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## The Divine, The Deviant and the Diabolical: A Journey Through An Artist's Paintings During Her Participation in a Creative Process Group: An Evolution of “Developmental Mourning”

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Participation in writing and creative process offers a unique window to view the evolution of the mourning process. This study traces how a painter's work as shown to such a group reveals and interacts with her developmental progress as she goes through the mourning process in individual therapy with the author, who is also the leader of the writing and creative process group to which the artist belongs. Through these mutually beneficial exchanges, the patient is able to relinquish her constructed false self-identity for an authentic female identity, as seen in the evolution of her painting over her two-year participation in the writing and creative process group.

Jane is a female artist who joined one of the writing and creative process groups that I lead for a two-year period. The group has been in existence for fifteen years. Throughout Jane's attendance, the group was comprised of one man and five women. Jane's participation — in her second year, she also began individual therapy with me — was marked by major psychic and personality change. These changes are evident in the paintings that she presented to the group.

The relationships Jane developed with her fellow group members helped her to embark on a critical “developmental mourning process” (1, 2), a process reflecting a lifetime of developmental changes, including the traumas, losses, and regrets related to separation-individuation (3), “abandonment depression”, and existential grief (4). The mourning Jane went through allowed her self-integration process to evolve and become manifest in her paintings. In addition, the act of painting itself allowed her to carry out the process of mourning at a visceral and symbolic level, while at the same time expressing the affect, memories, and transference related to her grief — first solely within the holding environment of the creative process group — then also within the context of individual treatment.

In this article, I attempt to show the correspondence between the developmental process revealed in Jane's paintings over this critical two-year period and her mourning process that occurred within the creative process group. The individual treatment enhanced this mourning process by highlighting the associations, dreams, memories, and transference that had already emerged within the creative process group.

It may be useful here to briefly describe the creative process group, which meets weekly. Every other session, each member has a thirty-minute period in which to present any creative work in process and to ask for the kind of feedback she/he wants from the group concerning this work. To facilitate this process, group membership is limited to no more than six people. Besides their feelings and conflicts related to the progression or arrest of their creative process, members also share their associations to their artistic work. If they do not actually present a piece of work, they are free to discuss their current struggles with feelings, conflicts, and life situations. Both members and myself then help make connections between their present associations and their creative process, focusing on where they may be stuck or blocked in their work and where they may be going with it.

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**Fig. 1. Early Self Fragmentation. Self Parts**



## Early Paintings: The Process of Progression

Although Jane presented many paintings to the group, I have chosen to discuss only those paintings that especially highlight her developmental and psychological growth. The first paintings Jane brought show an involvement with what might be divine, but they also hide the more diabolical elements of her internal world. They were distinctly different from her later paintings. These first paintings had a motif of handprints and dots (Fig. 1). Some reminded us of stained glass found in cathedrals. Without exception these paintings were painted on a flat plane. There were no complete human body forms. Rather, there were part object forms of hands, which could have been child's handprints, as made when playing with a finger painting set. The childlike imprints of these hands suggested that everything beneath the surface in Jane's psyche was still hidden.<sup>1</sup> The handprints were arranged in designs that gave the paintings a decorative effect rather than one of psychological meaning.

The next set of paintings Jane showed the group had an entirely different texture and quality. Figures began to emerge from a no longer flat surface (Fig. 2). Although still far from possessing human forms, these early figures had either grand or miniature dimensions. The large androgynous figure emerging from the background of handprints possibly represents Jane's yearning for a god-like divine figure. Because of its nearly three-dimension quality, this figure transforms the surrounding space, making the space also almost three-dimensional. What a strange creature it is. Snakes swim out of its head, and there is an embryonic creature inside of its midsection. The figure's face is severe and masculine, capped by hair cut in a moderately long pageboy. The hair seems to be made of straw or wheat; as such, rather than flowing femininely, it is stiff. The snakes emerging from this androgynous, but still somehow masculine-looking creature are wheat colored like the hair. But although they seem to

<sup>1</sup> Jane later was able to look back at the disconnectedness of all the hand prints and design fragments in these first paintings. She then made the definitive comment that these first painting symbolized her fragmented core self at this stage of her development.

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*Fig. 2. Internal Father as Psychic Embryo*



form a decorative hairpiece, the snakes also take on an animated life of their own. This androgynous creature is also apparently pregnant. A small, but not tiny figure, rests in a uterine state within its center. This embryo has a mature but enigmatic face, reflecting an androgynous persona, but its hair and braids suggest a female form, as do the red lips and staring eyes. Although the embryonic creature's arms are tied together with a cord wrapped around them like an umbilical cord, it has no lower body. A handprint, however, juts out of its foreshortened and cut off arms. The handprint "substitutes" for this smaller creature's hands, but it also is evocative of some ominous genitalia. The fine finger digits may also be seen as five phallic extensions, complementing the phallic forms of the snakes emerging from its "parent's" head. Two handprints on the side of the uterine body container, outside of the small creature's compartment, also complement the phallic design while enhancing to the abstract quality of the body shape. Round red shapes resembling large dots, or berries, underscore the surrealistic quality of the piece, almost making it seem as if this androgynous creature is lost in space, even though the embryo is contained inside a larger form. Indeed, this larger creature holds onto, and perhaps even communicates with the small and slightly feminine looking creature, as the end of the embryo's umbilical chord enters the parental chin, continuing up and out through its mouth. Looking down to the smaller embryonic creature, the viewer can see that a piece of this tube is also in its mouth. This set of paintings then shows Jane's strong oral preoccupations.

