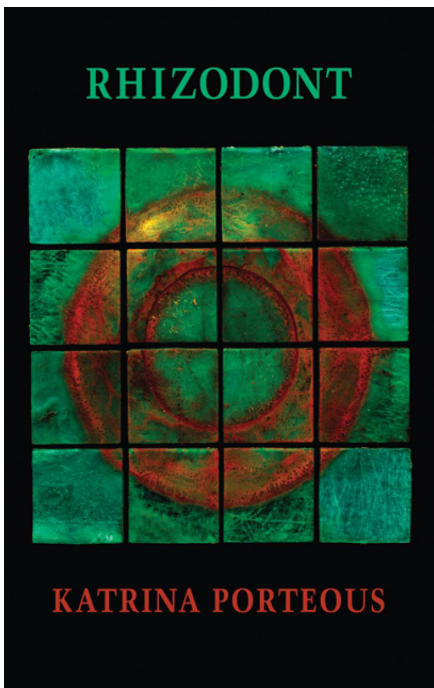


T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

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.



Rhizodont (Bloodaxe Books, 2024) by Katrina Porteous.
bit.ly/porteousrhizodont

On *Rhizodont*

'*Rhizodont* does for the mining and fishing communities of post-Thatcher Northumberland what Heaney did for mid century Mid-Ulster, archiving the vast richness of its language, culture and work-lives. Porteous' painterly eye for detail gives depth and resonance to the histories and dramas of her human and non-human subjects alike.' – Dave Coates, *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*

'This detailed and wide-ranging collection, while rooted in the North East, explores global landscapes and themes of ecology and community.' – Will Mackie, *New Writing North Summer Round-up*

'What are we doing to the planet? What is technology doing to us? These are the common themes [...] within the new collection of poetry by Katrina Porteous, who might well be described as the laureate of the Northumberland coast.' – Greg Freeman, *Write Out Loud*

'Porteous's new collection begins with a lovingly-observed contemporary journey through [...] ancient landscapes, from

the former coal-mining communities of the Durham coast, where the coal-bearing Carboniferous strata are overlain with younger rocks, to the Northumberland shores where the rhizodont's remains were found. Against a backdrop of vast geological time and recent fossil-fuel burning history, these poems address current issues of social and environmental change. They are followed by two sequences about aspects of the latest technological revolution – autonomous systems and AI, and the remote-sensing techniques used to explore the most inaccessible reaches of our planet, Antarctica, to measure Earth's changing climate.

The poems unfold from England's North-East coast into global questions of evolution, survival and extinction – in communities and languages, and throughout the natural world, where hope resides in Life's astonishing powers of reinvention.' – Publisher's blurb

About the poet

Katrina Porteous was born in Aberdeen and has lived on the Northumberland coast since 1987. Many of the poems in her first collection, *The Lost Music* (Bloodaxe Books, 1996), explore the Northumbrian fishing community. Her second, *Two Countries* (Bloodaxe Books, 2014), was shortlisted for the Portico Prize for Literature in 2015. *Edge* (Bloodaxe Books, 2019) draws on collaborations commissioned for performance in the Life Science Centre's planetarium, Newcastle, between 2013 and 2016, with multi-channel electronic music by the late Peter Zinovieff. Porteous often performs with musicians, and is particularly known for her radio-poetry broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 and 4. In 2021 she received a Cholmondeley Award from the Society of Authors.



Photo © Tony Griffiths

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What do you think?

- Is 'A Short Walk from the Sea's Edge' a poem of judgement?
- Is 'Northern Wheatear' a poem for an ornithologist or an archaeologist?
- Think about your favourite museum, who founded it, what role it was playing for its visitors at the time, and how that might have changed since. How does 'The Website at the End of the World' relate to that set of circumstances? What's shameful about the contents of a museum? Can you have a shameless museum?
- What might the speaker of 'The Website at the End of the World' make of this online article at bit.ly/humanaipoetry?

Reply in writing

'The Website at the End of the World' was written in response to the question 'What would you place in your Imaginary Museum?', a commission from the November Club at the Lit & Phil in Newcastle. How would you respond to the same question?

Find out more

Other work by Katrina Porteous

Edge (Bloodaxe Books, 2019)

Two Countries (Bloodaxe Books, 2014)

The Lost Music (Bloodaxe Books, 1996)

Something to watch

You can find the Eliot Prize videos of Katrina Porteous reading from *Rhizodont* on the Eliot Prize YouTube channel.

View the online launch of *Rhizodont* at bit.ly/porteouslaunch and Katrina reading outdoors at bit.ly/porteousforeshore

If you like Katrina Porteous's work, try...

- Ted Hughes
- Philip Gross
- Karen Solie

katrinaporteousdotcodotuk.wordpress.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

READERS' NOTES POEMS

A Short Walk from the Sea's Edge (Horden, County Durham)

The Sea is History – Derek Walcott

The coal is beginning again – Sean O'Brien, 'Fantasia on a Theme of James Wright'

Our Billy's Da walks the dog on the Grassy Banks each morning.
Seventy steps below, in the soft ochre shelf,
Each new tide kirves its jud. Its strata an archive,
The beach is forgetting itself.

