

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.66.06.3>

How to Cite:

Pecherskyh, L., Levchenko, N., Torkut, N., Boiko, S., & Khachaturian, K. (2023). The image of water in the Ukrainian postmodern novel. *Amazonia Investiga*, 12(66), 31-37. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.66.06.3>


The image of water in the Ukrainian postmodern novel

Образ води в українському постмодерністському романі

Received: April 25, 2023

Accepted: June 2, 2023

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Abstract


The purpose of the article is to define and systematize the artistic features and functions of water images on the material of Ukrainian postmodernist novels, in particular, in the novels "Twelve Hoops", "Moscovyada" and "Radio Night" by Yu. Andrukhovych, "Mesopotamia" and "Voroshylovgrad" by S. Zhadan, "AMtm" by Yu. Izdryk, "Tango of Death" and "Lutetsia" by Yu. Vynnychuk. The authors trace how artistic and figurative codes rooted in the oldest layers of Ukrainian culture are transformed into author's models of the image of water, which are subject to the artistic purpose of the novels, combine with other images, form more complex image combinations, and fulfill artistic tasks on the verge of artistic genres. The similarities and differences in the use of water images in a number of novels are revealed. The images of the river, the sea and water as element and substance are interpreted as frequently used, multilayered, multifunctional, multigenre and those that create a genre accent of mysticism in the novels, actualize mythological levels of perception of the depicted, emphasize the connection with the


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
Метою статті є визначення художніх особливостей та функцій, систематизація образів води на матеріалі української постмодерністської романістики, зокрема, в романах Ю. Андруховича "Дванадцять обручів", "Московіяда" і "Радіо Ніч", С. Жадана "Месопотамія" і "Ворошиловград", Ю. Іздрика "AMtm", Ю. Винничука "Танго смерті" та "Лютеція". Простежується, як художньо-образні коди, закорінені у найдавніших пластах української культури, трансформуються в авторські моделі образу води, що підпорядковуються художній меті романів, поєднуючись з іншими образами, утворюють більш складні образні поєднання, виконують художні задачі на межі художніх жанрів. Виявляються подібності і відмінності у використанні образів води у низці романів. Образи ріки, моря, води як стихії та речовини трактуються як часто вживані, багатошарові, мультфункціональні, різножанрові, а також такі, що створюють у романах жанровий акцент містики, актуалізують міфологічні рівні сприйняття зображуваного, надають акцентів

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otherworldly and transcendent, manifest the extraordinary abilities of the person interacting with it and testify to the possibility of endowing with these properties, of being a trans-level means of moving through the worlds and a source of life.

Keywords: water image, river, sea, element, postmodernism, novel, genre.

Introduction

The immense semantics of mythological ideas about “water” is one of the mental codes of every European nation. The multifaceted symbolism of water is embedded in a binary system of meanings, which, on one hand, were formed in accordance with its natural properties – the ability to cleanse, to refresh, to be transparent and move quickly – and, on the other hand, under the influence of pagan mythological ideas about water as an alien and dangerous environment: “In order to appease the water element (especially during floods), the villagers made special sacrifices to it. Until recently, there was a belief that the river, having flooded in the spring, would not subside until it had received the sacrifice. So people would throw a chicken or a rooster or even a mouse into the river. Sometimes the sacrifices were even bigger – horses and other livestock were drowned. In addition to bread, lumpy salt, boiled fish, stillborn children and dead animals were thrown to water demons. Beekeepers drowned the first swarm as a sacrifice to the water demon. In times of great drought, the corpses of drowned people (often buried on the banks of the rivers where they died) were dug up from the ground and thrown into the water» (Voitovych, 2005, p. 84).

In Indian mythology, “water is a form of *rasa*. *Rasa* is the essence of life, the basis of existence”, and one of the symbols of *rasa* is a flowing river (Pattanaik, 2021, p. 159). The flow of water creates new life on earth; in many religions, water is a major component of rituals, the essence of which is to improve and enrich life with the help of water. *Rasa* is also associated with the underworld and the knowledge of the resurrection of the dead. With the help of *tapas*, the embodiment of piety and asceticism, “one can overcome the natural laws of existence: to raise the dead, walk on water, fly, change the shape and size of any creature and the direction of fate, fulfil any desiree” (Pattanaik, 2021, p. 163). So water is historically linked to sacred aspects of the development of civilisation.

