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**DEATH AND REBIRTH IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS:  
APPLICATIONS IN ART THERAPY**

Vera Heller

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Therapy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

May 1994

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **DEATH AND REBIRTH IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS: APPLICATIONS IN ART THERAPY**

Vera Heller

The theme of this paper is Death and Rebirth in the creative process regarded first from a theoretical and then from a practical point of view as an application in the art therapy process.

The theoretical discussion is aimed at showing, on the one hand, how the fear of death blocks the creative process. On the other hand, it will be shown how death can be integrated within one's personality as a major source of creativity.

The theme of death and rebirth will be theoretically examined from three different viewpoints. The first one is an analysis of the internal structure of the creative process by Anton Ehrenzweig. The second perspective on the subject is brought by Ernest Becker, who attempts to explain within a post-freudian frame of reference the "why" of the fear of death and how it affects the individual's psychological life in terms of creativity on the one hand and of mental health on the other. In the third chapter, James Hillman provides an understanding of the same theme from the perspective of the soul in relation to death and suggests that death can be integrated in one's psychological life, as a source of creativity and of a meaningful life.

The case material and artwork included in the fourth chapter represents the use of the theoretical material from the previous chapters as a frame of reference for the understanding of the process of art therapy.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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Special thanks goes to Corinne Wile, for her exceptional editing skills, typing and her devotion to the work as if it were her own.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The choice of the theme of Death and Rebirth has been motivated by my own experience as an artist and a therapist. I hope that the exploration of the subject will help me to deepen my work in art therapy and would further my personal reflection and search for meaning.

For the purpose of this thesis, the term "death" is used according to different contexts in the sense of chaos, letting go, loss, separation, depression and pathology, as forms of suffering related to the human condition. "Death" will not be used here in its biological sense as the ending of one's life, but rather in its metaphorical sense as a psychic occurrence within one's life.

All authors cited throughout this paper agree upon the fact that when fully accepted, death paradoxically transforms one's life into something richer, more meaningful and creative. The acceptance of death seems to be the fundamental requirement of creativity as manifested in art, therapy, play and also in one's daily life.

Through the acceptance of death, which can mean, according to Hillman, holding despair, staying with the depression or with the pathological symptoms rather than denying them, one can have at one point, the experience of rebirth, which is poignantly described by Hillman as follows:

Often in the course of a therapeutic analysis, a revolution in experience occurs. Soul is rediscovered, and with it comes a rediscovery of humankind, nature and world. One begins to see all things psychologically, from the viewpoint of the soul, and the world seems to carry an inner light. The soul's freedom to imagine takes

on preeminence as all previous divisions of life and one's areas of thought lose their stark categorical structures. Politics, money, religion, personal tastes and relationships are no longer divided from each other into compartments but have become areas of psychological reflection; psyche is everywhere. (Hillman, 1972, p. 197).

Reading Hillman's description of rebirth recalled my own experience and that reported by some of my clients, such as "Anne", for instance, whose drawings will be produced in the fourth chapter.

However, as it will be mentioned several times throughout this paper, that rebirth requires a prior or simultaneous death. As an artist, one of the most powerful experiences of "death" came during a certain period when I experienced depression, a feeling of disintegration and chaos. I realized that my artwork perfectly mirrored the phases of the psychological processes of which I currently write. The titles I gave to that series of paintings were "Dionysos" and "Sisyphus" which both evoked cyclical occurrences of the death and rebirth phenomenon. By that time, I did not have any theoretical understanding of what was occurring; I was simply attempting to translate and give meaning to my interior experience through visual language.

When a new sense of identity and internal structure seemed to emerge anew, my paintings also became more cohesive and more colourful. By observing the phenomenon, I understood that therapy and art-making are both creative processes that pass through the same stages. In my work today, I am still fascinated by the "x-ray" quality of drawings in the way they reveal at once wordless experiences and feelings.

A third reason for taking up the subject of death and rebirth was my need to understand my personal experience as well as that of my clients within a theoretical perspective. I did not look for a specific theoretical model at the exclusion of all of the others. I rather attempted to regard my subject as a multifaceted reality, each facet having its own perspective yet still being part of the same reality. It is the way I related the chapters one to the other: each of them approaches the theme of death and rebirth in a different perspective. Whether the first and the second chapter uses the frame of reference of ego psychology, the third brings a different approach, from the point of view of the soul and archetypal psychology.

In the first chapter, Ehrenzweig regards death and rebirth as the central theme of the creative process, which he examines in terms of its internal structure. According to him, death is understood as chaos and disintegration and is intrinsic to creativity. Its denial blocks the process.

In the second chapter, I looked at the "why" of the fear of death and in which way it blocks the creative and psychological processes within the individual.

The third chapter is an attempt to deepen the understanding from the point of view of the soul in its relation to death.

The fourth chapter attempts to bring together the theoretical material from a visual perspective. The theme of "the descent" is the main thread which holds the three first chapters together and is used in the fourth chapter to allow understanding of the artwork from a common denominator.

Even if I did not make personal statements as such in the first three chapters, I feel that my contribution has been in the way I presented the theoretical elements as a whole and in the choices that I made from the wealth of theoretical material available to me.

During the writing of this thesis, I realized that the subject that I chose allowed me a certain advantage. Whenever I became discouraged by the apparent chaos of my work, I accepted this because I recognized it as one of the phases of the creative process which I was writing about; while simultaneously I was engaged in it.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **DEATH AND REBIRTH: DIFFERING VIEWPOINTS ON THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS**

#### **1.1 The Definition of Death**

In this paper, the term "death" is used according to different contexts, in the sense of chaos, of letting go, resolution, ending, depression or pathology.

Death is regarded in its dialectical relation with life and its acceptance is considered to be the basic requirement for achieving individuation and as a precondition for the occurrence of the phenomenon of psychic rebirth.

From the viewpoint of the ego, in its biological sense, "death" provokes anguish and fear and consequently, repression. Oppositely, from the perspective of the soul, "death" is "experienced as a state of being, as an existential condition as a privileged road toward a meaningful life." (Hillman, 1964, p. 60).

Following different authors cited in this paper, death is seen as co-existing with life and manifesting in the middle of it, as a transformation experience, a psychic requirement for the accomplishment of individuation and separation.

"Without a dying to the world of the old order, there is no place for renewal, because, as we shall consider later, it is illusory to hope that growth is but an additive process requiring neither sacrifice nor death." (Hillman, 1964, p. 68).



## 1.2 The Symbolism of Rebirth

The symbolism of rebirth is inherited from a very old solstice festival which brings with it the hope that the declining winter landscapes of the northern hemisphere will be renewed (Jung, 1984). It can also be found in various myths describing the journey of the hero, in old initiation rites of primitive people and in the dreams of modern man.

In tribal societies, the ritual takes the novice back to the original mother-child bond. His identity is temporarily dismembered and he is forced to experience a symbolic death. Firstly, he has to give up all ambition and personal desire and he must submit to the ordeal without any hope of success. Later, he will ceremoniously be saved from "death" by a rite of new birth. The purpose of the rite was to lead people through the necessary change in patterns required by the process of transformation in conscious and unconscious life.

(Campbell, 1973) pointed out that symbolic representations of these ordeals and images spontaneously appear in the dreams of an analysand and at the moment where he lives behind him his infantile fixations and begins a new phase of development. If in the past mythology and rites used to supply the symbols which had as a prime function to carry the human spirit forward, today in their absence, the initiation symbolism is produced by the patient himself at the moment of the release. These initiatory images are so important to the psyche that they have to be supplied, if not from without, then from within, by dreams "lest our energies should remain locked in a banal long outmoded toy-room, at the bottom of the sea." (Campbell, 1973, p. 12).

### **1.3 Death and Rebirth in Creativity**

Throughout his writings, Hillman also emphasized the importance of the symbolism of death and rebirth in the process of psychological transformation, and that of creativity. "Creativity has been given the meaning of renewal, and the path to it is cyclical regression." (1972, p. 47).

We can compare the individual involved in a creative activity with a novice submitting to the ordeal of initiation. We can also see him as a mythical hero who undertakes his journey without any guarantee that he will ever come back alive.

Rosemary Gordon (1978) suggests that in the case of the creative individual, death can be considered as a symbolic way to express surrender to a state of confusion which, if accepted, can become a powerful source of creativity. During the creative work, people often tend to suffer from moods of irritability, depression, sadness, despair, and sometimes they express the themes of death, dying and torture. "What makes it worse, of course, is that one can never, while one is in the middle of it, know whether this is really the announcement of a period of creative activity, or whether it is merely a gratuitous, and less beneficent, if not actually malignant, regression. For, just as one cannot cheat death by clinging with delusionary certainty to the idea of rebirth, so one cannot cheat in the creative process by accepting disorientation as the inevitable forerunner of an inspiration." (Gordon, 1978, p. 162).

The process of creativity requires a letting go, an acceptance of the suffering which is an intrinsic part to it. In order to draw inspiration from the depth of the unconscious, one must surrender his ego control, and this surrender is

synonymous with the acceptance of death. In her book, "An Experiment with Leisure", Marion Milner (1987) gives us an example of her experience of extinction, letting go, and the consequent surge of inspiration.

Whenever I felt a clutch of anxiety, particularly in relation to my work, whenever I felt a flood of inferiority lest I should never be able to reach the good I was aiming at, I tried a ritual sacrifice of all my plans and strivings. Instead of straining harder, as I always felt an impulse to do when things were getting difficult, I said: I am nothing, I know nothing, I want nothing, and with a momentary gesture wiped away all sense of my own existence. The result surprised me so that I could not for the first few times believe it; for not only would all my anxiety fall away, leaving me serene and happy, but also within a short period, sometimes after only a few minutes, my mind would begin, entirely of itself, throwing up useful ideas on the very problem that I had been struggling with. (p. 40).

This description of the creative process poignantly recalls the image of the novice submitting to the ritual ordeal of initiation, followed by rebirth.

Death and rebirth is seen by Ehrenzweig (1967) as the central theme of creativity. In order to illustrate it, he uses the myth of Dionysos, the dying and self-creating god, as an account of the heroic self-surrender of the creative mind.

The myth of the god of vines, who was tragically torn into pieces every autumn only to joyfully come back to life in the spring symbolizes the cyclical death and rebirth experienced in the process of creativity. The figure of Dionysos who unites the huge potential of destruction and death on the one hand, and that of intense life and rapture, on the other hand, evokes Hillman's (1972) definition of the essence of creativity: "that which builds at the same time tears down and that which breaks up at the same time restructures." (p.37).

According to Ehrenzweig (1967), the temporary giving up of the rational faculties during the process of creation is experienced by the creative mind as a destruction of the ego and death. In order to create, one must allow the shift of control from conscious focusing to what Ehrenzweig calls "unconscious scanning", that is allowing one's attention to scatter until the boundaries dissolve completely. The ego functions and ego control must be surrendered and the person has to give up the natural need to differentiate sharply and to rely on the "creative suspension of frontiers". By shifting to the unconscious, one comes in contact with one's inner void (which can be perceived from the outside as a sort of absentmindedness) and experiences a feeling of ego loss accompanied by fear.

The beginning of any creative work implies the necessity to make decisions about one's route without having any clear information which could indicate a possible direction. At this stage, one's attempt to control the process can only be a failure. He has no other choice but to trust the inner logic of his unconscious, for it is from there that new insights will eventually develop. In the middle of the unconscious scanning, the person never knows whether this chaotic period precedes a fertile creative activity or whether it will be totally sterile.

Ehrenzweig (1967) notes that whether a person will experience chaos or a high creative order, depends upon the capacity of the person to let go of the compulsion to see clearly from the beginning of the process; if the individual has a rational side which is too rigid or too judgmental, then the more scattered, lower-level imagery which comes up during the "unconscious scanning" will appear to him vague and chaotic and the continuity of the creative process is compromised.

Ehrenzweig sees the creative process as a spiral marked by several phases of destruction and re-construction which will occur until the work is completed. He sees the rhythm of creativity as a continuous oscillation between the life instinct and the death instinct.

#### **1.4 The Internal Structure of the Creative Process**

Inspired by the theories of Melanie Klein, Ehrenzweig sees the creative process as an alternation of projection and introjection or of the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive positions. Within this frame of thought, the phases of creativity are seen as a repetition of the stages of the child's development. Ehrenzweig divides the creative process into three main phases, schizoid, manic and depressive. Even though he emphasizes the work of the professional artist in relation to those stages, I believe that this frame of reference pertains to any other type of creative process.

#### **1.5 The Schizoid Phase of Creativity**

In the schizoid phase, persecutory anxieties which trigger projection and fragmentation lead the child to the shattering of the self and to massive projections into the void. In the artist's case, this stage mirrors his own fragmented personality through the fragmentation of his work. Unacknowledged split-off elements of the self are projected into the work, and they are experienced by the artist as accidental, unwanted and persecutory. At this stage, one unavoidably perceives his work as chaotic; in order to continue it, he must learn to tolerate the chaos without too much persecutory anxiety despite his feelings of loss of control and of confusion.

## **1.6 The Manic Phase of Creativity**

If the creative ego is strong enough to endure the experience of fragmentation and destruction, the first stage will be followed by a second one called "manic". At this stage, the child learns, as well as the artist, to prepare a "womb" in his unconscious where he can now repress the fragmented material he previously projected into the void. This process of scattering and repression of the surface imagery by the ego is referred to by Ehrenzweig (1967) as "dedifferentiation".

The canvas now plays the role of the womb in which unconscious linkages are established between the fragmented elements previously projected onto it until the achievement of an unbroken pictorial space. Parallel to it, a similar integration is taking place in the artist's own unconscious.

The creative dedifferentiation tends toward a manic oceanic space where all opposites, the inside and the outside world, the ego and the super-ego are merged. During the oceanic experience, all fragmentation seems to be resolved and all accidents temporarily disappear. This experience of return to the womb leads to the creation of the "the minimum content of art" which is characterized by an elusive surface in which all fragmentation appears to be restored, as tangible proof that an unconscious integration is taking place.

The oceanic immersion is experienced by the artist as a regression *in utero*, a complete fusion with the maternal breast through which he seems to be relieved from individual existence; time appears to have stopped and the notion of space is

not relevant anymore. If in the schizoid phase the individual was threatened of being overwhelmed by death, on the manic-oceanic level death is not fully distinguishable from birth anymore. The destructiveness of the first phase is replaced by stillness and serenity. But serenity is preceded by the genuine experience of death. "In this respect, the manic-oceanic experience of death and rebirth differs from pathological mania which simply denies death" (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 189). Through the oceanic experience, the repressed and scattered elements melt together and are reshaped in the newly created womb before they re-enter into the consciousness. "Perfect integration is possible because of the unlimited mutual interpenetration of oceanic imagery. All opposites merge, death and birth become one, the difference between the sexes, the differentiation of parent and child disappear. Temporarily, all splitting is undone." (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 192).

### **1.7 The Myth of the Dying God as a Metaphor of the Manic Phase**

Following Marion Milner, Ehrenzweig (1967) compares the ego's gradual descent into the oceanic depths with the fate of Dionysos, the self-scattering and self-creating god. The creative mind must identify with Dionysos' fate in order to surrender its control to the powers of the unconscious.

Ehrenzweig describes the myth within his psychoanalytic frame as follows: On the surface, there is the Oedipal level. Next down, the father recedes in importance while the mother becomes more terrifying by acquiring phallic-oral characteristics. On a still lower level, the mother has the full power of both parents and threatens the child not with castration, but with death by tearing and dismemberment. At the deepest level, that of the undifferentiated matrix, appears

the divine child, who absorbs and embodies the powers of both parents. At this deep level situated even below the imagery which induces and symbolizes the ego's creativity (poemagogic imagery) predominates a feeling of great stillness, austerity and security which follows the experience of death.

This descent parallels the legend of Dionysos. In the person of Pentheus, the god is torn alive by his mother, Agave. When she recovers from her madness and she realizes that she killed her own son, Agave gathers his fragments and buries them in order to ensure his rebirth. Then the Maenads, priestesses of Dionysos, tear a sacrificial bull in his honour. But as the bull represents Dionysos himself, it can be said that the god sacrifices himself to himself. At this level, the figure of the mother, Agave, recedes and the child remains alone, becoming both subject and object of self destruction. That is, he gives life and death to himself. In the myth of Dionysos, there are several variations on the theme of the god's death and rebirth. As a child, Dionysos was also torn limb from limb and reconstituted from his still beating heart. His dismemberment also occurred every autumn followed by joyful rebirth in the spring.

Through the myth of Dionysos, Ehrenzweig emphasizes "the theme of containment (trapping) and expansion (liberation) as the minimum content of art" (p. 173) which is formed on the manic-oceanic level. As we have seen before, in normal creativity, containment (buried alive) of the scattered elements leads to integration and re-introjection into the self.



### **1.8 The Psychotic Structure and Oceanic Experience**

The blurring of consciousness required by the creative process is experienced by the psychotic as a threat of chaos and death. His ego, in its need for clear information, clings to the surface functions. For him, the experience of human mortality seems intolerable. The oceanic experience is associated with the phantasy of being trapped in an empty inner world. This is why, says Ehrenzweig (1967), the psychotic is left only with the first phase of creativity. Oceanic dedifferentiation is feared and felt as death itself. Due to his fear of death, he fails to create a womb in his unconscious and consequently experiences his inner space as a hostile void.

According to the author, we all suffer from a measure of schizoid dissociation. We "have to face the anxieties and fears of self-destruction and the ego rhythm of creativity tests the ego's flexibility; if the ego rigidity impeded the more profound shifts of consciousness in creative work, the fragmentation of surface imagery preceding dedifferentiation is emotionally experienced as self annihilation. Marion Milner says that the confrontation with this experience is a test for the full emotional (not only intellectual) acceptance of death as a part of reality." (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 189).

### **1.9 The Depressive Phase of Creativity**

In the second phase of creativity, the artist simultaneously prepares in his work and in his unconsciousness a womb, which will contain and integrate the scattered material. The third phase is characterized by a partial re-integration of the oceanic imagery into consciousness. As the artist proceeds to a revision of his

work, its undifferentiated substructure necessarily appear again as chaotic to his conscious analysis. Thus, this third stage is also marked by anxieties. But this time, persecutory anxieties are replaced by depressive ones and they are accompanied by an acceptance of the imperfections and a hope for further integration. Part of the oceanic imagery is re-introjected into the artist's consciousness and integrated on a higher mental level and the rest remains repressed forming the "art's unconscious substructure".

### **1.10 The Secondary Revision of the Creative Process**

When the creative individual comes out of his oceanic experience and he realizes that his work is not what he meant it to be, the depressive anxieties which follow can lead him to a new immersion into the unconscious matrix, and opens the possibility of achieving a higher integration of the work. The unconscious links which have been established in the first manic phase are not complete and they are not fully translated into surface coherence. Some fragmented material still persists into the unconscious matrix. A second cycle of creativity gives the artist the opportunity to create further linkages. "For a while, as we have seen, these [images] will retain their generating power and fertility, as long as their link with the undifferentiated matrix below still holds. But as the new images cut themselves loose, as they inevitably will, the scene is set for a new enactment of the ritual of self destruction and rebirth in the sacrifice of the dying god." (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 206).

