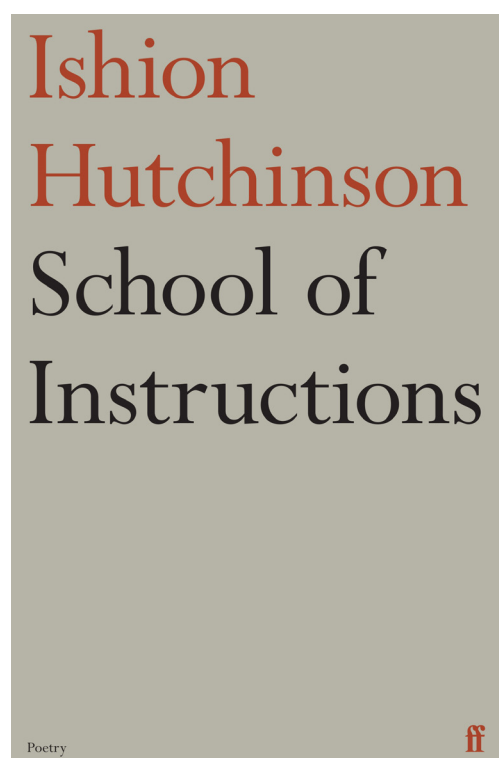


READERS' NOTES

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.



School of Instructions by Ishion Hutchinson What reviewers say



School of Instructions
(Faber & Faber, 2023)
by Ishion Hutchinson.
faber.co.uk

'Hutchinson renovates the high styles of British modernism and Caribbean postwar lyric poetry by juxtaposing the little-commemorated lives of Black, West Indian soldiers fighting for Britain in the Middle East during World War I with the more recent education of the poet's alter ego, a Jamaican schoolboy ironically named Godspeed. Reverberating hauntingly like an overheard litany, in a language of demotic lyricism ("his jam jar of blinky blink fireflies") and sonorous, Miltonian grandeur ("They resurrected new counterkingdoms / by the arbitrament of the sword mud"), this book-length poem wields the teeming arc of history as a single, double-faced implement to trace the multigenerational wound of colonialism, racism, and war.' – **David Woo, *Literary Hub***

'The collection weaves together the terrors of war with the terrors of imperialism, using dizzyingly original language and brutally impactful rhythms to create a tapestry of suffering, courage and struggle: "Frostbitten mud. Shellshock mud. Dungheap mud. Imperial mud [...] Caliban mud. Cannibal mud". These experiences filter into the book's second narrative, the life of Godspeed, a schoolboy living in Jamaica in the 1990s. Hutchinson subtly outlines the ways in which colonial force was perpetuated by language, English culture thrust into young minds with its own kind of violence: "Godspeed skulled elocution day [...] and so missed the shrieking out of 'And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils.' Bayonet fighting amid the cactus hedges". The collection sings of those who "have no memorial / who are perished as though they had never been" – reanimating their lives within the deathless, vivid fabric of poetry.' – **Rebecca Tamás, *The Guardian***

About the poet

Ishion Hutchinson was born in Port Antonio, Jamaica. He is the author of the poetry collections *House of Lords and Commons* (Faber & Faber, 2018), which received the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry, and *Far District* (Faber & Faber, 2021; first published 2010), winner of the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award for Poetry. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Joseph Brodsky Rome Prize in Literature, the Whiting Award, and a Donald Windham-Sandy M. Campbell Literature Prize, among other honours. Hutchinson is a professor in the Department of Literatures in English at Cornell University. Author photo © Marco Giugliarelli



READERS' NOTES



Discussion ideas

- Look up the SS *Verdala* on Wikipedia. Have you too learned about the history of the First World War from ‘corrosive dates’ in a book? What sort of book or text? Which WWI poets might mean most to you? What has happened to our understanding of WWI history because of the prominence of its poets? How does Ishion Hutchinson’s work develop that understanding?
- In the excerpt from ‘His Idylls at Happy Grove’, what do you understand the phrase ‘Recover them’ to mean?
- What sense does poem XVII from ‘The Anabasis of Godspeed’ give you about the soldiers’ responses to their ‘School of Instructions’?
- What do you make of the sentence structure in the excerpt from ‘Three Heroic Emblems’, and the double colon of ‘where it must show: England: leave room’? What role does ‘England’ play here? Is this third extract a memorial, a prayer, something else?

Writing prompt

- Track down the anthology *Unwritten: Caribbean Poems After the First World War*, edited by Karen McCarthy Woolf (Nine Arches Press, 2018), in which an early version of some of *School of Instructions* appears. In the anthology, Caribbean and Caribbean-diaspora poets re-imagine the untold stories of the Caribbean soldiers who fought for Britain in the First World War. What does it inspire you to write?

