably exists although it is quite often ignored or devalued within the function of society as a whole. Another manifestation of this symbol formation and expression is the artistic experience. Although it may be more external and visible in that the artist may exhibit her/his work for the public to see, it still is based on personal experience. Her/his audience and acceptance may be limited in that the artist may relate to society through the art, yet society does not necessarily respond. Art is no longer part of the religious experience for society.

#### B. G.C. Jung: A Psychological Point of View of Symbolism

Carl Jung recognized that some experiences cannot be fully explained. He postulated that we use symbolism in order to understand what we sense on unconscious levels, and that our conscious existence, as received through the accepted sensory apparatus, is just a part of our human make up (Jung, 1971). Within the unconscious realm, as often



expressed in dreams, lies a certain awareness of our entire being not expressed on conscious levels. This would seem to be our connection to the universe, the macrocosm of our existence. Jung felt that a symbol stands for more than just its conventional and obvious meaning (Jung, 1977). Like the function of some ancient symbols, it could imply something not quite understood by us, an expression of some unknown that is hidden from us.

A symbol always presupposes that the chosen expression is the best possible description or formulation of a relatively unknown fact, which is nonetheless known to exist or is postulated as existing. So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way. A symbol really lives only when it is the best and highest expression for something defined but not yet known to the observer. It then compels his unconscious participation and has a life-giving and life-enhancing effect. (Jung, pp. 474-6, 1971)

Jung recognized that much like our ancestors, we in the modern world still do not quite understand our existence, origin, and place in the universal scheme. In order to get a better understanding and to get closer to the ties of existence within the universe, we have to "dig" into our unconscious and encourage conscious expression of inner awareness. Through this process we can better understand ourselves.

Western society highly values facts as ascertained through scientific methods. Meaning beyond the empirical evaluation is subordinate. Whatever is unconscious, hidden,

or vague has no place with this kind of theory. Furthermore, the past is discredited if it does not fit within the current (established) scientific models.

Jung's theories, applied by his followers to this date, emphasized the link to the past and its symbolism. He felt that we do not exist cut off from past experiences and expressions. We produce symbols consciously for communication. However, we also create symbols unconsciously and spontaneously that are part of our repertoire of "existence". We need to do that because we never quite perceive or comprehend anything in its entirety. Through fragments of experiences and expression, (symbols) conscious or unconscious, we laboriously attempt to piece together the whole (Jung, 1977).

Jung further expressed that a lot of what we experience does not stay within conscious awareness. Many of our interactions are absorbed subliminally and without conscious knowledge. The only way to retrieve lost parts is through the process of profound thought or moments of intuition. Very often they appear in dreams as symbolic images trying to impart the emotional and vital importance of events (Jung, 1977). Jung was fascinated with our faculty to produce symbols. He felt a lot of answers lay within our dream life. It seemed to him the most basic and accessible material available for this kind of investigation. He found that a dream experience was as vivid and intense and

produced emotional responses as genuine as real life situations. Furthermore he ventured to say that the dream images could be experienced as more real, vivid, and intense than their waking counterparts. This was possible because in a dream there was no censorship and thus full meaning could be expressed. This state could be related to the experience of primitive human beings towards "reality". We pride ourself on our "rational" ability and need to explain all occurrences by common sense based on proven scientific models.

Primitives on the other hand allowed their instincts free flow. Consciousness and unconsciousness often merged quite naturally. We as moderns have increasingly divided consciousness, the "rational" part, from the unconscious which is the deeper, instinctual part of the human psyche. The most obvious connection between the two levels are dreams. In his research Jung found that some images and ideas did not necessarily correspond to an individual's memory. As much as a dream symbol belonged to the individual dreaming, there were some symbolic expressions that seemed not to correspond to the individual's experiences. He found that some symbols were collective in nature and origin; that is to say that they had become "collective representations" still present from our ancestral primeval dreams and creative fantasies. They seem to be part of our unconscious repertoire of symbols. Jung

felt that these were "archaic remnants"; he termed them "archetypes" or "primordial images". A dreamer uses these symbolic images to express instinctive messages from the unconscious (Jung, 1977).

The present cannot stand on its own separated totally from the past. Even though we evolved and changed from our primitive ancestors, in some ways we are still tied to the ancient past through our shared collective unconscious "experiences" and "expressions".

### C. The Visual Artistic Image as Symbolic Expression

From the earliest time humankind has left behind a rich legacy of symbolic manifestations. Historians and anthropologists have gone to great lengths to search out, preserve, and study these physical remnants of human expressions as classified within the category of the arts. These objects stand for a very rich symbolic life that earlier humans made part of their every day living experience. They are symbols of our interpretation and physical expression of ourselves, our environment, and the cosmos.

Scientific thought dominates the twentieth century. It provides advancement in technology in an effort to make human life more comfortable. The focus seems to be to conquer a perceived hostile and overpowering environment. Within this frame of reference there is little room for any

interpretation that is not based on scientific models. This applies to us as subjects, to the environment including mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms as well as to the acknowledged cosmos. Whatever phenomena cannot fit into these prescribed categories may be passed on to religion and art. These latter two categories still exist because humans still need them. Generally in the western world they no longer have an all-encompassing power since they have become part of a technologically oriented society. Within a majority consensus, a human can be religious and artistically creative but is still required to compete in order to survive in a technologically oriented society for food, health, and well-being.

Art, including visual art, has always been part of human experience. Each age has its own priorities as to what it needed to express through artistic symbolism. Silvano Arieti (1976) states that the image, as expressed visually, (e.g. painting and sculpture) has several sources that are combined to create the final product. There may be an imitation of nature to a certain degree. The artist may also draw upon his mental level of imagery, such as that which may be found in dreams. Furthermore she/he may also attempt to create new forms and combinations of the elements of art which include line, shape, colour, and form. According to Rudolph Arnheim (1969) perception is not a passive process. The eye selects the relevant parts and

reorganizes them. Thus, the artistic interpretation of a visual image may not look at all like the "real" visual image because a process of selection has occurred within the creative process. That which is important to the artist has been created. Thus some art is more symbolic than other art in the sense that the final image represents far more than the obvious.

Stone age humans did not separate their experience of inner and outer reality. Their knowledge of cause and effect was not defined. They lived in an enchanted magical world. For example, they believed that if they had a small, pregnant Venus statuette, it would influence actively the procreation of their family and tribe (Fingesten, 1970). They invested this image with powers that they could evoke to create the desired results. The Venus of Willendorf c. 15,000-10,000 B.C. is such a female fertility figurine. The representation emphasizes a bulbous roundness of form recalling the earlier egg-shaped "sacred pebbles" collected by stone age humans. The main focus of this symbol is fertility. It shows an exaggeration of female characteristics even though it is clearly based on close observation of a pregnant woman (Janson, 1968).

According to Fingesten (1970) it would seem that Paleolithic humans did not see the difference between symbol and concept. They captured reality in the image, in that they made the invisible visible. The hidden, that which

they did not understand was dangerous. However, once they manifested it concretely and visually (e.g. the cave paintings of 15,000-10,000 B.C. at Altamira, Spain and Lascaux, France or fertility figurines) in terms of protective magic, it was contained. It could then be used for their purposes, be it for hunting or acquisition of food or for procreation of their tribe. The symbolic legacy of this time is not clearly or completely understood to this day. However, if terms of symbolic representation are expressed through image making (art), it is understood that these people created these symbols based on their life experiences and invested them with meaning and purpose relevant to their way of life. That seems to be the common denominator to symbol formation for humans from the beginning of time to the present.

As one can see in the art of Mesopotamia and Egypt, there was a shift of powers of symbols. By that time some previously totally mysterious phenomena, such as procreation to mention one, were understood. The symbolic images themselves no longer had independent magical powers that primitive humans had been able to evoke. Rather, they could invoke these powers, make these symbolic representations through complicated rituals. Thus, they could receive the needed help and desired results. In these cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt it was understood that humans and the mysterious forces of the cosmos needed to cooperate to

create a harmonious, satisfactory way of life. Thus art and its symbolic aspects together with ritual made the transition from the primitive to the beginning of the civilized world (Fingesten, 1970).

Artistic symbolic representation moved on to new directions with the Greek civilization. Humans of the Ancient Near East represented themselves in an extremely stylized way. The Greek artists turned their attention and powers of observation toward themselves. Greek art represented humans as individuals and as unique beings (Fingesten, 1970). This was the beginning of our separation from our symbiotic existence with nature. We tried to make our artistic representations fit into the scheme of our observations. However, as Arieti (1976) points out, the images of classic Greek art were more idealistic than realistic. The gods were projected into human forms and the artist created these as perfect as she/he could conceive them to be. The gods were superhuman representing the supreme level of human virtue and perfection. Thus they became a creative symbolic expression accepted culturally and incorporated into daily life.

Christian art on the other hand was not interested in portraying or glorifying the human being. As Fingesten (1970) states the concern was towards religious revelation. They produced a stylized portrayal of Jesus Christ, of saints, and of related religious objects and events to



encourage the worshipper to partake of a religious contemplation rather than of an aesthetic appreciation of a work of art. Christian art symbolically created an atmosphere and a triggering point that allowed humans to feel closer to the sacred. It was never the image itself. Christians could never evoke or invoke powers into the symbolic representation. It was of religious significance and served to remind them of the teachings and purpose of their religion.

Fingesten (1970) further states that the Renaissance artist was more of an individual and had a choice of subject matter. The scientific study of humans and nature became incorporated into the artistic expressions. Thus some of the symbolic aspects of art were no longer important. Nature's interaction with man, as observed, became the expressed artistic motif. Artistic, symbolic representations had no hidden, magical or sacred powers. Through such methods as chiaroscuro and linear perspective among others, they served to communicate new scientific ideas to the masses. As humans were expanding consciousness of themselves, nature and the cosmos the role of their symbolic artistic expression was changing. It was no longer a mediating object of prime importance to an entire culture. Science was becoming the bridge to close the gap of understanding between human nature, "nature", and the cosmos.

In the nineteenth century the Realist and Impressionist schools of art emerged. The images carried an aesthetic point of view, devoid of deeper humanistic or spiritual significance (Fingesten, 1970). Science and technology were beginning to intrude into the artistic milieu. In the twentieth century some artists turned to new media and new techniques in an attempt to keep up with scientific advances. However, artists realized soon enough that they could not and should not compete with science, that they would have to accept that their role in society had definitely changed. Their representations no longer had the power to fundamentally move and influence the masses. Art and its symbolic aspects no longer needed to follow the cultural belief system. The artist had become an individual who no longer had to participate in a cultural system in order to create artistic symbology. Art had become separated and more autonomous. This gave the artist the opportunity to explore new dimensions.

The artist was looking for frontiers not yet discovered by the scientist. The scientist was occupied with outer space, exploring and explaining the cosmos and our place in it. The artist retreated into inner space. Here she/he realized that there was an inner reality, unconscious levels with rich visual imagery and symbolism. Nineteenth century Symbolists and early twentieth century Surrealists began these explorations. They used known visual data and re-

arranged them in dreamlike fragmentation (Fingesten, 1970). Arieti (1952) describes the year 1895 as a turning point in the history of Western civilization. Western culture had followed and expanded on the rationalistic philosophy begun by the ancient Greeks. However, by 1895 there was a surge in some areas of once again looking at the irrational. Freud and Breuer (1950) published work that began the psychoanalytic era and the study of the unconscious. In 1895 Paul Cezanne had a one-man show of modern paintings. This was the very first show of "modern" art ever exhibited. Cezanne's work was not very well received. His artistic expression was considered "primitive" (pre-Greek art) with no regard for the established laws of aesthetics. Cezanne claimed that he had no interest to reproduce nature. He represented it allowing subjective elements to enter and find artistic expression.

By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century the art world was going through a re-evaluation of its place. Humans were occupied with many diverse concerns. Art, especially visual arts and its symbolism was just one part of the many areas of exploration and expression of human experience.

