

CHAPTER 1

NOT ONLY THE MATTER OF METAPHOR

The world is like the characters of our [Chinese] writing. What the symbol is to the flower, the flower itself – this one (he pointed to one of the drawings) – is to something. To go from the symbol to the thing symbolized is to explore the depth and meaning of the world, it is to seek God.

Andre Malraux, *Man's Fate*

What happened to those imaginary playmates of ours who ate more from the family dinner table than we did? And those secret places that we found down the alleys and in the woods where we were not supposed to go? Remember the long hours spent talking to the trees and to our dolls? Of gazing in the mirror at ourselves, wondering what we would grow up to be, trying on the costumes of our fancies? There were long interminable days when we felt our future was sealed. In the morning we woke to discover that we had forgotten to punch holes in the jartop of our lightning-bug zoo and in the afternoon our brother approached us in a way from which we could only suppose that he had detected the presence of pennies where quarters had before jingled in his piggy bank. The endless trials, city jails, and certain sentencings arrested the flow of time as we waited in Purgatorial comers, full of the visions of Hell.

Other days flew by faster. We mothered our small children, speaking to their painted faces in the same tones as our Mommy did to us. Erecting grand towns, we motored ourselves as tiny trucks and tractors through the heart of our inner landscapes. The

rhymes and songs and favorite tales danced between us as we jumped the rope, leered at others, and pushed the tattered book into the elder's hands. And when our parent's tucked us into bed and were safely hidden in the living room, we would pop out of bed like jack-in-the-boxes and dance with the shadows or furtively bring beneath the sheets our toy friends and fantasies. Some nights it seemed that only the bear staring in the window or the ghost moving in the attic above could get us to be quiet. We were quickly lost in pondering how the first got out of the zoo (and if he knew how to open windows); or whether the latter was waiting hungrily for us all to go to sleep so that he might sneak some food from the family kitchen. That was the time when our sand castles were constructed as if by the priciest of architects, who had the honor of moving into their own creations upon completion.

Is it true that the ocean simply came and ate them up, leaving not a trace? Did you turn to your Mother one day and feel it necessary to explain that Laura had moved from your town, for you found it hard to understand in any other way the absence of that imaginary friend? Was it only the washing machine that got the better of your little black dog as the leakage of stuffings portrayed the passage of time? Do you remember the long afternoons of going through the toys, the collected stones and shells, pieces of branch, pictures from young loves and magazines, trestles from train villages, and the personal belongings of many a doll, and packing them into cartons for the Goodwill or the garbagemen or the younger brother? And when was that day when the box of paints was closed and you handed them, like a philanthropic financier (still pained, however, from the criticism of the school art teacher), to your mother for the benefit of the local home for orphans? Did you steal away a few friends from those cardboard graves who seemed to be not yet totally dead – tucking them away secretly in the attic or a place long since forgotten and now covered with the dust of decay?

We no longer leave food for Santa Claus or set a place at the table for our favorite doll. Though we might still talk to children and animals we do so with complete honesty only when alone. But

when we see the child kicking that stone down the street from school with determination that proves it surely is not just a stone, or similarly avoiding the cracks in the pavement for fear of their harmful effects, do we not suppress a smile that would betray our understanding? Or is that smile lost in our notions of what foolishness is all about? No longer do we spend hours standing at the sink whipping soap suds with Momma's egg-beaters in order to manufacture the building material of a snowy kingdom or an amorphous thing or two. Nor do we sit out by the sidewalk painting pictures with our buckets of water.

In days past the sun would eat them up leaving room for more of the visions that danced in our heads. But then the sun ate our last one, and once more the sidewalk became simply the concrete beneath the pedestrians feet. The snowy villages and furry animals went down the drain for the last time and the stone lay still — though surely we have passed by it everyday without noticing.

Those long debates in the dark (when our best friend would spend the night) over the pros and cons of the different proofs concerning the existence of the Easter Bunny, Hell, or the Martians have passed. One day we seemed to have finished the sorting of our experience into the bins of real and imaginary and having believed ourselves to have shipped the latter out of our houses, we thought that we had finally grown up to live in the world as it really is. We thought we had done with the unreal, the "purely and simply imaginary." But though we shone with the success of the precocious school child who has overcome the bears at his bedroom window with his new found knowledge of the animals of suburbia, the night still brought uneasiness — though we no longer knew why. The doctors conferred. The pills were prescribed.

