

Ripples of Emotion

Ray Douglas

The Mirror of Diana

Steep-sided lakes are often described by the local inhabitants as 'bottomless' – that is, they seem unfathomable, and there are often stories attached to them, some apocryphal, some historic. In Italy the Alban Hills close to Rome, thrown up by primeval volcanic upheavals, contain spectacular craters some of which have become filled with water over the centuries. One of these flooded craters is Lake Nemus or Nemi – the name means 'Forest Grove' – a three-mile stretch of water that in ancient times was called the 'Mirror of Diana'. A goddess not only of nature, but probably the most universally popular of all ancient deities, Diana, or her many equivalents by name and nationality, was called upon by all who felt threatened or oppressed; and her chief shrine was here amongst the trees, hard against the rocky hillside overlooking the lake.

Diana was the supernatural champion of the emotions. One of her many guises was the moon – and for many people in many lands a sight of the full moon majestic over the darkness of nature still brings her name to mind. At Lake Nemi her beauty on moonlit nights was to be seen reflected there in the dark water, her expression seeming to change with the moving clouds: a magical mirror framed by the steeply wooded slopes on all sides. Looking out across the water from her shrine, the supernatural Diana would have seemed almost tangibly real to any emotionally receptive person. In their imagination, visitors at night could well people the lake with naiads, the surrounding woods with nymphs, dryads and fauns – all the playful aspects, perhaps, of Diana's own complex temperament, fanciful personifications of the spirit of wild nature.

Worshippers and family petitioners, we are told, used to make the pilgrimage from Rome on foot, hoping for relief from their problems, bringing offerings of flowers and crescent moon-shaped cakes, and little lamps or home-made candles to light in Diana's honour at her shrine. They would follow the Appian Way from the capital, turning off after a few miles along a tree-lined side road winding through the Alban Hills among mature forests of oak, pine and chestnut. We can imagine their watchful eyes catching the first glint of Diana's lake through the trees, far below them in the steep-sided hollow. And down there, perhaps, Diana's worshippers would sit in quiet family groups beneath the trees on the shores of Lake Nemi, rising occasionally to dip their cupped hands in the water and make their supplication:

*The lake is full; the moon is full; our hearts are full.
We light a lamp in your honour, O Diana.*

This, indeed, is what water can mean to the human heart: the tangible symbol whereby its own feelings, sentiments, emotions, are reflected back and redoubled. Water tends to have the effect of heightening whatever we are already feeling – thus a stream, a lake, a fountain, a spring, a waterfall, seen through emotional eyes, can

represent in one, sorrow, in another, great love, in yet another, despair; perhaps even hatred and a desire for revenge. Peace of mind is there too, and almost automatically the poetic heart is inspired by water and drawn towards its musical sound and reflected light. If we call upon the muse, or the cultural spirits of water. this is what we are doing: opening and enhancing or expanding our own feelings, whatever they may be.

The Water of Creation

Whether your viewpoint is sentimental or down-to-earth, water is at the very heart and root of life. Traditionally it is considered one of the four basic elements – fire, earth, air and water – without which there could be no living world, no nature, no people. Water is constantly reacting with the other elements, soaking the earth and dissolving its salts, trapping with its movements life-giving oxygen from the air; constantly in circulation, drawn up by the heat of the sun to moisten the atmosphere, falling again in the form of rain, snow, mist or dew.

It has often occurred to the minds of simple men that water is somehow older, more primeval, more basic than dry land or solid rock. Ancient creation myths stress this point. To take the one most familiar to the western world, the biblical Book of Genesis tells how in the beginning:

The earth was without form, and void; darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said ... Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which are above the firmament.

The Babylonian creation myth personifies the elements that existed at the beginning, though the principle is the same. Salt water was made to gather beneath the firmament, fresh water above it – which indeed is pretty much the situation to this day. The primeval Chaos that was assumed to exist before the division into heaven and earth was seen as a female principle and visualised as a dragon called Tiamat. Together with Zu, the primeval storm-demon, she ruled over the watery Chaos. Then came the male principle of fresh water in the form of the god Apsu, who united with Tiamat, their union giving rise to the countless minor gods and goddesses of heaven and earth recognised by the Babylonians. Tiamat became the supreme goddess of salt water on earth; Apsu became the supreme god of fresh water and the ruling god of the sky. The storm demon Zu and his numerous assistants were driven off to become the constellations.

