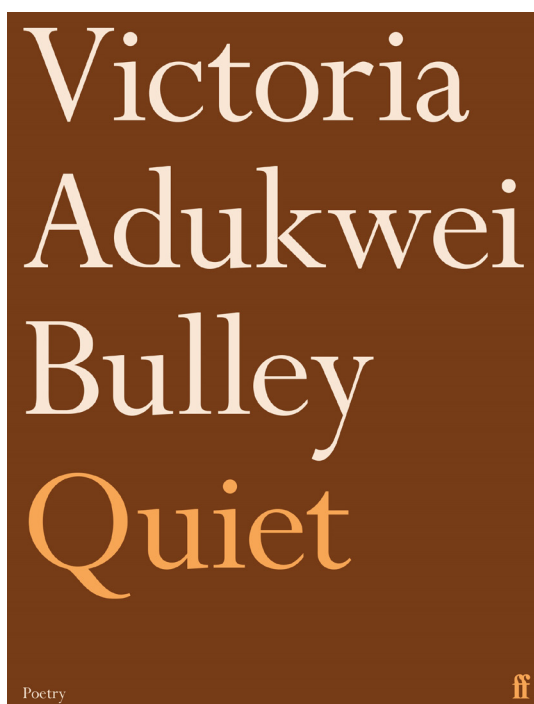


# READERS' NOTES

Welcome to the **T. S. Eliot Prize 2022 Readers' Notes**, in which we present the ten exciting collections shortlisted for this year's prize. The Readers' Notes offer introductions to some key poems, with reviews and biographies of the poets, and suggest creative writing prompts. Take the notes to your book group or poetry workshop, or respond individually to them in your own time. English teachers – if you're preparing your students for any Unseen Poem papers, hone their skills on this year's list.



## **Quiet** by Victoria Adukwei Bulley What reviewers say



*Quiet* (Faber, 2022) by Victoria Adukwei Bulley. [faber.co.uk](http://faber.co.uk)

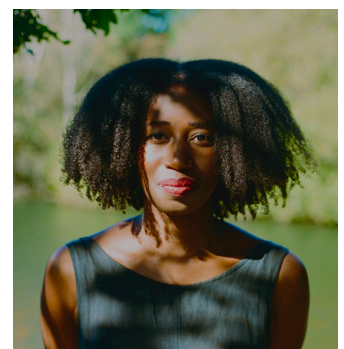
'Bulley's mission is to revise myopic historical narratives around Blackness. A particular focus is the Black female body, as in the epistolary poem 'dear little b,' where she writes: "some might say you should be louder, bolder, tall. / uppercase & camera-ready. but little b, you're weary, / aren't you, of being counted in the wrong kinds of ways". 'Death Is Everywhere & Not Here' is a subtle recollection of the Grenfell disaster: "I want to be useful & beautiful but what did I do today except watch a tall / building burn, while the boy who once called it home phones the BBC, says / you know at least five hundred people live in there – I didn't see five hundred people leave". [...] Bulley's collection may begin quietly, but by the end her voice is clearly heard.' – Sana Goyal, *Times Literary Supplement*

"Bones can speak long after the flesh has gone." Victoria Adukwei Bulley's debut is an exploration of the power of silence as a means of resistance, a way of carving space for the self in a hostile world. Rooted in Black feminist thinking, the poems have a clear-eyed elegance, buttressed with a controlled ferocity that is acute on the damage done by institutional blankness, and how it forces an uncomfortable conformity: "They were too happy / to realise they were poster girls / for the effacement of themselves." Bulley [...] achieves a tone both delicate and strong, studded with moments that catch the breath: "if your pain is alive in me / so too must be your joy". With a generous and interrogative spirit, *Quiet* marks the arrival of a major poetic talent.' – Rishi Dastidar, *The Guardian*

## About the poet

Victoria Adukwei Bulley is a poet, writer and artist. An alumna of the Barbican Young Poets and recipient of an Eric Gregory Award, Victoria has held residencies in the US, Brazil, and at the V&A Museum in London. Her debut pamphlet, *Girl B*, was published by the African Poetry Book Fund in 2017. She is the recipient of a Techne scholarship for doctoral research at Royal Holloway, University of London. *Quiet* is her debut collection.

