

When I discovered the Aboriginal word 'yawkyawk', which means 'woman spirit' and is often applied to fresh-water sprites which in Aboriginal lore are thought to have fishes' tails, I liked the word. It seemed to voice a real sound for the mythical siren song of the mermaid, a harsh and painful-sounding word, but one which I could imagine being wailed, mournful, yearning, into the sea mists and attracting sailors' attention. So I then considered an unsuccessful conversion of mermaid to human (turning the 'The Little Mermaid' story upside-down) and this poem was the result.

## The Yawkyawk

*(Aboriginal word for the mermaid, based on their supposed song)*

When she cast her spell  
the Sea Witch failed -  
only one leg and half a tail

I'm neither human  
nor yet fish -  
this is not what I wished.

The Sea Witch warned  
that each of my steps  
would be like walking on swords.

Wrong. I cannot walk at all.  
Balked  
of my dream of human love

I hauled  
my body on this rock,  
squawk

with glee at men who think  
I hawk  
my body to them.

I do not.  
I cannot walk

but I can yawawaawawkkkk

the yearning, luring song  
all mermaids know.  
My body shawled

by the covering tide  
I call men  
to their deaths

in the depths below.

Gill McEvoy has published two pamphlets (Happenstance Press, 2006, 2008, both now out of print). She has also published two full collections *The Plucking Shed* and *Rise*, both from Cinnamon Press, 2010 and 2013 respectively. Gill runs several regular poetry events in Chester. She is a Hawthornden Fellow.