During the primary revision the artist has learned to trust the hidden coherence of his unconscious. Through the passage from the schizoid to the manic phase, the surface and the depth ego have merged. Some control over the

dedifferentiation of images has been achieved. But as the cycle of creativity is characterized by alternating manic and depressive feelings, at a given time it will push on to a secondary revision. The newly created images will be perceived again through the rigid filter of the surface functions as less coherent, less perfect, as a series of clichés. The artist will experience again depressive anxieties, which lead to a new immersion into the oceanic womb. The oscillation between the two phases continues until a more satisfactory completion of the work.

Therefore, the creative process is marked by alternating manic and depressive feelings. No matter how perfect the linkages are in the unconscious, they will always lead to depressive anxiety again. It is difficult to completely disentangle the manic and oceanic phases in poemagogic imagery says Ehrenzweig (1967). The difference between the two can only be read in relation to their different roles in creativity: while creative mania resolves dissociation between many levels of the ego by joining surface imagery to the oceanic womb through vertical integration, depression achieves the ego's horizontal integration. Their different functions complete each other and are both necessary in establishing the rhythm of creativity upon which the ego's health depends. Ehrenzweig believes that mania and depression are the representations of the two basic instincts, Eros and Thanatos and that they have an equal status. As such, they cooperate with each other rather than being antagonistic. According to him, the ego could not function without its rhythm constantly oscillating between life and death. The author deplores the fact that in general, in the study of creativity an undue emphasis has been placed on the role of depression at the expense of mania.

### **1.11 Depression and Creativity**

Melanie Klein, whose writings largely inspired those of Ehrenzweig and Hanna Segal, is one author who appears to have emphasized the depressive aspect of creativity at the expense of mania. According to Hanna Segal who developed Klein's theories on creativity, the capacity to create is rooted in the depressive position. To illustrate her statement, Segal (1956) gives as example one of her clients, an artist, whose denial of the depth and seriousness of her depressive feelings produced an effect of superficiality and prettiness in her work. As she completely denied the death of her father and the way it affected her, no ugliness or conflict was allowed to disturb the perfect surface of her work.

Segal notes (1956) that in order to create, a person must be stripped of her disguises, admit reality and become vulnerable to loss and death. She mentions Proust, according to whom it is only the lost past and the lost or dead object that can be transformed into a work of art. According to Proust, creativity is only possible when the loss has been acknowledged and the mourning experienced through depression. In order to integrate depression within the psyche and to be able to give it symbolic expression, the artist must acknowledge the death instinct, both in its aggressive and self destructive aspects and to accept the reality of death. Segal suggests that both beauty in the narrow sense of the word and ugliness must be present for a full aesthetic experience. She mentions two aspects which are "necessary to the excellence of tragedy - the unshrinkable expression of the full horror of the depressive fantasy and the achieving of an impression of wholeness and harmony" (p. 400). The sensitive spectator can feel, in every beautiful work the terrifying experience of depression and death.

Hans Sacks writes that our difficulty to bear the experience of beauty is due to its peaceful and eternal aspect which connects us with the experience of death. (as cited by Segal, 1956, p. 404). Stokes refers to this kind of beauty as "sublime" and he associates it with "contemplated terror and discomfort". Its connection with aggression and the enveloping aspect of its form makes the "sublime" very different from "beauty", defined as a "composure of parts" and "self sufficiency" (p. 215).

Despite her emphasis on the role of depression in creativity, Segal recognizes along with Ehrenzweig the importance of both the life and death instincts in the achievement of a powerful work of art; she refers to "beauty" as "the desire to unite into rhythms and wholes" in relation to the life instinct, and to ugliness as the expression of the death instinct. In her opinion, creative work must reflect in its fullest expression the opposition as well as the cooperation between the two (p. 404).

### **1.12 The Manic Aspect of Modern Art**

If many studies of creativity emphasize the depressive aspect, modern art is characterized by the opposite tendency: "In modern art, the ego rhythm (that should swing between focused gestalt and oceanic undifferentiation) is somewhat one-sided. The surface gestalt lies in ruins, splintered and unfocusable, the undifferentiated matrix of all art lies exposed, and forces the spectator to remain in the oceanic state of the empty stare when all differentiation is suspended." (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 121). According to Ehrenzweig, this happens because the depressive phase is left to a rudimentary level.

Ehrenzweig identifies manic envelopment with the experience of "oneness", of merger with the figure of a benevolent mother, and the depressive phase with detachment, the experience of "otherness". He cites Adrian Stokes, who pointed out to the near-mystic quality of much modern art which refers to the oceanic experience. Even though the experience of "oneness" and "otherness" are present to different degrees in modern art, we can still encounter much more often the oceanic experience of fusion than that of "otherness" which involves separation between the artist and his work. In the experience of "otherness" the work is perceived as an independent object situated at a certain distance from him.

Ehrenzweig (1967) explains this phenomenon by man's desire to find some order and unity in a world which appears as discontinuous and to give meaning to experiences perceived as transitory. In other words, the "return to the womb" has the role of counter-balancing the violence and the feeling of disintegration provoked by the cyclic attacks on the ego reflected "...in the conscious themes of much modern art, which are hardly ever love, rarely pity, more often death, devastation and the hatred of life and human condition." In this context, "as the ego sinks towards oceanic undifferentiation a new realm of the mind envelopes us; we are not engulfed by death, but are released from our separate individual existence. We enter the manic womb of rebirth, an oceanic existence outside time and space." (p. 121).

### **1.13 Creativity in Psychotherapy**

Although the term "creativity" has often been used to define artistic production, we can note that its phases can be applied as well to psychological creativity, to the way man copes with his everyday life. As Winnicott (1971)

suggests, "a separate study is needed of creativity as a feature of life and total living." (p. 64).

Psychotherapy can be seen as a creative work for the therapist as well as for the client. Ehrenzweig (1967) points out that the awakening of creativity is part of the therapeutic process: both patient and therapist have to accept the passivity and self-scattering which characterize creative work. In the "schizoid phase", the therapist's unconscious plays the motherly role of a containing womb in which he receives the patient's fragmented material. At this stage, he must refrain from his desire to re-articulate the scattered elements and to put them back into the client. By projecting half-differentiated instead of fully articulated material into the patient, he allows him to prepare a womb in his own unconscious at a later phase, when de-differentiation begins to replace immoderate splitting. The patient learns how to further de-differentiate his material, without ejecting or burying it. In this sense, passivity for both therapist and client is vital to the therapeutic work, for it allows the patient's ego to experience the oceanic level at first by letting his material sink in the therapist's unconsciousness womb without fear of being buried alive on the one hand, but without being fed at a fully articulated level on the other hand. "The fate of the dying god must be lived through without help. Man in creative work ultimately remains alone". (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 279). In this way, the therapist helps the patient to build a healthy phantasy life in his unconscious and to acquire a new sense of reality "in a true rebirth of his ego." (p. 278).

Ehrenzweig (1967) believes that the analyst should not carry the work of a creative dedifferentiation and re-integration (the second phase of creativity) to its full conclusion. Instead, he should stimulate it directly in the patient for it is he who must do the creative work himself, instead of serving as a passive recipient

for the finished product. Together with Ehrenzweig, Winnicott (1971) notes that the therapist should not try to organize too quickly the apparently unrelated thought sequences by assuming the existence of a significant thread (c.f. Marion Milner, 1957, p.p. 148-163). He must leave room for nonsense, for "organized nonsense is already a defence, just as organized chaos is a denial of chaos" (p. 65). The attempt to prematurely organize the material can steal the patient's creativity. According to Winnicott "psychotherapy is done in the overlap of the two play areas, that of the patient and that of the therapist." (p. 63). And playing is essential, for only through play can the patient become creative. The idea of relaxation in the therapeutic setting belongs to play and both therapist and patient have to be able to play if therapy is to take place.

### **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, creativity has been approached in terms of internal structure from the viewpoint of the theme of death and rebirth. The cited authors conclude that the incapacity to face death blocks the creative process.

According to Ehrenzweig (1967), the ego's constant need for self destruction is inherent to the basic rhythm of creativity and every creative individual must be aware of this to some degree. The fear of death breaks the ego's rhythm of dedifferentiation and is consequently destructive for the psychic life.

The theme of death and rebirth mirrors the processes of decomposition and reconstruction in the ego. In relation to creativity, death is associated with the experience of chaos and fragmentation which characterizes the first phase of the



process. In this context, acceptance of death means one's capacity to face the chaos without excessive anxiety, in order to be able, in the next phase, to plunge into one's unconscious and contact one's inner void. The oceanic experience which reflects the second phase of creativity is at the same time, an experience of death and of rebirth and represents, according to Ehrenzweig (1967), the minimum content of art. It is through the feeling of fusion with the benevolent mother - represented here by the work of art - that unconscious links are established between the scattered elements and that an unbroken pictorial space is formed. The integrative process taking place on the canvas is paralleled by a similar process on a psychological level.

The understanding of the internal structure of creativity aids us to understand the therapeutic role played by art making in the individual's psychological development and integration.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **DENIAL OF DEATH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

#### **2.1 The Fear of Death**

According to Becker, the fear of death is one of the most prominent characteristics of man. As a consequence, the main human activity is aimed toward avoiding the fatality of death, and toward its denial. This is the main thesis of Becker's book, "The Denial of Death" (1973) which has been used as the main theoretical source of this chapter.

In the terms of Norman O'Brown (1959), it is not the consciousness of death but the flight from death that distinguishes men from animals. "From the times of the earliest cavemen, who kept their dead alive by dyeing the bones red and burying them near the family hearth, down to the Hollywood funeral cult, the flight from death has been, as Unamuno said, the heart of all religion. Pyramids and skyscrapers - monuments more lasting than bronze - suggest how much of the world's 'economic' activity also is really a flight from death." (p. 101).

But, says Becker, as life and death are related in a dialectical unity, the human being is characterized in fact by two great fears that other animals are protected from: the fear of life and the fear of death. This insight is the result of Freud's great broadening of perspective at the end of his life when he came to realize that the child is not bothered so much by his inner drives, but rather by the nature of human existence. Freud discussed "human perplexity and helplessness in the face of nature's dreaded forces" and about "our anxiety in the face of life's dangers" and "the great necessities of fate against there is no remedy" (as cited by

Becker, 1973, p. 52). Near the end of Freud's life, his point of view became existential: he saw anxiety as a reaction to man's feeling of helplessness, abandonment and fate.

## **2.2 The Repression of Death**

The consequence of the fear of death is the repression of death. "If death is a part of life, if there is a death instinct as well as a life (or sexual) instinct, man is in flight from his own death just as he is in flight from his own sexuality. If death is part of life, man represses his own death just as he represses his own life." (Brown, 1972, p. 101).

In Rank and Brown's point of view (as cited by Becker, 1973), repression is due to man's attempt to avoid death, rather than to the fact that man is seeking only sexuality, pleasure and expansiveness, as Freud thought. In this perspective, the consciousness of death becomes the primary repression, not sexuality. With a slight twist to the psychoanalytic theory, its crucial concept becomes the repression of death as a consequence of man's "creatureliness". As Rank writes, "Man is literally split in two - he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that it sticks out of nature with a towering majesty and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and durably to rot and disappear forever." (cited by Becker, 1973, p. 26).

## **2.3 Anality as Repression of Death**

Man's paradoxical nature - the fact that he is half symbolic and half animal - and his difficulty to accept it as such, has also been emphasized by Brown (1953)

in his study of anality, which he regarded as a reflection of physical determinism, decay and death.

Becker (1972) gives an example derived from Brown's study of anality in Jonathan Swift's work which illustrates man's perplexity "...at the sheer nonsense of creation: to fashion the sublime miracle of the human face...and to combine it with an anus who shits!" An adoring lover living with the illusion that the woman of his dreams "...is all head and wings, with no bottom to betray it...", expresses his disappointment in those lines:

"Nor wonder how I lost my wits;

Oh! Caelia, Caelia, Caelia shits!"

Following Brown, Becker (1972, p. 33) observed that the problems related to anality arise in childhood, when the child discovers that the body, with his strange and repulsive products, have ascendancy over him by its demands and its needs. "With anal play the child is already becoming a philosopher of the human condition. But like all philosophers he is still bound by it, and his main task in life becomes the denial of what the anus represents: that in fact, he is nothing but body so far as nature is concerned." (p. 31). When someone is said to have an "anal character" it means that he is trying very hard to protect himself against accidents and death and that he uses the symbols of culture in order to triumph over his biological determinism. From Brown's studies of anality, Becker (1973) concludes that eventually all cultural products and the whole of man's creative life are attempts to deny the human condition.

## **2.4 Fixation to the Past as Repression of Death**

According to Brown (1973), "repression of death" and "fixation to the past" are two concepts held together by the refusal to grow old and to reach the maturity which is the normal goal of one's life. He argues that according to the psychoanalytic theories of neurosis, life and death seem to co-exist harmoniously at an organic level and that at a human level, the dialectic unity between life and death instincts is disrupted at a human level by repression. Due to man's need to protect himself and his image, the two instincts now become two opposite principles at war with each other.

If, at an organic level, the compulsion to repeat and the nirvana principle correspond to the claims of the instincts for complete satisfaction, at the human level, they become opposed to the pleasure principle and are associated with the death instinct. As the balance between tension and its discharge has been broken by repression, repetition becomes part of a dialectic directed towards the future while aiming to recover the past. This contradiction causes a fixation to the traumatic experiences of the past and a tendency to inflict pain on oneself. The necessity to become replaces the desire to simply be, and man becomes a "historical animal" anxiously trying to recover a lost past (Brown, 1953). Fixation to the past can also be explained as man's fear of separation from the protective mother, which is ultimately responsible for repression and neurosis. In his analysis of organic life, Freud proved that it is through separation that one acquires his individuality and ensures his death. Eros, which is identified with sexuality, aims at unification and the preservation of the species, while Thanatos aims at separation. Freud's theory emphasized the dialectic between unification or interdependence - which supports that immortal life of species and the mortal life

of the individual - and separation or independence - which gives man individuality and death. Brown conclude that if man is the organism which represses its death, then he is also the one who represses his individuality (1953).

At a biological level, the death instinct affirms life by aiming at death: "what has become perfect, all that is ripe - wants to die" writes Nietzsche (cited by Brown, 1953, p.107). At a human level, as man repressed the death instinct, it cannot affirm either life or death anymore; life also becomes repressed and it cannot affirm death, and consequently, it must run away from it.

### **2.5 The Oedipal Project as Denial of Death**

Norman O. Brown (1953) redefined the Oedipus complex as the "Oedipus project". The Oedipus complex focuses on the sexual problem of lust and competition with the father, while the Oedipus project emphasizes the will of becoming God, or in Spinoza's formula, *causa-sui*. This new definition sums up, according to Becker (1972) the main problem of the child's life, whether he will be only an accessory of others and a passive object of fate, or whether he will come to depend upon himself. Therefore, the Oedipus project represents the child's desire to win over death by becoming the father of himself, his own center and the sustainer of his own life. In Brown's perspective, the sexual aspect becomes secondary, "a hypercatexis induced by the fantasies of human narcissism in its flight from death." (Brown, as cited by Becker, 1972, p. 36).

Even if the child has no knowledge of death before the age of three or five, he has the natural organismic fear of annihilation, which we call anxiety. This can be provoked by hunger, by the mother's absence, by discomfort, frustrations or fear

of abandonment. From the moment of his birth, the child attempts to fortify himself against vulnerability and he tries to repress his awareness of death and of his inability to stand alone. Psychoanalysis showed that the early experience of the child consists essentially in his attempt to deny his lack of power and his fear of losing support. (Becker, 1972). In order to avoid death and despair, the child needs to ignore fear and to build the defenses which will allow him to feel that he is in control over his life and death. But he does so at the expense of the awe and the ecstasy that he has to live behind. (Becker, 1972).

## **2.6 The Vital Lie as Denial of Death**

Automatic and unconscious character defenses represent a basic dishonesty about oneself and one's human condition; they create what Ferenczi and Brown call the "vital lie". Man is driven toward those things that support the fundamental lie of character, says Becker (1972), which "like a comfortable web keeps a person buoyed up and ignorant of himself and of the fact that he does not rest on his own center." (p. 55). Those things can be a god, a stronger person, some kind of passion or a dedication to an absorbing activity. In reality, we are given our meanings from the outside world, as we are also given a "self" and a "superego". We are not aware of most of our inner world and we do not know why we are born, what we are doing in the world and why we have to die (Becker, 1972). Therefore a person's character, concludes Becker, is a defense against despair and the real nature of the world which he or she builds up in order to avoid insanity. Freudian psychology teaches us that repression is a normal self protection and a creative self-restriction. The lie or armor of character is so vital to us that to destroy it means to risk death and madness. "If character is a neurotic defense against despair and you shed that defense, you admit the full flood of despair, the

full realization of the true human condition, what men are really afraid of, what they struggle against, and are driven toward and against from." (Becker, 1973, p. 57). In the context of the vital necessity of the lie of character, the essence of normality is the refusal of reality, says Becker.

## **2.7 Neurosis as Fear of Death**

Becker uses the term "neurotic" for the individual who has difficulties to live with the truth of existence. But, in Becker's sense, everybody is neurotic to some extent, for everyone has difficulties with the truth of existence.

I am aware that neurosis is such a wide spread problem today that it has been excluded from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). However, for purposes of understanding the theoretical material presented in this chapter, I will use the term according to the sense given to it by Becker.

According to Becker (1973), neurosis becomes a clinical problem only when it produces a crippling symptom or a too constricting lifestyle. Becker defines neurosis as any life style that begins to constrict too much, which prevents free forward momentum and the choices and growth that a person may want or need. In this case, one's life becomes so safe that it becomes poisoning.

The neurotic does not want to take risks. He does not want to age, to become sick or to be hurt in some way. It is as if he does not want to live his animal, biological side, as if he wanted to cheat nature. Instead of living his experience biologically, he makes it up in his mind, at a symbolic level. Thus, he



replaces the real world of experience and its discontinuities by the inner magical world of the self. According to Becker, neurosis emphasizes the dualistic aspect of man, half symbolic, half animal (and we all experience life at a symbolic level to some extent). The neurotic believes that his feeling of vulnerability in the face of the terrors of life and death is due to his badness or inferiority and he strives to become bigger and stronger; he works out his need for perfection in the symptom.

