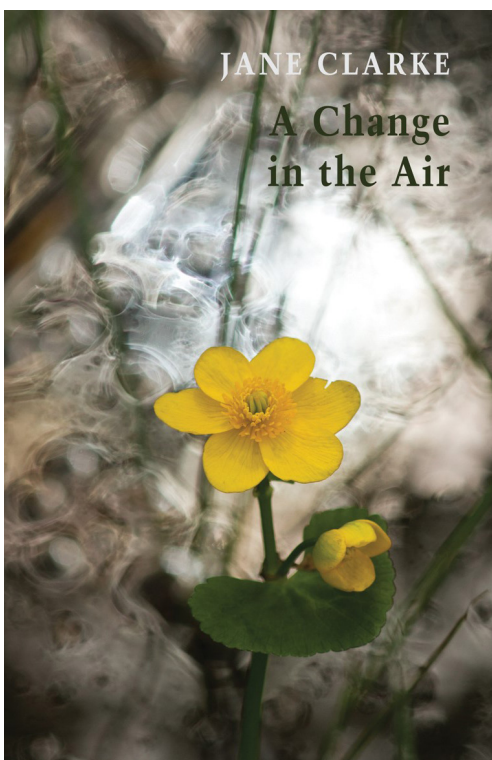


# READERS' NOTES

Welcome to the **T. S. Eliot Prize 2023 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.



## *A Change in the Air* by Jane Clarke What reviewers say



*A Change in the Air*  
(Bloodaxe Books,  
2023) by Jane Clarke.  
[bloodaxebooks.com](http://bloodaxebooks.com)

'The delight and haunting memorability of the elegies that open [Jane Clarke's] excellent third book of poems, *A Change in the Air*, can partly be explained by an ability to turn moments of steady objectivity into disclosures of emotion and insight [...] Clarke finds an archetypal purpose for her timely preoccupations, and local points of crossover between ordinary and extraordinary experience. In this clear-flowing book, she seeks to get whole valleys onto the page, and to dwell in elemental magic, and she deserves to be celebrated for it.' – **Martin Dyar, Poetry Ireland Review**

'What animates Jane Clarke are love and endurance: artfully calibrated, each section of *A Change in the Air* is an emotional complement to the next, for each poem hangs on one, or sometimes several, exquisitely clarified observations of landscape and of the figures in it, magnified as if through water. The two are in any case indivisible – the agricultural terrain is presented as a series of potent images whose significance is a measure of the unseen connection anchoring people to the world that made them.' – **Steve Whitaker, Yorkshire Times**

'Her verse attends so closely to the land and the people of her rural homeland that it makes us attend more closely to our own. This summer she published *A Change in the Air*, a collection that glides gently from caring for her mother to remembering the Troubles to moving into a new house in the countryside.' – **Ron Charles, The Washington Post Book Club newsletter**

## About the poet

Jane Clarke's first collection, *The River* (Bloodaxe Books, 2015), was shortlisted for the Royal Society of Literature's Ondaatje Prize. Her second, *When the Tree Falls* (Bloodaxe Books, 2019), was shortlisted for the 2020 Pigott Poetry Prize, the *Irish Times* Poetry Now Award and the Farmgate Café National Poetry Award 2020. *A Change in the Air* (Bloodaxe Books, 2023) was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection. Jane holds a BA in English and Philosophy from Trinity College, Dublin and an MPhil in Writing from the University of South Wales. She lives with her wife in Glenmalure, Co. Wicklow, where she combines writing with her work as a creative writing tutor and group facilitator. Author photo © Elementum



# READERS' NOTES



## Discussion ideas

- 'Ling' is from a sequence of poems inspired by a family First World War archive. How does your reading of the poem deepen with that knowledge? What is the balance between masculine and feminine energy in the poem?
- What do you make of the 'rusted iron bar' positioned on a prominent line break and exactly halfway through 'Spalls'?
- Do you think the 'First Earlies' neighbours would be abashed at being caught discussing potatoes as the hearse passes by? What layers of meaning are being expressed by the potato planting chat?

## Writing prompt

- What other Covid poems (or plays, novels, artwork, songs) have you experienced, and have any connected with you more than others? What's the smallest, strangest, most moving or most enraging detail you remember from lockdown? What's the poem you might write from it?

