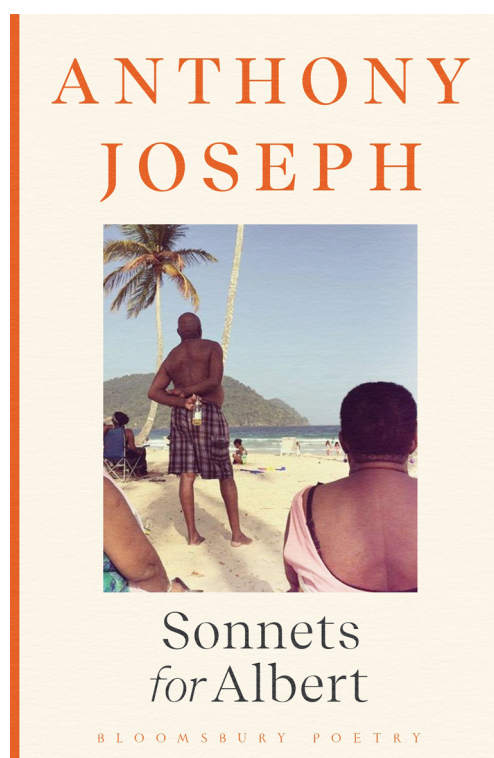


READERS' NOTES

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.



Sonnets for Albert by Anthony Joseph What reviewers say



Sonnets for Albert
(Bloomsbury
Poetry, 2022) by
Anthony Joseph.
bloomsbury.com

“My father died with his mouth open – / gasping for air”, we read in ‘Shame’. After much silence and absence in life, the poet’s father is painstakingly restored in death in a book-length “calypso sonnet” sequence. Albert is a rogue, and encounters with him often take place on the run, as when a brother of the poet catches him at the wheel of a van in traffic in Trinidad. Albert responds by badmouthing his brother to the poet: “the way he does talk proper English, Tony, / he talking more English than you!” [...] Joseph’s relationship with his father is profoundly ambivalent, but *Sonnets for Albert* movingly makes peace with his shade: Albert has “made his cycle”, an aunt tells the poet, “and that was all that was required of him”.’ – **David Wheatley, *The Guardian***

‘In *Sonnets for Albert*, the poet is trying to find his largely absent father. “[T]all jungle”; “appeared through curtains”; the brim of a sailor’s cap covering one eye; fingering through his jewellery. Everything about the poet’s father is veiled, or encrypted in performance. The absent father leaves clues. The wind doesn’t blow for months. The Hathaway record skips. The myth of him grows, and the rhythms of absence become familiar. The sonnet becomes the poet’s key to seeing.

Alongside the poems sit images taken by the poet of his father. In one photo, the father’s hand obscures the sun at dusk. Our eyes tell us the father is larger than a star even if our memory tells us this cannot be true. In the poem ‘Jogie Road’, the poet looks up at his father, bloodied like sunset, mining an unreliable memory to make sense of his own conflicted feelings. The relationship between the images and poems is self-ironising. They give the father a new form – a language that is usually designed to validate or challenge the written word. Instead, they obscure the father even more. How do we account for this?’ – **Fahad Al-Amoudi, *Wasafiri***

About the poet

Anthony Joseph was born in Trinidad. He holds a PhD in Creative Writing from Goldsmiths University and is a Lecturer in Creative Writing at King’s College London. He was the Colm Tóibín Fellow in Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool in 2018 and was awarded a Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship 2019/20. Anthony is the author of five poetry collections: *Desafinado*, *Teragaton*, *Bird Head Son*, *Rubber Orchestras* and *Sonnets for Albert*. He has also written three novels: *The African Origins of UFOs*, *Kitch: A Fictional Biography of a Calypso Icon*, and *The Frequency of Magic*. As a musician he has released eight critically acclaimed albums. Anthony lives in London. Anthony Joseph photo: Naomi Woddis



READERS' NOTES



Discussion ideas

- The blurb for *Sonnets for Albert* says: 'These jazz-inflected poems explore the impact of being the son of a mostly absent father and, though weighted with emotion, are as masterfully poised as the man they depict.' Does the Albert of 'Summer in New York' have poise?
- How come it took the poet so long to decipher the initials on the ring in 'Rings'?
- Swap the stories of the rings or jewellery you're wearing.
- How does 'Stones' reflect on parental potency and power?

Writing prompt

- Writing prompt: what 14 things do you know – or think you know – about your parent? Is there a sonnet in them?