Safety in the face of the real terror of the creature becomes a problem, for his life becomes devoid of any modicum of heroism. His "safe heroics" are choking him, but the giving up of the symptom would mean to the neurotic, the release of the anguish that he is trying to deny and overcome. Becker (1973) regards man's creation of things of lasting worth and meaning as an attempt to justify himself as an object of primary value in the universe. He tries to be a hero - which is natural for man - as a reflex to the terror of death and decay. We admire most the courage to face death and the hero myth moves us deeply, says Becker (1973) because we have doubts about how courageous we would be.

In the past, the mythic hero was one who went through terrifying ordeals and came back alive from the realm of death. Today, with the disappearance of the sacred dimension and interior values, man's desire to be heroic is given expression on a materialistic level. He desires a larger car, the best children and wants to build the highest buildings. In Becker's view (1973), society today is a codified hero system, which creates things in order to defy death. If the contemporary culture does not provide a place in which one can express heroics, it does not mean that the desire itself disappears; man continues to want to earn immortality on the basis of his unique qualities. For the neurotic, it is the symptom which becomes the stage for performance and heroism.

## **2.8 The Neurotic as "Artiste Manqué"**

We say of an individual that he is "well adjusted" when he has the capacity to partialize the world for comfortable action. Not to be able to partialize makes one susceptible to take in the world as a total problem, and this is the case of the neurotic (Becker, 1973). The neurotic is not able to partialize the world and takes it in as a total problem, says Becker. But the more one takes in the world as a problem, the more inferior or "bad" one will feel inside. Then he tries to work out his badness by striving for perfection. The neurotic is an individual who cannot create, an "artiste manqué" as Rank calls him. It is as though one were to take the whole world and fuse it into a single object or a single fear which is a creative dynamic in itself, but, as Rank puts it, it is creativity gone astray which has become confused (Becker, 1973).

As the neurotic isolates himself from others, he is separated out of the common pool of shared meanings. He can neither engage freely in other's partialization of the world, for the illusions that others share seem unreal to him, nor is he able to create new illusions on his own due to his lack of creativity.

The neurotic is confronted by a dilemma. On the one hand, he cannot accept his vulnerability in the face of the world he is taking in or the isolation due to his own individuality and he excessively criticizes himself for not being big and strong enough. On the other hand, he still needs to be a hero. But as he cannot produce a creative work which would express his unique qualities and his longing for perfection, he succeeds in glorifying himself only in fantasy. The neurotic

feels the unreality of his self-glorification in his symbolic inner world and this realization makes his feelings of unworthiness and inferiority even more acute.

As said previously, the symptom represents the creative work of the neurotic in which he tries to work out his "badness". The neurotic strives to feel more alive by avoiding death, but in doing so, he annihilates such an important part of himself and of his life that he obtains the opposite result: he becomes practically dead.

## **2.9 Creativity as a Solution to Neurosis**

Becker sees creativity as a solution to neurosis: "either you eat up yourself and others around you, trying for perfection; or you objectify that imperfection in a work in which then [you] unleash your creative powers." (p. 185). He believes that "some kind of objective creativity is the only answer to the problem of life". (p. 185).

Through creativity, man can satisfy his dualistic nature, by responding on the one hand, to the claims of nature who asks of him to act as a biological being who vividly plunges into the world, and, on the other hand, he fulfills his symbolic nature, by creating new meanings as a result of his plunging into the world on his own symbolic terms.

Becker (1973) uses the artist as an example of someone who also takes in the world as a total problem and is not able to partialize it; in this sense, he too is a neurotic. But the artist differs from the "normal" neurotic in regard to his capacity to transform his world at a symbolic level and give it a personal meaning. The

artist does not feel oppressed by the world he takes in, for he reworks it in his own personality and recreates it in a work of art. "Both the artist and the neurotic bite off more than they can chew, but the artist spews it back out again, and chews it over in an objectified way, as an external, active work project. The neurotic cannot marshal this creative response embodied in a specific work and so he chokes on his introversion. The artist has similar large scale introversions, but he uses them as material." (Becker, 1973, p. 184).

Similar to the neurotic, the artist may not or cannot consider society's values as his own, and like him, he also feels his isolation and his individuality. The world as a whole is problematic to the artist and he feels the urge to give it personal meaning through his work, which becomes the answer to his painful isolation and the expression of his heroism. His unique qualities expressed in his work give him personal immortality.

The artist gains his immortality by giving his objects an eternal life in his work. Since his objects represent his internal world, the artist himself will no longer be afraid of death. (Hanna Segal, 1956). The eternal aspect of a great work of art, observed Segal (1956) is conferred by a lesser degree of denial of death than in any other human activity, and by an acceptance of the death instinct which is subdued by the artist to the needs of the life instinct and of creativity.

### **2.10 Mental Illness: A Problem of Courage**

The normality or "normal neurosis" is seen by Becker as the middle of a continuum to the extremes of which we find schizophrenia at the one end and depressive psychosis at the other. In the middle, says Becker (1973), we find the

"culturally normal man". He does not stand up for his own meanings because they represent too much danger and exposure.

At the end of the continuum representing schizophrenia, break down occurs because of "too much possibility". At the other end, depressive psychosis is due to "too little possibility".

Following Adler, Becker (1973) says that mental illness is a problem of courage: the person cannot assume responsibility for his life and is very fearful of both life and death. From this perspective, the theory of mental illness becomes, in Becker's version, a theory about the failures of heroism, or about the failures of the death transcendence.

Schizophrenia and depression as presented by Becker again point to man's dualism as a symbolic animal. If schizophrenia is an attempt by the symbolic self to deny the limitations of the finite body, depression represents the opposite tendency, which means exaggerated limitation by the body and not enough freedom of inner symbolic possibility.

### **2.11 Schizophrenia: Too Much Possibility**

Schizophrenia is seen by Becker as a split of self and body. The illness exaggerates the symbolic half of human dualism, at the expense of the other. The individual who overvalues the powers of the symbolic self is pulled out of balance. The creativity that stems from within the symbolic self cannot be contained by the body and the person is torn apart. It is as if his symbolic awareness and his inner fantasies are free floating for they are not contained in the secure vessel of a solid

body. Instead, the schizophrenic relies on a hypermagnification of mental processes to try to be a hero. He is cut from the generous emotions housed in a secure body-setting. Biologically, the schizophrenic is unable to automatically respond to social meanings, but on the other hand, he cannot fashion an appropriate response because he is unable to organize his creative skills in a suitable manner. As a result, the schizophrenic feels terrorized by the world.

### **2.12 Depression: Too Little Possibility**

At the other end of the continuum we find depressive psychosis. If the schizophrenic is not wholly integrated into his world, the depressive is too solidly anchored into his own.

Along with Adler, Becker (1973) sees depression as a problem of loss of courage. Depression develops in people who are afraid to live and who consequently are afraid to die. The depressed person imposed on his life a systematic restriction; he seems to be caught in the confined space of his daily duties, in a web of demands of others and of obligations from which he feels that it is impossible to free himself, even if they no longer give him a sense of self-esteem, of value and of heroism. The depressive gives up any appearance of independent development: he accomplishes less and less by himself and the less he does, the less he feels like doing. This self-perpetuating cycle continues to lower his self-esteem.

According to Becker (1973), the depressed person uses guilt to keep his situation unchanging. He prefers guilt to the burden of freedom and responsibility; it is true that he loses a part of his life but at least, he avoids death, or so he

believes. In order to benefit from the protection of others, he sacrifices his own life.

### 2.13 Psychosis and Creativity

Becker said that schizophrenia reveals the nature of creativity, in the sense that the individual who is not programmed in the cultural *causa-sui* project is obliged to invent his own meanings. But the drama of the schizophrenic is that he is not able to create new meanings, for he does not inhabit his own body.

Marion Milner believes that the psychotic cannot create new meanings because of his ego rigidity. She suggests that real self-destruction and psychosis may perhaps be a distorted and frustrated form of the creative process (as cited by Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 177).

We have seen with Ehrenzweig that the psychotic person has access only to the first phase of creativity which evokes self-destruction and fragmentation. He fails to create a womb in his unconscious which could hold his fragmented material, due to his fear of dedifferentiation, which he equates with death.

Ehrenzweig (1967) suggests that the psychotic can be helped to recover his lost creativity in therapy: "If psychosis is creativity 'gone wrong', treatment might have to be concerned with setting into motion the mutilated creative process." (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 276). He believes that in the case of psychosis, highly articulate interpretations in therapy may only invite more violent fragmentation, for those interpretations appeal only to the rational surface level of thinking. The psychotic has to be helped to let go of his surface imagery and connect with his

unconscious. This is why interpretations should be given in a way that connects directly with less differentiated modes of thinking, so that the work of creative dedifferentiation is stimulated directly in the patient.

#### **2.14 The Fallacy of the Authentic Self**

Becker cites Perls who talked about the possibility for man to recover his "authentic self" by getting rid of a "four layers neurotic shield", and who suggested that by doing so, man can reach psychological rebirth. The neurotic shield described by Perls has a four layers structure: the first and the second layers reflect our everyday behaviours; the third represents the impasse that covers our feeling of being empty and lost. The fourth layer represents the fear of death and Perls calls it the layer of our "authentic self", in which we are without disguise and without defenses. This layer contains our basic animal anxieties. To get to this layer, suggests Perls, much of us has to die, and this is the painful, all-or-nothing process of psychological rebirth. (Perls as cited by Becker, 1973, p. 58).

Referring to Perls' theory of the four layers neurotic shield, Becker (1973) comments that this kind of psychological rebirth means for man "to be subjected, for the first time to the terrifying paradox of the human condition, since one must be born not as a god, but as a man, or as a god-worm, or a god who shits" (p. 58). To enjoy one's "full humanness", as Maslow urges us along with others, means primary mis-adjustment to the world. The person gives up something restricting and illusory only to come face to face with something even more awful: genuine despair. It is as if giving up defenses "achieves the very result that the child has painfully built his character over the years in order to avoid: it makes routine, automatic, secure, self confident activity impossible. It places a trembling animal



at the mercy of the entire cosmos and the problem of the meaning of it. This view of character is not one put forth by morbid existentialism, but instead represents the now agreed merger of Freudian and post-Freudian psychology." (p. 60).

Man has no choice but to shrink from being fully alive, says Becker (1973). For "to be wholly unrepressed, to live in full bodily and psychic expressiveness, it can only mean to be reborn in madness." (p. 66).

### **2.15 The Necessity of Illusion**

According to Becker (1973), a certain degree of illusion is necessary for man in order to live creatively and the cultural *causa-sui* contains a considerable amount of illusion. He considers that a humanly created meaning can be the solution to neurosis. He defines cultural illusion as the kind of "reality" that man can create, dramatize and nourish his symbolic dimension with an essential place of self-justification and heroism. To lose it means to lose one's life. For Becker, illusion means creative play. If, at a basic level, neurosis can be looked at as a problem of character, at a cultural level, neurosis can be defined as a problem of lack of illusion or creative play. Following the tradition of thought of Huizinga, Pieper and Harvey Cox, Becker considers that "the only secure truth men have is that which they themselves create and dramatize." (p. 201) In this sense, "to live is to play at the meaning of life." (p. 201). This tradition of thought teaches us that "childlike foolishness is the calling of mature men" (p. 202). Rank describes the cure for neurosis as the satisfaction of man's "need for legitimate foolishness" (p. 202). But, asks Becker, what is the most legitimate foolishness? He considers that the answer to this question would be given in terms of how much freedom, dignity

and hope a given illusion provides. These three terms contain the problem of neurosis and suggest a way of turning it into creative living.

### **2.16 The Question of Meaning as Collectively Created Illusion**

When he talks about illusion as a necessity in man's life, Becker (1973) refers to a collective cultural illusion rather than an individual one. He considers that neurosis became such a widespread problem today because of the disappearance of some kind of collective ideology in which the modern individual can perform his living drama.

Instead, modern man became the victim of his individualism, his scientific discoveries, and of his analytical strength. He paid by neurosis and mental illness the disappearance of the sacred dimension in his life. He banished the ideas of "soul" and "god" and remained alone, thrown back on his own resources. "The characteristic of the modern mind is the banishment of mystery, of naive belief, of simple minded hope. We put the accent on the visible, the clear, the cause-and-effect relation, the logical." "In his attempt to create his own world from within himself, man lives now in complete isolation, in disharmony with the rest of nature. He blows himself larger than his true size, he refuses to recognize his cosmic dependence." (Becker, 1973, p. 200).

The function of *causa-sui* is to hide man's basic creatureliness and "his hopeless lack of genuine centering on his own energies to assume the victory of his life" (Becker, 1973, p. 200). Becker points out that it is from this centering on one's own ego that comes the terror of being alone and unsupported in the world. Basing his statements on Rank and Kierkegaard's theories, he suggests that

necessity of some form of faith or religion is necessary as a means to satisfy man's need to transcend his own being and to reach out toward a larger reality. This would mean for man the abandonment of the *causa-sui* project, the acceptance of the fact that there is no strength within oneself, no power to bear the overwhelming experiences of life.

This also means that man has to admit that support has to come from outside oneself, and that justification from one's life has to come totally from some self-transcendent web in which one consents to be suspended "as a child in its hammock-cradle, glaze eyed in helpless, dependent admiration of the cooing mother." (Becker, 1973, p.107).

Following Rank and Kierkegaard, Becker asserts that as man is fundamentally a religious being, he can conquer death and give meaning to his life only by surrendering to some reality which surpasses his individual life, to some god or to the largeness of nature. Without wanting to make the apology of religion - for he is aware that its traditional and institutionalized forms do not correspond to the needs of modern man, Becker (1973) agrees with the opinion of Rank and Kierkegaard that psychology has to give way "to a world view that absorbs the individual's conflicts and guilt and offers him the possibility for some kind of "heroic apotheosis". Man cannot endure his own littleness unless he can translate it into meaningfulness of the largest possible level." (p. 196).

Becker (1973) definitely agrees with both Rank and Kierkegaard who arrived at the conclusion that psychology has to give way to religion. He justifies his opinion by the fact that psychology narrowed down man's existential problems to his early conditioning and banished the word "soul" from its vocabulary

replacing it by "self", and then studied how the self developed in the child's early relationship with his mother. "But when you narrow down the soul to the self and the self to the early conditioning of the child, you have the individual man and you are stuck with him." (p. 192). According to Becker, the early conditioning is only part of the problem, for the *causa-sui* is aimed at the whole of nature and not only at the early objects. In his opinion, by limiting the cause for personal unhappiness to the early conditioning, psychology remains stuck with the individual being without having found any satisfying answer to his ontological problems. For Becker, the general cause for personal badness, guilt and inferiority is the natural world and the person's relation to it as a symbolic animal who strives to find a secure place in it. "All the analysis in the world does not allow the person to find out who he is and why he is here on earth, why he has to die and how he can make his life a triumph." (p. 193).

In the same sense, Viktor Frankl (1978, p. 19) writes:

Indeed, if traditional psychotherapy squarely faces the issue of meaning and purpose at all - that is, if it takes meaning and purpose at face value rather than reducing them to mere false values, as by deducing them from "defense mechanisms" or reaction formation, it does so in the vein of a recommendation that you just get rid of your castration fears, and you will be happy, you will actualize yourself and your own potentialities, and you will become what you were meant to be. In other words, meaning will come to you by itself. Doesn't it sound somewhat like, seek ye first the kingdom of Freud and Skinner, and all these things will be added unto you? But it did not work that way. Rather, it turned out that, if a neurosis could be removed, more often than not when it was removed a vacuum was left.

## SUMMARY

In the second chapter, fear of death is regarded as a prominent feature of mankind, leading to denial of death, repression and character defenses. Brown (1956) believes that repression of death is due to man's refusal to grow old: he remains fixated to the past, unable to separate from the protective mother, while unceasingly trying to recover his past in the future. This dynamic prevents him from developing his own individuality and reaching maturity.

According to post-Freudian thought, repression of death is a consequence of man's dualistic nature which is half animal and half symbolic. As man's "creatureliness" represents physical determinism, decay and death, he unconsciously tries to avoid it and live to a lesser or greater degree at a symbolic level. Neurosis, which became the token of normality, as well as mental illness, results from man's denial of death.

By repressing death, man also represses his life. The *causa-sui* project is one's attempt to convince oneself that he can stand alone and depend upon himself. He denies his real situation, which is his lack of centering on his own energies, his aloneness and anxiety in face of life, by creating the "vital lie of character", a basic dishonesty about oneself and one's human condition.

The "fantasy of *causa-sui*" is an individual's way of deceiving oneself. Becker (1972) suggests an alternative to it, which is a collectively created illusion reflected by culture and religion. He suggests that a certain amount of illusion is necessary to human life. Illusion in the collective sense of the word is defined by Becker as a reality created by men, a reality that they can live and dramatize and

through which they can nourish their symbolic dimension. He sees illusion as a creative way of giving meaning to life and as a solution to the widespread problem of neurosis.

Becker is aware that institutionalized religion cannot continue to play an important role in modern man's life. Neither can traditional psychology, with its notions of the "self" and the early conditioning of the child. Both have not succeeded in answering man's ontological questions about the meaning of life and death.

Along with with Rank and Kierkegaard, he believes that man is fundamentally a religious being and as such, he feels the necessity to transcend his human condition by reaching out to some reality which is much larger than his individual world. Without clearly defining what religion would mean today, he suggests, however, that psychology has to give way to religion. Becker seems to believe that religion and psychology are mutually exclusive.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SOUL, DEATH AND CREATIVITY**

#### **3.1 Mythology as Religion in Archetypal Psychology**

In the first two chapters the theme of death has been considered from the viewpoint of the ego psychology. In the third chapter, the same subject will be approached through Hillman's depth psychology, that is, from the point of view of the soul.

Hillman's re-visioning of psychology from a mythological and archetypal perspective restores the place of the soul in human existence and equates "soul-making" to giving meaning to one's life. He suggests that the notion of "soul" brings together psychology and religion. By promoting a psychological approach that is theistic but still different from religion, he answers, in my opinion, to Becker's dissatisfaction with regard to the failure of psychology to feed man's religious nature and his need for experiences which transcend the ego. Hillman (1972) believes that today's depth psychology plays the role that religion used to play in the past, that is, connecting the individual with soul and death. In his psychology the notions of pathology and death are invested with special meaning and are considered as the indispensable ingredients of soul-making. In Hillman's perspective, enemies to be conquered become the soul's allies.

Along with Becker, Hillman (1972) notices that man responded to the breakdown of the official religious systems by replacing the word "soul" with the "self" or the "ego". "We personalized the soul, pressing it all into the human being...the last stage of this process is shrinking soul to its single and narrowest space, the ego, and thereby swelling the 'I' into the inflation called 'ego

psychology'." (p. 48). Hillman agrees with Becker that traditional religion no longer works today and therefore it cannot continue to contain our pathologies. On the other hand, the idea of secular psychology becomes impossible, for it does not take the soul into account. He believes that depth psychology is the answer to this dilemma because it brings psychology and religion together. Hillman has coined the term "archetypal psychology" which reflects his specific approach to depth psychology.