Jane's free associations to the group permitted her to suggest an overall interpretation. First, in associating to the painting, Jane speaks of a defensive and compensatory identification with her father and of her fantasy of him as a huge

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phallic figure. Having viewed her mother as a symbol of devalued femininity, Jane does not have conscious identifications with her. In fact, throughout her life she has consciously attempted to be the opposite of her mother; while unconsciously she has tried to find some sense of her own body shape through a "phallic construction" (Jane's own term), related to her image of her father. The painting highlights various ambiguities in Jane's psyche as she attempts to merge with her father as a grandiose god figure while unconsciously experiencing him as quite a miniature (in terms of the emotional support he provides) figure in real life. Jane tells the group about her belief that she was super special to her father and her subsequent painful disillusionment on realizing this was more a wish than any reality. Her father was actually

quite detached not only from her, but from the entire family, but his physical holding of her when she was a child caused her to form a bond with him in her own psyche that she held onto. Thus Jane created an image of a strong father who would keep her separate from her mother and from her mother's wishes to merge with her by pressuring Jane to submit to being like her.

The painting I have described captures two sides of what Jane did with her own wishes for merger after she disowned her mother and projected all the shame-ridden and devalued parts of herself onto her mother (a process she later reenacted with her female analyst in the transference). In the painting, the embryonic figure is clearly merged with the larger androgynous figure. We can look at this merger, enacted via the oral feeding tubes and umbilical cords, in two different ways. We may see the larger figure as the fantasy father. As such he reflects the large body proportions of Jane's actual father, the grand dimensions of a preoedipal fantasy father, and the amorphous shape a child might see as she looks at her father from a perspective in which only his head is differentiated and clear. But if we see this larger creature as a projected father image, then the smaller figure can be interpreted as being Jane herself, in the form of an undeveloped figure, totally dependent on her father; her identification with him unconsciously deemed by her necessary for her survival. Jane's unconscious fantasy is that she is alive only as long as the symbiotic connection lasts. (The power of this fantasy is reflected in the painting, where she is clearly not even born). Although the hair of the smaller figure in the painting suggests some feminine aspect, the genitals are clearly erased, and thus denied. The sexual ambiguity is underscored by the handprint, which although covering her genital area, gives the figure a phallic aspect, with the five fingers pointed downward suggesting five phallic extensions with downward erections extended from the potential lower body.

In her comments to the group on her childhood fantasy of her father, which she no longer felt to be accurate, Jane offered an alternate view of these two figures. In speaking of the loss of the grand image of her father, and her later apprehension of him — particularly on seeing him, as a consequence of old age and illness, as a physically frail and weak, Jane began to speak of the psychological weaknesses of her father. She described his vanity, self-preoccupation, and disconnectedness from the family. She told the group of her childhood longings to believe that he wanted her rather than her mother, explaining this as a [typical oedipal) fantasy she clung to in order to disguise her actual lack of importance and distinction to him. Jane also recounted her struggles with the idea of a strong phallic force, which she had imagined as her father's penis attached to a weak man. In one dream that she recounted to the group she imagines her father's penis as being erect and red but extending from a frail, elderly, yet infantile body. When she looked at her father in this new way as his life waned (not from illness but in the general aging process), Jane observed that she felt she must support and resuscitate him to bring him back to life. Her sharing these associations with the group led her to the following interpretation.

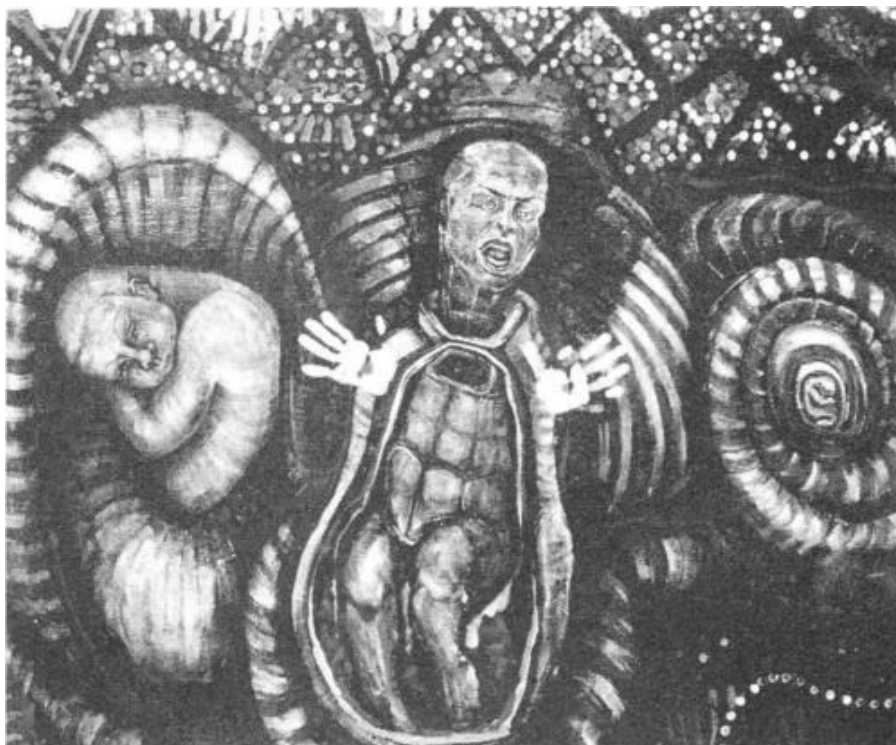
The small embryonic creature in the painting, she felt, could be her father. Perhaps she was the larger creature resuscitating her father, breathing life back into him through a feeding tube, shared mouth to mouth, a cord that "ends up" as an umbilical cord. Perhaps she was the more masculine but androgynous figure herself!

