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Images of Water and Woman in the Arts

Zdeňka Kalnická

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Introduction

"In much of western culture, the original character of death nature has been covered over by various dogmas and doctrines until it is split off from its other half, Life," writes Pincola Clarissa Estés in her *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. She advises us to accept the ambiguity of Death and Life and "rather than seeing the archetype of Death and Life as opposites, they must be held together as the left and right side of a single thought" (Estés 1997: 142).

Examining the old mythologies, we can see the close connection between life, water and woman, as well as between death, water and woman linked together within the world's circular movement symbolized by the Great Goddess. However, in the course of history the two aspects were divided and separated from each other.

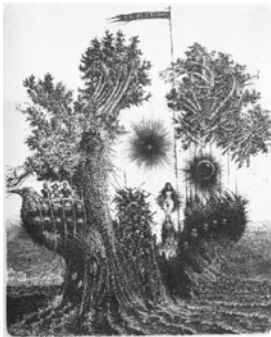
In the first two chapters we will examine the images to be found in the arts as evidence of the separation of Life and Death in European culture. It is not by chance that for each connection we present one picture created by a man and the other one by a woman. In the last chapter, we will go back to pre-Greek mythologies where an archetypal connection between water and woman representing the source of both Life and Death is alive in a strong but somehow forgotten image of a frog. We will explore the changes in the development of this particular image, emphasizing the changes in its interpretation and evaluation from a gendered point of view. At the end we will analyze a picture created by a contemporary woman artist. We hope that the complexity of the

above-mentioned frog symbol will help us to examine our own attitudes towards life and death.

Origin of Life

The origin of life as such is said to be in water, and many mythologies offer the vision of the creation of the world from water. Albin Brunovsky's world, as discussed below, is created out of an infinite mass of water as an original source of life, and, in the author's imagination, inseparably connected with a woman; the woman's body always contains water from which new human life emerges. An amniotic fluid is perhaps the only type of water which cannot be detached from its connection with woman, and reinforces the archetypal connection. In his graphic sheet entitled *L. P. Boat*

Fig. 1: Albin Brunovsky: L. P. Boat



The world has emerged from the concentration of water into a column, water doing an inverse whirling movement (instead of going down, it goes up) while continually changing into trees, animals and people. The boat-like shape of the emerged world indicates its dependency on water; but we can see it also as a bird.

An association of water and woman is underlined not only by the title where the initials of the name of a woman Ludmila Peterajová are hidden, and by the flag with her full surname positioned at the highest point of the picture, but also by a naked woman with the exaggerated signs of fertility. She dominates the picture and together with the breasts on the left side of the boat indicates the nutritional capacity of water and woman. The water in the picture comes from a larger reservoir of water outside the picture.

Brunovsky's world is built from air, water, fire and earth. Water serves somehow as the "ground" (looking like grass blowing in the wind); nevertheless all elements are mutable, and as ambiguous in their meanings (the boat as a bird, the vessels as the branches, the branches as flames, the sun as a breast, the moon as an eye). The image has a circular compositional structure that symbolizes the circularity of nature and human fate: the

people climbing on each other's bodies are at the same time falling down. A naked woman is standing alone in the place where she has the most immediate connection with water (where there is something like a "gap" in the boat). She is self-assured, calm, as if she were aware of her dominant status as creator and keeper (the watching eye on her left?) of this otherwise transient world (she is the stability within the changes). However, because of the woman's juxtaposition in the work with the battle on her left of the axis of the picture, we can sense that death has not been yet totally abolished. However, it seems to be Woman who is placed on the pedestal, honored as a source of life and the sacred. Here, Brunovsky is close to Thales,' the Greek philosopher's, idea of the Primary Water from which all things "emerge".