Archetypal psychology approaches the fundamental questions of psychology by means of the imagination. Following Jung's statement that the psyche is image, Hillman sees images as the basic nature of the soul. From the point of view of the soul, every event of life and every dream is seen as myth and poetry.

In archetypal psychology, religion takes the form of mythology. If in religious practice gods are approached through prayer, ritual and sacrifice, in Hillman's approach they are imagined. The archetypes, which Jung used to call "the little people" become in Hillman's writings, "the Gods in our souls". They are the deepest patterns of our psychic functioning and they influence the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us. Their collective dimension connects our soul with that of other human beings.

Along with Kierkegaard, Rank and Becker, Hillman believes that man's need for experiences which transcend the individual ego has to be fed through a psychological approach which includes a religious dimension. This function can be fulfilled, according to him, by the polytheistic dimension of archetypal psychology; which is able to welcome the ambiguity of meanings and the multiple



aspects inherent in each event and in each moment. Greek mythology as a polytheistic religion recognizes the mythical nature of the soul, its need for mystery and its constant urge out of life and towards images. The religious or psychological monotheism which does not recognize this aspect of the soul builds "...a strong man of frail soul trembling in the valley of existential dread." (Hillman, 1972, p. 209). "By refusing the 'as-if' frailty of our lives...we locate the Gods within us or believe we make them up as projections of human needs. We presume human needs to be literalisms of biology, economics and society rather than the psyche's perpetual insistence on imagining." (Hillman, 1972, p. 209).

It is according to the condition of our souls that we see the world and the gods as dead or alive. A person who believes the gods to be only symbolic projections has lost his capacity to imagine, says Hillman (1972). In his opinion, divinity is not to be found "up at the peaks" but in the "swamps of our funk, in the sludge of depression and anxiety." (p. 66). Unlike Becker, who urges us to look up to infinity and to expand at the cosmic level, Hillman suggests to descend into the darkness of the soul. Whether Becker sees in spiritual expansion the possibility to appease anxiety and to conquer death through "cosmic heroism", Hillman points out to the necessity to meet and cultivate death in the soul as a richness, as a way of giving meaning to our lives.

In contrast to the soul, whose language is "digestion, a vegetable love, depression into still waters" (Hillman, 1972, p. 94), the spirit is described as quick, in vertical ascent, an active masculine principle whose images burn with light. If swiftness is characteristic to the spirit, slowness reflects the deepening of the psychological space required by soul-making.

### **3.2 Belief in Images as Psychological Faith**

In his discussion about religion, Becker (1973) raises the question of faith as a solution to anxiety and fear of death. He defines faith as man's expansion into the "non-logical, the truly fantastic" (p. 201). As it has been mentioned before, in Becker's frame of reference, faith is only possible in connection to a collective ideology which allows the playing of the drama of life and makes fantasy appear as real.

For Hillman (1972) as well, faith is essential in order to give meaning to one's existence. But for him, faith is a psychological manifestation of one's belief in images, which can bring back to life the gods of one's soul. Following Jung, Hillman (1972) considers images as the privileged mode of access to the knowledge of soul. As he puts it, every single feeling or observation occurs as a psychic event by first forming a "fantasy-image". He suggests that images are the means by which one can transcend one's personal life, in this way satisfying the religious concerns of the soul. "Their increasing vivification gives one an increasing conviction of having, and then of being, an interior reality of deep significance transcending one's personal life." (p. 50). "Trust in the imaginal and trust in soul go hand in hand." (Hillman, 1972, p. 51).

When imagination is not part of one's life, one has the feeling of being trapped in the reality and in the ego's literalizations. One lacks the confidence which would allow him to fantasize in regard to one's problems. "Lack of psychological faith is compensated by exaggerated personalizing, a fantastic need for people (and a need for fantastic people) of which transference is only one manifestation." (p. 51). Whether imagination allows the gods of our soul to come

alive, its absence devoids them of life. Their archetypal qualities are then projected outside onto concrete individuals with whom our psyche becomes fascinated and to whom we desperately cling. As they become the carriers of our soul's qualities, in their absence we suffer from unbearable loneliness and despair.

### **3.3 Soul and Death**

Archetypal psychology does not favour the ego, but deals with the soul, and its subject is the examination of soul in relation to death. When he discusses the soul, Hillman refers to a "reflective perspective" rather than to a tangible presence or substance. The soul can be envisioned as a middle ground between ourselves and the events of our lives. Its role is to transform events into felt experiences.

The soul is the dimension of our being which makes meaning possible and gives a sense of purpose to our existence. Meaning is made possible by the special connection between soul and death. When he talks about death, Hillman (1972) means "...not our dying out of life or denying life, not literal death at all, but the movement of each event out of its defensive identities with life." (p. 208). In mythological terms, the relationship of the soul with dream, fantasy and image is seen as its connection with the realm of death.

Hillman points out that connecting with death is an innate urge of our psyche. Again, he talks about metaphorical death as a reality of the soul. He notices that when an individual emphasizes the physical body at the expense of the soul, the physical life rather than the psychic life, the subtle reality of metaphorical death becomes difficult to grasp. The person then becomes concerned with the fear of dying. Hillman (1972) believes that the kind of death we speak of in our

culture is a fantasy of the ego, and the fear of dying is the ego's concern rather than the soul's concern. According to him, organic death has absolute power over life when it has not been admitted in the midst of our life. The psychic death experienced by the soul has a different flavour; it is part of our organic life and is accepted as a natural existential condition. "To be human is to be soul-focused, which in turn means to be death-focused...what is human is frail, subject to death. To be human is to be reminded of death and have a perspective informed by death." (p.297).

### **3.4 Hades, the Hidden God**

In Greek mythology, Hades, god of the Underworld, symbolizes death. The movement of soul-making, writes Hillman (1972), is a vertical movement downward and inward into the realm of Hades. Entering his realm means making a transition from the material to the psychic world, from our obsession and fear of physical death to a metaphorical perspective on death. From an archetypal point of view, all movements toward Hades - whether they are reflected in fantasies of decay, in images of sickness in dreams, in repetitive compulsions or in suicidal impulses - are seen as movements of the soul toward a more psychological perspective. From the soul's point of view, Hades represents a hidden reality that holds things in their actual form. Each soul process ends up in the realm of Hades where the psyche finds permanence and rest.

### **3.5 Persephone's Ravishment as a Metaphor of Soul's Initiation into Death**

Persephone's ravishment by Hades is seen by Hillman (1972) as a reflection of the soul's movement from manic defense against Hades to love for him, as a metaphor of its initiation into death. The soul of each of us, says Hillman, has once been, like Persephone, an innocent young girl playing serenely in a field of flowers. One day, during a moment of crisis, a suicidal despair or an invisible depression, our soul has been dragged and pulled down by Hades, and given the perspective of death. But the soul's ravishment by Hades does not happen only in those very dramatic moments; it continues in various forms in each occurrence of our daily life, as a basic pattern of psychodynamics, and is invisibly and continuously changing our perspective of the human world.

The myth of Hades' rape of Persephone as an innocent soul evokes a basic necessity of our psychic life. This is why, suggests Hillman (1972), this tale is central to the main Greek mystery cult of transformation.

### **3.6 Death as a Symbol of Transformation**

In his book "Life Against Death", Norman O. Brown (1956) pointed out that it is only through the acceptance of death that the process of individuation becomes possible. In the same sense, Hillman (1964) considers that the death experience is required in order to allow the individual to separate from the collective flow of experience and to discover his own individuality. By standing against the collective stream of life, he becomes opposite to it, and therefore temporarily identified with death.

Jung discovered that during the process of individuation, death does not necessarily appear in the psyche under the form of death per se, as extinction, negation, and endings, but it can also occur as symbols of birth and growth, and transitions of time and place and so on. Most of all, Hillman believes the symbol of death is the most effective because it provokes intense emotions and requires a vital response of the whole being which makes transformation possible.

In analysis a person finds death all about him, especially in dreams. There he cuts up the old order with knives, burns it and buries it. Buildings crumble; there is rot, worms or fire in the walls...Parts of his body disintegrate; the surgeon, the gardener, and the executioner come for dismemberment...There is death by air, by fire, by water, and by burial in the earth...Or he is caught in a net or a web. He witnesses the death of all the carriers of no longer viable ways of adaptation, as favorites of childhood, world heroes, even as beloved poets and plants and trees. As old relationships fade in daily life there are departures and he loses habitual ways of behaving, he finds himself a hermit in a cave, by a stagnant pool, in the desert thirsting, at the abyss edge, or in a far island...Each time that one experiences these images and a new turn of suffering begins, a piece of life is being given over and we go through loss, mourning and grief. With it comes loneliness and vacuum. Each time something has come to a stop. (Hillman, 1964, p. 75).

A crisis situation is always a death experience. The individual can experience it in various ways, through depression, collapse, isolation, failure, psychosis, disassociation, panic, suicide, etc. It does not matter if those experiences are symbolic or concrete, provided that they create in the soul the appropriate mood needed for transformation (Hillman, 1964).

### **3.7 The Suicidal Impulse as Transformation Drive**

When the soul feels its urge for transformation it "...insists blindly and passionately on its intention. It will not be dissuaded, it will have its death really, actually, now." (Hillman, 1964, p. 87). It is important to know that when people experience a suicidal impulse - which is basically a transformative drive - any resistance for the sake of prevention reinforces the urge and makes concrete death appear more fascinating.

Hillman sees suicide as a body-soul opposition. The person feels caught in the bodily trap and wants to destroy it in order to free himself. The attack upon the body is his attempt to destroy the physical and emotional basis of ego-consciousness, to dissolve everything that represents the person's "I". Suicide represents a struggle between opposites, not only between body and soul, but also between activity and passivity, here and beyond, outer and inner, and matter and spirit. All those opposites eventually come to symbolize the struggle between life and death.

Initially, the suicide impulse represents one's desire to change one's life; but the only way the person believes he can put an end to this impulse is to destroy the body. This way of approaching suicide changes the focus from psychology to ontology: "The movement towards a complete stop, towards that fulfillment in stasis where all processes cease, is an attempt to enter another level of reality, to move from becoming to being. To put an end to oneself means to come to one's end, to find the end or limit of what one is in order to arrive at what one is not-yet ...suicide is the attempt to move from one realm to another by force through death." (Hillman, 1964, p. 68).

Since suicide impulses release the most profound fantasies of the soul, we need to look for the mythic fantasy which is being enacted, the "root metaphor" of this urge out of life. Hillman sees suicide as a "...late reaction of a delayed life which did not transform as it went along. It would die all at once, and now, because it missed its death crisis before. This impotence and intolerance reflects a soul that did not keep pace with its life." (p. 73).

### **3.8 Working With Suicidal People**

The therapist who is constantly confronted with suicidal people must take into consideration the reflections above mentioned. On the other hand, he is forced to consider his own fear of death and his own existential questions.

Hillman (1964) considers that what we call "suicide prevention" and the way it is most often practiced, is in fact a disguised suicide prejudice based upon the therapist's fundamental terror of death. According to him, the issue is not "for or against suicide" but the understanding of the meaning of this fantasy for the psyche. The therapist has to observe, as mentioned previously, the "root metaphor" to the mythic fantasy which is being enacted. If he loses it and puts concrete death first, in Hillman's opinion, it is because he became overwhelmed by the collective dread of death. If he denies the patient's need to die, he feeds his anxiety and contributes to his repression of death; he betrays him by leaving him alone with his despair.

The only possible solution is to go with the urge of the soul. This way, the therapist becomes a sort of psychopompos - a guider of the soul, and he can help it



to present its demands in a psychological form. The experience required by the soul may come before the actual death occurs. "Like the shaman, he welcomes the arrival of the urge as a sign of transformation, and he stands ready to help the other's entrance to the experience. He gives no special weight to the physical mode of death, but concentrates upon the experiences. By confirming the psychic death, it can be released from its organic fixation." (Hillman, 1964, p. 88).

If the therapist can refrain from breaking the trust and fully enter the other's situation, the patient no longer feels left alone with his experience: he is given an opportunity which is denied to him everywhere else: "He, too, is no longer able to break freely the secret league and take a step alone." (Hillman, 1964, p. 92).

### **3.9 Despair as a Conscious Form of the Suicide Impulse**

When the suicide impulse becomes conscious for the person, it takes the form of despair. This moment of acute awareness of one's suffering and one's full identification with it prepares the ground for transformation. Despair represents the death of one's life as it used to be, along with its illusions and false hopes which provoked the complaint.

In therapy, the whole work depends upon the therapist's ability to hold despair in suspension, in that moment of transition of the patient's life between the past and the future. In order to do so, the therapist has to enter the patient's position by giving up his own hopes and by accepting the patient's experience that nothing can be done. "By staying true to the hopeless condition as it is he constellates a kind of stoic courage in himself and the other person" (Hillman, 1964, p.90). The more despair can be held, the risk of suicide to "just happen" is

lessened. Despair emphasizes the difference between "case history" and a "soul history": while the first records that nothing is happening, a deep and wordless experience might take place in the second.

The transformation experience through which one holds despair, gives one an awareness of the paradox of the opposites and the opportunity to integrate them through the realization that sense and non-sense, inner and outer, and body and spirit, can co-exist in the psyche.

Hillman (1964) points out that the death experience is not merely passed through, but is painfully and slowly accomplished by the psyche and built into it. When this experience has occurred through suicidal impulses or in any other dramatic forms and it has been realized within the psyche, the individual's psychic reality takes on a numinous and indestructible quality (Hillman, 1964).

### **3.10 Pathologizing: Another Form of the Soul's Relation to Death**

In Hillman's perspective, pathologizing plays the iconoclastic role of breaking the soul free from its identification with the ego and its heroic life in the upperworld. It is why he sees pathologizing as a primary mode of soul-making. Through pathology, the literally known, trivial daily life, becomes something deep and unknown and is invested with special meaning.

Pathology is not present only in moments of crisis, but also in our everyday life. It manifests as a metaphor of the soul's relation to death. Hillman calls the symptoms "death's solemn ambassadors" (p. 110).

Hillman (1972) acknowledges our lack of unity as a reality of the soul and of our human condition. In his psychology, pathologizing is given a polytheistic perspective which allows the co-existence of all psychic fragments and gives them patterns drawn from Greek mythology.

For instance, a center that cannot hold, a state of fragmentation and multiplicity is called in a clinical language "schizoid fragmentation". But we can also regard it as a polycentric style of consciousness and we can look for a god in the disease, perhaps Hermes-Mercury or Trickster. Or, looking at "hysteria", we can see in it Dionysos and his followers and then realize again that self-division and dismemberment belong to a mythical pattern.

For Hillman (1972), the notion of our personality as a unity of self is an unrealistic fantasy of the ego. Taking things apart is a natural tendency of the soul in its desire to go below appearances, and of the analytical mind who wants to understand psychologically. Like alchemy, analytical work is characterized by processes of destruction, disintegration and decomposition. "Even should unity of personality be an aim, 'only separated things can unite', as we learn from the old alchemical psychologists." (p.134).

The attitude recommended by Hillman (1972) to the therapist working with pathological aspects of the psyche is "...staying with the mess while, at the same time, regarding what is going on from a mythical perspective...by staying with the mess, the morbid, the fantastic, we do not abandon method itself, only its medical model. Instead, we adopt the method of imagination." (p. 74).

As therapy originally means serving soul rather than treating it, the therapist must refrain from coagulating symptoms into literal interpretations and a medical diagnosis that demands treatment. He should rather look for their poetry and their dramatic forms and work with them by means of imagination. (Hillman, 1972)

### **3.11 Alchemy as a Method of Imagination**

Hillman's model of psychotherapy is borrowed from the alchemical work, which he regards as the depth psychology of earlier ages.

While working with his materials, the alchemist was also working upon his soul. In alchemy, psychic transformation is expressed through objective operations with concrete materials, which are personified metaphors of psychological complexes, attitudes and processes. "Every one of the alchemist's operations upon things like salt, sulfur and lead were also upon his own bitterness, his sulfuric combustion, his depressive slowness. The fire he tended and regulated with careful exactitude was the intensity of his own spirit, his failing or burning interest." (Hillman, 1972, p. 90).

Hillman sees in alchemy a method of imagination and he points out that pathologizing plays an active part in its imaginative aspect. The alchemist's processes and operations are expressed in a pathological language: we can find for example, operations such as putrefaction, mortification, pulverizing and dissolution, processes of dismemberment, torture, cannibalism, decapitation and poisoning and images of monsters, dragons, skeletons and hermaphrodites.

All alchemical activities were aimed at the *opus contra naturam* which can be translated in today's psychological language as "working through resistances". The *opus contra naturam* was based on the assumption that the soul was identified with material life and coagulated in physical realities; in order to release it from its literal, naturalistic point of view, the soul had to be "skinned alive and sensitized or blackened by melancholic frustration" (p. 90). In the process, resistances were considered as necessary qualities of the *prima materia*. (Hillman, 1972).

Because pathologizing offered images that cannot be found in the natural world, it was considered as indispensable to the alchemical processes. In other words, pathologizing was necessary for the transformation of the natural viewpoint into an imaginal one. Alchemy used to work with natural substances that were transformed into fantasies. Alchemical processes were paralleled by similar transmutations within the alchemist.

Despite the fact that within our psyches, the alchemical processes continue as before, we have lost the alchemical model. In its absence, we have to classify many of the psychic natural processes as psychopathology. (Hillman, 1972).

Hillman sees pathologizing as the "soul's mythical essence". When we lose it, our sense of soul seems to also fade because we are left only with the healthy, normal parts of the soul which are rather "unimaginative and literalistic fantasies" (p. 108). Artists understand these feelings very well, says Hillman, for pathologizing processes are the source of their imaginative work, and their work provides the container for the pathologizing processes.

Whether Jung saw neurosis as a "loss of meaning", Hillman sees it as a "loss of image". Insofar as the imaginal process is concerned, pathologizing can help the soul to recover its images. Like the alchemical images of dissolution and decay, our falling apart is seen by Hillman (1972) as a way of freeing the soul of its material structures which have become too ordinary and normal.

Like alchemical processes which are said to take place in the minimal space of a closed vessel, pathologizing happens in the deep and narrow space required for soul-making. Like in alchemy's *iteratio*, one's fantasy goes over and over the ground of the same complex again "under the heat, the oppression and the intensity which characterizes the alchemical process." (Hillman, 1972, p.198).

Von Franz (1980) compares the psychological processes taking place in the depth of one's unconscious with the suffocation of the *prima materia* into the alchemical vessel, or its imprisonment in a coffin. The closed space of the coffin or vessel symbolizes the basic attitude of introversion which is necessary in order to prevent the escaping of projections out of one's inner space. One's problems have to be identified as occurrences from within, instead of being considered as exterior happenings, and they have to be "suffocated" in the vessel of one's unconscious and worked upon through concentrated treatment. The process is intensified through the torture of the fire through which one is "roasted in what one is" or "cooked in one's juice". "Therefore the person in the tomb and the tomb itself are the same thing, for you roast in what you are yourself and not in anything else." (Von Franz, 1980, p. 87).

