

THE SYMBOLISM OF WATER PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND AESTHETICS

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The reality of water

Even in spontaneous sensations, water is perceived as the richness of various experiences: from the simple fact of washing oneself to the conviction about the healing properties of water or its religious aspects. How strong is the surreal power of water that we can see from the healing holy water of Lourdes or the numerous miraculous springs scattered all over the world, or the Indian holy river Ganges? Does the critical outlook suggest that ascribing a healing power to water is mere superstition? Even the most official, scientific medicine admits that water possesses healing properties - not only mineral water, but ordinary water helping in the treatment of injuries or skin diseases.

The natural history of water starts with the first manifestations of life on Earth. Its scientific career begins with the formula H₂O, one of the most popular chemical symbols. The term "symbol" signifies here a conventional sign performing the function of substituting a definite object, concept or phenomenon - in this case a chemical substance. It evokes an image of both an abstract concept and a real phenomenon, i.e., water. A symbol can be described as a manifold narration about a reality of great importance to a human being. This narration can be limited to one sign - a word or an artistic sign - or developed into a series of connected images. The three basic features of symbolic narration are:

- a call signal, a catchword stimulating attention, activating the imagination and a definite intellectual process; a word, an artistic presentation or a chemical symbol indicating the occurrence of this natural phenomenon
- proper narration, that is, an explanation of the content and meaning of the symbol, i.e., "water" as a symbol of life
- a retention effect, the results of an action of a given symbol, a memorisation or an actual change evoked by the influence of symbols; the introduction of the symbol of water/life into the ecological world/outlook and action

Obviously, water is, first of all, a real phenomenon in nature. Thus, it is important to learn the chemistry and biology of water as the substratum of our symbolic narration about water. It was as late as the end of the 18th century when A.L. Lavoisier and H. Cavendish proved that water was not a chemical element but a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, and that it can be synthesised of these elements and decomposed into them.

Water occurs in all densities: solid, liquid and vapour. In the language of symbols, this was expressed as the abundance of forms of life and life's capability of metamorphosis. What is important for technological and medical reasons is that water serves as a good solvent for numerous substances: acids, alkali and salts, organic compounds and gasses. Water remains in permanent circulation in nature - here we can cite an analogy with the circulation of ideas in human societies.

Water takes up two thirds of the Earth's surface. In its natural state, it occurs in dilute solutions of salts, gases, bacteria and mineral suspensions. For our imagination it is an inspiration for the symbolic representation of truth mixed with illusion, beauty mixed with ugliness, happiness with despair; we do not know pure truth, absolute beauty or complete happiness. There is distilled water, acquired through a three-stage process and used in chemical analysis, pharmacology and medicine, in the same way that the pure possibility of abstraction is used in theoretical thinking.

The greatest water reservoirs are the oceans and seas. In fact, they are a universal water region. These waters are not separated, though they are characterised by different properties depending upon their geographical situation, and they have acquired different names starting from the Pacific Ocean and ending with local names of little bays. The waste or excess of oceanic waters is probably possible to explain, biologically, from the point of view of the physical equilibrium necessary to maintain life on Earth. From a cultural stand-point, this phenomenal vastness brings reflections on a person's condition in the face of the power of nature i.e., the view of the sky. The weak, one-sided, and transitory character of human nature is contrasted with the power of the ocean and its specific enormity; a drop of water is insignificant but an ocean is unconquerable. Also the age-long past of the oceans can be found among the symbols of water. The direct contact of a specific coexistence of humans with the ocean oscillates between the boredom of long sea voyages, and the excitement of deep-sea fishing and sea-storms causing disasters.

Even in the names of the oceans we can find a moment of symbolic representation. The Atlantic Ocean refers to the legendary Atlantis, a mysterious island mentioned by Plato in *Timaios* and *Kritias*. It is said to have sunk one night due to a tectonic cataclysm. The Pacific Ocean, the greatest water reservoir with a surface area of 179,697 square kilometres and a maximum depth of 11,034 m, derives its name from the Latin word *pax*, peace, calmness, which symbolises the longing for safety provided by peace, and an end to fighting.