Symbol formation and expression as it had been known and used by earlier cultures no longer had the same role or impact on society as a whole. As Arieti (1971) points out that emphasis on the subjective experience, personal

imagery, and imagination were the elements embraced by the artist. The artist now seemed to have the opportunity to freely express feelings and thoughts regardless of established models of symbolism. Groups such as the expressionists, cubists, and abstract artists developed. Although these modern artists may have had different approaches towards symbolic expression, each in their own way allowed for the active emergence of subjective, unconscious, and possibly unreal material. Arieti (1976) also states that as subjective and personal as the modern artist's work may be, it somehow still received some collective consensus. No human expression can be so unique or alien that it does not in some way connect to the entire collective existence of man. This symbolic transformation began to change progressively. Artists like Paul Cezanne, Marc Chagall, or Salvador Dali took their perception of the world around them and re-arranged it on the canvas. There were recognizable elements, but juxtaposed differently, they gave new meaning to the experience. Very often they appeared distorted in time and space and related very much to the dream. The visual images symbolically created new combinations of inner experiences (Arieti, 1976).

Perception of reality takes place on symbolic levels. By the time the experience reaches conscious levels, it has gone through several transformations and finally will fit into some established symbology. Thus it becomes "workable"

and useful. Fingesten (1970) continues to say that there may be experiences of reality that are so elemental in nature that they are non-symbolic in the accepted sense of the definition of symbolism. This would include the mystical experience and metasymbolic art which refers to a certain kind of non-objective abstract art. In this modern symbolic transformation, traditional symbolism has lost a lot of this power and validity. Private symbolism which may include remnants of collective unconscious symbolism as Jung has suggested, has found a place in the artistic realm. Non-objective or abstract art claims to be devoid of established associative elements. It aims at presenting a new creative process (Fingesten, 1970). Artists let themselves be guided by their inner psychic processes. To the viewer the artistic work may or may not have meaning. Once the symbolic manifestation of an inner personal process has been visually created it has its own life and may be received and interpreted on different levels.

In this creative process of abstract art artists use their imaginations. However, they attempt not to harness their visual imagery or set boundaries for their expressions. The result, which is the work of art itself becomes a direct externalization of a purely inner process (Arieti, 1976). Artists like Paul Klee, Jackson Pollock, Piet Mondrian or Kandinsky, to mention but a few, are exponents of such visual artistic expression. Arieti (1976)

continues that the external patterns of lines, shapes, and colours are the reflections of internal patterns that exist only in the artist's psyche. The work of art itself becomes another reality somewhere between the internal and external experience of being. Like her/his primitive ancestors, the non-objective artist may feel that she/he is touching upon spiritual levels. The visually external product is an abstract, symbolic expression of a human experience. It "precedes" recognizable traditional symbols and aims at an abstract expression. Released from both the internal and traditional external worlds, it stands on its own, offering new opportunities.

For make no mistakes, abstract art is a form of mysticism...(It) is an effort to close the void that modern men feel...I think that one's art is just one's effort to wed oneself to the universe, to unify oneself through union... (Robert Motherwell, pp. 12-13, 1951)

There has been no change in the most basic needs of humans. Both primitive and modern humans feel the need to express the internal experience of interaction between their self and the universe. Psychic life presses for externalization and communication. Humans choose their mode of expression. Visual imagery is a most basic and elemental form and as artistic expression serves well in the formation of symbols. The symbols that humans have created and all that they stand for contributes to the understanding of humankind.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SYMBOL OF THE TREE: A CROSSCULTURAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

#### The Totem Oak

Sun-steeped, I leaned  
into moisture-laden  
wind, my foliage  
luminous with green

My rings still multiply  
forest wedding-bands  
recording myths  
within the ancient bark

- life and death chronicle  
of myriad men  
ephemeral events  
historic hieroglyphics

sealed in the living  
testament of wood

I knew them all, the  
old coureurs de bois  
constellations of traders  
trappers bristling with pelts

transient fishermen  
in the stream of time  
reflecting ripples of  
their own mortality

My crown of leaves  
has witnessed centuries  
of ghostly animation  
and my roots grasp

the earth tenaciously  
like fibrous claws

- a landmark tree  
encroached upon  
by many a highway  
yet miraculously spared  
by marching bulldozers  
that slashed  
the rich farmland  
into asphalt rubble

Erosion slides fertile soil  
into silted springs  
I can no longer read  
the language of rainbows

nature's face dissolves  
in the crucible of progress

Gone, the rain-washed tides  
of yellow wheat  
flowing like golden currents  
around my trunk

Now my heart-wood  
is a hollow tomb  
and my furrowed bark  
atrophies to ash-grey pulp

An ancient stranger  
rooted in concrete  
I stand alone, unknown  
- until a stroke of lightning

will sear my girth  
into the flaming  
apocalypse of men

(Mona Elaine Adilman)

As static as a tree might seem to be, it is "powered" by dynamic life energy. The roots reach deeply into the earth giving the tree stability and nourishment. Its trunk holds it up powerfully and its branches reach out into the sky. It blooms and bears fruit. It is a thing of beauty and can supply food. It goes through cycles of death and rebirth, losing its foliage only to grow it again with the



changes of the seasons. Some trees do not lose their foliage at all and remain alive throughout the cycles. It is not difficult to understand why primitives were drawn to this symbol to represent their internalized experience of life. In a most obvious and simplified manner they saw the parallel phenomena of life between themselves and their trees. Humans like trees, were, in primitive times firmly rooted to the earth. They stood upright like the tree and looked up and yearned to be closer to the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars. They, like the tree, lived and died leaving behind thin seed in the form of children to continue the cycle of life. The tree was a visible, external object that could represent for primitive and early humans the concept of the Divine.

As Arnold Whittick (1960) states, the tree is a widespread symbol in different cultures all over the planet. Tree worship of one form or another may be found among primitive and early historic peoples of Europe, Asia Minor, Northern Africa, and the Far East. This includes the ancestors of the people of the Scandinavian countries, Britain, Germany, Italy, Greece, the Semitic nations, Egypt, India, and China. A tree was worshipped as the home of a deity. Ancient people believed that a tree houses their god just as a human body houses a human soul. Thus the tree became sacred and offerings were made to the tree deity. Sometimes the tree became an oracle, as for example, the oak

of Dodona, or the burning bush out of which the voice of God spoke to Moses (Exodus 111, 1-4) or the mulberry tree that was to give King David a sign from the Lord as to when to attack the Philistines (2 Samuel V, 24)). In the following psalm the tree is used positively to represent an upright, moral:

Blessed is the man that walketh not  
in the counsel of the ungodly, nor  
standeth in the way of sinners, nor  
sitteth in the seat of the scornful.  
But his delight is in the law of the  
LORD; and in his law doth he meditate  
day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted  
by the rivers of water, that bringeth  
forth his fruit in his season; his leaf  
also shall not wither; and whatsoever he  
doeth shall prosper.

The ungodly are not so: but are like  
the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand  
in the judgment, nor sinners in the  
congregation of the righteous.

(Psalm I)

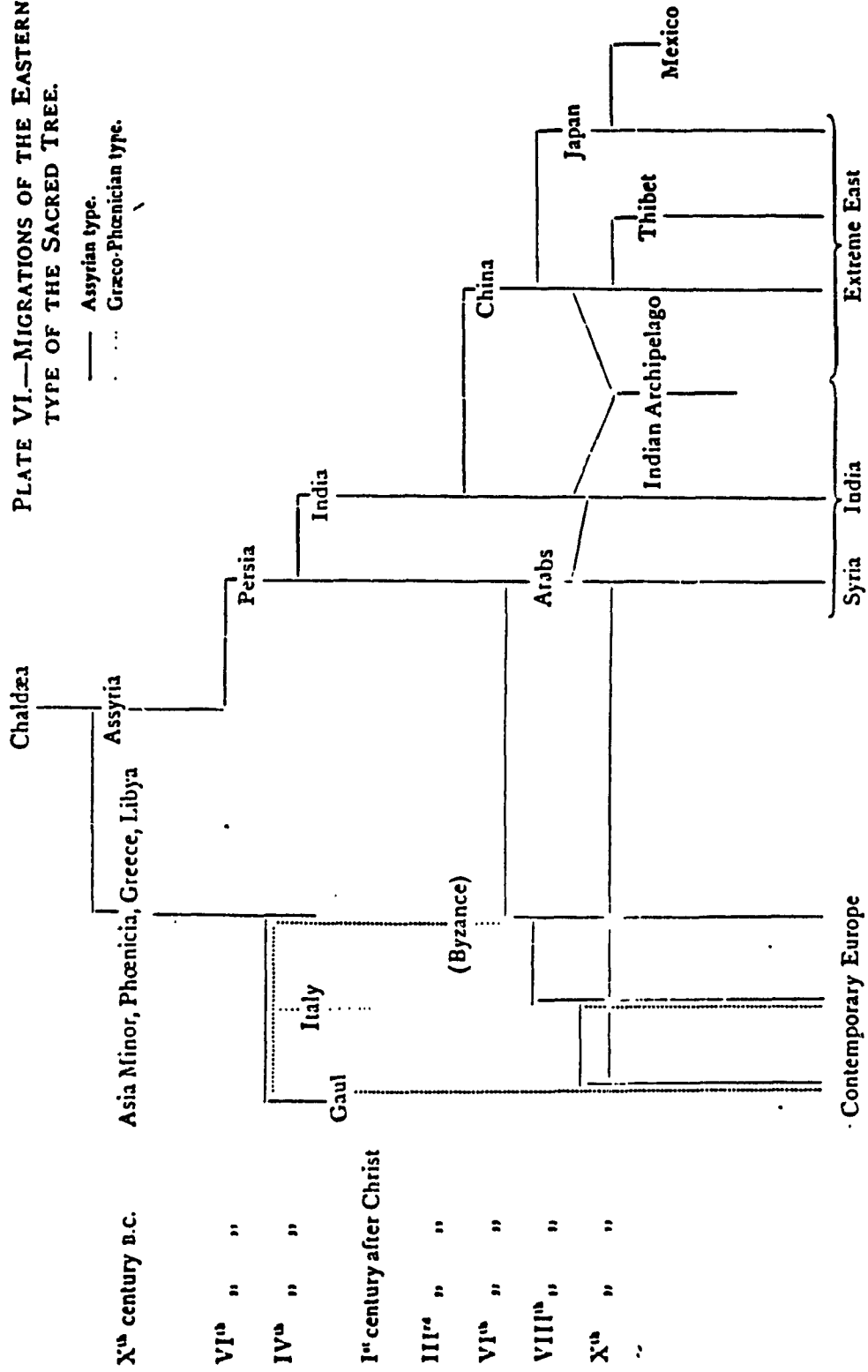
Different trees were chosen to be sacred by different cultures. Mostly a tree was chosen for its greatest value to the people or because it was the most imposing. For example, among the Semitic people fruit bearing trees such as the date palm or pomegranate tree, as well as the cedar, cyprus, and vine were designated as sacred, while the people of northern Europe venerated the ash, elm, oak, and alder trees. Goldsmith (1973) also points out different uses for the same symbol. The pine cone was used as a phallic emblem by some people and as a symbol of the union of the positive and negative forces by others (Egyptians). It was also a

symbol of Venus and Artemis. Thus it was associated with the feminine principle as well. Although different cultures chose different trees to represent varying concepts, their variations on the main theme were superficial rather than fundamental. The basic principles represented by the tree were that of regeneration, fecundity, abundance, immortal life, wisdom, and knowledge as well as the universe.