Among the children of Apsu and Tiamat were the thundering god of storms, Rimmon, and Enki or Ea, the god of fresh running water on earth. From Enki and his influence is said to have been derived the rituals of magicians "whose incantations sound like the babbling of water" – the unintelligible but melodic language of water flowing over stones in a mountain stream. (If you live in a land which is home to the dipper or water ouzel, take some quiet time out to watch and listen for this fairly inconspicuous little bird – a great favourite of mine – which lives, feeds and breeds in and alongside fast-flowing streams. The dipper's song is learnt in the nest during its first few days of life, perhaps beneath a stone bridge a mere few inches above the water. The first sound the nestlings will hear is the babbling, rippling, tinkling noise of water over the stones, and this is the theme sound on which they model their song. To me this

is birdsong at its most evocative: the natural music of water taken up and repeated, and turned into a piece of music with form and rhythm, by Enki's own bird).

Even at the wholly practical level of understanding about water – something which is there to drink, or to make you uncomfortably wet when it rains – there is always a depth of feeling attached to it. Even on a strictly utilitarian level involving canals, reservoirs, faucets, hydrants, bowsers and sewage works, the life-sustaining properties of water ensure that even in its most unromantic-seeming manifestations it can hold wonder and beauty in the eyes of any person willing to see it. It seems there is a place for water in the soul, a place where the imagination is inspired to produce all manner of completely non-scientific impressions, images and apparitions. For instance, this is what an old lady once told me:

"We were on a coach coming back from an outing, and we stopped at traffic lights or something like that. We were just by a sewage works and a whiff of it came through the open window. Some of the other people on the coach were complaining and joking about it. The sun was very low in the sky as it was late afternoon, and it was shining on those round pond things they have, with water sprayers going slowly round and round. And I seemed to see these shimmering figures dancing over the water. I've never seen anything so beautiful. Above all those ugly pipes and concrete things there were these wonderful gossamer figures with wispy flowing dresses, all gracefully moving and dancing over the surface!"

The others on the coach of course could see no more than sunlight playing on moving jets of water. Because most people are firmly centred in the down-to-earth level of being where a spade is no more than a spade, very few are able to see mystical beauty transforming the ugly workaday scene. This is the same level of creative storytelling from which in ages past sprang tales and legends of nymphs, mermaids and kelpies. It is, perhaps, the process of spiritual fragmentation being experienced by a human soul on the path of descent, a time when primal oneness has been lost, and the realism of solid materiality not yet gained. At this level of the psyche, symbols become a way of analysing the varied perceptions of the mind.

Purely natural phenomena can readily give rise to supernatural imaginings. For instance, one day I was walking on the Brown Clee Hill near my home and was passing a little reservoir pond when I heard a 'plop', and the water in one small area began bubbling and stirring as though on the boil. Gurgling like a pulled bath plug the water began to swirl, rising a foot or two up from the surface. I thought for a moment that there must be a piped outlet that had suddenly been opened, but no; the miniature whirling column moved swaying rapidly over the surface of the pond growing steadily taller and stronger, seeming to take on a living form. As it reached the edge of the pond it disappeared, leaving only ripples behind. Then the mystery was solved as the column of energy continued across land in the form of a small whirlwind, sending dead grass, leaves and thistle-down spinning high in the air. I had witnessed the birth - albeit short-lived – of a potential water spout.

I wondered how it might have looked on a misty day, surely a ghostly sight. A kelpie playing in the water, a water-demon, a malicious sprite taking the form of a horse rearing out of the water and liable to strike down any passer-by who ventured carelessly close – as the Scottish lyrical poet W S Graham wrote: "Every lake has its kelpie, often

seen ... dancing along the surface of the deep, or browsing upon the pasture on its verge".

