

T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2026 READERS' NOTES

The T. S. Eliot Prize 2026 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.

2026

T. S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT
PRIZE



Killing Spree
(Carcanet Press,
2026) by
Jorie Graham.
www.carcanet.co.uk

On *Killing Spree*

'In an interview with the *New York Review of Books*, Jorie Graham said of the title poem of her new collection, *Killing Spree*, that, even in the continuous oblitative offences of soul and justice streamlined to our lives via screens,

one needs to keep trying – one needs to work to stay open, to show up to witness. And we have the imagination as a tool – we can ask art to keep rinsing the soul, keep helping it stay lucid and awake and raw enough to experience the pain, keep empathy alive, allow outrage to linger in our senses.'

– Oluwaseun Olayiwola, *The Poetry Review*

'If the storm of progress seems, by now, a Category 5 hurricane, and our world a flooded detention center, Graham knows the poet's job is still to "speak"—even "from a cage" amid other "cages." [...] Under the cold hard rain which is the payoff for centuries of bad decisions and worse behavior (a "spree" of greed, wanton destructiveness, lies, theft, violence, and murder), the poet unfurls her eloquent attention, formidable intelligence, and an exemplary capacity for response – qualities that make each new book from this author essential reading.' – Laura Mullen, *California Review of Books*

'The book reads like a single epic poem covering all aspects of the disastrous period we are facing. How to do it justice in a short review? Many of the poems are thin columns covering several pages, reminding me of an image from *The Matrix* when streams of data pour down – known as digital rain. Graham manages through her fragmented approach and anaphoric rhythms to shower us with the impact of climate, disease, war and slaughter. We get the full picture through these fragments. Many of us, while still sheltered from the worst impacts, are bombarded daily with images of genocide, floods, fires, oppression, division and hatred. She does not shrink from an apocalyptic view.' – Rachael Clyne, everybodysreviewing.blogspot.com

About the poet

Jorie Graham is the author of sixteen collections of poems, including *To 2040* (2023), *[To] the Last [Be] Human* (2022), *Runaway* (2018) and *Fast* (2017), which was shortlisted for the Forward Prize. Her collection *PLACE* (2012) was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and won the Forward Prize for Best Collection. Her other Carcanet collections include *Sea Change* (2008), *Never* (2002), *Swarm* (2000) and *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974-1994*, which won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Her poetry has been widely translated and has received numerous awards, among them the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, the International Nonino Prize, and the Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry from the Library of Congress. She lives in Massachusetts and is the Boylston Professor of Oratory and Rhetoric Emerita at Harvard University, USA.



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What do you think?

- 'The World' is the first poem of the book. Imagine it as the headline of a newspaper, the overture to an opera: what might you expect to follow in the rest of the collection from an opening statement such as this?
- The phrase 'in particular' occurs three times in five lines – is particularity a quality of 'The World'?
- We've published an extract of 'The Killing Spree', the long poem which gives the collection its title. (You may be able to read the entire poem [here, on the New York Review of Books website](#)). The poem reads like the dust-choked aftermath of an explosive attack. What do you make of that final image in the last four lines of the poem?
- Less than a light year separates Keats, the nineteenth century author of 'Bright Star', and Graham, the twenty-first century author of 'Deep Winter Stars'. Take a look at 'Bright Star' – how has the poet-as-stargazer's perspective changed over 200 years?

Reply in writing

Pick a star. Look at it. Look it up. What does it look like? What is it looking at? What has it already seen? What is it still to see? Write its poem. Repeat the process. How soon do you have a constellation?

Find out more

Other work by Jorie Graham

To 2040 (Carcanet Press, 2023)

[To] the Last [Be] Human – incorporating *Runaway*, *Fast*, *PLACE* and *Sea Change* (Carcanet Press, 2022)

The Taken-Down God: Selected Poems 1997-2008
(Carcanet Press, 2013)

On screen

Hear Jorie Graham talking about *Killing Spree* in the Carcanet Press online launch. You can also see and hear her brilliantly interviewed by Sarah Howe in the Griffin Poetry Prize series.