We discarded the stuffed dogs, the fairy kingdoms, train empires, aspirations for stardom, and for early death. We turned in the secret notions that we could fly (if only given a chance), or be a tree, a Robin Hood, or a dog. The imagination is laughable. It is a lot of silliness and fairy dust and pale pastel colors which

caught us like cobwebs in our eyes, blurring what is really before us in life. Having rubbed them out of our own eyes, we laugh and scorn at those who waste their time dealing with “imagination” — who lock themselves up in their rooms with their closed eyes and fancy paints, talking to themselves. We dismiss them and continue with our practical “having-come-to-terms- with-the-reality” life.

The place upon the table where the doll once stood, the paint stain on the kitchen floor, the desire for sleep and both the fear of it and of its absence betray an emptiness unfilled by our knowledge — and most likely even created by the way we have come to use it. The length of this emptiness is measured by two times. For we have used our knowledge not only to sever ourselves from conscious participation in the fantasies of our childhood past but also from the imaginal history of a collective cultural past. The rituals and practices, mythologies and religions — once so always alive with man’s experience of the movement that gives birth to image and symbol — lay forgotten except in the antique shops of our scholarship. There the stories concerning the animism of the earth and heaven, no longer perceived by common man, were also sorted away. According to place, time and image they were stuffed in the drawers with the other relics and curiosities that serve now only to mark a time past. The shape of the earth and the geography of heaven and hell have been finally defined with instruments that attempt to measure out the fantasy. The movement of the stars, the oceans and the land is accounted for by the scientific community. The body is pure matter and the humors only humorous or at best curious. Fairytales belong only to the province of children. (One does not even know that that was not always so.) The symbol, once the vehicle to “explore the depth and meaning of the world” (Malraux, 1961:187) lies disregarded, as if asleep. No longer in our work do we make love to Mother Earth as we till in the fields, nor do we meticulously prepare the natural elements for the making of gold. We do not ask the plants and animals we eat for their permission to do so, nor do we thank coyotes for helpful wisdom given to us at nightfall. Electric lights have hidden our fear of the unknown from us, and we rest

comfortably in our ignorance.

We have skillfully tried to strain the mythical from the scientific, the imaginary from the real, metaphor from matter. We have used science to tell us just what “reality” really is and we have taken our scissors of reason and accordingly trimmed into the waste basket the apparently superfluous and contradictory. We have chased the gods from the stones, the animals, and the heavens in the hope that we will be left with a clear and modern idea of matter and life. Knowledge has brandished the censors of “ridiculous,” “superstitious,” “unscientific,” “imaginary” and “unreal” at Myth as he has disrobed her and believed himself superior. Myth leaves him standing there, coat in hand, as she hastily ducks within his closet of wraps. She has heard his censors before, at times of transition between one dominant mythic mode and a newly arising way of understanding.

Metaphor is denied its province in the material world. The experience to which it refers that has filled one shape, one particular group of metaphors, retreats before the threatening force of the prevailing doubt, fathered by Knowledge, and lies so seemingly barren. In time, however, it begins to arise to consciousness and animate a new form which does not conflict with what is known. Myth reappears, often unrecognized as such, in the dress of the day. More often than not she even ducks beneath the coat-tails of Knowledge (where he scarcely ever looks). To see her peeking out, while he smirks with the success of a victor, betrays the fact that a fundamental misunderstanding and confusion is prevalent, to which Knowledge (as well as his students, we ourselves) is usually so blind.

Our reasonable friend has confused the world of Myth, of the imaginal, with that of his own. When she has spoken he has laughed and snickered, if he has not more vehemently shut her up. He knows that there are not spirits in rocks and dragons in caves. She tries to explain herself, as well as the intimate connection, and paradoxical autonomy her world has to his. He wants nothing to do with her. Although he can make her appear foolish his actions of scandalizing and ignoring her do not make

her disappear. He forgets her and proceeds in ignorance of her reality. He thinks that Myth is merely incorrectly describing the material world. When he studies aspects of phenomena in his world and draws his conclusions about them, he discards all that Myth has surrounded these same aspects with and which do not concur with his views.