Full sized water spouts give an idea of the force for destruction that water can become, a truly awesome spectacle, threatening when you find yourself in a small boat – or even a large ship, or even on dry land at the edge of the sea. As the equivalent of a tornado on land, a wholly unstoppable force will have been unleashed. If a reasonable-sized tornado had indeed passed across that pond, certainly the water and everything it contained would have been sucked into the sky, no doubt to fall elsewhere as rain – hence perhaps the mysterious reports of "raining fish and frogs" that we hear about from time to time.

The sea of course holds a massive emotional appeal, and possibly a healing influence for stressed-out minds. Why else would normally land-locked people make a long journey in order to sit for hours on end, staring out to sea, or listening with closed eyes to the soothing murmur of waves stirring the shingle, whispering on the sand? It can only be because these are sights and sounds which soothe the anxious heart, and really seem to replenish the soul in some way, as though the sea contains the *answer* to whatever question is troubling the individual.

It is this sense of potency, besides the obvious material power that the sea is capable of exerting, that have helped to give rise to innumerable myths and fables and fairytales based on this theme. The Brothers Grimm have the one about the fisherman who with his wife lived in squalor by the sea. He caught an enchanted fish only to release it when it spoke to him, but his greedy wife made him go back and ask the fish to give them a nice cottage to live in. This reasonable request was granted, but not content with that, she sent her husband back again and again to demand a series of favours, each more outrageous than the last: to be king, to be emperor, to be pope. All these were within the fish's power to grant, for they were but the material boons of the world. But when she demanded to be made lord and ruler of the sun and moon, the fish withdrew all the favours that had been granted and returned them to their original squalor. The heart is limited to earth, to materiality, to this earthly life. The supernatural power she coveted had broken the spell and brought her back to that earth.

Through human imagination inspired by the sea, and the "wild white horses" of breaker and spume, creatures of the deep have inevitably been ascribed mystical powers in the spirit of Shakespeare's "sea change into something rich and strange". But there is more to it than this. Once such a being has been established in the heart, it can inspire religious certainty and a reverential sense of awe. Grimms' household tales are fairly well stocked with such semi-solid beings, the bit-part players of ancient religions.

To the Babylonians, for instance, Oannes was a perfectly solid sea-god with a man's body and a fish's head, visualised as clever and influential, a patron of arts and science. Conversely Triton, to the ancient Greeks, was a sea-god with a fish's body and a man's head, and it was he who generated the roaring of the sea by blowing on a conch shell. Another sea-god, Glaucous, "the blue-grey one", was depicted as a wild old man with a fish's tail and scales of the grey hue that gave him his name. He had long hair and a beard like seaweed flowing in the water, his body was decorated with seaweed and shells, and he was usually accompanied by a retinue of nereid sea-nymphs. He was indeed very similar in concept to Nereus, "the old man of the sea" and

supposed father of the nereids, and he too was endowed with flowing seaweed hair. Another "old man of the sea" was the sea-god Proteus, who was thought able to assume any shape he chose, or indeed to become shapeless, like the sea from which he rose. He was the supposed protector of seals, whales, dolphins, otters and other mammals able to hide in the sea.

The classical Greek god of the sea and all other watery places was Poseidon, the father of Triton, and ultimately the same character as the Roman Neptune. Like Neptune he carries a trident and is closely associated with horses, which were considered sacred to his name. Neptune's chariot has been depicted as being drawn through the waves by a monstrous sea horse – the hippocampus, with a horse's head, mane and forelegs, and the powerful hindquarters and tail of a giant fish. In stormy weather, Poseidon is symbolised by a black bull, snorting and charging, signifying his fiercely dark moods. In fair weather his symbol is the dolphin, friendly and playful.

Then there is Palaemon or Melicertes or Melkart, and Portunus and Sozon – and Oceanus who to the Greeks was depicted as an old man with bull's horns. Amongst all the races of mankind there have probably been hundreds of sea-gods. Modern minds would dismiss them as figments of the superstitious imagination of sea-faring folk, but they are products of the heart – of the deepest feelings. In dreams and visions the heart can be seen personified, playing the role that best befits the emotions of the hour. Such visions are more than mere imagination; they have reality, because they belong to the fundamental nature of their beholder's heart.