However, from a feminist perspective, the association of woman, water and birth can cause mixed feelings, especially when we take into account its interpretation within the patriarchal culture. On the one hand, Germaine Richier's sculpture, *The Water*

Fig. 2: Germaine Richier: The Water



plays, on the connections between water, woman, and the ancient pitcher, enabling the viewer to interpret woman as a source and preserver of both water and life; woman-water is also portrayed with the signs of fertility exaggerated : the large torso, and the belly and chest with the breasts dominant. However, we can arrive at quite a different interpretation when focusing on the fact that the woman's head is missing, and that her legs and arms look as not fully functional parts, something like vestigial appendages of her body. The

work thus can be interpreted as allusion to the traditional patriarchal image of woman as a container (the head being extraneous), theoretically expressed, for example, in Plato

and Aristotle.¹ The figure is sitting as if impaled, a pose invoking an act of fertilization. However, the stick and legs create the shape of three-legged chair, which can be interpreted as an allusion to a throne of the goddess Isis in the Egypt. The woman's arms are placed under her thighs as if holding a chair; however, they are attached to her body in such a way that they cannot move (not allowing for any woman's activity or defense), thus possibly serving as the handles of a pitcher (for someone else to use). The woman-pitcher image may cause the perception that she is created from mud – in several ancient mythologies the first material to form the world; the texture of the sculpture suggests that it is melting. Richier created a highly ambiguous image of water, woman and life playing on this ambiguity in their interpretation: either within the old goddess cults or within the

¹ Both philosophers, Aristotle in particular, formulated the view about woman as a container, having nothing to do with the new life, being only “an oven” for the child who is “planted” in her by a man to be baked there. The man is that one who “makes the thing, as it is”; a woman is seen only as a passive element giving the material for his active part. As Aristotle states: “...the female always provides the material, the male that which fashions it....While the body is from the female, it is the soul that is from the male, for the soul is the reality of a particular body...”(History of Ideas on Woman. A Source Book, edited by Rosemary Agonito 1977: 47) Aristotle's definition of a woman says: “...and the woman is as it were an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female, being incapable of concocting the nutriment in its last stage into semen.” (ibid.: 44) Concerning Plato, the interpretation is more complicated as he elaborated different view on the gender issues in his works *Timaeus* and *Republic*. *Timaeus*, where Plato developed his cosmological vision of the origin and structure of the world, ends with the section entitled: *The differentiation of the sexes. The lower animals (90e-90c)*. Here we can read, “of those who were born as men, all that were cowardly and spent their life in wrongdoing were, according to the probable account, transformed at the second birth into women” (Plato 1959: 115). Looking for the basis of such a view, we found it in Plato's opposition between matter (Recipient) and idea (model), the first being compared to mother, the second to father; and the things, which are placed between them to their off-springs (Plato 1959: 51). On the other hand, in *Republic* Plato seemingly calls for equality between men and women. However, we need to keep in mind that this equality was proposed only for the ruling class. And even in this case Plato states: “all the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man” (History of Ideas on Woman. A Source Book, edited by Rosemary Agonito 1977: 31), and “having selected the men, will now select the women and give them to them.” (ibid.: 35)

patriarchal tradition making woman only a tool for bringing new life into the world. As the woman's lack of any ability to move on her own helps reinforce her being for someone else, it seems that Richier aimed at subversion of the patriarchal view of water, woman, and her connection to life rather than a celebration of it.

Looking for an answer to where and when this separation of life and death (related to the re-evaluation of the woman-water connection) began is not within the scope of this paper. However, it might be useful just to consider a few possibilities, especially from Greek culture. In Greek mythology man became the chief God on Olympus, but traces of veneration for water and woman still remained such as the supreme power of the river Styx, its waters being those in which the gods took oaths which were impossible to renounce. We also find water as a source of life and as the most important element in early Greek philosophy, especially in Thales of Miletus. According to Thales, water was the *arché*, the first of the elements, the origin of all, having "mastery" over the rest because it represented the abyssal womb (Walker 1983: 273-274). In his vision, the Earth floats on water. Over the course of time, however, we can see changes in the hierarchies of elements and their value. As Lloyd claims, it happened within the development of Greek philosophy that wet and cold (and also left and down) became connected with femininity and evaluated negatively, and dry and warm (also right and up) became connected with masculinity and evaluated positively. (Lloyd 1970) We can establish evidence for that change also in Greek drama. As Eisler claims, it was in Greece during the time of Aeschylus that femininity underwent a change in status. She supports this contention in quoting the last part of Aeschylus' *The Oresteian Trilogy, The Eumenides*. Here, the matricide (Orestes had killed his mother) is defended by the playwright as undeserving of punishment for his crime by arguing that children are not connected with their mothers. This argument is brought about by Apollo, who called for goddess Pallas-Athena as an example claiming that she was not born by a woman (according to the Greek mythology, she sprang fully grown from the head of Zeus).² This process of re-

