

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

Lapwing

HANNAH
COPLEY

POETRY BOOK SOCIETY
RECOMMENDATION



Lapwing (Pavilion Poetry / Liverpool University Press, 2024) by Hannah Copley.
bit.ly/lapwingcopley

and understand her vanished father. Circling their stories are recorded sightings of Lapwing by countless amateur ornithologists.' – **Hannah Copley, *PBS Bulletin***

'A truly stunning collection, so beautifully crafted and presented. I love everything about this book and forced myself to read it slowly so as to savour it. From the font and the subtle but poignant reoccurrence of (punctuated) birds in flight across the pages, to the daring and tender concept, both experimental and heartfelt, this is an absolute must-read. Copley's poetry achieves the rare balance of being both jazz-loose and tightly woven, with poignant and playful phrases and images. My favourite new collection so far this year. A remarkable achievement, made even more so for tackling with such exquisite yearning the painful legacy of addiction.' – **J. P. Seabright, *Goodreads***

About the poet

Hannah Copley, shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize 2024 for *Lapwing* (Pavilion Poetry / Liverpool University Press), is a British writer and academic who works as a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Westminster. Her debut collection *Speculum* was published by Broken Sleep Books in 2021. *Lapwing*, her second, was a Poetry Book Society Summer 2024 Recommendation and shortlisted for the 2024 Laurel Prize. Her work has appeared in *POETRY*, *The London Magazine*, *Anthropocene*, *Blackbox Manifest*, *Poetry Birmingham Literary Journal*, *Under the Radar*, *bath magg*, *Annethology* and other publications. She runs poetry events at the Soho Poly in London and is an editor at *Stand*, where she first started as a student volunteer. Photo © Nick Dennis



Perspectives on *Lapwing*

'Voice and agency are given to the Lapwing, we enter into their world, their bodies, their minds and soul, speaking their language "panicked pees, weep weep / softening into prose." We are caught up in the conversations and thoughts of Peet and Lapwing, waxing lyrical about living and surviving in a world, overlapping birds and humans. We are carried away on a bird song.' – **Roy McFarlane, *PBS Bulletin***

'*Lapwing* is a poetic biography of a bird and the word itself, but it is also a sideways and jagged attempt to understand addiction and the ways it can vanish a life. I see it as a book-length sequence made up of multiple, overlapping forms, but there are a few clear voices in conversation. The numerical poems are concerned with the titular figure of Lapwing, an enigmatic bird slowly disappearing beneath addiction and habitat loss. His journeying is interwoven with that of his daughter Peet and her attempts to locate

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What do you think?

- Where does the description of a bird stop in 'Description' and that of a person begin? What is a neutral description, what isn't? What judgement is being passed on whom?
- Who are the 'them' of line 11 of 'She thought it was just the regular carnage'? What's the strongest perspective in this poem – that of the human or the animal?
- How does the context of 'Sighting' (an ornithological report or piece of found text placed in a collection referencing fathers, daughters and addiction) affect how you interpret it?
- Imagine you have an hour-long slot on BBC4 or Sky Arts to feature this book. What sort of programme are you making? A documentary, an adaptation, an animation? What do you want to tell or show viewers about the book?

Reply in writing

Are you writing a collection or a sequence currently? If not, what was the last poem that you wrote? Look for a piece of relevant found text and present it as an accompaniment to your poem or poems. How do the poems and the found text comment on each other?

Find out more

Other books by Hannah Copley

Speculum (Broken Sleep Books, 2021)

Something to watch

Find Hannah Copley reading online at bit.ly/copleyspeculum and bit.ly/copleynewpf

Visit hannahcopley.wordpress.com

If you like Hannah Copley's work, try...

- Pascale Petit
- Jemma Borg
- Carrie Etter

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](https://twitter.com/tseliotprize)

[Description]

'Last seen in his winter plumage. Black and white
from a safe distance, metallic olive at close range.

Undertail coverts rufous, cinnamon tinged,
thin legs of bright red flesh. Almost raw looking.

Often mistaken for Hoopoe, which riles him.

Black pectoral band, white flank, with a dark ring
of colour beneath each eye the thickness of paint.
Longest feather of his crest once boasted at four inches.
Wings an iridescent green. Seen only when flying away.

Will go by Peewit, Plover, Tew-it, Lhapwynche,
Peet-Peet-Peet, Toppo, Kievit, Lappewincke, Pater,
Vanellus vanellus, Phillipeen.'

Is that all?

'Just that everything he says sounds like a question.'

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She thought it was just the regular carnage –

robin hurling its sweet tune from the copse,
the churlish red kites circling the field like clock hands,
crows fussing, as down below every straggler
and time waster and early bird and misdirected
and unhatched and already dead get threshed
to less than pieces –

but turns out there's to be a new crop. The old barley field
gets stripped of all memory. A brown field in March
bathed in sun and drilled fresh with sugar beet. Whistle is,
there are going to be shortages, or else surplus.

Of what, none of them know. All the old nests
wiped and sown and everyone ploughed back

into themselves. A new beginning on the old
burial ground. Already, the moles are moving in.

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[SIGHTING

Canada, January 1927

At their first coming they appeared very weary, thin and tame, but began at once to search for and find food on the ground; and as they rested and gained strength, they became wilder and noisier. No evidence is at hand as to whether females as well as males were present, the small differences between the sexes not being noticeable in the circumstances. They soon crossed St. Lawrence Gulf to Cape Breton and scattered over Nova Scotia, even finding their way to the remote island of Grand Manan. In New Brunswick they were quickly reported about the city of St. John, where it is said that hundreds were soon killed by a great snowfall.]

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