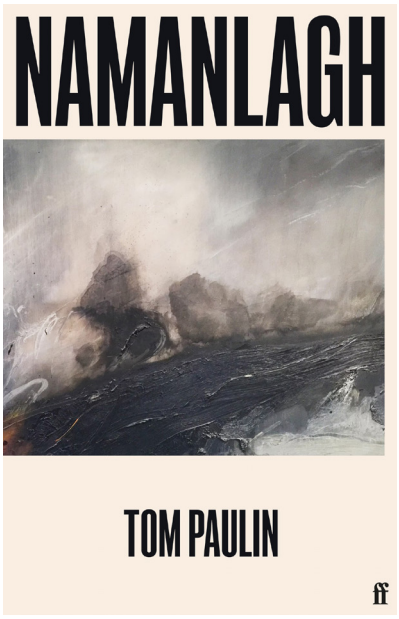
# T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2025 READERS' NOTES

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.

2025
T. S. Eliot
T. S. ELIOT PRIZE




*Namanlagh* (Faber & Faber, 2025) by Tom Paulin. Search Tom Paulin at **www.faber.co.uk**

## On *Namanlagh*

'It has been more than a decade – "long empty days / with the blank page" – since Paulin's *Love's Bonfire*. His tenth collection is informed by depression and the recovery from it: "if only some idea / could find its way / through enemy territory / then I'd at last begin / to look up at the sky". His lyrics still meander down the page, but linguistic fireworks have been replaced by language that is straightforward, unadorned and more affecting for it. This also gives his reflections on the recent shifts in Northern Irish history and politics more bite. But it's in its more private moments that the book really shines: "Heed my cadences then and live only for now. / Don't ever bother about tomorrow. / Just pluck, today, life's full-blooded roses".'
– **Rishi Dastidar, *The Guardian***

'[*Namanlagh*] reminds one how good Paulin is at rendering movements of mind and eye and memory – flickering via jazzy associations of sound and shape – and how well he conveys first the materiality of ordinary objects, and then the associations they carry with them. 'Edge of Town' describes a path surrounded on each side by metal railings, which first remind him, in "an image I'll never draw / or paint", of "two vast armies / of abstract soldiers eyeball to eyeball".

He fiddles with the image – "thin hoplites with jagged spears / like poster art but solider / almost Bauhaus I guess" – before "the image flies / out of sight – I mean out of my inner eye". It's all there – the little chimes ("soldiers"/ "solider"); the oscillation between material detail and metaphor; the philosophical musing; and behind it, but not spelt out, the political history implicit in that image of two armies facing off. The best pieces in this collection make one very glad that Paulin's distinctive, enlivening voice has not fallen silent.'
– **Robert Potts, *The Telegraph***

'Tom Paulin's *Namanlagh* is beautiful and moving. One of the poems is called 'Spare Room' and spareness is at work throughout – often the poems are a single stanza with relatively short lines. It's as though nothing is to be falsely embellished and yet the language sings "like the real hard stuff" – even through depression, as history echoes with the present and small resistances speak up.' – **Judging panel, PEN Heaney Prize 2025**

## About the poet

Tom Paulin grew up in Belfast and now lives in Oxford, where he is Emeritus Fellow of Hertford College, University of Oxford. *Namanlagh* (Faber & Faber) is his tenth book of poetry and was awarded the PEN Heaney Prize 2025. Of his previous collections *Walking a Line* (1994), *The Wind Dog* (1999) and *The Road to Inver* (2004) were all also shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize. His *New Selected Poems* appeared in 2014. He has published six books of critical prose on topics including Thomas Hardy and William Hazlitt, several plays and two anthologies.

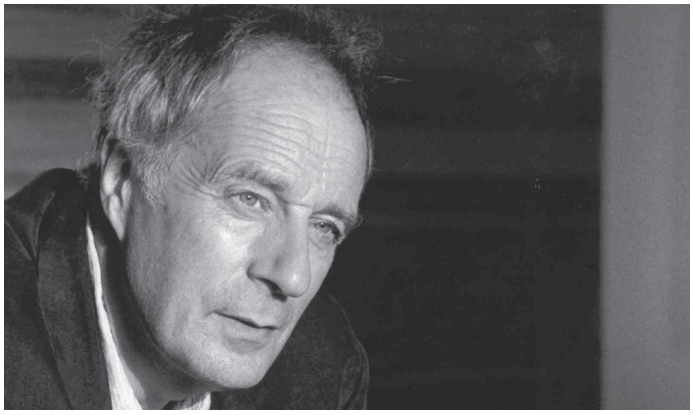


*Photo © Bobbie Harvey*

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## What do you think?