At the beginning of this process of tree worship, a specific tree in a specific grove was designated as sacred. This tree was the abode of the deity and to this tree the people came to worship and present offerings. At a later stage of man's development, instead of one special tree being designated as the god's special abode, all trees of the same species became sacred to that deity. For example, the oak tree was sacred to Zeus, the laurel to Apollo, and the olive tree to Athena. Whittick (1960) further states that in the final stage of development man no longer needed the actual tree to worship. Rather he used a symbol to represent that tree such as a stump, spear, post, or a branch that he placed upon his altar and worshipped. Furthermore, he could take with him the rod or staff, an extension of the tree, to help him on his way, for direction, climbing or defense. It was understood that the sacred tree existed but in some far away, unapproachable region.

PLATE VI.—MIGRATIONS OF THE EASTERN  
TYPE OF THE SACRED TREE.

— Assyrian type.  
- - - Græco-Phœnician type.



D'Alviella (1972) goes to great lengths to show that the tree is a widely used symbol that began far back in time. It is an important subject matter in Semitic pictorial art of which there are many remnants today. He feels that this symbol migrated to different parts of the world from Chaldea (diagram, p. 34) maintaining more or less the same meaning for the different nations. The Chaldaes-Assyrians like all the Semitic nations believed that the voice of divinity made itself heard through the rustling of the leaves on the trees. They saw the tree as the connection between earth and the heavens, between themselves and the universe where surely the Divine resided. For the tree visibly was rooted to the earth but reached far up into the sky. Their myths image a Cosmogonical Tree which as its fruits bear the planets, stars, and all the "jewels" of the firmament. The major trees venerated by these Semitic people were the palm, the pomegranate, the cypress, pine and vine. These trees had obvious meaning for the people of that area. The Palm tree which never changed its leaves seemed to them to be self-created and self-sustaining. It typified the miracle of reproduction and was a perfect representative for the Tree of Life (Goldsmith, 1973). Because it never changed its foliage it also came to symbolize the never-dying Fire. This tree symbol expanded geographically keeping some of its original meaning. The Phoenicians pictured on their coinage a palm tree that was coiled by a serpent. Their deity was

called Baal Tamar which translates into "Lord of the Palm". Tamar itself may be translated into "resplendent Sun Fire". The Hebrews word for palm was "phenice" which translates into "Fan light" while the Greeks called it "phoenix" which may be equated with the Phoenix, Feu or Vie, the one Great Fire of Life (Baylay, 1968).

The Cypress, as well as the Pine Tree, because of its pyramidal form resembling the pointed flame, was also associated with Fire which was an element attributed to the primary force. Because these trees inherently had superior vitality, these ancient people believed that they had power to strengthen the souls of the dead and to guard their bodies from corruption. Primitives had used the symbol of the pyramidal cone or obelisk to represent the divine Creator. The Cypress and the Pine tree, because of their pyramidal form, came to be associated with the feminine principle. It became the symbol of the nourishing, sheltering, protecting and supporting aspects of the Great Mother. In the mythology of the people the tree was connected to nature goddesses such as Astarte, Ishtar and Mylitta. The Venus of Lebanon was known as Cypress, and Cybels imprisons the spring time god Attis in a Pine tree (Goldsmith, 1973).

The image of the tree was not always presented in a simplified form. As the Assyro-Chaldaeian culture evolved their imagery expressing their mythology and traditions

became more elaborate. Their artistic expressions were more than just ornamental. They had religious significance. The sacred tree was represented in combination with other relevant elements. Frequently suspended over the tree was the Winged Circle which personified the supreme divinity. The tree almost always was placed between two people facing each other. These persons were either priests or kings who were expressing adoration. Sometimes the two facing beings were magical creatures such as unicorns, griffins and winged bulbs (D'Alviella, 1972). The tree as a symbol for life had a definite place in the mythology and imagery of these people.

The Egyptians thought the Sycamore tree to be divine. This tree with its thick, impenetrable foliage was able to thrive even in the sandy soil of the Egyptian terrain. For its roots are able to grow deeply into the ground to strike upon bands of water for nourishment. To the ancient Egyptian people this was indeed a Tree of Life. They would leave gifts of figs, raisins, cucumbers, vegetables, and water in containers at the foot of the tree as homage. Travellers could use these to quench thirst and satisfy hunger. They returned this generosity with prayers of thanks. This tree was portrayed as laden with gifts and water representing fertility (Frazer, 1926). The Sycamore was also represented by the goddess Nut. She was shown with head and shoulders coming through the tree's branches often

bearing bread or fruit and a vase of water. The "Book of the Dead" addresses this goddess as "Sycamore of Nut" and asks for the air and water that is contained in the tree (Baylay, 1968).

The Persians had two significant trees that symbolized important concepts. These two trees were placed upon the borders of a lake. One of them was a white "haoma" or "homa" tree which was believed to keep away death and confer "spiritual knowledge". The other tree was known as the Tree of All Seeds or also as the Eagle-tree. The myth surrounding this second tree, is that whenever a bird flies away a thousand branches will grow; but as soon as it comes back it also breaks a thousand branches. This results in a thousand seeds to fall. The sap of the Haoma tree was seen as the fertilizing rain as well as the special drink of the gods (D'Alviella, 1972). In keeping with the basic conceptual premises these two trees once again represent the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. Man's basic interaction with life and the universe is symbolically represented here.

In the Graeco-Roman traditions the tree was associated with several different deities. As with the other tree worshipping cultures the early Greeks believed that their gods resided in the trees. However they developed this concept further in their tendency to anthropomorphize. Their presentations of the gods were created in human form



although they had far superior abilities and qualities than actual mortal man. Thus the Greeks eventually gave the tree human semblance by carving into part of it the image of the god. Finally they used that sacred tree wood to create physical semblances of the god and placed this sculpture in their place of worship. Early Greek images of the gods were made of wood (Whittick, 1960).

The Oak tree was a most important tree in the Greek and Roman mythology. As Frazer (1926) points out, in earliest time Europe was covered with primeval forests which must have greatly impressed early man. The oak tree seems to have been the most common and useful tree in Europe. References to this can be found in statements made by classical writers; as well there were the remains of oak forests found embedded in peat bog. Speculative reconstruction indicates that these oak trees were giant structures. Although the primeval woods of Europe changed and the vegetation came closer to our contemporary view of it, oak forests were still quite common. Well into the twentieth century the chief forest tree of Europe was the oak. Besides the impressive size and abundance of the oak tree, classical writers such as Hesiod, Pliny, and Strabo, refer to the acorn, the fruit of the tree, as important human sustenance. Thus Frazer (1926) surmises that early man must have used oak sticks to light his fire, oak timber to build his villages, and other structures, and acorns to

feed his animal stock as well as himself. With this experience it is no wonder that the oak tree would be worshipped. The deity that resided in this tree obviously had the powers of fertility. It also became associated with the sky, the rain, and thunder. Goldsmith (1973) states that the oak tree symbolically represented fire, but it also combined with the element of water, which together are agents of productivity.

Both the Greeks and Romans associated the oak tree with their supreme gods: Zeus and Jupiter. They were the deities of the sky, the rain, and the thunder. This was their Tree of Heaven. One of the older and most well-known Greek sanctuaries was that of Dodona. There, Zeus was worshipped in the oak tree which had at its roots a perpetually flowing spring. The priest of Zeus would dip an oak branch into the sacred spring as a rain charm (Goldsmith, 1973). Frazer (1926) continues to explain that apparently rain storms were more frequent at Dodona. Thus it was believed that Zeus' voice spoke through the rustling of the oak leaves, the crash of thunder, and bolts of lightning. Lightning could kindle fire by striking the all standing oak tree. It must have been an awesome site. Zeus evolved into the rain god who resided on top of the mountains amidst clouds and oak trees. In order to grow their crops the land needed the rain, and therefore Zeus came to be associated with a source of fertility. The

Romans gave their supreme god, Jupiter, the same attributes as the Greeks had given Zeus. He too was the god of rain and fertility (Frazer, 1926). By merging the seemingly inherent qualities of the tree and those attributed to the deities, man symbolically represented the natural phenomena he had observed and experienced in nature.

The sacredness of the oak tree was widespread in Europe. It maintained more or less the same attributes among the different people that worshipped it. It was especially associated with thunder. The Celts of Gaul worshipped the oak tree. The Druids held the mistletoe and the oak tree on which it grew as most sacred. They believed that the mistletoe was a direct result of a flash of lightning that sparked off the sun. It was a visible representation of the celestial fire. Goldsmith (1973) continues that the mistletoe, rootless and evergreen on the oak, became a mystical symbol of life and immortality. The Teutonic god Donar or Thunar, as well as the Norse god Thor, were the gods of the oak as well as the gods of thunder, rain, and fertility. The same applied to Perun, the chief deity among the Slavs, to Perkunas, the chief deity among the Lithuanians, and Tacra, the chief deity among the Esthonians (Frazer, 1926). In awe of nature and an inherent need to organize his life experiences man created a mythological, religious belief system that had its roots in the worship of trees. The trees symbolically represented

natural phenomena and a spiritual sense of the universe.

In Scandinavian mythology the cosmogonical tree was the mystical ash known as Yggarasill. This tree embodies man's conception of the universe. It represented hell, earth, and heaven (Whittick, 1960). This tree carries with it a most elaborate mythology. It is the Tree of Life, the Tree of the Universe, the Tree of Wisdom and of Knowledge. This ash tree was looked upon as the Oracle and Judgment Place of the Gods. The Fates resided there. It was also the Spring and Source of Knowledge. It was said that a squirrel ran up and down the trunk of the tree never stopping. Legend has it that this little animal was animated by the "Voice of God". It whispered into the ear of Wotan informing him of what went on below (Baylay, 1968). Scandinavian mythology recounts that the Yggarasill, the most beautiful of all trees had tree roots. One of these roots spread out toward the upper spring. Here deities held council and decided the duration of men's lives. It was also the place where water was poured over the Tree so that it could have endless sap, health, and vigour. The second root extended into the land of the giants of the Frost. This root housed the well of Mimir the first man and king of the dead. It was also the well of all knowledge and wisdom. The third root descended into the Scandinavian Hades or underworld. There it was forever gnawed by a dragon (D'Alviella, 1972). A number of different Scandinavian myths dealt with tales related to

this mystical ash tree. All in all they centered around concepts of life issues and experiences as man tried to organize his reality. The tree and the underlying principles it represented, was a symbol that appeared in just about all cultures of that time.

Although Christianity turned its back on pagan beliefs and rituals, it could not cut itself off completely from man's past history and creative symbolism. The same issues that had concerned man before, were still of concern to the Christians. The tree had come to symbolize immortal life, wisdom, knowledge, and the universe. The Hebrew Bible begins with references to a tree.

Genesis:

Chapter 2

16 And the LORD-God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat;

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Chapter 3

1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant

to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

12 And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.

17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

22 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

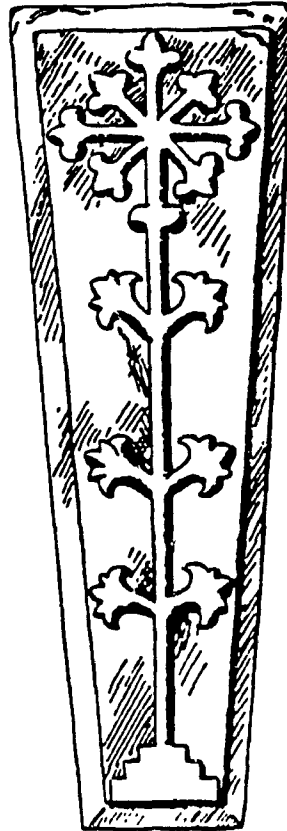
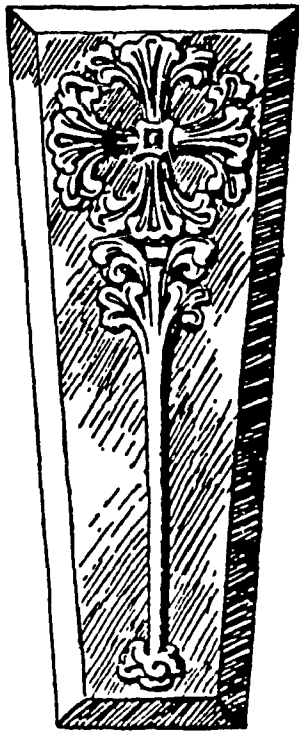
The early Christians saw that they could adapt the significance of the tree to their own beliefs (Whittick, 1960). Jesus himself expressed that "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air com... and

launch in the branches thereof" (Mathew xiii, 31, 32). The potential that man could attain the highest level, i.e. reach the kingdom of heaven, would depend on his way of tending to his life on earth and following the Christian doctrine.