Floods, waterfalls, heavy rain, fog, snow and ice are also of phenomenal character. The Old Man - a short story by W. Faulkner - is devoted to a flood; Old Man is the popular name of the Mississippi river. Among the dramatic scenes connected with this great disaster we also find descriptions of floods: "Instead and for the first time he looked at the River within whose shadow he had spent the last seven years of his life but had never seen before; he stood in quiet and amazed surmise and looked at the rigid steel-coloured surface not broken into waves but merely slightly undulant. It stretched from the levee on which he stood, further than he could see - a slowly and heavily roiling chocolate-troth expanse broken only by a thin line a mile away as fragile in appearance as a single hair, which after a moment he recognised. It's another levee, he thought quietly."

Niagara Falls is the queen of waterfalls, 1,100 m wide and 51 m high. For tourists from all over the world, it is the object of the greatest admiration of the wonder, diversity and power of Nature.

Usually a heavy, constant rain is connected to a flood. Yet, it is not always so. A specific, abstract essence of rain was presented by Marquez in his novel of "mythical realism" *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Rain falls incessantly for four years causing disastrous results, particularly to the human psyche.

Fog is water turned into vapour; it consists of water drops less than 0.05 mm in diameter, dispersed in the Earth's atmosphere. The number of water drops reaches half a billion in one cubic meter of fog. Fog symbolises obscurity, a logical amorphism. What influences the imagination even more is the phenomenon of a rainbow in the fog - concentric bows of different colours ranging from violet to red. Secondary and white rainbows are much more scarce. Thanks to its soft shape rainbow and the harmonious co-occurrence of colours, a rainbow has been made a symbol of peaceful social coexistence, i.e., it is used as a sign of co-operative movement.

Snow is a phenomenon of nature consisting of ice crystals with a characteristic structure; usually that of six-branched star shaped flakes. They are sometimes joined in bigger clusters. We perceive snow either as the most subtle shape of nature, structuring water into regular geometric shapes, i.e., particular starlets, or as the white snowy cover of the landscape. Both these forms evoke admiration and inspire metaphysical reflection.

Water in a solid state is ice. There are several kinds and forms of ice. On the surface of stagnant or still waters we find a thick cover of ice. Stronger water currents give rise to slush ice and ice floats. On the Earth's poles, the sea ice assumes the form of durable covers carried by sea currents. The objects most strongly connected to the emotional sphere are the vast tracts of perpetual ice on both poles, and the great exploratory expeditions of L. Christiansen, R. Scott, R. Amundsen, R. Byrd, V. Bering, W. Berents, N. A. Nordensjöld and J. Ross. In connection with the history of those expeditions, the Arctic and Antarctica are first of all associated with the extreme effort of the persons who decided - despite the most severe conditions - to conquer and explore the Earth to the end, with a deadly struggle and fight against low temperatures, wind, and immense patches of ice.

We can divide rivers into national and international ones, that is, into those which are important for the civilisation and culture of one country, and those which are meaningful for several countries. This discussion is limited to Europe and to illustrate the problems discussed some examples will be used.

European national rivers include the Seine, the Thames, the Volga, the Vah, and the Vistula. The Seine is undoubtedly the most important river of France: it is 776 km long and its drainage basin covers 78,500 square kilometres. As a navigable river it connects the Parisian industrial region with the shores of the Atlantic Ocean - Havre harbour. Towns like Troyers, Paris, Argenteuil, and Rouen are situated on its banks. The Seine is also a tidal river with tides reaching up to several dozen kilometres.

The queen of English rivers is the Thames. It is 338 km long, 250 m wide in London, 640 m wide in Gravesend and 16 km wide at its estuary. Financially, it does not represent any great value, but it is highly esteemed by the English due to the fact that it flows across the capital and because of its cultural traditions. For instance, it was on the Thames that King George I sailed his royal ship and Händel played for him his *Water Music*.

