Gaston Bachelard is acclaimed as one of the most significant modern thinkers of France. From 1929 to 1962 he wrote twenty-three books concerned with the philosophy of science and the analysis of the imagination of matter. His teaching career included posts at the College de Bar-sur-Aube, the University of Dijon, and from 1940 to 1962 the chair of history and philosophy of science at the Sorbonne. One of the amphitheatres of the Sorbonne is called "l'amphi Gaston Bachelard," an honor Bachelard shared with Descartes and Richelieu. He received the Grand Prix National, des Lettres in 1961—one of only three philosophers ever to have achieved this honor. The influence of his thought can be felt in all disciplines of the humanities—art, architecture, literature, poetics, psychology, philosophy, and language.

The Bachelard Translations are the inspiration of Joanne H. Stroud, whose interests—literature and psychology—parallel those of Bachelard himself. In 1981, Dr. Stroud contracted with Jose Corti to publish in English the untranslated works of Bachelard on the imagination. In 1985 a new contract was signed with Presses Universitaire de France for future publications. Dr. Stroud is a Founding Fellow of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.

Water and Dreams addresses the elemental substance of water as it plays throughout our lives, our reveries, and our poetry, ranging from maternal and feminine waters to masculine waters that swimmers oppose. The material imagination of water allows us to de-objectify objects and deform forms enabling us to dream and perceive the flow of soul in the world. Gaston Bachelard, master dreamer of the elements, animates the waters of the soul with his stirring, fluid imagination. With the subtlety of a poet, he ranges from the surface of water with its reflective narcissism to the very depths where water flows into death. A book of great beauty and philosophic profundity. Clear waters, deep water, the Charon Complex, the Ophelia Complex, water in combination with other elements, maternal waters, water's morality, violent water, water's voice.

At last this incredibly valuable book in English! No one, not Freud, not Jung, has offered more precise appreciation of the elemental imagination than Gaston Bachelard. For everyone who works with dreams, Bachelard is an indispensable companion, and a revelation.

- James Hillman
Water and Dreams

An Essay on the Imagination of Matter

GASTON BACHELARD

translated from the French by Edith R. Farrell
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Foreword

Gaston Bachelard caused a mild furor in France in 1938 when he published La Psychanalyse du feu. The audacity of it! In the ten years since he had achieved his doctorate with two dissertations, this teacher of philosophy had written eight works pertaining to philosophical questions in contemporary scientific thinking. That same year he had published La Formation de l'esprit scientifique. Now the title of his new work seemed to indicate a total shift of interest toward psychology, phenomenology, and literature. But Bachelard never gave up his penetrating search for ways to understand scientific modes of thought, the fruit of which was five other books on the philosophy of science, four appearing before his death in 1962 and one posthumously. His work on fire, however, forged a new direction. Eight subsequent volumes by this compelling thinker pursued the epistemological question: How does the imagination work? Viewing his work retrospectively, as we are now in a position to do, provides the evidence that establishes Bachelard as a pioneer in the field of phenomenological studies of the imagination.

It is difficult to conceive why such a creative mind and prolific writer, so well known in France, has remained in relative obscurity in the English-speaking world. The Psychoanalysis of Fire became available in English in 1964 and several of Bachelard’s other writings in the twenty years since. Many of his works, however, are untranslated. It is to make this rich lode available that The Dallas Institute, under the sponsorship of the Pegasus Foundation, brings out Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Material Imagination, the second of five books on the elements, which Bachelard calls the “hormones of the imagination.”

What is an “element” for Bachelard? Water—like fire, earth, and air—is an element in a pre-Socratic sense and is therefore both “inner” and “outer.” By water, Bachelard means actual ponds and streams, as well as bodies of water that populate our dreams and reveries. Especially the latter, for this book is the first which directs his reader to the value of reverie.

Bachelard began his study on the imagination with the psychoanalysis of an element, but, because he found Freudian psychology
too much of a closed experience, his interest shifted to a more accessible area of human nature. In the zone of active imagination, where man is a thinking, willing being, an openness is retained. "Here the depths are not so fearful nor the heights so unattainable." Here we can retrace, reclaim, retrieve, relive, and even transform experience in our imaginative selves.

Bachelard never disowned the darker side of our nature. Some readers, who glide over the surface of his word, believe him to be a student only of the joyful side of experience. Yet over and over he reminds us of the "profound and lasting ambivalences" that are characteristic of all meaningful participation in the world. Duality must exist for the imagination to be engaged: there must be a "dual participation of desire and fear, a participation of good and evil, a peaceful participation of black and white" for the material element to involve the entire soul. Black and white do not remain, in his thinking, such lonely opposites. Each involves the other, needs the other. Just as the subjective and objective world implicate each other, just as we need to see and the world needs to be seen, so he reclaims reciprocity.

To read Bachelard's books on the elements is not to acquire more knowledge, but to change one's way of looking at the material world. It is a transformation difficult to describe to someone who has not shared the experience. Just as no prose statement captures a poem, no amount of paraphrasing will bridge the gap between one who has and one who has not read his work. Just as we are altered by experiencing Hopkins or Yeats or Rilke, so it is with Bachelard. With a concern for our own oneiric element. Black and white do not remain, in his thinking, such lonely opposites. Each involves the other, needs the other. Just as the subjective and objective world implicate each other, just as we need to see and the world needs to be seen, so he reclaims reciprocity.

We read and return to Bachelard, and each time our imagination expands in a new way. He teaches us to read images centrifugally. He presses our interior space outward, as if moving imaginatively from the center of a flower. Perhaps more appropriate for a book on water would be the image of ripples from a center point, constantly expanding our way of seeing. This consciousness of change, or "felt change of consciousness," in Owen Barfield's term, is never linear or logically causal. Sometimes the movement is vertical and horizontal, but these dynamics are more characteristic of the elements of air and earth, which will be taken up in later translations in this series.

The light of understanding that Bachelard offers is not that of blaring noon. It is like a refracted beam of early morning light seen through pure water. Bachelard gently urges us to take the lessons of water to heart, to see by means of water. Water calls for a seeing in depth and also a seeing beyond: "The lake or pool or stagnant water stops us near its bank. Its says to our will: you shall go no further; you should go back to looking at distant things, at the beyond."

Water is the most receptive of the elements, thus its strongly feminine characteristics. Water is the spring of being, motherhood. Water flows, its constant movement responding to the environment and to possibility. While the masculine sea calls for tales of adventure, the rivers, lakes, and streams evoke reverie. It is the liquidity in our eyes that causes us to dream. If a person favors one of the elements as his poetic landscape, then Bachelard claims water as his own oneiric element.

Reflection, the type of thinking that we are urged to do in psychology, is a water term. James Hillman claims that "what matters is that little syllable 're,' the most important syllable in psychology." Psychological echoes appeal to Bachelard. Rereading is almost obligatory with Bachelard, and he encourages us to do so with felicity.

We are renewed when we follow Bachelard's instruction on how to read the world or how to read a poem. His material reflections are lessons in psychological methodology. We see through the barnacles of complexes that cling to our lives. These include the cultural complexes, which he defines in this book as prereflective attitudes. We learn a new definition of the verb "to see," so that we can look beyond our own narcissism, beyond our own images reflected back to us, and begin to see, with Bachelard's help, the world looking at itself, loving itself. "The cosmos, then, is in some way clearly touched by narcissism," he writes. "The world wants to see itself," to be seen. Water reveals, reflects. "The lake is a large tranquil eye."

Water imagery impels us to seek the profound level of any experience. Depth always feels like watery depth. We are refreshed by what Gerard Manley Hopkins, in his poem "God's Grandeur," calls "deep down things." Linking poetic imagery and dreams, in this book on water, Bachelard directs his attention to poetry. His concern is not for the whole poem but for isolated images. He is interested in "that strange reverie written down and coordinated in writing." In order to
penetrate the complex of creativity, the unique essence of the poets we love, Bachelard advises us to take re-soundings like sonar, sounds of the depths. He explains that, by participating in the resonances, we hear the poem. Its repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our experience. Once gathered into its reverberations, the poem possesses us entirely in "a veritable awakening of poetic creation." This is the methodology by which Bachelard draws us into the central vortex of creativity.

Bachelard reanimates language—even in translation. Edith R. Farrell’s careful and exact translation has produced that sense of the spoken word so characteristic of Bachelard. He admires images and words that "sing reality," not merely describe it. For all his inspiriting of matter, his enlivening of the world, there always remains a peasant-like cast to his thoughts. He offers to the contemporary mind a wholeness that we can no longer afford to neglect.

Joanne H. Stroud
Fellow, The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture

Acknowledgments

The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture brings together a diverse group of people with a remarkable range of talents. The present volume would never have been possible without the assistance of many associates. José Corti, Bachelard’s French publisher, granted us the American copyrights. The project flowered due to the sustained concern of James Hillman, Gail Thomas, Robert Sardello, and Donald Cowan. Colette Gaudin and Louise Cowan took time away from teaching to check our text carefully. Ki Kugelmann coordinated our efforts with efficiency. But most especially it was Robert Dupree, in his poetic editing, and Susan Dupree, with her meticulous attention to each phase of the book, who worked to make this much needed translation available.

J.H.S.
Introduction

Imagination and Matter

Let us help the hydra clear away the fog.

STÉPHANE MALLARME, Divagations

1

The imagining powers of our mind develop around two very different axes.

Some get their impetus from novelty; they take pleasure in the picturesque, the varied, and the unexpected. The imagination that they spark always describes a springtime. In nature these powers, far from us but already alive, bring forth flowers.

Others plumb the depths of being. They seek to find there both the primitive and the eternal. They prevail over season and history. In nature, within us and without, they produce seeds—seeds whose form is embedded in a substance, whose form is internal.