According to Whittick (1960) Christian symbolism associated the tree with other symbols. The main Christian symbol was the cross and thus the tree came to be associated with that particular symbol. The cross made of wood, represented eternal life, knowledge and wisdom as taught by Christ. It also represented the universe of which Christ was the Creator and Saviour. The same life principles attributed to the tree, shifted to the cross. During Medieval times it was believed, according to a legend, that the cross upon which Christ had been crucified was made of the wood of a tree which had grown from a slip of the Tree of Knowledge. This symbolically connected the fall and salvation of man which is what Christianity is basically all about. This association between the cross and the tree seemed to have been widely adopted. W.R. Lethaby (1892) points out that the earliest memorial crosses were representations of the tree. The scrolls of foliage decorating the shaft sides of the cross were definitely indicative of this association between the cross and the tree.

(Whittick, p. 280)

(Whittick, p. 280)



Two medieval sepulchral slabs, the designs of which probably emanate from the association of the cross with the sacred tree.

(a) In Westbourne church, Lincolnshire.  
Early thirteenth century.

(b) In Wells Cathedral. Late thirteenth  
century.

Christ Himself mentioned the vine symbolically when he referred to Himself as the vine, and His disciples to the branches (St. John, xv, 1-8). Thus the vine came to symbolize Christ and His followers. It also became a general symbol of the Christian faith. When it is combined with wheat it represents the Eucharist. The leaves and fruit of the vine signify the blood of Christ (Whittick, 1960). Christianity began a new era in western world history. So much of man's spirit had gone into creating the



old symbols, such as the Tree, that it was to be expected that somehow they would be adapted and incorporated into the newer system.

The tree as a symbol for life, wisdom, knowledge, and a general connection to the Divine can also be found among the cultures of the Far East. Tree worship among the ancient Chinese was widespread. As Morgan (1972) points out they believed that life originated in water which was controlled by the dragon gods. In the spring these dragon gods awoke and caused the rain to fall. The soil and vegetation absorbed this water which gave them soul-substance, blood-sap, vital energy, odours and colours allowing them to renew their youth and life force. Because the cypress and pine remain evergreen, they were believed to have special powers of health and longevity. Trees were given human qualities since it was believed that when a tree was cut down it could cry out in pain. The spirit of a local god was often thought of dwelling in a tree. A shrine in his honour was placed in the fork of the tree. For the ancient Chinese the Tree of Life was the Peach tree. It grew on the slope of the Kuen-Luen Mountains, believed to be the earthly paradise (Goldsmith, 1973). This tree was most important for the Taoist priests. They used its wood to make seals to seal their talismans and amulets. They believed the peach fruit could give immortality to man and called it the "fairy fruit". Because it blooms in February, the first new moon

of the year is a most popular time for marriage, the Peach tree came to symbolize spring and marriage. It also represented long life and immortality (Morgan, 1972).

Nature, and its different aspects used for the human being was carefully observed and incorporated into the Chinese philosophy and ritual. The tree was an important symbol used to express life themes. Different functions were attributed to various trees. The Willow also a symbol of spring, was supposedly able to ward off demons and evil spirits. A willow branch placed over the front door of a home brought good luck and kept evil away. The Cherry tree, abundant, beautiful, and useful was used for medicinal purposes. It was also a model for artists and poets. The Cinabar orange became a symbol of good fortune and immortality. The Mulberry tree came to be symbolic of industry and the comforts of home, while the Pear tree symbolizes longevity. The Bamboo known as "the friend of China", also came to represent longevity. For the Chinese artist it became a most inexhaustible subject matter. He associated the bamboo with modesty, protection of purity, open-mindedness, culture, and refinement (Morgan, 1972). A tree with pairs of branches joined together represents the joining of opposites, the resolution of duality in unity. The concept expressed here is that life's beginning at the root is unity, and as it proceeds with the proliferation of the many branches, it embodies the duality of existence. As

the branches join at the end, so does life return to universal unity (Guenon, 1958).

In the Hindu traditions the Tree of the Universe, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge were closely linked. In the Vedas, the Hindu sacred writings, the tree was mentioned as having its foot on earth and its summit in heaven (D'Alviella, 1972). The entire cosmos was seen as a tree. Its roots reached into the underworld, its trunk was the terrestrial realm while its branches extended into the heavens. The Cosmic Tree came to be represented at times as springing forth from the Cosmic Egg which was floating on the chaotic ocean waters. The Tree of Life was known as Aditi which represented the essence of individuality. The dualistic Tree of Knowledge was known as Diti, meaning division (Vries, 1974). The sap of the Tree of Knowledge could give man poetic and religious inspiration. From its top the celestial voice, *vac*, revealed the will of the gods. As man approached the foliage of the Tree of Knowledge memories of his previous existences became unveiled to him (D'Alviella, 1972).

The Hindu tree depicted with twelve suns symbolized the Adityas, the twelve signs of the Zodiac and the months of the year. The depiction of two trees superimposed at the trunks came to represent the celestial and terrestrial as reflections of each other (Vries, 1974). Within the Hindu religious philosophy the tree became an important symbolic

representation of life concepts.

In the Buddhist tradition, the Fig or the Bo (Bodhi) tree was revered (Goldsmith, 1973). Either tree came to be a symbol of the Great Awakening, the Great Wisdom and the essence of Buddha (Vries, 1974). It is under the tree that Buddha was born, did penance, attained enlightenment, preached and died (Goldsmith, 1973). It was said that the roots of the tree reached deeply into stability, and its flowers became moral acts, while its fruits represented righteousness (Vries, 1974). Once again the tree embodies the life concept of the relationship of man and the Divine in Life Force.

In India the tree became a symbol representing the Universe. This tree gave the gifts of eternal life, productive power, perfect happiness, and supreme knowledge (D'Alviella, 1972). In Japan, the Tree of Life was symbolized by the Sa-ka-ki tree. Branches of this tree were used in ceremonies at the temples (Goldsmith, 1973). The Bonsai tree represented Nature both austere and wise (Vries, 1974).

The tree used by man as a symbol of life concepts can also be found in North America. The Hidasta Indians believed that the Divine Spirit existed in all objects of nature. This spirit manifested itself in the shade of the particular object. Not all had the same significance and therefore need not be respected or revered with equal

attention. The greatest tree in the valley of the Upper Missouri was the cottonwood. It gave off a significant amount of shade. Therefore the Indians believed it had an intelligence that if properly approached would help them. They never cut down these trees and only used the logs of trees that had fallen down by themselves as a result of the spring flooding of the Missouri River. The Iroquois Indians also attributed a spirit life to each species of vegetation and paid homage to them (Frazer, 1926). The Senal Indians of California believed that the earth at the beginning of time had been a globe of fire. They acknowledged that the element of fire was still in existence and passed up into the trees. It could be re-activated by rubbing together two pieces of wood. Furthermore the American Indian had a World Tree. Whenever the Five Nations expressed peace, the ritual would take place under the symbol of this tree (Goldsmith, 1973).

Whatever part of the world, in whatever time, some reference is made to the tree in connection with human relationship to nature. Man's ongoing questioning about life and its meaning, and the organizing of the reality, has led him to use symbols to represent his ideologies. Some concepts dealing with life themes have found expression in the symbol of the tree. The Cosmos or World Tree, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge and Wisdom, represent our relationship in this reality on earth, and what we feel and

think is beyond ourselves, out there in the universe. To this date no one has the "complete picture" or "truth". The striving to know and to understand has always been there, and is a continuing creative process starting in the individual person and spreading to a group of people. Each age and each culture goes through the same process. The questions are universal and some symbols such as that of the tree have become widespread and universal as well.

#### The Tree

I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,  
Knowing the truth of things unseen before,  
Of Daphne and the laurel bough  
And that god-feasting couple old  
That grew elm-oak amid the wold.  
'Twas not until the gods had been  
Kindly entreated, and been brought within  
Unto the hearth of their heart's home  
That they might do this wonder thing;  
Nathless I have been a tree amid the wood  
And many a new thing understood  
That was rank folly to my head before.  
(Ezra Pound)

Therefore, it is not surprising that the symbol of the tree has survived and is still functional in contemporary times. We are still looking for answers to the timeless question of what life is all about and especially our role in it. The tree as an image and symbol appears as an aid to psychodiagnosis. It is part of diagnostic personality assessment testing. One such test is the House-Tree-Person Test (H-T-P). The subject is required to draw three images that become symbolic of her/his inner view of her/himself and her/his environment, as well as other issues that are

important to her/him. It would seem that these graphic images symbolize a person's emotional and ideational experiences in relation to the personality's development through projection on the part of the subject (Hammer, 1958).

Several people have devised systems that involve tree drawing analysis. John Buck created the "House-Tree-Person Test" while Charles Koch came up with "Der Baumtest" another tree test. Karen Bolander followed another system also using the tree for analysis. Both Koch and Hammer have explored and written about the significance of the tree theme in mythology. They have acknowledged the tree as an ancient and central symbol that has shown up in just about all cultures (Bolander, 1977).

John Buck emphasized that the tree image would reveal our impressions of ourselves in relation to our environment. Hammer felt that the tree could provide a means for a person to express relatively deeper and more unconscious feelings. Both agreed that it allowed a person to express painful traumatic past experiences or negative, disturbing traits. Hammer claimed that person was less likely to censor forbidden feelings or possibly exhibit less fear of revealing her/himself. The request to draw a tree does not seem as threatening. It appears to be a neutral enough subject matter and one that is familiar to everyone. Bolander (1977) adds that the tree drawing can reveal

biographical events that include the person's origin, experiences as well as her/his wishes for the future. Thus the ancient symbol of the tree has survived into contemporary time. Although adapted and applied in a different context it still maintains traces of its original meaning in that it deals with ourselves and our relationship to the environment.

#### I Consider the Tree

I consider the tree:  
a rigid pillar in a flood of light,  
or splashes of green  
traversed by the gentleness  
of the blue silver ground.

I can feel it as movement:  
the flowering veins around the sturdy core,  
the sucking of the roots,  
the breathing of the leaves,  
the infinite commerce  
of earth and air -  
and the growing itself  
in its darkness.

I can assign it to a species,  
observe it as an instance  
with an eye  
to its construction.

Or I can recognize it  
only as an expression of law;  
I can dissolve it into a number,  
into a pure relation  
between numbers,  
and make it  
eternal.

(Martin Buber, adapted by Howard Schwartz from I  
and Thou)



## CHAPTER III

### THE IMAGE: PHILOSOPHICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RELATED MATERIAL

In the art therapy process "symbol" and "image" are closely linked. When a client executes an image of a tree, it's not just a tree, rather, it is a symbolic expression. The tree has a symbolically meaningful history that to this day may be applicable though adapted to contemporary ideology. This chapter deals with image formation that becomes the visual symbolic expression used in the art therapy process. Horowitz (1970) discusses image and image formation in a most coherent manner. He defines an image as a thought representation that has a sensorial quality. In his study Horowitz, like the art therapist, focuses on the visual image. When he uses the word "image", he is referring to the interior mental contents that have a visual sensorial quality and are of a specific experience. When he uses the expression "imagery" he is referring to different kinds of external image that we experience collectively.