² It is important to note that it was Pallas Athena who was the head of the court and that it was she who made the final decision not to punish Orestes (the vote of the judges was even, so her decision was the final one). Apollo says: "The mother is not the true parent

evaluation and denigration was somehow definitely established by Aristotle, who stated unambiguously that woman was inferior to man.³

Medieval culture argued the schism of the original circular unity of Life and Death further and developed a clear division between body and soul, mortal and immortal life, good and evil, heaven and hell, saint and sinner, virgin and witch. In the realm of water images, this separation occurred in the form of what was known as Life and Death water, which would later become a part of fairy-tales. In general terms a new source of life, the Spirit, in the Middle Ages emerges. Though water is said to have existed before the Creation, the act of the creation of the World started only at the moment of this primal element by Spirit, Light and Word, and subordinated to God's spiritual power: God is able to issue, confine, stop, and divide water.⁴ However, the ancient symbols connecting water and woman are not totally discarded: they are re-interpreted in accordance with the needs and framework of the new ideology and patriarchal social order.⁵

Calling to Death

It seems that the connection between woman and life is more obvious for us than the connection between woman and death. Kristeva claims that the image of Mother as Death

of the child / Which is called hers. She is a nurse who tends the growth / Of young seed planted by its true parent, the male." (Aeschylus 1967: 169)

³ Aristotle states: „Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind.“ (History of Ideas on Woman. A Source Book, edited by Rosemary Agonito 1977: 51)

⁴ We can recall several events involving water, which were described in the Old Testament, such as the Flood, Jonah and the whale, the crossing of the Red Sea, and Moses striking water from the rock. The most important of them was the miracle that took place at the river Jordan as described in the Book of Joshua.

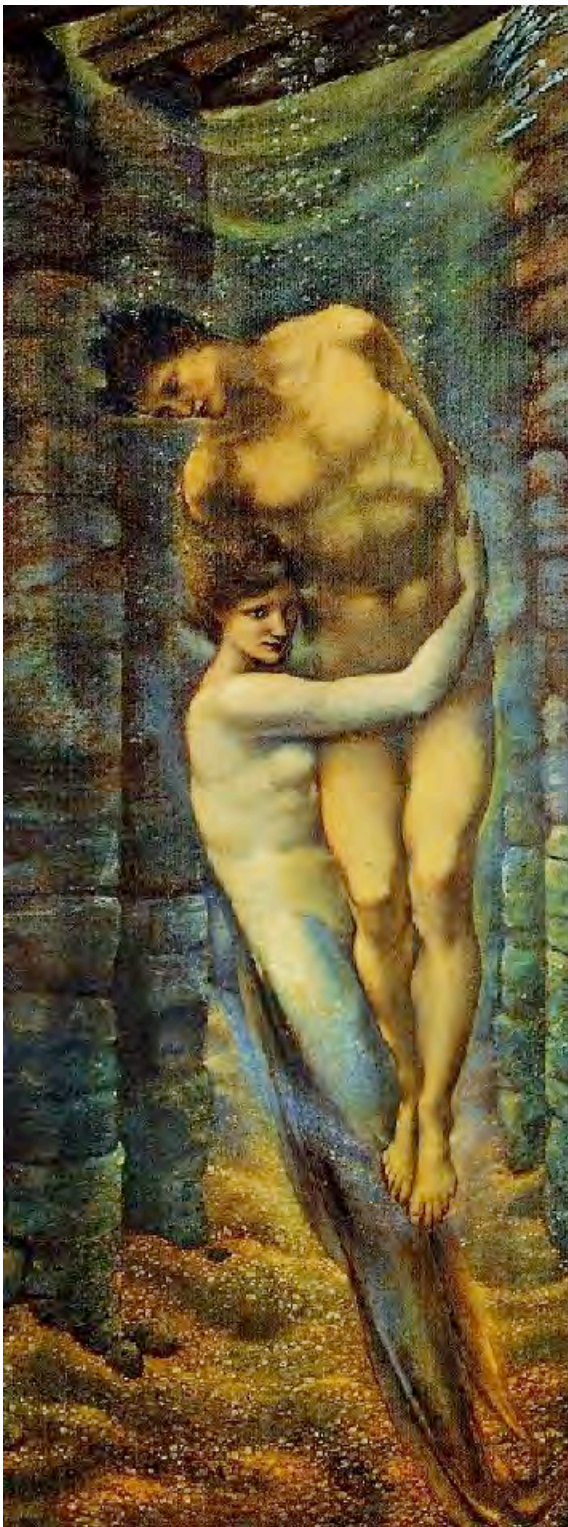
⁵ This happened to the symbol of a lily (lotus), a water-woman creature (mermaid), to the symbol of a fish, and, as we will see later, also to the symbol of a frog. For more information see Walker, B. G. 1983: *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. San Francisco, Harper and Row Publishers.

