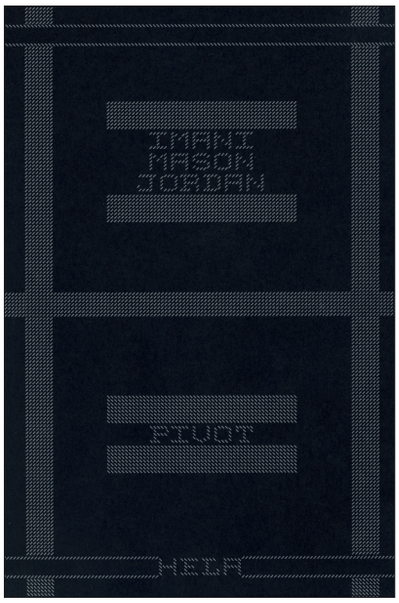
T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2026 READERS' NOTES

The T. S. Eliot Prize 2026 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.

2026
T. S. Eliot
T. S. ELIOT PRIZE



PIVOT (HELA Press, 2026) by Imani Mason Jordan. **www.helapress.com**

On *PIVOT*

'*PIVOT* is an experimental, book-length poem exploring the profound act of turning, with the Haitian Revolution as its cornerstone. It moves beyond historical narrative, scrutinising this epochal event through its critical junctures of rupture and radical reorientation. Using minimalist abstractions of language, Mason Jordan delves into the visceral and conceptual mechanics of turning: a turning away from colonial subjugation, and a turning towards new vocabularies of freedom. *PIVOT* examines international revolt, revolutionary fervour, and the development of Black Marxism(s) through a critical reflection on Haitian revolutionary history.' –**HELA Press blurb**

'"[T]he psyche curls the / throat, somewhere beneath fire": a book-length poem that reads as compressed resistance and reframing, *PIVOT* calibrates its expressions – at once fluid and enraged – through the nexus of the Haitian Revolution. Across the poem's four movements, British author Mason Jordan pursues our understandings of slavery, marronage, uprising and rebellion, deepening and inculcating them in the rhythmic insistences the poem makes. Dispense with binary readings of the text and feel it open further to you: it is a work that has accumulated life before you even open its first page. *PIVOT* will reward your attention, and entrust the most attuned reader to a power of knowing that runs marrow deep, in which the poem's speaker builds "a language of / absurdity, glissant, been tears, between / 18th, the 19th, between Marseille / between bourdeux, fanon, rocks, and / continuous frame, no monolithic language".' – **Shivanee Ramlochan, *Caribbean Beat***

'*PIVOT* is a staccato of the spirit, syllables gripping the tongue! This is an avant-garde in the true sense of the word, a place for every reader to take their place! Thank you, Dear Poet, for sparing us nothing, "swarmed over guns, and gunners, silences / nothing, two thousand dead lay upon the / field" – a brilliant collection of poems!"' – **CAConrad**

About the poet

Born in London, Imani Mason Jordan is a writer, editor, artist and curator working across performance and poetics. *PIVOT*, published by HELA Press, is their debut poetry collection. Other recent writing is included in *Thinking from Black: A Lexicon* (Macmillan, 2026) and Zanele Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (MACK, 2026). They are a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham, where their research explores carcerality and racial capitalism through the work of radical intellectual and cultural theorist Stuart Hall. Mason Jordan is Director of paperflesh publishing, a small press and editorial studio dedicated to Black experimental writing in translation and recovery. In 2026, they curated the group exhibition *Nomenclature for the Time Being* at Raven Row in London.

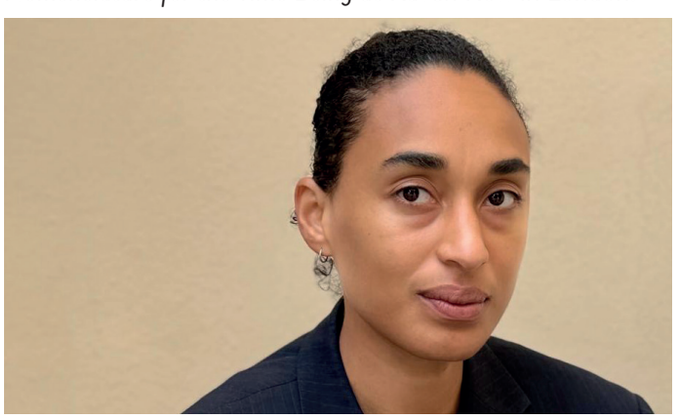


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What do you think?