зв’язку із потойбічним і трансцендентним, маніфестують екстраординарні здібності людини, що взаємодіє з нею, свідчать про можливості наділяти цими властивостями, бути трансрівневим засобом пересування світами та джерелом життя.

Ключові слова: образ води, річка, море, стихія, постмодернізм, роман, жанр.

In the Ukrainian Orthodox prayer, the river is a symbol of the Mother of God, while the sea is associated with the immensity of God’s gifts and miracles: “Blessed Mother of God, who gave birth to the Word God before any other word for our salvation and accepted His grace, the Sea of divine gifts and wonders; the ever-living River, who by the power and love of the Lord gives grace to all who run to God through You in faith <...>” (Kyrios Christian Portal, 2023). In Ukrainian folk songs, there are whole complexes of artistic and figurative codes related to water (see: (Davidyuk, 2005), (Kostomarov, 1994), (Dei (Ed.), 1985), (Talanchuk, 1998), (Krypyakevych (Ed.), 1994). The river, according to the mythology of different peoples, which reflects ancient ideas that have been developed and preserved for centuries, is the boundary between worlds. In folklore, crossing the river had a metaphorical meaning of the transition from earthly life to the afterlife.

“Oh, there’s a river in the field,
There’s a bridge across the river.
Don’t leave him, Cossack,
your dear father.
And if you do,
You’ll die yourself,
You’ll be drifting down the swift rivers,
You’ll float to a strange land.
Oh, let you, river,
Not give birth to fish.
As you did with me, young,
You separated me from my family”.

In this folk song, in particular, the image of a river is associated with separation, crossing a certain boarder in difficult circumstances, probably with the escape from the enemies; the image of a wooden footbridge is associated with the only possible lifeline, which could threaten to break with the family. The poetisation of water “constitutes a kind of folk poetic dominant that manifests itself in folklore, the artistic word, ultimately determines the worldview of Ukrainians, penetrates the folk consciousness,

determines its respectful, sometimes sublime solemn perception”, as K. Prykhodchenko points out (Prykhodchenko, 2021, p. 273).

Of course, mythological layers have not disappeared also in Ukrainian postmodern novels, where the images of water emerge repeatedly, and water is also referred to in terms of ratio, which adds more weight to its symbolism. The purpose of the article is to select the most striking artistic images of the river, sea, and water as element and substance created in Ukrainian postmodern novels, and to identify their artistic features and functions in the text.

Theoretical framework

Water, as one of the four basic elements – earth, air, fire, and water – that structure the world, has prompted cultures of different nations to form ambivalent cosmogonic archetypal concepts, in which, on one hand, it acts as an object of creation, and on the other hand, it participates in creation as a subject of creation. In the system of symbols, water is a symbol of fertility, the beginning and end of all things on Earth, purification from sins (the rite of baptism for Christians), death and resurrection from the dead, purity and health (Potapenko et al., 1997, p. 29). For example, Lazar Baranovich, emphasising the omnipotence of the absolute, “speaks about God’s right hand, which governs everything and saves everything in the stormy waves of the restless sea of the world” (Levchenko, Liamprekht, Zosimova, Varenikova, Boiko, 2020, p. 66). In particular, he notes: “Wiele na tym morzu potonęło, co się śmieło, bez tego wiosła, bez prawicy Pańskiej, którą tonącego Piotra ratowała, puścili. Jeśli się łódką puścisz na te morze, patrz jeśli masz takiego Styrnika, ktoremi wiatry y morze byli posłuszne” (Baranowicz, 1676, p. 334), – this image embodies the Omnipresence of God, His benevolence, which, in turn, instils hope of salvation and reward for our life’s work that is eternal life (Levchenko, Liamprekht, Zosimova, Varenikova, Boiko, 2020, p. 66). The archetype of water has been the subject of research by scholars in the analytical psychology by C. G. Jung (Jung, 2018), (Jung, 1996), mythic criticism by N. Frye (Frye, 2021), onirism of primordial elements by G. Bachelard (Bachelard, 2004), and ethnology by M. Eliade (Eliade, 2001).