Victoria Adukwei Bulley.  
Photo: Timothy Pulford-Cutting



# READERS' NOTES



## Discussion ideas

- 'Declaration: I' is one of a number of poems in the book titled some version of 'Declaration'. This one is very near the beginning. How does it read as a creative manifesto, an ars poetica or a statement of intent?
- The note to 'How Not to Disappear' reads 'This poem's epigraph borrows words spoken by Evidence Joel in an interview with Sky News following the disappearance of her son, Richard Okorogheye, from their London home. Okorogheye, aged 19, was reported missing in March 2021. His body was subsequently recovered from a pond in Epping Forest in the weeks following.' Is 'How Not to Disappear' a memorial?
- Read the first section of 'Of the Snail & its Loveliness' and then stop. Where do you think the poem is going to go? Does your subsequent reading of the rest of the poem confirm or confound your expectations?
- How does Victoria Adukwei Bulley's snail poem compare with Fiona Benson's glow worm poem? You can read Fiona's poem, 'Love Poem, Lampyridae (Glow Worms)', in our Readers' Notes on her shortlisted collection *Ephemeron* (Cape Poetry, 2022).

## Writing prompt

- *Quiet* contains a poem called 'essex playground, 2004'. Victoria Adukwei Bulley was born in 1991. The connection between the poet and the poem in this case might not be directly autobiographical of course – but write a poem with the title '[your home region] playground, [the year you were 13]'. What troubled you then? What brought you joy?

## Find out more

### Other books by Victoria Adukwei Bulley

*Tonipoem* (Bad Betty Press, 2020)

*Girl B* (Akashic Books, 2017)

See also: [granta.com/three-poems-victoria-adukwei-bulley](https://granta.com/three-poems-victoria-adukwei-bulley)

Listen to Victoria on poetry, quietness and music at [bit.ly/bulleyfaberplaylist](https://bit.ly/bulleyfaberplaylist)

### If you liked Victoria Adukwei Bulley's work, try...

- Kayo Chingonyi
- Lavinia Greenlaw
- Dzifa Benson

## About the T. S. Eliot Prize

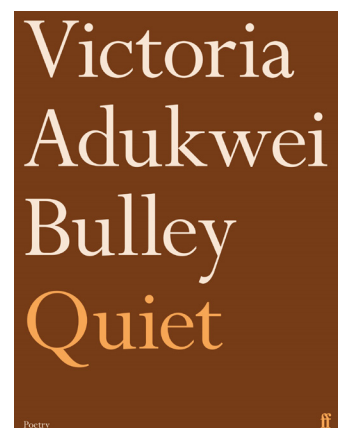
The T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry, awarded annually to the author of the best new collection of poetry published in the UK and Ireland, was inaugurated in 1993 to celebrate the Poetry Book Society's 40th birthday and honour its founding poet. Since 2016, the Prize has been supported and run by the T. S. Eliot Foundation. It is the most prestigious poetry prize in the world, and the only major poetry prize judged purely by established poets. It is also the most valuable in British poetry. The judges for the 2022 Prize are Jean Sprackland (Chair), Hannah Lowe and Roger Robinson. For more information, visit [tseliot.com/prize](https://tseliot.com/prize)

## T. S. Eliot Prize 2022: join in

- Look out for the **video recordings of interviews and poems** by all ten of the shortlisted poets, as well as past winning and shortlisted poets, on our YouTube channel: [bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube](https://bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube)
- Join us and the poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 15 January 2023. Hosted by Ian McMillan and British Sign Language interpreted, readings are simultaneously live streamed to a worldwide audience. Book at [bit.ly/eliotprize22sbcreadings](https://bit.ly/eliotprize22sbcreadings)
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at [bit.ly/eliot22reviews](https://bit.ly/eliot22reviews)
- **Sign up to our weekly e-newsletters**, packed with information and insights about all ten shortlisted poets, and specially commissioned features and giveaways. To stay up to date with Prize news, subscribe at [bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews](https://bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews)
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Twitter, Instagram and Facebook**: @tseliotprize
- Who is your pick for this year's T. S. Eliot Prize? Share ideas at **T. S. Eliot Prize shortlist shared reading events** such as the one run by the Poetry School at Southbank Centre, London, held on the day of the Eliot Prize Readings (see [poetryschool.com](https://poetryschool.com)) – or you could set up your own!