My own interpretation is that the ambiguity is never resolved in the painting, but is built into it. Perhaps the snakes emerging from the larger figures' heads are meant to be associated with her father, and with a form of phallic power suggestive of evil, which snakes often symbolize in mythology.

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*Fig. 3. Born Into Time*



## Early Middle Paintings: Born into Life

Jane entitled the next important painting she presented to the group, “Born Into Time” (Fig. 3). The birth theme possibly supports what Jane had already disclosed to the creative process group as part of her history — that her mother gave birth to her through a Caesarian section, leaving Jane with the impression that she had not entered the world through a natural birth and, therefore, needed to repair the situation by being born from within through her paintings. In this painting, the artist has moved clearly away from symbiosis with a masculinized figure; rather her focus has shifted to birth into a state of independent being. The painting shows three figures, side by side. These figures seem to express three stages of birth in the same being. The figure on the right, constructed of colored and striated snake formations, has a tiny curled up sleeping embryo deeply embedded in its womb. In contrast, the figure on the left is half-formed and half-awake. Half-human and half apelike, this creature looks like it is just beginning to open its eyes and look out into the world. The expression on its face is daze, the eyes are half shut, and the head is curled into itself. The creature has no genitals or legs. Although it is emerging from a womb of snake formations, this womb seems more adequately containing for a birth than are the wombs in earlier paintings that seem like penises swirling into snakes. Here the creature comes out from a section of the womb that partly resembles a woven basket opening and partly looks like fingers (with red nail polished tips) that are opening. This figure has both amorphous and phallic qualities. Masculine phallic and female womb part objects appear merged at the stage of psychic development seen in this painting.

In the center of the painting is a much bolder and dramatically awake figure than the other two figures. In fact, we may view it as an infant who is fully awake and screaming just after birth, because its eyes are wide open and so is its mouth as if in a shout or scream. Two handprints on each side of its torso, flatly but acutely applied, suggest more of a thrust open towards life. As often with babies, the head appears like it may be too big for its body. Yet the overall extension of the figure is

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what stands out. The striated snake formations of the womb area are reduced to a background motif, suggesting that the womb has been left behind and the figure is fully born into life, as the painting's title reminds us (“Born Into Time”). But some portion of the womb still seems to be encasing the figure in diagonal enclosures, and the womb appears to be in vivo in the process of transforming into a cape, an article of clothing that covers the figure. There is an energetic movement in this figure radiating out to its surroundings that enlivens the entire painting, giving the viewer quite a different impression from that of the static formations of Jane's earlier paintings. A background design at the upper part, consisting of multicolored dots and black lines, suggests the surface veneer of the earlier paintings. But here the design is fuller than previously; the painting has the quality of stained glass, giving a spiritual transcendence to the whole scene of birth.

Yet even the most dynamic figure, the middle figure, inherits the body and psychic disconnection discernable in the earlier paintings. For example, the handprints are disconnected from the body. In addition, although the neck emerging out of the top of a cape has the human figure form, with a head above the neck, and the neck also connected to the torso, the torso has a hole in it, making it appear like a second head has been cut out of the torso. This shadow imprint of a cut off second head reinforces the impression of disconnectedness conveyed by the painting.

Another interesting aspect of this vibrant figure is that the surface of its body, appears as less than human; indeed, it appears more turtle-like. That is, the square indentations on the front of the body resemble an armor-plated turtle shell. As in Jane's earlier paintings, an animal-human anomaly is indicated, and gender issues in human forms are avoided, with the figures being born having no genitals.

## Late Middle Paintings: The Feminine and the Deviant

A strange and ambiguous creature totally dominates the space in the next significant painting that Jane presented (Fig. 4). In this painting, the breasts and fleshy body parts give the appearance of a female creature. This figure is fuller in form than any in her earlier paintings. The figure has legs, but the artist evades the genital area by balancing the figure on its stomach, with its legs behind the stomach. This painting has a more cohesive appearance than Jane's earlier paintings due to her consolidation of all part figures in one dominating creature. Nevertheless, the creature's birth process still does not resemble any in the natural world. It is giving birth to two heads out of its body, and one of these heads is emerging from a huge hand formation that extends out of the side of a thigh rather than an arm. The other head figure, which is obscure and without distinct features, appears to be a fleshy head that may resemble the head of a baby. Yet this “baby” is not emerging from a female womb or vagina, but rather from the back of an upper thigh of a distorted female form, or possibly out of the back of a creature that is half female (it has breasts and its legs are rather feminine in shape) and half animal. The head emerging from the gross leg-hand formation has more distinct features than the other head and looks like a small male Egyptian idol, possessing painted eyes and a striated gold and red painted headdress.

