

# 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.



## *England's Green* by Zaffar Kunial What reviewers say



*England's Green*  
(Faber & Faber, 2022)  
by Zaffar Kunial.  
[faber.co.uk](http://faber.co.uk)

'Kunial's second collection sees him find serenity within the roar of modern England. He directs us to look at not just war memorials and hedges ("This place is full of them"), but cities and "the locked stone wreath / of motorways" too. His ability to convey moments of sheer loveliness remains unmatched; his style is simple, declarative, elegant. A guarded sense of the spiritual provides another thread to bind the poems together. ['Ings'], a long poem that braids J.L. Carr and a speed awareness course into a meditation on mourning, is a brilliant example of this: "There is something // locked-in about grief, but there is something // horribly unlocked about grieving.'" – **Rishi Dastidar, *The Guardian***

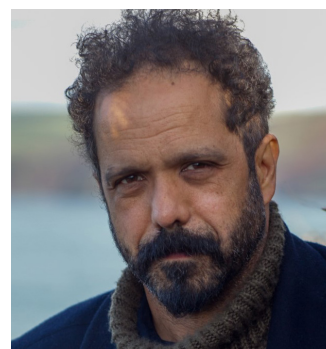
'Words like "motherland", "fatherland" and "Eng(er)land" are too often brandished, drawn as weapons against some feared, or hated, other. Kunial disarms these words, polishes them, and sets them with the skill of a jeweller. He shows us how beautiful these words can be when handled with care and shown in their best light.'

– **Carl Tomlinson, *The Friday Poem***

'Zaffar Kunial is a proven master of taking things apart, polishing the fugitive parts of single words, of a sound, a colour, the name of a flower, and putting them back together so that we see them in an entirely different light. [...] By such close attention to the parts, the poems have a genius for invoking absence, whether that be a missing father, the death of a mother or a path not taken. Fully formed, they share a centre of gravity: migrations, memories, little transgressions and disturbances, summoned and contained in small gestures – a hand held, the smell of a newly bred rose or the scratch a limpet makes to mark its home.' – **Faber & Faber blurb**

## Zaffar Kunial

Zaffar Kunial was born in Birmingham and lives in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. In 2011 he won third prize in the National Poetry Competition with 'Hill Speak'. In 2014, he published a pamphlet in the Faber New Poets series, was awarded The Poetry Society's Geoffrey Dearmer Prize and was Poet-in-Residence at the Wordsworth Trust. His debut collection, *Us* (Faber & Faber, 2018), was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and other awards. *Six*, his pamphlet of cricket poems, coinciding with a residency at the Oval, was published in 2019. He was a 2022 recipient of the Yale University Windham-Campbell Prize. *England's Green* is his second collection.



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## Discussion ideas

- Who was Juan Ramón Jiménez? How is your Spanish? Look for his poem 'La Verdecilla' (here for example: [bit.ly/verdecilla](https://bit.ly/verdecilla)) – is it the one which has influenced Zaffar Kunial's 'Green' do you think?
- What is Yorkshire fog? If you were to invent a ritual to welcome a poet's child to the world, what might you include? Is that what's happening in 'Inkling and Font'?
- Do you recall an unread book from childhood with a power over your imagination similar to that of *The Wind in the Willows* on Zaffar Kunial? Did you ever read it? What happened?
- 'The very last thing poetry is // is a poem' are the very last lines of *England's Green*. What do you think it means?

## Writing prompt

- Can you try translating or making a version of 'La Verdecilla'?

