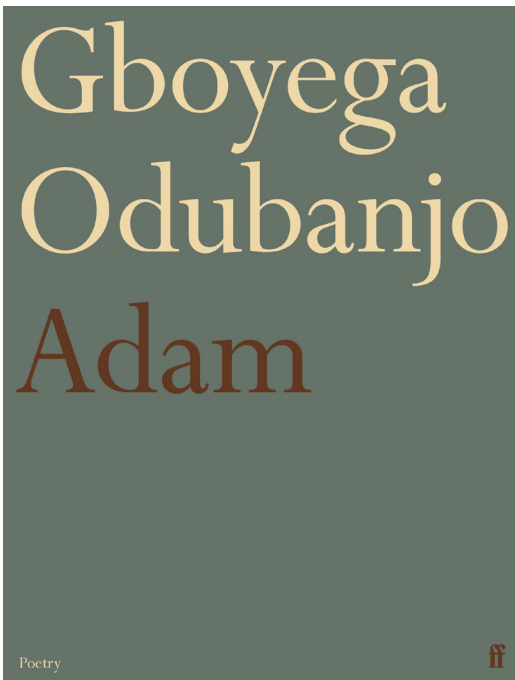


# T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

The T. S. Eliot Prize 2024 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.



*Adam* (Faber & Faber, 2024)  
by Gboyega Odubanjo.  
[bit.ly/odubanjoadam](http://bit.ly/odubanjoadam)

## On *Adam*

'This highly anticipated collection from the acclaimed British-Nigerian poet, who died in 2023, is a monumental polyphonic odyssey that tells the story of "Adam", the name given to an unidentified boy whose torso was discovered in the Thames in 2001. What Odubanjo accomplishes in just under 40 poems extends beyond mere persona; Adam is an avatar, "playing whoever [he] wanted to be that day". In Odubanjo's lushly intellectual and disarmingly jovial poetics, autobiography parallels archival material. His unmistakable voice fuses Yoruba, English, Nigerian Pidgin: "everything on credit highlife lovely / every ting na double double everything // london na be de place for me / where i dey chop money". Reading this collection is an experience of exquisite heartbreak.' – Oluwaseun Olayiwola, *The Guardian*

'Odubanjo's [...] writing is both muscular and limber, exhibiting an apparently depthless capacity for grief, love, warmth, humour, disbelief, curiosity and care. 'The Lyric Adam', for instance, briefly pastiches the academic language used to talk about poetry ("most commonly understood as

the objective form of adam") before letting that language splinter into multitudinous forms: 'or—more simply—the speaking voice prompting the reader/witness/man who first sees the body in the thames to imagine adam—to try to go beyond the page/thames and understand who adam is'. Standard academic language cannot accommodate the webs of connection here, where the "reader" is also a "witness", too close for comfort to the man who initially sighted Adam's body. The Thames bleeds into the page, binding readers, witnesses and citizens together into a common subjecthood.' – Imogen Cassels, *Literary Review*

## About the poet

Gboyega Odubanjo (1996–2023) was born and raised in East London. He was the author of three poetry pamphlets: *While I Yet Live* (Bad Betty Press, 2019); *Two stops short of Barking* (The Alternative School of Economics, 2021); and *Aunty Uncle Poems* (The Poetry Business / New Poets List, 2021), winner of the Michael Marks Award and an Eric Gregory Award. *Adam* is his debut full collection. A Barbican Young Poets alumnus, Odubanjo was an editor at *bath magg* and Bad Betty Press, co-chair of *Magma* and a member of the Roundhouse Poetry Collective, after which he later became a Roundhouse Resident Artist. He was a Creative Writing Tutor on the Creative Future IMPART programme, supporting writers from under-represented backgrounds. His UK garage single 'LDN GRLS' with Love Remain is out with the Sony Music UK label Black Butter Records. The Gboyega Odubanjo Foundation for low-income Black writers was established in 2023 to honour his legacy.



Photo © Asare Debrah

# T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

## What do you think?

- You can find more information about Adam's story at [bit.ly/adammurder](https://bit.ly/adammurder) but it's very upsetting, so go carefully. What's the nature of the gratitude being expressed in 'Adam'?
- How do you read 'Rewilding' in the light of the climate crisis? What character does the river play in Adam's story?
- What do you know about the history of the Benin Bronzes? Here's one starting point online: [bit.ly/storybeninbronzes](https://bit.ly/storybeninbronzes). What might be missing from this story? Does 'Bronze Adam of Benin' fill the gaps?
- How do you read the phrase 'tell yourself that you are right there'? Are the roles of father and son in relation to the speaker of the poem fixed? How about through the rest of the book, if you have read all of it? Do we take on the role of Adam's parent, or of Adam himself?

## Reply in writing

How would you write an elegy for somebody you didn't know?

## Find out more

### Other work by Gboyega Odubanjo

*Two stops short of Barking* (The Alternative School of Economics, 2021)

*Aunty Uncle Poems* (The Poetry Business, 2021)

*While I Yet Live* (Bad Betty Press, 2019)

### Something to watch

You can find many videos of Gboyega Odubanjo reading on YouTube. He reads his poems for Wandsworth Libraries on National Poetry Day 2021 at [bit.ly/gboyeganpd2021](https://bit.ly/gboyeganpd2021). See him read 'Man' at [bit.ly/readsman](https://bit.ly/readsman)

### If you like Gboyega Odubanjo's work, try...

- Ishion Hutchinson
- Victoria Adukwei Bulley
- Yomi Şode

[www.faber.co.uk/author/gboyega-odubanjo](https://www.faber.co.uk/author/gboyega-odubanjo)