Although this singular figure has large and pendulous breasts, leading the viewer's eye downward to rolling swells of flesh in the torso and then to human shaped legs, its arms are foreshortened, as are most of the forms in Jane's paintings. But, in a departure from earlier paintings, where arms are generally cut off from body parts and therefore useless, here Jane has carried the arms downward, until they metamorphose into full forms like the front legs of an animal. The legs end as hoofs, rather than lower arms and hands. Yet there is the distinct figure of a hand, enlarged and extending from the left leg of the figure, which cradles and gives birth to the painted Egyptian head creature. In other words, a seemingly masculine figure emerges from a feminine form.

The background of this painting marks another departure from Jane's earlier work. The striated snake formations of the previous paintings have yielded to orange and blue decorative designs in all areas, except for the headdress worn by the figure itself. The background designs have the colors of an Indian blanket, or that of some kind of wallpaper. There is a distinct division in this painting between the flat one- or two-dimensional decorative motifs in the background — reminiscent of Jane's flat designs in her earliest paintings — and the full fleshy and human animal moving towards

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**Fig. 4. Unnamed Movement Towards a Feminine Self**



the viewer as represented by the dynamic three-dimensional figure, created via chiaroscuro and artful perspective. The amorphous boundary between these two areas, of the fleshy figure in front and the background blanket design, occurs in only one place in this painting, in the female figure's headdress. A trace of the merging evident in the earlier paintings remains here in the blending of background and foreground, where the headdress of pointed phallic striated forms (no longer red, but orange) metamorphoses from a distinct cone-like shape on the top of the head to a less contoured horn-like striated shape, emerging from the back of the head, where it merges with the design of the background wallpaper (or blanket).

This strange creature seems to be hairless, but it is also possible that the hair is suppressed and hidden under the headdress and hat form on the top of the head. In either case, the female-like body is not softened by any feminine flow of hair. Without such a feminine flow, the figure appears stark, if not rigid in form, in this way recalling the more masculine figures in earlier paintings. This creature also has a strange, almost estranged, aspect. One eye is wider and more formed than the other. Both eyes glare, their focus overly intense. The face has a stony expression, and the stiffness of the nose and mouth evoke a chiseled in stone quality. The creature's ears are also lopsided and unbalanced, with the left ear foreshortened into a kind of hole that expresses its own deviance from the normal human form.

Despite its strangeness, this figure marks the closest that Jane had come in her art to the world of flesh and blood human and female figures in all their three-dimension dynamism. The deviance of individual body shapes from realistic human forms suggested to me an interesting dialectic between realistic perception of body forms and body forms molded by internal psychic fantasy.

## Late Paintings: Female at Last

Jane's last significant painting represents great growth in its degree of self and body integration

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**Fig. 5. Full Bodied Woman**



(Fig. 5). Its cohesion lies in the realism of the human form. The balance between masculine and feminine aspects of the human form, as well as the dialectic between the masculine and feminine symbolism surrounding the central figure is evocative and distinctive. The painting signifies a dramatic culmination of Jane's developmental process within the environment of the creative process group.

This painting marks the first time that I was able to label any figure in Jane's paintings a true woman. This woman looks out at us with eyes apprehensive but focused. Her face is bold and somewhat distinct, but not stony, and her lips, nose, and eyes all have a full and natural form. The distinctly female body has well-shaped and plump breasts that are neither elongated nor exaggerated. Her head, neck, arms, and torso are each appropriately proportioned to the volume of the full figure. For the first time we also see arms that are full and formed, rather than cutoff, foreshortened, or transformed into animal hoofs. One arm is cropped at the picture's edge. But the other arm extends into a full hand, with detailed fingers and even nails. This hand, raised in an athletic or militant pose, holds a striated tube form, somewhat like a spear.

The female figure has an overall majesty. Despite the masculine toughness of the torso and the vividness of its muscular development, it remains fully female in character. Interestingly, this female quality does not extend to its slower body dimensions. The figure is cropped at the waist and so there are no genitals or legs. The issue of a womb or vagina is again evaded. Yet despite these significant omissions, in this painting the figure form has finally evolved into the shape of a woman.

