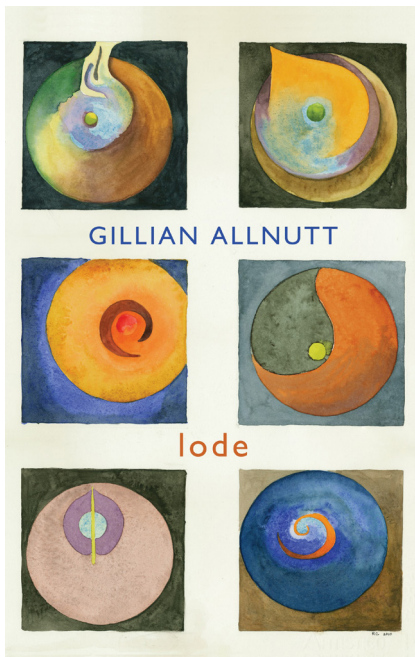


# T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2025 READERS' NOTES

The T. S. Eliot Prize 2025 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.



*Lode* (Bloodaxe Books, 2025) by Gillian Allnutt.  
[www.bloodaxebooks.com](http://www.bloodaxebooks.com)

## On *Lode*

'[*Lode*] unfolds as a triptych: beginning with war and its aftermath, moving through the strange terrain of the Covid era, and arriving in an unsettled present. The poems draw deeply from the spiritual and natural worlds, as well as the lives of the poet and those closest to her. These are spare words, minimal and restrained. [...] And *Lode*? A journey, a seam of buried ore. Something discovered, uncovered – gleaming quietly, like this collection.' – Jane Pikett, *The Northumbrian*

'Despite being awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2016, Gillian Allnutt remains beneath the radar even of many well-informed readers. This is odd, because there's no better poet alive in England, and no better poet of England, either. Her poetry is full of English plants and places, and it inhabits, too, the full historical landscape of English poetry: from Chaucer to Eliot, via Shakespeare, Blake, Hopkins and Julian of Norwich. That risks making her sound learned and difficult, a sort of female Geoffrey Hill. But Allnutt's poetry has the smooth, rich patina of old furniture (one of her favourite words): shaped by time, but lovely to handle and apt for use.' – Victoria Moul, *Times Literary Supplement*

'This is her tenth collection, showing work that becomes ever more closely focussed, not only on her immediate surroundings but on connections – both material and spiritual – to a larger world. [...] In recent collections Allnutt's poetry has settled into a close and quiet attentiveness to the minutiae of life, and how this informs our relationship with things of the spirit. She is writing of herself, of her own observed experience, but this expands to become universal. This is in sharp contrast to much of what is published in the third decade of the twenty-first century and we should treasure her work, reading it slowly and giving it the contemplation it deserves.' – D. A. Prince, *The High Window*

## About the poet

Gillian Allnutt was born in London but spent half her childhood in Newcastle upon Tyne. *Nantucket and the Angel* (1997) and *Lintel* (2001) were shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and poems from these collections are included in her Bloodaxe retrospective *How the Bicycle Shone: New & Selected Poems* (2007), a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation. *Lode* (Bloodaxe Books) is her tenth collection. Since 1983 she has taught creative writing in a variety of contexts, mainly in adult education and as a writer in schools. In 1988 she returned to live in the North East. In 2009/10 she held a writing residency with The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (now Freedom From Torture) in the North East, working with asylum seekers in Newcastle and Stockton. She won the Northern Rock Foundation Writer's Award in 2005 and received a Cholmondeley Award in 2010. In 2025 she was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Allnutt received The Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry 2016.



Photo © Phyllis Christopher

# T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2025 READERS' NOTES

## What do you think?

- The note to 'Poem for John Clinging' reads: 'My mother's brother John was the navigator in an RAF Lancaster bomber shot down over France in April 1943. The plane and its crew of seven exploded in the air. I knew him only as a photograph in a silver frame on the sideboard in my grand-parents' house in South-east London. Brodie Anderson was my grandfather's name.' What do you make of that word 'miscarried' in this poem?
- What's the word 'gallimaufry' doing in the poem 'Mask'? What about 'celanese'? Is Satan's appearance a surprise?
- What is experiencing the sea-change in 'Sea Change'? 'As if [...] you could' – is such a change even possible?
- The note to 'Sea Change' reads 'Pteropods are minute free-floating marine snails that make up the base of the oceanic food web. Like coccolithophores, they build themselves shells of calcium carbonate. (The current increasing acidification of the ocean is affecting these shells, thinning and damaging them.) Around seventy million years ago what is now the south coast of England was submerged beneath a shallow sea. The sea bottom was made of a white mud formed from the fragments of coccoliths – the skeletons of tiny algae that lived in the surface waters of the sea. This mud became the chalk of which the White Cliffs of Dover are built.' How might that new knowledge about the geology of the White Cliffs of Dover affect your reading of the poem?

