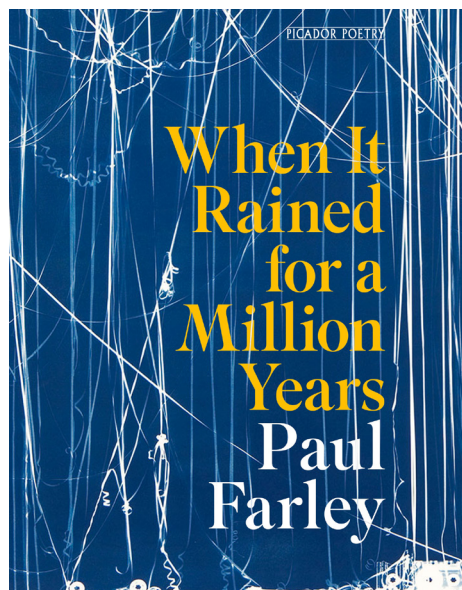


T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2025 READERS' NOTES

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.



When It Rained for a Million Years (Picador Poetry, 2025) by Paul Farley. Search at www.panmacmillan.com

for example, being described as “a dandelion clock / that emigrated, did well, grew huge, blew back / a legend of the screen” (‘Tumbleweed’).’ – Vona Groarke, *The Irish Times*

‘What fascinates me most of all is Farley’s meditation on the millennia-old question of time. What is time, where does it go, and what do we do in its long shadow? The “distances” covered in *When It Rained for a Million Years* are most surprising in a temporal sense. In ‘The Workaround’, our speaker emails the eighth century, hoping to take an illuminated leaf from Bede’s book. Fast forward to the present day in ‘The Gorilla’ and we are sitting awkwardly in a Zoom waiting room, suspended from reality and its usual ticking reminder. “Here in the lobby, in limbo, waiting to gain / entry [...] Time is out of joint”. The concept bends in his hands like a bough in the wind and miraculously never seems to break.’ – Jade Cuttle, *The Observer*

Reviewers on *When It Rained for a Million Years*

‘Veteran lyricist Farley returns with his signature blend of magical realism and nostalgia, a miscellany of observations on nature, meta-commentary on writing and publishing poetry, and artful reconstructions of his own past. There are tantalising brushes with social commentary: ‘Three Riots’ identifies Britain’s history of police violence; it would’ve been fascinating to read more. Farley’s strength, throughout his career, is in the delicacy of his poems’ music, their soft lighting and good humour, and this book is no exception.’ – Dave Coates, *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*

‘His poems have elegance, a way of turning into a conclusion that both clinches and amplifies what comes before, as in the final two lines of ‘Memories of Midhope Street’: “I was still in my twenties. I thought I’d ran my race. / An Apple Mac IIsi. The thrill of changing the typeface.”

Farley is a great poet of memory, harnessing just the right degree of circumstantial detail to bring a subject to full-on, vivid life (“Whitethorn smells like sex in sleeping bags [...] / The tarp applauds like mad in summer hail” – ‘Tinned Peaches’). He works metaphor and simile to yield the kind of visual accuracy that’s also great fun to read, as with tumbleweed,

About the poet

Paul Farley was born in Liverpool and studied at the Chelsea School of Art. He has published six collections of poetry with Picador, including: *The Boy from the Chemist is Here to See You* (1998), which won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection; *The Ice Age* (2002), which won the Whitbread Poetry Award; and *The Mizzy* (2019), which was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Costa Book Awards. His other awards include an RSL Jerwood Award for Non-Fiction, the Somerset Maugham Award, and the E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has written and presented many drama and documentary features for BBC Radio and is a freelance writer and broadcaster.



Photo © Urszula Soltys

T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2025 READERS' NOTES

What do you think?

- Which nation might the superflag represent? Or which sports team? Is there a difference between the two, in this poem?
- There is a lot of 'we', 'our', 'us' in this poem. Do you feel included in this 'we'?
- Find this YouTube: '**Airfix Retro Unboxing: Anne Boleyn**', to set the context for the Anne Boleyn poem. How do you unpick the punning title of that poem? There are few statues of Anne Boleyn in the UK – search online for **this one** in Carshalton, Sutton. Should there be more? Is this a poem in place of a statue?
- Just in case you missed the reference in the last line of 'The Gorilla', watch this '**selective attention test**' **video on YouTube** (see also www.theinvisiblegorilla.com). What's the effect of all those 'how's at the end of the poem – seven of them in six lines? What does the poem tell you about attention? Had you remembered the poem was called 'The Gorilla' by the time you got to 'the gorilla' in the last line?

Reply in writing

The form of 'The Execution of Anne Boleyn, Airfix 1:12' is inspired by its content: the lines either side of a spine like the individual parts of the model ready to be snapped off their plastic frame or sprue. Think about some childhood pastimes with a very distinctive form: the two-up two-down rooms of a doll's house, for example, the grid of Twister, the staircase a Slinky walked down. What poetic forms do they inspire, and what content?