The spear represents a very interesting male — female duality. The striated snake forms — so much a part of the background of Jane's earlier paintings — are now contained in distinct shapes, with a thematic relationship indicated between themselves and the painting's figure. The spear is not sharp; moreover, it becomes a tube. In addition, although its surface is covered by striated lines, the spear does not appear to be a snake. Rather, its phallic aspect yields to the feminine form of a tube

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that might be a fallopian tube opening in the female womb. In fact, out of its forward end a small creature appears to be emerging, as if possibly during the act of birth. This part of the tube is thus "open ended". What emerges from it is unformed and inchoate, leaving a mystery for the viewer to solve — what is the precise nature of event occurring? Still the painting does present an evolving, emerging, and thereby birth-like situation, in which a human womb is suggested, even though this womb is separate from the lower end of the human body, where it might be associated with the female vagina. The disconnection the artist maintains here is that of the female's distinct genital

sexuality. The female has an external womb! This phallic-womb tube opens its end to what might be an oral cavity, in which there is a tiny being with teeth, or possibly these are tiny finger tips curled up as baby fingers are at birth. Out of this portion of the tube, where these teeth or fingers emerge, extends a long string-like, snake-like creature. This creature is not composed of striated forms, but of smaller lines and indentations, more like those of a real snake than those in Jane's earlier paintings of the larger phallic forms resembling Egyptian motifs and clothing. The snake in this painting may also be an umbilical cord stretching from the tiny figure in the womb tube.

The female figure in the foreground presents us with another form that appears to be an integrated consolidation of formerly split off parts. I am referring to the headdress neatly and firmly fitting the head of the woman who so forthrightly confronts us in this painting. The headdress has no pointed phallic extensions like those in the headdress in the painting Jane presented us in earlier work. Here the headdress is like a hat, but a hat with more feminine than masculine contours. The part hat extends backward and downward from the band around the head. Both the band, snug fitting like a cap, and the back part, flowing down like hair, are painted in multicolored stripes. These stripes pick up the motif of striation and Egyptian headdress established in Jane's previous paintings, but here they consolidate what in those paintings seem like snakes into a rich fabric motif fluttering to the feminine form, rather than opposing it with the masculinely textured phallic erectness in the earlier paintings. The multicolored stripes of the hat complement, rather than mimic, the striated form of the external womb tube. Instead of the stark alternations (and oppositions) of red and white stripes, there is a multicolored flow of blue, gold, red, purple, and gold suggestive of the richness of fabric rather than the animal aspect of a snake. Still, once again, a creature that appears feminine has no hair. The presence of hair is only suggested underneath the flowing fabric. This hint lends a mystery to the feminine form that can be enticing, although it also suggests that the most feminine flowing aspect of the self is hidden, as are the genitals. The musculature of the woman's body, which allows the viewer to infer a masculine tension in the figure, despite its distinctly drawn breasts, may be consonant with the evasion of direct feminine flow (the absence of freely flowing hair).

The figure in the foreground in this painting is less separated from the background than the figures in Jane's earlier paintings. In addition, the background has circular designs that express more of an organic and perhaps feminine form than the backgrounds in earlier paintings, largely constructed from striated phallic snakes or disconnected handprints and surface dots. There is a much more organic feeling in this painting. Also, circles of wheat seeming to form something like a straw basket that provides another containing womb shape. This shape corresponds to the straw color of the hair in the female and yet still somewhat androgynous figure, in which an embryo is housed. This painting shows a new emphasis on circular flow, as exhibited in the containing figures with their archetypal references to female wombs. The entire background of this painting then takes the viewer into a female world, in which not only part object breasts of full-blooded women are visible, but also in which there are acknowledged maternal functions. The artist is no longer disowning her maternal origins. In accepting that she is born from a maternal womb, she can be fully born into her own female body as the woman born of woman (5).

But the female womb forms are balanced, in the upper corners, by crosses. These crosses, although novel for the artist, show some continuity with her former work, for they may be seen as abstractions of her earlier snake formations and striations. The crosses also suggest an unconscious spiritual meaning, particularly as they appear at the upper edges of the painting, pointing possibly to heaven.

The dialectic between the masculine and feminine

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parts of the artist is much more flowing and interactive in this painting, and the achievement of overall integration (in contrast to the polarization of masculine and feminine forms) is more fully realized than in earlier works. However, the artist's discomfort concerning the female genitals is still present, as indicated by the disconnected womb imagery and her evasion of presenting the lower portion of the female body where the genitals would be. The masculine musculature in the female body is also significant as a defensive armor against feminine softness and female vulnerability. Nevertheless, the female part of the artist's personality is born here into the shape of a fully alive and dynamic woman, whereas formerly this female part was presented either as an androgynous embryo with the disguise of phallic finger extensions for genitals or as a disconnected figure with exaggerated female body parts. Now a full female figure is realized! This is the last painting Jane presented to the creative process group.

## Mourning Process Concurrent with Paintings

During the period Jane painted these pictures, she was also opening to a beginning developmental mourning process, which allowed her early infant self to emerge. Both the group and her individual analysis with me provided a holding environment for this mourning process to occur. By developmental mourning, I mean the mourning related to childhood traumas and losses, which allowed Jane to move on with a self and psychic development that was formerly arrested (1, 2). The same self-integration that permitted Jane to assimilate formerly split off and disconnected self parts enabled her to portray this self integration process in her paintings.