By speaking philosophically from the outset, we can distinguish two sorts of imagination: one that gives life to the formal cause and one that gives life to the material cause—or, more succinctly, a formal imagination and a material imagination. Thus abbreviated, these concepts seem to me indispensable for a complete philosophical study of poetic creation. Causes arising from the feelings and the heart must become formal causes if a work is to possess verbal variety, the ever-changing life of light. Yet besides the images of form, so often evoked by psychologists of the imagination, there are—as I will show—images of matter, images that stem directly from matter. The eye assigns them names, but only the hand truly knows them. A dynamic joy touches, moulds, and refines them. When forms, mere perishable forms and vain images—perpetual change of surfaces—are put aside, these images of matter are dreamt substantially and intimately. They have weight; they constitute a heart.

Of course, there are works in which the two imagining powers cooperate. It is not even possible to separate them completely. Even the most fleeting, changing, and purely formal reverie still has
elements that are stable, dense, slow, and fertile. Yet even so, every poetic work that penetrates deeply enough into the heart of being to find the constancy and lovely monotony of matter, that derives its strength from a substantial cause, must bloom and bedeck itself. It must embrace all the exuberance of formal beauty in order to attract the reader in the first place.

Because of this need to fascinate, the imagination ordinarily works where there is joy—or at least one kind of joy—produced either by forms and colors, variety and metamorphosis, or by what surfaces become. Imagination deserts depth, volume, and the inner recesses of substance.

However, it is to the intimate imagination of these vegetating and material powers that I would like to pay most attention in this book. Only an iconoclastic philosopher could undertake the long and difficult task of detaching all the suffixes from beauty, of searching behind the obvious images for the hidden ones, of seeking the very roots of this image-making power.

In the depths of matter there grows an obscure vegetation; black flowers bloom in matter's darkness. They already possess a velvety touch, a formula for perfume.

II

When I began meditating on the concept of the beauty of matter, I was immediately struck by the neglect of the material cause in aesthetic philosophy. In particular it seemed to me that the individualizing power of matter had been underestimated. Why does everyone always associate the notion of the individual with form? Is there not an individuality in depth that makes matter a totality, even in its smallest divisions? Meditated upon from the perspective of its depth, matter is the very principle that can dissociate itself from forms. It is not the simple absence of formal activity. It remains itself despite all distortion and division. Moreover, matter may be given value in two ways: by deepening or by elevating. Deepening makes it seem unfathomable, like a mystery. Elevation makes it appear to be an inexhaustible force, like a miracle. In both cases, meditation on matter cultivates an open imagination.

Only after studying forms and attributing each to its proper matter will it be possible to visualize a complete doctrine on human imagina-
Dreams, even more than clear ideas and conscious images, are dependent on the four fundamental elements. There have been countless essays linking the doctrine of the four material elements to the four organic temperaments. Thus the ancient author Lessius writes in *The Art of Long Life*:

Thus some, who are cholerick, are chiefly affected in their Sleep with the imaginary Appearances of either Fire or Burnings, Wars or Slaughters: Others, of more melancholy Dispositions, are often disturbed with the dismal Prospect of either Funerals, or Sepulchres, or some dark and doleful Apparitions: The Phlegmatick dream more frequently of Rains, Lakes, Rivers, Inundations, Drownings, Shipwrecks; and the Sanguine abound in different Kinds of Pleasantries, such as Flying, Courses, Banquets, Songs, and amorous Sports.

Consequently, persons governed by choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood are characterized by fire, earth, water, and air respectively. Their dreams usually elaborate on the material element which characterizes them. If we admit that an obvious—though quite generally accepted—biological error can correspond to a profound oneiric truth, then we are ready to interpret dreams *materially*. Therefore, along with the psychoanalysis of dreams there should be a psychophysics and a psychochemistry of dreams. This intensely materialistic psychoanalysis should return to the old precepts that held *elemental diseases* to be curable by *elemental medicines*. The material element is the determining factor in the disease, as in the cure. We suffer through dreams and are cured by dreams. In a cosmology of dreams, the material elements remain the fundamental ones.

In a general way, I believe that the psychology of aesthetic emotions would gain from a study of the zone of material reveries that precede contemplation. Dreams come before contemplation. Before becoming a conscious sight, every landscape is an oneiric experience. Only those scenes that have already appeared in dreams can be viewed with an aesthetic passion. And Tieck was right to recognize in human dreams the preamble to natural beauty. The unity of the landscape appears "as the fulfillment of an often-dreamed dream" (*wie die Erfüllung eines oft geträumten Traums*). But the oneiric landscape is not a frame that is filled up with impressions; it is a pervading substance.

It is understandable, then, that a material element such as fire could be linked to a type of reverie that controls the beliefs, the passions, the ideals, the philosophy of an entire life. We can speak of the aesthetics of fire, of the psychology of fire, and even of the ethics of fire. A poetics and a philosophy of fire condense all these teachings. In themselves, these two constitute a prodigious, ambivalent teaching which upholds the heart's convictions through lessons gleaned from reality and which, conversely, lets us understand the life of the universe through the life of our own heart.

All the other elements abound in similarly ambivalent certitudes. They hint at close confidences and reveal striking images. All four have their faithful followers—or more exactly, each is profoundly and materially a *system of poetic fidelity*. In exalting them, we may think that we are being faithful to a favorite image; in reality, we are being faithful to a primitive human feeling, to an elemental organic reality, a fundamental oneiric temperament.

**IV**

We shall find confirmation for this hypothesis, I believe, as we study the substantial images of water and create this psychology of "material imagination" for an element more feminine and more uniform than fire, a more constant one which symbolizes human powers that are more hidden, simple, and simplifying. Because of this simplicity, our task here will be more difficult and more varied. The poetic sources for water are less plentiful and more impoverished than those for other elements. Poets and dreamers have been more often entertained than captivated by the superficial play of waters. Water, then, is an embellishment for their landscapes; it is not really the "substance" of their reveries. Philosophically speaking, water poets "participate" less in the aquatic reality of nature than do poets who hear the call of fire or earth.

To bring out this "participation" that is the very essence of water-related thoughts, of this water *mind-set*, we shall be forced to dwell on a few, all too rare examples. But if the reader can be convinced that there is, under the superficial imagery of water, a series of progressively deeper and more tenacious images, he will soon develop a feeling for this penetration in his own contemplations; beneath the imagination of forms, he will soon sense the opening up of an imagi-
nation of substances. He will recognize in water, in its substance, a type of intimacy that is very different from those suggested by the "depths" of fire or rock. He will have to recognize that the material imagination of water is a special type of imagination. Strengthened in this knowledge of depth of a material element, the reader will understand at last that water is also a type of destiny that is no longer simply the vain destiny of fleeting images and a never-ending dream but an essential destiny that endlessly changes the substance of the being. From that point on, the reader will understand more intimately, more painfully, one of the characteristics of Heracliteanism. He will see that the Heraclitean flux is a concrete philosophy, a complete philosophy. One cannot bathe twice in the same river because already, in his inmost recesses, the human being shares the destiny of flowing water. Water is truly the transitory element. It is the essential, ontological metamorphosis between fire and earth. A being dedicated to water is a being in flux. He dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away. Daily death is not fire's exuberant form of death, piercing heaven with its arrows; daily death is the death of water. Water always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death. In innumerable examples, we shall see that for the materializing imagination, death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite.

V

Before giving the broad outline of my study, I should like to explain its title, for this explanation will shed light on its purpose. Although the present work, following The Psychoanalysis of Fire, is another illustration of the law of the four poetic elements, I have not kept the title "The Psychoanalysis of Water" that would have matched the earlier essay. I chose a vaguer title: Water and Dreams. Honesty required it. In order to speak of a psychoanalysis, I would have had to classify the original images without allowing any of them to bear the traces of their original rights. The complexes that have long united desire and dreams would have had to be pointed out and then taken apart. I feel that I did just this in The Psychoanalysis of Fire. Perhaps it is surprising that a rationalistic philosopher would pay so much attention to illusions and errors and that he would be constantly obliged to present rational values and clear images as corrections of false notions. In point of fact I see no solid basis for a natural, direct, elemental rationality. Rational knowledge is not acquired all at once, nor is the right perspective on fundamental images reached in the first attempt. Rationalist? That is what we are trying to become, not only in our learning generally but also in the details of our thinking and the specific organization of our familiar images. That is how, through a psychoanalysis of objective knowledge and image-centered knowledge, I became rationalistic toward fire. To be honest, I must confess that I have not achieved the same result with water. I still live water images; I live them synthetically in their original complexity, often according them my unreasoning adherence.

I always experience the same melancholy in the presence of dormant water, a very special melancholy whose color is that of a stagnant pond in a rain-soaked forest, a melancholy not oppressive but dreamy, slow, and calm. A minute detail in the life of waters often becomes an essential psychological symbol for me. Thus, the odor of water mint calls forth in me a sort of ontological correspondence which makes me believe that life is simply an aroma, that it emanates from a being as an odor emanates from a substance, that a plant growing in a stream must express the soul of water. . . . If I were to re-live in my own way the philosophical myth of Condillac's statue, which finds its first world and primitive consciousness in odors, I would have to say, "I am, first of all, the odor of mint, the odor of mint water," instead of saying as it did, "I am the odor of rose." For being is before all else an awakened being, and it awakens in the power of an extraordinary impression. The individual is not the sum of his common impressions but of his unusual ones. Thus, familiar mysteries are created in us which are expressed in rare symbols. It is near water and its flowers that I have best understood that reverie is an ever-emanating universe, a fragrant breath that issues from things through the dreamer. Therefore, if I intend to study the life of water images, I must allow the river and springs of my home a dominant role.

