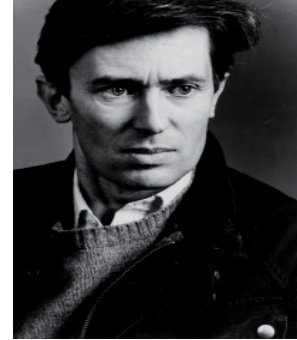


The T S Eliot Prize 2009

Reading Groups:

West End Final

Hugo Williams was born in 1942 and grew up in Sussex. He worked on the London Magazine from 1961 to 1970, since when he has earned his living as a journalist and travel writer. His previous collections include *Billy's Rain*, which won the T S Eliot Prize in 1999, *Collected Poems* (2002) and *Dear Room* (2006). He writes a freelance column for the Times Literary Supplement and lives in London. *West End Final* (Faber), which includes poems about his father, the actor Hugh Williams, was the Poetry Book Society Autumn Choice.



The Reading

If I turn round now
I'll be back at school,
arranging the chairs in the Library
with Briggs and Napier.
Briggs is chair monitor for readings.
He's flicking through a copy of my new book,
An Actor's Life for Me,
and making rude noises.
A display card on the table
shows me holding up
the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry.

They have taken me down to the gym
and put me inside the horse.
They push it across the splintery floorboards
while I run along inside,
looking out of the hand-holds,
trying to stay upright
as it crashes into a wall.
Photos of me with the Queen
are floating in the bath
when they force my head under
and hold it there.

Poems to My Mother

You're the top, you're an ocean liner.
You're the top, you're Margaret Vyner.

- Cole Porter

1. The Cull

You sit with your address book
open on your knee,
gently but firmly
crossing out the names
of old friends who have died.
'I wonder what happened
to Kay Morrow?' you ask.
'It doesn't matter,
I never liked her really.'
Your pen hovers briefly
over the head of the bridesmaid
we've heard so much about,
then slices her in two.

You have the look of a job well done
as stragglers are rounded up
for demolition.
'Dear old Denny Moon!
He taught me to ride.
He used to jump out from behind a tree
cracking a banksia whip.
That, or driving an old Lancia
between kerosene tins.'
You shake your head at him.
In spite of all the fun
you smile with quiet satisfaction
as you let him slip away.

Marital Visit

The odd thing put away
in the wrong place – cups and plates
back in the cupboard
that I always leave out,
curtains open on the street
that I always keep drawn,
remind me of your recent brief
progress through here,
looking for something in the attic.

How could I forget:
butter in the fridge, but never eggs,
burnt matches everywhere,
in spite of the gas lighter,
jam jars soaking in water
to get the labels off.
How typical of you
to give the Chinese teapot a last chance
to prove itself in company.

And look at that tea towel
slung like your signature
over the back of a chair.
I could weep for the small spoons
lying down with the forks,
the corkscrew with the tea strainer.
Leave them where they are forever?
Or harden my heart
and put them back where they belong?

Buy Hugo Williams's *West End Final* from the Poetry Book Society's online bookshop:
www.poetrybookshoponline.com.

Call the PBS on 020 7833 9247 for details of membership or to request a copy of our quarterly poetry review, the *Bulletin*, or visit our website www.poetrybooks.co.uk.