

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.



Hyena! by Fran Lock What reviewers say, a word from the poet



Hyena! (Poetry Bus Press, 2023) by Fran Lock. thepoetrybuspress.onlineweb.shop

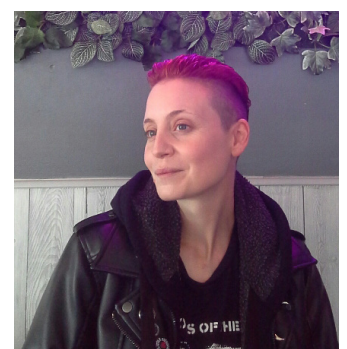
'Lock imagines herself as a four-legged predator prowling London's dingy streets in scabrous, thrillingly OTT poems – and offers elegies for the late poet Roddy Lumsden.' – *The Telegraph*, 'The 50 best books of 2023'

'Fran Lock's new collection [...] is her biggest and best collection yet, a series of vivid monologues and harangues by marginal voices, loners, outsiders and outcasts, surreal and subversive. She uses the idea of "therianthropy" (the magical transformation of humans into animals) to give voice to shape-shifting, twilight, feral creatures – vampires, angels, witches and hyenas. Much of the book addresses bereavement and loss, and the way that grief can change us: "on the day of your death i became a striped / hyena. hysteria's lank technician, cursorial / man-eater, witch's mount. i ran, feliform punk / with my mane of stale thistles, over primrose / hill, over blackheath, to gnaw the shinbones / of monuments." Then there are the real monsters: "the low moral wastes of england; farage's mouth as a misconnected cistern. *farage, forage, far-right rage.*"' – Andy Croft, *Morning Star*

'The *Hyena!* poems were – are – unusual for me, because I had this weird, unshakable faith in them [...] they say what I wanted to say how I wanted to say it. Knowing that has sustained me. While the poems in this collection are very much concerned with loss, they also assay a way of reckoning with the political and social worlds implicated in those losses [...] What differentiates this *Hyena!* from her other incarnations are those moments of goofiness and crack-up, the nerdy riffs on sixties *Batman*, *Hancock's Half Hour*, or Higher Education's rightly detested Research Excellence Framework. I have come to understand that such play is also part of grieving, that both loss and language have a transformational capacity, that a weird alchemy happens if I let my *Hyena!* sing.' – Fran Lock, from *The Poetry School Writers' Notes* series

About the poet

Fran Lock is the former Judith E. Wilson Poetry Fellow at Cambridge University (2022-2023), and the author of twelve poetry collections. She is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, and she edits the Soul Food column for *Communist Review*. Fran is an Associate Editor at the arts and culture cooperative, Culture Matters.



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Discussion ideas

- Where would the Hyena sit at that funeral? In the front row, under the eye of the celebrant... or right at the back? Would she attend the wake?
- “Bone Breakers” was written as a response to a commission for a book of poems aimed at children, exploring loss and conflict. How does knowing this affect the way you read the poem?
- Everyone grab a pencil and paper and draw a ‘pyrite argonaut’. What do they all look like?
- Visit poetrynonstop.com/tag/sevenling to read up on the background to the Sevenling. Is this a poem of abundance or scarcity?

Writing prompt

- Fran Lock’s Hyena, Ted Hughes’s Crow: what’s your animal alter ego? What poems can it howl or call that your human self can’t utter? Does your alter ego write sevenlings?

Find out more

Other books by Fran Lock

White / Other (the87 Press, 2022)

Forever Alive (Dare-Gale Press, 2022)

‘a disgusting lie’ (further adventures through the neoliberal hell mouth) (Pamenar Press, 2023)

Listen

View Fran Lock reading Hyena poems at Pamenar Press’s launch of her collection *Hyena! Jackal! Dog!* at bit.ly/lockhyena

See also: poetryfoundation.org/poets/fran-lock

If you like this poet’s work, try...

- Wayne Holloway-Smith
- Roddy Lumsden
- Melissa Lee-Houghton

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 and for the livestream at bit.ly/TSEP23livestream
- 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**

Hyena in her human form attends a funeral

there was, of course, his mimsy girl: apt
witch with her spread of gossamer divinings.
not me. or again the *brilliant friend*, her dear
face caught like a wasp in a cobweb. boys
with staunch lusts mizzled into anecdote.
eminent dressers, all eyes drawn into
the orbit of their wardrobes. there were
smugglers of honey, doomed ones lost in
the errand of their jeopardy. i was not
afraid. beneath their clothes they're pink
like links of sausage. look away, look again.
in the albinising light before the storm, i'm
there, smelling of creosote and spent
pleasure. tawny sardonicus, writhing
in the grim heat of my rictus genes. i am
always there, jawjacked and bleakly
glitching. a baddy's cackle. the zip
on a vampir's dress drawn down
at zinging speed. my laugh. my lips
ripped back to their sateen lining. this
deviant seam. wind-change artist,
neither cat nor dog. but oh, i've hung
his name from my mouth in reddest
shreds. this tongue a flag i've flown
from mildewed ramparts. sweet girls, he
had, who filed their teeth and took their
meds. and me, convulsing and whooping
without joy. look again, look away. look
again. i have turned my face to the wall.



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by Fran Lock. thepoetrybuspress.onlineweb.shop



‘Bone breakers’

up, through heather. up, through widgeonweed and ditch
grass, scenting air. the midges and the millwakes. ours are
not your postcard pastures, meekly clovered. ours are gorse,
bedraggled stalks of redshank; frayed chantilly wreck
of fool’s parsley, sparsely clinging. up, through agrimony,
hemp and keck; the dock-leaves and the sorrels. ’til joe says
look! below us dogs are living wrinkles in the mist. caravans
are longboats; churches remember their galleon-past, drag
broken keels against their graveyards. up, until the town
spreads silent and distance makes a desert of our enemies;
’til houses, decimated by malarkey, darken, grow grand
in silhouette. and on the plateau we find them: little pyrite
argonauts, fronting with the pluck of drunks, equally smote
and gold. old folks mistook them for poison. greek myth
had them spread, in lush proletarian meadows, for
a common displaced dead. up, up. joe said they eat the heart
entire; make words a bitter picnic *of exile and of fire*. i don’t
know what he means, the air is sweet. bloody liar. our
asphodels nod in the milky heat.



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onlineweb.shop](http://thepoetrybuspress.onlineweb.shop)

2023

T. S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT
PRIZE
SHORTLIST

from Hyena sevenlings

After Roddy Lumsden

Hyena-pleasures

she loves bats, their tenebrous arias, the way
they catch in the evening air like leather combs.
she loves peaches too, and porous honey-suck;

she loves myrrh, and the sight of a dreaming dog.
she loves you, ghetto mensch: your soft frontiers
and amber spurs, your mien of moody thriving.

red sun over sweating roofs. in venice. just one time.

Hyena!
Hyena!



fran lock

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onlineweb.shop](http://thepoetrybuspress.onlineweb.shop)