### **3.12 Depression: Another Encounter With the Death Experience**

Depression is another mode through which the soul can experience death and transformation.

Von Franz (1980) believes that unless there is a pre-psychotic symptom underneath, a depression should be encouraged in people, for at the bottom of it can be found the seed of creativity: "Listen, go deeper and deeper, until you again reach the level of the psychological energy where some creative idea can come out and suddenly, at the bottom, an impulse of life and creativeness which have been onlooked may appear." (p. 104). Following Jung, who said that one outgrows conflicts rather than solving them, Von Franz considers that the person should remain in his or her depression as long as it lasts, until the evolution has taken place. However, if there is a risk of latent psychosis, then the creative content may burst out with such power that it can destroy the personality. In this case, a therapist must be cautious when deciding whether the person should be encouraged to go into depression or not.

According to Hillman (1972), despite its necessity for soul-making, depression is still considered in our system of values as the great enemy: human beings expend a great deal of energy in manic defenses against it without realizing that denying it only makes it worse and more painful. Hillman explains this attitude by the fact that in spite of the collapse of the official religious systems, our unconscious is still under the influence of the Christian model of the "light at the end of the tunnel". He believes that psychotherapy imitates more or less consciously the "Christian program" moving from Thursday night to Sunday which implies that the following day will be better than the day before. According

to this model, it is prescribed that we have to accept depression as necessary and that it must be suffering, for it appears as such in crucifixion; but staying depressed must be negative, for in the Christian allegory, one knows on Friday that Sunday is the day of resurrection.

Together with Von Franz, Hillman believes that depression should be held as long as necessary. One should use it as an invitation to descend into the depths of one's soul rather than trying to overcome it and remaining caught in repetitive cycles of hope and despair. "The true revolution begins in the individual who can be true to his or her depression" (p. 98). "...through depression we enter depths and in depths we find soul. Depression is essential to the tragic sense of life. It moistens the dry soul and dries the wet. It brings refuge, limitation, focus, gravity, weight and humble powerlessness. It reminds of death." (p. 99).

One of the alchemical materials which remind us of the qualities of depression is lead which represents "that heaviness, listlessness, that feeling of nothingness which covers up, or suffocates the contents of the unconscious." (Von Franz, 1980, p. 104). Often, one can find underneath a depression either creativity or a violent, frustrated urge. Depressive states are well known by professionally creative people often experience a depression before a performance of the execution of a new piece of work.

### **3.13 The Psychology of Renaissance: a Lesson About the Meaning of Death and Rebirth**

The most important themes of Hillman's writings can be summarized in one notion - that of Renaissance - which is used by him in two ways: on the one hand,



in the sense of the historical period of humanity with specific characteristics, and on the other hand, in the sense of rebirth. Hillman notes that Renaissance is the word that people of that time used in order to describe themselves in much the same manner as we today use the word rebirth about ourselves.

The major lesson we are taught from the Renaissance period, which is also one of Hillman's favourite themes, is the necessity to acknowledge the role played by death in the process of soul-making and in the occurrence of the psychic phenomenon of rebirth. According to Hillman (1972), we can come closer to a psychological rebirth, whether in our individual lives or in the field of psychology, if we remember that Renaissance psychology has always been in touch with disintegration and death. "A renaissance comes out of the corner, out of the black plague and its rats, and the shades of death within the shadow." (p. 207).

The constant preoccupation with Hades was one of the most prominent features of the Renaissance period; with the presence of Hades' shadow in the background, Renaissance celebrates the richness of the soul and its peculiar imagination. "Petrarch kept before his mind the 'great overarching reality of man's life: his death.' Yet the more occupied with death, the more these humanists thought, built, wrote, painted and sang." (Hillman, 1972, p. 206).

The Renaissance reveals to us the meaning of death and rebirth; through its emphasis on decay and disintegration, it proves that the archetype of rebirth is organically related to pathology and death. "To imagine the Renaissance psyche we must enter a fantasy of street knifings and poisonings, murder at High Mess, selling daughters, incest, torture, revenge, assassination, extortion, usury amid

magnificence. Hostility was studied and enemies cultivated as necessary to the complete phenomenology of being human." (p. 204).

Whether in the Christian frame of reference the motif of resurrection appears together with the denial of death, the Renaissance's example shows that only prior or simultaneous death makes rebirth possible.

The occurrence of psychic rebirth within the therapeutic process is described by Hillman (1972) as a "revolution in the experience" (p. 197). The rediscovery of the soul parallels that of the human kind, the nature and the world. The soul's freedom to imagine changes one's perspective on life. The world acquires a numinous quality. We can recognize in this description the feelings provoked by the awakening of one's psychological creativity.

According to Hillman (1972), the way towards wholeness and rebirth in modern therapeutic practice is believed to be the lifting of repression from the dark sides of one's unconscious. Together with Becker, Hillman warns us of the danger of such a fantasy, which would be full open psychosis. For lifting repression means the reunion with the shadow or the id which is no other than the "Renaissance Man" with his "vitality, his liberty and his other morality"...the "two horned bull Dionysos, our Devil, pagan, perverse, psychopathic, all-powerful, once he comes through the mountain wall.". This means invasion by energies that we are not prepared to allow anymore, in our "emptied cities of reason which have been depersonified and demythologized and have no containers to receive the divine influxes. [Then] the Gods become diseases." (p. 224).

As an alternative, Hillman (1972) suggests the building of new containers in the psyche by means of imagination and myth, which would be able to hold our fantasies. For Hillman, moving toward rebirth means first of all the recognition of the death aspect of the soul then followed by our descent in the realm of the "Renaissance man": "Not him to us; we to him. [If] its incursion is barbarism, our descent is culture." (p.225).

### **SUMMARY**

In the first two chapters, the theme of death and rebirth was addressed from the point of view of the ego and in the third chapter the subject was approached from the perspective of the soul.

Hillman's archetypal psychology gives the soul its due place in a meaningful human existence in which imagination plays a primary role. Soul is defined as a reflective perspective transforming the events of our life in significant psychological experiences. The meaning and the sense of purpose of one's existence is made possible by the special connection of the soul with death.

Hillman refers to death in a metaphorical sense, that is, to the psychic death which unceasingly takes place in life's midst. He believes that Western culture's emphasis on physical death and the fear of it is a fantasy of the ego due to the confusion between physical and psychic life. In his perspective, psychic death is a basic requirement of the soul on its way toward individuation and it must be cultivated in the soul and accepted rather than denied.

The soul's relation to death gives psychology a theistic flavour, for soul naturally keeps psychology and religion bound together. The merger of the two disciplines in archetypal psychology can respond to man's longing for some kind of experience that would transcend one's individual life; through archetypes, the individual's existence is extended to its collective dimension.

The religious aspect of archetypal psychology is embodied in Greek mythology which, because of its polytheistic aspect, has the capacity to acknowledge and hold the multiplicity of meanings and the complexity inherent to human nature. As archetypes, the Greek gods and goddesses are considered by Hillman as the deepest patterns of the soul which structure the human experience and influence our perception of life's events. Through their collective aspect, the archetypes connect us with the larger human community.

Hillman calls the archetypes "the Gods in our soul" and believes that they can be brought to life or death according to one's capacity to give them shape and meaning in one's imagination. In other words, he takes seriously Jung's assumption that images are the basic givens of the psyche and believes that image-making is the royal road to soul-making. One's belief in images is seen by Hillman as a measure of one's psychological faith.

According to Hillman, one's psychological faith is cultivated through one's slow descent into the underworld. The tale of the young and innocent Persephone's ravishment by Hades, god of the underworld, reflects the process of soul-making through its descent and initiation into death. The soul expresses its urge for transformation through crisis, pathologizing, depression and even suicidal impulses. From an alchemical perspective, they are the necessary ingredients of

soul-making and as such, they must not be suppressed by any means, but worked through; the resistances encountered during the work are considered in the alchemical laboratory as natural qualities of the *materia prima*.

Hillman concludes that rebirth as a psychic occurrence is only possible through the acknowledgment of the death aspect of the soul. The vitality of the "Renaissance Man" who represents the dark forces of our unconscious, is born out of the fruitful meeting between life and death; if one wants to acquire it, one must descend in his realm and meet him on his own ground. This statement synthesizes all of Hillman's thought.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR ART THERAPY**

#### **4.1 The Theme of the Descent**

The authors cited in the previous chapters unanimously conclude that death has to be accepted and integrated at a conscious level if life is to be more fully lived and creativity is to be enhanced. In order for such an integration to be made possible, we have to descend into the depth of our unconscious. Willingly or unwillingly, each individual has to wander at several moments of his life through the darkness of the underworld devoid of landmarks indicating the path to be taken.

In order to illustrate this general assumption, the material presented in this chapter will be articulated around the theme of the descent, reflected by the old summerion myth of the goddess Inanna.

Inanna, the Queen of Heavens descended from her kingdom into the hell region of her sister opposite, the Queen of Death, Ereshkigal. As she prepared for the descent, she instructed Ninshubur, her faithful servant, to rescue her if she did not return within three days. Inanna is killed by Ereshkigal's cold gaze and then was impaled. As active and extroverted as she was, she was transformed into an inert and passive rotten piece of flesh. Later she is rescued by her servant Ninshubur and is liberated by her on the condition that somebody else would sacrifice themselves by replacing her in the underworld. It is Geshtianna who voluntarily offers to replace Inanna; she is a representation of her alter-ego, the one who integrated both heaven and hell into her personality. Compared to the

goddess, Geshtianna appears as humble, human and humanly conscious, with a positive attitude in regard to feelings.

Campbell (1973) views the legend of Inanna as an account of the difficult road of trials, a theme which is present in all hero's myths. According to antic symbolism, the two sisters, Inanna and Ereshkigal - the light and the dark respectively - represent one goddess in two aspects. Their confrontation reflects the hero's main task which is to discover and assimilate his opposite, which represents his own unsuspected self.

On her way to see Ereshkigal, Inanna has to pass through seven gates and at each of them she gives up, one by one, a piece of her cloth or adornments and when she eventually meets Ereshkigal, she is completely naked. The giving up of cloth and jewelry means that one by one the heroine's resistances are broken. She must put aside her pride and surrender to the terrifying Queen of Death. Then she finds that she and her opposite are not of differing species, but of one flesh.

Like the two sisters, the two worlds are represented as different as night and day or as life and death. But eventually the two kingdoms prove to be one: the realm of Ereshkigal is the forgotten dimension of Inanna's world and its exploration is the purpose of the goddess' descent. In Campbell's interpretation, the significant question of this ordeal is whether the ego can put itself to death. Indeed, once having arrived in the underworld, Inanna experiences a loss of personal individuality through the experience of death.

Sylvia Brinton Perera (1993) regards the myth of Inanna's descent as a model for initiation for women. Extroverted and active, Inanna represents the Eros

principle, while Ereshkigal, Queen of Death, bears the qualities of receptivity, patience and gestation, the other aspect of the feminine. Together, the two sisters represent the light and the dark face of the moon and the initiation consists in a psychological journey aiming at the unification and integration of both in one's personality.

While Inanna was in the underworld, the earth lost its fecundant principle and was rewarded by the immolation of the goddess. The goddess surrenders and dies, and she transforms in the rot which nourishes and fertilizes the earth. By choosing to confront Ereshkigal, she sacrifices herself to herself; she consents to be destroyed in order to be reborn. This part of the myth reflects death as transformation of the ideal, the differentiation into primordial indifferentiation. Her total dismemberment recalls that of Dionysos.

#### **4.2 Life and Death as Reflected in Art**

We have seen with Hanna Segal, Ehrenzweig and Becker that highly creative individuals are characterized by a great capacity to accept death and the human condition; they allow the death instinct to be part of their life and curb it to the needs of Eros and of their artistic activity. I believe the work of the three artists presented below (Figures 1, 2 and 3) reflect in a very powerful way the intergration of life and death within a single entity represented by the work of art and, we can assume, within the personality of those artists.



### **4.3 Betty Goodwin**

The work produced in the eighties by the Montreal artist Betty Goodwin (Figure 1) conveys the feeling of solitude and void which is often experienced by an artist. This feeling is due to the fact that conventional language is useless in artistic expression. Thus the artist is forced to rely exclusively on his own resources in order to express his view of the world. In Goodwin's case, this feeling of isolation and painful effort to communicate through the artistic language is accepted as inherent to the creative process and integrated within her work. Goodwin's theme recalls Becker's comments on the capacity of the artist to accept his existential condition and to give it personal meaning. (Georges Bogardi, 1986).

The work presented in Figure 1 is titled "Il y a certainement quelqu'un qui m'a tué" (Somebody certainly killed me). The contrast between the light and hesitant outline of the body and the massive black spot alludes, perhaps, to one's awareness of the frailty of one's body which is subject to illness and eventually death. (Drawn from the catalogue "Passages", 1986, Concordia University Art Gallery).

### **4.4 Geneviève Cadieux**

The work presented in Figure 2, entitled "Blue Fear" expresses the process of aging and the fear of death through the medium of photography. This work was intended to be a public project at Plymouth, a military port inhabited by many retired persons. The photograph was intended to be enlarged and exhibited outside in order to be seen from far away. However, Cadieux's photograph of the aging

body was considered by municipal authorities as too shocking for public view and was rejected. (Drawn from "Vie des Arts", no. 150, printemps, 1993, p. 23). Censorship of this work of art reflects western attitudes opposing the natural processes of life and implicitly toward the grand taboo of death.

#### **4.5 Francis Bacon**

Francis Bacon (Figure 3) willingly allows irrational elements into his painting. The pictorial "accidents" give Bacon's paintings a feeling of vibrancy and elusiveness which evokes our perception of the transitory and fleeting quality of our experiences. According to Michel Leiris (1988), "...his pictures help us, most powerfully, to feel the sheer fact of existence as it is sensed by a man without illusions." (p. 18). (Figure 3: "Study of Heads", 1962, drawn from Michel Leiris, 1988, illustration no. 19).

Those pictures, with their "sovereign conjunction of beauty and its negation, echoes the dual nature of those moments...in which...we feel we are in touch with reality itself and are at last living our life, while at the same time realizing that our delight is flawed with a strange dissonance: the anguish aroused by that hostile immanence, death, which any apparently total grasp of life reveals as being lodged in our most intimate being." (p. 18-19).

#### **4.6 Schizophrenia and Creativity**

Ehrenzweig says that the individual who is not able to accept the death aspect as part of the creative process is left only with the first (schizoid) phase of creativity. This is the case of the schizophrenic. Figure 4 indicates the

fragmentation of the surface that we usually find in schizophrenic art. (Illustration drawn from Adamson, 1990, p. 28).

#### **4.7 Art as Healing: The Phases of Creativity as a Process of Psychological Integration**

Whether the professional artist can proceed through the complete cycle of creativity (as mentioned by Ehrenzweig in Chapter 1) within one painting and even repeat the same phases several times until the completion of the work, this is not the case for a mentally ill person. We can observe the different phases of creativity in different works over a long period of time. They are paralleled by a process of psychological healing, as Figures 5 and 6 illustrate. These paintings (which were completed over a period of eighteen months) record the process which lead the mentally ill person from psychological disintegration to complete cohesiveness. Adamson (1990) comments that following the completion of all the phases illustrated here, the patient becomes able to lead a perfectly normal life. The work was done over a period of eighteen months, once a week. (Figures 5 and 6 drawn from Adamson, 1990, pp. 60-61).

#### **4.8 "Anne": An Alchemical Perspective of the Descent**

"Anne" is a 47 year old woman who commenced art therapy for personal growth and her drawings presented here were produced over a period of seven months.

When she initially started therapy, Anne reported of difficulties she had at her job at that time and how she felt that her job was not offering her the

opportunity to be spontaneous and creative. At that time, she had been considering terminating her employment to commence a creative work project of her own.

Throughout the therapeutic process, she also came in contact with tremendous anger directed at her parents whom she felt did not adequately fulfill her needs as a child. Anne's father died a few years ago and she is expecting that her mother who is suffering from a terminal illness, would also soon pass away.

For this paper, I chose Anne's artwork because of the inherent symbolism related to the theme of death and rebirth. In relation to the third chapter, I attempted to link various symbolic elements to the alchemical process as approached by Hillman and Von Franz. I felt that Anne's process reflects the cyclical occurrence of different phases of the alchemical work.

### **Figure 7: Nigredo**

With respect to Figure 7, untitled, Anne initially drew her mother and father linked by their ears and an umbilical cord, which was meant to express Anne's feeling that she was ignored by her parents during childhood. According to Anne, the green square on the left side of the page represents a letter she wrote to her parents telling them all that she could not say face to face: that she felt she was not allowed to be a child and that she had to grow up too quickly. The drawing brought up feelings of sadness due to her perceived rejection by her parents, followed by anger. Following this, with angry, quick gestures, she blackened the part of the drawing representing her parents and cried "I don't want to see you anymore!"

After the pain and anger came her realization that "it is too late..." The only thing she could do now, she said, is to take care of herself the best she could in an attempt to make up for her parents neglect.

According to the alchemical model, we can regard the black scribbling on the right side of the drawing as the blackness which appears first in the opus, the *nigredo*. Through distillation, the material evaporates and nothing can be seen for sometime, other than a kind of cloud, a confusion, which the alchemists compare to the earth being covered by a black cloud. In the antic manner of symbolization, the cloud sometimes corresponds to the unconscious and at other times, to confusion (Von Franz, 1980).

### **Figure 8: Rebirth**

Figure 8, entitled "Butterfly" was drawn at the end of the session and Anne did not comment on it.

At the commencement of the session, Anne discussed the death of her father and how it affected her. Her uncle, brother of her father, is very ill and he will also soon die. Anne went to visit him and showed her affection towards him, something that she did not have the opportunity to do with her father. She told her uncle that he reminded her of her late father. She felt good about having talked to her uncle before his death and felt that she had somehow resolved her feelings towards her father by relating to her uncle.

She also mentioned the death of one of her friends who died alone, she said, because her friend was unable to relate to other people. There was also another

kind of "death" Anne was preparing for - she advised her employer that she would shortly terminate her job.

She felt deeply depressed that day and the drawing of the butterfly seemed to come up as a surprise.

According to Joy Schaverien (1992), there are images which she calls "embodied images" whose meaning might be reduced, rather than amplified through discussion of them. She defines these types of pictures as an embodiment of deep unconscious processes, at the difference of "diagrammatic images" which are rather an illustration or description of a feeling, an additional way of talking. Discussion is important in regard to "diagrammatic images".

If the diagrammatic image appears cold as a result of a detached attitude to image making, an embodied image is the result of an intense engagement of the client with the process. The production of a diagrammatic image is an indication that the therapeutic process runs parallel. As for the embodied image, there may or may not be an initial, conscious image; then, the picture evolves as a result of the interplay between the mental and the pictorial image. A sense of self seems to emerge from the embodied image which positively feeds the self through the recognition that the picture embodies a special meaning and a new image of self can be created.

