Liquid Dreams: Water as Metaphor in Literature
Material elements reflect our souls; more than forms, they fix the unconscious, they provide us with a sort of direct reading of our destiny.

--Colette Gaudin
“Sometimes, even when I touch things, I still dream of an element.”

--Gaston Bachelard
The special symbolic forms are not imitations but organs of reality
Fact (Objective Truth)

Meaning (Subjective Truth)

Ideological or Religious Fundamentalism
Objective Flat-lining

Meaning (Subjective Truth)

Fact (Objective Truth)
Fact (Objective Truth)

Meaning (Subjective Truth)

Ghost Curve: The Emotional Unconscious
Ceremony
--William Stafford

On the third finger of my left hand under the bank of the Ninnescah a muskrat whirled and bit to the bone. The mangled hand made the water red.

That was something the ocean would remember: I saw me in the current flowing through the land, rolling, touching roots, the world incarnadined, and the river richer by a kind of marriage.

While in the woods an owl started quavering with drops like tears I raised my arm. Under the bank a muskrat was trembling with meaning my hand would wear forever.

In that river my blood flowed on.
Mircea Eliade
“The waters symbolize the universal sum of virtualities; they are *fons et origo*, “source and origin,” the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence; they precede every form and support every creation. One of the paradigmatic images of creation is the island that suddenly manifests itself in the midst of the waves.”
--Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*
Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. --Genesis 1:2
In whatever religious complex we find them, the waters invariably retain their function; they disintegrate, abolish forms, “wash away sins”; they are at once purifying and regenerating. Their destiny is to precede the Creation and to reabsorb it, since they are incapable of transcending their own mode of being, incapable, that is, of manifesting themselves in forms. The waters cannot pass beyond the condition of the virtual, of germs and latencies. Everything that is form manifests itself above the waters, by detaching itself from the waters.

--Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*
“On the other hand, immersion in water signifies regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence. *Emersion* repeats the cosmogonic act of formal manifestation; *immersion* is equivalent to the dissolution of forms. This is why the symbolism of the waters implies both death and rebirth. Contact with water always brings a regeneration--on the one hand because dissolution is followed by a new birth, on the other because immersion fertilizes and multiplies the potential of life.”
The Flood, or the periodical submersion of the continents (myths of the Atlantis type) have their counterpart, on the human level, in man’s “second death” . . . Or in the initiatory death through baptism. But both on the cosmological and the anthropological planes immersion in the waters is equivalent not to a final extinction but to a temporary reincorporation into the indistinct, followed by a new creation, a new life, or a “new man” . . .

--Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*
The Ganges
Baptism in the Jordan
Baptism in the Jordan
Ceremony
--William Stafford

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a muskrat whirled and bit to the bone.
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That was something the ocean would remember:
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rolling, touching roots, the world incarnadined,
and the river richer by a kind of marriage.

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The Sea

--Pablo Neruda

The Pacific Ocean was overflowing the borders of the map. There was no place to put it. It was so large, wild and blue that it didn’t fit anywhere. That’s why it was left in front of my window.

The humanists worried about the little men it devoured over the years.

They do not count.
Not even that galleon, laden with cinnamon and pepper that perfumed it as it went down.

No.
Not even the explorers’ ship--fragile as a cradle dashed to pieces in the abyss--which keeled over with its starving men.

No.
In the ocean, a man dissolves like a bar of salt. And the water doesn’t know it.
With Kit, Age 7, at the Beach
--William Stafford
We would climb the highest dune,
From there to gaze and come down;
The ocean was performing;
We contributed our climb.

Waves leapfrogged and came
Straight out of the storm.
What should our gaze mean?
Kit waited for me to decide.

Standing on such a hill,
What would you tell your child?
That was an absolute vista.
Those waves raced far, and cold.

“How far could you swim, Daddy,
in such a storm?”
“As far as was needed,” I said,
and as I talked, I swam.
April
   --Connie Wanek
When the snowbank dissolved
I found a comb and a muddy quarter.
I found the corpse of that missing mitten
Still clutching some snow.

Then came snow with lightning,
Beauty with a temper.
And sleet, the compromise that pleases no one;
Precipitation by committee.

Out on Lake Superior the worried ice
Paces up and down the shoreline
Wearing itself out.
Chimneys have given up smoking.
In the balcony of the woods,
A soprano with feathers.

And upon the creek
The wicked spell is broken.
Your are free to be water now.
You are free to go.
A genuine human symbol is characterized not by its uniformity but by its versatility. It is not rigid or inflexible but mobile.

--Ernst Cassirer
Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.

John 4: 13-14
Each contemplated object, each evocative name we murmur is the point of departure of a dream and of a line, a creative linguistic movement. How often, beside a well, on the old stone covered with wild sorrel and ferns, have I murmured the name of the distant waters, the name of the buried world. How often has the universe suddenly answered. O my things, how we have talked!

Gaston Bachelard
Water is a natural mirror; it offers the possibility of poetic transposition of forms, and it also has a depth which immediately leads the poet to a cosmic narcissism. The idealized image reflects itself on the subject. Moreover, through the reflection given by nature the whole world tends to beauty; water itself dreams.

--Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*
Poetic language expresses the continuous tension within a substance. It is by virtue of the dialectic of opposite qualities that poetic matter fascinates us.

--Gauden
Some possible ramifications of the future of water and its changing imaginative value.
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