He picks an argument where there is no need. Myth speaks about an imaginal reality using aspects of his material reality. Her statements are not meant to be mere literal, concrete descriptions and opinions about this world. She wants to convey her reality. When he takes some aspects away from her, she must chose others. The more he denies her expressions the more she must use his own words. Though he can discredit her means of expression and make her look foolish to his friends he cannot destroy that which she seeks to express. His inability to distinguish between the concrete level of the symbol and what the symbol refers to leaves him open to her use. It leaves her totally misunderstood. She hides in what and how he studies and her reality begins to come from his own mouth, although he does not hear her inclination.

In our confusion we, as students of Knowledge, have tried to separate the scientific from the metaphorical, matter from spirit, behavior from psyche, the real from the imaginal. They pretend to yield, and in so doing trick us. They have not separated at all, these lovers. What we find flowing down our sinks is our awareness of our participation in myth at every moment of our being in reality, of psyche in our every action. We mistake our confusion for straightforwardness and clarity. What we have packed away in those boxes is not the imagination and the mythical but our recognition, acceptance and conscious valuing of it.

We live out the imagination in everything and yet we are against the very notion of it. In our confusion we lose something. Our actions are “nothing but.” Life can be found boring, interminable and most unkind in all the harshness of its “reality.” And yet it is the crushing of a dream that makes us cry; the refusing of a wish that makes us feel hopeless. Our fears send us

flying into bed for far longer than our physical selves demand, or we turn to endless fidgeting with details that will never make any difference except to the time they consume and discard for us. The locking of doors and the keeping off of streets, or airplanes, or cars hardly begin to make us feel at ease. We try to get ourselves out of our fears and fantasies and back to work in the morning. And if we cannot make the continual bifurcations and dichotomies that our efforts at reason demand from us, we find or fear to find ourselves in the asylums which allow for the inability to separate and discard – but not without a most critical opinion, crazy.

Here the images we can no longer push from our awareness rise up and frighten us. We do not recognize them from our history of dreams and wanderings, actions and feelings. Only now do their participation with “reality” seem evident. One doctor warns not to think about them. It is sickness and will go away. Another says that the images are real and have meaning, but that they should not be acted upon. And yet the doctor, having fulfilled his altruistic image of himself for the day, having confirmed his own fantasies about “reality” through his patients or his treatment of them, turns to go home to his wife, to be mothered. He dreams he falls ill and a voice says to him that he should not work so hard. He shortens his hours. His patient dreams people are chasing her and that she should turn and attack the people behind her. He interrupts her contemplations about really doing this, and confines her if she tries. The image is real, but more real some times than at others. The imaginal is experience, but experience which one must choose among, according to values of reason (that know nothing of the nature of metaphor). It is the content of vision and not the relation to content that is perceived and valued. Ambiguity and contradiction mark our efforts to deal with something we *know* nothing about.

When the last doll is tucked securely in the garbage pail, my friend, the imagination has not been overcome. We have, it is true, taken away a few more of its toys. But the imagination is a far deeper affair. It is not just a child to whom we toss toys as appeasement, to get it off our mind or nerves. It travels with us to

the spaces behind closed doors to contemplate our fate and our faith. Our loneliness and our successes and failures. It sits with us at the breakfast table as we straighten our hair and head for work, and read the cries of the newspaper chroniclers. It makes us turn one way or another on streets and lanes, and having once turned down them, holds out certain items for our query, fascination, wonder, or disgust. It urges us to worry about our height and our fingernails and our ever-present symptoms. We see it in the eyes of those who love us and we argue with it at the dinner table.

It makes us have secrets and tell secrets. It is not the toys of childhood, and it cannot be outgrown by an individual or a culture. The toys are sorted away only to leave us acting out the same images using elements of our lives in their place. The imaginal is not dependent on matter, though it uses it to extend into common space. Its gods are other than physical and they dance and command without our noble permission.

