

T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

The T. S. Eliot Prize 2024 Readers' Notes offer a selection of poems from each of the ten exciting collections on our Shortlist, plus reviews, reading suggestions, and a writing prompt or two for those inspired to respond creatively. We hope the Readers' Notes will aid your deeper reading as an individual, with friends, or within a book group or writing workshop. English teachers: if you're preparing your students for any Unseen Poem papers, why not hone their skills on this year's Shortlist? And don't forget to check out the T. S. Eliot Prize Young Critics Scheme.

2024

T. S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT
PRIZE

POETRY BOOK SOCIETY RECOMMENDATION

Eleanor Among the Saints Rachel Mann

CARCANET POETRY



Eleanor Among the Saints (Carcanet Press, 2024) by Rachel Mann.
bit.ly/mansaints

On *Eleanor Among the Saints*

'The collection is divided into three parts, the first, 'Eleanor Among the Saints' imagines Eleanor Rykener in conversation with three saints, all roughly contemporary to her: Catherine of Sienna, Katherine of Alexandria (famous namesake of the Catherine Wheel) and Saint Perpetua, "an early martyr of the church who reputedly changed sex from female to male at the moment of her death in the Roman Arena."

The second part, 'Praise', is the most liturgical, a priest's grappling with the shape of her work during lockdown, a daughter holding vigil at her father's deathbed. The effort towards praise during such dark times is deeply moving [...] words cut through to something elementally human in their reaching towards faith and gratitude in such painful times [...]

'A Charm to Change Sex' is the final part, speaking most directly to Mann's experience of her own body; its relationship to earth, life, her God. 'A Charm to Change Sex (3)', and the two preceding poems are short, single-stanza poems written in the two-columned form of an Anglo-Saxon metrical charm.'

– Ellie Julings, *Dundee University Review of the Arts*

'Eleanor Rykener was a "transgender-like" seamstress, barmaid and sex worker in 14th century England. In this collection, Mann, a trans poet herself, forges an ecstatic mythos that imagines Eleanor as a lyric poet, as a murdered trans girl, and as the mystics Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, her near contemporaries ("I say holy, I swear there is nothing more beautiful / Than a face under pressure"). Mann moves from Eleanor's dramatic monologues to personal mythologies, one poem a movingly restrained outcry meditating on the body and biblical instruction: "Every woman who makes herself male / Will enter the kingdom of heaven,' Says one version of Christ. // What, then, of the male who makes of himself a woman?" Using transgressive linguistic play to expand the prosody of faith-based poetics, Mann's language energises without compromising the soul's inclination towards the afterlife: "Will my end be Garden or Glass?" – Oluwaseun Olayiwola, *The Guardian*

About the poet

Rachel Mann is a priest, writer and broadcaster. She is the author of thirteen books, including her debut poetry collection *A Kingdom of Love* (Carcanet Press, 2019), and the acclaimed non-fiction *Fierce Imaginings: The Great War, Ritual, Memory and God* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2017). *Eleanor Among the Saints* is her second collection. Mann is a Visiting Teaching Fellow at Manchester Writing School, and broadcasts regularly, including as a contributor to BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*. Born in the UK, she lives in Manchester.



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What do you think?

- Mann imagines Eleanor 'as a near contemporary of medieval saints like Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe et al' – what do you know of those two figures? Visit bit.ly/julianhazelnut to find out more about Julian and her vision of the hazelnut. Is 'Eleanor as Julian as Margery' a vision? How should the vision be interpreted?
- To whom is the rain venomous in 'Fylde Coast Apocalyptic'? Who is being nursed in the nursing home? Where is 'out beyond'? Could you find it on a map of the Fylde coast?
- What other poems set in nursing homes do you know of? What about novels or films or TV series? Does our art and culture fully reflect life in these sites of profound human experience?
- 'The envoi' says the Poetry Foundation '[is the] brief stanza that ends French poetic forms such as the ballade or sestina. It usually serves as a summation or a dedication to a particular person.' This 'Envoi' is the last poem in *Eleanor Among the Saints*. If you were to set it to music, what sort of music would you write?