Methodology

The study uses elements of archetypal analysis to study the archetypes of water as expressions of

the unconscious essence of the writer, subordinated to a specific purpose. The technique of text interpretation is based on the hermeneutic method. The method of comparative analysis was used to search and identify similarities and differences in the images of water based on empirical studies of Ukrainian postmodern novels.

Results and discussion

The texts of Ukrainian postmodernists demonstrate different models of the image of water, which are subordinated to the artistic purpose in each particular novel.

Rivers and interflaves are the main component of the image of the city in the novel “Mesopotamia” by S. Zhadan: “The sun was broking through the fog, and the city was filled with light, voices and sounds, waking up from sleep and letting go dreams. The city stood on the hills, in the interfluve, washed by rivers on both sides. In the valley that opened up below, the first workers’s houses and schools were already there <...>” (Zhadan, 2014, p. 130). In the novel “Voroshilovgrad”, the river is a part of the suburban landscape: “<...> from the north, the city was surrounded by a river, flowing from Russian territory towards Donbas. Its left bank was gentle, while along the right bank high chalk mountains stretched, the tops of which were covered with tarragon and thorns” (Zhadan, 2011, p. 34); “Fog rose from the river, hiding the small figures of fishermen and the nearest huts, spilling out onto the road and creeping into the suburbs. Outside the city, there was also white fog in the gullies, and the whole valley gently blurred before our eyes, like a riverbed, falling into darkness, although here, on the hills, it was still quite light” (Zhadan, 2011, p. 55).

Water is a wonderful substance in which a creative person feels comfortable and draws inspiration and creative strength from his or her contact with it: “What a reward it is that even here, in a dirty dungeon <...> there is hot water, what a drive it is, completely beyond the understanding of many <...>. I want to be here forever! To forget about everything, close my eyes and surrender to the water like a lover. You wrote most of your poems in hot water. Because in hot water, you can be great, kind, brilliant, and yourself at the same time. And fuck them all” (Andrukhovych, 1997, p. 123). According to the understanding of Yu. Andrukhovych, water is personified and is an inexhaustible source of creativity; water is sacralised in the depiction of the ritual of ablution, after which it plunges into

the “underworld” according to one of the archetypal ideas of connection with the other world. One of the author’s most daring transformations of the connection with the otherworld and the meaning of transition is created by Yuriy Andrukhovych in his novel “Radio Night”, when he depicts the characters’ escape from rhinos through the footbridge: “There was very little left to the river. <...> Perhaps there is no storm, no cries, no groans on the other side <...>? If only I could cross it, stormy and foaming, jumping over the stone pillars of the unfinished bridge, while the water was coming, before it overflowed its banks, before it flooded the other side – all life would end, disappear, melt away? <...> This one is for me, the First manages to think and takes a sharp left. He already knows why – there is a wooden footbridge there, which may not have been washed away yet. It is shaky and slippery, and the river waters are already licking it off with eager storms. At the moment when the First and the Second, miraculously still have been balancing like comedians on the tightrope during a fair in Bozhi Karkolomi, reach about its middle, the footbridge begins to crack and disintegrate, and they are falling down. But not into the river, because for some reason the waters getting apart, making room for a free fall into a zero-circular tunnel, which – neither the fall nor the tunnel – was supposed to end. And neither should the nulls (Andrukhovich, 2021, p. 339–340)”. Here we can see a transformation of the biblical image of the sea that got apart for the Jews during their escape from Egypt, an allusion to the tunnel through which Alice by L. Carroll was falling down, and the significance of the only way of salvation provided by the river as the main one.