When the imaginal has been pruned from the trees and exorcized from the animals, having chased the night creatures under the rocks by the light of our reasonableness — when everything is still, clean and free of the beasts of the imaginary — within the hour we feel their movement from within. One forgets a well-known name, says something unintended, cries “without reason,” becomes angry at one thing and not another, loves one man and not another and does not know why. One person becomes afraid to climb stairs, another has an eye twitch. One’s actions and fleeting thoughts cannot be attributed to the person one believes oneself to be. But more importantly, when we observe what we are doing, who we have become, and where we are aimed, it is often as if our lives were dreamed by another; and we are some two-bit or noble actor or actress executing a part. We are grown up, married to any number of ideas, professions, people, or ways of life. We find certain types of clothes in our closet and food in our cupboard, medicines in our chests and friends at our table. Yet can we remember the day we decided to be a mother or to go on in school, to marry, to believe in God or meditation, or the virtues or blasphemies of politics? Was it we ourselves who chose to become

a femme fatale or a bustling (full of competence and confidence) young professional, a Momma's boy or a searcher of the psyche? Surely we contemplated it all before. But when it came time to sign the paper or move one's belongings, to make love or to espouse a view, did it not just happen in a dreaminess — as if indeed we were playing our parts, having memorized them well? The belief we have created that we are a continuous “I” living in certain predetermined landscapes, experiencing an outer world independent of ourselves breaks down. The science of memory, the practices of medicine, and reason fail to account. There is another force influencing our thoughts, emotions, movements, and actions. One can no longer say it is a god or a spirit and yet one has those ancient feelings of possession and movement by a force that does not answer to logic or common space and time. There is something using matter in a way that does not have to do with matter itself. Science can say just what reality is and is not, and yet something fails to be included in the inventory. Appearance hides a world that the tools of a rationalistic knowledge have no access to.

The movement can only be accounted for by positing the existence of an unknown. Psychology did just that, naming it the “unconscious” (the “unknown”). It stopped in the hallways of asylums to listen to the fantasies of many a man and woman. It noticed that when what was known, the “conscious ego,” was caught off guard the life of this other world was brought into clearer focus. The early psychologists, went to séances, hypnotized their patients, and went to the homes of hysterical women in an attempt to gain access to what was behind the already known. In the malady they heard other personalities speaking unheard of fantasies. Beneath the fainting, the fixed idea, and the paralysis moved a sea of images with a reality of their own. As patient lay upon the couch and allowed the unreasonable to well up, as doctor himself introspected in his study at day's end, the commonplace parted to give birth to the fantasies that had been writhing and moving within it. Action, feeling and belief were no longer such literal affairs. Beneath them flowed images which made matter

and behavior concede to their unacknowledged metaphorical Mother.

Through the observations of psychology qualities were gradually attributed to what came to be seen as the two main portions of the psyche. The conscious, in its qualities of awareness and willfulness, paralleled the visible, active, and material aspects of the world. It was filled with notions of who we think we are and what we think is happening, our knowledge and our aims, our strivings. The world of the unconscious was found to be imagistic and metaphorical, rather than verbal and concrete. Its qualities of multivalency and ambiguity allow it to say what the conscious sees as opposing things without being contradictory. Its time and space are not linear but multi-dimensional. Different times can exist in a moment of conscious linear time. It does not adhere to theories of cause and effect, moved as it is by other laws of a more simultaneous and contextualizing nature. Its inhabitants, symbols and images, are always more than can be spoken of. They are not quantifiable or merely material. Though the image may use things that have a material existence one can observe that it does not concern itself with the ways of that world. The horse walks though it has three legs. A hand can be both red and green in the same space. The train is also a ship and the dream ego often man and woman.

Though the imaginal was revealed by psychology, what was then made of this discovery differed. The “unconscious,” that unknown presence, became seen in a variety of ways — all to some degree dependent on how the viewer feels about a ghost in the attic. If one likes a clean house with one master, the unconscious is a threat and a nuisance. Psychotherapy becomes a means of exterminating one’s soul against the blight of the unpredictable, anything unreasonable, unseemly, and ambivalent. One notes this most poignantly, though certainly not only, when the ghost seems to have taken possession of the house and the doctor intervenes to set things back into their original order, as he sees them to be. One comes upon statements, like Freud’s, that a successful analysis would terminate dreaming. The ghost is rendered impotent and

the invisible ceases to move.

