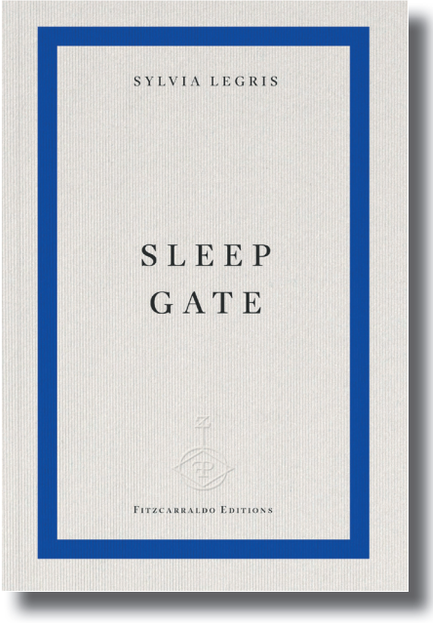
T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2026 READERS' NOTES

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



Sleep Gate (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2026) by Sylvia Legris.
fitzcarraldoeditions.com

On *Sleep Gate*

'In *Sleep Gate*, Sylvia Legris descends into biological dreaming itself: the sleep beneath sleep, where "the dream under the dream / is the dream of plants". Taking up Inger Christensen's summons to "dream our way inward", and H.D.'s insistence that the dream is "no poetic phantasy / but a biological reality", these poems dissolve the waking world into the fabric of sleep, drawing the natural and the built alike into its slow respiration. Animating a whole taxonomy of sleepers – a ruby-throated hummingbird whose dream is a nest "hinging on spider silk", a honeybee with "perfect recall of citrus one thousand and fifty-seven flowers ago", an earthworm fleeing "by slow peristaltic wave" – Legris follows sleep through phylum and season. Sensuous, Latinate and strange, this extraordinary collection captures the disjunctive, jump-cutting logic of dreams, leaping from a time before "the clouds are inventoried" to winter's "gnashing bruxism", and assembles the world, as one does on waking, through distortion and towards clarity.' – **Publisher's blurb**

'To stay with Legris' voice is to subject oneself to a willed hypnosis that one must snap out of to put the book down mid-read. *Sleep Gate* is the beneficiary of this voice, at once mercurially dense, nimble, sonically effortless and spectrally haunting. The paucity of verbs in this collection is a remarkable demonstration that the mind's visual apparatus has its own action, flow, rhythm and pathos. This is what it means to be a visionary.' – **Oluwaseun Olayiwola**

'*Sleep Gate* offers an incredibly dense lyric, one with a lightness across line and an agile language that delights in sound and vigor through her array of detailed scientific language. [...] There's an element of her work comparable to seeing the familiar through an electron microscope: most have never seen plant material this close, and and with such a lens, articulated across a lyric of unsentimental lushness.' – **Rob McLennan, robmclennan.blogspot.com**

About the poet

Sylvia Legris's collection *The Principle of Rapid Peering* (2024) won the City of Saskatoon Award and was nominated for two other Saskatchewan Book Awards. *Garden Physic* (2021), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, was named a Best Poetry Book of the Year by both *The Sunday Times* and CBC Radio, and was longlisted for the Laurel Prize. Her other collections include *The Hideous Hidden* (2016), *Pneumatic Antiphonal* (2013) and *Nerve Squall* (2005), which was awarded the Griffin Poetry Prize and the Pat Lowther Award. She is also the recipient of the Lieutenant Governor's Saskatchewan Artist Award and the Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg Award for a body of work. Originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, she lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.



Photo © Sylvia Legris

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What do you think?

- Look online for information about the **ruby-throated hummingbird**. What effects do those eight apostrophes in the last stanza have? Are there as many as eight different effects?
- Would you give 'Wake Fatigue' to an insomniac? How would you hope they would receive it, if so?
- The epigraph to **'Natural History' is by Horace, translated by Stephen Harrison**. Is it a useful mantra to bear in mind during a climate crisis?
- If the dominant imagery of the first stanza relates to the head; and the second, the house – what dominates the third stanza? How are all three stanzas connected?