emerged due to the psychological necessity of both man and woman to become autonomous personalities, i.e. to be re-born. In this process, they should disconnect themselves from the mother, an act that is symbolically viewed as matricide. “Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances and can be eroticized...” (Kristeva 1989: 27 - 28). Nevertheless, this matricidal drive, when hindered, turns in on the self, causing depression or a melancholic “putting to death of the self” (Kristeva 1989: 28). In doing this, we know, according to Kristeva, “that it comes from her, the death-bearing she-Gehenne” (Kristeva 1989: 28). To be able to deal with that situation, in other words not to kill her and not to kill ourselves, we will make of Her an image of the Death we can attack, harass, and symbolize. The image of woman as Death is thus “an imaginary safety catch for matricidal drive that, without such a representation, would pulverize me in melancholia if it did not drive me to crime” (Kristeva 1989: 28).

In ancient mythologies, the symbol of Death has been incorporated into an image of the Great Mother who represented both aspects of the world: creation and destruction. However, in Greek mythology, we can trace the separation of the two and find an association of the women with Death in the image of the Sirens. The Sirens were originally nymphs accompanying Persephone. Persephone’s mother, Demeter, punished them (for not helping Persephone when Hades raped her) by turning several of them into Sirens whose duty it was to seduce passing sailors with their beautiful voices causing their death by distracting them from steering their boats which crashed into the cliffs). This story explicitly connects water, woman and death.

We can find many examples in art showing that the water-woman seduction is fatal, especially for men. In Edward Burne-Jones’s watercolor *The Depth of the Sea*,

Fig. 3: Edward Burne-Jones: The Depth of the Sea



the seductive power of water is directly identified with that of woman. Woman-water-death is looking seductively at us while half-victoriously, half-passionately and tenderly carrying the body of a dead sailor to the bottom of the ocean. „Am I not beautiful, am I not carefully holding you and soft to you, am I not a part of you that you always seek? I promise I will console you and give you never-ending pleasure,“ the Depths of the Sea addresses us.

This picture is often interpreted as a so-called "*femme fatale*" image, the woman as an instrument of a death. According to Jung, she is "a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's unconscious: a representation of the anima consciously repressed by the male. This may be seen to lead to a cultural suppression of women, with the *femme fatale* representing men's fears of women's power - more of a projection onto the

female than a mirror of her reality" (Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography 1982: 317). According to Kristeva, woman as a representation of death is more likely to occur in men's imagination as a projection of the loss of a mother, but it might also occur in women's consciousness. For a woman, the process of identifying women with death is more difficult: an interjection of the maternal body and woman's self is more immediate and "the hatred I bear her is not oriented toward the outside but is locked up within

myself” (Kristeva 1989: 29) She describes the process of the emergence of this projection based on “negative narcissism” and developing into a feeling of an “oceanic void”: “It is a feeling and fantasy of pain, but anesthetized, of *jouissance*, but in suspense, of an expectation and a silence as empty as they are fulfilled. In the midst of its lethal ocean, the melancholy woman is the dead one that has always been abandoned within herself and can never kill outside herself.” (Kristeva 1989: 29-30).

The last example is by a woman connecting images of water, woman, and death: Edith Rimmington’s *Washed in Léthe*.

Fig. 4: Edith Rimmington: Washed in Léthe



The title alludes to the mythological river of ancient Greece, the Léthe, its water having been poisoned, the toxic effects of which are sleepiness, lethargy, and "forgetfulness" as forms of death. The picture can thus be interpreted as a reminder of many dead - that is, forgotten women in history. It portrays woman’s "mental odyssey" as "a descent into the depth of the sea" (Chadwick 1985: 212). We can see a woman under water covered by clothing that partly resembles the Greek (toga) and partly the Muslim style of dress (the veil covering her face). A woman meditates on all of the drowned women the waves of water are carrying past her in the River under the River (the motif of the River under the River is explained by Estés as a part of a Wild Woman archetype). She stands on a small piece of a “firm ground” (the remains of a house wall or fence?), which is also being carried by the stream. In contrast to the waves of the river, she is surrounded by “waves” painted in a stylized, decorative manner, waves that unmenacingly move in different directions behind her. They also resemble the wings of the big bird, into which woman would like to transform herself. As Irigaray writes: “Once we have left the *waters* of the womb, we have to construct a space for ourselves in the air for the rest of our time on earth – air in which we can breathe and sing freely, in which we can perform and move at will. Once we were fishes. It seems that we are destined to become birds.” (Irigaray 1987: 66)