If one finds through observation that no amount of extermination rids our psychic inventory of that ghost, then we concoct a psychotherapy bent on “getting to know” him and of coming to some terms as long as we must be neighbors in the same house. But this is most often done a bit begrudgingly. We try to give him just enough space so that he won’t raise hell — so that we can continue on our way with as little disturbance as possible. The most desirable contract for us is one where after some negotiations we can reach an agreement that can be kept for years, thereby placing the ghost in a part of the house where we can forget about him. This is often the attitude of people entering analysis who feel that a three year process of negotiation — analysis — will enable them to keep the ghost confined in the attic for the rest of their lives.

One may feel that occasional trips upstairs are necessary, but by no means is he invited to dine at our table and sleep in our beds. If one is lucky in the fulfillment of ones conscious desires, the ghost is heard rumbling upstairs only occasionally.

We light a candle and go with a put-on smile as if we loved him, and yet when we turn away again, we lock the door more surely than before, and hurry away with a look of worry but a hope of success.

There is yet another way. It lies in getting to know that ghost, but not in order to put some fast deal over on him (if we were honest about our real intentions). The ghost is invited to stay not simply because we feel we have no choice about it, but because there is something in him which we know is ours — not in the sense of our possessing him but of our being related to him in a way it is hard to explain. It is a sense of our somehow being inextricably together in this house of being alive. It is not even a matter of our always feeling that we like him; for indeed, sometimes he is the most frightening, frustrating, and disagreeable being that could be conjured. Still he is part of the house and after some time we not only grow accustomed to this but glad of it — though not in a simplistic sort of way. One becomes like a

couple that may speak of divorce but who would never part. In this case the practice of psychotherapy becomes a bit more unpredictable in its task and goals. Extermination or extensive alteration are no longer the objects of treatment. A contract with the ghost is seen to be untenable, for a real relationship is a daily affair and its only terms “commitment no matter what.” Relationship implies a certain acceptance and communication (though of course that does not exclude disagreement in the least).

A feeling of relief is experienced that he is actually around. For though our scientific conscience no longer allows us to speak in ease about a soul, we never the less feel our loss of it and through our sense of despair we mourn for it. (Luckily through our mourning we often find the means to become reconnected to it.) We have made a ghost of the soul’s movement, imagination. He has been pushed into the attic or the cellar, the unused forgotten room. When he roams unbidden we feel possessed. We either want to murder him or stuff him back into some closet. We are afraid of him, of the price he asks us for living in this house. And though we can recognize the background of angst and fear in which we go about our houses, there is also a more subtle fear that the ghost has died. That the demands and criticisms we have made of soul have indeed not only disproven rationally its existence, but have killed or made ill its being as we experience it on our sleepless nights and long afternoons. There are those days when we are overcome with what must be sadness, and yet no tears find their way down our cheeks, and we set to wondering about the dryness and brittleness of our self-chosen rationalities.

What happens to the image, the life of the imaginal, when we begin our study of it with these different preferences and aims? In the first case we try to kill it: to shock people out of it, to have the skillful surgeon remove it from the brain, overpower it with drugs, convince the patient to look elsewhere — in his work, his marriage, his penis. One retreats to the common “reality” and learns more thoroughly how to see only the concrete. The metaphorical is disavowed, as surely as when children we walked out on our imaginary companions. At one extreme a strange

psychology arises which does not allow for the postulation of an unconscious, a soul, or a psyche, nor of worthwhile experiences of these things. The computer is consulted for models of behavior. The thesis on imagery is rejected on terms of its religiosity. The symbol is studied only with respect to the nuances of cognitive paradigms; the dream only as physiological reaction.

In the second case one may go to analysis and accept the language of a particular psychotherapeutic system. The dream and fantasy images are sorted into piles of anima, superego and shadow, transference reactions and degrees and kinds of interpersonal relatedness. They are parceled out as belonging to our job, our sense of inferiority, our mothers. The individual experience is subtly exchanged for a predefined package process toward an end, which will remove one from the scary, disabling aspects of the imaginal. The presence of the image is acknowledged but it is then taken from its world and used to further the ego. The meaning (or what is interpreted to be the meaning) is strained from it and the image is discarded and forgotten. The image is recognized but one does not want its world. The ego relates to the imaginal on its own terms and to get from it what it wishes. The metaphor is lost though we cannot recognize it. We think we have comprehended it by saying the image is this or that aspect of yesterday or year.

