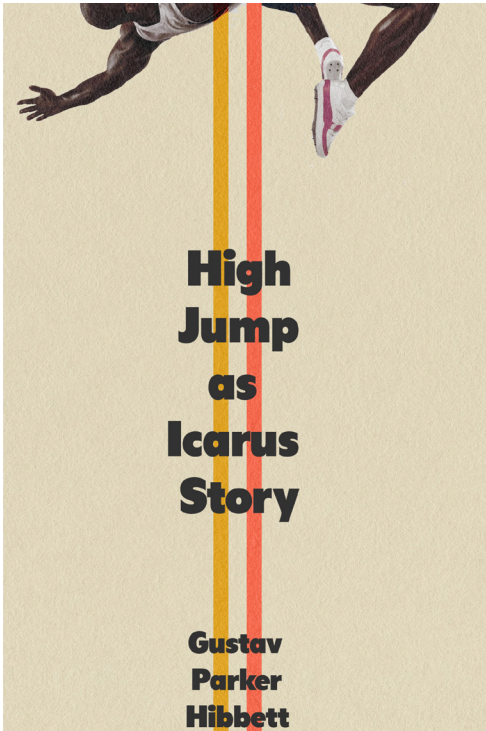


T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

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.



High Jump as Icarus Story (Banshee Press, 2024) by Gustav Parker Hibbett. bit.ly/icarushibbett

of myths surrounding Black masculinity, and an attempt to forge a private self-mythology complex enough to contain all kinds of contradictions.

The approach is improvisational, playful: as the title suggests, the poems plug elements of autobiography into the mainframe of different mythic structures, trying them out. But none of the archetypes Hibbett draws on, from ancient Greek heroes and Shakespearean monsters to modern cinema and music, feel random: they all feel weighty, as if chosen with a quiet reverence and held together associatively.' – Ruby Eastwood, *Books Ireland*

'These are poems of real grace, poems in which the intellect and form are harmonised and made to move together. Gods and mythic figures provide the relief-work and architecture for a moving exploration of Blackness, the body, philosophy and so much more. Stylish, tender, playful and rigorous all at once, in this collection Parker Hibbett proves themselves to be one of our most compelling new voices.' – Seán Hewitt

About the poet

Gustav Parker Hibbett is a Black poet, essayist, and MFA dropout. Hibbett was born in the USA and currently resides in Ireland. They are a 2023 Obsidian Foundation Fellow, a 2024 Djanikian Scholars Finalist, and featured in 32 *Poems* as an Emerging Poet. They are currently pursuing a PhD in Literary Practice at Trinity College Dublin, where they are an Early Career Research Fellow at the Long Room Hub. *High Jump as Icarus Story* is Hibbett's first poetry collection.



Photo © Abbie McNeice

On *High Jump as Icarus Story*

'This stunningly accomplished debut deconstructs and redefines notions of Blackness, queerness, and masculinity through the lenses of myth, pop culture, and that most transcendent of sports – the high jump.

Formally inventive, these poems speak in a vulnerable, rapturous voice that urges us to reimagine our possible selves, while navigating a labyrinthine America that conjures its young into monsters. Taking us from the arroyos of New Mexico to a West Cork farm in winter, these meditations on beauty and the elusive nature of love are insightful and hard-won: the spirit triumphs, even when the body falls.'

–Banshee Press blurb

'If, as Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested, "the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction", then a problem arises when the myths available to us can no longer contain, let alone overcome, the contradictions of our lived experience.

[...] *High Jump as Icarus Story* is a complex re-examination

T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

What do you think?

- Religious practice and athletics practice: the two habits are set side by side in 'High Jump as Religious Calling'. Where are the similarities and differences for you?
- Are you a sporty person? An individual athlete or a team member? Do you watch sports, are you bored by sports? How might a reading of the poem alter depending on those perspectives?
- Who might be pulling the string of the marionette in 'High Jump as Religious Calling' and why?
- 'Joni Mitchell dresses up as me (II)' is preceded in the book by the poem 'Joni Mitchell dresses up as me'. The note to the latter reads: '[this poem] is written in reference to Joni Mitchell's blackface alter ego, whom she called 'Art Nouveau' and who appears on the cover of her album *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*. Joni once told *LA Weekly* that: "I don't have the soul of a white woman. I write like a black poet. I frequently write from a black perspective.'" What does the speaker of the poem(s) suggest about how 'we see ourselves'?
- Who once told the speaker of 'Icarus' about the birds? What is the speaker doing to the 'you' of the penultimate line? Who told you about Icarus? How do these myths get passed down, and who decides what form they take?

Reply in writing

Carol Ann Duffy has already written the poem 'Mrs Icarus' – but what if Icarus himself was a woman? Write that myth.

