

The Water Spirits' Colloquy

**By
Lee Roscoe**

(with thanks to Wendy Shreve)

Poseidon

Arethusa, the Water Nymph

The Horned Serpent

(Stage Direction reader, if this is a reading)

Poseidon, Water Nymph, meet at the edge of a set with a backdrop of a storming sea on the Atlantic coast of America, perhaps in the Gulf of Maine. Rocks and trees to the side and front of the sea, near the beach. A magical, bluish light. Video projection plays, of the death and beaching of Vector, a female humpback whale, May of 2019, in Sandwich, Massachusetts, and every depredation the characters mention should play in video projection: pollution, plastic, dead fishes from eutrophication, etc.

Poseidon could carry his triton and wear his crown. Water Nymph's filmy garment could have salamanders, frogs, fishes on it. She could wear a wreath of pondweed such as watercress.

Horned Serpent has lynx head with horns, serpent tail, and scales.

Important NOTE: If this is a reading, the stage directions can obviously indicate the staging. If this is a fully staged performance but with little time for rehearsal, and no access to video and projection devices, then the technical requirements can be eliminated completely. The play can stand on its own with the simple backdrop of sea as a set, or indeed with no set, and perhaps just the use of ocean and wind sounds, if available. Or not, if that is problematic. Also, the Voice Over requirements can be pre-taped by one of the actors, or, again, dropped completely. Do what is simplest and easiest within the parameters of any particular production's capabilities and the director's imagination.

Poseidon

They've forgotten the old Gods.

Nymph

The Goddesses. Of Nature, of the trees, the spirits of sacred groves and those of my domain, the waters.

Poseidon

Of my seas, my seven roiling, interconnected seas, which by their exhalations create the rains.

Nymph

Which by exhalations too from my lakes and rivers create the clouds, and the protective snow. Why did you want to see me, Poseidon?

Poseidon

Vector is dead. The humans knew of her since 1984 but could not save her. My favorite humpback whale, mother of five calves. It was like seeing the world end. Her carcass. The mother of my seas. I wanted your company, as the leader of naiads, to mourn her, here, near enough to her death on the American side of this Atlantic ocean.

Nymph

What happened?

Poseidon

She gave up. She decided to die. She thought if the humans saw her, they might by compassion be moved to change. She wanted to deliver a message.

Nymph

What message?

Poseidon

I'm not sure. But I need to storm-feel with you, to avenge her, to do something so that her death is not for nothing.

Nymph

The humans. They don't listen.

Poseidon

We are semi-human, gods, spirits, myths; perhaps if we make an appearance they will hear. See. *(He shows her the footage of Vector's dead body floating.)*

Nymph (starts to cry.).

Amnesis, Lamnos, Eurotas, fellow naiads, by the river gods, by Nereus and my mother Doris who birthed me....not just Vector, but some of my best friends are dying in MY waters; especially my beloved frogs.....the humans are disrupting their hormones with what they put in my waters, so they cannot breed, or they grow two heads....I love my frogs, my salmons, my salamanders, my....

Poseidon

Don't cry.

Nymph

Don't come near me, you who change into a stallion to pursue your own sister! You a most feared god, earthquake maker, storm bringer.

Poseidon

Friend to sailors. Companion of dolphins, frolicker on spume. I was young. I am faithful now to Amphitrite my wife. Fear me not now. I have been insulted. *(Nymph quakes)*. No. Not by you but by mankind.

Nymph

Your world is less threatened than mine as 70 percent of the earth is salt-water, a mere 2 to 3 percent is fresh water and much of that is in glaciers.

Poseidon

Which are being set free by humans warming of the earth and which will change my oceans' currents and salt content.

Nymph

Shall we argue whose waters are the worse made by them who walk the earth now? Instead, I call the horned lynx, serpent of the Original People who were here first by these waters of the Americas!

Poseidon

Your power is more than mine in the fresh waters, the rivers, the wetlands, the aquifers, the springs, the streams, the lakes.