I was born in a section of Champagne noted for its streams, its rivers, and its valleys—in Vallage, so called because it has so many valleys. The most beautiful of retreats for me would be down in a valley, beside running water, in the scanty shade of the willows and
water-willows. And when October came with its fogs on the river...

I still take great pleasure in following a stream, in walking along the banks in the right direction, the way the water flows and leads life elsewhere—to the next village. My "elsewhere" is never farther away than that. I was almost thirty when I saw the ocean for the first time. And so, in this book, I shall not do justice to the sea. I shall speak of it indirectly, heeding what poets have said of it in their pages, and remain under the influence of those schoolbook commonplaces that relate it to infinity. For in my own reverie, it is not infinity that I find in waters but depth. Furthermore, does not Baudelaire say that six or seven leagues, for a man dreaming by the sea, represents the radius of infinity? Vallaige is eighteen leagues long and twelve wide. It is, therefore, a world. I do not know it in its entirety; I have not followed all its streams.

But the region we call home is less expanse than matter; it is granite or soil, wind or dryness, water or light. It is in it that we materialize our reveries, through it that our dream seizes upon its true substance. From it we solicit our fundamental color. Dreaming by the river, I dedicated my imagination to water, to clear, green water, the water that makes the meadows green. I cannot sit beside a stream without falling into a profound reverie, without picturing my youthful happiness... does not have to be the stream at home, water from home. The nameless waters know all of my secrets. The same memory flows from all fountains.

There is another reason, less emotional and personal, for not using "The Psychoanalysis of Water" for a title. In this book, the organic nature of materialized images, necessary for a truly deep psychoanalysis, has not been developed systematically. The first psychic interests which leave indelible traces in our dreams are organic interests. Our first ardent belief is in the well-being of the body. It is in the flesh and organs that the first material images are born. These first material images are dynamic, active; they are linked to simple, surprisingly primitive wants. Psychoanalysis has caused many a revolt by speaking of the child's libido. The action of this libido would perhaps be more clearly understood if it were allowed to retain its confused and general form, if it were linked to all organic desires and needs. The libido would then appear to be responsible for all desires and needs.

One thing is certain, in any case, and that is that the child's reverie is a materialistic reverie. The child is a born materialist. His first dreams are dreams of organic substances.

There are times when the creative poet's dream is so profound, so natural, that he redisCOVERS the images of his youthful body without knowing it. Poems whose roots are this deep often have a singular strength. A power runs through them, and without thinking, the reader participates in its original force. Its origin is no longer visible. Here are two passages where the organic sincerity of a primary image is revealed:

Knowing my own quantity,
It is I, I tug, I call upon all of my roots, the Ganges, the Mississippi
The thick spread of the Orinoco, the long thread of the Rhine, the Nile with its double bladder...

Thus it is with abundance... In popular legends, there are innumerable rivers which have come into being through the urination of a giant. Gargantua also inundated the French countryside at random during all his walks.

If water becomes precious, it becomes seminal. Then the songs celebrating it are more mysterious. Only an organic psychoanalysis can illuminate an obscure image like the following:

And as the seminal drop enriches the mathematical figure, dispersing
The growing attraction of the elements of its theorem
Thus the body of glory desires under the body of clay, and the night
To be dissolved in visibility.

One drop of powerful water suffices to create a world and to dissolve the night. To dream of power, only one drop imagined in its depth is needed. Water thus given dynamic force is a seed; it gives life an upward surge that never flags.

Likewise, in writings as idealized as Edgar Allan Poe's, Marie Bonaparte has discovered the organic meaning of numerous themes.

2. Ibid., p. 64.
She offers extensive evidence of the physiological nature of certain poetic images. I did not consider myself sufficiently prepared to go so far toward the roots of organic imagination—to set down, as a subtext beneath this psychology of water, a physiology of water. That would require an extensive medical background and, above all, broad experience with neuroses. As for me, I have only reading through which to know man—reading, that marvelous means of judging man by what he writes. I love man, most of all, for what can be written about him. Is what cannot be written worth living? I have to be content with the study of a material imagination that is grafted on. I have nearly always limited myself to studying the different branches of materializing imagination above the graft after culture has put its mark on nature.

To me this is not simply a metaphor. The graft seems to be a concept essential for understanding human psychology. In my opinion it is the human stamp, the specifying mark of the human imagination. In my view, mankind imagining is the transcendent aspect of natura naturans. It is the graft which can truly provide the material imagination with an exuberance of forms, which can transmit the richness and density of matter to formal imagination. It forces the seedling to bloom, and gives substance to the flower. All metaphors aside, there must be a union of dream-producing and idea-forming activities for the creation of a poetic work. Art is grafted nature.

Naturally, when I have noticed a more distant strain in my study of images, I have made note of it in passing. In fact, it is only rarely that I have not disclosed the organic origins in the case of very idealized images. Yet this does not suffice to rank my study among examples of exhaustive psychoanalyses. My book, then, remains an essay in literary aesthetics. It has the dual objective of determining the substance of poetic images and the suitability of particular forms to fundamental matter.

VI

Here, then, is the general outline of this essay.

To show clearly what an axis of materializing imagination is, we shall begin with images that do not materialize well; we shall call up superficial images which play on the surface of an element without giving the imagination time to work upon its matter. The first chapter will be devoted to clear waters, to sparkling waters which produce fleeting and facile images. Nevertheless, as we shall see, because of the unity of the element, these images are ordered and organized. We shall then anticipate the transition from a poetry of waters to a metapoetics of water, a transition from plural to singular. For such a metapoetics, water is not only a group of images revealed in wandering contemplation, a series of broken, momentary reveries; it is a mainstay for images, a mainstay that quickly becomes a contributor of images, a founding contributor for images. Thus, little by little, in the course of ever more profound contemplation, water becomes an element of materializing imagination. In other words, playful poets live like water in its yearly cycle, from spring to winter, easily, passively, lightly reflecting all the seasons. But the more profound poet discovers enduring water, unchanging and reborn, which stamps its image with an indelible mark and is an organ of the world, the nourishment of flowing phenomena, the vegetating and polishing element, the embodiment of tears.

But, let me emphasize again that by remaining some time near the iridescent surface, we shall understand the value of depth. We shall then attempt to identify certain principles of cohesion that unify superficial images. Specifically, we shall see how the narcissism of an individual being fits, little by little, into a truly cosmic narcissism. At the end of the chapter, I shall also study a facile ideal of whiteness and grace under the name of the swan complex, wherein buoyant and loving waters take on a symbolism easy to psychoanalyze.

It is not until the second chapter—where we shall study the main branch of Edgar Allan Poe's metapoetics—that we shall be sure of reaching the element itself, substantial water, dreamed about as a substance.

There is a reason for this certainty. Material imagination learns from fundamental substances; profound and lasting ambivalences are bound up in them. This psychological property is so constant that we can set forth its opposite as a primordial law of the imagination: a matter to which the imagination cannot give a dual existence cannot play this psychological role of fundamental matter. Matter that does not provide the opportunity for a psychological ambivalence cannot find a poetic double which allows endless transpositions.
ment to engage the whole soul, there must be a dual participation of
desire and fear, a participation of good and evil, a peaceful partici-
pation of black and white. We shall see the manichaeism of reverie
more clearly than ever when Poe meditates beside rivers and lakes. It
is through water that Poe, the idealist, intellectual, and logician,
comes in contact with irrational matter, a "vexed," mysteriously liv-
ing matter.

A study of Poe's work will provide us with a good example of the
dialectic necessary to the active life of language, as Claude-Louis
Estève understood so well: "If then it be necessary to take subjectivity
out of logic and science, insofar as it is possible, it is no less necessary,
by the same token, to take objectivity out of vocabulary and
syntax." Because we fail to de-objectify objects and deform forms—a
process which allows us to see the matter beneath the object—the
world is strewn with unrelated things, immobile and inert solids, ob-
jects foreign to our nature. The soul, therefore, suffers from a defi-
ciency of material imagination. By grouping images and dissolving
substances, water helps the imagination in its task of de-objectifying
and assimilating. It also contributes a type of syntax, a continual link-
ing up and gentle movement of images that frees a reverie bound to
objects. It is thus that elemental water in Edgar Allan Poe's meta-
poetics imparts a particular motion to a universe. It symbolizes with a
Heracliteanism that is slow, gentle, and silent as oil. Water then
undergoes something like a loss of impetus, a loss of life; it becomes a
sort of plastic mediator between life and death. In reading Poe, one is
led to a more intimate understanding of the strange life of dead
waters, and language learns the most frightening of syntaxes, the syn-
tax of dying things, dying life.

To characterize accurately this syntax of becoming and of material
things—this triple syntax of life, death, and water—I have selected
two complexes, here called the Charon complex and the Ophelia com-
plex. I have treated them in the same chapter because they both sym-
bolize a meditation on our last voyage and on our final dissolution.
To disappear into deep water or to disappear toward a far horizon, to
become a part of depth or infinity, such is the destiny of man that
finds its image in the destiny of water.