Reply in writing

Make a poem that contains a 'house, warm and bright' and the 'out beyond'. What's inside trying to get out, what's outside trying to get in, what wants to stay exactly where it is?

Find out more

Other work by Rachel Mann

The Gospel of Eve (a novel – Darton, Longman & Todd, 2020)
A Kingdom of Love (Carcanet Press, 2019)

Something to watch

Browse YouTube for many readings, discussions and lectures by Rachel Mann. Highly recommended is Carcanet's online launch of *Eleanor Among the Saints*, with Rachel Mann in discussion with Kim Moore, at bit.ly/saintslaunch and Rachel Mann discussing her collection at bit.ly/manndiscussion

If you like Rachel Mann's work, try...

- Michael Symmons Roberts
- Rowan Williams
- Anthony Vahni Capildeo

www.rachelmann.co.uk

About the T. S. Eliot Prize

The T. S. Eliot Prize, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year, is awarded annually to the best new poetry collection published in the UK and Ireland. The Prize was founded by the Poetry Book Society in 1993 to celebrate the PBS's 40th birthday and to honour its founding poet. It has been run by The T. S. Eliot Foundation since 2016. It is the most prestigious poetry prize in the world, and the only major poetry prize judged purely by established poets. The judges for the 2024 Prize are Mimi Khalvati (Chair), Anthony Joseph and Hannah Sullivan. For more information, visit tseliot.com/prize

T. S. Eliot Prize 2024: join in

- Hear our shortlisted poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 12 January 2025. Hosted by Ian McMillan and British Sign Language interpreted, readings are simultaneously live streamed to a worldwide audience. Book for in-person tickets at bit.ly/eliot24reading or for the live stream at bit.ly/eliot24livestream
- Look out for the latest additions to our amazing **video archive of interviews and poems** with Eliot Prize poets on our YouTube channel: bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at bit.ly/eliot24reviews
- **Sign up to our weekly e-newsletters**, packed with information and insights about all ten shortlisted poets, and specially commissioned features and giveaways. Subscribe at bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Instagram, X** and **Facebook**: @tseliotprize

Eleanor as Julian as Margery

Hazelnut and tears, a meaning of I –
Consider the curve of salt water, its dribble
Down face, I am all meniscus holding back
The edge of edge and others might say ugly,
I say holy, I swear there is nothing more beautiful
Than a face under pressure. Nothing more
Like hope and hazelnut, and last hazelnut
Survives and shews the eternity, goodness
As the red of raw, face as worst of winter,
World without end. If I do not make it to tree,
Not even sapling, my sealed-up body, my fury,
A sufficiency, more than enough, universe is tears.

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Fylde Coast Apocalyptic

Of all ends (fire, ice, pale horse), none of the predicted.
Rather: a house, seashore, a room
Sealed by brick and glass, glazed, mirror-dim.
A house, warm and bright, walls of hydrangeas,
Acres of white and powder-blue, and out beyond, a view –
Beach at low-tide, sea sucked out, grey as whale.
Out beyond, banks of sand and pools cling, I hear no sound,
Further still, surely, raw waves crash,
And rain's venom. A nursing-home near the end (attendants gone,
Tea stains and cake crumbs, silent TV), and out beyond,
A partial witness: man with rod, he runs towards the swell,
Casts and waits, he's no fisher of men. No need
Of me. And me of him? Earth curves beyond sight
And close to its edge, venom rain, miles and miles.

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Envoi

If at the end, fabrication, so? All text is stitched,
Body too only subset of making, a stored magic –

Oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, carbon and trace and trace
Of trace, base and noble, transmutations, a gifting;

You too: recipient, a trace of trace, trans, queer, every name,
A mutate of Love, good and holy, trace of trace in you –

Trace of every name despite your best efforts, your horror.
No one and nothing so very far from embryo or Eden,

The wild play, from chromosome and myth, wondrous edits,
Additions, all of us hand-me-downs, a holy cause;

Behold! she becomes they, all worm-gorged earth, or bed worn
And wet with fuck, let us be lines sown into lines, a break.

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