The split off parts can generally be described as infant parts of her that Jane needed to own in order to become realized as a female. These parts had been previously locked into split off and projected devaluation of the feminine. As Jane painted, she mourned, but the mourning was opened up more fully through the holding environment in the creative process group and during individual treatment. The analysis of her defenses, projections, and transference opened the way to a mourning process that had developmental progressions. Without the emotional holding in her group and in individual therapy, Jane probably would not have proceeded in this developmental progression within her paintings. Rather, she probably would have continued to reenact early fragmenting processes and self-disconnections, as she warded off internal experience. This, as we have seen, revealed itself in surface design without depth or three-dimensionality in her early paintings. This reenactment reflected the reenactments of early preoedipal trauma detailed in my studies of preoedipal women artists and writers, in two of my books, *The Compulsion to Create: A Psychoanalytic Study of Women Artists* (1), and *The Creative Mystique: From Red Shoes Frenzy to Love and Creativity* (2).

Significant dreams, fantasies, and memories highlighted Jane's mourning process. As long as these dreams, fantasies and memories



were unconscious, Jane was compelled to defensively split off basic parts of herself and thereby avoid the primal affects of rage and grief related to the repressed phenomena. This response, which left her in the disconnected state from her repressed interior life, is depicted in the surface quality and the fragmentation of her first paintings. But as the mourning process proceeded, Jane started to connect with disowned (or split off) parts of herself as she no longer needed to maintain a defensive position of self sufficiency to seal her self off from her pain. The object relationship with the creative process group, and towards the latter end of the second year in the group, with myself as her therapist, provided the critical connections that helped Jane's mourning proceed.

Two dreams especially revealed Jane's oral level infant self split-off from consciousness and appearing as intensely vulnerable creatures. The re-owning of this infant self permitted her to weep her way into connection with her sealed off feminine and female potential.

The first of these two dreams is of herself as a two or three-year old toddler who has been left like a feral wolf outside the family home to fend for herself with tiny animals and other creatures. In this dream, Jane sees herself as a naked or half-naked being,<sup>2</sup> who has been shut out of her family home — and out of her mother's kitchen — possibly

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<sup>2</sup> This view of herself in the dream can be seen as analogous to the inchoate naked beings still not psychologically born in her dreams, prior to the painting, "Born into Time".

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left to starve. Through glass doors, she looks in to this kitchen and sees her family eating, oblivious to her.

In this dream Jane directly identifies with her own infant self. But in the second dream she encounters a being who appears manifestly dependent on her, but who may also be viewed as a part of herself, split off, yet unconsciously connected through projective-identification. In this second dream Jane sees a delicate horse that died of starvation through her own neglect in caretaking. She has forgotten to feed the horse, which may represent a child part of herself. In the session in which Jane recounted this dream, she wept profusely, even more full of the pain of grief and longing than when she recounted the first dream to me. Now she felt this intense regret, which is a significant aspect of grief as Klein has spoken of it within a depressive position mourning state (4). Jane's relationship to the fantasy horse may have been partly like that of her psychological relationship to her children and students (she is a teacher), and perhaps even to her paintings, and certainly to the creatures within her paintings. On the conscious level, she felt she needed to take care of the dependency needs of these others, as a "good" and nurturing mother, yet fearing disappointment with her own capacity to fill this maternal role. But unconsciously, the dream shows how she had also denied for so long her own dependency needs, and certainly the early infant and toddler preoedipal needs now evoked in the context of the analytic transference, both toward me and the creative process group members. Jane tried to evade the consciousness of her own dependence by always experiencing it through projective-identification in relation to others, whether the others were her husband, children, students, friends, or analyst.

In the writing and creative process group there had been another female member whom Jane felt a deep need to nurture. Jane saw this woman as more vulnerable and openly needing than even she was. However, this other woman had over time become increasingly willing to expose to the group her own vulnerability to emotional need, as she mourned and also felt the nurturing support of Jane. Through this other group member's example, Jane began to vicariously experience her own dependent needs without directly confronting them. But over time, as the changes in her paintings showed, she did connect with her split off dependent self.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in this second dream, in which Jane saw herself as responsible for nurturing and sustaining the life of a frail horse,<sup>4</sup> she failed to be the good mother that she consciously wished to be. Rather, she let the horse starve to death, perhaps as she had always fantasized herself to have been starved to death emotionally by her mother, particularly during her frail preoedipal years. She knew that she had been a colicky baby as well as that she had not had a natural birth, but had somewhat artificially entered the world through a C-section. It is no wonder then that Jane may have needed to create a natural psychological birth for herself on a symbolic level, through painting baby creatures being born on canvas.

Jane often describe her mother as hard and closed, with a stony face — a woman rigid in her schedules and compulsive organization, unable to yield to contact and connection because of an emptiness inside that even as a child Jane had sensed unconsciously (See Kavalier-Adler (7), on the "empty core" mother and also Seinfeld (7)).

Being dependent on her mother instilled deep terrors in Jane during her childhood. These terrors took the form of annihilation anxiety that she handled in her later childhood by a defensive stance of self-sufficiency. Possessing good internal resources and talents, Jane was able to seclude herself in her room and there work at her own personal projects, withdrawing into her own world within her mother's house.

But viewing herself through this second dream as a depriving and neglectful "bad mother", Jane glimpsed the shadow side of herself. She witnessed herself playing the very role she had assigned to her mother. In her dream about the horse, she became that which she always feared herself to be — her own bad mother. In facing her dream by telling me about it, she faced too the dark unconscious side of her wish to compensate for her mother's deficiencies by being the mother she believed her mother could never be (both compensatory and competitive). Jane was living her worst nightmare in this dream, that of being the very internal bad mother object that she sought to

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<sup>3</sup> See Jeffrey Seinfeld, 1990 (6), on "the dependent self," related to Ronald Fairbairn's "libidinal ego."