Find out more

Other books by Anthony Joseph

Rubber Orchestras (Salt Publishing, 2011)

Bird Head Son (Salt Publishing, 2009)

Teragaton (poisonenginepress, 1997)

Desafinado (poisonenginepress, 1994)

Listen

Hear Anthony Joseph's reflections on absent fathers at bit.ly/josephR4albert

See also: anthonyjoseph.co.uk

If you Anthony Joseph's work, try...

- Roger Robinson
- John Burnside
- Malika Booker

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

T. S. Eliot Prize 2022: join in

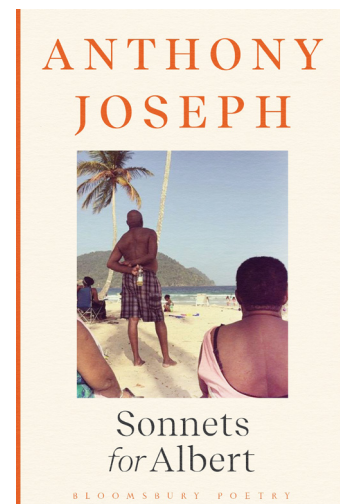
- Look out for the **video recordings of interviews and poems** by all ten of the shortlisted poets, as well as past winning and shortlisted poets, on our YouTube channel: bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube
- Join us and the poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, 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
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at 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
- 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) – or you could set up your own!



Summer in New York

He woundeth not, so may he escape these people smoke.
Something was happening across East River.
Dark was the billow and the sky obscured by smoke.
When the second plane strike, Albert was still in bed.
It wasn't the boom that wake him but his neighbour
Elaine shouting above her television set –
 'Put on CNN Mr Albert; New York burning down!'
And when Albert jump up and turn on his little screen,
he start to pray soon as he witness that biblical scene.
In Revelation, the desolation of smoke upon smoke upon smoke.

He see tall building fall. He see people jump from a tower on fire.
But his faith was so strong that he vision them landing safe.
'The terror overcome them, so they put faith in flight.
If was me I woulda jump too, it have no shame in that.'

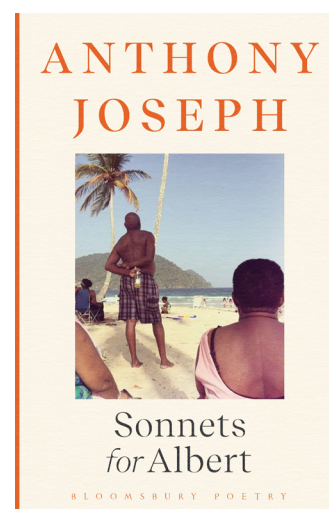


from *Sonnets for Albert*
(Bloomsbury Poetry, 2022)
by Anthony Joseph.
bloomsbury.com



Rings

I only have look at my hands to see my father.
The wide silver ring spans the proximal of my left hand's
ring finger. I remember this ring as a child, asking
my father what the raised letters spelled. But he laughed
and, like everything else made of secrets, he would not tell.
It was revealed after his funeral, when we were at the house
and the jewel bag get bring out from the bedroom
for my brother and I to choose which as heirlooms.
The bag held things which were either removed
from my father's body as he lay dying,
or kept in a saucer beside his Bible.
I chose the silver and soon deciphered that the raised letters
were his initials: AHJ, in Western typeface.
The ring fit firm and right. My brother chose a chain.

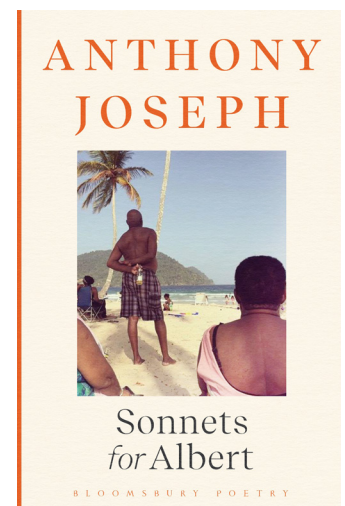


from *Sonnets for Albert*
(Bloomsbury Poetry, 2022)
by Anthony Joseph.
bloomsbury.com



Stones

I did ask him once, when we were sitting
on the veranda in Santa Cruz overlooking
the moon, if all was still functioning as wood should,
and he flung his head back and laughed,
'If I ever lose the use of my stones,' he said,
'I might as well dead.' With the *lignum vitae* at seventy –
he could still swim but he didn't show off.
And I never saw him dance or even run,
except a few steps when laughing
as black folk often do, when running from
and back towards the centre of a joke.
And I never called him 'Dad' or 'Pops', or 'Father'.
False formally as 'Mr Joseph', more often, but mostly
I avoided calling him anything at all.



from *Sonnets for Albert*
(Bloomsbury Poetry, 2022)
by Anthony Joseph.
bloomsbury.com