Pacifying the Waves

People who earn their living from the sea, or who follow a trade at the water's edge, usually know only too well how changeable the sea can be: its moods like the human heart itself can alter rapidly from peaceful to furious and back again. The more furious the sea, inevitably, the more masculine its associations; the more peaceful it seems, the more feminine. The beautiful goddess Venus or Aphrodite, or Anadyomene who rose from the sea, has even been depicted in art and sculpture wearing a beard under the masculine name Aphroditos, as though to indicate her unpredictable inconsistency, her rapid changes from the feminine to the masculine mode of expression. The principle of intercession, calling hopefully upon a kind goddess to plead with a furious sea-god for the merciful abatement of a storm, is an irresistible one; a hermaphrodite intermediary takes the principle a stage further.

Goddesses of the sea too are numerous, their personification as often as not restricted to individual nations, or provinces, or even villages. Local sea-goddesses may well have originated in the story of some local heroine. One such is Leucothes, the "white goddess" of the Mediterranean, whose ancient story tells how, as a human mother, she leapt into the sea to escape a madman. She and the baby were rescued and brought to a safe part of the shore by friendly dolphins, and ever after she was revered by sailors and fishermen as a goddess. Her son, growing up, became Portunus the harbour-god – perhaps the least masculine and least furious of all the sea-gods – whose self-imposed duty it is to see ships safely into port, to act himself as the friendly dolphin which shepherds human lives ashore.

There can be few sights more peacefully beautiful than dolphins playing in the calm sea, and these creatures have won a place in the hearts of countless generations of men – except perhaps in those hard-edged lands where these seemingly noble creatures are periodically rounded up by fishermen and slaughtered. The nature of sentimentality has a strangely racial variability. But in the Mediterranean area in classical times (where the sun, personified as Apollo, was the prime mover in the abatement of winter storms) seaside communities recognised the *delphinia* ceremonies – spring festivals praising the spirit of the dolphin, and given in honour of Apollo, offering thanks for the calming of the seas after winter's storms, enabling sailors and fishermen to venture out more freely in their frail boats.

But of course, with or without a place for dolphins, heartfelt ceremonies with thousand-fold variations have been held on a thousand coastlines during the ages. The symbolism, the manner of projection of each community's shared feelings will differ, but the need is the same. Alongside the Aegean Sea the goddess of fishing and navigation was Brizo, the guardian deity of sailors honoured especially by the seamen's wives, who would intercede on their behalf when Poseidon was in one of his dark moods. Brizo's worshippers would prepare portions of food which they consecrated to the goddess by setting them afloat on the sea in miniature boats made of sticks and leaves.

The content of such festivals and the hopes of the people who took part in them were perhaps little different from those who sometimes gather close to the harbour wall to sing:

*Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.*

In the hearts and minds of those who repeat their prayers and sing their songs with sincerity, there is no real difference between the various names and powers called upon to represent the elements. The sentiment is the same: the wish to evoke the possibility of a boon, a grace, an act of mercy.

In many parts of the world "the people's favourite goddess", Diana, often under her alias of Artemis, was thought to rise from her favourite forests and range over the sea by way of the moon. Certainly she was called upon routinely by seafarers of the Mediterranean and its inlets to grant them safe and prosperous sea voyages. She too was associated with the dolphins of fair weather, and given the title *Delphinia*, in this context assuming her to be the consort of *Delphinus*, the Greek god of estuaries and inshore seas, and thence of the dolphins themselves – as many sailors will have it even today (if only tongue-in-cheek), the reincarnations of drowned sailors.

But the truly sea-born goddess, fabled to have risen out of the sea near the Cypriot shore, was of course Aphrodite, also known as Venus Anadyomene who could adopt at will the enigmatic guise of *Hermaphroditos*. Everywhere seashells were arranged as decorative symbols of Aphrodite in little shrines among the rocks of the

seashore. She had many names and many guises, many personalities, and a separate title to cover every function she was called upon to perform. When sought by mariners to protect them from rough seas she was Galenia, or "fair weather". To merchant seamen setting out on a venture she was Euploia, "prosperous voyage". And when disaster struck and ships foundered, she was Muchia, "goddess of the depths", and Melania, "the dark one", wearing a widow's veil to signify her connection with death and burial, with loved ones lost at sea.

