

8th October 2021

Sprites

**“Ah! Gentle, fleeting, wav’ring sprite,
Friend and associate of this clay!”**

Hadrian, Adrian’s Address to His Soul When Dying

Wandering in the gardens of Cockenzie House in my village, at the beginning of a walk after a coffee in their outdoor café, I came across an odd sight. Overlooking a small lily-pond in a quiet corner of the grounds was a life-sized representation of a water-sprite. Produced by a local artist, some folk have labelled it “The Tin Man”, given that it’s pieced together from odd bits of discarded metal and painted an aluminium grey. But it looked like a water-sprite to me, strange and alluring as it was.

A water-sprite is an elemental spirit associated with water. The ancient alchemist, Paracelsus, tells us they can breathe both water and air, and sometimes they can fly. The Greeks called them “Water Nymphs”. Slavic mythology knows them as “Vilas”. The Irish and other Celts have them as “Water Faeries”. They only exist in mythology, of course, and aren’t real at all – more’s the pity.

A little further on in my walk, along the John Muir Walkway to the north of my village, I came across several more water-sprites in a little cove known locally as *The Boat Shore*. For there I saw half-a-dozen mature women venturing into the sea in that bizarre practice known as “wild water swimming”. They weren’t flying, of course, and I suspect they couldn’t breathe water either. But they were certainly “spritely,” and their raised voices and squeals of glee were a fair indication that they were appreciating the opportunity to cavort in the waves – brave ladies indeed!

Mythology or not, shouldn’t there be a little bit of the sprite in all of us? It could be “gentle, fleeting or wav’ring”, as Hadrian would have it, or gleeful, cavorting and brave like the ladies at *The Boat Shore*, or static, watchful and amusing as was the Tin Man in the gardens of Cockenzie House. But however it comes about, in mind and in body, in caring and in swimming, in awareness and in watchfulness, let’s try to keep spritely, as much as we are able.

A prayer for today

*Lord, I might be gentle; I could be fleeting; I may even be wav’ring.
But in my service, I’ll try to be as spritely as I can be, OK? Amen*