

Nigh-No-Place **by Jen Hadfield**



Prize judges were canny in awarding Jen Hadfield the 2008 T S Eliot Prize for [*Nigh-No-Place*](#) – since then, she has gone on to develop a body of work characterised by originality, astonishment and adoration, poetry that is popular but never populist. Her work is rooted in her adopted Shetland, in its bogs, tides and skylscapes, and reflects her experience as fish factory employee, a working poet and a classroom assistant. She says that ‘walking, and gathering wild food and materials for my visual art-works, are as important in my creative life as my language-based practice.’

Nigh-No-Place

I will meet you at Pity Me Wood.
I will meet you at Up-To-No-Good.

I will meet you at Stank, Shank and Sty.
I will meet you at Blowfly.

I will meet you at Low Spying How.
I will meet you at Salt Pie.

I will meet you at Coppertop.
I will meet you at Scandale Bottom.

I will meet you at Crackpot Moor.
I will meet you at Muker.

I will meet you at Dirty Piece.
I will meet you at Booze, Alberta.

I will meet you at Bloody Vale.
I will meet you at Hunger Hill.

I will bring you to New Invention.
I will bring you to Lucky Seven.

I will bring you from Shivery Man.
I will bring you to The Lion and Lamb.

I will bring you to the North Light.
I will bring you to Quiet-The-Night.

I will bring you to Hush.
I will bring you to Hungry Hushes.

I will bring you to Grace, Alberta.
I will bring you to Nigh-No-Place.

I will meet you at Two O'Clock Creek.
Will you go with me?

Paternoster

(for A.B.J)

Paternoster. Paternoster.
Hallowed be dy mane.
Dy kingdom come.
Dy draftwork be done.
Still plough the day
And give out daily bray
Though heart stiffen in the harness.
Then sleep hang harness with bearbells
And trot on bravely into sleep
Where the black and the bay
The sorrel and the grey
And foals and bearded wheat
Are waiting.
It is on earth as it is in heaven.
Drought, wildfire,
Wild asparagus, yellow flowers
On the flowering cactus.
Give our daily wheat, wet
Whiskers in the sonorous bucket.
Knead my heart, hardened daily.
Heal the hoofprint in my heart.
Give us our oats at bedtime
And in the night half-sleeping.
Paternoster. Paternoster.
Hallowed be dy hot mash.

Daed-traa

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

It has its ventricles, just like us –
pumping brine, like bull's blood, a syrupy flow.

It has its theatre –
hushed and plush.

It has its Little Shop of Horrors.
It has its crossed and dotted monsters.

It has its cross-eyed beetling Lear.
It has its billowing Monroe.

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

For monks, it has barnacles
to sweep the broth as it flows, with fans,
grooming every cubic millimetre.

It has its ebb, the easy heft of wrack from rock,
like plastered, feverish locks of hair.

It has its *flodd*.
It has its welling god
with puddle, podgy cheeks and jaw.

It has its holy hiccup.

Its minute's silence.

daed-traa.

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

Discussion Ideas

- Is the poem 'Nigh-No-Place' a spell? What makes you say so? What might it be attempting to conjure up?
- Could you examine your own geography, history and cartography and find similar rhyming pairs to create your own version of this poem? Who would you write it for, and why?
- "Paternoster" *Nigh-No-Place's* back cover blurb has it 'is the Lord's Prayer uttered by a draught horse'. Is that blasphemy, a theological experiment, or something else altogether?
- 'Daed-traa' means 'the slack of the tide'. 'I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide / to mind me what my poetry's for' – how does a visit to the beach function as a poetic manifesto? Is this poem just a 'note-to-self' for the poet, or does it have something to offer the reader too? What, if so?
- <http://rogueseeds.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/the-dominant-species-is-on-this-weekend.html> - this is a recent visual art project by Jen Hadfield. She says that 'walking, and gathering wild food and materials for my visual art-works, are as important in my creative life as my language-based practice.' Why make actual limpets, do you think, rather than write about them?

Jen Hadfield lives in Shetland where she works as a poet and writing tutor. Her first collection *Almanacs* (Bloodaxe, 2005) was written in Shetland and the Western Isles in 2002. Her second collection, *Nigh-No-Place* (Bloodaxe), won the T S Eliot Prize in 2008. She has also received a Dewar Award to produce a solo exhibition of Shetland ex-votos in the style of sacred Mexican folk art, incorporating rubrics of very short fiction. She won the Edwin Morgan Poetry Competition in 2012, and her most recent collection is *Byssus* (Picador, 2013).

<http://rogueseeds.blogspot.co.uk/>

Other books by Jen Hadfield

- *Almanacs* (Bloodaxe, 2005)
- [*Byssus*](#) (Picador, 2013)

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