Sailors and fishermen of Scandinavia and the northern lands had even more cause than their southern counterparts to be wary of the sea and its moods. Their supreme sea goddess was Niordhir, who reached out of the mist and concealed her form with sea-fog. Close to the Arctic Circle, inevitably, frost and ice have been personified. The Scandinavian frost god is Gymir, a frost-giant carrying a club of ice, and he was married to the fertility goddess Freyr. Their beautiful but frigid daughter was the nymph-like frost-goddess Gerda. The fair skin of Gerda's naked arms, and her pure white dress, together shone so brightly that both sea and air were illuminated with a brilliant white glow, enough to dazzle sailors many miles off shore. This dazzle is a real phenomenon, by the way; one which warns seamen of dangerous ice ahead, and known to them as "ice-blink".

The Weather for Romance

In former times Hera, the queen of heaven, was invoked in the mountains when rain was needed, and in Balkan lands she is still official keeper of the clouds; they are her special responsibility. As fleeting clouds range across the open sky, or scud across the face of the moon to be chased by "the cloud huntress" Diana, it is the great Hera herself who decides whether or not rain will fall that night. Even the seven nymphs of the rain, the Hyades, can do nothing but sit in their constellation Taurus, watching and waiting.

In northern and western lands, the old thunderer Thor is outmoded. But Hadad, Ramman, or Adduramman, the eastern storm-god and prince of cloudbursts and thunderstorms, is ageless, unlimited by time or space. The dry back seat of your car may seem an ideal spot for courting in the rain, but beware: someone up there takes perverse delight in bogging down your carriage – setting your wheels a-spinning – and summoning various demons of the night to gloat over your plight.

The bogeyman is a fairly universal frightener for naughty children who will not settle down for the night. The Babylonians went a step further: from their pantheon – or pandemonium – they produced Lilith, a fearful vampire demon of the night who makes her appearance mainly in stormy weather. As she roams about looking for victims, children wandering on their own are in particular danger from her attentions. She or her sisters may still be around; watch out for the flapping of their black robes, and listen for their blood-chilling wail, the next time you walk through a graveyard on a stormy night.

Storms cannot simply happen. They are brought by the wind, and the winds which bring storms may well have been conjured up by Enlil, lord of gusts and gales. But the gentler winds that later disperse the storm leaving only freshness in its wake, are sent by the mother of winds – none other than the beautiful Aurora, goddess of dawn, bringing the "innocent brightness of a new-born day". It depends upon where you live, of course. Prevailing winds and changes of wind direction are associated with specific

seasons and different local expectations. In northern Europe the east wind can be bitter and cruel; but further south the east wind personified by the ancient Greeks as Eurus and closely associated with the rising sun and the goddess of dawn, was the harbinger of fair weather. Zephyrus, as the mild west wind, was messenger of spring, promoting the healthy growth of plants. Zephyrus was also known as Favonius "the favourable one", fertiliser of spring flowers and fabled lover of Flora, the goddess of spring. Notus, the south wind, can be hot and dry; Boreas, the north wind, can herald the cold touch of autumn almost anywhere in the northern hemisphere.

All these fanciful names from long ago seem somehow people-friendly; they sprang from the feelings then, and our present-day feelings can be equally open to them. A kind of elemental communication, a natural rapport, can build itself up between the weather and anyone who is constantly aware of it. The direction of the wind can be instinctively known to you, particularly if your livelihood depends upon it in some way. A suburban householder can hear which side of his house, which door and which windows are being rattled and pelted with rain during the night, and he can say: "Ah, it's from the north tonight", and sleep easy. He will have become akin to the legendary North American tribesman who welcomed the icy north wind to his bosom as a living friend.