Most often, Anne appeared to have the capacity to trust the process, and images often appeared unexpectedly. After she drew the butterfly, her mood seemed to lighten up. We can notice in the background the butterfly has the head of the little girl appearing in Figure 10.

We can find the symbolism of the butterfly in the myth of Psyche, where she is portrayed with butterfly wings; on the Pompei frescos, Psyche appears as a winged little girl looking like a butterfly.

In psychoanalysis, the butterfly is seen as a symbol of rebirth. According to Chevalier & Geerbrant (1969), the symbolism of the butterfly is based on its metamorphosis where the chrysalis is the egg containing the potential of being. The butterfly which emerges is a symbol of resurrection and also of coming out of the tomb. There was a popular belief in the Greek-Roman Empire that the soul which leaves the body after death is in the form of a butterfly (p. 727).

The butterfly as a symbol of rebirth, paradoxically came out as Anne talked about death and accepted the deep feelings of sorrow attached to it. We can also notice that the butterfly's wings have a pink colour in them which is also the colour of the little girl's dress (Figures 10 and 17).

### **Figure 9: Albedo**

With respect to Figure 9, the desert, Anne recounted a dream which she had a few nights before our session. This dream moved her deeply: after five years of wandering in a desert with no indication of where she was or where she was going, she arrived at a fortress. Once there, she asked for the commander, for she knew that he could help her get back home. Anne reported a feeling of well-being related to this dream.

Figure 9 is the drawing of Anne's dream, but while in the initial image of the desert in the dream there is no vegetation at all, now a few cactuses appear and the desert seems less arid. Anne identified herself with the cactus plant which has the capacity to live under difficult and extreme conditions. She said the thorns represented her tendency to keep people at a certain distance.

After completing the drawing, Anne talked about the imminent death of her mother. She said she prepares herself by trying to understand the process: she reads books by Kubler-Ross. She expressed a lot of pain related to the imminent death of her mother. She again talked about her desire to communicate with her mother, to tell her what she has to say before it is too late, but she did not know how to do this, for her mother is preoccupied with herself as she had always been.

Since Anne will quit her job within one week of our session, she felt insecure about her future and her capacity to develop her own project. She felt extremely depressed.

Joy Schaverien (1992) considers that the symbolic meaning of the desert is identified with the stage of *albedo* in alchemy which means the washing of the sand. In alchemical literature, it is said that the passage from *nigredo* to *albedo* represents the greatest effort and trouble. The *nigredo*, the blackness and the terrifying depression, has to be compensated by the hard work of constant washing until the matter becomes white. The process from *nigredo* to *albedo* is repeated many times until the work is consolidated.

According to Von Franz, the *albedo* signifies the withdrawing of projections, the purification of the *prima materia* which is a state of feeling at



peace with oneself. However, it is a slow process and even if some aspects of the problem seem to have been resolved, a few weeks later all begins to surface again and the *prima materia* has to be washed over and over again (Von Franz, 1980).

It can be noticed that the drawing of the butterfly which symbolizes rebirth, has been followed by the powerful dream of Anne's wandering through the desert. This dream recalls the pilgrim's initiatory journey in his quest for some central reality; in Anne's case, the center is represented by the fortress and its central position in the drawing.

The fortress is universally considered as a symbol of interior refuge and the number five (five years) is, according to Allendy, a manifestation of man in terms of biological and spiritual evolution. (Chevalier & Geerbrant, 1982, p.p. 457 and 254).

According to Hillman (1991), the alchemical desert results from the dryness acting upon the flood of emotions; drying releases the soul from personal subjectivism. With the receding of the moisture, the vitality which has once been invested in feelings can now pass over into the imagination. Hillman finds that there is more "colour" in the alchemical desert, in less emotion rather than in an outpouring of emotion.

The feeling of well-being which resulted from the dream did not last and new feelings of depression and sorrow came to the surface again.

### **Figure 10: Transition**

Anne completed two drawings in the same session. The first drawing, which is not depicted here, was one of a door. Asked to open the door, Anne saw herself as a little girl at a crossroad (Figure 10). Anne said the little girl would like to take the road which opens before her, but she does not feel ready yet. On the other side of the road, on the bank of the river, there are the toys of her childhood which remind her of happy moments in her childhood. It is in Figure 10 that the image of the little girl, already evoked by the butterfly in Figure 8, appears for the first time.

### **Figure 11: The Descent**

Figure 11 represents the drawing of a dream, which has been done outside the art therapy sessions in a workshop on dreams. I present it here because I find it relevant to the theme of the descent. However, I will not discuss all of the elements presented in the dream, but only the ones which pertain to my subject.

In the dream, Anne descends downstairs into the basement of her childhood home. An old bathtub (in French, "bain-tombeau") used to be stored there for many years which Anne looked for but did not find. Everything had been cleared up in the basement and it was completely empty. She felt disappointed, because she wanted to have a bath and relax in the bathtub.

It is the day of her mother's funeral. She must wash many dishes for there are many guests coming for the funeral. She prepares to go to her mother's burial:

she puts on a summer dress and winter boots since she cannot find her summer shoes.

While commenting on the dream, Anne said that her parents used to punish her by locking her in the basement. She used to sit for hours in the dark, at the top of the staircase.

### **Figure 12: Mortificatio**

In Figure 12, Anne's dream of descent and burial is followed by the image of a fish "run aground". The fish is sitting on eggs and Anne said that she had heard that it is the male fish who sits on the eggs.

The fish is associated with her feeling of impotence and exhaustion as related to her professional life. After having quit her job, she felt inert and passive. As she was always accustomed to being active at work and not giving much attention to her inner life, she felt that it was not acceptable to just rest and do nothing else. She was afraid that because of her financial insecurity, she would be obliged to undertake another job similar to the one she had just quit. Anne's description of herself was previously very active and her feeling passive and devoid of life recalls Inanna's transformation when she was killed by Ereshkigal.

Anne said that she felt concerned about her mother's illness. She felt as if she could not begin to work on her personal project as long as her mother was still alive since the situation takes all of her energy. She felt like she is always waiting - waiting for her mother's death.

Anne reported a lot of anger in relation to her mother but because of her mother's illness, she preferred to wear a mask and not confront her directly. She also felt that in her daily life, she had to suppress her anger, fearing that it would take her by surprise in the presence of her mother if she let it show. The result is the image of the fish in Figure 12, appearing almost dead and out of the water. Anne identified the red colour underneath as blood.

In alchemy, the colour red is associated with *rubedo*, the red sulphur as an underlying factor of the inner psychic life and as the element that one has to unearth at first because it represents the *prima materia* - the emotional quality of one's life. In order to get to the bottom of someone's problem, one has to first determine the make-up of such drives. (Von Franz, 1980).

The meaning of *rubedo* is to wash the *prima materia*, to fill it with blood in order to vivify it and then warm it with fire, which will give it life and resurrection. It corresponds to the birth of the divine child. (Von Franz, 1980).

The egg on which the fish is sitting appears as a symbol of rebirth. It confirms and bears the promise of resurrection as return and repetition. The alchemical tradition refers to the philosophical egg as containing the germ of a spiritual life. It is a representation of the alchemical vase: like the egg, the vase has to be "sat on" in the metaphorical sense of warming it up, in order to make possible the transformation of the material into silver or gold and ultimately into the divine child. (Chevalier & Geerbrant, 1982, p. 689).

The drawing in Figure 12 appears to contain the elements representing death (the fish run aground) and the potential of new birth (the eggs). The red

colour in the picture can have a funeral signification, according to Chevalier and Geerbrant (1982, p. 831): hidden, it symbolizes life, but spilled out (as it seems to be in this drawing), it signifies death. The drawing reflects a moment of stillness where death and birth are fused together and become one. Apparently, nothing happens on the surface, while in the depths of the ocean, powerful forces are confronting each other.

### **Figure 13: "Blue" Depression**

Figure 13 was drawn during the same session as Figure 12. In relation to this drawing, Anne said that when she looked at the trees and the sky during the winter nights, she experienced a feeling of well being. She found the drawing nostalgic, a nostalgia that she had always borne in herself.

This drawing was done as a closure to the session and seemed for Anne to be an effort to balance the deep feelings of depression provoked by the first drawing as an attempt to lighten up the depression. The earth, the moon, the sky, everything is blue, conveying the feeling of "having the blues".

According to Hillman (1991), the blue colour, which is predominant in this drawing, represents a transition between the blackness of the *nigredo* and the whiteness of the *albedo*. Through the colour blue, despair is transformed in reflection. The soul's *putrefactio* in the *nigredo* prepares, via the blue colour, a new grounding which can now include the underworld experiences of the psyche. Blueness always brings blackness with it, as traces of mortification and depression. But the same dark events feel different and are now seen in a different light. If *mortificatio* represents the psyche trapped in the inertia and extinction of matter

(which can be represented in our example by the fish) the blue mood gives a different, lighter quality to depression. "The ascetic exercises that we call symptoms, the guilty despairs and remorse as the *nigredo* decays, reduce the old ego-personality, but this necessary reduction is only preparatory to the sense of soul which appears first in the blue imagination of depression. It is the blue which deepens the idea of reflection beyond the single notion of mirroring, to the further notions of pondering, considering, meditating." (pp. 154-155).

All the elements in Figure 13 revolve around the cycles of nature, periodicity and renewal. The moon, for instance, besides its reflective quality emphasized by its blue colour, is the feminine principle of birth, growth and decline. Its eternal return to its initial forms symbolizes the passage of time, the transition from life to death and from death to life. A similar symbolic meaning is contained by the trees which lose their leaves every autumn and grow again in the spring. (Chevalier & Geerbrant, 1982, pp. 589 and 62).

#### **Figure 14: Nigredo**

Figures 14 and 15 were drawn during a weekly women's workshop during the same evening. Figure 14 is a drawing on the theme of the relationship with the father. It conveys a feeling of suffering and darkness, of loneliness and death. Anne was deeply affected by the drawing and she did not comment on it. She called the little girl appearing in the drawing "Cinderella".

Columns are usually a symbol of solidity and to shake them means threatening the solidity of the whole building, be it architectural or personal. The

signification of the architectural column can be extended to the spine as an expression of asserting oneself. (Chevalier & Geerbrant, 1982, p. 269).

### **Figure 15: Burial**

Figure 15 was drawn immediately after Figure 14. It can be seen as Anne's attempt to bring closure to the session and to attempt to lighten the overwhelming feelings that the first drawing brought forth. The little girl that we have seen in Figure 10 reappears again, however, here she is a few years older. As in Figure 10, she is standing beside a road which in Figure 15 is represented by the railway. Anne commented that "the little Cinderella is waiting for the train". Whether in Figure 10 we see the toys on the other side of the road, which evoke happy moments in her childhood, in Figure 15, the same place is now occupied by the tomb in which Anne buried Cinderella's old, dirty dress as it appeared in Figure 14. Next to the tomb she placed "Cinderella's sword" which represents a cross as well. The dress, as a symbol of a traumatizing past, is buried and still visible. This fact perhaps suggests that past events in her life are not repressed, but are brought to awareness, while at the same time, a more distanced perspective is taken in relation to it. Again, like in Figure 12 (the fish) there are elements suggesting death and rebirth which appear in the same drawing.

### **Figure 16: Beginning the Process of Birth**

The drawing in Figure 16 was inspired by one of Anne's recurrent dreams on the theme of the descent into the basement. In this last dream which she had the night before the session, she again (see Figure 11) descended into the basement. This time at the place where the bathtub (in French, "bain-tombeau")

used to be stored in the past, she found a black-cow giving birth to a calf with a head of a little boy. She found the dream very enjoyable and the drawing represented in Figure 16 is a response to that dream.

Anne drew the baby still enclosed in its placenta. On the right side of the image there is the uterus. On the left side, she drew an active volcano, the earth and its vegetation, she said.

In the alchemical tradition, the vase is associated with the maternal breast, the uterus where a new birth is taking place. The volcano is given a similar symbolic meaning of birth and alchemical fire. (Chevalier & Geerbrant, 1982, pp. 993 and 645). The alchemists define "their secret fire" as a lively, luminous spirit embodied in a translucent green crystal, easily melted. In all esoteric traditions, the vital principle, the secret of the secrets appears like a deep green blood contained in a green vase. For the western alchemists, the green blood represents the gold. The grail is also described as an emerald vase containing the blood of God. (Chevalier & Geerbrant, 1982, p. 1002).

The aspect of birth is emphasized here (Figure 16) by three different elements with a similar symbolic meaning: the vase with its green content and the fire underneath signifying transmutation, the baby still contained in its placenta and the uterus.

### **Figure 17: New Birth**

Figure 17, "The Birth of the Little Animus" was Anne's title of this drawing. If in the previous drawing, the baby was still at the fetus stage, it is now



fully born. Its being half calf, half human recalls the comments made by Norman O. Brown and by Becker in the second chapter, regarding the dual aspect of the human being (half animal and half symbolic) and suggests perhaps an integration of both in the newly born baby. "He will make a good companion for the little Cinderella", commented Anne with a smile.

**Figure 18: From Renewal to "Blue" Depression Again...**

Figure 18 is a drawing that recalls the blue in Figure 13. The position of the trees suggests the opening of a road. We again find the blue moon, the blue earth and the blue sky. But Anne's mood is different now. She reported a feeling of well-being, of being alive and of the excitement related to the arrival of the spring. There is a feeling of vibrancy in this drawing suggesting spring and the renewal of nature, which is somewhat different from the cold blue beauty of the winter landscape in Figure 13. However, this drawing foreshadows a new cycle of alchemical work and the return of the black cloud of depression.

Like Inanna, Anne voluntarily accepted the descent and its ordeals. Along the process, she conveyed her feeling that a deep transformation was taking place within her inner world. But, as we can expect when we understand soul-work from the perspective of the alchemical model in which transformation from *nigredo* to *albedo* happens many times before a problem is solved, Anne experienced a return of depressive feelings a few days after she drew the blue drawing represented in Figure 18.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