The Volga is 3,530 km long and it is the longest European river. It flows through four geographical zones: the taiga, temperate forests, temperate grasslands and deserts. It also flows through several lakes and forms a 170 km long delta. Nine water power stations have been built on this river. A wildlife sanctuary created at its delta covers 72.5 thousand ha. It is the only site in Europe where wild lotus plants can be found. The main towns situated at the Volga include Rybinsk, Jaroslav, Kazan, Saratov, Volgograd, and Astrakhan. For the Russians the Volga is associated with the "Slavonic melancholy" and with the hard lot of the peasants from this region who, in the days of the tsars worked as haulers - burlaks - of up-stream bound river boats. The famous 1873 painting *The Burlaks on the Volga*, by I. Riepin, most probably contributed to this pessimistic image of the river.

The Vah is 433 km long. It springs in the Tatra mountains and is a Danube tributary. The Vah is partly navigable. Several dams have been built on it and one of the most renowned is the Liptovska Mara, whose name implies the Slovak longing for the sea. This great dam performs several functions of importance for the economy and the tourist industry. Towns situated on the banks of the Vah include Liptovsky Mikulas, Ruzomberok, Pestany, Zylina (the largest) and Trencyn (the most attractive as a tourist site). An excursion along the Vah, from its mountain springs to Komarno, where it joins the Danube, is a wonderful, unforgettable experience for every tourist.

The Polish Vistula is a typical national river. It flows from the South to the North across the whole country and the most important Polish towns, Krakow, Warsaw and Gdansk, are situated on its banks. It is a symbol of integration, unity and community, both in the traditional and historical aspect, and in the Polish consciousness today. It is 1,068 km long and is the largest river in the mouth of the Baltic Sea.

The Vistula is a "whimsical" river, hence the relatively frequent floods. Nearly every winter some regions are covered with ice. Birds come from the North and the East to spend the winter. However, the Vistula is painfully polluted, due to negligence, by chemical poisons. This is why the naturally warm attitude towards the river is chilled by the awareness of the threats it hides.

For our nation, the Vistula is omnipresent, for it flows across the whole country and its tributaries cover 54.1% of Poland. The most important architectural monuments are situated on its banks: Wawel, the old royal castle, the later royal castle in Warsaw, historical towns like Sandomierz, Torun, and Malbork. Popular songs are sung about this river and numerous paintings represent life of the Vistula.

The Danube is a river of great international importance. Obviously, there also exist specific sentiments, images and national symbols, but what dominates is the feeling of unity that joins all those who live near the Danube. Yet, how fragile is this thread of unity. Is there any awareness of social community among the people living by the Danube, a powerful, 2,860 km long river?

It seems that the Danube is, first of all, a specific symbol of contrasts. Namely, a large part of it constitutes a natural international border, and a border is a line of division. Sometimes this line of division is merely formal, but other times it is the object of controversy, a barrier between the conflicted parties.

However, when the Danube flows across a country everyone is conscious that it is just a part of it. In order to exploit the river, a specific international convention must be signed. Such agreements were made in 1856, 1921, 1948 and 1959. Navigation conditions and the co-ordination of the facilities meant to keep the river navigable have been agreed upon. However, it is generally known that, sometimes, the interests of particular users of the Danube clash in the competitive economy system. For instance, controversies may arise concerning investments on the river. In extreme cases, violations of the conventions may even occur, like the transport of weapons and ammunition to the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Basically, every river performs three functions: economic, aesthetic and ecologic. Frequently, these functions collide; the number of wildlife reserves is reduced for the sake of river management. Probably, the most striking example of this is the construction of two stone embankments in Budapest and the turning St. Margaret Island into an entertainment centre.

