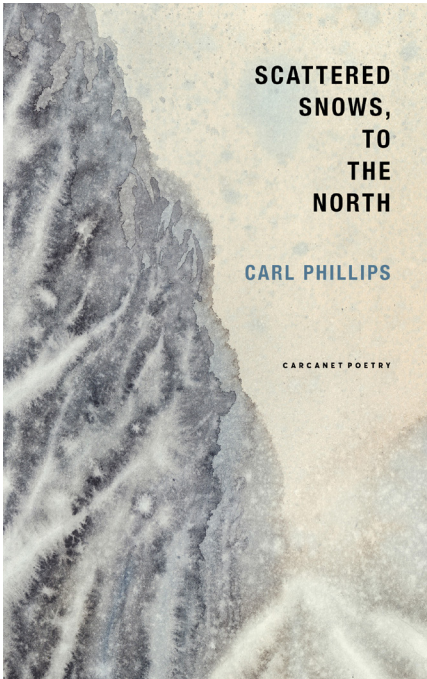


T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

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.



Scattered Snows, to the North (Carcanet Press, 2024) by Carl Phillips. bit.ly/snowsphillips

about Eros, death, memory, and the troubling climate of our time. This is the best that poetry offers – earthly but not earthbound, self-aware yet never self-indulgent, philosophical but with a firm awareness of emotional puzzlement. “You can treat the past / like a piece of fine glass to see yourself / reflected in; or to see through”, Phillips writes. Reminiscent of late WB Yeats, Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop, his muscular, interrogative poetry investigates “the beautiful colors // of extinction”, admitting that “the truth is [...] an over-washed sweatshirt, sometimes on / purpose worn inside out”. Phillips has an unparalleled gift for teasing out the peculiarity of grammar and syntax; his breath-long, branching lines move in an unpredictable pattern that keeps our hearts stopping and racing: “Like looking / violence for once straight / in the face and watching it / turn, if not gentler, then // differently violent, and / telling yourself that’s not / nothing, at least, and // calling it Eros.” Open-minded, erudite and deeply moving, this book of love and memory will withstand years of rereading.’ – Kit Fan, *The Guardian*

On *Scattered Snows, to the North*

‘Some poets seek topics never before explored. Others look around and see what seems constant, from antiquity to today: autumn and winter; aging and death; erotic desire, and our regret if it fades.

Carl Phillips belongs to that second group. He writes about those simplest, oldest things with a syntax so unpredictable, so elaborate, that they can seem almost new, even when – as in his new book, *Scattered Snows, to the North* – he writes as a man looking back over much of his life [...]

This 17th book of his poems – his first since winning a Pulitzer last year for his new-and-selected *Then the War* – does a lot of remembering, and even more self-questioning. Its attitudes range from the wistful and nearly Proustian to the bitter and nearly pedestrian, as if Phillips cannot quite bring himself to accept how much love he has lost, nor how many leaves have touched the ground.’
– Stephanie Burt, *The New York Times*

‘After 16 books of poems and a Pulitzer, Phillips gives us another pitch-perfect collection, a meditative chorus

About the poet

Carl Phillips is the author of seventeen books of poetry. They include *Then the War and Selected Poems, 2007–2020* (Carcanet Press, 2022), which won the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Phillips has also written three prose books, most recently *My Trade Is Mystery: Seven Meditations from a Life in Writing* (Yale University Press, 2022). After more than thirty years of teaching at Washington University in St. Louis, he lives on Cape Cod, Massachusetts.



Photo © Reston Allen

T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

What do you think?

- What does it mean, to 'catch a wind god breathing', as in 'Vikings'?
- What might it feel like to hate etymology?
- What is the most ordinary pleasure you experience? Are those last three images of 'The Closing Hour' (the beast, the crown, the wreath) ordinary?
- What might the dark ship symbolise in 'Rehearsal'?

Reply in writing

Write a poem about a wind god. There are plenty to pick from (try an online search) – or you might want to conjure up a local one of your own.

Find out more

Other work by Carl Phillips

Then the War and Selected Poems, 2007–2020 (Carcanet Press, 2022)

Pale Colors in a Tall Field (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2020)

Wild Is the Wind (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2018)

Something to watch

You can find the Eliot Prize videos of Carl Phillips reading from *Scattered Snows, to the North* on the Eliot Prize YouTube channel. Find him discussing cooking, singing, dancing, desire, his writing process and his book *Then the War* in an excellent Carcanet video at bit.ly/phillipsthenthewar

If you like Carl Phillips's work, try...