110 *Disintegration*



111 *Depression*

Figure 5



112 *Return towards Reality*



113 *The Naked Man*



114 *The Robot Guru*

Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

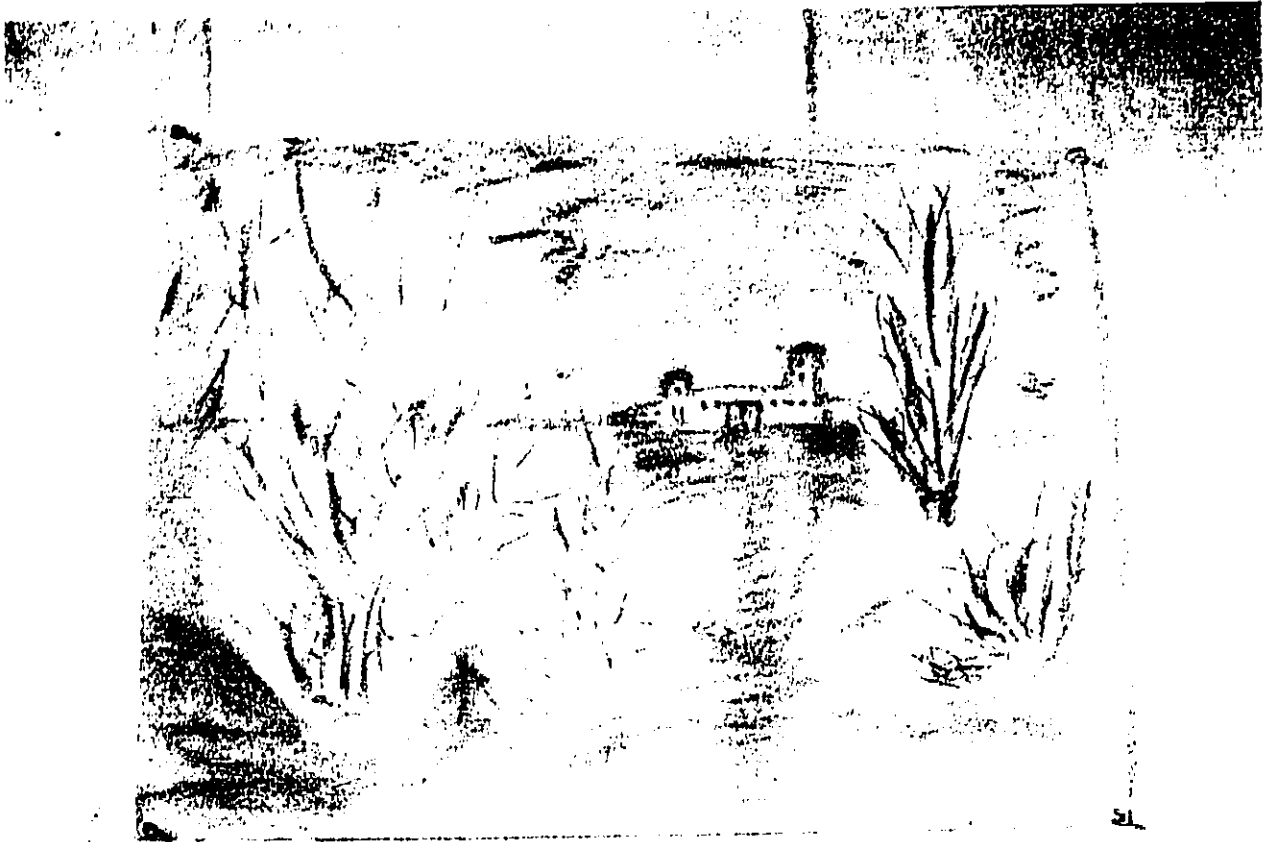


Figure 9



Figure 10

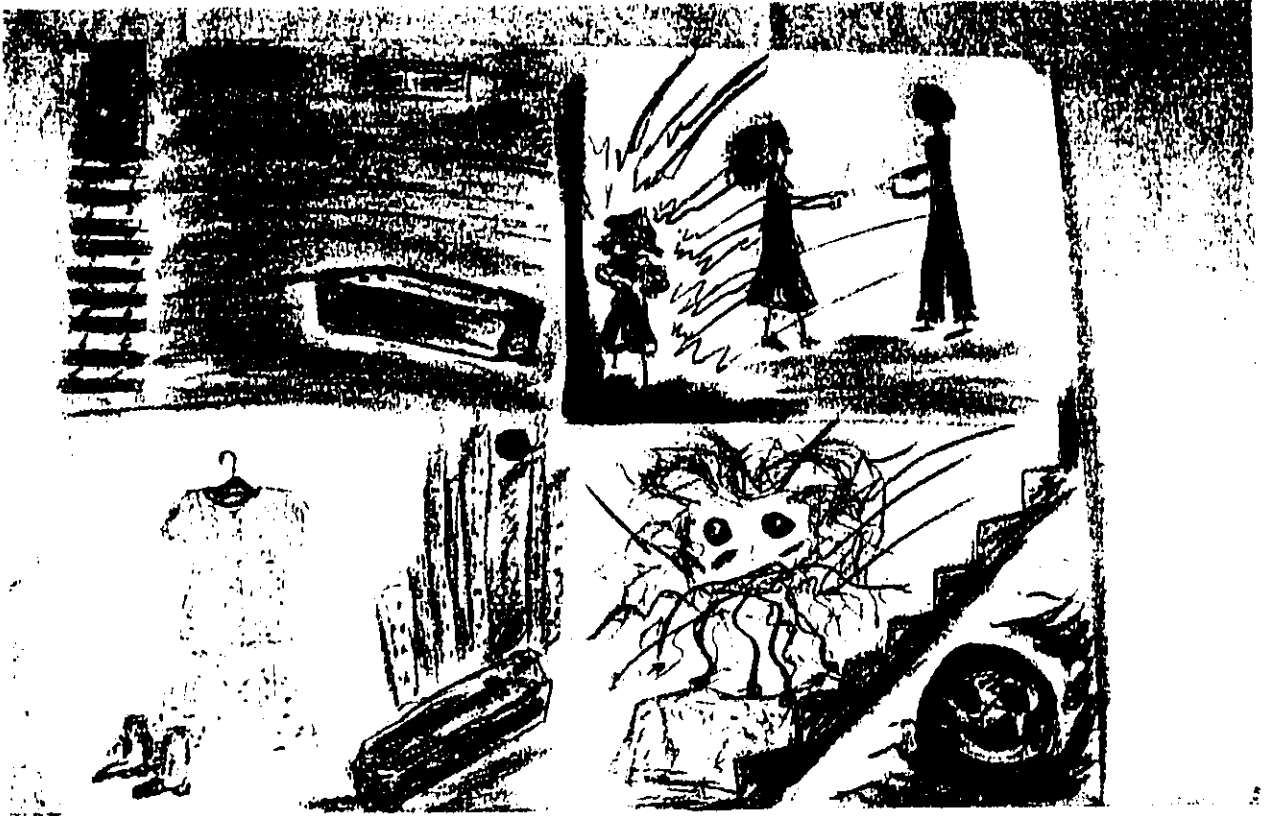


Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



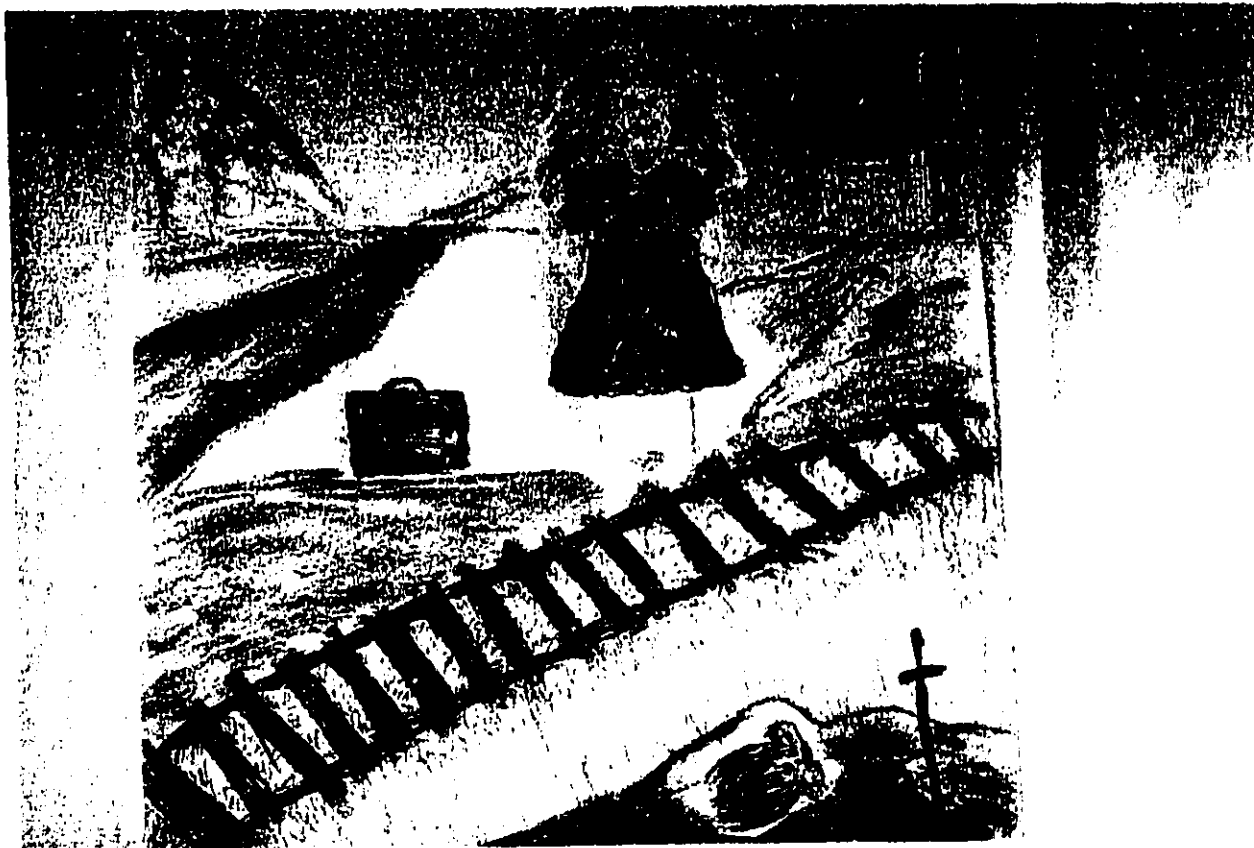


Figure 15



Figure 16

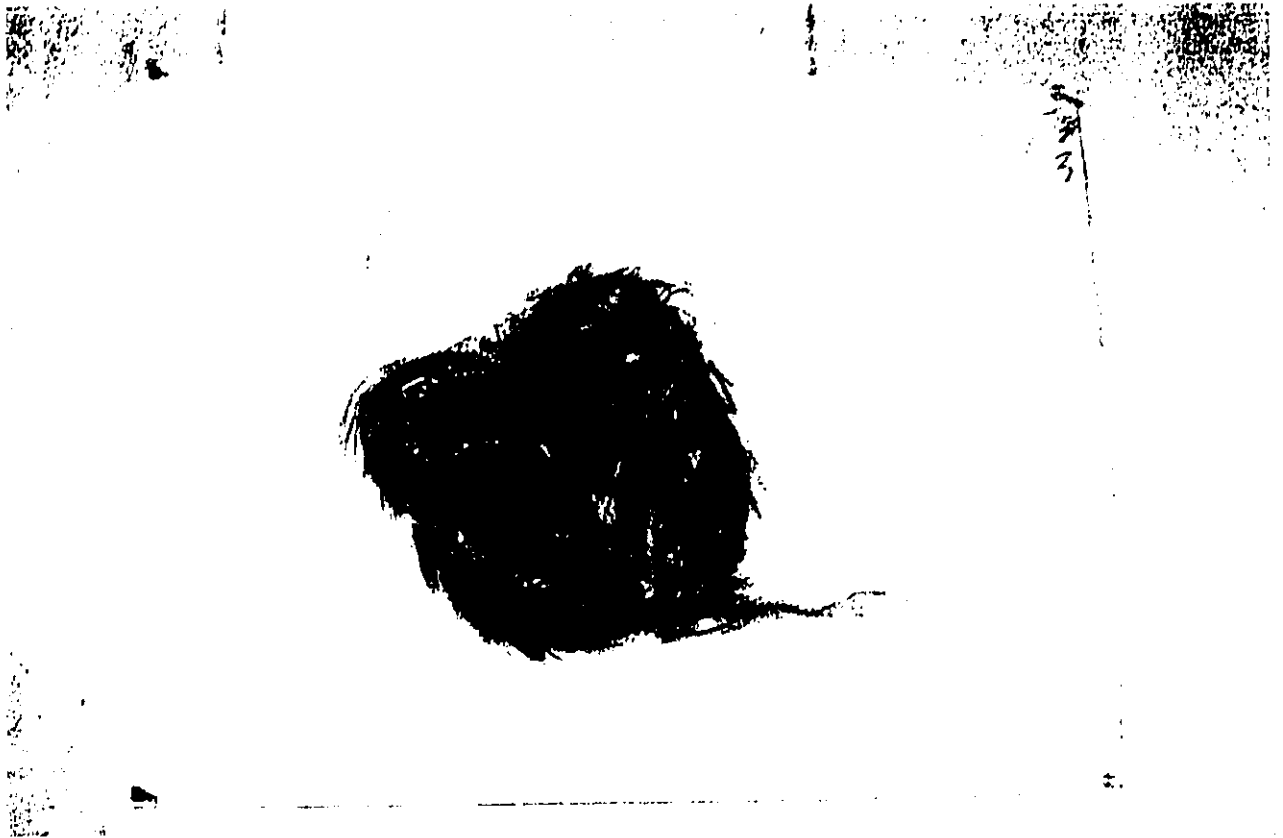


Figure 17



Figure 18

#### **4.9 "Marie": The Unwilling Descent**

"Marie" is 60 years old. She entered art therapy because of a depression which she had experienced since childhood and every time she found herself alone. Marie's way of coping with depression was to deny it by being very active. She was involved with varying groups of people, creatively, spiritually, etc., in order to avoid being alone. As the result of constantly trying to overcome her depression, she reported a feeling of inner void and a lack of contact with her emotions. When confronted with a difficult situation, she felt anxiety and oppression at the chest level.

Although she is potentially a talented artist, Marie was unable to work by herself and in order to paint or draw, she needed to be with other people. She entered art therapy with the hope that she would unearth some hidden truth in relation to her life which could help her unblock her creativity and diminish her depressive feelings.

Marie conveyed a feeling of being haunted by the memory of her mother (who had been dead for many years) and she experienced feelings of guilt in relation to her. She actually lived with and took care of her 80 year old father.

She had difficulty dealing with people who were depressed or who were physically ill. She was confronted, in the last few months, with the near death of her brother, terminally ill of cancer, and who eventually died one month prior to our meeting.

Marie was very anxious about her own aging and its meaning in her life in terms of loss of power and beauty. The process of aging brought on the fear of loneliness even more acutely than when she was younger.

The drawings that Marie did in the first few months of therapy clearly show her reluctance to meet the "shadow" (Figure 20) and her fear to "jump into the water" (Figure 21), or in other words, to undertake the heroine's journey.

The drawings presented below are part of her process over a period of six months, in which she intermittently participated in art therapy because of her traveling outside of Montreal. Marie had a specific approach in the realization of her drawings or paintings which she learned in a creativity workshop. She began by drawing large lines or strokes of different colours with which she covered the whole paper and afterwards she developed them into recognizable shapes and figures. She said that this was the only way she could turn off her tendency to control the process.

### **Figure 19: Splitting**

Figure 19 represents Marie's first drawing in art therapy. She identified the left side of the drawing with depression and the right side with joy. The feeling of joy is related to her life when she was married and she had young children. By that time, she was living in the countryside, surrounded by nature.

A radical split can be observed between the left and the right side of the drawing, respectively between depression and joy. They are separated from each other by the door in the middle, representing a "barrier" in Marie's terms. A dark

corridor which reminded her of the one in the house of her childhood leads to the door. Marie drew a second drawing, which is not presented here, about what was behind the door. Behind the door, she discovered the image of her mother, as a white, foggy figure. She commented that after so many years, her mother still haunted her.

The first drawing (Figure 19) embodies, in my feeling, Marie's basic conflict in which life and death are kept separate by some traumatic past or event. The two parts of the drawing also can be regarded in terms of depressive and manic defenses.

The door is traditionally seen as a passage between two states, between two worlds, between the known and the unknown, the light and the dark. The door opens to mystery, indicating a passage and invites one to pass through. It can also be an invitation to some kind of journey. For alchemists, it signifies the key of the alchemical work. (Chevalier & Geerbrant, 1982, p. 779).

### **Figure 20: Confrontation with the Shadow**

After having finished the drawing, Marie said that she was puzzled by it. When asked to make up a story about the drawing, Marie recounted the following. A huge black bird casts a shadow over the face of the woman who is located in the center of the drawing. The woman screams for help. She seems to have lost an arm in her struggle with the black bird. Both the woman and the bird are enclosed in a circular shape. There is light below and water underneath the central figures.

Marie thought that the shadow (the black bird) represented her mother and she identified herself with the woman. The woman in the drawing seems to be trying to free herself from the grip of the shadow and she fights it. In order to escape, she would rather lose her arm than stay with the shadow.

Asked in which way she thought that the woman could free herself, Marie suggested as a solution the possibility of jumping into the water, which can be seen under the circular form.

### **Figure 21: Denial of the Shadow**

Figure 21: When asked to draw the next stage, Marie drew the water and wanted to "jump into it". But she realized that she cannot, for the water is too rough and dangerous. Then she chose to "fly" instead.

To jump into water signifies to go completely and spontaneously into the experience, to consciously enter it. The drawing illustrates one of Marie's favourite ways to avoid the descent and her confrontation with the shadow. Instead of jumping into the water, she flies up into the spiritual realm of the sky.

### **Figure 22: Anguish in Relation to Death**

Figure 22: At the beginning of the session, Marie talked about the discomfort she experiences every time she was confronted with others' suffering. She said that during the last few days she took care of her brother who was terminally ill, that she felt uneasy, and not knowing what she could do for him.

She could not identify any other emotion in relation to her brother's nearby death, except that of anguish.

The drawing in Figure 22 represents the way she felt whenever she witnessed the suffering of others. She said that it felt as if a powerful earthquake was shaking the center of her being.

Marie said that the little house in the middle of the drawing was being shaken by a nasty, huge animal. She commented that in such a situation, one must go outside rather than stay inside the house if one wants to take the chance to survive. Perhaps, continued Marie, the house represented her fear of her mother. However, in spite of this fear, she felt so attached to her that she lacked the distance necessary in order to understand what happens.

### **Figure 23: Manic Defenses Against the Fear of Death**

The drawing in Figure 23 was done in the same session as Figure 22. By drawing, Marie tried to find a way to straighten up the house represented in Figure 22. The solution she found was to build an external structure which would support the house. She said that she did not know how to reinforce the house from the inside.

In the beginning, the drawing was done in black and white. Then she decided to use some colour as a way, she said, to give the house what it needed in order to make it alive. After having coloured it, she found that it looked like the house in the countryside where she once used to live with her husband and children and where she felt happy.

In Figures 22 and 23, inner processes are considered to be caused by external causes and the anguish due to the fear of death is denied by taking care of the appearances and by trying to find external solutions. The second drawing seems to be a denial of the powerful feeling of anguish experienced in the first: the attempt to straighten the house from outside and to give it an attractive appearance through the use of vivid colours can be seen as a manic defense against death.

The contrast between the two drawings recalls Marie's first drawing (Figure 19) which clearly shows Marie's fundamental conflict, the split between life and death. In this first drawing too, the order in which the two sides were completed was the same: first depression, then the defense against it. Marie also talked about her depression which she has experienced since her childhood. She always tried to suppress it, she said, by pushing herself to be active in the external world.

### **Figure 24: Death and its Anguish**

Figure 24: Marie's brother died between the last session and the session in which Figure 24 was completed and she had accompanied him through his last few days. In relation to her brother's suffering and death, Marie again talked about her difficulty to witness depression, suffering and death. In Figure 24, Marie associated the two central figures with the image of her brother being carried away by death.

The blue form in the upper part of the drawing is perhaps the soul which leaves the dead body. She commented that there was also a woman's head up on the right side and according to Marie, this figure represented her self portrait where



she felt "haunted by an image". Marie could not say what kind of "image" was haunting her... While talking, Marie added yellow all around the cold blue and purple of the drawing: she said that it represented an enveloping warmth, or light, which could "reassure" her. In relation to her brother's death, she reported a feeling of anguish but said that she ignored whether or not she felt pain.

While commenting on the death of her brother, Marie said that she realized that death is peaceful and what is difficult is the suffering beforehand. She would like to die all at once to avoid her own suffering and that of others around her.

Marie said that she felt depressed when alone and very alive when surrounded by people. When she was alone, she had an acute awareness of her inner void, which she experienced as having nothing in her belly, and which made solitude unbearable. But "...when one dies, one dies alone, even if there are lots of people around" concluded Marie.

### **Figure 25: A New Attempt to Lighten the Anguish of Death**

As a response to the anxiety provoked by the first drawing, she drew a second one (Figure 25). Again, it represents the house where she used to live with her husband and children, which became associated with joy and being alive. "Life is youth, the summer, the movement, the animals, the countryside" commented Marie. In my opinion, in spite of Marie's comments, the drawing conveys a feeling of anxiety and disintegration.

After she talked about the drawing, she added the sun, she said, as a guarantee of warmth and light.

### **Figure 26: The Descent**

Figure 26 is a drawing responding to a dream she previously had where she was in the house she used to live in with her husband and children. The basement of the house had caught on fire. She tried to save her mother who was trapped in the basement. She descended into the basement and dragged her mother up the stairs. In the dream, Marie did not know if her mother was dead or alive, but the feeling is that of a passive, dead body. While she was dragging her mother up the stairs, a big black cloud of ash fell upon them.

All her family, father, husband and children were in the house. Outside, there were her two "guardian angels", her grandmother (who looks young and beautiful) and her aunt.

Marie succeeded in saving her insurance policy and important papers which she found undamaged in a fireproof box in the basement. The dream was followed by a feeling that "something important was being unearthed".

As Marie always found ways in her daily life to avoid the descent, her dream unwillingly forced her to undertake it. This dream was followed by another dream featuring the same house, in which she discovered that the first floor was rotten and the oven was rusted. But the beautiful staircase leading to the attic was intact and so was the attic itself, so Marie went up into the attic... This dream recalls Marie's drawing in which she could not jump into the water and therefore she chose to fly (Figure 21).