## Declaration: I

check if you want to  
but you won't find any  
lyric shame here.  
we don't do that, no;  
we nuh ave dat here.  
you won't find one lash  
on the surface of this eye –  
look: if I say I, I mean  
a lot of people  
& at this table  
*all of us eat.*



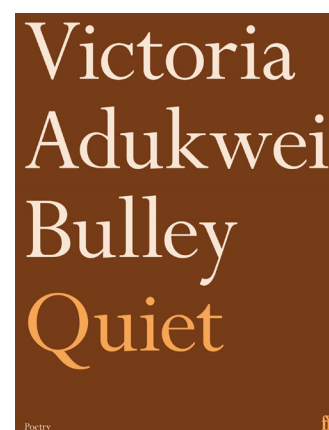
from *Quiet* by Victoria  
Adukwei Bulley (Faber, 2022).  
© The author. [faber.co.uk](http://faber.co.uk)



## How Not to Disappear

*'I told a police officer that my son was missing, please help me find him, and she said: "If you can't find your son, how do you expect police officers to find your son for you?"'*

Who would guess the prayers you'll say  
walking home at night, crossing streets you know  
too well were never yours to claim. All the promises  
you'll make about what you'll do with your life  
should you make it to the warm indoors,  
the soft & grateful bed. God, you'll say, below your breath,  
*let no strange man put hands on me*, let the dark  
not drape this body on terms other than its own;  
speed me to the door, let the first key be the right one;  
the mechanism oiled & easy. *& should I fail*, you'll say  
*in any of this, let me have spoken to no one lately*  
*about bad days, hard times*, or worse have written  
a poem or two about them, to be found when your belongings  
are thumbled through, finally; too late. *Please, God*, you'll say,  
*one more time, deliver me home to my known life*, seen  
& loved by those to whom it's always mattered; borne & fed  
by a lover & others who, like you, already know how  
(& how not) to disappear, unable to forget  
the way they spoke to that boy's mother.



from *Quiet* by Victoria  
Adukwei Bulley (Faber, 2022).  
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## Of the Snail & its Loveliness

1.

Once, I saw a snail so small  
so young its shell was still  
transparent.

I stopped to look – I had the time  
to see a thing unseen before –  
a tiny flute

a ghost of white that swayed  
within the sleeping shell,  
marking time so faithfully.

Little snail,  
you'll never know what happened  
outside as you dreamed.

I watched your small heart's beating  
& called my love  
to come & see.

2.

Nomad of no fixed address, praise  
your paradox, your calcium elasticity.  
You who wander are not lost.  
Home is wherever you are right now.  
Everywhere you go is where you live.

3.

Let me sing of the snail  
& its loveliness, of the beauty  
I have ruined underfoot,  
wincing as though the pain  
were entirely mine.  
Knowing I could walk this city  
in a fatal rush  
I have learned to step aside for you.  
Have crouched, even, in the rain  
to move you further along your way  
in the line of your direction.  
& what is care but this: to hold  
that which comes too soon to harm  
& set it on a safer path.  
To say *I'm sorry*, simply –  
to do this, & not dance.  
To signal the way to that place  
where the skin meets itself again  
or failing that, where honey  
fills the wound's red mouth;  
solders a space left empty  
of love. *Love*,  
*this way*, we might say,  
*this way*,  
holding, sometimes, the other  
sometimes the lonely self  
until it can be said, *love*,  
we are home now.