If you like Jorie Graham's work, try...

- Denise Riley
- Kathleen Jamie
- Caleb Femi

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 2026 Prize are Leontia Flynn (Chair), Ishion Hutchinson and Daisy Lafarge. For more information, visit tseliot.com/prize

T. S. Eliot Prize 2026: join in

- Join our shortlisted poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 17 January 2027. 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/eliot26readings or for the live stream at bit.ly/eliot26livestream
- 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/eliot26shortlist
- 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' – and look out for new additions by poets shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize 2026
- **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

READERS' NOTES POEMS

The World

didn't change much
at first. At
first it
didn't change

much, at first I
didn't—I don't—
change much.
At first we

didn't & they
didn't & the atmosphere
stayed the same
or enough to seem

the same. The same.
I say the word
out loud to my-
self. Who changed I

think. What started out & then
disappeared without
actually dis-
appearing. It's so quiet

in here. It's so
quiet now. The now
used to be a noisy
place & now

it is so
still. Where is everyone
I think. What is it
that is dis-

possessed. Can it ever be re-

possessed. Never?
Now and again your soul
wakes up in
spurts asking

what is—or is there—a just
struggle. Then you,
then I, cry out
where are you
everyone. We were in one world

& then was it u or
us or them or no one in
particular—in
particular, my heart

leaps at that—oh
in particular—but no one
answers & no one
came along in the end.

And that was when
the end began.
I only just realized
it. Only just heard

no one survived—or is it they
still hide, above
the cries, no
child, no one

replies, no one not
blind, confined,
lined-up, wired-up, piled-
up, made to

comply, des-
pised, compromised, the soul perpetually dis-
guised, the words even
the right words

cannot be un-

furled from breath from
mind oh
memory no cannot be
dug up dug up from

this buried world.



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from The Killing Spree

Will it be erased from time itself now
the small stony hill
in which my village lay,
will it bleed out from me now
the cool stone floor, the water in the basin,
my window onto the olive groves,
the pigeons muttering in the lowest limbs—
& where will it go
where I overhear my father
thanking my mother—
late at night in the dark kitchen—
his thank you, thank you—this clicking of the stars
all round them—
where will it go, where will *it* be buried
my time,
will it rise up in no one ever again
as memory, as dream,
this moonlight's scent over the fields
& in it the barefoot steps of my father
coming to see if I am
asleep.
And stars falling anytime I look—anytime—like magic—my luck.
And mother's low song in the other room....

You who do not know any longer what song is,
or dream, or memory, or the sound of
stars—look up—don't blink—here it is now the slit throat of the sky
where the endless beginning
keeps pouring itself
forth.



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Deep Winter Stars

What if I were given eyes only
to feel
I am
a disappearance

of mind into
thought, into a
tossing foam of
thought

straining
to watch you, so exact
up there,
endlessly undertaking your

casting of
seeds into that which will never
grow into
more.... Bright star,

you come closer

than I thought,
you don't hang as I was
told, you are in a
mid-place

neither here nor
far—infinite spaces hum
beyond you
but you seem still here

on our side
even if you are not
for us or faced
towards us, here, so alone in

this storm of

history....
And there is no one star among you
to stand out—each of u
points to an

other—
strong or weak all do
whatever they do all
together—

& the fire that tossed

your white-hot embers
up is
banked in a
beyond we don't even try

to imagine. You
are not apart
though scattered.
Once I see yr

netting I seek
a protection
you know
nothing of—

you know nothing
of this apartness,
you do not
jump forward to

be yourselves.
I am afraid, I say
as I look up.
The wind

fingers the tips
of the empty
limbs. They whisper & clack
with appearance—

jittery. There is
no appearance
u hiss in yr acid yr pitched
brilliance. That wld be

singleness. Nothing
is a part
of the whole
we are a part of.



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