Horowitz observes that a person may describe an image in various ways. He may include information about content, vividness, clarity, colour, shading, shapes, movement, foreground and background characteristics, and other spatial relationships. He may also be able to recount how he became conscious of this image, how long it lasted, what emotions

were associated with it, and the relationship of it to objects in the external world. He may be concerned with efforts to change or to get rid of the image. There may also be a sequential or simultaneous arrangement of a series of images. However, as much as a person may be aware of image contents and be able to recount it, he is generally unaware of all the underlying processes or motives which create the image formation. The physical aspect of image formation is dealt with in neurobiology while psychology and art therapy focus on the cognitive use, psychodynamic meaning, and motivational areas of image formation.

An image may be produced within the psychic system, or it may be derived directly from external visual stimuli. Horowitz (1970) distinguishes between the two systems of sealing an image. When it is produced intrapsychically he refers to the image as being "formed", whereas if the image is a direct response to an external object he feels the image is being perceived.

The root meaning of the word image is "replica" (Sarbin and Juhasz, 1970). Yet, an image as a mental representation is not just an imitation or a momentary perception. It carries with it memory fragments, reconstructions, reinterpretations, and symbols that represent objects, feelings, and/or ideas. Furthermore, an image is a private experience. In the art therapy process it has a physical, graphic form. Whether it is expressed graphically or

verbally the primary source of information about it would be the introspective report which in itself may be subject to distortion.

Aristotle felt that images were basic elements of thought and were connected by associational relevance. A most important and enduring concept about the image that Aristotle established, was that images have the power to motivate man to emotion and effort (Mandler and Mandler, 1964). Locke (1690) believed that thought was developed by our perceiving, and then recording these perceptions in residual images. We then were able to recall images as part of thought. Thus simple images could be combined to create more complex ideas (Mandler & Mandler, 1964).

Hume (1739) postulated that memory preserved perceptions as recorded images. Furthermore, he felt that memory also must keep a certain scheme of order in time and position in space. Recall of images did not have to be strictly in the order they were perceived. They could be reprocessed in different combinations and yet still recount accurately the past. Hume expressed that the immediate perception was by far more vivid, forceful, and lively, than the image recorded. He conceded that under certain conditions such as sleep, fever, madness, and violent emotions, the image could seem as real as the perception, and that at that point there was no difference between the two (Mandler and Mandler, 1964).

In earlier times it was the philosophers who set that task for themselves. It is not until the latter part of the 19th century that psychology, detaching itself from philosophy, began a more systematic approach in the field of imagery research. This began when Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychological laboratory (1879) in Leipzig (Morris and Hampson, 1983). This new movement known as Structuralism, promoted the idea that knowledge was derived through the senses, and then was stored in the form of "ideas" or mental atoms. The movement evolved to using two basic techniques of experimentation to support its theory: psychophysics and introspection. The former was research into the physical and psychological connection of mental functioning. The latter experimentation, proposed that all the important aspects of mental functioning were conscious. All this interest led to a closer, official investigation of imagery.

Wundt felt that the immediate response to a sensory input was an image - no attachment of meaning, just sensation. He theorized that images were the basic elements of thought although he was unable to explain how they were systematically transferred into the higher mental processes of perception and thought.

At the turn of the century at the University of Wurzburg researchers such as Marbe (1901), Kulpe (1922) and Messer (1906) discovered that there were times when a

subject aware of a presented experience (stimulus) did not respond with an image, nor a word, or even clear awareness of will or choice. Rather, their reported reaction was that of a kind of formless sense of predisposition or association without any awareness of intervening conscious thought processes Messer (1906) hypothesized that there was thinking activity that went on below the conscious level. These theoreticians came to the conclusion that there existed imageless and unconscious thinking.

At about the same time Titchener (1909) seconded Wundt saying that there was no such thing as an imageless thought. The contents of thought that the Wurzburg psychologists labeled as imageless were just highly complex integrations of sensory elements which they had failed to recognize due to improper techniques. Titchener felt that even if the subject could not come up with a clear image, images were present but were perhaps difficult to recognize or describe due to possible kinesthetic or spatial qualities.

Thus there developed two opposing schools of thought. Both used the scientific method of introspection yet come to different conclusions. Their questions were: Is the image part of the mental process or not? Is there an area within our mental framework that is beyond the conscious level of awareness?

This image-imageless thought controversy resulted in Watson (1913) concluding that images and other mental events

were not valid objects of scientific enquiry. Furthermore, the technique of introspection was obviously error prone. He felt that the role of the image in mental activity should be dropped in favour of the verbal responses. He proposed that thinking was an internal vocalization. Imagery research continued but ceased to carry with it the same sense of importance and credence.

Horowitz (1970) points out that one reason for the slow rate of progress in imagery research is that it has been isolated from the general theory of perception, memory, and thought. He continues that visual images are but one aspect for representation of percepts, memories, ideas, and feelings. The thought process includes images with different sensory qualities, words without sensory quality, as well as implicit ideas, feelings, or presuppositions. Therefore examining the visual image alone would not explain the entire thought process. The visual image is but part of the entire process.

In the late 50s there was renewed interest in mental imagery. There was still no agreement as to definition, placement, and application of the mental image. Z.W. Pylyshyn (1973) in a classic paper reasoned that the concept of "mental images" seemed to imply the existence of "mental pictures" which obviously would require "seeing" by some internal mechanism. Thus he said, that images were probably not pictorial forms at all, but were complex, abstract

structures. He also added that going from images to words and vice versa, could obviously cause translation problems.

Kosslyn (1980) pointed out that mental images may be pictorial but are not photograph-like. Rather, they seem ethereal and parts may fade in and out making the information at times difficult to read. Perception is a process whereby a whole lot of sensations are reduced into a simpler more organized form. These may be sorted and later assembled into images that are experienced in a quasi-pictorial, spatial way similar to the primary experience of the perception. Horowitz (1970) too, adds that images are made up of highly processed perceptual encoding. Thus Shepard (1975) and Kosslyn and Pomeratz (1977) have evolved the theory that the image is percept-like and not picture like. They also add that the image is a spatially extended, analogue representation.

Basically their conclusion (Horowitz 1970) are that thought does not always take the form of a visual image. Some ideas and feeling may be synthesized imageless. Multiple thoughts may be experienced simultaneously. Thought is not necessarily a sequential association between basic elements. There are levels of thinking that take place out of awareness. They are within unconscious realms and may not be available when thought of introspectively. The very act of introspection may alter the thinking. There is a hierarchy in the thought organization. Not everyone

follows the same mode of image formation. Some people experience image formation more than others. An important factor in the study of image formation is definitely the cultural factor (Horowitz 1970).

In the late 70s and into the 80s the imagery debate shifted somewhat in character (Morris and Hampson, 1983). Kosslyn (1981) pointed out that instead of discussing the general form that imagery theory could take, there should be a move to examine the adequacy of specific theories and to collect new data that might set constraints on such theories.

It would seem that there is no dispute with regards to the existence of a mental/psychic image, be it vague, strong, or distorted. Rather the discussions center around how the image occurs, why it occurs, and what its role and validity is in mental functioning and in human experience. When the image is experienced it can be agreed that it is within conscious levels since the person is aware and may be able to recount it verbally or graphically.

A lot of importance is put on the state of consciousness. To be conscious is to be aware. This state is not exclusive to humans. Animals too may have consciousness which is defined as the ability to react to the environment. Human beings in addition, have the awareness of being aware (Tolman, 1927) i.e. self-consciousness.



Rene Descartes (1596-1650) implied with his statement, "cogito ergo sum." (I think; therefore I am) that personal consciousness is the only sure knowledge that man has (Strange, 1978). Followers of Descartes' thinking see consciousness as a part of a substantial soul or mind, which may be made up of different levels of consciousness. The transpersonal psychologists whose forefather was Abraham Maslow (1950) have incorporated Far Eastern philosophies into their movement. These psychologists focus on an inner, spiritual realm. In their exploration of unconsciousness they include, among others, states of normal waking, sleeping, dreaming, day dreaming, meditation, and hypnosis (Pope and Singer, 1978).

For Freud consciousness was being aware of the environment and of sensory information available (Freud, 1951). To perceive was to be conscious. Titchener felt consciousness was a subjective experience of which man was aware. The Gestalt psychologists studied mental phenomena as they appear in consciousness in the immediate experience, stressing its wholeness (Strange, 1978). As different and contradictory as all the theories may be, they are valid in that each human being makes sense of his/her environment and his/her life within the frame of reference of a given set of presuppositions. It seems that with every contribution of a personal view or study, more of a truth is added to the truth. For the total human experience is the sum total of

the individual, subjective experience.

Consciousness, thinking and imaging are obviously a most important aspect of the human make-up. It has occupied many great minds. It has been explored and the findings have been recorded. Furthermore, they have helped to shape human life - our attitudes and modes of behaviour. In many ways the mind and its working have fascinated us, but it has also been shrouded in mystery and fantasy. To this day no-one has "The Answer" to the primordial question of how and why (Life exists). As much as man lives in an external world (his environment), his life is lived within and inner private world. Philosophers and psychologists among many other scientists, have attempted to get inside, into that inner realm, and bring it out into the open. For humans, there seems to have been and still is, a compulsive need to explain own functioning to ourselves. As much as has been brought out into consciousness, there seems to be an area that is not within our conscious and cognitive grasp. It seems to be beyond our awareness in unconscious realms.

Humankind has evolved a body of thoughts and images (i.e. knowledge), which has been organized so that a person may be able to communicate and associate with others. This complex process has been going on since human beginnings. The content of conscious images is synthesized from perception and memory. In the process of perception a person may receive external visual signals as well as

stimuli that arise from within the body (e.g. excitations of the optic pathways - entoptic images). In the process of memory a person may recollect events, recall fantasy, and also reconstruct various fragments of memory. Conscious image experiences may simultaneously contain elements from both sources (Horowitz, 1970).

Freud presents two levels of forms of thought regulation that effect image formation. "The primary process" is made up of forms of thought regulation that influence fantastic, wish-oriented and magical thinking. The term "the secondary process" he designated to those forms of thought regulation that influence the analytic, reality-oriented and logical thought (Horowitz, 1970).

Primary process forms of thought regulation are more primitive and occur in earlier in childhood. The main feature of this thought process is that motives need some kind and immediate response, which does not necessarily have to be realistic. What is important is immediate gratification in anyway, with no delays, detour or extended planning. Thus the nature of this primary process gives it a magical quality and an orientation of more pleasure-less pain (Horowitz 1970).

As the child grows and develops there appears the secondary process forms of thought regulation. The child learns how to think more realistically. It learns that gratification may be delayed until the right time and place.

This can be much more fulfilling than the primary immediate magical gratification. Thus the secondary process includes the child's ability to test reality, to delay, and to organize. It is learning skills that will enable it to best interact with the physical environment. This secondary process like the primary one sets goals of maximum pleasure, minimum pain, and the right level of tension. However, it is subject to the reality principle where a person directs the gratification of drives towards real possibilities in space and time (Horowitz, 1970).

The primary process is not completely lost and forgotten as a person grows and develops into an adult. There are situations where it will re-emerge and at times to the advantage of the situation. Such a situation would be the creative process where the speed of thought, the low need for conventional and reasonable association, and the relative absence of logical restraints characteristic of the primary process, would be conducive to new and novel combinations of ideas. At one point or another the creator might use the secondary process mediation to modify and/or complete the creative thought. Although images often appear as representations in the primary process of thinking, they may also appear in the secondary process (Horowitz, 1970).

Another situation where primary process thinking may emerge, is during sleep. Freud did extensive investigation in dream-thinking. (Freud, 1953) He found that during

dreaming the primary process influence creates its own styles of organization. He noted that in this process there was a central use of visual images. He stated that dreams were wishes and described how latent thoughts appeared in the dream world. He brought up the idea that dream work used condensation, displacement, and symbolization. Through this process dreams became disguised expression of censored ideas and feelings.

