

# READERS' NOTES

Welcome to the **T. S. Eliot Prize 2022 Readers' Notes**, in which we present the ten exciting collections shortlisted for this year's prize. The Readers' Notes offer introductions to some key poems, with reviews and biographies of the poets, and suggest creative writing prompts. Take the notes to your book group or poetry workshop, or respond individually to them in your own time. English teachers – if you're preparing your students for any Unseen Poem papers, hone their skills on this year's list.



## *The Thirteenth Angel* by Philip Gross What reviewers say



*The Thirteenth Angel* (Bloodaxe Books, 2022) by Philip Gross.  
[bloodaxebooks.com](http://bloodaxebooks.com)

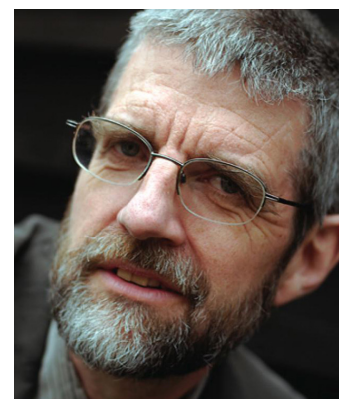
'With each new collection, Philip Gross' poems extend their conversation between the metaphysical and the acutely physical. His sequences in *The Thirteenth Angel* scan from moment to moment like flickering needles, registering stress patterns in the world around us – ebbs and flows of weather or events, in our own bodies, in the city streets before and after the pandemic, or on the autoroutes of Europe with their undertow of human flight. If there are angels, they are nothing otherworldly, but formed by angles of incidence between real immediate things, sudden moments of clarity that may disturb, calm or exhilarate.' – Bloodaxe Books blurb

'Philip Gross's *The Thirteenth Angel* is a book with its finger firmly on the pulse of the sounds of the contemporary world... Gross uses language which is precise and sharp one moment and then veers into a familiar colloquial style the next, which makes him intensely readable.' – Mona Arshi, *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, Winter 2022

'Gross presents us hurtling forwards, across the circuit board of the modern city, but making the same old mistakes. What we need is perspective, an opportunity to gain some objectivity, and *The Thirteenth Angel* offers us this divine intervention [of angels] and the opportunity to step outside of ourselves and to view the world from a fresh angle.' – John Field, T. S. Eliot Prize reviewer

## Philip Gross

Philip Gross was born in Cornwall, the son of an Estonian wartime refugee. He has lived in Plymouth, Bristol and South Wales, where he was Professor of Creative Writing at Glamorgan University (USW). *The Thirteenth Angel*, his twenty-seventh collection, is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and follows eleven previous books with Bloodaxe, including *Between the Islands* (2020); *A Bright Acoustic* (2017); *Love Songs of Carbon* (2015), winner of the Roland Mathias Poetry Award and a Poetry Book Society Recommendation; *Deep Field* (2011), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation; *The Water Table* (2009), winner of the T. S. Eliot Prize 2009; and *Changes of Address: Poems 1980-1998* (2001). He regularly collaborates with other artists, photographers and writers; he also writes poetry for young people – *The All-Nite Café* won the Signal Award 1994, and *Off Road to Everywhere* won the CLPE Award 2011. He received a Cholmondeley Award in 2017.



Philip Gross. Photo: Stephen Morris

# READERS' NOTES



## Discussion ideas

- Why might the buildings of 'The Follies' (the Gherkin, the Shard) be robbed of their proper noun capital letters?
- What would Elon Musk and his lunar-landing ambitions make of 'Moon, O'?
- What is the relationship between masculine and feminine energy in this poem? Is the moon ever portrayed culturally as a man or a god, rather than a mistress or a goddess? What might it mean to worship a male moon?
- 'Springwatch in Lockdown': was it like that for you?

## Writing prompt

- How many poems do you think have been written about the moon? Tens of thousands? Hundreds of thousands? What might need to be said in the millionth moon poem? Write it.

## Find out more

### Other books by Philip Gross

*Between the Islands* (Bloodaxe, 2020)

*Love Songs of Carbon* (Bloodaxe, 2015)

*The Water Table* (Bloodaxe, 2009 – Winner, T. S. Eliot Prize)

See also: [philipgross.co.uk](http://philipgross.co.uk)

### If you liked Philip Gross's work, try...

- Michael Symmons Roberts
- George Szirtes
- Matthew Francis

## About the T. S. Eliot Prize

The T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry, awarded annually to the author of the best new collection of poetry published in the UK and Ireland, was inaugurated in 1993 to celebrate the Poetry Book Society's 40th birthday and honour its founding poet. Since 2016, the Prize has been supported and run by the T. S. Eliot Foundation. It is the most prestigious poetry prize in the world, and the only major poetry prize judged purely by established poets. It is also the most valuable in British poetry. The judges for the 2022 Prize are Jean Sprackland (Chair), Hannah Lowe and Roger Robinson. For more information, visit [tseliot.com/prize](http://tseliot.com/prize)