The imagination or the unconscious may become understood as a place. We then set aside time to go there in our active imaginations and introspections. We may use the Tarot or the *I Ching* or the prescriptions of one psychology or another as our new toys. But in the end we may find that what we felt enabled us to see the imagination as a place in its own right, our “respect” for it, was more likely a means to once again bifurcate our existence into two separate worlds, where we are believed to be the ones in control of the traveling between them. We relieve ourselves of the burden of metaphor and pretend that now we are rational, undreamed, and straightforward and then (in those minutes in our easy chairs) we are irrational, mythical and tortuous. At that point our ideas and feelings, work and beliefs seem self-evident and

understandable. We lose sight of the imagination within them, of the “more than meets the eye” quality which disturbs us. We fidget because we cannot understand it as we are used to understanding; i.e., understanding as being able to overcome, to do away with. We acknowledge that the ghost creeps out from his quarantined quarters when we are sleeping and shows us his art and experience in our dreams. No less surely, though does he do his work during the day – not just when we are listening to “the imagination.” In the loom of our moods, beliefs, movements, arguments, loves, loneliness, in the midst of our most mundane tasks, he tosses his own threads. And though we chose to see the tapestries of our experience as our own creation, his colors and shapes make his presence known – if only we would stop to acknowledge it.

When we still the noise of our movements we can hear his – not only at night when we wake from sleep and catch him moving in our dreams, but while we are awake. We cannot catch him in the sense of stopping him. The ghost is not of this world though he moves within it. He is not made of flesh but rather of a more mercurial substance that takes a different eye to see. When we understand the secret that things are not only as they appear to common sensible perception, we find the need to nurture an uncommon kind of perception. This imaginal perception sees him moving within the metaphors of our life making them more than, different than, plain statements of fact.

At some point we may find that the ghost is not crazy or silly and that we were mistaken all those years when we laughed at his words and gestures as if they were nonsensical and absurd. We attempted to correct his broken speech and to tell him in our clear ways what it was he must be saying. But suddenly we may see that it is not the visible he has been talking about. In his gestures he has sought to make the invisible visible. He is talking about something we do not know and thereby cannot judge according to our usual standards. He does not use our language because he does not speak of the things our language was created for. He has, like Proteus, donned the costumes of countless images, assumed the

voices of many gods, to live out the drama of his experience. He has used the material from our houses and our lives, as props for his art, as before he seized our trains and pets, the heavens and waters of yesteryear. No longer can we look in a self-satisfied manner at the tip of his finger when he is pointing to the moon (Durand, 1971:99) and laugh at him for pointing to what is only darkness for us. We must grow accustomed to the twilight of his space, his images and metaphors, by dwelling there. In this way we can begin to travel within it toward that which he points to. To dwell there we must no longer assume that this ghost lives the same life as our conscious egos. We must resist our urges to flee to the concrete facts and activities, to the literalistic ways of thinking with which we try to constitute not only *our* lives, but also *his*. We are seized with fear and so we hope to reduce that which we do not understand to the realm we are in control of.

However, one cannot completely understand him. The interpretations which in the end we manufacture cannot account fully and adequately for the image's movement. If we allow ourselves this recognition (which is not at all simple, for it posits an area of knowing to which our knowledge will never be sufficient) we must go to the ghost and stay with him, hoping he will take us as pupils. We are pupils, however, who will never graduate, leave, or teach.

The medieval alchemists said that "for those who have the symbol the passage is easy." But the "passage" is not one of overcoming things, of getting linearly further. Passage is movement between endless planes, contained only by the hall of mirrors within the metaphor, the image. One begins a journey from "the symbol to the thing symbolized." Yet by the nature of the image it is always longer than we will ever know and different from what we could ever say. The image is a vehicle in that we can move in it, but its space has no terminus . . . only unending depth.