During condensation several latent meanings fuse and form a single image. In displacement there is a change of relative emphasis. The focus is on the unimportant idea or feeling. This is a way to escape censorship and disguising ideas and feelings that are not allowed to be clearly expressed. During symbolization one object, feeling, or situation is chosen to represent another. The meaning is relatively fixed and may be collective as well as idiosyncratic. A symbol is chosen because it is relevant, a good disguise, or simply because it is easy to visualize. A symbol may also differ in personal meaning from cultural meaning. Very often only context and personal association reveal the significance of a symbol (Horowitz, 1970).

Freud found that motives behind image formation were well-disguised allowing only the image itself to enter into our awareness. He found that by using this apparent image with the method of free association, a person could get by resistance and discover the information concealed in the

image (Horowitz, 1970).

Freud (1895), Rapaport (1954, 1951), and Holt (1967) agree that a person may achieve gratification from internal sources through image formation. The images come from memories of situations or fantasies that in the past have gratified similar desires or needs.

Freud also indicated that the attachment of a word-representation to a thing-representation raised an idea to the level of consciousness (Freud, 1923). He further stated that the clearest thought was achieved when the ideas and affect were labeled with words. Thus when a person has acquired lexical representation he may progress to new levels of conceptualization and reasoning (Horowitz 1970).

Image formation seems to belong in the primary process of thought regulation. Images are harder to inhibit, although when they appear they may be fleeting and poorly recorded in memory. They may also be disguising motives through condensation, displacement, and symbolization. Lexical representation develops later when secondary process thought regulation has developed. It would seem that words may be recorded more easily in memory. It is the artist who may extend the image from its intrapsychic existence into the physical, visible environment and from that point onward the image now a graphic product, exists externally.

We form images on intrapsychic levels. It is a means of expressing our life experiences. We live in a visually

rich world, to which we can readily respond with our sense of sight. It would seem natural that images would be an important tool of communication. Before the development of sophisticated verbalization primitive and early humans used images as a means of expressing and communicating with each other. Image representation was symbolic for an inner experience or issue that was shared among the people. Historically it can be seen that the image of the tree was used symbolically to express specific existential concepts (above, Chpt. II). The tree as an image executed in an art therapy process would be the symbolic representation of an internalized experience or issue. The actual image would be the conscious communication. Image communication among contemporaries in our culture is not the norm. Rather, verbalization is the accepted form of interaction. Images may be closer to the unconscious and if allowed to rise through different layers of intrapsychic awareness may present a needed revelation. This symbolic expression may be obvious or shrouded; however, it can be worked through to make the process meaningful and to lead to personal growth and resolution of conflict.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SYMBOL OF THE TREE: APPLICATION IN ART THERAPY CASE STUDY

#### SYMBOLIC REALIZATION: THE TREE AS A SYMBOL OF EXPRESSION AND COMMUNICATION IN ART THERAPY PROCESS WITH AN ELDERLY PATIENT

What follows is an actual case study. I worked with a patient during my art therapy internship and her case study illustrates the use of the tree as symbol and as an image in the art therapy process. It counterbalances in a specific form, the theorization that I have presented in the previous chapters. Although she does use other symbolic images, her main expression is the image of the tree. Throughout the entire art therapy process, the patient never indicated that she had knowledge of the role that the tree had played historically (above Chpt. II). She drew trees because as a young person she had loved to walk in the woods. She expressed that this memory gave her comfort. On the surface her graphic expressions seem to reflect a childhood memory. However as Jung points out a symbol stands for more than just its conventional and obvious meaning (above, p. 12). He further states that within our unconscious realm exists a certain awareness of our entire being. In order to get a better understanding of ourselves Jung feels that we should "dig" into our unconscious and encourage conscious



expression of inner awareness (above, p. 12). As will be seen my patient used the art therapy process to do just that.

The tree is an old symbol. Jung feels that we moderns have a link to the past and its symbolism. It would seem that we can create symbols unconsciously and spontaneously that were part of our repertoire of "existence" (above p. 13). We are still tied to the ancient past through our shared collective unconscious "experiences" and "expressions" (above, p. 15). Ancient people believed that a tree housed their god just as a human body houses a human soul (above, p. 28). This symbolic interaction connecting a person to the tree is still used today. For diagnostic purposes the tree becomes symbolic of a person's self image and personal interaction with the environment (above, p. 50). My patient used the image of the tree to symbolically shape her reality by participating in the process of the tree. The case study is presented in an experiential format recounting sessions as they happened. The entire process represent my patient's use of the tree symbol in a unique and personal way.

How calmly does the orange branch  
Observe the sky begin to blanch  
Without a cry, without a prayer,  
With no betrayal of despair.

Sometime while night obscures the tree  
The Zenith of its life will be  
Gone past forever, and from thence  
A second history will commence.

A chronicle no longer told,  
A bargaining with mist and mould,  
And finally the broken stem  
The plummeting to earth; and then

An intercourse not well designed  
For beings of a golden kind  
Whose native green must arch above  
The earth's obscene, corrupting love.

And still the ripe fruit and the branch  
Observe the sky begin to blanch  
Without a cry, without a prayer,  
With no betrayal of despair.

O Courage, could you not as well  
Select a second place to dwell,  
Not only in that golden tree  
But in the frightened heart of me?  
(Tennessee Williams)

#### Identification of the Patient:

Anna is a 78 year old female. She is a chronic care patient and was admitted over one and a half years ago having suffered a stroke. The left side of her body is paralyzed as a result. The muscles in her legs tend to have spasms which cause her a considerable amount of pain. She is diabetic and takes insulin shots every day. She has a catheter which causes her discomfort. Her worst and constant source of pain are her haemorrhoids. Since she is a surgical risk they will not operate. Although this possibility has been considered, it was dismissed by the staff.

She sits in a wheelchair but cannot manipulate herself. The quality of her life presently is very poor. She does not read since her eyesight is poor. She does not wa h

T.V. She does not interact with the other patients in her room or elsewhere. Because the staff insists she sits most of the time in her wheelchair and stares into space. Her only expression is to moan and groan when she is in great pain.

Family and Personal Background:

Anna's chart is far from complete and she does not readily volunteer information. The following is a synthesis of what is in her chart and what she has disclosed over the course of our therapeutic process.

Anna was born in Germany in a small town. She was the oldest of three children (she had one brother and one sister). She was a kindergarten teacher until she got married whereupon she did not work. Her husband was of Romanian background and by profession an interpreter. Anna was very domestic, cooking, sewing, knitting and generally caring for her family. There was not a lot of money and her husband carefully controlled the budget.

She loved to read. She did not go to movies or watch too much T.V. However, in her youth she loved to dance (waltz, polka). She also liked to ski and skate, and watch American football. She was a very industrious person, always busy doing something useful.

She came to Canada in the late 1950s. Her husband died about 30 years ago of heart problems. She had three

daughters, the eldest of which had died some time ago. One daughter lives in Texas, U.S.A. and the other in France. They visit about once a year and write occasionally. She has five grand-children and one grandson who died this past summer in a car accident. This event has caused her great grief and pain. Whenever she mentions this she cries.

She has no family in Montreal except one grandson who lives in her apartment, but who never comes to visit. She has no visitors. She feels that life has not been fair and that there is no justice. Her husband died, her daughter died and her grandson died. She repeats quite often the phrase, "It is all for nothing".

#### Therapy - Introduction:

This case has two keywords that seem to truly apply: relationship and symbolic language.

When a person feels as abandoned and hopeless Anna does (she has stated this) and realistically is in a most difficult situation, how could I, a stranger reach her? She has 78 years of life experience behind her. A lot of that was and is far from pleasant - war, loss of loved ones - to mention just two events.

I have seen her for about 18 sessions. Ours has been a slow "pas de deux", leading to the therapeutic alliance. She seems to have minimum conscious personal insight and tends to be very withdrawn generally.

A typical session begins as I walk into her room and set up my materials. She shares this room with four other patients who are being washed, dressed, etc...by the nurses as we work. Sometimes I can use a private room but that is very occasional. Most of the time we begin with some chit-chat depending on her. She will say in a most ritualistic way "What should I draw? I haven't been out there (world) for such a long time. There is nothing in here," (she points to her head). Anna does not appear senile at all, though her drawings do point to some organicity.

I have extended the session to one and half hours because it takes her a good twenty minutes to begin drawing. Once she draws she is completely involved. There is very little dialogue as she is quite oblivious to her surroundings. At the end she might point out what she has drawn in quite concrete description. We do not get into symbols and internal feelings vis a vis the artistic expression.

She is quite frail, her movements being quite slow yet when she draws there is a certainty and decisiveness in the artistic execution. Her face clears of the apathetic or painful expression. It looks focused and absorbed. It is most interesting to observe her. It would seem that this process gives her a certain amount of autonomy and choice. Once she does begin to draw one stroke follows another consistently.

THE QUALITY OF THIS MICROFICHE  
IS HEAVILY DEPENDENT UPON THE  
QUALITY OF THE THESIS SUBMITTED  
FOR MICROFILMING.

IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO MICROFILM  
SLIDES.

PLEASE REFER, IF NEED BE, TO THE  
ORIGINAL THESIS DEPOSITED WITH  
THE UNIVERSITY CONFERRING THE  
DEGREE.

LA QUALITE DE CETTE MICROFICHE  
DEPEND GRANDEMENT DE LA QUALITE DE  
LA THESE SOUMISE AU MICROFILMAGE.

IL EST IMPOSSIBLE DE MICROFILMER LES  
DIAPOSITIVES.

VEUILLEZ VOUS REFERER, AU BESOIN, A  
LA THESE DEPOSEE A L'UNIVERSITE QUI  
A CONFERE LE GRADE.

Anna draws mainly trees. I never asked her to draw trees, she chose to do so on her own. She has told me that the happiest time of her life was her childhood when she lived in a small town bordering a big forest. She remembers of that time walking in the woods by herself or with her father. Both of them were "wild for the woods". (This is a literal translation from her German expression.) When she draws she places herself in the forest. I once asked her what she thinks of when she sits in the chair all day. Her answer had been, "I walk in the woods."

#### Art Therapy with Anna:

Anna does not talk much during the therapy session. She is totally involved in the process of creation and expression. She sits in her wheelchair and has a board (custom made) that fits over it creating a kind of tray/table. She has been offered plasticine, paints, pastels, markers, and collage. She prefers and has chosen to work with markers.

#### Session #1 (slide 1)

There was no expression on her face when I approached her to do art therapy. However, she agreed to do it. I set up my materials and waited. It is said that a first drawing is most important. She drew her first work saying it was a scene from her childhood - i.e. where she use to live: a

castle, a tree and the town library. She mentioned her daughters who live far away. She also mentioned her grandson who had died this past year. She cried when she said that. She bemoaned her lot in life complaining that things just never went right for her.

Our session was over. I said to her that I would be back again giving her a date and time. She did not acknowledge this, however, she did not say 'no'.

#### Session #2 (slide 2)

She drew the evergreen tree first investing a lot of time and concentration into it. This image is based on an actual memory, yet its choice may indicate a deeper meaning in that evergreens have been associated with superior vitality and the power to strengthen the souls of the dead and to guard their bodies from corruption. It also represented the divine Creator (above, p. 33). This theme of God, life and death seems to extend to the accompanying image. Next to the Pine tree she drew what she said was first a house, then it became a church (bell tower & aisle). The meticulously slow way of drawing those lines on the tree and the house indicated a somewhat compulsive personality.

The image of the tree and the church/house seem to be quite a contrast. The colours support this as well being a set of opposite complementary colours: red and green. The objects are not grounded and there is a lack of a roof and



some walls. Once again she brought up her grandson's death and cried. At the end of the aisle the image does seem to be that of a person. After having exposed painful feelings she withdrew emotionally. She expressed that the drawing was stupid.