## About the T. S. Eliot Prize

The T. S. Eliot Prize, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year, 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. It has been run by The T. S. Eliot Foundation since 2016. 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 2024 Prize are Mimi Khalvati (Chair), Anthony Joseph and Hannah Sullivan. For more information, visit [tseliot.com/prize](https://tseliot.com/prize)

## T. S. Eliot Prize 2024: join in

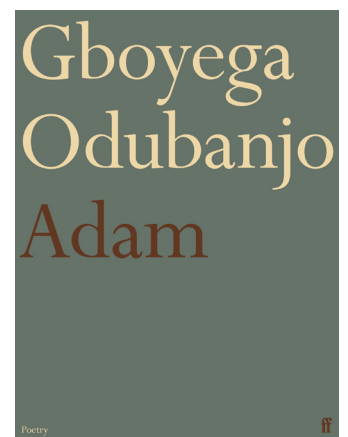
- Hear our shortlisted poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 12 January 2025. Hosted by Ian McMillan and British Sign Language interpreted, readings are simultaneously live streamed to a worldwide audience. Book for in-person tickets at [bit.ly/eliot24reading](https://bit.ly/eliot24reading) or for the live stream at [bit.ly/eliot24livestream](https://bit.ly/eliot24livestream)
- Explore the Shortlist with Eliot Prize winner Joelle Taylor at the **Poetry School's Preview Workshop**, 2pm, Sunday 12 January 2025. See [bit.ly/2024eliotpreview](https://bit.ly/2024eliotpreview) for details.
- 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](https://bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube)
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at [bit.ly/eliot24reviews](https://bit.ly/eliot24reviews)
- **Sign up to our weekly e-newsletters**, packed with information and insights about all ten shortlisted poets, and specially commissioned features and giveaways. Subscribe at [bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews](https://bit.ly/eliotprizesubscribenews)
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Instagram, X** and **Facebook**: @tseliotprize



## Adam

first and foremost thank you to the coast because without the coast how do we move from here to there how does the boy land in germany where an adult maybe a woman buys a pair of orange shorts from woolworths thank you to those who circumcise within the first few days meaning when i look at him at his self i know he is from benin city i know from benin city they took him to hamburg thank you joyce who he was handed over to and who brought him to london who after years said this is ikpomwosa who a year later said actually this is patrick thank you joyce maybe before it all happened you heard the boy coughing and gave him medicine maybe the medicine put him to sleep maybe that's when thank you for doing what you were told to do maybe telling them to make it quick telling them to start with his neck

thank you ceremony thank you tradition thank you river where he was seen the last time the first thank you to the man who found him thank you orange shorts for covering what shame he had thank you to the men in uniform who named him adam because he was the first they'd seen because all of him was torso was body was ribs because they knew adam was where knowing began

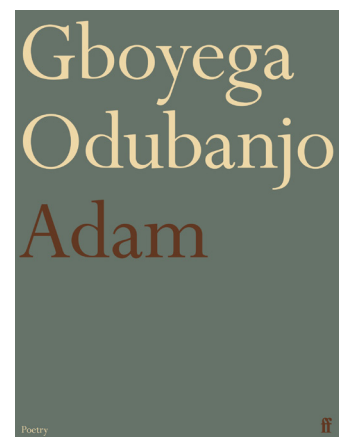


Adam (Faber & Faber, 2024)  
by Gboyega Odubanjo.  
[bit.ly/odubanjoadam](https://bit.ly/odubanjoadam)



## Rewilding

it was the rainy season so it rained. the old man snored. these times the river like a boy was either missing or was everywhere you looked. in the east it was everywhere because they had convinced themselves it didn't exist. newbuilds and roundabouts existed. the river was just a story they thought. so they planned their journeys to the minute not knowing where they had come from. but it rained so there was rain and because the people had forgotten the river had to retell its story. it said before anything there was water and there was water. on one side you. on the other side you. the people mistook this for a riddle. each claiming a side for themselves. the river welcoming the people in their entirety. taking in them the clothes on their backs all that they clung to.

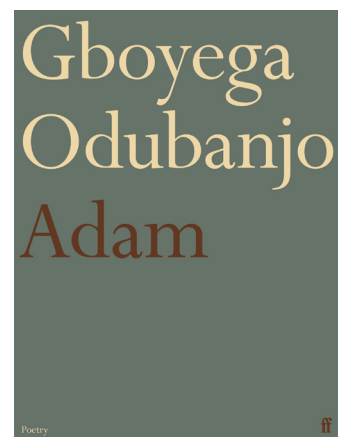


*Adam* (Faber & Faber, 2024)  
by Gboyega Odubanjo.  
[bit.ly/odubanjoadam](https://bit.ly/odubanjoadam)



## Bronze Adam of Benin

if walking through your home as the day becomes itself  
you find the bed of your only son empty do not panic.  
decline all media requests. ignore the authorities  
for they cannot help and there is work to be done.  
you have prepared exactly for this. the longer  
you take to make a mould of your son the harder  
it will become to remember him. to ensure that the head  
of your son is lifelike close your eyes as you meld it.  
think of how his nostrils flared as he grinned  
in the face of your worry. now cream the mask  
in spit and clay. swaddle it firm to your chest  
just as you would an actual boy. pour molten bronze directly  
onto your chest and let it flow into the gap of your cradle.  
rest so you wake to your son's burnished eyes free from tears or want.  
people will have by now heard of your work  
and will travel to bear witness. do not allow visitors.  
instead make an altar for your son and on days  
when his laugh echoes inside you go to the altar  
and wear your son and tell yourself that you are right there.



*Adam* (Faber & Faber, 2024)  
by Gboyega Odubanjo.  
[bit.ly/odubanjoadam](https://bit.ly/odubanjoadam)