

11th June 2021

Misunderstood

**“You spotted snakes with double tongue,
Thorny hedge-hogs, be not seen;
Newts, and blind-worms, do no wrong;
Come not near our fairy queen.”**

William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream

Stimulated by my reference to *The Fox and the Hedgehog* story yesterday, I had to do a bit of research. And it's the hedgehog first ...

A hedgehog is a spiny mammal of the *Erinaceinae* family. There are seventeen species of hedgehog in Europe, Asia and Africa. They're nocturnal creatures, have changed little in 15 million years and their spiny protection is a defence mechanism against predators. Described by *The Woodland Trust* as "sleepy, cute, truly iconic", hedgehogs are one of the UK's best-loved mammals and spend much of their lives asleep, relying on hedgerows and woodland edges for food and shelter.

"Sleepy, cute, iconic"? The Irish word for a hedgehog is *gainneog*, which means "ugly little thing". And Shakespeare obviously didn't care for them much either when he lumped them in with snakes, newts and blind-worms. But why should we label something as ugly, or dangerous, or distressing just because it's different and misunderstood?

A young couple moved in next door to an elderly lady I knew. They were "bikers", the woman with a shaved head and covered in tattoos, the man with long hair and bedecked in piercings. The elderly lady complained to me about them about them every time I visited. She bemoaned a drop in standards. "The people here aren't what they used to be." One day, she tripped in the stair and hurt herself badly. When I visited her in hospital, she told me she remembered nothing till she woke up in her hospital bed. "And I don't even know how I got here," she confessed. Just then, her two "biker" neighbours appeared at her bedside with a bunch of flowers and a box of chocolates. "We found you on the stair," the man said. "We got an ambulance and went with you to the hospital," his partner added.

Ugly, dangerous, different, misunderstood? I wonder ...

A prayer for today

*Lord, forgive me if I am guilty of misunderstanding others.
Let me be more patient and slower at jumping to conclusions. Amen*