Session #3 (slide 3)

Anna picked up her favorite colour: purple. However, her pain was extreme and she just kept moaning and groaning saying this made her feel better. The nurse standing near us, however, kept saying that Anna should show some courage and try to be cheerful. Anna felt that she could not draw that day.

In the following two sessions (sessions #4 and #5) much the same happened more or less. She would pick up the pastels and markers, stare at them, groan a lot and then state that she was in too much pain to do any art therapy.

Session #6 (slide 4)

This drawing was done in total silence with no preliminary conversation. She worked diligently and with continuity and certainty. She took her favorite colour, purple, and drew the tree to the far right first. She worked from right to left which she tends to do most of the time.

She explained that the purple tree is an imaginary

tree, whereas the one next to it is an 'Erica' plant that grows wild in the forest. The last tree was supposed to be an evergreen, though she said it was not complete. She then talked about the forest especially her love for it.

These three trees are of interesting contrast. The largest tree's foliage is purple, her favorite colour. The middle tree is in bloom paralleling a possibly productive life. The last tree, an evergreen, has an open ended trunk and branches.

Anna was not able to consciously voice her feelings or her issues, but they came through in her art. Her parting comment in this session was: "It is all nothing."

#### Session #7 (slide 5)

Anna seemed to be in good spirits. There was again minimum conversation and no explanation of her art work. She drew the purple tree first, then the other followed. The tree trunks were filled in. She drew the purple tree this time with an oil pastel, a softer material than the marker in the previous drawing. There seems to be a contrast between the trunk of the tree and the lower branches. The trunk is coloured in whereas the bigger lower branches have an outline but are transparent. They seem spearlike and have foliage that look like thorns. The second tree is similar to the "Erica" plant/tree in slide 4. There is a big, purple branch with barb-like thorns pointing

towards this blooming tree. She made no comment about this drawing.

Session #8 (slide 6)

Preceding this session the client had a traumatic morning. She was having a bowel movement and was in extreme pain, yelling most of the time "help me!" I was in the room working with another patient with my back towards Anna.

When it was Anna's time to do art therapy she was not very keen. However, she did make a drawing. She seemed very withdraw. throughout the session and offered little conversation. She seemed to stay in that right space on the paper away from me. She tried to draw a buck but felt that she had not succeeded to make it look like the animal should. She expressed that this was stupid. She pointed out to me that she would need to look at something to be able to draw.

Session #9 (slide 7 & 8)

Although Anna did not tell me outright that she did not want to do art therapy she was quite uncommunicative. We had a chance to use a private room off the lounge this time. She kept staring at the aquarium in silence. She then said that she did not like fish and preferred birds.

Finally she picked up a red marker and started a most atypical image for her. At first it seemed to take the

shape of some distorted human figure. There were no arms to give or take. The balance was tilted, one foot cut off at the ankle. The eyes were big and empty and where the mouth should be this red stain spilled forth. She gave up quickly, saying, "Ah, it's no good. All for nothing!"

The atmosphere was quite charged. I decided to make a drawing for her. I drew a bird, flying towards her and I chose her favorite colours. She watched in silence.

We then discussed the bird a bit. The following words and phrases came up from her: flying, feeling of freedom, sun and air. She herself associated this to skiing, an activity she had loved to do. In this situation the image became charged with a sensorial quality (above, p. 50). It seemed to trigger a memory of a positive experience. There were only two direct comments she made about the bird and these were: "Birds do not have blue eyes." I offered that she could change this with no trouble at all. She replied that she would not and would rather leave it this way. Her parting words and second comment about the bird were, "The bird is pretty."

The drawing of the bird was a spontaneous act on my part. I felt the need to give. In her image she had opened up to express her true hopeless and painful feelings. There was no cathartic effect as far as I could discern. Something had poured out. The wound was gaping open. The whole situation needed to be contained. There was no way I

could leave her this way. She responded to my intervention. I believe that this was a meaningful symbolic interaction between us and it proved to be a turning point in the therapeutic process. An alliance had been established.

Session #10 (slide 9)

We were back to the same ritual. "I have nothing in my head! What can I draw?" Nevertheless she drew. She indicated before she began, that she would draw an oak tree. Looking at the tree image it has more mass than some previous ones.

She said that oaks grow to be quite big. The younger and stronger branches are towards the top and their foliage is green. The older branches get brown and are at the bottom of the tree. We talked in metaphors. She felt that a forest ranger has a hard job keeping track of the forest. The oak tree when it is old and sick has to be cut down. If the wood is rotten it becomes firewood; if it is still good they build furniture with it. She mentioned that oak furniture is durable and is handed down from generation to generation. The oak tree was and still is a most common and useful tree in Europe (above, p. 36). Anna had grown up in Germany. In ancient times the oak tree was associated with fertility, the sky, the rain, and thunder. It symbolically combined the elements of fire and water, which together were agents of productivity (above, p. 37). She may have also

been referring metaphorically to the tree as a symbol of immortality.

Following this she reminisced about her childhood and proclaimed her love for children. The subject of her grandson and his death came up again. She mentioned living through a war and how terrible that was. Although she again said, "It is all so useless!" her voice was strong and charged with feeling and spirit.

Then she added two fragile, young trees to the left of the oak. She made no comment other than that these were young trees. Our session was at an end and she had to stop here. I offered that she could complete this drawing next time if she so desired. She agreed, but did not do so when we met the following time.

#### Session #11 (slide 10)

Anna was in a lot of discomfort and pain. She was having cramps and spasms in her legs. She groaned a lot asking for some relief. The O.T. came in trying to adjust her legs. It took a while to calm down and start to draw.

She drew a tree. This time she concentrated on three spots. First she drew brown grass and then five flowers. There was no elaboration. Then she drew the bench on which two lovers were sitting. She pointed that out herself. Then towards the top, she drew what could be seen as three branches or trees. She did not explain or want to discuss

this drawing. "It's nothing," she gestured with her hand in a dismissing manner.

I thought that perhaps it was a beginning of some sort of life review. Represented in the tree there seemed to be three important events or relationships - 1) her family and childhood, 2) she and her husband and love, and, 3) her children of which she had three. Those were possibly the most meaningful highlights of her life.

#### Session #12 (slide 11)

This session produced a story and the first and only time that she said, "This is me in the drawing." Once again she drew her forest. The forest ranger and his dog are hiding behind the second tree from the right awaiting a herd of deer. He is going to shoot them. The deer are innocently advancing but Anna is there as well, the red figure, and intends to warn them of the danger. Only, as one looks closely at that figure one can see that it is quite powerless. There are no features and there are no arms. She can neither shout nor wave. Furthermore, she has no feet. This person seems totally immobilized, totally unable to communicate. As the person is incapable of giving she is also unable to receive.

Anna drew herself in red, a colour that often represents very strong feeling such as love or anger. In session #9 she had also drawn a figure in red. Both figures express

strong feelings and share a general feeling of helplessness.

Perhaps on the unconscious levels she was trying to come to terms with the concept of death. She presented the concept in a personal allegorical scene (above, p. 9). She charged it with her feelings of danger, fear, and helplessness.

There was no conclusion to this story because Anna started thinking and decided that all this was rather "stupid and silly". However, it would seem inevitable that the forest ranger will be successful in his intent. She said that she was feeling rather tired and our session was concluded.

#### Session #13 (slide 12)

This was our last session before the two weeks Christmas holidays that I was taking. I had informed Anna of this some time before. She had received a letter from her daughter in Texas that she and her husband were coming to spend the holidays in Montreal. She did not express strong emotions over this forthcoming event.

Anna became very involved in this session. There was little dialogue other than how much the forest meant to her. She drew a scene from childhood memory - a hill covered with different coloured roses and some evergreen trees. All these were around a pond upon which swans would swim. The latter she was unable to draw since our session had come to



an end.

All was done again very meticulously, part of the compulsive personality I have mentioned before. She pointed out that at the edge of the pond there is a little house. Graphically this is represented by a window and a door with bars on it. The house has no walls. The faint yellow lines on the bottom right are stairs - too faint to see and frail looking, once again reinforcing inaccessibility to the house.

Anna recreated and worked on a memory of beauty and comfort from her childhood past. Perhaps she intended to surround that poorly formed house with this image so that the house blends in and becomes more formless and may be overlooked. The flowers, the trees and the pond become the walls of her house and lend strength to her drawing. The tree on the left running from top to bottom of the page and with foliage only on the right inside stands like a sentinel guarding or fending off any intruders. This image is similar to the one in session #8 (Slide 6). She said with great feeling, "Thank God, I have the forest! If I didn't have that..." she left this sentence unfinished. Our session was concluded.

#### Session #14 (slide 13)

Christmas holidays were over. As I walked onto the ward, I could hear Anna yelling. She was having a bath.

When I came to see her shortly after, she was sitting dressed and calm in her wheelchair. The O.T. had told me that Anna's daughter had visited for the holidays and was still in Montreal. Anna did not seem depressed. Rather she had very little expression on her face. As is usual she did not really greet me. She just looked at the art materials touched them gently. Without too much prodding she began to draw.

She drew her house in the town where she used to live as a little girl. She also included the garden that they had had. All this was drawn carefully with much thought and deliberation. Finally, she became frustrated because it did not look on the paper the way she had it imagined in her mind. She was recalling visual images from her past. On the paper they became just images. She felt that they were not quite right. Somehow they did not express the percepts, the ideas, the feelings, and memories surrounding this imagery (above, p. 58). She talked about the garden mentioning that they had grown potatoes, beans and cabbage among other vegetables. They had also had chickens who produced eggs.

It is interesting that she chose to portray the garden with her favorite colour, purple. Perhaps, the garden equated here with the forest, her favorite place of dwelling. Up and above the garden are two trees. This level is quite different from the previous one. The tree

trunk on the right is open ended whereas the other one on the left closes on the top. The former has two-dimensional open ended branches whose lines sometimes are reinforced as is the tree trunk. The branches point upwards. The latter tree has single lined branches that reach out in more directions. These two stages, the garden and the trees, are connected by a rather spindly and inadequate looking staircase.

The last stage is not connected. Rather it is afloat and separated from the others. The house is squeezed into the corner at the top right of the paper. It looks incomplete and pushed out of scene.

The door like the house is incomplete. It is also small in proportion to the house and window. According to Hammer (1958) this may signify a reluctance to make contact with the environment, a withdrawal from interpersonal give-and-take and an inhibited capacity for social relations. These references might well fit into Anna's profile. The latter part of her life has been lonely. There are no friends, just a few acquaintances who really do not care. And mostly, her family is not here. We concluded our session.

#### Session #15

Anna was in pain. Thirty minutes had passed into our session and she had still not begun to draw, although she

had picked up and looked at the markers. She was groaning. Finally she said that she would need a painkiller. However, there were no nurses around at that moment. I went to the nursing station and explained the situation. Shortly after that a nurse came with the painkiller. In session #8, she had been in extreme pain as well. She had yelled for help. I had been in the room but was not in the position to help her. In that session she had expressed (slide 6) that she was angry at me and did not wish to interact. She had confided to the Occupational Therapist that she no longer wanted to do art therapy.

In this session within minutes her pain had cleared up. However, she decided that she just did not feel like drawing this time. Rather she wanted to talk and did talk about cooking and food.

Session #16 (slide 14)

I asked her once again whether she could express her feelings on the paper. She replied that she felt totally miserable and could not ever express this on the paper. I persisted but asked her whether she could draw a tree that would express misery.

She did not answer but after some time began to draw. She said that it was a chestnut tree. They had had one growing in the town. She was quite concerned to depict the correct leaves that a chestnut tree has. She said that one

such leave was as big as the human hand.

When asked what season this was, she needed time to decide. Finally, she replied that it was spring. The leaves and blossoms were out but not the fruit (i.e. the chestnut). The tree is leaning heavily towards the right, striving towards the end and death as K. Bolander (1977) points out. Most of the branches and foliage are on that side as well. They seem to almost pull the tree off its balance.