Once we have thus defined both the superficial and the profound
characteristics of imaginary water, we can attempt to study the rela-
tion of this element to other elements of material imagination. We
shall see that certain poetic forms are fed by a double substance; that
a dual materialism often works upon material imagination. In certain
reveries, it seems that every element seeks either marriage or struggle,
episodes that either calm or excite it. In other reveries, imaginary
water will appear to us as the element of compromise, as fundamental
to mixtures. That is why I shall pay considerable attention to the
combination of water and earth that is "realistically" presented under
the guise of "paste." Paste (la pâte) is thus the basic compo-
nent of materiality; the very notion of matter is, I think, closely
bound up with it. An extensive examination of kneading and model-
ing would have to be the point of departure for any description of the
real and experienced relationships between formal and material
causes. An idle, caressing hand that runs over well-modeled lines and
surveys a finished sculpture may be charmed by seemingly effortless
geometry. Such a geometry leads to the philosophy of a philoso-
pher who sees the worker working. In the realm of aesthetics, this visual-
izing of finished work leads naturally to the supremacy of formal im-
agination. Conversely, this working, controlling hand learns the
essential dynamic genius of reality while working with a matter that
resists and yields at the same time, like passionate and rebellious
flesh. It amasses all ambivalences. Such a working hand needs an
exact mixture of earth and water in order to realize fully what consti-
tutes matter capable of form, substance capable of life. To the uncon-
scious of the man who kneads the clay, the model is the embryo of
the work; clay is the mother of bronze. Therefore I cannot emphasize
too much how important the experience of fluidity and pliability is to
an understanding of the psychology of the creative unconscious. In
experimenting with paste (la pâte), water will obviously be the domi-
nant substance. One dreams of water when taking advantage of the
docility of clay (l'argile).

To show the capability of water for combining with other elements,
we shall study other compounds, never forgetting that, for the mate-
rial imagination, the exemplary compound is a mixture of water and
earth.

Once we understand that for the unconscious every combination
of material elements is a marriage, we shall realize why the naive or poetic imagination nearly always attributes feminine characteristics to water. We shall also see how profoundly maternal the waters are. Water swells seeds and causes springs to gush forth. Water is a substance that we see everywhere springing up and increasing. The spring is an irresistible birth, a continuous birth. The unconscious that loves such great images is forever marked by them. They call forth endless reveries. In a special chapter, I have tried to show how these images, impregnated with mythology, still give life naturally to poetic works.

An imagination completely attached to one particular substance readily ascribes value to it. The human mind has claimed for water one of its highest values—the value of purity. How could we conceive of purity without the image of clear and limpid water, without this beautiful pleonasm that speaks to us of pure water? Water draws to itself all images of purity. I have therefore tried to list in order all the reasons for the power of this symbolism. Here we have an example of the kind of natural morality learned through meditation on a fundamental substance.

In the light of this problem of ontological purity, the superiority of fresh water over sea water, recognized by all mythologists, is understandable. I have devoted a short chapter to this appreciation to focus the mind on a consideration of substances. The doctrine of material imagination will never be fully understood until the equilibrium between experiences and spectacles has been reestablished. The few books on aesthetics which attempt to take up concrete beauty, the beauty of substances, often merely skim over the real problem of material imagination. Let me give only one example. In his Aesthetics Max Schasler announces his intention of studying "die konkrete Natur-schönheit" (concrete natural beauty). He devotes only ten pages to the elements—of these, only three treat water—and the central paragraph is on the infinity of seas. It is most fitting, therefore, to place our emphasis on reveries that concern more common natural waters, waters which do not need infinity to hold the dreamer.

My last chapter, "Violent Water," will approach the problem of the psychology of water by very different routes. This chapter will not be, strictly speaking, a study of material imagination; it will be a study of dynamic imagination, to which I hope to devote another book.

In its violence, water takes on a characteristic wrath; in other words, it is easily given all the psychological features of a form of anger. Man rather glibly boasts of checking this anger. Thus violent water becomes water to which one does violence. A malicious duel between man and the floods begins. The water becomes spiteful; it changes sex. Turning malevolent, it becomes male. Here on a new level is the conquest of a duality inscribed in the element, a new sign of the basic value of an element of the material imagination.

I shall, therefore, first describe the will to attack that inspires a swimmer and then the revenge of the water—the flux and reflux of an anger that rumbles and reverberates. I shall take note of the special dynamic genius that a human being gains through constant contact with violent waters. This will be a new example of the fundamentally organic quality of the imagination. We shall thus discover the muscular imagination, whose action I perceived in Lautréamont's energetic metaphoetics. But after contact with water, with this material element, the material imagination will seem both more natural and more human than Lautréamont's animalized imagination. This will serve as one more proof of the direct nature of symbols formed by material imagination contemplating the elements.

Since I shall make it a point, as I have throughout the entire course of my work, to emphasize themes of material imagination (with perhaps tiring insistence), I need not recapitulate them in my conclusion. I will devote this conclusion almost exclusively to the most extreme of my paradoxes. It will consist of proving that the voices of water are hardly metaphoric at all; that the language of the waters is a direct poetic reality; that streams and rivers provide the sound for mute country landscapes, and do it with a strange fidelity; that murmuring waters teach birds and men to sing, speak, recount; and that there is, in short, a continuity between the speech of water and the speech of man. Conversely, I shall stress the little noted fact that, organically, human language has a liquid quality, a flow in its overall effect, water in its consonants. I shall show that this liquidity causes a special psychic excitement that, in itself, evokes images of water.

Thus water will appear to us as a complete being with body, soul, and voice. Perhaps more than any other element, water is a complete poetic reality. A poetics of water, despite the variety of ways in which it is presented to our eyes, is bound to have unity. Water should sug-
gest to the poet a new obligation: the *unity of the element*. Lacking this unity of the element, material imagination remains unsatisfied, and formal imagination is insufficient for drawing together dissimilar features. The work lacks life because it lacks substance.

VII

Finally, I should like to close this general introduction by making a few remarks on the kind of examples chosen to bear out my theses. Most of the examples are taken from poetry. *For the time being*, in my opinion, the only possible way of illuminating a psychology of the imagination is through the poems it inspires. The imagination is not, as its etymology suggests, the faculty for forming images of reality; it is the faculty for forming images which go beyond reality, which sing reality. It is a superhuman faculty. A man is a man to the extent that he is a superman. A man should be defined by the sum of those tendencies which impel him to surpass the human condition. A psychology of the mind in action is automatically the psychology of an exceptional mind, of a mind tempted by the exception, the new image grafted onto the old. The imagination invents more than objects and dramas—it invents a new life, a new spirit; it opens eyes which hold new types of visions. The imagination will see only if it has "visions" and will have visions only if reveries educate it before experiences do, and if experiences follow as token of reveries. As d'Annunzio has said: "The richest experiences happen long before the soul takes notice. And when we begin to open our eyes to the visible, we have already been supporters of the invisible for a long time."

Primal poetry, poetry that allows us a taste for our inner destiny, is to the invisible. It gives us the sense of youth and youthfulness by constantly replenishing our ability to be amazed. True poetry is a function of awakening. It awakens us, but it must retain the memory of previous dreams. That is why I have sometimes tried to delay the moment when poetry steps over the threshold of expression; I have tried, at every hint, to retrace the oneiric route leading to the poem. As Charles Nodier said in his Rêveries: "The map of the imaginable world is drawn only in dreams. The universe perceived through our senses is an infinitely small one." Dreams are, for certain souls, the very substance of beauty. Upon waking from a dream, Adam found Eve: that is why woman is so beautiful.

Strong in all these convictions, I was then able to set aside hackneyed knowledge, formal and allegorical mythologies that survive in weak and lifeless teaching. I was also able to disregard countless insincere poems in which shallow poetasters strain to produce the most diverse and confused echoes. Whenever I relied on mythology, it was because I recognized some permanence in its unconscious effect on people today. A mythology of waters in its entirety would be simply history. I have tried to write psychology, to bind together literary images and dreams. I have often noticed, however, that the picturesque disrupts both mythological and poetic forces. The picturesque disperses the strength of dreams. To be active, a phantom cannot wear motley. A phantom that can be described as complacent is a phantom that has ceased to act. To the various material elements correspond phantoms that keep their strength as long as they are faithful to their matter or, what amounts to almost the same thing, as long as they are faithful to original dreams.

The choice of literary examples is also due to an ambition, which, finally, I intend simply to confess: if my research is to have any impact, it should contribute some means, some tools for renewing literary criticism. For this reason, I introduced the notion of *culture complex* into literary psychology. I have given this name to *prereflective attitudes* that govern the very process of reflection. In the realm of the imagination, these are, for example, favorite images thought to be derived from things seen in the world around us but that are nothing but *projections* of a hidden soul. Culture complexes are cultivated by someone who thinks he is acquiring culture objectively. The realist, then, chooses his reality in reality; the historian chooses his history in history. The poet arranges his impressions by associating them with a tradition. Used well, the culture complex gives life and youth to a tradition. Used badly, the culture complex is the bookish habit of an unimaginative writer.

Naturally, culture complexes are grafted on more profound complexes, which psychoanalysis has brought to light. Charles Baudouin has stressed that a complex is essentially a transformer of psychic

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4. The specific study of the *history* of the psychology of water is not my subject. This subject is treated in the work of Martin Herman Ninck, *Die Bedeutung des Wassers im Kult und Leben der Alten, eine Symbolgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig, 1921).

energy. The culture complex continues this transformation. Cultural sublimation prolongs natural sublimation. To the cultured man a sublimated image never seems beautiful enough. He wants to renew the sublimation. If sublimation were a simple matter of concepts, it would come to an end as soon as the image was enclosed within its conceptual limits; but color overflows, matter abounds, images develop; dreams continue their growth despite the poems that express them. Under these conditions, a literary criticism that is not to be limited to a static balance of images must be complemented by a psychological criticism that revives the dynamic quality of the imagination, following the connection between original complexes and culture complexes. There is no other way, in my opinion, to measure poeticizing forces in action in literary works. Psychological description does not suffice. It is less a question of describing forms than of weighing matter.