In Middle Eastern and Mediterranean lands there rarely seems to be a shortage of light. In Scandinavia and other northern lands, however, light can seem a commodity in short supply, even during the season of the midnight sun, and valued correspondingly highly. The Scandinavian god of light, Heimdall, was said to guard the rainbow bridge to heaven. Certainly, there can be no rainbow without light, and no rainbow without rain – or at least plentiful moisture in the atmosphere. According to the Book of Genesis, the first ever rainbow was set in the clouds as a covenant between God and Noah after the great flood, and according to the Book of Revelations, there is a rainbow round about the throne of God. Certainly, there is no more beautiful a phenomenon of the weather. In Hindu sacred writing the rainbow is related to the concept of ultimate oneness, and an expression of faith:

Through grace, the mystery of vision transforms the radiance of pure white light into the colours of the rainbow. As all colours originate in pure white light, and to pure white light they surely return, so all God's creatures originate in God, and to God they shall surely return.

According to European classical mythology the nymph or goddess of the rainbow is of course Iris. She was considered the virgin messenger of all other gods and goddesses, borne aloft with golden wings, and carrying the staff of Hermes, her unique position expressed by the arch of the rainbow which, spanning the skies, unites heaven and earth. We should never tire of such natural beauty while we live; the rainbow simply invites a poetic sentiment, and as Wordsworth put it:

*My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old.
Or let me die!*

From Flood to Fountain

In not a few drier parts of the world agricultural fertility has always depended upon an annual flood. As often as not the flood follows seasonal rainfall in distant hills, or sometimes spring snow-melt in far-off mountains. In Egypt, for instance, along the banks of the lower Nile where the goddess Isis in her role as the "Lady of the Flood" was (and perhaps still is) thought responsible for controlling this flow, and thence the well-being of her people. Without their annual floods the Mesopotamians too, the Babylonians and Assyrians, would doubtless have starved. They gave their god of dormant vegetation, Tammuz, the title "Lord of the Flood", guardian of the continual cycle of nature itself.

But there is a world of difference between a life-giving flood which irrigates your fields, and a devastating flood which washes away your lovingly nurtured topsoil and precludes cultivation of any kind. Too severe a flood can mean the loss of home and possessions, followed by certain famine. The immense difference between the two has often been expressed in myths and fables – as in the story of Achelous, Greek god of river and flood plain, who was said to appear in various guises: sometimes as a snake; sometimes as a bull, or a bull-headed man. In this last guise he had the misfortune to break off one of his horns during a fracas over a mortal woman, thus losing half his potency. The kindly nymph-goddess Amalthea came to his rescue and gave him a cornucopia – the horn of plenty – to replace the missing horn. Amalthea was the goddess of milk and milkmaids who, along with her sister Melissa, the goddess of honey and beekeepers, presided over the proverbial "land flowing with milk and honey". And so Achelous, god of the river flood, was left with two distinct sides to his personality: the one representing the blind, ferocious onslaught of a bull, the other reflecting the benign source of fruit and vegetables from his constantly self-replenishing cornucopia. The image of Achelous very neatly sums up the hopes and fears of a peasant farmer struggling to make ends meet on the river plain.

The pre-English British Celts, during their long and ongoing history, have seldom been short of rain to water their fields, but they too have always enjoyed an almost supernatural relationship with their rivers, and with the nymph-goddesses said to live in them and help regulate their flow. Sabrina was the Roman name for the Celtic river-nymph Sabre or Hafren of the River Severn, and for the river itself, but it was the river-god Lud who resided over the water meadows and flood plains of the lower Severn, and provided the best grazing for cattle and horses.

The Celts love horses, and these noble animals are firmly connected with running water in the Celtic mind. Rhiannon is a Celtic goddess of horses and the domestication of animals in general. Incidentally, she is also the patroness of marriage relationships, happy families and peaceful homely pursuits. She it is who sprinkles dew to moisten the pasturelands on clear mornings. But above all she is a river deity, especially potent at the point where the river runs into its estuary – aber afon – and thence into the sea; her association with the wild white horses of waves breaking on the shore and blowing in the gale, is compelling.

The same can be said of the goddess Epona, though as a river goddess she is more closely connected with the source – with springs and waterfalls – than is Rhiannon. She shares the same intimate love of horses however, and in Celtic art she

has sometimes been depicted cast in bronze in the form of a horse. or sometimes as a helmeted maiden riding bareback, as a decoration for amulets, shields or brooches.