Figure 19

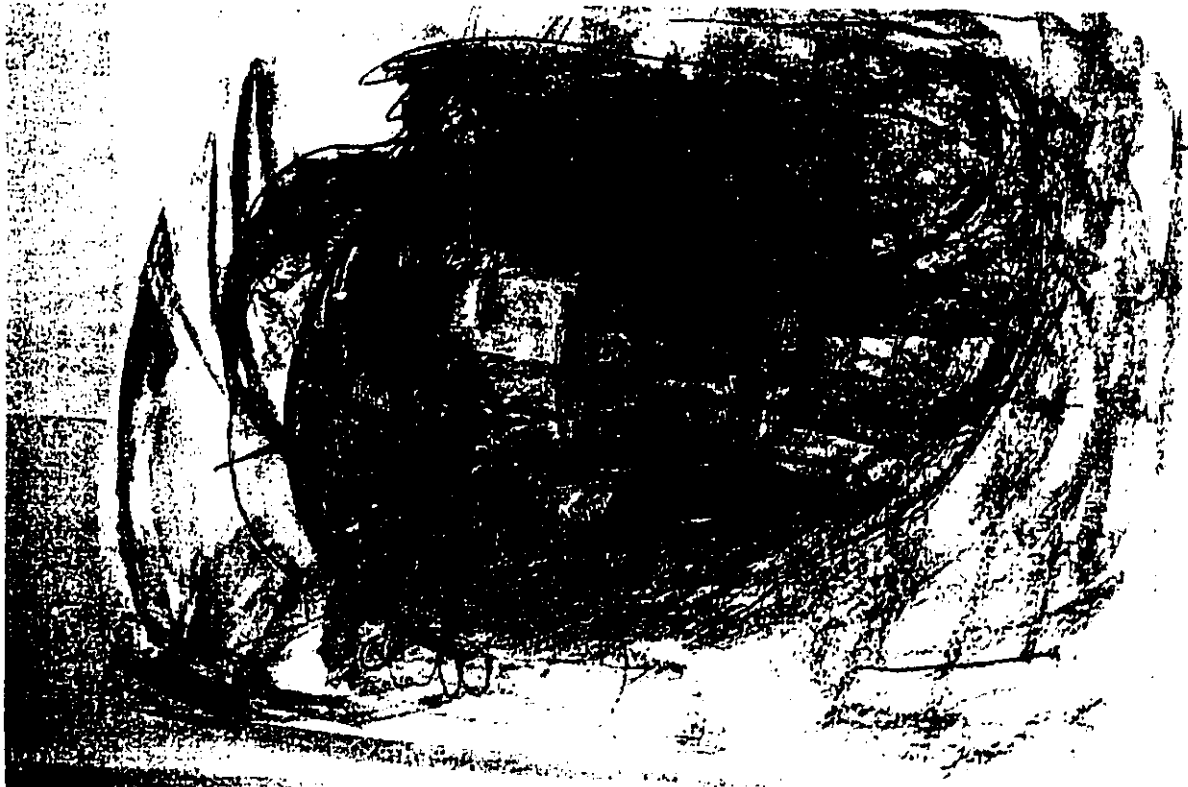


Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

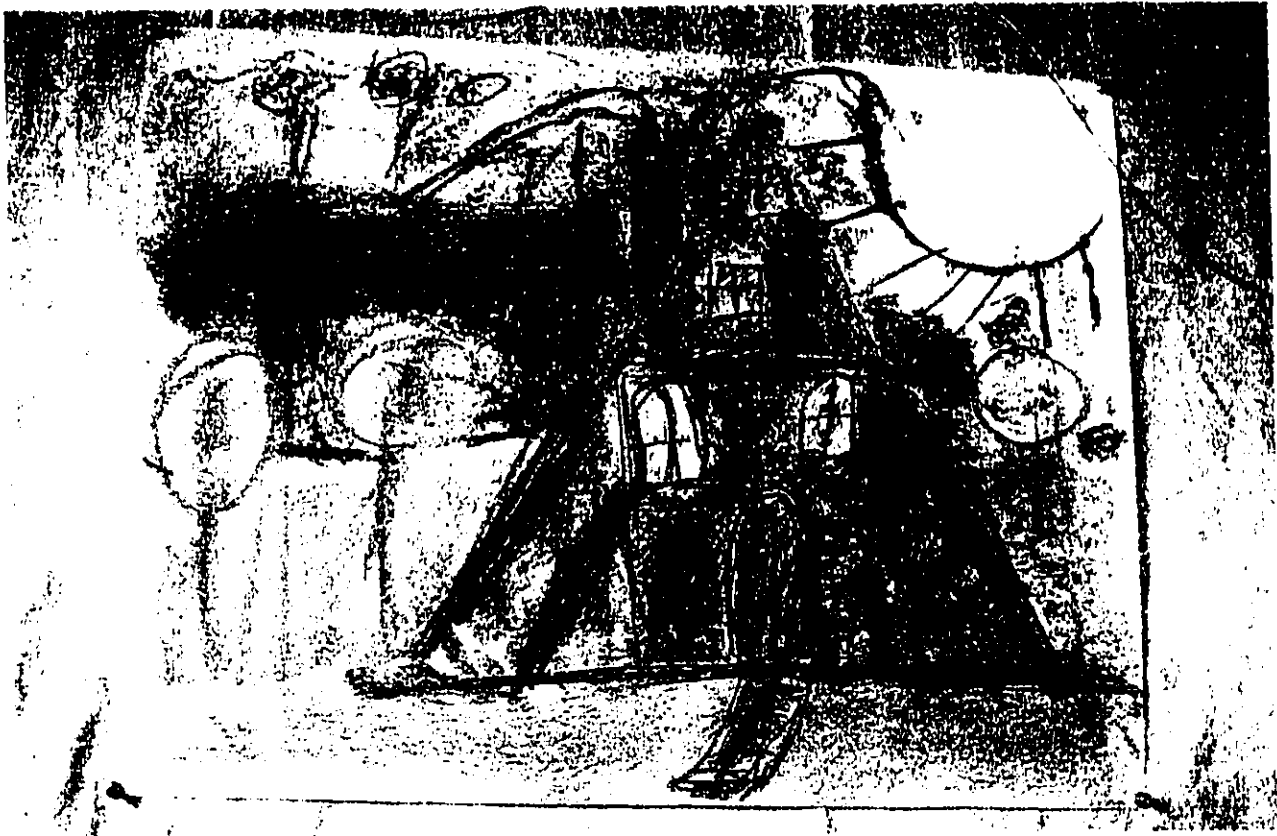


Figure 23



Figure 24

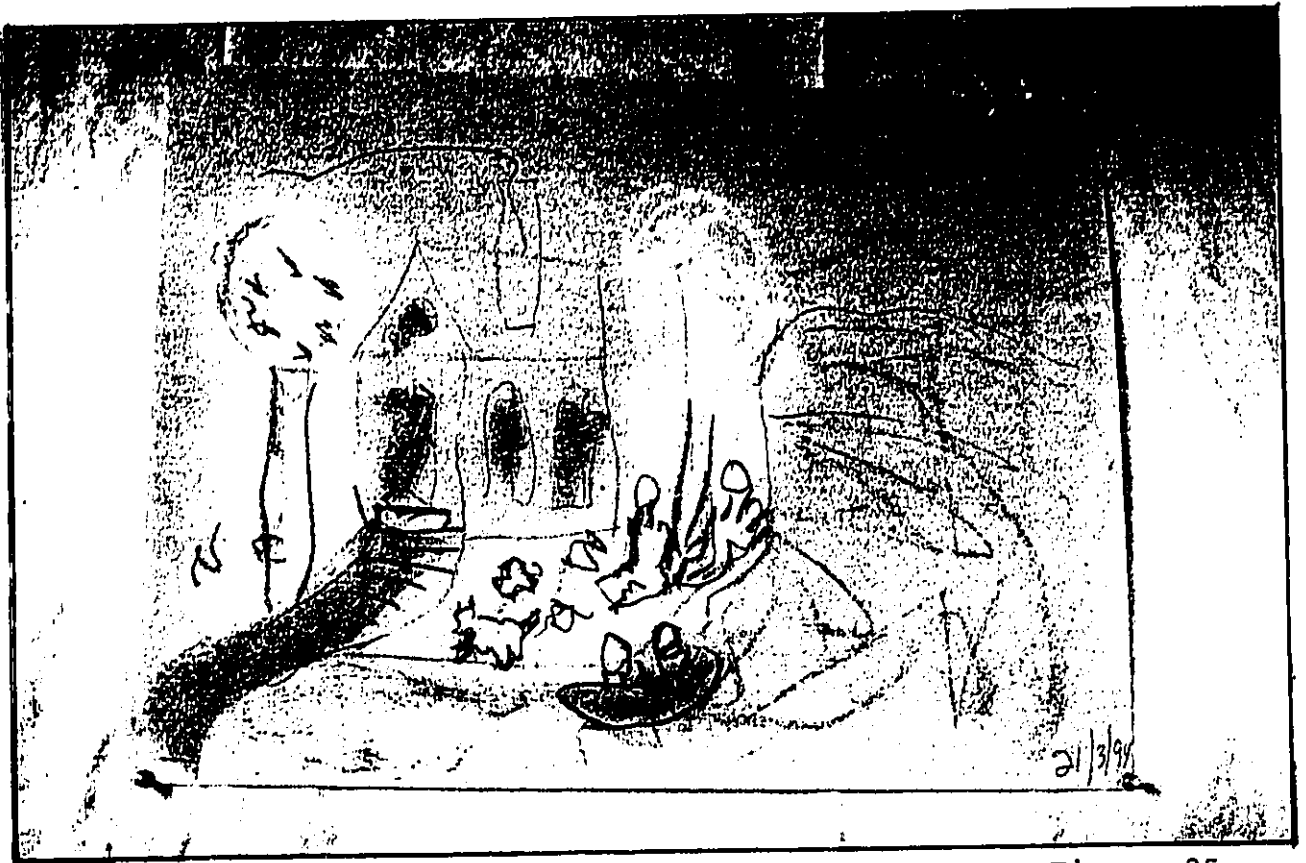


Figure 25



Figure 26

#### **4.10 Limitations in Relation to the Presentation of the Clinical Material**

In this chapter, the presentation of selected clinical material was used to illustrate the theme of "death and rebirth" in art therapy rather than as a complete "case study". Therefore, not all issues that were discussed in the therapy sessions were included. For example, Anne's problem of separation from her mother or Marie's unresolved relationship with her father were not fully presented.

Other limitations consist in the fact that I did not talk about Oedipal issues, incest, abuse, or the benefits of long term and short term therapy. For the purpose of focus and clarity, I chose to limit my comments to the theme of "the descent".

#### **4.11 The Timing and Pacing of the Therapy Session**

In my work with different clients in art therapy, each of them has a specific way of using the one hour session. With each of them, I developed a specific "ritual" which served as a frame for the therapy hour which fit one's own personal rhythm and needs. Some chose to talk before drawing and vice-versa. With some other clients, I used music, movement, visualization or relaxation in order to help them unblock their creativity or to work on a specific emotion before drawing was commenced as their response to their emotion.

For instance, Anne used to first share verbally the issues on which she encountered during the week. At a certain moment, when a powerful emotion or conflict came up, I asked her to draw a response to it. Usually, Anne had a lot of ability to emotionally invest in her drawings and then to talk about them.

This was not Marie's case, who most often, did not have access to her emotions. Usually she talked about her life, her loneliness and her relationships with very little affect. This is why I used to practice relaxation techniques with her, before she began to draw. Like Anne, she used to come to the therapy session and talk beforehand. At a certain moment, she often talked about her fear of suffering, her difficulties with her father or the death of her brother. I would then stop her talking and, after using a relaxation technique, ask her visualize again the situation she was previously talking about. Through this approach, Marie succeeded in briefly connecting with her emotions. But, as her defense mechanisms were so strong with regard to pain, sadness and depression, she rapidly cut herself off from her affect. I would seize the short moment where I had the intuition that she felt her emotions in order to ask her to draw. Afterwards, as she lost contact with her feelings again, she could not relate to the drawing anymore. Then, I proposed to her that she make up a story about the drawing and the story-telling enabled her to relate again to her image. Often, I suggested that Marie draw a second and even a third drawing in relation to the first one in order to allow her to stay with the emotion for a longer time.

#### **4.12 The Timing and Pacing of the Therapeutic Process**

Sylvia Brinton Perrera (1981) compares the process of therapy with a controlled descent in the realm of the shadow which has to be known and integrated by the client. The therapist is the guide of the client in this descent.

During the therapeutic work with clients such as Anne and Marie, I often asked myself whether it was or was not the appropriate moment to make a certain



interpretation, to confront, or if it was simply a time where I should receive the material of the client without intervening.

Of course, I theoretically know that in therapy there is a beginning, a middle and an end and that each of these phases have their specific tasks. For instance, breaking defenses when it is not the right time can be dangerous and even lead to suicidal fantasies or attempts. On the other hand, not confronting the client when I feel it may be the right time, may lead to missing an important moment in advancing the therapeutic process.

However, as working with people in therapy is working with diversity and unique qualities, I feel that the most precious indication of when it is the "right time" is my own intuition and my deeply felt connection with the person and his or her images.

#### **4.13 Countertransference**

The countertransference is another important way of sensing when it is the "right time" to work with the client in a specific way or another. On the one hand, it connects me with my own unresolved issues and points out to the necessity to further explore them. On the other hand, as it is put by Kernberg, countertransference allows the therapist to gain access "to the patient's reality as well as to his transference" and it is "useful in gaining more understanding of the patient." (quoted by Schaverien, 1991, p. 18).

Heinman discussed the idea that through countertransference the analyst's unconscious understands that of the patient and "this rapport at a deep level ... is

the most dynamic way in which the patient's voice reaches him." (quoted by Schaverien, 1991, p. 18).

### SUMMARY

The fourth chapter is an attempt to present visual examples of the creative and therapeutic processes within the frame of my theoretical understanding of the theme of death and rebirth.

The material presented in this chapter has been articulated around the theme of "the descent" for I felt that this is the central motif running throughout all the theoretical chapters as a reflection of the processes of death and rebirth. In the context of my thesis, the "descent" is understood as one's confrontation with the dark forces which can be found within one's depth (this depth is called "the unconscious", the "soul" or otherwise) in order to integrate them into one's personality.

The myth of Inanna's descent into the realm of her dark sister Ereskigal eventually appeared to me as a reflection of the whole process of creativity understood as one's initiation into the reality of death. In my feeling, Inanna's myth echoes Hillman, Von Franz and Ehrenzweig's assumption that within chaos and disintegration, in the depth of our depressions, lies the seed of creativity. Through the confrontation with the dark Ereskigal, we acquire a new, more imaginative perspective on life, which is richer, more meaningful and more complete.

The visual material is intended as a therapeutic, visual and artistic version of the theme of the descent.

## CONCLUSION

The title of this paper, "Death and Rebirth in the Creative Process", implies that "death" and "rebirth" are intimately related. The exploration of my subject is built upon the basic assumption that psychological transformation is impossible without a prior or simultaneous acceptance and integration of death. In the present context, death is regarded as some form of psychological suffering intrinsic to the human condition and therefore indissociable from one's individuation.

I also assumed from the beginning that enhancing one's psychological creativity - a creativity which extends to every area of one's life - is the main purpose of the therapeutic process in general and that of art therapy in particular.

From this viewpoint, I began my exploration by examining through the writings of Ehrenzweig, the internal structure of the creative process. Even though Ehrenzweig discusses more specifically about the artistic work, it has been shown that the same processes can be applied in the study of any form of creativity. Ehrenzweig's conclusion is that the acceptance of death is one of the basic requirements of the creative process.

At this point, it appeared essential to understand how the fear of death affects and impedes one's creativity. In the second chapter, I discuss how Becker approaches this question from the perspective of post-freudian thought.

However, the understanding of the theme of death and rebirth would seem incomplete without Hillman's notion of soul, which involves the depth, mystery and meaning, without which our lives would seem pale and unidimensional. By

his use of words, he evokes through powerful images a kind of human experience which is difficult to grasp because of its elusiveness. It is not surprising that Thomas Moore calls him an "artist of psychology" (Hillman, 1991, p. 1).

While Becker sees death as the main source of anguish in human life, as an ontological problem which cannot be solved at an individual level, Hillman sees it as a manifestation of the soul which does not have to be solved, but rather acknowledged as a source of meaning in one's life. We have seen all of the consequences of the fear of death as experienced by the ego brought forward by Becker. Through Hillman's writings, we can now 'relax' by descending into the realm of Hades with a meditative attitude towards death. It is there that death - the great enemy, the terrible dragon - can be confronted and integrated as a part of ourselves and then, the flames coming out of its mouth become the alchemical fire of transformation.

Hillman's writings particularly interested me as an art therapist because of his emphasis on images and on the search for meaning, which, I feel, is the main purpose of therapy, rather than the curing of symptoms. Whether the neurotic condition has been referred by Jung as a loss of meaning, in Hillman's perspective, neurosis can be understood as a loss of images without which meaning is not possible (Hillman, 1991, p. 60).

Hillman's images of the descent into the depth of the soul, which he parallels with the alchemical processes, recalled the myth of Inanna, the lively goddess of the upperworld who descended into the underworld in order to confront her dark sister, the Queen of Death. I felt that this is what therapy encompasses:

the client's gradual descent accompanied by the therapist who continuously adjusts the alchemical fire to the temperature which is appropriate at each moment.

However, in spite of my affinities with Hillman's work, his theory appears to me incomplete without Ehrenzweig's and Becker's contributions. On the one hand, Hillman brings forth the dimension of soul, without which the human being and the therapeutic work would appear as too dry, too matter of fact. On the other hand, by criticizing ego psychology and its emphasis on the primal relationships and the early conditioning of the child, he excludes without nuances an important aspect of the therapeutic work. By giving up the "case history" in favour of the "soul history", he denies the question of human complexity that he himself puts forth.

In my opinion, each theory excludes an important aspect: if ego psychology is too concrete and does not account for man's search for meaning and his ontological questions, Hillman's theory is too vague and excludes important aspects that should be worked through in therapy and which are part of the makeup of human beings.

For this reason, I felt the need to describe three different approaches to the same subject: their co-existence in the same paper serve as an implicit criticism of each other as well as a mutual completion.

Looking at the subject of death and rebirth from three different points of view helped to deepen my therapeutic work with my clients. For instance, when I finishing this paper, I had worked a few times with a patient who attempted suicide. When talking about his life before his suicide attempt, he described it as a

"massive, gray wall" just in front of his eyes. He could not see anything else - no horizon, no plans for the future, no pleasure - just a gray wall in front of his eyes.

The client reported that after his suicide attempt, his life completely changed without any specific reason. Suddenly he found it exciting and he began to make plans for organizing his life in a new way. He said that it was as if the gray wall was melting a little bit every day. As it diminished and became thinner, he began to see "beautiful colours" coming to him from the other side.

I asked him if he believed that his new perception of life had something to do with his suicide attempt. He said, he never thought about it and he never had the opportunity to reflect upon it in therapy. The other therapists, he said, encouraged him to talk only about life, never about death. He felt that having passed through his experience of near death and his subsequent desire to live were both linked in some way and that he was willing to explore this.

I have recounted the story of this client because it is relevant to the subject of death and rebirth. I felt that I was able to allow the client to reflect upon the link between his new desire to live and his near death experience because of the work and research I have completed in putting together this thesis.

The material presented in this paper evokes in one way or another the ordeals of the hero in accomplishing life's main tasks. The individual involved in the creative process, be it the artist, the client or the therapist, are compared by Anna Falco and Arthur Robbins with Castaneda's "impeccable warrior" who undertakes an exciting but dangerous journey into the unknown "with the death on

his shoulder." He fully lives the present moment and he celebrates life through his constant awareness of the existence of death.



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