Four capital cities full of various contrasts are situated on the banks of the Danube. Vienna seems to be most proud of the tradition of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the legendary personality of the Emperor Franz Joseph. Other wonders of Vienna are the Strauss waltzes, the most famous being Upon the Beautiful, Blue Danube. We must not forget that the most sublime music by Gustav Mahler, avant-garde music by Arnold Schönberg and classics by Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Mozart or Ludwig van Beethoven were composed here. We could also surmise that Bratislava was chosen for the capital of Slovakia because of its location.

The socio-political situation of Belgrade should not be associated with the Danube. Yet, it so happens that there is no peace upon this river. It is one of the centres of the "Balkan kettle" in which bloody conflicts frequently break out. The Celtic settlement Singidun was destroyed by the Avarians and the Slavs. In the early Middle Ages it received a Bulgarian name, Bely Gorod. It was besieged several times in the Middle Ages and captured by the Turks, the Hungarians and the Austrians. At the beginning of the 19th century, Belgrade became the capital of Serbia, and, at the beginning of the 20 century, the capital of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Even today the situation of Belgrade makes us include this capital city among the towns of political contrasts.

Probably it would be in accord with a solidarity attitude to recognise the Danube as the international river of the European Union, since it is the river of ten nations. Yet, would it be right to neglect the contrasts and controversies around the Danube? Thus, let us say that this river has a chance to become a symbol of co-operation and unity, while the century-old controversies should be solved as soon as possible.

Great symbols of water

In an analysis and interpretation of a more general and high level of abstraction, seas and rivers shall not be referred to as definite entities, but as a cultural phenomenon or, more precisely, as the symbolic character of water as the coefficient of the humanist structuring of actual reality.

There are three basic symbols of life: water, the sun and the Earth. They are the symbols of the full, rich, exuberantly developing life, for even in the drought, darkness and far from the ground there exist some modest forms of life. All these agents of life co-operate for the existence, continuation and development of life on Earth. In the history of mankind each of them has acquired certain specific cultural settings in science, art, religion and Weltanschauung.

Water is a necessary condition of life. It is an image of richness, uncertainty, transience, perfection and weakness. The generic symbol "water" corresponds to the general phenomenon and concept of "life." Therefore, water is a symbol of life; Water and Life have the same meaning.

Water and life have many forms, and humans assign various meanings to them. A precise and systematic description of the different specialised humanistic relations involved will be attempted. Oceans are the mysticism of life; life is conceived as a great, impenetrable

mystery. This kind of symbolism of a metaphysical-existential character is best received by persons endowed with a special intellectual sensitivity, coloured with irrationalism.

A lake is most frequently perceived as the symbol of the lyricism of life. A person open to aesthetic values of emotional character encounters the appropriate picture of an intimate atmosphere, where the clear water, green banks, clouds, trees, and passing birds are reflected in the smooth but "living" surface. A lake refers us to the passing moments in which the intimate attachment to that which rarely occurs and moves us is condensed. Devoid of emotions, the beauty of water is framed with green and covered with blue.

The romantic atmosphere of lakes and their lyrical symbolism of life, hidden in the subtle tremors of poetry, have often become an inspiration to literary works. For instance, in Polish literature we find a deeply meditative poem by Adam Mickiewicz, included in the series of Lausanne lyrics, referring to Lake Geneva, and starting with the words: "Over the water great and pure..."

A river flowing slowly but incessantly, has become a symbol of the transitory nature of life. This sensation is sometimes coloured with melancholy or resignation. Sometimes it may be connected with deep satisfaction and pride that an individual, like a drop of water, is included in the great current of the passing existence. Among the texts describing the life of an Arabian sufi, a sage and hermit from the 9th century, we can find the following sentence: "Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea."

Swift-flowing mountain streams, with their vehement current and violent sound of water breaking on the rocks, bring associations with the joy of life, its continuous movement and surprising changes. This symbol also includes the carefree energy of youth, for it is streams that give birth to rivers. The orgy of the Danube's youth takes place in the Black Forest mountains, starting with the twin streams Bege and Brigach.

