

**Four poems: Incident at St Kilda, On the thinnest of nights, Song of the Nepr,
Wardsend**

CAROLYN WAUDBY, SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

Incident at St Kilda

As I slept, half-way up the Stack
on the ledge where moss clings

Malcolm McDonald seized me.
Ferguson tied my legs. I could see they feared

the white spot on the side of my head,
my open mouth, the snapping.

Three days in a bothy.
I blanched them with my shrieks

called to wind and sea.
The summoned storm brought them to their knees.

Vexed
that I would not die

McKinnon ordered my killing,
took up a stone.

One hour they rained blows, weeping, slowing,
their salt and sweat anointing. Until

my beaten soul, through my bill
on redundant wings flew.

Carolyn Waudby

Based on an account in which 19th century islanders of the Outer Hebrides are said to have captured then killed a Great Auk believing it was a witch.

This poem first appeared in *Millstone Grit*, Antiphon, 2016.

On the thinnest of nights

I will tiptoe down
to the towering firs

meet the souls
who've migrated
through thick sea mists

to fold brown wings
and hang clustered
like autumn leaves.

Their trance is deep:
more precious
than long feathers.

They wait
for the warm breath
of gods.

You will know me among them.
I will wear a Tehuana skirt, my red boots.
I will not sleep.

Carolyn Waudby

In November every year, millions of monarch butterflies migrate from the United States and Canada to the Oyamel fir forests west of Mexico City to hibernate and breed. Their arrival coincides with Mexican Day of the Dead. Since the time of the Aztecs, Mexican people have believed that the butterflies are the souls of their dead loved ones returned to earth to visit them.

From *Apus*, The Red Ceilings Press, 2020.

Song of the Nepr

breast hot
see my hair
dark

mist
rapids
grass
 springing

summon the wind
cross
scream
my breast hot

storm
shadow
teeth

drool
your fingers
in my locks

Carolyn Waudby

**Nepr – a pagan name meaning ‘water spirit’ and possible origin of the name Neepsend by the River Don in Sheffield, UK.*

A version of this poem first appeared in *The Sheffield Anthology: Poems from the City Imagined*. Smith/Doorstop, 2012.

Wardsend

The lads bear me
hefters of hammers,
muck under the nails.

Women washed me
but soap and scrub would not shift it.
I wear it with my Sunday suit.

We cross. No sound, the river
runs heavy, hot.

I'm ready – know
the deafening din of the dark,
the white melt.

Carolyn Waudby

Wardsend is a cemetery on the banks of the River Don, Sheffield, UK. The name is thought to come from World's End.

This poem first appeared in *The Sheffield Anthology: Poems from the City Imagined*, Smith/Doorstop, 2012.