- Michael Longley
- Jane Clarke
- Robert Minhinnick

www.carlphillipspoet.com

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

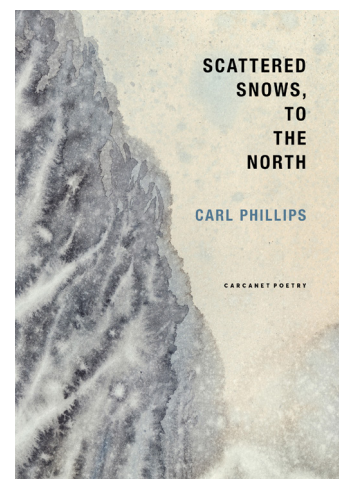
- Hear our shortlisted poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 12 January 2025. Hosted by Ian McMillan and British Sign Language interpreted, readings are simultaneously live streamed to a worldwide audience. Book for in-person tickets at bit.ly/eliot24reading or for the live stream at bit.ly/eliot24livestream
- Explore the Shortlist with Eliot Prize winner Joelle Taylor at the **Poetry School's Preview Workshop**, 2pm, Sunday 12 January 2025. See bit.ly/2024eliotpreview for details.
- 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
- Browse the brilliant **Writers' Notes series**, devised by our partner the Poetry School, in which Eliot Prize shortlisted poets reflect on the writing of their nominated collections at bit.ly/writersnotes2024
- **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



Vikings

The Vikings thought the wind was a god, that the eyes were holes. A window meant a wind-eye, for the god to see with, and at the same time through. I used to hate etymology – What’s the point, I’d whisper: I was quieter back then, less patient, though more easily pleased. I am pleased to have been of use, I used to say to myself, after sex with strangers. Leaning hard against the upstairs window, I’d watch them make their half proud, half ashamed-looking way wherever, and if it was

autumn – whether in fact, or only metaphorically – I’d watch the yard fill with leaves, then with what I at first thought was urgency, though it usually turned out just to be ambition. I’d leave the window open, as I do now – if closed, I open it – then pull the drapes shut across it, which of the many I’ve tried remains the best way I know, still, to catch a wind god breathing.

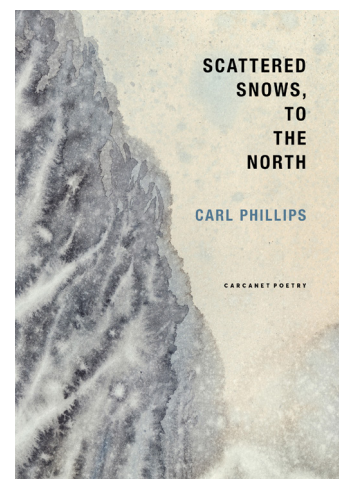


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The Closing Hour

There are pleasures so ordinary that we barely notice them. They leave no impression worth mentioning, even. Not the leaves but the delicate under-leaves that we'd somehow missed. Not the stranger whom we've never met, whom we pass on the walk each morning, but the matched set of off-white-not-quite-ivory-though spaniels that seem to float like two patches of low fog to either side of him. I used to worry about the impression I left on others; and then I really don't remember which came first: I grew up? I grew tired? Desire had become by then something different from what it had been. More hurricane than tornado, its damage therefore more easily at least prepared against, if not forestalled. That certain gestures don't so much linger as seem to make a routine of unexpectedly becoming more apparent some moments than at others doesn't mean we miss them, means there were parts that we loved. I regret almost nothing. I come in peace A lost beast A crown of feather grass A matching wreath



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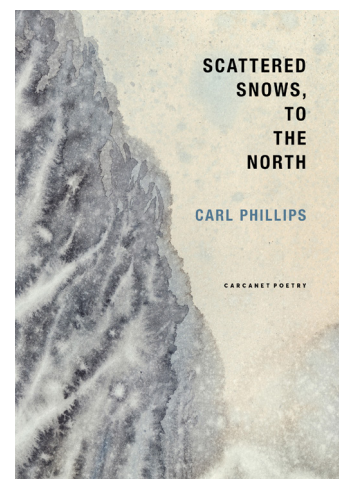


Rehearsal

By then the point of the forest was the getting through it. Then it lay behind them, all but its sharper details – flies licking at dried blood, I think, on a random tree stump – getting swiftly lost, its muffled birdsong, too, that had come less, it seemed, from the trees than from beneath, mostly, as if somewhere deep, deep inside the earth. Maybe meeting you has been the one good reason I lasted so long in a world that must eventually not include me, I almost said to him. Past the forest,

the shore, where the land ended, where briefly the waves hitting it seemed the latest example of how squandering momentum can become routine; while, upon the waves, the taken-for-grantedness of shadow play seemed its own example: how one way to prove power can be to quietly assume it. Then except for offshore, where the dark lay like – defiantly – a ship at anchor, everything was itself. As it always had been. They took off their shoes, their clothes.

They swam out to the dark ship.



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