On the other hand, the two bodies of water can be seen as two female selves – one a deeper underworld, the other more culturally elaborate and restrained. The space of stylized waves is divided vertically by a column containing an object resembling an old book covered in leather. Could it be an allusion to the way in which women were marginalized and forgotten in books written in the patriarchal tradition? The covered woman is not looking at the dead women in the water, but inquisitively at us, as though she would like to ask us the questions that arise from her meditations: „How long will women not be allowed to be individual persons (hidden under the dress), forced to be silent (the covered mouth), forgotten (under the sea), the victims of the historical process (dead)?“ On the other hand, the woman is calm and composed, even provocatively so, aware of the importance of her insights into oppressed women’s past, and waiting for the time when she can come to us and speak. Even the symbol of the veil can be understood in the tradition of the old goddess cults as a sign of the woman’s sacred pilgrimage into the underworld, a time during which she escapes recognition and refuses to be diverted from her intentions. As Estés explains, the symbol of the veil is about keeping oneself without giving all away to whomever asks; it promotes nourishing solitude; it is about potentiality and preserving a woman’s inner mental space against unwelcome intruders. Even if there is an intruder in “her” realm – for example, the column and book which seem to be strange elements in the picture because of their geometrical shape, their strong masculine verticality--it is obvious that she is the queen of that underwater realm, that she is the master even of that hidden element.

The Circularity of Life and Death: The Frog

As we pointed out previously, in pre-ancient times the circularity of Life and Death was associated mostly with the Great Mother figure. She occupied the highest position in these ancient mythologies.⁶

⁶ For more information see: Baring, A. – Cashford, J. 1991: *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., Gimbutas, M. 1974: *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe. 7000 to*

For example, the Hindu goddess Kali or Kali Ma ,”Dark Mother,” was the Hindu Triple Goddess of creation, preservation and destruction. Though Kali was primarily associated with the earth, she was also called “the Ocean of Blood,” the dark formlessness of a water womb at the beginning and the flood at the end of the world, which appeared in all of the myths of pre-creation and post-doomsday as elementary chaos. (Walker 1983: 488-494). Eliade explains the closeness of earth and water symbolism by the fact that “The Earth-Mother embodies the archetype of fecundity, of inexhaustible creativity. That is why she has a tendency to assimilate the attributes and the myth of the divinities of fertility, whether they are lunar, aquatic or agricultural. But the converse of this is also true: these divinities appropriate the attributes of the Earth Mother, and sometimes even replace her in the cult. And we can see why: the Waters, like the Mother, are rich with the germs of life, and the Moon, too, symbolizes the universal becoming, the periodical creation and destruction” (Eliade 1960: 184-185).

And it is precisely those two elements – water and earth – being the living environment of the frogs. “The frog, of course, is an amphibian. Life begins in fresh water and then runs its course principally on dry land, necessitating a complete change of body form and function. The adult is perfectly at ease in either element.” (Ribuoli – Robbiani 1991: 6). From the point of nature’s development, the frog is a very old creature: it has been around for some 150 million years (*ibid.*: 6).⁷ It is not surprising, then, that because of “the watery slime of chaos being the base of creative matter, several primeval gods, related to that fertile chaos-slime (the Nile) had frog-heads.” (de Vries 1974: 204) However, for a long time before Egypt the Batrachians were used to

3500 B.C. Myths, Legends and Cult Images. London, and Neumann, E. 1963 [2nd edition]: *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, translated from German by Ralph Manheim. Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Ins.