In this book, as in others, I have not hesitated to designate new complexes by their cultural emblem, by the sign that all cultured men recognize; this may betray a lack of prudence, for such signs remain obscure and awaken nothing in the man who lives far from books. A man who does not read would be greatly astonished to hear of the poignant charm of a dead woman adorned with flowers and drifting away, like Ophelia, with the flow of the river. This is an image whose living development literary criticism has not shared. It is interesting to show how such images—rather unnatural ones—have become rhetorical figures and how these rhetorical figures can remain active in a poetic culture.6

If my analyses are accurate, they should help, I believe, to bridge the gap between the psychology of an ordinary reverie and the psychology of a literary reverie, a strange reverie, written down and coordinated in writing, that systematically goes beyond its initial dream, but remains faithful to elementary oneiric realities. To have that constancy of dream which produces a poem, one needs something more than real images before his eyes. The images born in us, that live in our dreams filled with a dense and rich oneiric matter—inexhaustible food for material imagination—must be pursued.

6. A rhetorical figure, as Charles Baudouin so aptly puts it, is a mental attitude, that is, the expression of a desire and the first step toward an act. La Psychanalyse, ed. Hermann, p. 144.
Not a simple eagerness to engage in facile mythologizing but a genuine intuition about the psychological role of natural experiences caused psychoanalysis to give Narcissus's name to the love that man has for his own image, for his face as it is reflected in still water. Actually, the human face is above all an instrument of seduction. Looking at himself, man prepares, stimulates, polishes this face, this gaze, all these tools of seduction. The mirror is the Kriegspiel of aggressive love. This active narcissism, too much neglected by classic psychoanalysis, can only be hastily sketched. A whole book would be needed to develop the "psychology of the mirror." Let it suffice to note at the beginning of our studies the profound ambivalence of narcissism, which goes from masochistic to sadistic traits and lives in a contemplation that both regrets and hopes, consoles and attacks. One can always ask a person before a mirror the double question: For whom do you look at yourself? Against whom do you look at yourself? Are you aware of your beauty or of your strength? These brief remarks will suffice to show the initially complex character of narcissism. In the course of this chapter we shall see narcissism grow more complicated page after page.

First, we must understand the psychological advantage of using water for a mirror: water serves to make our image more natural, to give a little innocence and naturalness to the pride we have in our private contemplation. A mirror is too civilized, too geometrical, too easily handled an object; it is too obviously a dream device ever to adapt itself to oneiric life. In the image-filled preface to his book, which is so moving from a moral point of view, Louis Lavelle notes the natural depth of a watery reflection, the infinity of the dream, which this reflection suggests:

If we imagine Narcissus in front of a mirror, the resistance of glass and metal sets up a barrier to his ventures. His forehead and fists collide with it; and if he goes around it, he finds nothing. A mirror imprisons within itself a second-world which escapes him, in which he sees himself without being able to touch himself, and which is separated from him by a false distance which he can shorten, but cannot cross over. On the other hand, a fountain is an open road for him.¹

The mirror a fountain provides, then, is the opportunity for open imagination. This reflection, a little vague and pale, suggests idealization. Standing before the water which reflects his image, Narcissus feels

that his beauty continues, has not come to an end, and must be completed. In the bright light of a room, glass mirrors give too stable an image. They will become living and natural again when they can be compared to living and natural water, when the renaturalized imagination can enter into participation with sights pertaining to river and spring.

Here we have grasped one of the elements of natural dream, its need to be engraved deeply into nature. One cannot dream profoundly with objects. To dream profoundly, one must dream with substances. A poet who begins with a mirror must end with the water of a fountain if he wants to present a complete poetic experience. Poetic experience, as I conceive it, must remain dependent on oneiric experience. Poetry as polished as Mallarmé's seldom transgresses this law; it gives us the intussusception of water images into mirror images.

O mirror!
Cold water frozen by boredom in your frame
How many times and for hours, cut off
From dreams and searching out my memories which are
Like leaves under your ice in the deep hole
I saw myself in you like a distant shadow,
But, oh horrible, some evenings in your harsh fountain
I have recognized the nakedness of my scattered dream?

A systematic study of mirrors in the work of Georges Rodenbach would lead to the same conclusion. By deliberately ignoring the spying, inquiring eye, always clear, always on the offensive, we can recognize that all of Rodenbach's mirrors are veiled; they have the same grey life as the canal waters which surround Bruges. In Bruges, every mirror is stagnant water.

III

Narcissus, then, goes to the secret fountain in the depths of the woods. Only there does he feel that he is naturally doubled. He stretches out his arms, thrusts his hands down toward his own image, speaks to his own voice. Echo is not a distant nymph. She lives in the basin of the fountain. Echo is always with Narcissus. She is he. She has his voice. She has his face. He does not hear her in a loud shout.


He hears her in a murmur, like the murmur of his seductive seducer's voice. In the presence of water, Narcissus receives the revelation of his identity and of his duality; of his double powers, virile and feminine; and, above all, the revelation of his reality and his ideology.

Thus, near the fountain an idealizing narcissism is born. I would like to indicate briefly its importance for a psychology of the imagination. This is all the more necessary because classic psychoanalysis seems to underestimate the role played by this idealization. In point of fact, Narcissism does not always produce neuroses. It also plays a positive role in aesthetics and, by expeditious transposition, in a literary work. Sublimation is not always the denial of a desire; it is not always introduced as a sublimation against instincts. It can be a sublimation for an ideal. Then Narcissus no longer says: "I love myself as I am"; he says: "I am the way I love myself." I live exuberantly because I love myself fervently. I want to show up well; thus, I must increase my adornment. Thus, life takes on beauty; clothes itself in images, blooms, transforms being, takes on light. It flowers, and the imagination opens to the most distant metaphors. It participates in the life of every flower. With this floral dynamics, real life takes a new surge upward. Real life is healthier if one gives it the holiday in unreality that is its due.

This idealizing narcissism, then, achieves the sublimation of a caress. The image contemplated in the waters appears as the contour of an entirely visual caress that has no need for a caressing hand. Narcissus takes pleasure in a linear, virtual, formalized caress. Nothing of the material remains in this delicate, fragile image. Narcissus holds his breath.

So much fragility, so much delicacy, so much unreality push Narcissus out of the present. Narcissus's contemplation is almost inevitably linked to hope. Meditating on his beauty, Narcissus meditates on his future. Narcissism, then, gives rise to a sort of natural
Yet combinations of hydromancy and catoptromancy are far from rare. Delatte tells of the practice of combining the reflections of the water and those of a mirror held above it. Sometimes the reflecting powers may be significantly augmented by plunging the divining mirror into water. It seems undeniable, then, that one of the component characteristics of hydromancy stems from narcissism. A systematic study of the *psychological* characteristics of divination will reveal that material imagination must be given a considerable role. In hydromancy it seems that we attribute a second sight to still water because it holds up to us a second version of ourselves.

But at the fountain Narcissus has not given himself over exclusively to contemplation of himself. His own image is the center of a world. With and for Narcissus, the whole forest is mirrored, the whole sky approaches to take cognizance of its grandiose image. In his *Narcissus*, a book that deserves a long study in itself, Joachim Gasquet gives us a whole metaphysics of imagination in a single phrase of remarkable density: “The world is an immense Narcissus in the act of thinking about himself.” Where could he consider himself better than in his images? In the crystal of fountains, a gesture troubles the images; repose restores them. The reflected world is the conquest of calm. It is a superb creation that requires only inaction, only a dreamer’s attitude; the longer one can remain there without moving, the better one can see the world taking form! Thus, a cosmic narcissism, which we shall study extensively in its different forms, continues very naturally from the point where egotistic narcissism leaves off. “I am handsome because nature is beautiful, nature is beautiful because I am handsome.” Such is the endless dialogue of creative imagination and its natural models. Generalized narcissism transforms all beings into flowers, and it gives all flowers consciousness of their beauty. All flowers turn into Narcissuses, and water is for them the marvelous instrument of narcissism. It is only by following this detour that we can see all the power and philosophic charm in a thought like Shelley’s:

> And on the bank a lonely flower he spied,  
> A meek and forlorn flower, with naught of pride,  
> Drooping its beauty o’er the watery clearness,  
> To woo its own sad image into nearness:  
> Deaf to light Zephyrus, it would not move;  
> But still would seem to droop, and pine, to love.

A delicate touch of a narcissism without pride that gives to every beautiful thing, to the simplest flower, consciousness of its own beauty. For a flower, to be born near the water is truly to be devoted to natural narcissism—to humid, humble, tranquil narcissism.

When specific reveries in the presence of a specific reality are considered one at a time, as we are attempting to do, one discovers that certain reveries have a very regular aesthetic destiny. Such is the case of reverie before a watery reflection. Near a stream, in its reflections, the world tends toward beauty. Narcissism, the first consciousness of beauty, is therefore the seed of pancalism. What gives this pancalism its power is the fact that it is progressive and detailed. We shall look at it later.

Let us first list the different types of cosmic narcissism. Instead of the precise, analytic narcissism of brightly lit reflection, we may see a veiled, foggy narcissism intervene in our contemplation of autumnal waters. It seems that objects lack the will to be reflected. Sky and clouds, which need the whole lake to paint their drama, then remain.


When an angry lake responds to the tempest of the winds, we see a sort of narcissism of anger thrust upon the poet. Shelley translates this angry narcissism into an admirable image. Water then resembles, he says, "a gem to copy Heaven engraved."

The whole importance of narcissism cannot be grasped if we limit ourselves to its reduced form, detaching it from its more general ones. A being confident of its beauty has a tendency to pancerism. A dialectic activity between individual narcissism and cosmic narcissism can be demonstrated when the principle which Ludwig Klages developed at such length is applied—without the world's poles, the soul's could not be determined. The lake would not be a good painter if it did not do my portrait first, individual narcissism declares. Then the face reflected in the center of the spring abruptly stops the water from flowing and returns it to its function of universal mirror. Eluard, in his work The Open Book, expresses it this way:

Here no one can be lost
And my face is in the pure water I see
A single tree singing
Rocks softening
The horizon being reflected.

