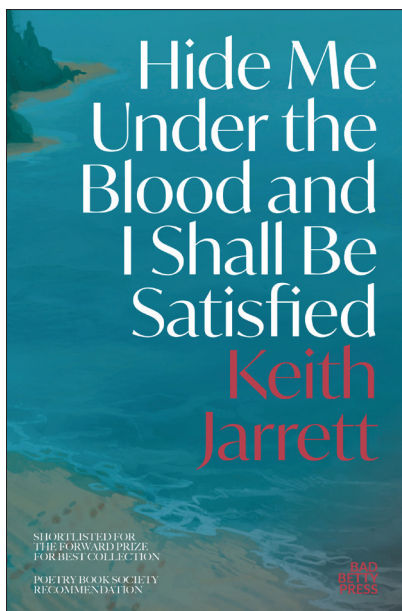


T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2026 READERS' NOTES

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.



Hide Me Under the Blood and I Shall Be Satisfied
(Bad Betty Press, 2026)
by Keith Jarrett.
badbettypress.com

On *Hide Me Under the Blood and I Shall Be Satisfied*

'Jarrett channels a voice and a chant of "the undocumented history of this Empire" where spirits, saints and literary ancestors are summoned to carnivals and holy communions. There is much defiance, queering and inquiry in these poems, a "reckoning with sorrow" as only a poet can put it. As well as formal inventiveness, there is playful bilingual lyricism and humour.' – **Raymond Antrobus**

'Strong religiosity beats through nearly every poem. In his best moments, Jarrett's God inhabits plural identities, often as a signifier of class. Buried in a footnote (though still very much a part of the poem), he writes: "I'd hoped to graduate from God to Greeks – the stuff of literary magazines! To bin, at last, my Pentecostal angst, retrieve acclaim from 'the establishment'." The way his speakers perform Christianity sets them in linguistic opposition to "the establishment", with the sounds of speech at the intersection between class and religion. The final couplet in the book rhymes "prayer" with "sincere", echoing the speaker's grandma's earlier prayer: "De lawd is my shepherd / – whom shall I fear?".' – **Magnus McDowell, WritersMosaic**

'These poems are tough, taking faith and doubt, colonialism, being black and queer in their stride, whilst drawing upon performance poetry alongside the mystical, experimental and canonical. [...] The remnants of spiritual engagement underpin Jarrett's poems, yet he is weary and resigned: "If we must pray, then let this be our prayer: / If we must live, then let us live sincere."' – **Rupert Loydell, *Tears in the Fence***

'The skill of his poetics is to make the reader think about multiple ideas at once – through his form, language choice, changing vernacular, formatting on the page.' – **SK Grout, *The Alchemy Spoon***

About the poet

Keith Jarrett is a writer and educator of Jamaican heritage. His debut poetry collection, *Selah* (2017), was published by Burning Eye Books. Also in 2017, his play, *Safest Spot in Town*, was performed at the Old Vic, London, and aired on BBC Four. An international slam champion, he has appeared on Benjamin Zephaniah's BAFTA-winning show, *Life & Rhymes*, and his poetry has been projected onto the façade of St Paul's Cathedral. In 2019, he was selected for the International Literary Showcase as an outstanding LGBT writer. He is a Lambda Literary Fiction and an Obsidian Poetry Fellow, and holds a PhD from Birkbeck University, where he was awarded the Bloomsbury Studentship. *Hide Me Under the Blood and I Shall Be Satisfied* (Bad Betty, 2026) is his second collection and is also shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection. He teaches at NYU in London.



Photo © Adrian Pope

T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2026 READERS' NOTES

What do you think?

- 'Hide me under the blood' is a church chorus of Caribbean provenance. The poem 'Hide me under the blood, Lord' begins a sequence of poems within the collection which 'reference public – and personal – conversations on police brutality, against a backdrop of youth violence in London around 2018'. What might it mean to 'walk good' in this context?
- 'I drink my family's history black:' – what does this phrase mean to you? Don't forget to think about the colon.
- A clipping of the story about Benjamin Zephaniah referred to in 'Sun newspaper' and **more background to the story can be found online**. This poem offers another opportunity to think about the importance of the colon: what do you think comes after 'Here is an example of the standard of his work:'?
- Some background listening to 'The Safest Space in the Whole Wide World' – **here's Destra Garcia**. She has an **alter ego called Lucy**. 'Perhaps' is a word in the middle of both stanzas of this poem – why might that be?

Reply in writing

Who is your alter ego? Do they have more of the personal qualities you possess – or fewer of them? Imagine sending them somewhere in your place – what ensues? Then write the poem.

Find out more

Other work by Keith Jarrett

Selah (Burning Eye Books, 2017)

I Speak Home (pamphlet, Eyewear, 2015)

On screen

See and hear Keith Jarrett interviewed on the podcasts **Black British Queer Poetry & Identity** (with Taylor Woodby) and **Black Poets in Britain – The Apples and Snakes Podcast** (with Yomi Şode). Also search 'Jarrett' on the **Apples and Snakes Poetry YouTube channel** (@ApplesandSnakesPoetry).