⁷ In Bamanan tale Chameleon and Frog, the two are making argument in front of the God’s presence about who is the oldest creature on the earth. The frog’s main argument for his long survival on the earth sounds as follows: “You must skip over some matters so that you can achieve personhood.” The tale does not end with the proclamation of the winner, but it seems that it would be the frog as the tale ends with the words: “Frog is not a saint, but he is one of the creatures that God like.” (Kone 1995: 60-61)

represent the circle of life, earth and rebirth connected with water and woman, and we can find their images in other mythologies throughout the world.⁸

Though we can find the symbol of a frog in other mythologies, it seems that it was in Egyptian mythology that the frog played the most significant role. Its importance was grounded in the fact that during the annual flooding of the Nile, a great number of small frogs appeared in the Nile's mud. As Pliny recorded, the Egyptians believed that after six months the frogs are dissolved into mud and spontaneously recreated in the following spring (Ekenvall 1978: 9). That might be the reason that in Egypt mythology we can find an old mother-goddess and frog-goddess at the same time called Heqit (Heqet, Heket, Hekit). She appeared sometimes in the shape of a frog, sometimes in human shape with a frog's head, and was a goddess of birth, death and resurrection.⁹

Fig. 5: Horus procreated by Isis (in the shape of a falcon) and Osiris, in the presence of Heqit

⁸ For more information see A. Ekenvall: *Batrachians as Symbols of Life, Death, and Woman*, 1978, M. Gimbutas: *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*, 1974, and H. Wassén: *The Frog in Indian Mythology and Imaginative World*. In: *Anthropos. Revue Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Linguistique*. Tome XXIX, 1934, p. 613-658.

⁹ According to de Vries, she was later identified with the Goddess Hathor (de Vries 1974: 204)

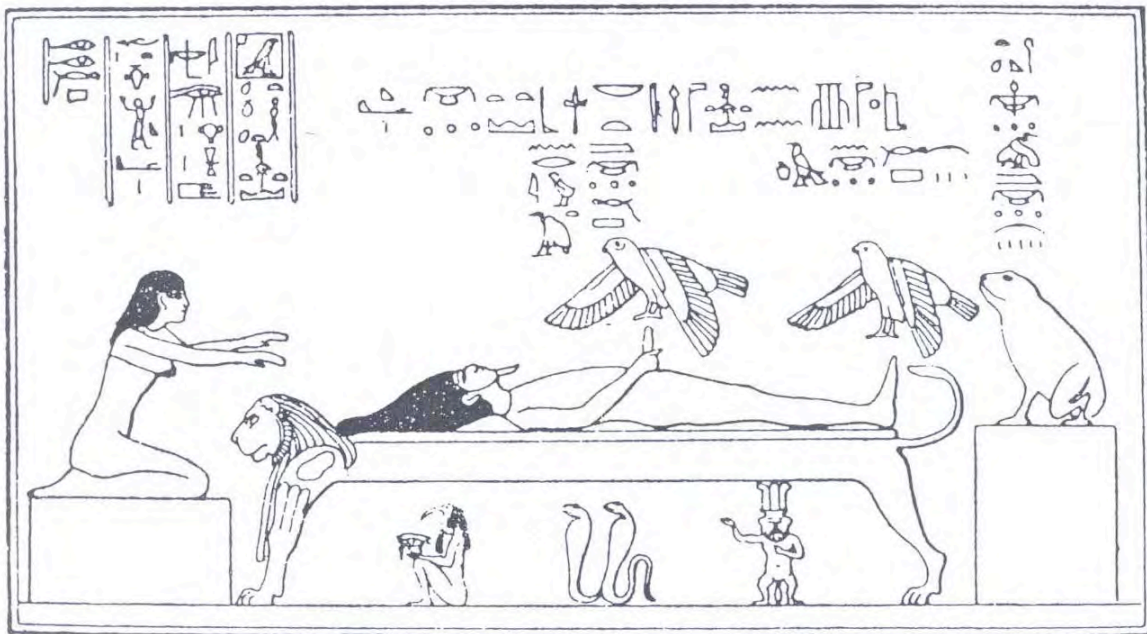


Fig. 8. Horus procreated by Isis (in the shape of a falcon) and Osiris, in the presence of Heqit.

Batrachians were connected with procreation and played an important role in fertility creeds, since “for a long time they were included among the animals that were thought to be spontaneously generated” (Ekenvall 1978: 8). However, the frogs were connected not only with birth and rebirth, but – as a part of the life circle – also with death evidenced by the small statues of frogs have been found in graves from all periods of Egyptian history (they accompanied the dead into the tomb in order to assure his/her resurrection and were sometimes mummified). Frogs also were associated with human embryos and stood as a symbol for *fetus* (there is a resemblance between frog and human embryo one or two months old), and also for the uterus thus connected closely to women’s sexual life.