## Find out more

### Other books by Jane Clarke

*The River* (Bloodaxe Books, 2015)

*When the Tree Falls* (Bloodaxe Books, 2019)

### Listen

Hear Jane Clarke interviewed by Timothy Green, editor of the US poetry magazine *Rattle* (Jane features from 09:35) at [bit.ly/janeclarke\\_rattle](https://bit.ly/janeclarke_rattle) and in the RTÉ programme at [bit.ly/rte\\_janeclarke](https://bit.ly/rte_janeclarke). Find more audio links at [bit.ly/clarkebloodaxenews](https://bit.ly/clarkebloodaxenews)

See also: [www.janeclarkepoetry.ie](http://www.janeclarkepoetry.ie)

### If you like this poet's work, try...

- Eavan Boland
- Seamus Heaney
- Jessica Traynor

## About the T. S. Eliot Prize

The T. S. Eliot Prize celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2023. 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 2023 Prize are Paul Muldoon (Chair), Sasha Dugdale and Denise Saul. For more information, visit [tseliot.com/prize](https://tseliot.com/prize)

## T. S. Eliot Prize 2023: join in

- Look out for **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 the poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Shortlist Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 14 January 2024. Hosted by Ian McMillan and British Sign Language interpreted, readings are simultaneously live streamed to a worldwide audience. Book at [bit.ly/TSEP23shortlistlive](https://bit.ly/TSEP23shortlistlive)
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at [bit.ly/eliot23reviews](https://bit.ly/eliot23reviews)
- **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](https://bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews)
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Twitter, Instagram** and **Facebook**

2023

T. S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT  
PRIZE  
SHORTLIST

## Ling

A sprig of heather falling  
from his sister's letter

carries him home  
to the slopes of Slieve Donard –

a sea of honey-scented ling,  
purple flowers teeming with bees.

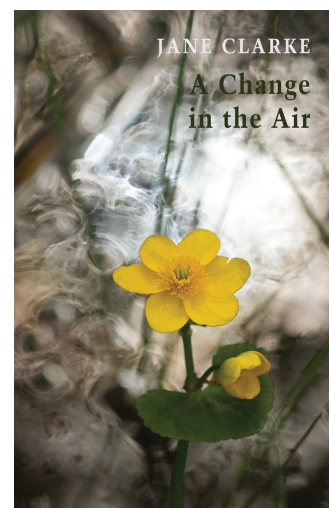
A shepherd told them  
that at the time of creation

no plant would cover  
the bare mountain slopes;

only heather, out of kindness,  
offered its modest growth.

A brave little plant, he called it.  
No matter how trampled

by rutting stags,  
the woody branches always spring back.



*A Change in the Air* (Bloodaxe Books, 2023) by Jane Clarke.  
[bloodaxebooks.com](http://bloodaxebooks.com)

## Spalls

To help us grow a garden, my mother and father travelled  
across the Bog of Allen and over the Wicklow Gap.

They'd have preferred to drive west to Galway or Mayo,  
they'd have preferred a husband and children

but their daughter loved a woman. We'd have the table set  
for breakfast: rashers, black pudding, fried bread and eggs.

When the soil had warmed, we unloaded shovels  
and rakes, buckets of compost and the rusted iron bar

for prising out rocks. The back seat was thronged  
with pots of seedlings my mother had nurtured all winter.

We worked to her bidding: *loosen tangled roots before planting,*  
*sow marigolds next to beans, sprinkle Epsom salts around roses.*

My father took off on his own to spud ragwort or clip a hedge.  
One day he spent hours gathering stones of different shapes and sizes.

By evening he'd built us a wall under the holly, held together  
by gravity and friction, hearted with handfuls of spalls.



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[bloodaxebooks.com](http://bloodaxebooks.com)

## First Earlies

By rights we'd be standing side by side,  
making idle conversation as we wait

to shake hands with our grieving neighbours  
after Requiem Mass in Greenan,

but we keep the byroad between us today.  
The virus lingers, a low-lying cloud,

until someone asks about planting first earlies.  
Advice flies from gateway to gateway:

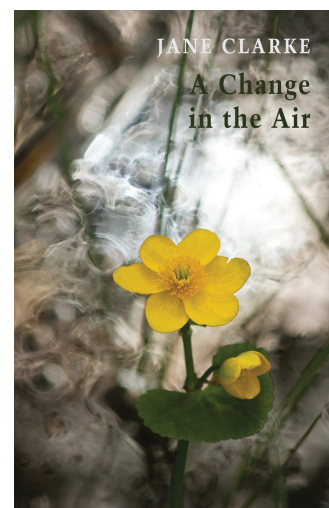
*you can split seed potatoes  
as long as each half has a chit;*

*dig plenty of manure into the drill,  
place them a foot apart, a fist deep;*

*don't forget to earth up the shoots,  
they'll be ready for lifting mid-June.*

*Sharpe's Express, Setanta, Orla,  
Slaney, Red Cara, Accord...*

our litany's only hushed  
by the hearse coming down the road.



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