

I Have Not Answered

Adam Grydehøj

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Ghostly and symbolic, the Scottish island setting gives this supernatural tale authenticity.

The Shetland Islands of Scotland are remote and relatively isolated—the perfect setting for Adam Grydehøj's novel of the supernatural, *I Have Not Answered*.

Grydehøj has lived on islands in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom, and he holds a PhD in folklore from the University of Aberdeen. He brings his education and knowledge to bear in *I Have Not Answered* with the protagonist Innes Pitmedden, who arrives in Shetland seeking folktales for his own research. As a result of his inquiries, Innes becomes involved with some of the families of Shetland, and strange events occur, hinting at the presence of something not quite human.

The story is narrated by this presence, and we see Innes through its eyes and through the dialogues Innes shares with the island's inhabitants. The sense of place delivered in the book is not just authentic but altogether transporting—Grydehøj's descriptions of “simmer dim” (the summer twilight, when the sun lights the sky for up to nineteen hours) and the Up Helly Aa festival, along with the native characters' unique dialect, give readers a real, complete world, one that is probably unknown to most.

With Innes's story-seeking driving the early plot, characters recount plenty of short tales of Trows (fairies) and Selkies (mythological creatures who live as seals in the sea but become human on land), which helps deepen the supernatural mood.

Foula, the most remote of the inhabited Shetland Islands, lurks ominously in the distance throughout the story. When questioned about what he's seen during a strange encounter at the beach, one character answers: “Was it Foula? It's nought to do with Foula. That's a symbol. Du's so bloody literal minded.” This could also be considered a warning to literal-minded readers to embrace the journey this story offers without attempting to pin down characters or meaning until that journey is complete.

The book's limitations are those that come with the choice of narrator and the author's effort to preserve the sense of mystery by not providing answers to every question: we don't get to know Innes intimately, other than the fact that he's something of a haunted soul, and it's never made clear exactly who or what the narrator-ghost is.

Categorized as literary/supernatural, the book straddles both types, resulting in an engrossing combination of the two. Adventurous readers looking for something a bit different should find *I Have Not Answered* worth the read.

PETER DABBENE (Summer 2014)

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