

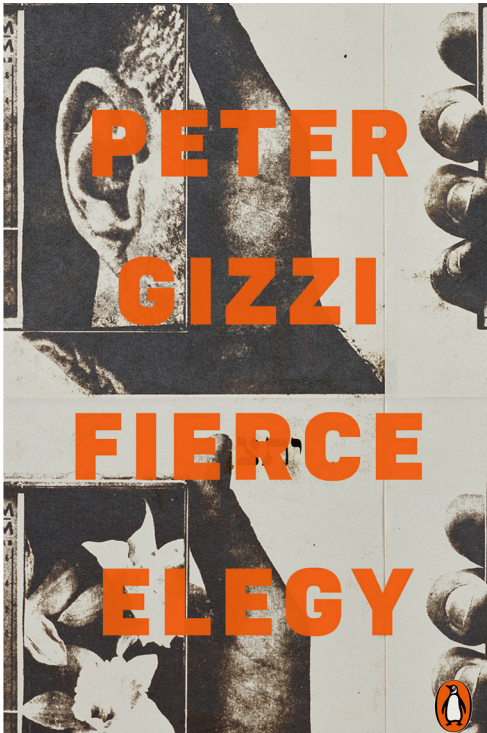
T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

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



Fierce Elegy
(Penguin Poetry,
2024) by
Peter Gizzi.
bit.ly/gizzifierce

Perspectives on *Fierce Elegy*

'With his last several collections, Peter Gizzi has distinguished himself as one of America's finest living poets [...] Mark Strand said all poems are elegies. Gizzi would probably agree. Although he has called *Fierce Elegy* a single book-length elegy, *Fierce Elegy* doesn't read that way. Too many of the poems have a different feel, and different forms, and the collection also includes love poems like 'Roxy Music' and 'Ecstatic Joy and Its Variants'. But given the elegiac tone throughout, it seems useless to argue the point. You could say Gizzi's entire body of work is one long elegy.'

– James O'Connor, *Harvard Review Online*

"Love", "wounds", "sky", "moon", "mirror", "tears" – the most cliched words in poetry. But what of it, Gizzi asks, if the spectre of death continues to make us into cliched subjects? "If I write about the moon, / it's because it's there." Lyrics of resignation are juxtaposed with ecstatic lines that reimagine silence as "conversations with the dead". Spare and raked of impurities, these poems reside in an airy purgatory of the soul:

"To have died in youth and remain. / To be good with that. // To forget now who was speaking." Although composed in an "old language" that reminds us of tradition, in its beautiful, fiery insistence this collection redeclares the elegy as the undying practice of the living.' – Oluwaseun Olayiwola, *The Guardian*

'[R]ather than a continuous utterance, Gizzi's rhythms are those of words teased, wrested, chiseled, and siphoned out of the darkness, with all of the nuances of sound those operations imply [...] *Fierce Elegy* differs equally from elegies that establish strong ties to a tradition (e.g., Milton) and from those that imagine themselves as wholly anti-elegy (e.g., Plath and Ginsberg). It omits not only proper names but dead addressees altogether, and the affect set in most salient contrast to sadness is actually ecstasy.'

– John Steen, *The Poetry Project*

About the poet

Peter Gizzi was born in Alma, Michigan. He is the author of eleven collections of poetry, including: *Now It's Dark* (2020); *Archeophonics* (2016), a finalist for the National Book Award; *Threshold Songs* (2011); and *In Defense of Nothing: Selected Poems, 1987–2011* (2014). *Sky Burial: New & Selected Poems* was published by Carcanet Press in 2020. Gizzi has also published several limited-edition chapbooks, folios and artist books. Marjorie Perloff has called him 'a master of the mot juste'; Robert Creeley, 'one of the most exceptional poets of his generation'. Adrienne Rich has said 'his disturbing lyricism is like no other'; and John Ashbery thought him 'the most exciting new poet to come along in quite a while'. He lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

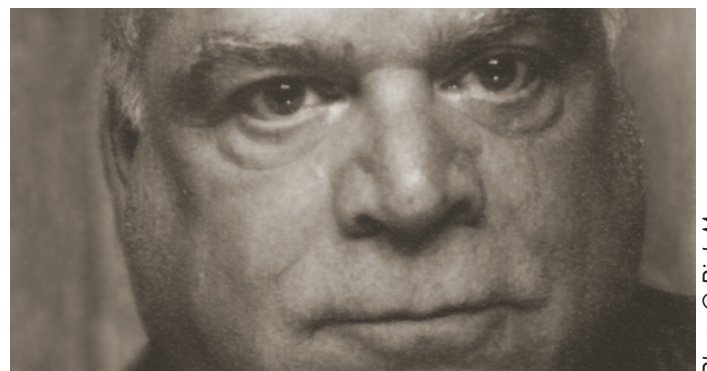


Photo © Rick Myers

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What do you think?