Find out more

Other books by Ishion Hutchinson

Far District (Faber & Faber, 2021)

House of Lords & Commons (Faber & Faber, 2016)

Listen

Hear Ishion give a resonant reading of a selection of his poems at bit.ly/berkeleyhutchinson

See also: ishionhutchinson.com

If you like this poet’s work, try...

- Raymond Antrobus
- Roger Robinson
- Karen McCarthy Woolf

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

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
- 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
- Read **John Field’s authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at bit.ly/eliot23reviews
- Read specially commissioned **Writers’ Notes from the shortlisted poets** themselves on the Poetry School website. These new resources are designed to help writers develop their practice and learn from some of contemporary poetry’s most exciting and accomplished voices. Visit bit.ly/poetryschoolwritersnotes
- **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 **Twitter, Instagram** and **Facebook**

READERS' NOTES POEMS

from His Idylls at Happy Grove

Agog with corrosive dates in his book,
Godspeed shuttled between bush and school, branching
with delirium. He recalled
rain gauzed cannons with steam. Escutcheons fluttered
a red-letter day of sorrow:

*Every man who went from Jamaica to
the front was a volunteer. 10,000.*

Volunteer? *Bourrage de crâne*. Shadowed chains.
Sails, the air stagnate, white flashes of sharks
haunting fevers strangers shared in the hulls,
never to break after centuries on land;
perpetual flashes, perpetual sharks

trailing men who sang on the *Verdala*
in a blizzard to war.

Recover them.

They shovelled the long trenches day and night.

Frostbitten mud. Shellshock mud. Dungheap mud. Imperial mud.
Venereal mud. Malaria mud. Hun bait mud. Mating mud.
1655 mud: white flashes of sharks. Golgotha mud. Chilblain mud.
Caliban mud. Cannibal mud. Ha ha ha mud. Amnesia mud.
Drapetomania mud. Lice mud. Pyrexia mud. Exposure mud. Aphasia mud.
No-man's-land's-Everyman's mud. And the smoking flax mud.
Dysentery mud. Septic sore mud. Hogpen mud. Nephritis mud.
Constipated mud. Faith mud. Sandfly fever mud. Rat mud.
Sheol mud. Ir-ha-cheres mud. Ague mud. Asquith mud. Parade mud.
Scabies mud. Mumps mud. Memra mud. Pneumonia mud.
Mene mene tekkel upharsin mud. Civil war mud.
And darkness and worms will be their dwelling place mud.
Yaws mud. Gog mud. Magog mud. God mud.
Canaan the unseen, as promised, saw mud.

They resurrected new counterkingdoms,
by the arbitrament of the sword mud.

2023

T. S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT
PRIZE
SHORTLIST

Ishion
Hutchinson
School of
Instructions

Poetry

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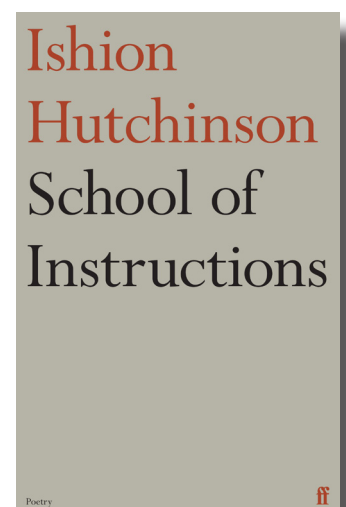
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from The Anabasis of Godspeed

XVII

Section drill and extended order drill and artillery drill
and artillery formation and attack formations and
the training of runners and observers and scouts and
musketry and embodying fire control and discipline and
description and recognition of targets and visual training
and judging distance and instructions in Lewis gun work
and bombing and rifle grenades and bayonet fighting
and rapid firing and intensive digging and hangar
construction: these were their School of Instructions for
the New Year.

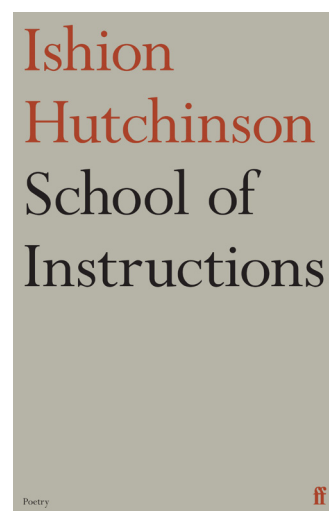


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from Three Heroic Emblems

Where the sun never conceded to light,
now lit. Even still, belated justice
does not reflect where it must show: England:
leave room for the beloved below;
recover them all, for belated praise.
A whiff of incriminating cherries
holds beneath the meridian blue,
raises choppy flatlines of the Atlantic
into vertical columns, heavenwards,
which is the earth. Earth which is their bodies
that have crossed, above deck, the sea-earth,
and give the earth a lasting heritage,
and the sea the broad church of night and day.



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