Little by little, beauty is enframed. It spreads from Narcissus to the world, and we understand the certainty of Friedrich von Schlegel: "We know for a certainty that we live in the most beautiful of all possible worlds." Pancalism becomes an inner certainty.

Sometimes one senses the poet's resistance to this cosmic image. This is the case, I believe, with Eugenio d'Ors, who is, from all evidence, a "terrestrial" poet. According to d'Ors, the landscape must first be "geological." In the following passage he betrays his resistance to water poetry. It illustrates our own point of view through contrast. D'Ors tries to prove that qualities of air and light are adjectives which cannot help us to know the true substance of a landscape. He thinks, for example, that a seascape should have "architectural consistency," and he concludes:


A seascape which could be inverted, for instance, would be a bad painting. Turner himself—audacious though he may be in luminous fantasies—never risks painting a reversible seascape, that is, one in which the sky could be mistaken for the water, and the water for the sky. And if the impressionist Monet, in the controversial series, Les Nymphéas (The Water Lilies), did it, it can be said that he found his penance in the sin, for Monet's Les Nymphéas has never been, and will never be considered, in art history, a normal product; but rather a caprice, which, though it may caress our sensibility for a moment, certainly has no claim to acceptance into the ennobling archives of our memory. A half-hour's recreation, a perishable object placed here and now in the immediate vicinity of the purely decorative among the products of industrial art; brother to arabesques, to tapestries, to pottery from Faenza; a thing, to wit, which can be seen without looking at it, which can be grasped without thought, and which is forgotten without regret. Such disdain for "the perishable object!" Such a need for immobile beauty! How willingly shall I, unlike d'Ors, accept a work of art which gives the illusion of mobility, even through deception, if this error opens the way to reverie for me. This is just what I feel in the presence of Les Nymphéas. When one is in sympathy with water sights, one is always ready to enjoy its narcissistic function. A work that suggests this function is immediately understood through the material imagination of water.

Perhaps these remarks on the relationship of egotistical narcissism and cosmic narcissism will seem better grounded if I stress their metaphysical nature.

Schopenhauer's philosophy shows that aesthetic contemplation alleviates human sorrow for an instant by detaching man from the drama of will. This separation of contemplation from will eliminates a feature that I would like to stress: the will to contemplate. For contemplation also gives rise to a kind of will. Man wants to see. Seeing is a direct need. Curiosity sets the mind of man in motion. But in nature itself, it seems that powers of vision are active. Between contemplated nature and contemplative nature, there are close and reciprocal relations. Imaginary nature effects the unity of natura naturans and of natura naturata. When a poet lives his dreams and his poetic crea-
tions, he thus effects natural unity. It then seems as though contemplated nature helps in the contemplation, as though it contains within itself the means for contemplating. The poet asks us "to associate ourselves as closely as we can with those waters which we have delegated to the contemplation of what exists." But is it the lake or the eye which contemplates better? The lake or pool or stagnant water stops us near its bank. It says to our will: you shall go no further; you should go back to looking at distant things, at the beyond. While you were wandering, something here was already looking on. The lake is a large tranquil eye. The lake takes all of light and makes a world out of it. Through it, the world is already contemplated, already represented. It too might say, "The world is my representation of it." Near the lake, we understand the old physiological theory of active vision. Active vision implies that the eye projects light, that it illuminates its images by itself. It is understandable, then, that the eye may be desirous of seeing its visions, that contemplation may also be will.

The cosmos, then, is in some way clearly touched by narcissism. The world wants to see itself. Will, taken in its Schopenhauerian sense, creates eyes to contemplate, to feast on beauty. Is not the eye itself luminous beauty? Does it not bear the mark of pancaalism? It must be beautiful in order to behold beauty. The iris of the eye must be beautiful color for beautiful colors to enter the pupil. Without black eyes, how can one really see the blue sky? Without black ones, how look at the mght?

As a violet's gentle eye
Gazes on the azure sky
Until its hue grows like what it beholds.

How better could one surprise material imagination in the midst of its task of substantial mimesis?

Strindberg's Swanwhite (Swanehvit), while awaiting Prince Charming, caresses the back and fan of the peacock:

"Little Pavo! Little Pavo! What do you see! What do you hear! Will someone come? Who will come? Is it a little prince? Is he handsome and charming? Can you see him with all your blue eyes?" (She holds up a peacock feather and looks fixedly at the eye of the feather.)

Let us note in passing that the eye of a feather is also called its mirror. This is a new proof of the ambivalence which plays about the two particules seen and seeing. For an ambivalent imagination, the peacock is vision multiplied. According to Creuzer, the primitive peacock has a hundred eyes.

A new shade of meaning quickly finds its way into universalized vision and reinforces the voluntary nature of contemplation. Strindberg's fairy world sheds light on this aspect. The iris of the peacock feather, the "eye" without an eyelid, this permanent eye suddenly takes on a certain harshness. Instead of contemplating, it observes. An Argus relation warps the tender fascination of admiring love: A little while ago you looked at me, now you are spying on me. Thus, soon after caresses, Swanwhite senses the persistence of the ocellated fan.

"Are you there to observe, naughty Argus... Silly! I'm drawing the curtain, do you see?" (She draws a curtain which hides the peacock, but not the countryside, then she goes toward the pigeons.) "My turtle-doves so white, white, white, you are going to see what is whitest of all."

Finally, when temptation comes, the peacock Argus with the cruel eyes will draw aside the curtain. "Who drew aside the curtain? Who commanded the bird to look at us with his hundred eyes?" O many-sighted fan!

From the point of view of a stubbornly realistic and logical criticism, I may be readily accused of punning on the word eye, a word assigned—by what stroke of chance?—to the circular spots on a peacock's feathers. But the reader who really knows how to accept

8. Shelley, Prometheus Unbound, in Works, p. 204.
the invitation to contemplation that the peacock offers will be unable
to forget the strange impression made by these hundred converging
"looks." By all indications, the fan itself wants to fascinate. Observe
the spread out fan carefully. It is not flat. It is curved inward like a
shell. If some mere barnyard denizen comes into the center of this
concealed vision, pride becomes wrath, anger runs
over the plumes, the whole fan shudders, trembles, rustles. The spec-
tator then has the feeling that he is in the presence of a direct will
to beauty, a force for ostentation that cannot remain passive. A psy-
chology devoted to man, confronting some foolish display of beauty,
misses the features of aggressive beauty so unmistakable to an observer
of animals. On the strength of this example, a Schopenhauerian
philosopher might become convinced of the need to reunite the in-
sights that Schopenhauer separated: the magnetism of contemplation
is related to will. Contemplation is not opposed to will but rather
follows another of its branches, participating in the will for beauty
which is an element of will in general.

Without a doctrine of active imagination that can unite the
phenomenon of beauty with the will to see, passages like these by
Strindberg are incomprehensible and dull. One does not read them
correctly by looking for easy symbols. To read them properly, one's
imagination must participate in both the life of forms and the life of
matters. The living peacock effects this synthesis.

This combination, made up of cosmic narcissism and dynamic pan-
calism did not escape Victor Hugo. He understood that nature forces
us to contemplation. Before one of the great views along the banks of
the Rhine, he wrote: "It was one of those places where we think we
see that magnificent peacock we call nature spread his
fan." 11 We can
certainly say, then, that the peacock is a microcosm of universal pan-
calism.

Thus, in the most diverse forms and on the most diversified oc-
casions, in the works of very different authors, the endless exchange
of the visible for vision itself takes place. Everything which shows, sees.
Lamartine wrote in Graziella: "Lightning flashes without interruption
between the cracks of my shutters, like winks of a fiery eye on
the walls of my room." 12 Thus, the lightning which lights, looks.


If the look bestowed by things is rather soft, grave, and passive,
then it is the look of water. An examination of the imagination leads
us to this paradox: in the imagination of universalized vision, water
plays an unexpected role. The true eye of the earth is water. In our
eyes it is water that dreams. Are our eyes not "that unexplored pool
of liquid light which God put in the depths of our being"? 13 In nature
it is once again water that sees and water that dreams: "The lake has
created the garden. Everything is composed around this water which
thinks." 14 As soon as one surrenders himself entirely to the sway of
the imagination with all the united powers of dream and contempla-
tion, he understands the depth of Paul Claudel’s thought: "Thus,
water is the gaze of the earth, its instrument for looking at
time.

VI

After this metaphysical digression, let us return to the simpler char-
acteristics of the psychology of waters.

To the play of clear waters and springtime waters, all shimmering
with images, must be added a component part common to the poetry
of both: coolness. We shall encounter this quality of water’s mass
when studying myths of purity and see that coolness is a power of
awakening. But we must also call attention to it at this time because it
combines with other direct images. A psychology of the imagination
must include all the immediate data of aesthetic consciousness.

That coolness which is felt while washing one's hands at a stream
reaches out, expands, and takes hold of all of nature. It rapidly
becomes the freshness of spring. The adjective springlike cannot be
applied to any noun more appropriately, perhaps, than to water. For
the French ear, there is no cooler word than eaux printanières (spring
waters). Coolness impregnates the springtime with its trickling
waters, giving the whole season of renewal its value. Conversely,
coolness is often applied negatively in the realm of air images. A cool
wind implies chilling. It cools enthusiasm. Thus, each adjective has
its privileged noun which material imagination quickly retains.

Coolness, accordingly, is an attribute of water. Water is, in a sense,

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
embodied coolness. It is indicative of a poetic climate. Thus it is that water points up the contrast between Erin, which is green, and Scotland, which is russet in color—grass as opposed to heather.