Find out more

Other work by Paul Farley

The Mizzy (Picador Poetry, 2019)

The Dark Film (Picador Poetry, 2012)

The Boy from the Chemist is Here to See You
(Picador Poetry, 1997)

On screen & further reading

Find Paul Farley in the **T. S. Eliot Prize 2019 Playlist** on YouTube. Visit the poet's page at www.panmacmillan.com

If you like Paul Farley's work, try...

- **Don Paterson**
- **Ian Duhig**
- **Greta Stoddart**

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

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 or for the live stream at 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
- **John Field's authoritative reviews** of all the shortlisted titles will be published on the T. S. Eliot Prize website over the coming months. Read them online at 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 and search 'writer's notes'
- **Sign up to our weekly newsletters**, packed with information and insights about all ten shortlisted poets, and specially commissioned features and giveaways. Subscribe at tseliot.com/prize
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Instagram**, **Bluesky**, **X** and **Facebook**: @tseliotprize

The Superflag

We watch it fill the giant screen
and hear it behind us, tacking like sail,
a rumour with a definite edge.

We're watching and can *feel* its approach,
floating with the acreage
of empty commercial premises.

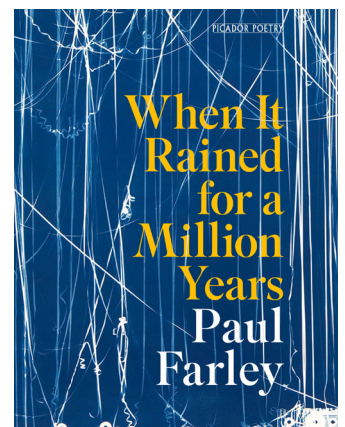
We think of how it shivers like
a bolt of silk on a bed of nails,
or a waterfall in a pantomime.

Then it pauses. It has a mind of its own
or has the mind of a swarm or shoal.
We feel its overcast and the hairs
on the backs of our necks are magnetized.
Our arms rise and we all become
part of one giant bedsheet ghost.

We scare ourselves when we look around.
We see the big screen through its shroud.
We see the floodlamps as four moons.

We see its leaf veins, running repairs.
In this world with different gravity
there's a definite pull. Look at our hands
waving like starfish on a tide.
There's held breath, like when the shot glass
on a talking board begins to slide
and when we emerge on the other side
and out from under it, we cheer,
while the fans in the away end sing:

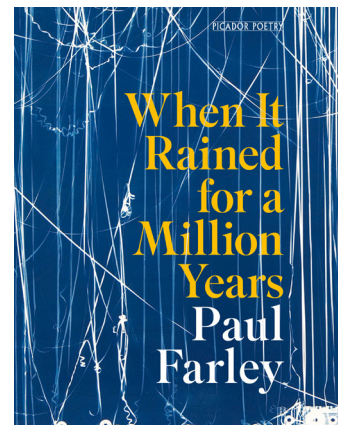
Where's your famous
Where's your famous
Where's your famous atmosphere?



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by Paul Farley. Search at
www.panmacmillan.com

The Execution of Anne Boleyn, Airfix 1:12

face and hood
back of hood
front of gown
back of gown
supporting plaque and veil
display plinth and earth
front right arm and cuff
rear right arm
right hand
front of pedestal
rear of pedestal
sundial
gnomon
front left arm and cuff
rear left arm
left hand
rose flower
rose stem
frond of ivy
frond of ivy
ivy leaf
ivy leaf
handkerchief

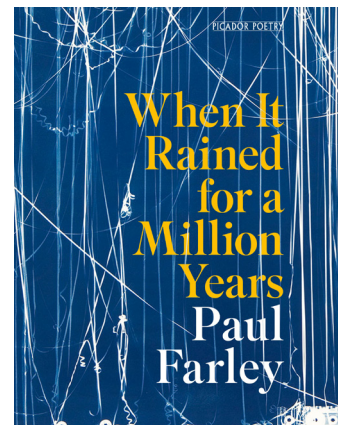


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The Gorilla

The meeting host will let you in soon...

Here in the lobby, in limbo, waiting to gain
entry, before another Zoom call
gets underway, I rehearse, a screen actor,
only this time, there, in the speaker thumbnail,
rendered an eye-blink slower than my own,
is another face. Time is out of joint.
Latency. The lag in the machine. I
look behind the 'now' our brain predicts
a split second before the next thing happens,
which this face must be gurning in the middle of
all the time, never meeting my eye, a shy
latent mug a moment ago, and I
keep blinking my dad, about my age, alive
in this moment. The other guy – the one with
no creases or crow's feet, no silvery
grey hair, the gob that greets me in the slowest mirrors,
the me I kid myself I am – he's gone.
'Hello?' The host has let me into the meeting
room, and look how quickly we slip into
our roles, how much slips through the gaps, how
unknowable things are, how quickly our time
goes, how misdirection masks the truth,
how we never see the gorilla walking through.



*When It Rained for a Million
Years* (Picador Poetry, 2025)
by Paul Farley. Search at [www.
panmacmillan.com](http://www.panmacmillan.com)