Nymph

By these I call you, Horned Lynx Serpent, Mishipeshu, Oniare, Unktena, Hobbomock, arise! Ally of Lightning, foe of Thunderbirds, flood-maker. I realize I am a western construct and by that suspect to those who live right, the elder races, the indigenous, but Horned Serpent, Underwater Power, Manitou of the water, I offer tobacco (*she takes some out and scatters it*) to the four winds. I beseech you. We need your help. Honor us.

Horned Serpent

(appears in a puff of smoke. Water rolling off his gleaming scales and lynx paws, and horned lynx head, and serpent tail. This can be done with costume and lights, clever staging.)

Once they lived right. They knew water was life. They lived for pleasure, responsibly with reciprocity to each other and from the land and waters which nourished them. Within which they walked in the beauty and challenge of the earth and oceans, rivers and skies, sun and winds; with their hands and bodies in season; within time, without time, by rock and star. Eternal. Then a blight came upon the world which now consumes it: Destroying time. A blight came. How can I describe it? (*The wind and trees near the ocean begin to move and howl*) The blue planet protests but cannot speak. We hear her. She has no champion but we spirits. I will join you. (Understanding that your anthropocentric shape, oh Nymph, is less viable than my true spirit of the waters!)

They wanted to prove their superiority, they created objects, millions of objects, concretizing earth to make them, obsessed with comfort, with power, with immortality over death, with ego, with self, with war, with buying and selling; a wrong way of life, a nightmare of living, changing forests, clearing swamps, draining wetlands, to feed their growing masses, who in turn sold their time to buy their lives, to buy things, to dig into the earth to power the machines to create the things; who became in their mad zeal for things, themselves machines, finding pleasure not in scent, breath, sight, vision, touch-- the Slow-- nor in each other, but in the Rapid, in the disconnected screens by which they communicate, in the industry which misuses **us**, and in the release of their wastes from their excess, devouring into all of us.

Nymph

At our expense. Into my lakes, and the river gods' rivers.

Horned Serpent

Into my lakes and the water spirits' waterfalls, into the marshes, and the swamps, the silent wetlands where muskrat and beaver enjoy peace.

Their brightness strips away darkness yet they see nothing.

Poseidon

Into my coasts and my marshes, and my estuaries and my seas!! Their brightness strips away darkness yet they see nothing.

Horned Serpent

They destroy the elder races which protect the water, the ripe earth, the rich gladness of grasses, the mushroom scented soil, the tangled spirits of trees; they destroy because they can, and the world is converted to their immorality. **This is what they do. Speak your complaints! And I will listen.**

Poseidon

They have released gases which cover the planet in a blanket warming my seas which collect the heat, destroying my favorite microscopic beauties, the plankton which delight me in their clear and strange shapes, little artists of the sea—which are ingested by so many of my animals; the humans' carbon dioxide from their motors falls into my seas and its acid release eats away at those housed in shells; they scoop up my fishes with their terrible dragging nets; they entangle my whales with their gear cutting deep into their flesh; they damage my creatures' bodies and behavior with their sonic booms used for defense and to search for more oil to power more of their motors, and with the cacophony of those motors, so some cannot eat nor find each other, and confused, rise from the depths, die; they begin to mine those depths for minerals for wealth, to make more machines. This is why Vector despaired. She gave up. She died of despair. My friend! I want to avenge my friend. What sickness these humans carry that makes ill all it touches?

Nymph

They pull up the waters from inside the earth to irrigate their farm-fields which pasture their cattle; which grow their monocrops. They do not take gently the rain as the elder race did, mixing crops, corn, beans, squash, protecting the soil thus; instead they mine the water and dry the earth to feed their maws.

I can no longer swim in many of my places. Their run off from fertilizer kills the oxygen in me and my freshwater fishes die. I suffocate with them! (*She is increasingly desperate.*)

Poseidon (*puts an arm around her to calm her. She is unsure of his affection but then yields to it.*)

They are careless. There is so much plastic now in my oceans, unseen bits the size of my plankton and larger which my mollusks, squids, crabs shrimps, bivalves, sea turtles, sea birds, seals, dolphins, fishes ingest, tangle in, and can die of. There are rafts of plastic and garbage, big

as islands in my oceans. There are dead spots. Soon there will be more plastic in my oceans than fishes.