- Is 'Dissociadelic' a song of praise? Praising what? What do you make of the title? What definition would you give the word?
- 'You don't write no more, sluggard' – what sort of 'old language' is this, in 'Roxy Music'? Here's a [link](#) to Roxy Music in their pomp nearly fifty years ago. How does the title of this poem connect to its content?
- If you were to read 'But the Heart in a Sense Is Far from Me Floating Out There' at a funeral, what would you be offering the mourners? (Note, you can also hear this poem as a song at [beatport.com](#))
- James O'Connor, in his review of Gizzi's book in *Harvard Review Online*, wrote 'Mark Strand said all poems are elegies. Gizzi would probably agree.' Do you agree with Mark Strand? What or whom are the three poems we've selected elegising?

Reply in writing

Consider that phrase 'the afterlife of the beloved'. What does it mean to you, who is the beloved, what does the afterlife look like or feel like? Is the afterlife a place or a condition? Write the elegy you need to.

Find out more

Other books by Peter Gizzi

Sky Burial: New & Selected Poems (Carcenet Poetry, 2020)

Now It's Dark (Wesleyan University Press, 2020)

Archeophonics (Wesleyan University Press, 2016)

Something to watch

View the Rain Taxi online event with Peter Gizzi reading alongside Ocean Vuong at [bit.ly/gizzionlinereading](#) and Gizzi reading at CHAX Fine Poetry Press's Enclave series at [bit.ly/gizzienclave](#)

If you like Peter Gizzi's work, try...

- Mark Doty
- Denise Riley
- John Ashbery

About the T. S. Eliot Prize

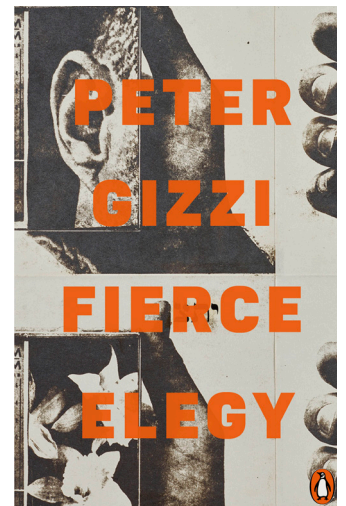
The T. S. Eliot Prize, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year, is awarded annually to the best new poetry collection published in the UK and Ireland. The Prize was founded by the Poetry Book Society in 1993 to celebrate the PBS's 40th birthday and to honour its founding poet. It has been run 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](#)

Dissociadelic

To be a desperate player
in the invisible world.
This is something different.
To have crossed over into ink
and to loiter and bleed out
on the occasion of the universe.
I've learned this.
My spirit broke long ago
so I won't be broken.
This is something quite different
inside the song.
Blurs. Gestures. Something loved.
Come as you are, collapsing
and thriving with endings
like beginnings.
When 8 Ball says "ask again."
When the day reveals
the prismatic systems of loss,
a blinding shimmer
on new blacktop in a sun shower.
Everything always in black.
Black wax. Black dress. Black hole.
Whatever.
When you're brought to your knees,
sing a song of praise.
When you're gutted,
embrace the whorl. FTW.
There's nothing like it.

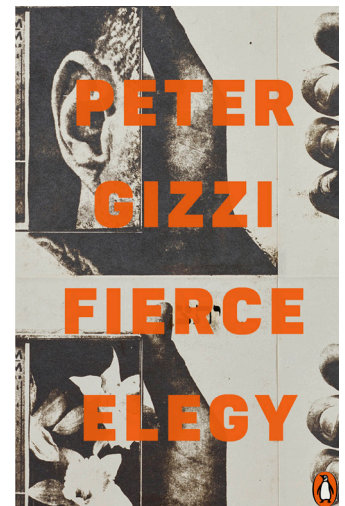


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Roxy Music

The old language reminds us of tradition; of nights, of tapers billowing by the window; of balmy and aromatic breezes; recalls historically, our girl asks for a poem; each week or so says, where is my poem, you don't write no more, sluggard; I say, I don't care, when I see you and we buckle and your shirt is on the chair and the room is blowsy, poetry don't matter; after, when I saw you in the mirror, I wrote: poetry died today.



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But the Heart in a Sense Is Far from Me Floating Out There

Hold on to the afterlife of the beloved, it's the
only thing that's yours

Hold on to whatever magic in the backyard where
we bury our thoughts, things of the world

Things of the world like an afterlife of the world
to bury our setting outness

It's right to extract bone from the afterlife, dust
collecting shoes, relics of the afterlife

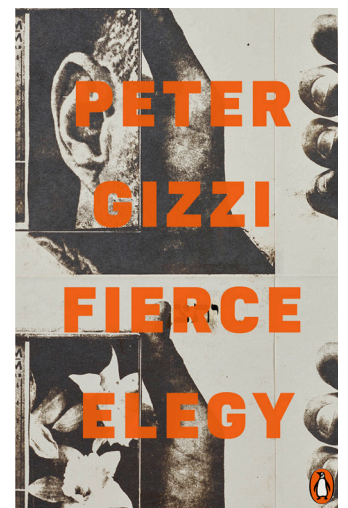
Cut a hole in the poem to play peekaboo with
the afterlife

Rebuild my house out of sky, blur my memoria
into song

Make my headdress the right size to salute the
emptiness alive in the beloved

The humanness of the beloved, the beloved and
the night sky

Shapes floating out there becoming the beloved,
the abstract, the total



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