

## ***This Thirsty Land* – Leonard Enns (b. 1948, Canada)**

While the challenges of climate change make water a major issue of concern today, it has been a theme for poets and politicians alike since earliest records – water as gift, as life source, as life sustaining, but also as source of conflict, tragedy and grief. *This Thirsty Land* celebrates the gift of water, and mourns the possibility of a future that may result if we do not attend to it, if we care too much about ourselves, and too little about the earth. This is a celebration, and also a cry for help and forgiveness, ending with the words of T. S. Eliot:

*Sister, mother  
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,  
Suffer me not to be separated  
And let my cry come unto Thee.*

The first movement is a hymn of thanks to the sky, that womb of vapour which gives life to the earth; the words are those of Aeschylus, from the fifth century BC. The second movement is a dance-like celebration, extolling the virtues of Sister Water; the thirteenth century words are those of Saint Francis. The text of the third movement, from T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, paints a world that is dry, a land in which one longs hopelessly for water and for the song of the hermit-thrush. As relief, the fourth movement is an a cappella setting of words by the late Canadian George Whipple, reflecting on the stunning beauty of the smallest drop water. The final movement returns to Eliot again; here is plea that we not lose (nor lose sight of) our bond with the spirit of the sea. Eliot's final line, *and let my cry come unto Thee*, essentially determined the musical references to Purcell's *Hear my Prayer, O Lord*, which forms the scaffolding of this last movement.

*This Thirsty Land*, commissioned by Marta McCarthy for the University of Guelph, was premiered in Guelph on 7 April 2018.

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## I: THE GREAT SKY

The great and amorous sky curved over the earth,  
and lay upon her as a pure lover.

The rain, descending from heaven  
for all the earth,  
for both weak and strong,  
germinating the wheat,  
swells furrows with life  
and brings forth buds in the orchards.

~ *Aeschylus (alt. Leonard Enns; public domain)*

## II: SORELLA ACQUA

Laudato si, mi Signore, per sor'Acqua,

la quale è molto utile  
et humile  
et pretiosa  
et casta.

*Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water,*

*she is very useful,  
and humble,  
and precious,  
and pure.*

~ *St Francis of Assisi (public domain)*

## III: THE SOUND OF WATER

If there were the sound of water only  
Not the cicada  
And dry grass singing  
But the sound of water over a rock  
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees  
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop  
But there is no water

~ *from T.S. Eliot, The Wasteland: What the Thunder said  
(public domain)*

#### **IV: THE SMALL BLUE LAKE**

Have you seen  
how, after rain, the small  
blue lake at the bottom  
of the tulip cup  
looks back at you?  
How flowers effloresce  
on the first warm night in May,  
burst from green buds and raise  
sprung faces to the stars and do  
a moon-dance with the breeze...?

~ *George Whipple, Swim Class and Other Poems: Flowers (used by permission of the author)*

#### **V: THE SPIRIT OF THE SEA**

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,  
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still  
Even among these rocks,  
Our peace in His will  
And even among these rocks  
Sister, mother  
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,  
Suffer me not to be separated  
And let my cry come unto Thee.

~ *T.S. Eliot, Ash Wednesday (public domain)*