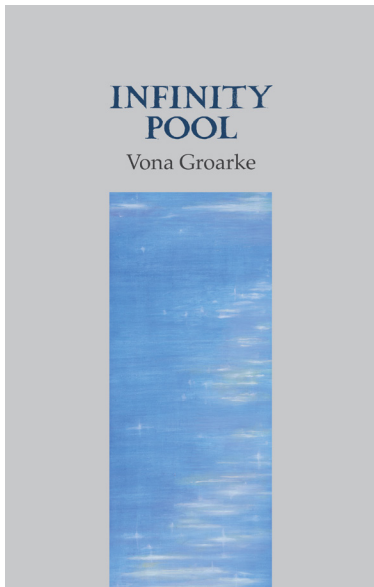


# T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2025 READERS' NOTES

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.



*Infinity Pool* (The Gallery Press, 2025) by Vona Groarke.  
[www.gallerypress.com](http://www.gallerypress.com)

## On *Infinity Pool*

'Vona Groarke's ninth collection [...] continues this poet's tradition of formal and imaginative boundary-pushing: utilising the tautness of the lyric poem as a frame through which to glimpse larger vistas. *Infinity Pool* places interior poems with the quality of a baroque still life alongside wider-lensed and wilder seascapes. These contrasting energies are synthesised in the collection's title poem, which captures water's movement in the still frame of an infinity pool. The image teases the poet at the edge of sleep, so that it must be carried with her – "its deep blue scrap of lie" – in order to be completed, and pinned to the page. But of course this poetic endeavour is impossible: "But carrying folded water isn't feasible. You know that." – Jessica Traynor, *Poetry Ireland Review*

'The starting point of these poems is inevitably how a subject strikes the eye: the dense clouds above Knock as seen from an aeroplane window; a future passed through, "like a car through fog"; or the poem itself – the "infinity pool" of the title – a blue rectangle held against blue, so the viewer can't quite "tell / the edge" [... Groarke's] is a "thinking eye", to borrow Klee's phrase: the immediacy of the visual is always joined and powered by the working-out of an idea. 'The Future of the Poem', for instance, is a verse-essay in

miniature, each brief section a prophecy, or a dare: "Watch it become something smaller. / Watch it rot." – Tara Bergin, *The Irish Times*

'[Groarke's] writing is precise, chiselled and instructive for anyone learning how to write well. She is a poet of clouds, sea, light, summers and mothers. Her lovely poem 'Setting My Mother's Hair as an *Ars Poetica*' has the force and delicacy of the best Sharon Olds' poetry: "She'll sit under hair that's like corn on the cob". And the prose poem 'Tipping Point' is a real beauty, exemplary, worth buying her book for this alone, to see how successful a successful prose poem can be.' – Thomas McCarthy, *Poetry & Writing*

## About the poet

Vona Groarke was born in the Irish Midlands in 1964. She attended Trinity College, Dublin and University College, Cork. She has been writer in residence at universities around the world and teaches in the Centre for New Writing at the University of Manchester. *Infinity Pool* is her ninth collection. Her previous collections, all published by The Gallery Press, include *Flight* (2002), shortlisted for the Forward Prize and winner of the Michael Hartnett Award; *Spindrift* (2009) and *X* (2014), both Poetry Book Society Recommendations; and *Double Negative* (2019), shortlisted for the 2020 *Irish Times* Poetry Now Award. In 2017 she received the Hennessy Hall of Fame Award for outstanding contribution to literature. She is currently writer in residence for St John's College, University of Cambridge and was recently selected as the Ireland Professor of Poetry (2025–2028).



Photo © St John's College, Cambridge

# T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2025 READERS' NOTES

## What do you think?

- Whose signature phrase is 'spit-spot'? What might the phrase – and by extension its speaker – be doing in 'Infinity Pool'?
- What does 'Infinity Pool' tell us about feasibility?
- What do you make of the repetition in the first stanza of 'Tipping Point'?
- An **ars poetica** being a meditation on poetry in the form of a poem, what does 'Setting My Mother's Hair as an *Ars Poetica*' tell you about Groarke's poetics, her subjects, techniques and approach?