I asked her if a bird were to live in this tree where it would be. She chose the top and sparsest of the branches and put a nest on it. The bird cannot be seen since it is inside the nest. Upon close inspection it can be seen that the end part of the branch is very close to the nest and is most frail looking. Too much activity in the nest might easily break off the branch and the nest with the bird would fall down. This theme of hiding inside, of being cut off from the environment runs through a lot of her work.

Lastly she drew the creeping leaves on the tree trunk. The way she depicted these creeping vines, it looks as if they were inside of the tree rather than outside. Furthermore, the tree trunk comes to a closed pointy rounded edge at the top.

She said that this type of ivy was planted to keep the tree warm. She then added that they put this type of ivy on gravestones as well. She proceeded to write it out in

German towards the top right corner.

When we looked at the drawing she expressed that it was not a restful tree, rather that it looked as if there were a wind and the tree was bending. She was quite involved and invested in this drawing.

She seems to be dealing consistently with the concept of death. Common themes for the elderly within the context of psychotherapy are resolving feelings about death and an awareness of time, i.e. the end of time for them (Butler and Lewis, 1977).

Session #17 (slide 15,

She expressed the desire to be able to get up and walk. However, no-one listens and they are not giving her exercises to help her try to stand up. At one time someone (a physiotherapist) used to come, but she no longer does. At this point she also shared, that while she sits in this chair staring off into space, in her mind she is walking in the woods. She would not express this feeling on the paper. However, she started drawing quite readily on her own and became totally absorbed. At one point she was drawing off the top edge of the page and did not seem to notice.

The branches are most peculiar. Some have the appearance of clubs and possible spears. To refer to Hammer (1958), he speculates that branches that have these shapes or have barb-like thorns along their surface (teeth) may

underscore the presence of intense and ready impulses of hostility and aggression. These feelings are a major theme in therapy for the elderly (Butler and Lewis, 1977). The tree seems to have a kinesthetic expression directly resulting from those deep and strong feelings surfacing on the paper. Her self image especially the physical one must indeed be quite distorted, 'an old and broken body'. She said, "Do not get old!"

Our time was up and she was unable to complete the second tree. It seemed that the spiky needles on this evergreen reinforced the feeling of the first tree. The former however, seems to have a more raw and crude expressive quality. I would like to add that the nest that rests somewhere above and on top of the first bottom right side branch is most interesting. There is a mother bird with three little ones. Her only comment about the nest, was that if the little ones fell out they would surely be killed.

In a former drawing the bird had been inside the nest. Now there was a visible family. However, there could be danger and disaster upon exposure. Our session was concluded.

#### Session #18 (slide 16)

The session began with Anna's usual ritual of pointing out to me that she did not know what to draw. However, it

did not take her too long to start on something. She worked diligently and with certainty on the first two trees on the right side of the page. As her images were shaping I was moved by what I discerned to be a beautiful graphic representation. The kinesthetic expression of the trees has this graceful, dance-like movements.

The large tree to the right is an apple tree in the fall season. The smaller one next to it is in the spring. She expressed that spring apples are sweet whereas fall apples are sour. The former stay so for a very short time and may spoil rather quickly whereas the latter keep longer and may be used for cooking. Once again symbolically and metaphorically Anna expressed the generative and regenerative immortal nature of the tree and consequently life. Both fruits in different seasons have their advantages and disadvantages as both have their constructive use.

These two trees relate to and interact with each other, the large one reaching out and the smaller one leaning back offering to share the space on some fundamental common ground of existence. She added the third tree, however, she did not have enough time to complete it. She pointed out to me that where exist apple trees it is almost inevitable that other fruit trees exist. They do not grow in isolation.

When I left at the end of our session, for the first time she acknowledged verbally my leaving by saying



'Aufwidersehen' which would translate 'see you again'. She thanked me as well.

Conclusion:

It is most gratifying to see the symbolic realization of Anna's art therapy process. When I first began the art therapy with her, I felt uncertain about how and if I might be able to establish a therapeutic alliance. What goal in therapy could be set up for her? Reorganizing and reintegrating practically 78 years of life expression seemed a monumental task.

The unconscious has its own way and pace of working things through. This woman hardly related herself to the drawings she made. Yet her relationship to the imagery is obvious. She did not seem to acknowledge her work; yet something did happen in the process. A therapeutic alliance was established and the patient was able to work through some of her unresolved feelings. She dealt with loss—specifically the death of her grandson. She did begin a kind of life review process. And, she allowed herself to relate to another human being.

In session #1 she expressed symbolically through her images that she had removed herself and did not want anyone to come near. In her present situation it is understandable that Anna would not be too eager to participate in Art Therapy. She was showing in a transferential way her

difficulty in becoming involved while in her life everything was pointing to separation and disengagement. She was approaching death and needed to let go. She did this as much as she could. In session #18 she took a risk and opened up reaching out to another. The art therapy had allowed for this process to occur.

No guest had come to my house for long,  
my doors were locked, my windows barred; I  
thought my night would be lonely. When I  
opened my eyes I found the darkness had  
vanished. I rose up and ran and saw the  
bolts of my gates all broken, and through  
the open door your wind and light waved their  
banner. When I was a prisoner in my own house,  
and the doors were shut, my heart ever planned  
to escape and to wander. Now at my broken gate  
I sit still and wait for your coming.  
You keep me bound by my freedom.

(Rabindranath Tagore)

Verbalization is our major means of communication. We have learned how to use words to say or not to say what we feel and think. Art is not a common communication mode for most people and therefore is less amenable to control. Unexpected things may appear in the art work that were not intended to be expressed (Wadeson, 1980). What happened in these therapeutic sessions with Anna, was expressed on the paper with the art materials. Her art work formed a bridge between her unconscious and conscious and between her and myself. She externalized her inner feelings in an object, namely the tree, and thus gave recognition and life to them (Wadeson, 1980).

Anna drew images of trees. They became symbolic of

herself and her life. In her childhood, she had experienced and became familiar with the forest. It had been a meaningful and happy time. Now she has come to the end of her life. There was need to express her anger, sadness, disappointment, loneliness and despair. And, she had to come to terms with death and let go. She chose the personal meaningful symbol of the tree. The execution of this image through a symbolic process allowed the working through of some of her concerns. She expressed anger. She expressed the losses in her life. She reached out to me. There is no extensive symbolic analysis of the trees she drew, since the emphasis was on the relationship she was allowing to happen. All this occurred within the boundaries of Art Therapy.

Her personal symbol is also a "collective image" (Jung, p. 81, 1977). The tree has been reproduced many times and in many parts of the world (above Chpt. II). This archetypal image may vary somewhat in its symbolic representations, but has some basic meanings. It has come to stand for a connection between nature (humans) and the divine. It represented knowledge and regeneration. Besides looking at her own life cycle, Anna questioned the meaning of life as well. This symbol was very appropriate.

M-L von Franz (Jung, 1977) expresses that psychic growth and maturation is possible for every individual. It is a process that happens involuntarily and naturally. In dreams it is often symbolized by the tree. Von Franz

suggests that the tree has a definite pattern that determines its slow, powerful and involuntary growth. Just so there is an organizing center in our human psychic system. Jung called this center the "self". Here is the source of the dream images (Jung, 1977). This is an unconscious realm. In the individuation process the ego allows the unconscious to become conscious and to be realized thus leading to the fulfillment of a pattern (Jung, 1977). Dreams are expressions of unconscious material. Freud pointed out that they impress themselves mainly in visual images (Wadeson, 1980). Art Therapy was the vehicle for this process. It allowed for this unconscious material to be objectified and realized. On some level, Anna knew what she needed to do. Art Therapy provided the opportunity and from within her unconscious rose the image of the tree that came to symbolize the process that occurred.

## CONCLUSION

This research paper has attempted to investigate the importance and use of the tree as symbol, and to analyze its importance in the context of art therapy. We have seen that the tree symbol is indeed quite universal. It manifests itself in importance in different cultures at different stages of history. As early as primitive times the tree came to represent the concept of life and the Divine. Humans saw the parallel phenomena of life between themselves and the tree. The tree's regenerative powers were seen as the continuation of life. Different cultures chose different trees to be sacred based on their value to the people and/or their imposing presence. Whatever part of the world, in whatever time, some reference is made to the tree in connection with the human relationship to nature. The basic principles represented by the tree were that of regeneration, fecundity, abundance, immortal life, wisdom, knowledge, and the universe.

Having such an important and persistent existence, the tree symbol is part of the collective human memory. It is still alive in the twentieth century in that the tree as an image and symbol appears as an aid to psychodiagnosis. On a more personal level this symbol was found as very central in art therapy case study. The tree is my opinion that this is a symbol that through time and use has become an integral

part of us. As a result we can relate to such a symbol naturally and with ease and are thus able to express ourselves even without being aware of its history or relevance as was evident in the case study with my patient.

Besides the historical aspect, this thesis also examined the nature of symbolism especially as it relates to psychology and art. Symbols are means of expression and communication. Symbols do not have to retain their original value and meaning. As we develop, grow and change so may our symbols evolve. The tree as a symbol is still alive now because it has retained meaning relevant for us. Jung felt that a symbol stands for more than just its conventional and obvious meaning. He felt that human beings are linked to the past and its symbology. He theorized that we create symbols unconsciously and spontaneously and that they are part of our repertoire of "existence". These symbols are collective in nature and origin. My patient created the tree symbol unconsciously and spontaneously to express her life issues. As universal as the tree symbol is, it became very personal for her.

Symbolism is important to artistic expression. Some art is more symbolic than other art in the sense that the final image represents far more than what is obvious to the eye. Attitudes towards artistic expression have evolved as well. Earlier art was closely linked to religion. Contemporary art encourages and accepts private symbolism

which may include remnants of collective unconscious symbology. The visually external product is an abstract, symbolic expression of a human experience. Once the symbolic manifestation of an inner personal process has been visually created, it has its own life and may be received and interpreted on different levels. Visual imagery is part of the artistic expression and serves well as a means of symbolic representation. Art therapy uses this process. In the case presentation, the patient created graphic images of trees. They were symbolic of her internalized life experiences and represented more than the obvious image. This symbolic representation (tree) was her means of communicating to herself and to me.

The tree has also appeared in art and literature. Being a recognizable concrete object, it has been frequently described through imagery. In the case study, my patient created graphic images of trees. There is no definite explanation for the existence of mental imagery. There are different views. It is part of mental functioning and the human experience. When the image is experienced it is within conscious levels since the person is aware and may be able to recount it verbally or graphically. Freud (above, p. 69) did extensive investigation into dream-thinking where there is a central use of visual images. He found that motives behind image formation were well-disguised allowing only the image itself to enter into our awareness. Through

artistic expression the image may emerge from its intrapsychic existence into the physical, visible environment. Thus the image, now a graphic product, exists externally and on conscious levels. Historically, the image of the tree was used symbolically to express specific existential concepts. Specifically, the image of the tree symbolically expressed my patient's life experiences and personal issues. To understand the nature of image formation contributes to the understanding of the expression of symbolism. This knowledge adds to further understanding of the art therapy process.

This thesis has been a positive learning experience for me. It has helped to expand my understanding of the art therapy process. The tree symbol was the main focus. However, to fully comprehend the significance of this symbol and its manifestation, it was necessary to look at the nature of symbolism and image formation. This information gave a background to the case study placed at the end of the thesis. This case was the art therapy experience demonstrating the contemporary manifestation of this ancient symbol.

My research consisted of pursuing one specific symbol, recording and explaining its existence and relevance. The connection to art therapy was my case study. Further research could concentrate on finding other art therapy cases where patient(s) have used the tree symbol.



Furthermore, perhaps clinical situations may be set up where patients are given the opportunity to use the tree image in the art therapy sessions. It would be of interest to see how these studies relate to the information of this thesis. This could contribute to a greater understanding of the formation and function of the symbol and the image in art therapy as well as in art.

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