When the substantial root of a poetic quality has been discovered, when the matter of the adjective on which material imagination works has really been found, all the well-rooted metaphors develop by themselves. Since they are attached to substances, sensual values—and not sensations—provide correspondences that will not mislead. Thus, perfumes green as meadows are obviously cool perfumes, a cool, gleaming flesh, plump as children's flesh. This whole correspondence is upheld by primitive water, by carnal water, the universal element. Material imagination is sure of itself when it has recognized the ontological value of a metaphor. On the contrary, phenomenalism in poetry is a powerless doctrine.

VII

The song of the river is, likewise, cool and clear. The noise of the waters quite naturally takes on the metaphors of coolness and clarity. Laughing waters, ironic streams, waterfalls with their noisy gaiety, all are found in the most varied literary landscapes. These laughs, these babblings are, it seems, the childhood language of Nature. In the stream the child Nature speaks.

It is hard to abandon this childish poetry. In the works of numerous poets, streams still gurgle in that same special nursery tone that too often restricts the childish soul to disyllables with few consonants: da-da, boo-boo, wa-wa. That is how streams sing in those children's tales that adults have invented.

But this oversimplification of a pure and profound harmony, this persistent puérilité or poetic infantilism that is the defect of so many poems must not cause us to underestimate the youth of waters, the lesson in vivacity that lively water affords us.

Springs found in groves, these forest springs, so often hidden, are heard before being seen. They are heard upon awakening, when we come out of dreams. It is thus that Faust hears them on the banks of the Peneus: "Prattling seems each wave to play"; and the Nymphs reply: "We rustle, we murmur / We whisper to thee."

But does this mythology have real power? Happy is he who is awakened by the cool song of the stream, by a real voice of living nature. Each new day has for him the dynamic quality of birth. At dawn, the song of the brook is a song of youth, advice for youthfulness. Who will give us back a natural awakening, an awakening in nature?

VIII

With the rather superficial poetry of reflections is associated an entirely visual, artificial, and often pedantic sexualization. It gives rise to the more or less bookish evocation of naiads and nympha. Thus, a mass of desires and images, a real culture complex that could well be named the Nausicăi complex, is formed. Actually, nympha and nereids, dryads and hamadryads are no longer anything but schoolbook images. They are products of the high school-educated middle class. Carrying high school memories with him to the country, a bourgeois who quotes twenty words of Greek, palatalizing several dieresis on the "i," cannot imagine a spring without a nymph or a shady bay without a princess.

I shall give a more accurate description of the culture complex at the end of this chapter when we have struck a balance between words and images in traditional symbols. Let us get back to the examination of those real sights that are at the origin of imagination's metaphors.

The woman at her bath, such as poets describe or suggest her or painters depict her, is not to be found in our countryside. Bathing is no longer anything but a sport. And as a sport, it is the opposite of feminine timidity. Henceforth, the bathing scene is a crowd. It provides a "background" for novelists. It can no longer provide a true nature poem.

Moreover, the primitive image, the image of woman bathing as seen in a brightly lighted reflection, is false. By disturbing the waters, the bather breaks up her own image. The one who bathes is not reflected in the water. Imagination, then, must supplement reality, must make a desire real.

What, then, is the sexual function of the river? It is to evoke feminine nudity. Here is extremely clear water, says a passer-by. How faithfully it would reflect the most beautiful images! Consequently, the woman who bathes there must be white and young; she must be nude. Moreover, water evokes natural nudity, a nudity that can keep its innocence. In the realm of imagination, truly nude beings, with
hairless lines, always come out of the ocean. The being rising out of
the water is a reflection that is materialized little by little; it is an im-
age before it is a being, a desire before it is an image.

For certain reveries, everything which is reflected in water has femi-
nine traits. Here is a good example of this fantasy. One of Jean-Paul's
heroes, dreaming by the water, says suddenly without the slightest
explanation: "From the midst of the pure lake waters rose the sum-
mits of hills and mountains which seemed like so many women bathers
coming out of the water..." 16 No realist challenged to do so
could explain this image. Any geographer may be questioned; unless
he leaves the earth for dreams, he will never have any reason to
confuse an orographic profile and a feminine profile. The feminine image
is forced upon Jean-Paul by a reverie surrounding a reflection. It can
be grasped only by the long circuitous psychological explanations
that we propose.

IX

The swan, in literature, is an ersatz or substitute for the nude
woman. It is sanctioned nudity, immaculate but nevertheless osten-
sible whiteness. At least swans let themselves be seen! He who adores
the swan desires the bather.

A scene from Faust Part II shows us in detail how setting calls up
character, and the dreamer's desire, under different forms, evolves.
Here is a scene divisible into three tableaux: setting, woman, and
swan.

First, the uninhabited landscape:

Arthwart thick-woven copse and bush
Still waters glide;—they do not rush,
Scarce they rustle as they flow:
From every side their currents bright
A hundred crystal springs unite,
And form a sloping bath below.

Zum Bade flach vertieften Raum. 17

It seems that nature has formed crypts to hide women bathing. In
the poem, this space, hollowed and fresh, is at once people accord-

16. Jean-Paul Richter, Titan, a Romance, trans. Charles T. Brooks (Boston, 1864),
1:29.
17. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust Part II, ed. F. H. Hedge, trans. A. Swan-
wick (Boston, 1884), act 2, lines 713-42.
present in the German text; they imply a weak, untruthful kind of escape, especially when compared to the kind that calls for psychoanalysis.

Moreover, it will not be difficult for the least experienced of apprentices in psychoanalysis to discern the masculine traits in this last image of the swan. Like all images active in the unconscious, the image of the swan is hermaphroditic. The swan is feminine when brilliant waters are contemplated, but it is masculine in action. For the unconscious, action is an act. For the unconscious, there is only one act. . . . An image that suggests an act must evolve in the unconscious from feminine to masculine.

This passage from Faust Part II, then, gives us a good example of what we shall call a complete image or, better, a completely dynamized image. The imagination sometimes gathers images of increasing sensuality. It is nourished first with distant images, dreams before a huge panorama; it isolates a secret place where more human images are assembled. It goes from visual enjoyment to more intimate desires. Finally, at the climax of a dream of seduction, the visions become sexual aims. They suggest acts. Then the swan "swells his plumage . . . landl the hallowed spot doth near."

One step more in psychoanalysis and it is clear that the song the swan sings before his death can be interpreted as the eloquent professions of a lover, as the warm voice of the sederator before the supreme moment, an ending so fatal to exaltation that it is really a "love-related death."

This swan song, this song of sexual death, of exalted desire about to find gratification, appears but rarely in its complexual significance. Because the swan song is one of the most overused of all metaphors, it no longer has any reverberation in our unconscious. It is a metaphor that has been crushed beneath artificial symbolism. When La Fontaine's swan sings "his last song" while under the cook's knife, poetry stops living; it no longer moves the reader and loses its own meaning, contributing either to conventional symbolism or to an out-dated realistic meaning. In the heyday of realism, people were still wondering if a swan's larynx was capable of real song or even of an agonized cry. The swan song can be explained neither by conventional symbolism nor by reality. In this case, as in the case of so many other metaphors, the unconscious must be explored for an explanation. If this general interpretation of reflection is accurate, the "swan" image is always a desire. It therefore sings in its capacity as desire. Now there is only one desire that sings while dying or dies while singing, and this is sexual desire. The swan song is, then, sexual desire at its culminating point.

For example, such an interpretation is the only one, it seems to me, that can account for all the unconscious and poetic resonances of this beautiful passage from Nietzsche. The tragic myth conducts the world of phenomena to its boundaries where it denies itself and seeks to flee back again into the bosom of the true and only reality; where it then, like Isolde, seems to strike up its metaphysical swansong:

In the sea of pleasure's
Billowing roll
In the ether-wave's
Ringing sound.
In the world-breath's
Drifting whole—
To drown in, to sink—
Unconscious—extremest joy! 18

What, then, is this sacrifice that annihilates a being by enveloping it in sweet-smelling waves, that unites a being to a universe that ceaselessly palpitates and rocks like a wave? What is this intoxicating sacrifice of a being who is unconscious both of loss and happiness—and who sings? No, it is not final death. It is death for one night. It is a satisfied desire that a bright morning will see reborn, just as day renews the image of the swan floating upon the waters. 19

To have its full poetic strength, a complex like the swan complex that I have just identified must act in secret within the poet's heart.

19. Perhaps one might find in Mallarmé's Swan the fusion of the Narcissism of love and the Narcissism of a loving death. Claude-Louis Estève, in his essay on Mallarmé (Etudes, p. 146), says by way of synthesis: "Mallarmé's swan, with its Narcissistic beauty and consummation, whose neck (and not its feet) shakes off the white agony—where, finally, immobilized in the reflections, ever remains the Pure and the Magnificent."
The poet contemplating at length the swan on the waters must not himself know that he desires a more delicate adventure. This is the case, I believe, with Goethe’s reverie. To underscore the naturalness of Faust’s reverie, I am going to present for the sake of contrast a second example where the symbols will seem obviously manufactured and crudely put together. In this example, we shall see in action that cheap Hellenism so characteristic of culture complexes. Here, there is no fusion between desire and symbol. The primitive image does not have its own life; it has been too quickly taken over by the memory of a learned mythology. I shall take this example from one of the short stories that Pierre Louÿs published under the title Evening for Nymphs. This book has some very beautiful passages. I shall not claim to criticize it from a literary point of view. It is the psychological viewpoint that interests us here.