An interesting image of the underground sea is created in the novel “Tango of Death” by Yuriy Vynnychuk, who inhabits the building of Lviv book collection (library) with fish-like creatures that live under the floor in the underground “sea” and appear at the most unexpected moments: “The old floor creaked underfoot, and the pungent smell of the sea and algae came from below, as if rising from the cracks in the floor, <...> in that black density, in the hairy silence, the waves were barely audible, slowly and sleepily washing ashore, as if the sea had not yet awakened <...>. In that sea unknown creatures live – neither fish nor people, they sometimes come out of the depths and can be found on the street. But only late at night. They dress like us, but they have big green eyes and walk barefoot because their flippered feet won’t fit any shoes. It is quite possible that they enter the library as well” (Vynnychuk, 2012, p. 177).

The most interesting question that arises in the study of the artistic world of the novel by Yuriy Vynnychuk is why mysterious sea creatures come into contact with the human world in the library? The image of the library as a portal between worlds gives grounds for further elaboration. The image of a fantastic sea creature evokes surprise, but without fear or disgust: “<...> the floor beneath us swayed, cracked, and the boards parted and began to rise, we jumped back and watched in horror as someone’s black, shiny back, wet and slippery, with shells and algae attached, began to appear between the boards <...>” (Vynnychuk, 2012, p. 178).

The writer transforms the story of eternal life through “living” water and creates an image of the mysterious Book of Iblis, written by the great Sufi poet, classic of Persian and Turkish literature Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi from the words of Al-Hidr, the teacher of Moses, who found the Water of Life and became immortal while accompanying Alexander the Great on a campaign. One of the drawings in the Book of Iblis depicts a dervish walking on water. The flow of water in the book is associated with the flow of lives and reincarnations: “I died as a man and became a plant. I also died as a plant and became an animal. I died as an animal and became a man. Why should I be afraid of losing my human qualities? I will die as a man to rise as an angel... And our path to our origins, to our sources, will be illuminated by beacons that we must recognise in order to meet where the hashgash blooms, under its shadow” (Vynnychuk, 2012, p. 193). The protagonist of the novel quotes a tenth-century poem written by Mansur al-Hallay, a Sufi poet:

“I sprouted hundreds of times as grass
On the banks of swift rivers
For hundreds of thousands of years I have
been born and lived.

In all the bodies that exist on earth” (Vynnychuk, 2012, p. 192). Thus, water in the novel by Yuriy Vynnychuk is the environment for fantastic creatures, source of eternal life, and a background for reincarnation. The writer compares human life to swimming in water, events to waves and tides, and the bottom to death, creating an artistic image of a “water sky”: “So I swam and swam, and if anyone thinks that we are in the same place now, they are mistaken. We are never here and now, we are always on the move, in an eternal swim through the sky of water, in a struggle with waves and tides, along the way many of us go to the bottom, exhausted and losing faith, thousands and thousands behind



us wave their hands in desperation, trying to grasp a ray of sunlight or feathers of anxious birds of silence, and disappear into the depths of the boundless ocean. And you and I are also sailing towards the great unknown, which barely dreams on the horizon, but in the end, the same thing awaits us – exhaustion, a wave of hands, a ray of sun in a handful and bubbles on the surface of the water” (Vynnychuk, 2017, p. 69). The writer builds an image of the Rudka River, which combines childhood memories of the boys rescuing small fish from dried-up mochars with the statement of the river’s recent death: “Now the Rudka is gone, it has been drained and built up <...>. Its death came as a surprise to me. It seemed that it should have survived <...> I don’t want to see it anymore, the destroyed space falls from my eyes, covered by the haze” (Vynnychuk, 2017, p. 143–145).

The protagonist of the novel “Lutetia” by Yu. Vynnychuk, who is the author himself, a writer and a scholar, studies the myths and legends of primitive peoples and focuses his guests’ attention on the fact that “the feminine is always associated with the earth and water, and the masculine with the sky; water and fire, as well as the tree of life, are mediators between these two principles”, “that is why in folk songs lovers always meet near a river, near a ford, near a well”, “or something is burning” (Vynnychuk, 2017, p. 288). The author actualises the metaphorical perception of the images of water used in the text of the novel emphasising these connections in the extract.