Nymph

They pollute my waters above and underground for what goes in must go down and what goes down must come up—filling my waters with their ills--their pills, their toxins to kill insects, their poisons to murder herbs which the original peoples used for medicine, but which these Civilized who savage us call “weeds.” The water which I drank, as nourishing as mother’s milk, as sweet, tastes now of chemicals; it chokes me.

Their filth and wastes, from their sad farm animals and from the millions upon millions of humans, come into my shallows and my depths. I feel dirtied.

Horned Serpent

They dam my rivers so they cannot flow free, so the fishes in them cannot mate and swim and must be replaced by farmed species off the shore in your waters, Poseidon, or in your lakes Arethusa. The silt clogs up my waters and ruins my freedom to run.

Nymph

And this threatens my wild fishes who cry to me to save them. I am their mother. I cannot save them. I’m helpless.

I do not care, like Vector, I do not care to live!

Horned Serpent

No. Live.

Poseidon

Live!

(beat)

Nymph

It is too much, too much damage. Too many sorrows. *(She sits down, braiding her wild hair by the sea. The seas, trees, clouds roil up more. We hear humpback noises. We hear the trees and winds speak (Voice Over) from offstage: “Help us, help us, let-us-help-you-help-us!”)*

Horned Serpent

The humans -- their bodies are 60 percent water. They are born in amniotic water like a diluted ocean. They have fresh water in their flesh and bones. Now the toxins and disruptors of hormones in us, are in their mother-milk. They suckle on destruction. Even the innocent.

Nymph

They drill for oil and send it down in pipes which break and spill blackness into my rivers, destroying them. ‘Water is life,’ the good humans cried. But they were not heard. The evil humans continue. *(long pause)*

Poseidon

What shall we do?

Nymph, Horned Serpent, Poseidon (in chorus)

They lack the will to fund and find change. All nation-states, specialized, technologized, no matter what political system, by their nature, use us, and ruin us. Some are aware but they are overwhelmed, for the politicians, the corporations, the powerful, do as they please. (And most humans accede to this for they are slaves to each other -- in their lust for more—slaves to their work and their Wants-- and will war to save their products' ends. Yet in their greed, they devour themselves, too.) Only the indigenous care about us. (*There is a pause while the three think. We hear Voice Over offstage pre-taped- "Avenge me, we the waters which run through the land and cry! Or make them see!"*)

Nymph, Poseidon

Perhaps if we come to them and ask for pity! Humans, pity my enslaved rivers in which fish are decimated. Pity me as I dry up with the drought of the new fiercer heat you have created! *Pity my seas, murdered! Pity my fouled waters!*
(*There is silence.*)

Horned Serpent

They do not answer.

Nymph

We allow them to drink us, to travel on us, and so expand their empires and goods --and thus --- we brought our own downfall. (*The three nod, pause.*)

Perhaps if we tell them of the Beauty of the waters they will change!

How beautiful water is. When the darkness of spring rain comes to the sky, the flowers and blossoming trees brighten in response. They vivify their pinks, yellows and swan-whites as if from within.

Humans do you remember when my lakes were so fish-filled that one could almost walk across fins; fins sprouting upstream to breed, abundance? Recall: immersion in the lakes with the trout below, the ducks on the surface dipping, and above--the trees stretching and dancing. The colors of the sea some of my waters run into--an aqua moss when plankton blooms, rare seafoam green, pastels of powder pink and feather blue when the sun sets over thin sheaves of tidal waters, and the scent of female ocean, algae and salt, cleansing; reproduction, comforting. And the sea how we swim in it and it gladdens our bodies in suspension of tension, floating in thanksgiving of being one with it, watching the sharp-edged terns hover, blunt gannets dive, black and white eider swim. The sound of it, succulent soughing at the beach edge, sharp and soft at once, like its birds.