When the Romans took charge of Celtic river estuaries and sailed their boats upstream to supply their bases, they built shrines to their own gods and goddesses, and in rivers they saw a connection with Janus, their god of doorways able to see both ways at once, patron of all who entered or left. In the case of Sabrina's river Severn it certainly flowed out, but flowed in again with the impressive Severn bore with its regular backwash carried many miles upstream. The Roman name Janus is the same as Dianus, the masculine form of Diana, our familiar "people's favourite" goddess.

"Lady of the Lake" – Limnaia – was one of the numerous titles bestowed upon Diana, and she was chief goddess of the band of nymphs and water sprites which have for so many centuries been associated with almost every sheet of water in the Old World, particularly perhaps if it surrounded by forest. Not only will the trees make Diana feel truly at home, but the forest verge is the natural home of lustful satyrs who love to gaze upon the nymphs as they bathe and dance at the water's edge. Wanton they may be, and passion-ridden, but they are all cheerful, unlike the mournful spirits said to haunt those lakes which are completely in the open. Trees act as natural cloaks: amoral, but soul-warming and spirit-raising.

The mud-flats of an estuary, it seems to me, have never been a likely haunt of nymphs, though other supernatural creatures may well have roamed these wastes. Salt marshes, like other coastal sites, are practical places for practical people who look to the sea for their livelihood. But freshwater marshes, wild and uninhabited by men, have always been thought a favourite playground of the "Wild Wanderer", Diana. Indeed, yet another of her titles is Heleia, "Lady of the Marsh". Marshlands have often been thought to be haunted, sometimes by spectral hounds, sometimes by the ghosts of lost travellers; and of course they are still the undisputed home ground of Will o' the Wisp, also known as Jack o' Lantern, or Ignis Fatuus – the light of a somewhat mysterious nature, spectral or gaseous, reputed to lure unwary travellers to their doom. Whether methane, spontaneously combusted, or phosphorescence resulting from decaying flesh beneath the surface, in years gone by this strange phenomenon has been seen in churchyards too: a great source of superstitious imaginings.

Perhaps the time is ripe to convene a celebration of nymphs, friendly spirits of unpolluted water, guardian goddesses of nature: the dryads and hamadryads of the forest, the oreads of the mountains, the oceanids and nereids of salt water, the naiads of fresh water. Let us listen again to their fanciful stories from pre-materialistic days. Some of these stories may have been purely sentimental, like that of the river nymph Dido who only put in an appearance, shimmering beneath the surface, when her sister the moon was to be seen in the sky above. But most are green stories, based on ecological observation, environmental concern. The nymph Syrinx, for instance, was pursued lustfully by Pan and hid in the river. When the gods saw her hiding, in order to save her modesty they changed her into the reeds from which Pan later made his pipes. Castalia too, a nymph who dwelt in a spring on Mount Parnassus, was pursued too avidly by the sun god Apollo, and leapt into the water to escape his overpowering passion. In her case the gods changed her into a water lily. It is streamside vegetation, lush greenery, that helps keep water from excessive evaporation, and their oxygenating properties which purify it and allow the animals represented by Pan to use it safely.

Then there is the nymph Daphne, daughter of the river-god Peneus, who was pursued so persistently by Apollo that the other gods, to protect her virginity, changed her into a bay laurel – a plant ever after held sacred to the name of Apollo, a true plant of the sun. It has been claimed that a few bay leaves placed beneath your pillow as you sleep will lend you the gift of prophecy.

The sight and sound of water gushing seemingly miraculously from the ground in spring or fountain is, unconsciously perhaps, associated in our deeper minds with new understandings, inspiration and prophecy; with blessings – marriage and fulfilment; with new life – successful childbirth. Is it any wonder that the popular imagination has peopled such places with semi-divine beings able to help those who invoke them and drink their water with a sense of reverence? The least we can do is to take care not to pollute their home.