The main component of the native topos is the image of the river in the novel “Mesopotamia” by S. Zhadan. Interaction with river water is commonplace for a metropolitan resident in the novel; river water does not frighten, even in the dark: “<...> one could hear laughter and shrieking, and the merry splash of water, and confident waves of hands raking in the middle of the stream. Women’s bodies glowed silver in the moonlight <...>. I recognised them, standing on the shore, calling out to them, shouting to them to the blackness. They answered from there, approaching and then sailing away again to the opposite bank. It was as if the river was bringing all the voices I knew from the city, all the laughter, all the singing. It gave me a sense of calm and confidence, because everything was right there, just a few steps away. And in no way could it disappear, it could never end, no matter how long I would stand there, no matter how much time would pass” (Zhadan, 2014, p. 313). S. Zhadan’s metaphorical authorial expression “by this river” or “by this water”,

which is used both in “Mesopotamia” and in the author’s poetry (“And there is no difference by this river, what your pupils reflect...” – a line from a song by the collaboration of S. Zhadan and “Dogs in Space” musical band), it means “being here, on the native land, which is located near the river”: “I thought how good it was that I ended up here – on this bank, by this water. Standing there and watching her undress and enter the river, knowing that you can actually enter any river endlessly. You can hold on to the moisture that envelops you indefinitely, you can wait infinitely long for the return of everyone you knew and loved. The river will bring all the intonations you heard, the river will keep all the warmth left at the banks, rivers know how to wait, they know how to start all over again. Because there is the continuity of the riverbed, the continuity of the flow, and no one can stop all this mass of wet light, all this enormity of heat and cold” (Zhadan, 2014, p. 313–314).

One of the characteristic features of the prose by S. Zhadan is the combination of the image of water with the image of light. The writer purposely accentuates the moment of presence or absence of light, creating an image of the river, its brightness, tonal colour, sparkling light from objects or people in the water: “The old quarters overlooked the river, a gentle bank overgrown with reeds, where fishermen hid, catching precious fish that recklessly buried themselves in the coastal silt and glowed like stolen silverware” (Zhadan, 2014, p. 131). A synthetic image is being created by adding images of smell, texture, etc: “I thought that I would remember the smell of this water for a long time, the smell of clay and grass, the smell of smoke and autumn, the smell of life that has not yet ended and death that has not yet come <...>. After all, everything depends on us. First of all, our desire to remember at least something. And our desire not to remember anything” (Zhadan, 2014, p. 315).

The river in the novel by Yurii Izdryk seems alive and internally powerful, revealing the primary human fear of deep, moving water: “Eventually, when my foot hit the ledge of a dug concrete slab, I hung half a metre from the water – up close, the river did not look dead and steel, but it had a hidden power that inspired panic. The sound of metal structures could be heard from above: a train was rushing across the bridge <...>” (Izdryk, 2010, p. 277). The “hidden power” that Izdryk writes about is the embodiment of the dynamic movement of water combined with the human perception of a large mass of water.

The dynamics of water can be conveyed through the movement of aquatic creatures, and the tension and effort in movement may not carry a sense of danger, and the water in this case is light, transparent and beautiful, as, for example, depicted by Yuri Andrukhovych in his novel *Radio Night*: “Rothsky never missed an opportunity to admire the tense and tight movement of trout in the swift and beautifully green waters of the Oslava. He had two or three favourite observation spots on the old (fifteenth-century) Stone Bridge, which he had witnessed being built once in his previous lifetime” (Andrukhovych, 2021, p. 278).