A drying puddle becomes a symbol of vanishing life, a symbol of death caused by the lack of water. Little reservoirs of rain-water or spring thaw, are characterised by the lack of additional water supply - hence the short duration of their existence. With the rise of temperature, caused by the sun, water evaporates, changes its state of aggregation, and life in a puddle ceases to exist. We know that abundant life - plants, reptiles, insects, bacteria - develops in these small puddles. When they dry up, all of this wildlife degrades. Tadpoles do not manage to transform into frogs and die at this transitory stage, plants requiring much water to survive shrivel up. However, the life energy gathered in the puddle does not vanish irretrievably. Underdeveloped frogs are eaten up by birds or decay, thus enriching the soil; the speedy transformation of life is once again present. Boiling water symbolises violent changes and a geyser can be perceived as a spectacular manifestation of life as a riot. A puddle remains a symbol of the withdrawal of life.

Let us mention one more form of water - mud. Even the Danube forms a great muddy delta, used in agriculture and tourism. Yet, mud is a symbol of negative values: degradation, evil, ugliness, dirt, pollution. It is in the swamps that folk demons are likely to appear, and in everyday speech "mud" often signifies immorality.

When soil turns into mud it becomes waste and the plants that may grow there are recognised as weeds. Mud is like evil - left to itself it produces its own, unconventional ways of survival. Vast swamps untouched by human civilisation produce specific plant and animal micro-cultures: flocks of birds, water snakes, swarms of mosquitoes, hundreds of poisonous plants and morasses bubbling with brown liquid.

The symbolic meaning of water has been revived by the New Age movement, in which the sign of Aquarius plays an important role. It is an indirect semantic affiliation: the element of water has been transferred to the sky and found its place there as a constellation. In the history of culture we can often encounter similar complicated chains of associations. At present our planet is approaching the zodiac position of Aquarius. According to the theoreticians of the New Age, this epoch will have certain cultural characteristics corresponding with the properties of water. These include:

- a mitigation of contradictions, for water is a fundamental unity
- the domination of mildness over violence. Water is seldom cruel. It is usually gentle and benevolent
- the acquisition by women of their due place in private and public life. The gentle shape of the waves are analogous to the basic will for peace in female nature. Hence the feminist movement growing in our days.

Water in religion

Water is a symbol of purification. The symbolic ritual of bathing originated from numerous Eastern religions. To achieve absolution from sin and sanctification, rites of bath existed in the Ganges (India), Nile (Egypt), and Euphrates (Babylon). In Judaism the ritual bath was ordered to purify new converts. In Christianity, the act of purification with water gained a versatile theological and liturgical setting. "Jehovah's baptism" had a double meaning: (a) expiation, as seen in the Old Testament, where John the Baptist performed the rite of purification in the Jordan river, in Aion near Salem; and (b) the basic features of baptism in Christianity, namely absolution from sin, inclusion in the Church community and spiritual salvation as a sacrament.

According to St. Paul, baptism joins a man with Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the community of God's People. St. Paul the Apostle called those baptised "born anew," called to a new life through baptismal water. St. John the Evangelist taught that baptism is a necessary condition for entering the Kingdom of Heaven, for it gives spiritual enlightenment while it is effective thanks to the Word, i.e., faith. The decisive moment for establishing the sacrament of baptism through the cleansing power of water was the baptism of Jesus Christ, performed by John the Baptist. It was a ceremony that was to emphasise the beginning of Christ's mission as the Messiah. The theological interpretation of this

connection of the old with the new, the divine with the human, the natural with the supernatural is limited to the three elements of theophany:

- the opening of the Heavens so that man could achieve the higher level of spiritual consciousness
- descent of the Holy Spirit, which enlightens the human mind in the matters of faith
- the voice from Heaven, i.e. the revelation of the teachings and of the Divine truths

Water as a motif of beauty in art, music and literature

The beauty of water in art and nature is a separate topic. Art is generally included among the phenomena of symbolic culture. Works of art are signs transformed by fantasy, speaking of natural and human reality. In turn, the beauty of nature often constitutes an inspiration for art and, besides, it is itself a result of the symbolic creations of para-artistic structures.