- Read 'Namanlagh' aloud to yourself, or each other if you're in a group. What do you notice about the sounds, and their contrasts? How do they relate to the contents of the poem? Is this a 'hard' poem or a 'soft' poem?
- 'His tenth collection is informed by depression and the recovery from it' writes Rishi Dastidar in *The Guardian* about *Namanlagh*. Do you read 'The Catch' in the light of this observation?
- What sort of god might one who tries to live only in daylight be? (Do gods have to 'try' to do anything, are they not all powerful?) How and why might you worship a daylight-only god? What qualities might a nighttime-only god have?
- Look up other translations of 'Quand vous serez bien vieille' and compare them to this version. Renderings of the final line about the roses, 'Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie', include 'the roses of this life', 'quickly fading roses', 'pick yore roses today' and (if you count W.B. Yeats' free version in 'When You Are Old') 'a crowd of stars'. What do you make of 'life's full-blooded roses' as a translation?

## Reply in writing

What's 'a small object' in your home, perhaps the smallest? Imagine it up against the largest issue in your life – how does the one inform or reflect the other? Write the poem inspired by 'The Catch' which explores this relationship.

## Find out more

### Other work by Tom Paulin

*New Selected Poems* (Faber & Faber, 2014)
*Love's Bonfire* (Faber & Faber, 2012)
*The Invasion Handbook* (Faber & Faber, 2002)

### Online

Search Tom Paulin at **faber.co.uk**

### If you like Tom Paulin's work, try...

- **Bernard O'Donoghue**
- **Jamie McKendrick**
- **Nick Laird**

## 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 the shortlisted titles are all now published on the T. S. Eliot Prize website. You can read them the reviews 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**
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## Namanlagh

Somewhere in the pine trees beyond the lough
two stones are being knocked together
– once twice three times – very dry – maybe
it's a chain gang working in the quarry?
There is no quarry though
and there never was a chain gang
only the little chunks of red granite on the long
looping bog road tell of famine relief,
congested districts – that human weather
that sticks like salt stains or burrs in your hair
– no I realise all these are not
in fact the case – it's a stonechat
I can hear – its clatt-
ery cry that's like the real hard stuff
– poteen distilled on stony hills
where the black craychur, the chough,
should be sounding its red beak, its curved bill,
against the screes –
not hiding out on the soft bog by the lough.

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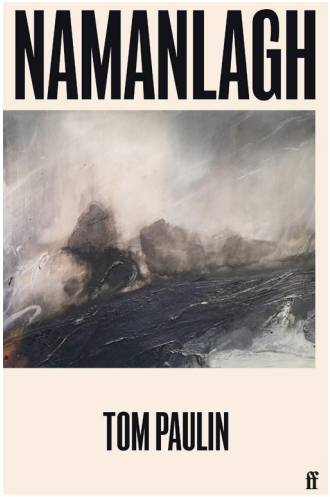
## The Catch

The bedroom window was half-open
but it was the window-catch that caught my eye
– a small object – utile
with only the tight beauty of its function
and nothing else except
it spoke to me in its own dumbness
like a certain stubborn spirit
that pays no heed to those gods that try
– social self-conscious –
to live only in the daylight.

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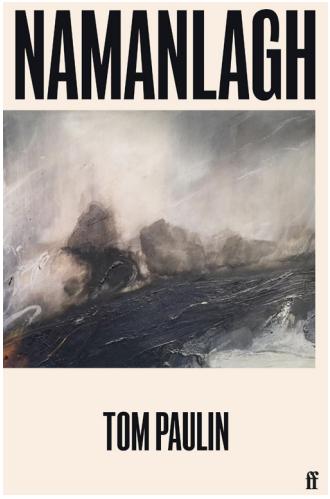
## *Quand vous serez bien vieille*

*after Pierre de Ronsard*

When you're well old and dozing by the fire
spinning wool or cotton under the light
of two fat tallow candles
you'll say in wonder as you chant my lines

'Ronsard admired me when I once was fair.'
Then one of your sleepy servants
hearing you speak my name most softly
will wake up from her dreams
and bless your name that my desire
has made to last so long.

I'll be below the earth then a boneless shadow
taking my late rest under the myrtle boughs
and you'll be an old woman on the edge of death
regretting all my love for you
and your so high and proud disdain.
Heed my cadences then and live only for now.
Don't ever bother about tomorrow.
Just pluck, today, life's full-blooded roses.

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