The flow of rivers has long brought fertile soil, wood used as fuel, lost jewellery, fragments of ancient artefacts, antique coins, and garbage to the banks; it could change the configuration of the course and the relief of the coast during floods, and could be destructive and life-giving at the same time. In the novel *Mesopotamia* by S. Zhadan, the effect of contrast with the beautiful flow is created by the image of a dead bird: “The children threw dead birds they found on the street into the water, and they floated away, terrifying the inhabitants with their appearance” (Zhadan, 2014, p. 131). The legend created in the novel “*Twelve Hoops*” by Yuriy Andrukhovych, says that the locals of the village have been expecting the waters of the local River to bring large Danube fish for centuries, “none of them understood how this was really possible. After all, the waters of the River cannot flow backwards, and neither can the waters of the Danube. <...> the Danube fish turned out to be a human being, a stranger who had recently walked along the shore here <...>” (Andrukhovich, 2003, p. 226–227). According to an ancient prophecy, “as soon as the waters of the River bring the great Danube fish, one must leave here. It was a sign that everything had changed and time was moving into a new dimension” (Andrukhovich, 2003, p. 226–227). Could it be that in a few hours the prediction will begin? The appearance of the great Danube fish is associated with a change in the stage of life. The motif of disturbing change, change not for the good, but for suffering and grief, is also found in the novels “*Tango of Death*” by Yu. Vynnychuk and “*Voroshlyovgrad*” by S. Zhadan.

S. Zhadan’s artistic foresight made it possible to create a vivid synthetic multilayered image of a pre-dawn procession of fantastic creatures from the river: “Orange lights were burning in the valley, burning the fog around them. The sky was becoming black and high, the constellations appeared on it like faces on a photofilm <...>

Suddenly I noticed some movement down on the slope. Someone was coming up from the river, stretching up a steep ascent, sinking in the fog. It was hard to understand who exactly was walking there, but I could hear these footsteps, as if someone was driving frightened animals away from the water <...> (Zhadan, 2011, p. 57). The fog, illuminated from below, from the valley, seemed full of movement and shadows. Over the fog, the air was transparent, and bats flew in it from time to time <...> figures began to emerge from the fog, quickly approaching through the thick hot grass. They moved easily, climbing upwards, and there were more and more of them <...>. It was unclear who they were, some strange creatures, almost incorporeal, men hiding clots of fog in their lungs. They were tall, had long uncombed hair, tied in ponytails or gathered in iroquois, their faces were dark and scarred, some had strange signs and letters painted on their foreheads <...>. They had medallions and binoculars hanging around their necks, fishing rods and rifles behind their shoulders, and some held flags <...> some wore officer’s frenches, others pulled woollen coats over their shoulders <...>. Some had army boots on their feet <...> dark figures began to emerge from the fog, unlike anything else <...>. Cows were being driven by shepherds dressed in black coats and grey military overcoats <...>. The sky was already white where they came from, and as soon as they disappeared, the air was filled with a steady grey light, filling like a dish with water, with a new morning. <...> It felt as if death had passed me by. Or a freight train had passed by” (Zhadan, 2011, p. 58–60). Let’s pay attention to the accents and artistic details associated with the war that are exquisitely embedded in the description: scarred faces, binoculars around the necks, an officer’s french coat, rifles, flags as military attributes, Iroquoises and tails as symbols of belligerence. The feeling of near death experienced by the hero is connected to the anticipation of the war that will soon go through these same hills.

In the historical novel “*Tango of Death*” last night before the outbreak of World War II, mysterious creatures with fins wearing green helmets and long cloaks that “smelled of rotten algae and iodine” left Lviv, escaping the suffering to which the city was doomed (Vinnychuk, 2012, p. 244).

Conclusion

The images of water in the texts of Ukrainian postmodernists Yu. Andrukhovych, S. Zhadan,

Yu. Izdryk and Yu. Vynnychuk are rooted in the oldest layers of national culture.

The author's models of the image of water are transformations of traditional images as part of synthetic image combinations (in particular, the image of the city, countryside landscape, inhabitants of the ancient underground sea) and plots (the plot of eternal life and "living water") and perform artistic tasks on the verge of novel genres, giving the text appropriate genre and style accents.

The multifunctionality of water images implies the actualisation of mythological levels of perception (the boundary between worlds, movement between them, the source of life, the transition from earthly life to the afterlife), the discourse of the transcendent, and the understanding of water as an ambivalent source of creative inspiration and death.

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