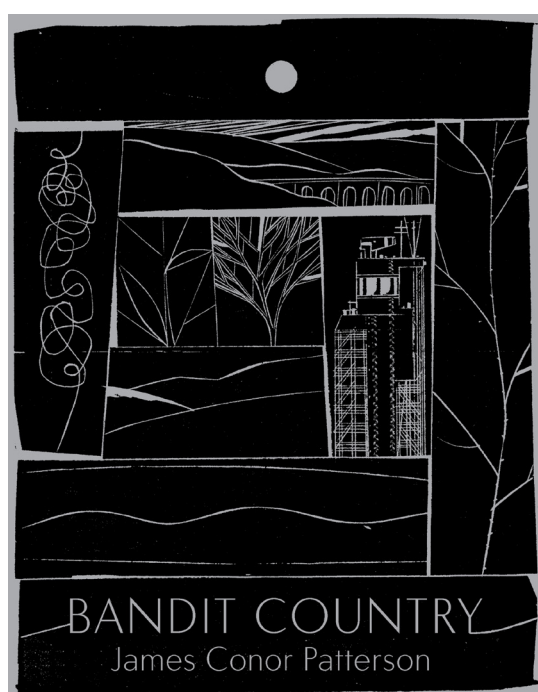


READERS' NOTES

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.



bandit country by James Conor Patterson What reviewers say



bandit country (Picador Poetry, 2022) by James Conor Patterson.
panmacmillan.com

'Patterson's prose poems are brilliantly tight and sonnet-like, his Douglas Dunn epigraph prompting a comparison with the succinct, haunted atmosphere of Dunn's *Terry Street*. Patterson [...] conjures revenants from a bloody history. 'about suffering' [...] assembles a canvas of Newry characters [...] Masterful timing turns the poem here when we realise this is an imaginary scene, "the sorta thing I imagine there mighta bin / had I lived through the eighties...". The past informs the present beautifully [...] Patterson's London is equally haunted [...] But Newry's ever-present as "we bully home intae coherence [...] HDMI cables, glasses a pinot grigio [...] our *salt rebuff* t england has less t do with speech, an more the small republic sprawled across our mattress." ('london poem').' – **Martina Evans**, *The Irish Times*

from an interview with *The Friday Poem*

TFP: You've suggested politically engaged poets with progressive views are 'fighting back', comparing them to figures such as Auden, MacNeice and Spender. Can you elaborate on this?

JCP: It may sound melodramatic, but poets now are publishing books into a world where climate change and the constant threat of poverty and war have made the future perpetually uncertain. Couple that with the normalisation of far-right attitudes in media discourse and you have the same situation that Auden, MacNeice and Spender faced in the 1930s [...] I think of Raymond Antrobus's work in that regard, Roger Robinson, Jay Bernard, Momtaza Mehri and Caleb Femi. By telling the truth, these poets are doing the exact same thing that Auden did during the rise of Fascism in Europe in the 1930s, and with Fascism on the rise again, we need to pay attention to those who are calling it like they see it.

James Conor Patterson

James Conor Patterson is from Newry in the north of Ireland and currently lives in London. He won an Eric Gregory Award for *bandit country* in 2019 and fragments and versions of the poems have appeared in publications including *The Moth*, *New Statesman*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Poetry Review* and elsewhere. A selection of James's poems was shortlisted for *The White Review* Poet's Prize. His journalism and non-fiction have been widely published. He is editor of the anthology *The New Frontier: Reflections from the Irish Border*, published by New Island. *bandit country* is James's debut collection. *James Conor Patterson photo: Aimée Walsh*



READERS' NOTES



Discussion ideas

- James Conor Patterson says 'about suffering' is loosely structured after W.H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts'. How do the two poems speak to each other?
- What role does food play in 'london mixtape'?
- Dickens, Alexander McQueen and Hitchcock: why might this trio appear in 'london mixtape'?
- If you were a cocktail, what cocktail would you be? What about other members of your group, or your wider circle of friends? What's an oubliette? (A synonym is 'bottle dungeon'.) How playful is 'cocktails', ultimately?

Writing prompt

- Where was your first home? Where is your current home? What's the distance between them? Write into that distance – maybe using thoughts about food to bridge the gap.

Find out more

Read more poems by James at bit.ly/poemsjcp

Read *The Friday Poem*'s interview with James in full at thefridaypoem.com/james-conor-patterson/

See also: jamesconorpatterson.wordpress.com

If you liked James Conor Patterson's work, try...