<sup>4</sup> Jane loved horses. She usually identified them with her masculine side and saw them as phallic. Yet, the frail state of the horse in this dream might indicate that she viewed it as susceptible to infant needs as she felt her female side to be.

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oppose and counteract. Unconsciously, she identified with the horse "child", and also with the oral level bad mother of infant starvation. The unconscious starved child came to consciousness, but with it Jane had to face the immensity of her grief over her own failings in relation to her exaggerated attempt to be a "good mother".

Jane had needed to face the dark side of her own rescue fantasy. Otherwise, she would have continued to be compulsively driven to overcompensate for her fears of being bad with a kind of obsessive and narcissistic perfectionism that overwhelmed her. Not facing her dark side also meant her continuing to project the internal bad mother onto others. Jane was intuitively knowledgeable about her own psychological need, while still unconsciously defending against it in various ways, a fact highlighted in her relationship with me as her analyst. In facing herself, she was gradually becoming more whole and more fully realized as a woman, a woman who could be receptive and vulnerable as well as phallic. Jane's developmental mourning process included facing her unconscious aggressive impulses in her experience of object loss and the self-sabotaging effect of these impulses.

Jane's mourning process also was about confronting the deepest and darkest terrors of her oral infant period. She brought these terrors to consciousness first through symbolic images and then by connecting words to them. Mourning always includes this essential "naming" process (9). In one dream early in her individual treatment, and later in her creative process group mourning, Jane saw an image of what she identified as "death barges coming to get me". This image captured her fears at the level of annihilation anxiety terror<sup>5</sup>.

At the anal, as opposed to the oral, level of her developmental mourning process, Jane faced memories of a forbidding anal stage mother, whose rigidities overlapped with a possessiveness that could have blocked separation-individuation strivings for Jane if she did not possess the internal resources that have been mentioned. This was the mother who provoked shame and humiliation more than terror. Jane's memories triggered fantasies of this mother, and she experienced these fantasies in projected form within the psychoanalytic transference. She remembered this mother as so rigidly and obsessively organized that she would attack in fits of narcissistic rage if any one posed a threat to any of her attempts at omnipotent organization.

In infancy her mother forced Jane to eat on a rigid schedule. Later in high school, she vented her rage by throwing Jane's clothing out of her dresser drawers. When Jane came home from school she found all her belongings dumped out on her bed, the demand being obvious that Jane reorganize all her personal items in immaculate fashion. Jane did not miss the threatening rage behind her mother's gesture, and her conscious and unconscious levels of shame were incited each time she reexperienced this gesture. Jane received the message loud and clear that she was being told that she was "bad" for being messy, which could also be read as her mother's claim that she was "dirty". In discovering this unconscious shame, Jane was freed up by the mourning process. She then began to be able to play, in Winnicott's sense of play and the creativity of everyday life, with the concept of being messy, rather than of masochistically ingesting the accusation of being "bad". Jane told the creative process group at this point that she was just enjoying painting "doodies", as if symbolically playing with her feces was one of the greatest pleasures to now be experienced in adulthood, although the harsh maternal treatment of her during toilet training was marked on her for life. Jane had many dreams of overflowing toilets and obsessions with "bowel movements" in the morning to make herself feel "right" during the day. Perhaps the striated snake forms in Jane's paintings represent some more refined forms of feces in her paintings.

The anal rage mother struck a chord of deep anguish in Jane as she remembered a much later, but startling memory, of her mother's reaction to her father lying down to rest on a bed in their household just before his heart attack. She recalls that her father in grave need of rest pulled back the fastidiously made bedspread to lie down only to be verbally assaulted by his wife for spoiling the bed. This memory not only underscores the mother's pathology, but is enlightening as to Jane's own trauma at her hands.

During this two-year period, Jane described conscious memories from her late teens and early adult life. One memory was of her parents condemning

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<sup>5</sup> Hurvich writes extensively about annihilation anxiety, and its prevalence within all our psyches. Hurvich M. Personal communications on writing related to 'Annihilation Anxiety' and lecture at Freudian Society on 'Annihilation Anxiety'. New York, 1995.

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her for leaving the garage door partially open after parking her car in it. She related this scolding to her current habit of waking in the morning and thinking that she was "bad" if she didn't get immediately out of bed to wipe up a drop of water left by her husband on the floor after a shower. By recalling these memories in her analytic therapy sessions, Jane was able to link them to her fantasy of being a bad child or bad person. By becoming aware of how she projected it in the transference, she was also able to see how much she projected her bad mother onto the world. One example occurred when Jane imagined me chaining her to my arm with a diamond bracelet, which I could yank anytime I wished to, demonstrating the omnipotent quality of my control over her. Jane was also able to see how she constructed a false phallic and masculine self to compensate for the oral-level terrors and the anal-level shame that arose when she was in a dependent position, as opposed to when she was in a position of control as a parent or teacher.