Reply in writing

As a member of a writing partnership or group, keep a dream diary for a couple of weeks, noting images, feelings, jumps of dream-logic. Swap your diary for a partner's, so you each use the other's dreams as spurs for poems.

Find out more

Other work by Sylvia Legris

The Principle of Rapid Peering (New Directions Publishing, 2024)
Garden Physic (Granta Poetry, 2022)
The Hideous Hidden (New Directions Publishing, 2016)

On screen

Rachael Allen hosts a fascinating exchange between Sylvia Legris and Mary Jean Chan on **Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre YouTube channel**. You can also view the dual launch of Sylvia Legris's *Garden Physic* and Sheri Benning's *Field Requiem* (Carcanet Press) on bookshop **McNally Robinson's YouTube channel.**

If you like Sylvia Legris's work, try...

- Karen Solie
- Anne Carson
- Rachael Allen

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 'writers' 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

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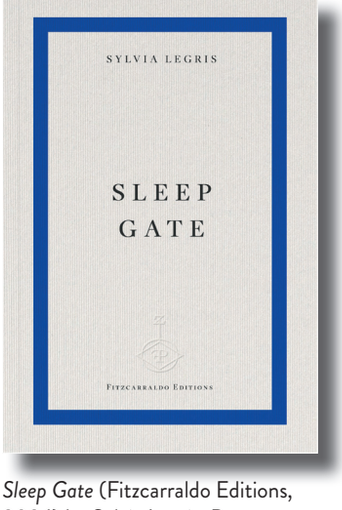
Brief Field Guide to a Ruby-throated Hummingbird's Dream

A recurring nest hinging on spider silk,
a repository of eighteen hundred take-offs and landings,
some a rising metre, others a deep dive.

The excess of a season's waking hours
is a rapid complicated hovering,
is a mathematical copious shingling,

a protective decorative architecture,
a reflective dovetailing façade,
moulted lobe tips of foliose lichen,

the bird's sleeping eyes' nictitating sun
focuses the bird's dream's mind's eye,
the bird's eyes' horns' hearts.



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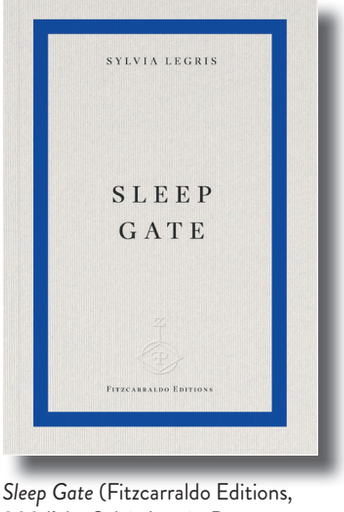
Wake Fatigue

The drag of drowsiness.
A juddering plumb bob.

Day's liquefaction.
A chronobiological dissolution.

The night sky's tumbling cortisol.
The slowing pulse

of an outflow water clock's
cohesionless dribble.



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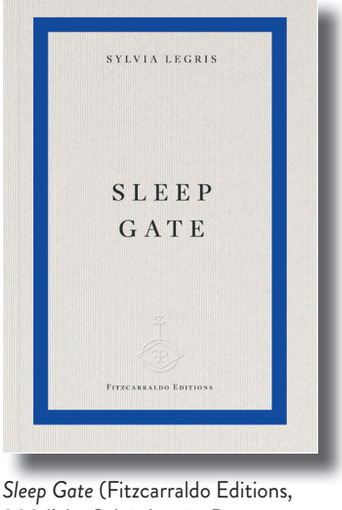
Natural History

But though you thrust nature out with a pitchfork, it will always return,

to the always heavy head,
to the brain-poisoning leaves of the walnut tree,
to the leaves pounded and concocted with vinegar and despair,
a pulp of ancient anguish,
a skull of mustard and detergent,
sour and incisive,

to the house without distant prospect of fields,
to the unhousebroken madness of the Dog Star,
the narrow seedpod walls,
the unpedigreed claustrophobic sleep,
the splitting-open dreams,

to the dreams jaundiced by Saturn after sunset,
the regurgitated offspring, the calculating swarm,
to the bee-glued shelter computations,
the rude propolis algebra of saliva and sap,
honeycombed apertures of mortal starlight,
ceilings of stony frozen planets.



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