Find out more

Other work by Gustav Parker Hibbett

Poems in *London Magazine*, *Guernica*, *The Adroit Journal* and *Propel Magazine* throughout 2023, *Banshee* and *The Missouri Review* in 2022.

Something to watch

See Gustav Parker Hibbett reading their poem 'orientation' for Peach Bites at bit.ly/gphorientation

If you like Gustav Parker Hibbett's work, try...

- Fiona Benson
- Jason Allen-Paisant
- Rebecca Perry

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

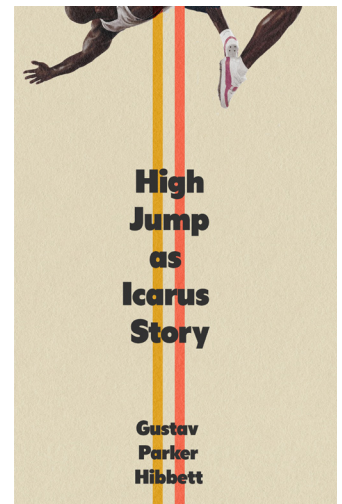
- Hear our shortlisted poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 12 January 2025. Hosted by Ian McMillan and British Sign Language interpreted, readings are simultaneously live streamed to a worldwide audience. Book for in-person tickets at 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)

High Jump as Religious Calling

Prayer, like anything, takes practice.
To put your back to a bar and jump
without looking, bend your knees
and bend them again, feel without
touching, without turning back to look.

Trust, like anything, takes practice.
You're the kid who always sits where
they can see a room, and knows the exits.
Learn to move like a marionette
pulled up at the waist by a string,
up and slightly back, almost forgetting
what's behind you. Up, then back.
Practise holding this position: arms
and forehead up and backward,
pelvis lifted skyward. Eyes shut,
memorize the arc your body makes.

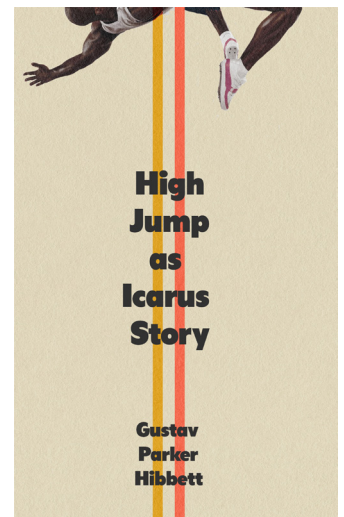
Back-overs, like anything, take practice.
Submit yourself to muscle memory,
until trust replaces knowing. Liquid,
head thrown backwards, floating:
you begin each practice like this.



High Jump as Icarus Story (Banshee Press, 2024) by Gustav Parker Hibbett. bit.ly/icarushibbett

Joni Mitchell dresses up as me (II)

When she leaves me in a pile
at the end of her bed, turns back
into herself for sleep, I up and walk
the streets, the jagged jazz clubs, alleys
of the white imagination, trail smoky
grace notes in my wake. Dance with
other muses, bodies, curios, on break
from metaphor: Saartjie Baartman back
from endless exhibition; the Zealy seven
cut, emancipated, from daguerreotype: Alfred,
Renty, Drana, Fassena, Jack, Jem, Delia; Caliban,
Othello. We end most nights with candles, whiskey
tumblers, playing cards at bars with little tables
where we laugh off all that makes our eyelids
heavy, stay for hours in the minutes before
morning dawns. Part with kisses on both cheeks,
reminders of the kind of love that stains us
lipstick-red, until we see ourselves again.



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Icarus

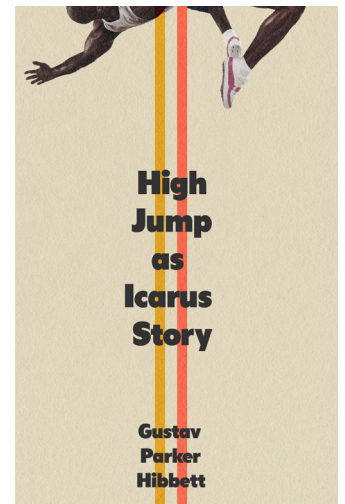
I was told once about erupting volcanoes, how sometimes
the steam from their cones melts the wings off birds,
how you can stand at a safe distance
and watch their skeletons fall.

I was told that it's beautiful –
sad, alarming, of course – but beautiful
to watch them almost evaporate.

What goes through a bird's mind
in that last instant before the steam,
before its mind and body split?

Does it see the steam,
the shimmer in the air ahead,
and choose, still, to keep flying?

And when the steam keeps rising,
as you know it does, without the bird,
does it take the wings with it?



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