The coast path tells one story, and the shore another.
A steep drop, headlong, precipitous. Inaccessible, inviting,
The sea rolls its old stones, stained fiery amber. 'Once
The worst pollution anywhere in Europe,' boasts the sign.

Now hogweed and scrub willow are slowly erasing that hard-drive;
Shales, pyrites, oxides, remember hermit crabs, rock pools.
Inland, behind the railway line, our Billy's granddaughter,
Chloe, checks in with Insta before school.

Our Billy's Chloe has no word for bluebell or cowslip,
Willow or yellowhammer. Granda's pigeons wheel and turn
Over the tracks, but she doesn't know *stobbie* from *skjemmie*.
A soft breeze blows from the beach. A smell of burning.

Lads on their dirt-bikes down the slacks. Amid the limestone rubble,
Tall reeds, rushes, someone has tried to set that sign alight,
Photographs of butterflies, orchids, twisted, distorted.
Half a mile from the coast, impenetrably tight,

The roofs, rows, back lanes – safety. Chloe has a butterfly
Emoji glued to every nail. Her own words – *Gels*, *Acrylics*, *Apps* –
Incomprehensible to Billy's ears, are strange, untranslatable
As *yella-yowlie*, *gowdspink* are on Snapchat.

The old words clatter off men's lips: honeycombs of tree-bark
And giant ferns, frozen in mudstone, sinking into slag
In the relentless crunch and uproar of immense machinery –
Canch, *post*, *rammel*. *NCB*. *The Low Main*. *Maggie*. *Scab*.

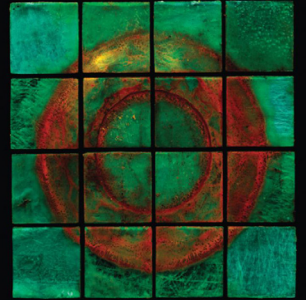
Beyond them, wordless, stretch the fields, the sea. Glued to her phone,
Chloe waits at the bus-stop on the Coast Road, at the edge of the Dene
Where, among *sparty* ground, green *seggs*, gigantic ferns
And spidery horsetails, the coal is beginning again.

2024

T. S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT
PRIZE

RHIZODONT



KATRINA PORTEOUS

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bit.ly/porteousrhizodont

kirve a jud: in mining, to undercut a section of coal before taking it down; *stobbie*: unfledged pigeon; *skjemmie*: weak, sickly pigeon; *yella-yowlie*: yellowhammer; *gowdspink*: goldfinch; *canch*: large slabs of stone removed from a coalmine to make space; *post*: hard sandstone; *rammel*: loose stones; *NCB*: the National Coal Board, the statutory authority which ran the nationalised coal industry from 1946 until its demise in 1987; *The Low Main*: one of the deep seams worked at Horden pit; *Maggie*: Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister at the time of the 1984–85 miners' strike and subsequent pit closures; *scab*: a strike-breaker; *sparty*: damp, marshy; *seggs*: sedge and rushes.

Northern Wheatear (Low Hauxley, Northumberland)

Here I am, the same colours –
Pit dust on my wing tip,
Radcliffe brick on my breast –

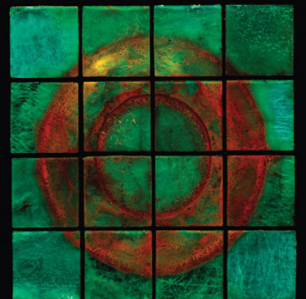
A teaspoon of blood, nerve and feather
Lit for a moment
On the colliery rubble, chipping flint

On a concrete lintel sinking
Into wartime sand. Though I go
By a different name, I am

The same Wheatear you saw
On the dunes that summer
You stepped out of the wet

Scented forest – that swoop
You felt, fear. The same courage.
The same soaring hope

RHIZODONT



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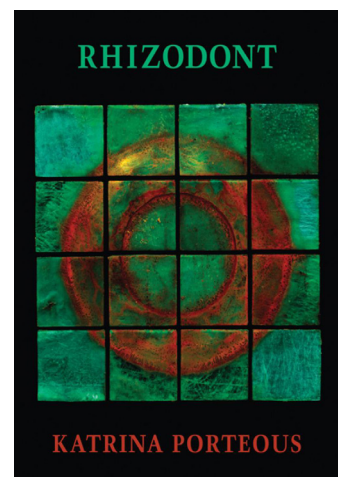


The Website at the End of the World

To the Museum of the Future I bequeath
My digital footprint;
My wandering snail-trail of websites, my cookies, my clickbait,
My peculiar archived obsessions, orientations,
My status updates, my step-count, my heart-rate, my Fitbit,
My jumbled cupboards, the dreams that I do not remember,
What I did, what I said, where I went in my head, and with whom.
What I actually probably thought when I thought I thought different.

When I Googled my future – my Final Judgement
A boot-sale of data, my immortal soul
A shimmering hologram of preferences, proclivities – my shame,
The banal inside-out of my Favourites, was indexed, on show.
It predicted the loop of my contacts, faces at my funeral –
Their marks out of ten, unacceptable opinions,
Personal anxieties, body mass index, their probable death-dates.
Your name.

Your phone wants to guess the end of this poem
Based on the premise that you demand more of the same.



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