

The Imagery of *Dānu*

A traveler once asked of the ferryman,
"Where does the great river *Dānu* end?"
And this is how the ferryman answered him:

A million thoughts,
Just rainy jots,
Mist mountain prides.
A thousand dreams
Do surge in streams
Down steep hillsides.

O the river lives
Time by time.
Still the river gives
Time by time.

Water gleams.
Our eyes reflect
And perfect,
While time's presence
teems.

A hundred plans,
Hope's caravans,
Wend boats of needs.
A single life,
The ferry's fife,
To the sea it leads.

O yet *Dānu* lives
Time by time.
Still the Giver gives
Time by time.

Summer's clime,
Autumn's fen,
Winter's chime,
Spring's green glen,

Forever when,
Forever when,
Forever when.

So how can we answer the traveler's question? Where *does* the river end?

A **million raindrops** create a **thousand streams** which rush down hillsides to form a **hundred tributaries** gathering in a **single great river** emptying at last when it reaches the sea. A million thoughts lead to a thousand dreams which yield to a hundred plans making up a single life which finally pours itself out into oblivion. But though the river ends at the sea, yet the river lives!

That's the essence of the poem, *Dānu*, but let's look more closely at the imagery to see just how this the poem conveys its message:

"**Jots**" are just temporal notes, something of little consequence soon forgotten. "Rainy jots" mist mountaintops, the pride of the mountains, much as ephemeral thoughts whet our minds, minds being people's pride. Raindrops collect into streams which tumble down mountainsides, just as our thoughts coalesce into dreams which surge in our consciousness giving shape and meaning to our thoughts.

Water Gleams: When we look into the river, we see the light reflected there, and the gleaming light is, in turn, reflected by our eyes. Our mind's eye "perfects" by noticing the sparkle while ignoring the foundational grayish murk beneath.

To "**teem**" means to fill to overflowing. To those who are aware, the presence of the moment and of the passage of time through the moment fill our hearts to overflowing.

So, a thousand streams collect into a hundred tributaries plied by a hundred needs-laden boats. Our dreams give way to "a hundred plans" filled with all the hopes from the distillation of those dreams. But, as we "wend" the river's tributaries, *do we sometimes forget the dreams left behind us?*

The "**ferry's fife**" announces the ferry's arrival, the ferry being an ancient symbol of the journey from the living world to the afterlife. All our thoughts and dreams and plans make up a single life, which finds its way, like the river to the sea, to oblivion.

Season follows season. "Summer's clime" evokes hot and moist fertility. "Autumn's fen" is where grasses and sedges decay into peat. "Winter's chime" is a punctuation, the end of the year, the end of life; but which is followed by rebirth, as "Spring's green glen" bursts forth filled with the meltwaters from winter's snow.

And yet! "**O yet *Dānu* lives!**" A mist of "A million thoughts" whet our minds creating new dreams.

"Still the Giver gives, Time by time."