Certainly, a voyage along the Danube can provide unforgettable experiences, but there are many sites of fascinating beauty in Europe. The underground lake on the Greek island of Kefalonia is situated in a deep cave, several dozen meters deep, with a small opening on top. The colour of the water is a bright ultramarine blue. It is possible to sail on this lake and reaching to the dark arms of the cave. Plitvice lake in Croatia is highly attractive as regards the landscape surrounding it. There are interesting diversities such as big waterfalls, numerous islands covered with green plants, and charming natural spots resembling the famous Japanese gardens. Even without travelling far away, we can admire the beauty of water in the form of drops sprinkles in the sun, frost, or the ice-covered glittering twigs of roadside willows.

Music often uses water motifs. A famous piece is the symphonic poem *The Vltava* from the series *My Motherland* composed by Frederic Smetana. Here, the river has become a symbol for the motherland. This is how a musicologist has described this piece of music: "A stream taking its birth from an inconspicuous spring - two flutes, followed by two clarinets - is transformed into a river. A beautiful broad "theme of the Vltava" is drawn by the composer out of folk substance, more and more magnificent and great. Here it flows into the Czech Wood; merry sounds of hunting horns signal the hunt taking place there. Soon the woods will give place to vast fields among which a dancing and singing wedding is held. Night falls. In the moonlight, the whisper of waves clearly audible in the silence accompanies airy pageants of dancing nymphs: the strings with dampers, arpeggio of the harps, damped chords of the horns. Pearly, waving figures lead back again to the known theme of the Vltava. Having overcome the rocky barriers, the Vltava flows broadly and grandly to Prague. This is documented by the theme of the Vltava appearing now full of glamour and major mood."

To represent the running of a mountain stream in his song *Die Forelle*, Franz Schubert applied, to a large extent, a monotonous rhythm and subtle turns of accompaniment. He also managed to represent, by the application of music, the cheerful jumps of a trout above the surface of the water. For the second time we meet the same motif in the variations constituting the *Andante* of the *Piano Quintet in A-minor*, op. 114. A piece of music composed by the king of waltzes, Johann Strauss, Jr. titled *An der schönen blauen Donau* is directly connected with the Danube. According to the composer's biography, the creation of this "most Danubean" waltz was actually inspired by the Danube itself, though it is only the atmosphere of the music that may suggest a trip of a merry company on the river.

There exists a type of landscape painting called seascape painting. A picture representing a seascape, a harbour or seashore is, in art history, called "marina." As a distinct type of painting, it was developed in the 17th century, in the Netherlands, by painters such as S. van Ruysdael and W. van der Velde. Seascape paintings are usually realistic studies from nature, attempting a faithful representation of the beauty of the sea in its different manifestations. They are studies on the perspective of air and sea water. In France, C. J. Vernet painted fantastic seascapes. In the age of Romanticism, the sea served mostly as the scenery for unusual events; the works of Th. Gericault and E. Delacroix are representative of this style.

The Impressionists, C. Monet, A. Sisley, V. van Gogh, G. Seurat and P. Signac also painted seascapes. Probably the best known, outstanding work of this kind is *The Impression by Claude Monet*. The *Sunrise* is connected with the Impressionists' fight for the new art. This oil painting, 46x55 cm in size, represents a view of the Seine in Havres, at the place where it flows into the Atlantic. We can see the slightly misty sky turning pink; the round, bright sun over the horizon and its reflection blurred on the waves; hardly visible boats, dim outlines of harbour facilities on the embankment and looming ships. It is a study of colours but, at the same time, one of the most suggestive representations of water. It is a symbol of colouristic painting imitating a direct, true sight impression - but this "impression" also symbolises all the beauty of water, accumulating the abundance of glittering and bright threads of the world of nature and the world of humans. In the 20th century, the best known seascape painters include A. Marquet, R. Dufy and L. Feininger.