## Find out more

### Other books by Zaffar Kunial

*Six* (Faber & Faber, 2019)

*Us* (Faber & Faber, 2018)

See also: [faber.co.uk/author/zaffar-kunial](https://faber.co.uk/author/zaffar-kunial)

### If you liked Zaffar Kunial's work, try...

- Paul Farley
- Vidyan Ravinthiran
- Anthony Anaxagorou

## 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!

# READERS' NOTES POEMS

## Green

after Juan Ramón Jiménez

Green she is when I find her. Or find her grave. A second time. I saw but didn't look at the life in the front garden on the way to the church, never mind the little nameplate which had lost its stick and been driven to a back wall towards her garden, on the green tide of a mower, I guess. I found it unexpectedly. Slate grey. She who taught me how black shapes tame sounds – A is for acorns, apples. But why is this grass so green? And what are you doing here? I keep asking, over the grass. Over jungles and over seas from bedtimes when my father worked. *Nights*. The word hid a job, the dark's factory. *Not there, not there*, she says as I feel the seeds out from a sunny packet and lob them over the lawn she'd kneel on, a decade later, losing hours to find a four-leaf clover I'd take into exams at the end of corridors – but no, the nasturtiums should go in the border. Wake Green Road, where Tolkien lived and saw his Old Forest move, was off my road, a road that led to the hospital I was born in and nearly was not, small, blue, having a fit. When we left home one Christmas day, it was because I wouldn't wear a paper crown from a cracker and Dad exploded. To him the green hat was a country, unfolded – a flag I didn't see. The mostly missing forest of Arden marched on in moss and hard gaps. Hard as baked conkers. Concrete. Like the dread, older than life, that was always her death. Solid. In a hole in the ground. It was here – in Bodenham, in the Welsh Marches, miles from the choked-up ring roads, a grey concrete tide, the locked stone wreath of motorways and my patch of city, with that small grass roundabout branching like a mad clock to Moseley village, Hall Green, Sparkhill, Sarehole – we held her wake at England's Gate. Of all places. A coach house country pub, a bus stop away from this grave. *Bus* in our house meant *enough*, which I took as *stop* as tea poured from a green spout. I'll stare further on not looking at the front garden as I pass, as I stare now at this green hair, cut grass, the loose nameplate I press in, remembering those seeds, a round nasturtium, a thin cosmos. Her laughing at me as I threw their promise in the lawn. Between buses I feel the lock of the hour. *Not there, not there*. However short the life that began with her a green gate will always open from a hinge in the air. Unlatched like this now

2022

T. S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT  
PRIZE  
SHORTLIST

Zaffar  
Kunial  
England's  
Green

from *England's Green* (Faber & Faber, 2022) by Zaffar Kunial. [faber.co.uk](http://faber.co.uk)

## Inkling and Font

*My baby's fingertips were dusted  
that morning in Yorkshire fog  
and his ears in poetry too*

*no font's liquid  
but cloud's and earth's, suspended.  
And composed, lifted quiet.*



from *England's Green* (Faber & Faber, 2022) by Zaffar Kunial. [faber.co.uk](http://faber.co.uk)



## The Wind in the Willows

Unread, the book was all shades of distance  
but I knew the title and the title stuck. Mossy cover.  
Hazed interior. The species too. I'd say, if asked,  
it was my favourite kind of tree, though it was never  
with one certain tree in mind. There was a garden

I vaguely remember, the way the leaves curtained  
like shadows. A lit cave. A fringe, not yours, you could  
look through. And the wood that grew by flowing water  
carved cricket bats, which was a part of the little I also knew.  
Maybe it was all a little to do with letters too, the tongueless

trees of that printed double *I*, or the uncrowing tall *Ws*  
of *The Wind in the Willows*; maybe it was all aural –  
an echoed 'in', *Wind in...* the open-mouthed billowy *lows*  
– maybe the leaf-fringed mystery, between the two.  
And speaking of poetry, I had this initiating thought: in

the flax-smelling grain of the first bat I was gifted  
wind was contained. Old power locked. A gravity well  
beyond mine. Light enough, slight arms could lift it. Wind  
in willow, this percussive wood a gathered strength. A mutual  
bind. Though I was far from writing – or this book –

that sense, I suppose in spirit, was poetry and early.

The very last thing poetry is

is a poem.



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