And the life within: Clams suppurating, mussels, gem-blue clumping, shorebirds in sand-and-snow colors, with black and russet, amassed. Horseshoe crabs waddling from eternity back under the water's apse to hide in shadow until the next return; the sun and clouds dappling their wet roof, cast runes upon the ocean surface beneath.

Nymph, Poseidon and Serpent

We could praise moons' phases, and the moon, full, pulling a pregnant sea upwards, and the long silver tunas and the whorls of herring and the earnest travelling of mackerel and bass...

Nymph

...and the iridescent trout, like an aurora caught from sky.
And the rain, wet down the rivers to the sea, pricking the surface of the lake, sizzling,
Replenishing. And the eager ground imbibing the wet...swelling.Do they hear?
(silence for a few beats)

Horned Serpent

They will not listen to beauty.

There is only one solution.

Poseidon (as Nymph looks at Horned Serpent questioningly)

What?

Horned Serpent

Violate them as they have violated us! We must turn on the humans to show them the gods and spirits are angry.

Poseidon

How? Should we draw them down to drown, down the rivers to the sea? Should we capsize their crafts? Should we make ourselves so bitter they cannot drink us?

Nymph

Or should we absent ourselves with the sun's help, evaporate and bring them arid drought, parched mouths, no greenery to shade them nor to eat, none for their cattle to graze?

Horned Serpent

No. We should ask our waters to rise up, as your ocean is already doing, Poseidon. We should ask you to create more storms, to intensify those which the heat of the rising temperatures creates, by sucking up more moisture from your seas, by clapping heat against cold in monstrous circles of gales.

We must set our waters against them. **We must flood them.** As I have done before.

I pulled down Manabohzho's favorite twin the Wolf and when Manabohzo came against me I caused a great flood. I have been evil, but will use that evil against evil. I call on the Thunderers and the lightning, now--come to hand to avenge us! (*A crack of thunder and lightning, agree.*) Good. We will ally against a common enemy.

Poseidon

Humans we have given you life. Life evolved in the ocean, by lightning and mineral, by father sun and mother moon, generative. We have given you life; we are inside you, and this is how you treat us! Defile us! dispose of your waste into us! Shall we then do this to you in return, dig our wastes into you? Defile you, ruin you as we can? Treat you as you have treated us?
(*to Nymph and Horned Serpent.*) What shall we do?

Nymph

I vote for floods then, to wash the world clean.

Poseidon

...Then... I vote for this.

Horned Serpent

I will do it as I have done before in the lakes...when the ice world melted and only crow flew above, before muskrat recreated earth from a ball of mud.

Nymph (to the humans)

Cascades, through caverns of rock which they erode, striking a way for their liquid bodies to flow through, I call on these to turn into serpents' tongues against man!

Poseidon

I will do it by my oceans! Rise waves, and avenge yourselves, rise against they who despise you! Rise rain and storm, hurricane and cyclone.

See how you have not regarded us! See us now! And fear our retribution!

(Screen fills with water images, the sounds of a broiling hurricane and flood are heard throughout the theater.)

(As the play ends perhaps roll this on the video:

The UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and others report:

66% of the marine environment has been significantly altered by human actions. Plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980.

300-400 million tons of heavy metals, solvents, toxic sludge and other wastes from industrial facilities are dumped annually into the world's waters, and fertilizers entering coastal ecosystems have produced more than 400 ocean 'dead zones'.

85%: of wetlands present in 1700 have been lost (facing even more habitat loss than forests).

40% of amphibian species are threatened with extinction.

Almost 33% of reef forming corals, sharks and shark relatives, and 33% of marine mammals face possible extinction. Ocean species are disappearing at a rate faster than those on land.

"20 % of the 10,000 known freshwater fish species have become extinct or imperiled in recent decades."

"By 2025, an estimated 1.8 billion people will live in areas plagued by water scarcity."