## T. S. Eliot Prize 2022: join in

- Look out for the **video recordings of interviews and poems** by all ten of the shortlisted poets, as well as past winning and shortlisted poets, on our YouTube channel: [bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube](https://bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube)
- Join us and the poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 15 January 2023. Hosted by Ian McMillan and British Sign Language interpreted, readings are simultaneously live streamed to a worldwide audience. Book at [bit.ly/eliotprize22sbcreadings](https://bit.ly/eliotprize22sbcreadings)
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at [bit.ly/eliot22reviews](https://bit.ly/eliot22reviews)
- **Sign up to our weekly e-newsletters**, packed with information and insights about all ten shortlisted poets, and specially commissioned features and giveaways. To stay up to date with Prize news, subscribe at [bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews](https://bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews)
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Twitter, Instagram and Facebook**: @tseliotprize
- Who is your pick for this year's T. S. Eliot Prize? Share ideas at **T. S. Eliot Prize shortlist shared reading events** such as the one run by the Poetry School at Southbank Centre, London, held on the day of the Eliot Prize Readings (see [poetryschool.com](http://poetryschool.com)) – or you could set up your own!

## The Follies

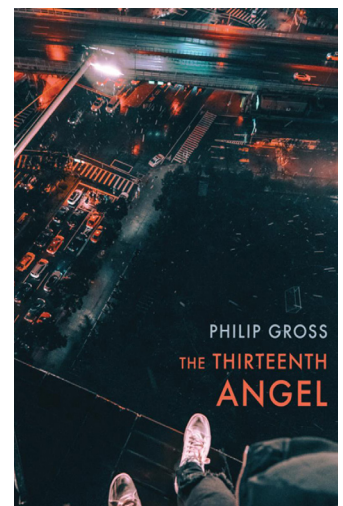
Slipping out of the City  
in a grey-brown fug,  
air full of uncompleted rain.

Behind us, already reduced  
to the ghosts of themselves,  
the follies of big money:

gherkin, protuberant shapes  
of the time. Only the shard  
is honest: cloud-capped

splinters. The final push  
to the summit... called off  
at the snowfield of Forever.

On the way down,  
that (statistics tell us)  
is when climbers die.



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## Moon, O

true moon, if you love us,  
    give us nothing. Blank us. Don't  
disclose a wink of water, not a glitter-speck of ore –  
    nothing to raise a twinkle  
    in the futures market's eye. Chaste  
goddess (did you have an inkling, all this time, of our  
cracked yearnings, how we would madden ourselves,  
    how girn in your direction vaguely?)  
    stay that way – a glimpse  
of pure negation, so not us, not ours, so unwarmed  
    to our touch, unstirred by the least  
    wind or whim.  
    Don't let us think, not  
    for a moment, we can have you.  
Leave those toddler-suited astronauts slack-dangled  
    in their old home movies,  
    like marionettes in the wardrobe,  
a childhood we'd better forget. Leave the tangled  
tracks of our million-dollar toys where they crawled  
    to a halt amidst the perfect pointlessness  
    of you. O bleachy-  
skinned cool mistress, arsenic complexion, dead-  
pan geisha unmoved by our high romance,  
    all the shadow-puppetry  
    we made of you, O  
    pocked and harrowed cheek, no wonder,  
those rough-sleeping nights on the sidewalk of space, O  
    never really mistress,  
    tell us to sling our hook, to blast  
and fizzle off, remember we've got family at home.



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# READERS' NOTES POEMS

## *from Springtime in Pandemia*

### 1 Springwatch in Lockdown

Birdsong in the human quiet. Streets  
empty enough to walk through the middle of town  
and step aside when one car comes in sight

If Sunday, say, or New Year's Day is benchmark:  
calm, then this is a minus reading.

Peacefulness below the level of comfort,  
the dial on Danger... Now,  
what would that be called?

•

As if in the pause of us, Spring is beginning.  
As if it had been waiting  
for us to be somewhere else...

Only, somewhere else, a place  
called Elsewhere, has turned up to stay:

here, estranged, or us estranged in it.

And all of this is peaceful; anxious;  
itchy on the surface of itself.

We long to scratch it. Are forbidden to.

•

A word from a single  
cotyledon in the cracked path:

you had no idea, it says,  
how fast everything could change.

You have no idea – just sit in there  
and watch; I am the slightest

part of it – just how much more it could.

•

If I could match the deftness – the way  
the play-chase-and-squabble of two adolescent rats

on the patio twines with their twitch-  
perfect nose for a new chance, and the Spring-

loaded life force that catapults them off,  
a slithering tight braid

of here-and-gone-ness, into cover,  
their whisker-fine grip

on the balance of containment  
and quest... well,

I would be a member of another species,  
better suited maybe for the times we're in.

•

Nose to the grindstone  
of a crisis – no,  
to the plate glass window of it,

the thing, if single thing it is,  
too close and wide to see –

only to see through, see  
the way I see through glasses  
with my face mask on – our breath

too hot, fogging the pane,  
so we see little but the misting: our

own worry-sweat turning to chill  
in every droplet. Finger-scribe  
some big blunt letters in it; write

SPRING. Watch them pucker  
and begin to weep. As if they cared.



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