In Greek culture, the frog still survived as a favorite animal of Aphrodite, and in ancient Rome, of Venus (Ribuoli – Robbiani 1992: 31). However, the positive aspects of the frog’s symbol were gradually changed into the negative ones. For example, Aristophanes in his comedy *The Frogs* used these animals to symbolize his opinion of



Fig. 10. *Superbia, pride, as represented by Bosch.*

other playwrights of his time, satirically comparing them to the meaningless sounds uttered by the chorus of frogs.¹⁰ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we can find the legend of the pregnant Latona, who turned into frogs the people who had prevented her from drinking fresh water when she was thirsty. Here, to turn into the frog was seen as a punishment.¹¹ The similar image was offered by Bible: we can recall, for example, the events from the Book of Exodus, where God punished the Egyptian Pharaoh for not freeing the Israelites by ten plagues, the first being the change of the Nile's water into t blood, and the second being the infestation of frogs on his land.¹² However, the old meaning of the frog as a symbol for resurrection was preserved for much longer: we can find the amulets in the shape of frogs with the words on them: "I am the resurrection" being dedicated to Jesus Christ and St. Mary. However, in medieval times the image of the frog was predominantly used to symbolize Pride (or Lust) as one of the seven deadly sins: for example, we can see the coupling of batrachians and the female genitals in the famous picture *The Seven Deadly Sins* of Hieronymus Bosch.

Fig. 6: Hieronymus Bosch: The Seven Deadly Sins (detail)

¹⁰ Fitts, D. 1983: *Aristophanes: Four Comedies (Lysistrata, The Frogs, The Birds, Ladies' Day)*, San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace and Company, p. 79 -156.

¹¹ See Ribuoli, P. – Robbiani, M. 1992: *Frog. Art, Legend, History*. English translation by John Gilbert. Boston, Toronto, London: A Bulfinch Press Book, Little, Brown and Company [2nd printing], p.107.

¹² The God says to Pharaoh: "I will plague the whole of your territory with frogs... They shall come up from the river into your house, into your bedroom and on to your bed, into the houses of your courtiers and your people, into your ovens and your kneading troughs. The frog shall clamber over you, your people and your courtiers..." (Ribuoli – Robbiani 1992: 28 – 29)

And it is not surprising that the frog, or, more precisely, the toad, was one of the animals associated with the practice of witchcraft; it was believed that the Devil changed himself into the shape of a toad (or into the shape of a goat) and “at the Sabbath the witches kissed the devil in homage, under the tail if he appeared as a stinking goat, on the lips if he were a toad” (Daly 1978: 187-188). In this transformation, we can trace the connection of the original association of the frog with the Egyptian goddess Heqit, who later transformed herself into the Greek goddess Hecate the model for the image of the witch, elaborated in the late medieval times. (Walker 1983: 378-379) The image of a frog plays quite an important role in the world of the fairy-tales.¹³

However, is this image of the frog portrayed the above-mentioned symbolism in contemporary art? After some effort to find symbolically important images of the frog, I decided to conclude this essay with a digitally produced artwork created by Susan Makov.

Fig. 7: Susan Makov: F is for Vanishing Frogs



Susan Makov’s picture *F is for vanishing frogs* suggests the concern for the danger frogs face from human civilization (especially their deaths from cars when roads cross their traditional territories). This interpretation is supported by the “box” containing the “flatted” staff (on the lower part of the picture) where we can distinguish a frog (on the left side of the box); by two frogs in the left (being in the tomb?); by the tadpoles trapped in the net (in the middle of the picture); and, finally, by the strips crossing the road and connecting the two frogs on the left with the buildings (as a product of civilization) pointing to the cause of the vanishing of the frogs.

¹³ For more information see Ribuoli, P. – Robbiani, M. 1992: *Frog. Art, Legend, History*. English translation by John Gilbert. Boston, Toronto, London: A Bulfinch Press Book, Little, Brown and Company [2nd printing], where you can find also the psychoanalytical interpretation of these fairy-tales.