At twelve years old, Jane decided to stand up to her mother and to tell her what she really thought of her. Having seen herself as too compliant, Jane expressed her anger openly to her mother. For Jane it was an act of separation and self-assertion, which she experienced herself as failing miserably at. This incident left Jane alone with her own accusations and hatred of her mother because her mother did not survive Jane's opinions and feelings with any understanding that her daughter was attempting to communicate something important for them both. Rather, Jane's mother retaliated with the punitive and the abandoning remark, "Things will never be the same between us"! Because her mother had reacted to Jane's open and direct confrontation (and probably to the retaliatory impulse involved) with her own vengeance, Jane was left with her hatred and her unconscious guilt about this hate as she felt it intermingled with her act of assertion.

It was at this point in her life that Jane said that she “gave up on words”, committing herself more fully to her visual talents as an artist. The memory of this dramatic exchange between mother and daughter emerged into consciousness through a powerful transference experience in which Jane protested when I asked her to refrain from showing me a painting at one point during her individual psychoanalytic treatment. Jane's initial response was extreme anger, casting me into the role of the bad mother, who she saw as depriving. Then the pain behind this rageful anger opened up and brought a critical piece of mourning through memory. Jane recalled the confrontation with her mother. This memory was evoked when I asked her why she couldn't tell me her feelings and memories in words rather than through a painting. Jane understood why when her association to my question brought the memory of her confrontation with her mother. Words had failed her at that time. Her mother had not received her words as a communication, but only on the pre-symbolic level as an attack. From then on, words seemed useless to Jane as a means for expressing her deepest feelings and emotions. When I asked her to surrender her visual communication and to try words, her old rage at her mother — so much of which had to be formerly repressed, thereby demanding reenactment and repetitive compulsion — was thrown at me. Between the time of this negative transference blast and her next session, the critical memory came through unconscious connection into consciousness, and Jane willingly recalled it with me the next day. As she did, she grieved and felt the anguish of her lost hope for love, understanding, and relationship with her mother. I could feel a deeply emotional responsiveness in myself, as I empathized with her pain and helped her through the mourning process of putting it into words.

Jane's conscious rejection of her mother had begun when she was a child. At an early age, she had retaliated against her mother's control by vindictively smashing a present her mother had given her. Her retaliatory impulses were strong and powerful, but at this earlier stage, were acted out as opposed to being spoken. They would not be expressed in words until she relived this buried past with her mother in the transference with me. Transference allowed Jane to symbolize her retaliatory rage and to begin to feel vulnerable feelings of love and longing for her mother that she had long ago shut off and displaced onto men, first her father, and later, her husband. When Jane shut those feelings off, she had simultaneously devalued her mother, freezing her image of her mother into that of the “bad mother” in response to this traumatic experience.

One way Jane had of rejecting her mother was to devalue and repel her mother's feminine self and

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her female identification with her mother. This rejection Jane carried out at a body level through her transference projections onto me of the devalued mother (a split off devalued part of her internal world). Jane told me that she viewed any clothing I wore that was not tailored and tweedy as some horrible feminine display, a display she associated to as being like “smelly vaginas”. Jane's smelly vagina fantasy was analytically explored by the two of us. Her associations to this transference vision of me — which she acknowledged was imbued with powerful projections from her internal world, split off as parts of her self from past experience — led her back to another significant memory that she was now capable of deeply mourning. When she was about ten years old, she had entered her mother's room at night and found her in a nightgown. Jane remembered a faint smell, which she labeled, using a ten-year old's vocabulary, as “yucky”! Later she surmised that maybe her mother had just had sex.

Seeing the progression of Jane's paintings, it is clear that she had split off infant and female parts of herself that she later reowned and connected to through her developmental mourning process, as it manifested in her paintings. Reviewing Jane's transference associations, and her memories as they emerged in the group and into her individual treatment, reveals the nature of her self-rejection, as it corresponded to her mode of rejection of her mother. The memory process in treatment explains the relationship that led to her particular views of her mother, as they came to reside as fantasies within Jane's internal world.

Another element of Jane's mourning process becomes understandable in light of this internal worldview of her mother. For Jane had attempted to compensate for both early and late losses in relation to her mother by idealizing her father and his external masculine persona and image. She wished to have a penis, as revealed later in her analysis when Jane dreamed that in a state of rage she wanted to fuck an image of buttocks “up the ass”. She was shocked in the dream when she realized she did not have a penis!

Jane's sublimated form of identifying with her fantasy of her father's phallic grandeur was to take on what she later called a “constructed identity”, as opposed to a true identify. This constructed identity consisted of wearing clothes and sometimes costumes that presented her as a sharply defined phallic, as opposed to, feminine being. In the extreme form of this constructed phallic identity, Jane went to parties dressed in dramatic masculine attire, such as her “Napoleon” outfit. During the course of Jane's mourning process, she began to surrender this constructed phallic identity, which she had used as a compensatory penis. This phase of her recovery may be seen in her paintings when she substituted headdresses for snakes and overt penises. Jane felt a devastating loss in relinquishing the use of her constructed identity, or what I would call an image presentation or an “image object” (2), or an “image self” or false self. However, the loss was repaired and compensated for by her newfound authentic identity as a full woman, as shown in the evolution of her art.

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