## Reply in writing

'Mask' deploys one personified element of the pandemic to recall the entire Covid experience. Using this poem as a starting point, are you ready to write your own version? What do you remember – the handwashing, the social distancing, the pan-banging? What feelings were the strongest – rage, grief, fear, something else? If your poem stays close to 'Mask' and you go on to publish it, remember you must add 'after 'Mask' by Gillian Allnutt' as an acknowledgement.

## Find out more

### Other work by Gillian Allnutt

*wake* (Bloodaxe Books, 2018)

*indwelling* (Bloodaxe Books, 2013)

*How the Bicycle Shone: New & Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe Books, 2007)

### Further reading

Bloodaxe Books' website includes many interviews with Gillian Allnutt. Visit the poet's page at [www.bloodaxebooks.com](http://www.bloodaxebooks.com)

## If you like Gillian Allnutt's work, try...

- Alice Oswald
- Katrina Porteous
- Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

## About the T. S. Eliot Prize

The T. S. Eliot Prize, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2023, 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. The T. S. Eliot estate has provided the prize money since the Prize's inception, and the T. S. Eliot Foundation took over the running of the Prize in 2016, following Inpress Books' acquisition of the PBS. 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 2025 Prize are Michael Hofmann (Chair), Patience Agbabi and Niall Campbell. For more information, visit [tseliot.com/prize](http://tseliot.com/prize)

## T. S. Eliot Prize 2025: join in

- Join our shortlisted poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 18 January 2026. 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/eliot25readings](http://bit.ly/eliot25readings) or for the live stream at [bit.ly/eliot25livestream](http://bit.ly/eliot25livestream)
- 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](http://bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube)
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at [bit.ly/eliot25shortlist](http://bit.ly/eliot25shortlist)
- 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. Visit [poetryschool.com](http://poetryschool.com) and search 'writers notes'
- **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 [tseliot.com/prize](http://tseliot.com/prize)
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Instagram, Bluesky, X and Facebook**: @tseliotprize



## Poem for John Clinging

Of you, John, there was nothing to go on –  
nothing but your smithereen of skin and bone and plane.

You were one of *the quick and the dead*  
and far too many of them to crowd into the dining-room.

You came alone, the chosen one

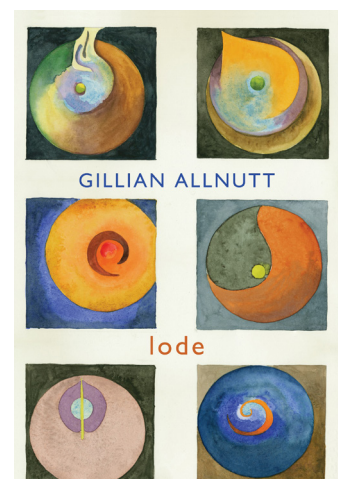
miscarried, made, laid out among them –  
Gran, my mother and, in the blustering silence, Brodie Anderson.

And then you were no more alone, old navigator, party to  
their incompleteness.

So it was that when at last my mother helped me lay her down  
I took you into my own heart's pondering

and still she claimed and wouldn't dream of claiming you her one and  
only. 'You'd have liked him,' she said to me

often. I think I would have done.

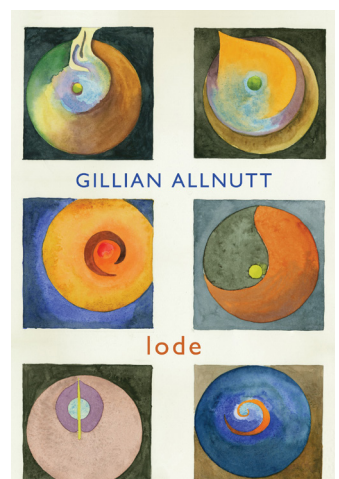


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## Mask

*(for Tom)*

I am clout cast and caught in undergrowth  
or lying dead mid-path, among middens, lost  
in mud for good or gallimaufry. Look now –  
I was well-intentioned. Worn with love  
I would caress your face as if with kisses subtle  
slow as silk or celanese. I'd cloud  
your glasses quietly while in queues you stood  
and waited for an ambulance or amber from the Baltic Sea –  
simple, silly as the summer day  
when Satan fell fine-fettled from the sky.



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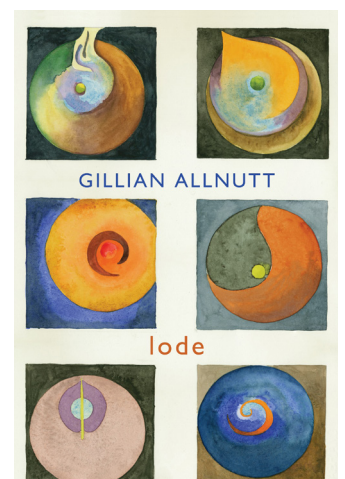
## Sea Change

Put off the self-protective loneliness of God,  
the pod, cast, of the word.

Put on the coat of calcium carbonate you'd wear  
as pteropod or coccolithophore –

as if like them  
you could become

Earth-hoard.



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