There can be few natural springs that have not at some time been associated with a supernatural presence: a nymph, a sprite, a goddess, a god, a muse, or a human saint following some miraculous occurrence. Holy wells abound, and in such places it has been considered a dire offence to pollute the water. To modern sophisticated minds all sources of fresh water are now particularly to be shielded from harm. We know only too well from our own experience, the ills and misfortunes that can result from pollution, whether careless or malicious.

The Romans, to be on the safe side perhaps, tended to ascribe an individual god or goddess to whatever object, subject or theme seemed of special importance at the time. A Roman housewife knitting or weaving a garment might conceivably have prayed: "O Wool, please see that my husband's new tunic is a perfect fit!" It was certainly a successful way of concentrating her own determination, while at the same time acknowledging the spiritual foundation beneath all things. Following this principle, Fontus was the official Roman god of fountains, springs and wells. Festivals called *fontinalia* were held in his honour at the end of summer, when garlands were ceremoniously cast into the city fountains or set to float in village wells. If the well was too deep, flowers would be arranged around the top of the well. Well-decorating ceremonies are still held in rural areas around the world today - certainly so in England, usually with a local fable to augment the custom. Flowers, petals, leaves and moss are arranged around the brim of the village well to form intricate and imaginative patterns.

Springs and fountains everywhere have been associated with inspired thoughts – especially poetic inspiration – and with hopes for new beginnings, for a happy forthcoming marriage and safe childbirth to follow. Nymphs of spring and fountain were routinely called upon to assist young mothers during childbirth. And if the birth went badly and the child died, the sorrowful mother would return to the spring to mourn, her tears mingling with the water. The fabled Niobe, as the personification of maternal sorrows, has frequently been represented by a stone set in a fountain, permanently wet as though with tears.

In the classical European world, nymph-goddesses were as numerous as the springs, streams, wells and fountains which they were thought to inhabit, and one of the best-known was Egeria, goddess of "issuing forth" from the source, whether referring to the water from the ground, or the new life of childbirth. In the city of Rome the famous vestal virgins used to carry water for their ceremonies from Egeria's fountain to their

temple. Egeria, who reputedly possessed the spirit of the counsellor-wife of an ancient king of Rome, was supposed able to offer wise advice to all who requested it, and even the emperor himself was said to seek her advice from time to time. The idea of a friendly nymph acting as guardian of a spring has inspired many a poetic sentiment, even by scientists, and a pretty little brown and gold butterfly has been named after Egeria.

Two or three butterflies have been named after Niobe, for their mournfully dark and tear-stained appearance, and a delicate white butterfly has been named after Aganippe. She was a water nymph who dwelt in a spring held sacred to the muses, and through this association was considered the guardian nymph of all poetic inspiration. This was not to usurp the status of the poetic muses themselves, but to recognise the inspiration supplied by the tinkling music of gently running water. Calliope, "she of the fair voice", was herself guardian goddess of a sacred spring and the noblest of the nine muses. Yet another butterfly has been named in her honour, this time a beautiful crimson one.

The muses of course represented culture in the ancient world, and culture inevitably has been associated with the sound of running water. They were conceived by soul out of memory, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. Besides Calliope there is Euterpe, "she that gladdens", again a nymph-goddess set to guard a sacred spring from whence men drew inspiration, and as the muse of music and song the favourite of Apollo to whom music was especially dear. Then there was Erato, "the lovely one", again originally a nymph of the fountain, who became a goddess of inspiration and the muse of erotic poetry – of love poems. Then of course there are Clio, the muse of history; Thalia, the muse of dramatic comedy; Melpomene, the muse of dramatic tragedy; Terpsichore, the muse of dancing; Polyhymnia, the muse of harmony; and Urania, the muse of astrology, and the inspiration to be gained perhaps by watching stars sparkling in the water.

All these things are for the heart, and from the heart: the seat of sincerity, the seat of desire, the seat of deception, of arrogance and fanaticism. All the niceness and all the nastiness of human society, all are from the heart. The fervour of men's hearts can transform something noble into something vile. As the prophet Jeremiah pointed out in his own uncompromising way: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* But no matter how wicked, no matter how sincere and noble. no matter how poetic, no matter how sure, all this will change. Only one thing is certain: the heart cannot carry the soul into the realms of spirit. All that is in the heart will change, or die.