If you like Keith Jarrett's work, try...

- Danez Smith
- Malika Booker
- Nick Makoha

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



Hide me under the blood, Lord

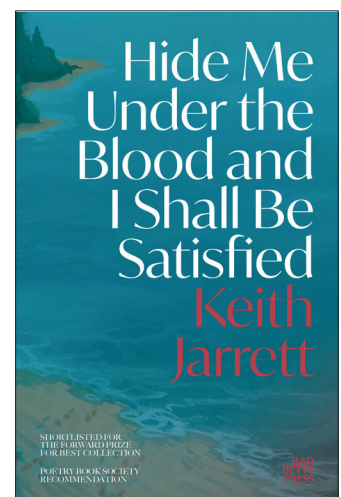
When I walk good
& I raise my hands above my head
& have no glove compartment or bible to reach for

& I recall my father's friends who were once cuffed
& dragged into separate vans & made to sit on their hands
on plastic seats, to lift their fingerprints

all them bad duppy still walk with me
those of my father's generation, *self-asphyxiated*
down at the station

while my father's father locked his children
inside the hands of God, suffering them
only to shuffle to school and church and back

& so I drink my family's history black:
the fettered Cains of my uncles wandering
this unsettled ground from which my blood cries out.



Hide Me Under the Blood and I Shall Be Satisfied (Bad Betty Press, 2026) by Keith Jarrett.
Poem © Keith Jarrett and reproduced by permission of Bad Betty Press. badbettypress.com

READERS' NOTES POEMS



Sun newspaper

[April 1987]

for Benjamin Zephaniah

Would you let this man near your daughter? He is black –

I am black but comely oh ye daughters of Jerusalem

And, oh yes, he is a poet.

What ails you now / you who are full of stirs, a tumultuous city?

He has tasted approved schools and borstals.

Play fool / ketch wise like King Solomon

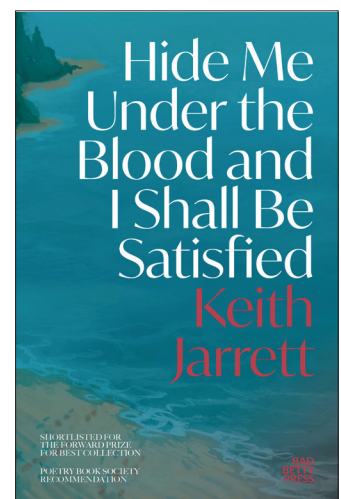
Is this really the kind of man – ?

Babylon, wha de matter wid yuh? Me realise yuh nuh pray de way like yuh used to

The kind that parents would wish to have teaching their sons and daughters?

Fret not yourself / neither be envious against the workers of iniquity

Here is an example of the standard of his work:



Hide Me Under the Blood and I Shall Be Satisfied (Bad Betty Press, 2026) by Keith Jarrett.
Poem © Keith Jarrett and reproduced by permission of Bad Betty Press. badbettypress.com

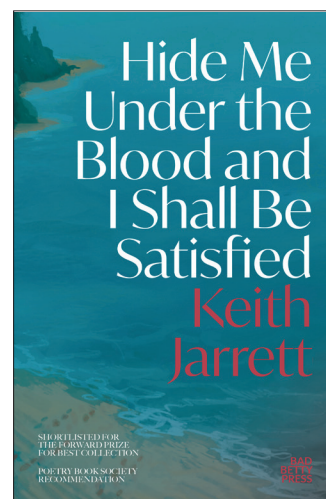


The Safest Space in the Whole Wide World

after Destra Garcia

is by the ricketiest window of the hired hall. No blame for resting yuh eye, for not talking, not living right. Nobody go berate the ascended for electric slide step failure. Mind how this is not a belated conversation about superficial Blacknesses. Or perhaps indeed it is. (Nobody need die from ashy knees). When Lucy gate-crash the funeral, we snort into our paper cups and side-eye each other. *The dead know who fi frighten*. Lucy go wild, bawlin' at the speaker box – or rather, coffin – and wukkin' wukkin' her bottom against the panelling. Inside every tomb is a stopped thought. There would have been a comma here

but Lucy's elbows have sent our plates heaven-wards, crisps and all. It is safer to be quiet and eat twice. (I grew up as a real good Christian: we sidesway dance and cuss peculiar). How my lip bleeds for biting! Lucy tries to draw my tongue, but I decline the invitation: We've one person dead, a multitude of hungry fishes, and she's rising like she damn well own all of it: death, dance, the drinks tokens. This is not my sideways glance at how we stay. Or perhaps. Indeed. Take Lucy any which way you need; we tend to shape our ghosts in our image. The safest place at a funeral is inside the coffin. Come cotch a while and rest your gaze. We all too soon will learn to mourn ourselves.



Hide Me Under the Blood and I Shall Be Satisfied (Bad Betty Press, 2026) by Keith Jarrett.
Poem © Keith Jarrett and reproduced by permission of Bad Betty Press. badbettypress.com