## Reply in writing

'Hair' as someone once said 'is everything.' What poem would you write to confirm or confound this assertion? What's your setting? The barber's, the salon or under your mother's pudding bowl? Buzzcuts, bald spots and box braids are all available to you!

## Find out more

### Other work by Vona Groarke

*Link (Poet and World)* (The Gallery Press, 2021)

*Double Negative* (The Gallery Press, 2019)

*Selected Poems* (The Gallery Press, 2016)

### On screen & further reading

Recent videos of Vona Groarke include her contributions to **Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation's Read By poetry film series** and to the **UCD Library Special Collections** on its YouTube channel (search 'Vona Groarke'). Visit the poet's page at [www.gallerypress.com](http://www.gallerypress.com)

### If you like Vona Groarke's work, try...

- **Tara Bergin**
- **Martina Evans**
- **Sharon Olds**

## 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)
- **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](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 '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](http://tseliot.com/prize)
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Instagram, Bluesky, X** and **Facebook**: @tseliotprize

## Infinity Pool

I had it in the night, the image,  
but lacked the energy or will  
to magic my body through  
my own fourth wall and lower  
myself, spit-spot, into the page.

I saw, I just about recall,  
a blue rectangle not quite blank  
held up against blue sky, blue sea,  
so you weren't supposed to tell  
the edge, the stitching or the seams.

And I am folding it now, this pool,  
corner to corner, line to line,  
so as to carry about with me  
its deep blue scrap of lie.

But carrying folded water  
isn't feasible. You know that.

### INFINITY POOL

Vona Groarke



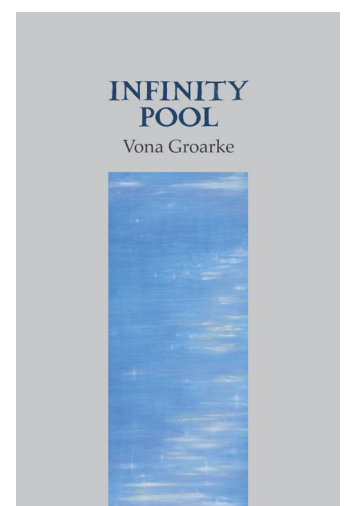
*Infinity Pool* (The Gallery Press,  
2025) by Vona Groarke.  
[www.gallerypress.com](http://www.gallerypress.com)



## Tipping Point

Put your coin in the slot with one clever hand; use the other to angle the chute so the coin falls nicely behind a good clump of coins and when the batten sweeps forward to nudge them all on, a few will cascade over the top ledge to fall nicely behind a good clump of coins and when the batten sweeps forward to nudge them all on a few will cascade over the front ledge to fall out of the game and back into the life you'll just have won.

And if this were a game the batten would not be a solid block of time. The coins would not be years and years and, when you were done, you'd not be running all through the arcade calling out for your father and mother, your dog, only to find yourself in darkness, your hands twiddling emptiness, the coin cold on your tongue.



*Infinity Pool* (The Gallery Press, 2025) by Vona Groarke.  
[www.gallerypress.com](http://www.gallerypress.com)

## Setting *My Mother's Hair* as an *Ars Poetica*

First the rollers like a sack of elvers,  
elastics in a tangle, the little cups that sit  
in one end to stretch everything taut  
missing, more often than not, so pins  
are called for that will have to be  
inveigled into place.

Then the steel comb with the long handle  
pointed at the end, good for teasing out  
hair to be wound from its tip around  
a bristled plastic cone and pinned until  
her whole head is armadilloed so tight  
she could do a handstand, nothing would shift.

But she won't be doing handstands, not today.

She'll sit under hair that's like corn on the cob,  
do the Simplex, smoke Silk Cuts, drink cups of tea  
I ferry to her and bide her time for the time it takes  
for the hair to set; for the grand unfurl; for

my hands to drain, for the pins and rollers,  
comb and all to be lost or landfill,  
nothing I've need of, my hair  
too short to be set by anyone,  
least of all by me.

### INFINITY POOL

Vona Groarke



*Infinity Pool* (The Gallery Press,  
2025) by Vona Groarke.  
[www.gallerypress.com](http://www.gallerypress.com)