In the short story “Leda or in Praise of the Blessed Shades,” the swan complex immediately discloses its human, too human, traits. The covering images do not fulfill their role. They are too transparent. A libidinous reader is too quickly and too directly served. “The beautiful bird was white as a woman, splendid and pink as light.” But the bird, white as a woman, as soon as it makes its presence felt by circling the nymph and giving her sidelong glances,” has already abandoned all of its symbolic value. He approaches Leda.

When the swan was very close [to Leda] he came even nearer, and raising himself on his large red feet, he stretched the undulating grace of his neck up as far as he could, in front of her bluish young thighs, and up to the soft fold of her hip. Leda’s astonished hands took the little head carefully and covered it with caresses. The bird’s every plume quivered. With his deep, velvety wing he squeezed her naked legs and made them bend. Leda let herself fall to the ground. And two pages later, everything is consummated:

Leda opened herself to him like a blue river flower. She felt, between her cold knees, the heat of the bird’s body. Suddenly she cried out: Oh!... Oh!... and her arms trembled like pale branches. The beak had pierced her horribly and the Swan’s head moved furiously within her, as if he were eating her entrails, deliciously.

Such passages have lost all their mystery, and there is no need for a psychoanalyst in order to explain them. The swan here is quite a useless euphemism. He is no longer a water dweller. Leda has no right to the title “a blue river flower.” All water ornaments are out of place here. Despite Pierre Louÿs’s great literary talent, “Leda” has no poetic strength. This short story, “Leda or in Praise of the Blessed Shades,” disobeys the laws of material imagination which demand that varied images be attached to a fundamental image.

In many other places in Pierre Louÿs’s work, examples of this literary nudism could be found hidden under the image of the swan. In Psyche, without preparation, without atmosphere, without anything which suggests either the beautiful bird or the reflecting water, Louÿs writes: “Aracoeli was seated nude, in the top drawer of her Empire bureau, and seemed to be the Leda of the large yellow copper swan which spread its wings on the lock.” Is it necessary to add that Aracoeli speaks of her lover “who dies in her arms only to be born again, still more handsome than before”?

Folklore, too, is touched by the “nudism” of swans. Let me give one legend where this nudism is presented without any mythological surcharge:

A young shepherd on the island of Ouessant who was tending his sheep near the edge of a pool, surprised to see resting there, white swans, from which beautiful nude girls came, who, after their bath, took back their skins and flew away, told his grandmother about this; she told him that these are swan-maidens and he who succeeds in stealing their clothing, forces them to carry him to their beautiful palace which is held in the clouds by four golden chains.

Stealing bathers’ clothes, a trick played by naughty boys! Often in dreams we have mishaps like that. This swan is a symbol of covering in the full meaning of the term. The swan-maiden belongs to reverie rather than to nocturnal dreams. At the slightest provocation, she appears in water reveries. A single trait may indicate her presence, proving the consistency of her characteristics. Thus, in one of Jean-Paul’s dreams where immaculate whites multiply, there appear “white swans, their wings open like arms.” This image in its rudimentary aspect says a great deal. It bears the stamp of an impulsive imagination—that is, one which must be grasped like an impulse. Wings that

are open arms manifest an earthly happiness. They are the opposite of arms that are seen as wings to carry us skyward.

XI

The example of Pierre Louÿs's swan with its excess of mythological surcharge can now help us to understand the precise meaning of a culture complex. The culture complex is attached most often to an academic culture, that is, to a traditional culture. Louÿs does not seem to have had the patience of a scholar like Paulus Cassell, who collected myths and tales in several literatures to measure both the unity and the multiplicity of the swan symbol. Louÿs borrowed from academic mythology to write his story. None but the "initiates" in the scholarly knowledge of myths will be able to read it. But, if such a reader be satisfied, his satisfaction is still mixed. He does not know if he loves the content or if he loves the form; he does not know if he is linking images or if he is linking emotions. Often symbols are brought together with no regard for their symbolic evolution. Whoever would speak of Leda must speak of the swan and of the egg. The same tale may bring these two stories together without penetrating the mythical character of the egg. In Louÿs's short story, the idea even occurs to Leda that she might be able "to have the egg cooked in hot ashes as she had seen the satyrs doing." Moreover, the culture complex often loses contact with deep and sincere complexes. It soon becomes synonymous with a badly understood tradition or, what amounts to the same thing, with a tradition which has been naively rationalized. Classical erudition, as Marie Delcourt has so well pointed out, has forced upon myths rational and utilitarian links that are not implicit in them.

The psychoanalysis of a culture complex, then, will always require that a definite separation be made between what is known and what is felt, just as the analysis of a symbol requires a separation between what is seen and what is desired. Having reached this conclusion, one may question whether an old symbol is still animated by symbolic forces and may evaluate the aesthetic mutations that sometimes reanimate former images.


Thus when handled by true poets, culture complexes can make us forget their conventional forms. They can then sustain paradoxical images. Such a case would be Gabriel d'Annunzio's Leda without a Swan. Here is the introductory image: "Now the Leda without a swan was there, so smooth that she must not even have had lines in the palm of her hand, and really shining from the waters of the Erotas." The swan seems to have a beauty fashioned by the waters, polished by the current. For a long time it was thought that the swan was the first model for boats, the best possible form for skiffs. Sails may have been copied from the rare sight of their wings spread in the breeze.

But this purity, this simplicity of line which appears to be the primary reason for d'Annunzio's metaphor, corresponds to too formal an imagination. As soon as the swan image presents itself to the imagination as a form, water must well up and everything which surrounds the swan must follow the impulse of the water's material imagination. Let us follow in just this direction the spirit of the metamorphoses that enlivens d'Annunzio's poetry. The woman does not appear in the waves. She appears surrounded by her white greyhounds. But the woman is so beautiful and so much desired that the mixed symbol of Leda and the swan is going to form right on the earth. "The ancient rhythm of the Metamorphosis is still circulating through the world." Water will well up everywhere, in the being and outside the being.

The young woman seemed to have been captured and recreated in nature's youth, and to contain within herself a spring which rose up bubbling against the crystal of her eyes. She was her own spring, her river, and her bank, the shade of the plane-tree, the trembling of the reed, the velvet of the moss. Great birds without wings rushed upon her; and certainly, when she held out her hand to one of them and took it by its feathered neck, she was repeating the gesture of Thestios's daughter exactly.

How can the immanence of imaginary water be better expressed? Dogs, a woman under an Italian sky, on Italian ground—that is what is given. And, nevertheless, behind the image of an absent, effaced, virtual swan, which the author refuses to mention, there is the water of Leda without a Swan which invades the scene, which bathes the people there, which in spite of everything expresses its legendary life. Such passages will be judged badly if the judgment is based on a
simple "association of ideas" or "an association of images." A more
direct growth is involved here, a production of images that are pro-
foundly homogeneous because they participate in an elementary rea-
}lity of material imagination.

**XII**

Images as active as the swan image are liable to all types of expan-
sion. Just as there is a cosmic narcissism, so in certain passages we can
recognize a cosmic swan. As Pierre Reverdy says: "Universal and
human dramas tend to become one." 23 A great desire is thought to be
a universal one.

An example of sublimation through great size, with reference to the
theme of the Swan reflected in water, can be found in one of Albert
Thibaudet's youthful works, The Red Swan. It is a dramatic myth,
a cultivated solar myth:

Far away, at the horizon, where the sun goes down, the Red Swan
still sends out his immortal challenge... He is the king of space,
and the sea swoons like a slave at the foot of his brilliant throne.
And still he is made of lies as I am made of flesh....

Thus speaks a warrior; a woman answers him: "Often, too, the Red
Swan glided slowly, set in the center of a halo of pink mother-of-
pearl, and his shadow slid over things in a long sheet of silence....
His reflections fell on the sea like the touch of kisses." Despite the fact
that two characters derive life from one symbol, the images are co-
herent. The author believes that his images have a kind of warlike
power. And in fact sexual proofs abound: The Red Swan is a woman
to be possessed, to be conquered. The myth that Thibaudet con-
structed, then, is a good example of dissymbolism: symbolism of the
sort in which images are explicitly set forth and given their sexual sig-
ificance. If this dissymbolism is lived out properly, it conveys the im-
pression that sight assembles images just as the heart gathers desires.

An emotional imagination lies behind a formal imagination. When
symbolism draws its strength from the heart itself, how much greater
visions become! The visions then seem to think. In works like The Red
Swan, one senses that meditation continues contemplation. That is
why metaphors become more general, why they invade the sky.


C. G. Jung gives several arguments that help us understand on the
cosmic plane why the swan is the symbol both of light on water and
of a hymn of death. This is, in fact, the myth of the dying sun. The
German word Schwan (swan) comes from the radical Swen, as does
Soone (sun)—sun and sound. 24 In another passage Jung quotes a poem
where the death of the singing swan is described as being a disap-
pearance under the waters.

In the pond sings the swan,
While gliding back and forth
And singing ever more softly
He dives and breathes his last.

Other examples of the swan on a cosmic plane would be easy to
find. The moon, like the sun, can evoke this image. Such is the case
in one of Jean-Paul's images: "The moon, that beautiful swan of the
sky, rose with its white plumage from Vesuvius, to the top of the firm-
ament..." 25 Conversely, for Jules Laforgue the swan is the
Moon's "substitute" during the day. 26

In his Legendary Moralities, Laforgue also writes:

The swan spreads its wings, and, rising straight up with a new and
imposing shudder, with well-filled sails, he scuds along and soon
completely disappears from view beyond the Moon.

'Oh sublime way to burn one's vessels! Noble fiancé!'

All of these disparate images, which a realistic doctrine of meta-
phor can do so little to explain, have real unity only through the
poetry of reflections, through one of the most fundamental themes of
the poetry of water.

24. C. G. Jung, Métamorphoses et symboles de la libido, trans. L. De Vos (Paris,
1927), p. 331.