The group of novels, plays, and poems connected thematically with water, and particularly with the sea, is very rich and goes back to the most ancient times. The authors most frequently mentioned include: H. Melville, for his novel *Moby Dick*; J. London, for *Seawolf*; E. G. O'Neill, for the play *The Moon over the Caribbean*; P. Loti, for *My brother Yves* and *An Iceland Fisherman*; and J. Bojer for *The Last of the Vikings* and *Folk on the Sea*.

The most valuable works devoted to the sea are the novels by Joseph Conrad. He was a moralist who included the element of the sea in the conflict of human ethics. It is in the struggle with the sea that a man shows and tests his honour, responsibility and devotion, in a most complete, convincing and obvious way. Conrad situates these great issues of human dignity in a scenery corresponding with the tension of events and the importance of the problems. The struggle with the sea is a symbol of the struggle with fate. There are two works that deserve special attention: *Lord Jim*, focusing on the theme of desertion from an endangered ship atoned by death after realising the enormity of guilt,

and Typhoon, a cruel fight against the element of the sea ending, with a victory that restores dignity and proves the inflexibility of character.

In Lord Jim there are not many direct descriptions of the sea, yet we constantly feel the presence of the sea itself and its various problems. Those scarce descriptions are highly suggestive and strictly connected with the plot. For instance, a sea storm approaches, threatening the ship: "He saw a silent black squall which had eaten up already one third of the sky. You know how these squalls come up there about that time of the year. First you see a darkening of the horizon - no more; then a cloud rises, opaque like a wall. A straight edge of vapour lined with sickly whitish gleams flies up from the south-west, swallowing the stars in whole constellations; its shadow flies over the waters, and confounds sea and sky into one abyss of obscurity. And all is still. No thunder, no wind, no sound; not a flicker of lightning. Then in the tenebrous immensity a livid arch appears; a swell or two like undulations of the very darkness run past, and suddenly, wind and rain strike together with a peculiar impetuosity as if they had burst through something solid."

The artistic conception of Typhoon consists of comparing the sea storm with the situation of the passengers of the described ship; Chinese coolies. The typhoon corresponds with the extremely violent behaviour of those coolies who, worried by the storm also fight with one another; for money that was scattered due to a lurch. The symbolic moment is the break in the storm and the coming of good weather paralleled by the inflexible attitude of the captain, thanks to whom the ship is not destroyed by the typhoon; the poor Chinese men are saved and regain their money. Here the description of the stormy sea is precise and constantly accompanies the plot. The description is full of expression, menace, and tension: "The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last. It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward."

In modern art, the motif of water is a potent symbol in the movies by Andrzej Tarkowski, particularly in *A child of the War*, *Mirror*, *Solaris*, and *Andrej Rublow*. Tarkowski uses several thematic groups: a picture of a well and a bucket, a scene of washing, rain and snow, representation of still, calm beautiful as well as stormy, dirty and muddy water. The symbolic interpretation is of water as the source of life, as the element of death, as a way of purifying and isolating; yet also as a symbol of dirt, illness, and the arduous discomfort of life. In his symbolic representations, Tarkowski follows cultural traditions, refers to them, and his movies show "the second stratum" of life hidden under everyday routine.

Our analyses and interpretations regarding the symbolic meanings of water have shown the extensive horizons of this issue. They have probably also provided new insight into the basic problems which are to be discussed at this conference, namely, what economic and culture-creating functions the Danube performs today. A person who professionally deals with philosophy is convinced that a full understanding of practical questions and an understanding of their sense may be achieved only if they are considered in the deep background of the anthroposphere.

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