However, we also can interpret this “vanishing” on a more symbolic level, as the vanishing of the old and complex symbolic meanings of frogs in our culture (making them only the object of popular culture by their humorous appearance). If we adopt the holistic view without dualistic assumptions about nature and culture, animals and humans, we can interpret the picture as an image of circularity, transformation and connectedness of the two elements in question. The frogs in the picture complete the circle from the birth, death and rebirth, undergoing the transformation from eggs (the stones on the road-pond), tadpoles (in the net-water) to the grown adults (on the left). This interconnectedness of the frogs and humans is supported by the fact that the frog, “although phylogenetically a primitive, cold-blooded animal, possesses certain morphological and structural features that are very similar to those of humans” (Ribuoli – Robbiani 1992: 69-70). In this case, we can interpret the black space where the two white frogs are placed as a life-giving mud, from what the frogs are emerging and into what they are disappearing (it is interesting that the white and black are seen as opposite poles of the color spectrum: black as having absorbed all other colors, and white as the potentiality of any color). The play of the white and black conveys the emphasis here: for example, the block of “packed staff” apparently representing the death stage of the circularity, is nevertheless painted almost in white, suggesting the possibility to the new life emerging from it (the frog on the left side of the box seems to make its step toward life and others may follow it).¹⁴

¹⁴ We can also recall Estés’ shortened description of the colors involved: The black and white symbolizes the ancient colors connoting birth, and death: the black for the dissolution of one’s old values, and the white as the new light, the new knowledge. Each color has its death nature and its life nature. Black is the color of mud, the fertile, and the basic material in which ideas are sown. Yet black is also the color of death, the blackening of the light. And black has even a third aspect, for black is the color of descent. Black is a promise that you will soon know something you did not know before. White is the color of the new, the pure, and the pristine. It is also the color of the soul free of the body, of spirit unencumbered by the physical. It is the color of the essential nourishment, mother’s milk. On the other hand, it is also the color of dead, of things, which have lost their flush of vitality. When there is white, everything is, for the moment, a *tabula rasa*, still unwritten upon. White is a promise that there is nourishment enough for things to begin anew, that the emptiness or the void can be filled. (Estés 1997: 107 - 8)

The meaning of the box as a transition into new life is supported by the fact that it is placed on the spot where the bridge (or the allusion to a bridge, being the symbol of transition: in many mythologies crossing the river means to undergo the passage from life to death, and death to life) ends; thus the box continues to serve as a bridge to connect the road and the living place of the frogs (mud). The tiny, almost invisible net of lines between the stages of birth, life and rebirth of frogs, and also between the animal and human areas supports a notion of their interconnectedness and symbiotic destiny. However, the net of lines also resembles how the scientists (and also the artists studying the perspective), objectify the living world (the numbers, words, lines and points measuring the frogs as well as the human space - even the dead frogs are compressed into the geometrical box) to be able to study it, control and manipulate it. From that perspective, the two frogs on the left create the potential cross; however, the cross is at the same time part of the larger circle starting with the frog emerging from the box, through the frog in “standing” position of the left and the other one turning to the right toward the building. From that point of view, we see the circular movement going through the points of the virtual ends of the net structure “flowing” in the space (connected only by the words) and completing the circle entering the box.

Conclusion

It seems that sometimes men and women evaluate differently the symbolic connection of life with woman and water (and earth). Brunovsky’s picture apparently venerates the nurturing potential of woman; Richier’s criticizes the traditional notion of the woman as a container, even as the container of water and life (pointing to some painful women’s experiences). Burne-Jones’ picture portrays woman and water as a fatal danger for a man (with no possibility of returning to life); Rimmington’s points to women as victims of a patriarchal culture (with the possibility of renewal). The conclusion seems to appear that women more often than men subverted the traditional symbolism associated with woman and her connection with life and death, thus weakening their powerful dual nature. It might be the result of their life experience telling them that they are not only life-givers

(and that there are not only positive aspects connected with this) but neither exclusively life-devourers (and that there are not only negative aspects to mermaids and witches). For that reason, the very suitable and complex symbol for the connection between woman and life and death (and water and earth) is that of the frog with its ambiguity of meaning. Though the frog is a very ancient image to be used to symbolize the circularity of Life and Death and their transformation, its original meaning was lost in modern times (Susan Makov's picture is a rare exception). With re-introducing an image and symbol of the frog with its complex meaning and original symbolic potential, I aim at fostering the revival of non-dualistic thinking as such, and a non-dualistic view on life and death in particular.

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