- Ciaran Carson
- Seamus Heaney
- Tom Leonard

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

T. S. Eliot Prize 2022: join in

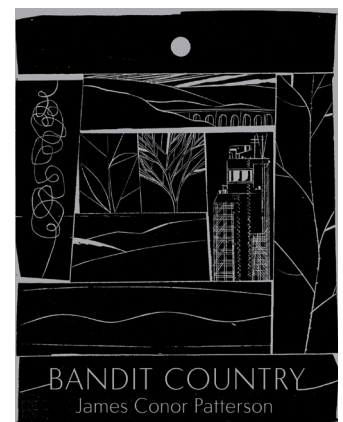
- Look out for the **video recordings of interviews and poems** by all ten of the shortlisted poets, as well as past winning and shortlisted poets, on our YouTube channel: bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube
- Join us and the poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, 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
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at 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
- 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) – or you could set up your own!



about suffering

so many of us gathered that ye'd think
we were about t levitate the town hall;
freaks of ivry stripe – from navvies ankle-deep
in concrete dust, t pensioners, schoolteachers, councilmen, the ecumenical –
callin down the moutha the crimean war cannon
like oracles charmin apollo from the rocks...
am somewhere near the back, among that sun-bleached portion
of a stranger's bad polaroid – probly drunk,
probly pitchin
memorial arcs of strongbow down the arts centre steps –
when outta nowhere, a saracen comes squealin
through the barricades and our handiwork is scyattered all over kildare st:
bornt-out cars, wash pots, empty kegs, cinder blocks.

the sorta thing i imagine there mighta bin
had i lived through the eighties; as the unheard of, unseen
narrator of an altoger
grottier icarus – wearin my german army sorplus coat
& battered derbys – who can't seem t articulate
the insidiousness of failure as sanctioned by the state.
i think about this, and about my parents & brors,
press *book selected flights* and i go back home t vote.



from *bandit country* (Picador Poetry, 2022) by James Conor Patterson. panmacmillan.com



london mixtape

1

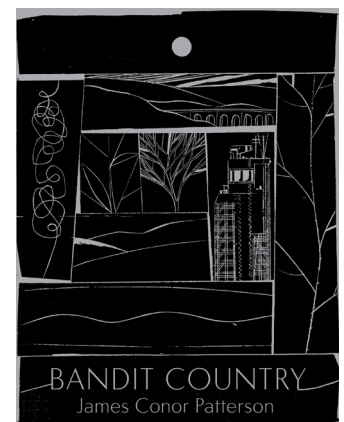
say ye go fer a walk near clerkenwell green. say it's november, and the sertraline rattles yer bones like the shackles on jacob marley's wrists – *you may be an undigested bit of beef, you think. a blot of mustard* – though the night swings gently off the alexander mcqueen buildin, an the time fer thinkin yer happiness unreal has melted intae yer toffee nut latté.

2

the soup digs down between the polymers of the disposable carton ye wanna save fer overnight oats. burrowed within the subatomic, so that the non-scratch super-absorbent scourer ye use just won't cut it fer the lingerin smella garlic. these are the days before ye can afford bowls, an by then yer anger has pitched itself so far above the fire alarm goin off across the street, that when ye finally fling yer keys across the room an scream that ye wanna kill yerself, the fire brigade arrives an you think that they're there for you.

3

the streets here lie thick as forest strata an dumber than god, though t night they luk well. in an alley behind yer flat, a man nods off with his trousers round his ankles. a security light flashes agin the brown brick tenement facin intae the courtyard, and as ye drift off t sleep, ye whisper to yer girlfriend that it reminds ye of *rear window*.



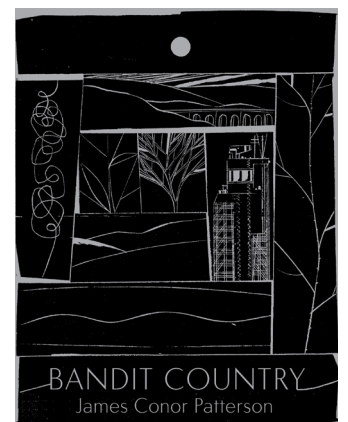
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cocktails

because we're in *bellini's* on merchants quay – still reelin from the public display of affection near margaret sq – i order somethin rough & warm, wi lotsa whiskey, which the barman introduces as *old fashioned* an tops off with a twista lemon an floatin ball of crushed, smooth ice.

you order a *dark & stormy*, which is described by the menu as bein: *fiery, refreshing, sweet, shaken & served long*, an i can't help but think that wiv each just ordered ourselves from the bar, as though our tumblers wer lined wi the elixir of poolside narcissi, or an oubliette driven through the highball lukin glass.



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