- You can find more information about the **Haitian Revolution** from multiple sources online. Our first excerpt from *PIVOT* (beginning 'men in linen fragments') is the first page of the book. What might the three-times-repeated word 'not' set you up to expect?
- Read our second excerpt from *PIVOT* aloud (to each other if you are sharing the text as a group). Try this sitting down, or standing up, or moving around if you can. How do you make your performance alive? What do you do with the pace, pitch and volume of your voice to trace the changing energies of the words on the page?
- In our third excerpt (beginning 'impenetrable and stern'), who was 'dying in an alpine prison'?
- *PIVOT* is a book-length poem and we have given you short excerpts to discuss, rather than individual poems. Have we given you a fair introduction to the book? Does a trailer ever characterise a full-length film or a single aria, an opera? Should we have chosen another way to represent *PIVOT*?

Reply in writing

Interviewed about their writing process in our T. S. Eliot Prize videos, Imani Mason Jordan describes how, when writing long-form poems, they lay texts out on the floor and crawl over them to arrange and see them differently. What happens if you bring this approach to your writing, treating your poems like objects for a while rather than words? Cut a poem into pieces, throw them up in the air and see what happens when they land. Scrumple up a poem's page and listen to it. Bury a poem for a few weeks and then unearth it: what editorial suggestions have been made by the worms, the water and the soil?

Find out more

Other work by Imani Mason Jordan

Objects Who Testify (PSS, 2019)

Further reading

Look online for Yaniya Lee's in-depth **interview of Imani Mason Jordan** for *Public Parking*. An excerpt of **Imani's writing for the The Montez Writers Residency** is also available online.

If you like Imani Mason Jordan's work, try...

- M NourbeSe Philip
- Jay Bernard
- Safiya Kimaria Kinshasa

About the T. S. Eliot Prize

The T. S. Eliot Prize, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2023, 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. The T. S. Eliot estate has provided the prize money since the Prize's inception, and the T. S. Eliot Foundation took over the running of the Prize in 2016, following Inpress Books' acquisition of the PBS. 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 2026 Prize are Leontia Flynn (Chair), Ishion Hutchinson and Daisy Lafarge. For more information, visit **tseliot.com/prize**

T. S. Eliot Prize 2026: join in

- Join our shortlisted poets live at the celebrated **T. S. Eliot Prize Readings** at the Southbank Centre, London, on Sunday 17 January 2027. 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/eliot26readings** or for the live stream at **bit.ly/eliot26livestream**
- 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**
- **John Field's authoritative reviews** of all the shortlisted titles will be published on the T. S. Eliot Prize website over the coming months. Read them online at **bit.ly/eliot26shortlist**
- Browse the brilliant **Writers' Notes series**, devised by our partner the Poetry School, in which Eliot Prize shortlisted poets reflect on the writing of their nominated collections. Visit **poetryschool.com** and search 'writers' notes' –and look out for new additions by poets shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize 2026
- **Sign up to our weekly newsletters**, packed with information and insights about all ten shortlisted poets, and specially commissioned features and giveaways. Subscribe at **tseliot.com/prize**
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Instagram**, **Bluesky**, **X** and **Facebook**: @tseliotprize

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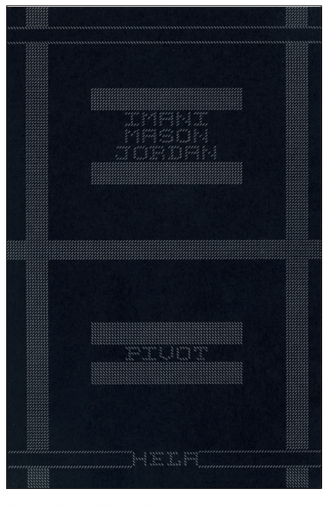
excerpt 1 from *PIVOT*

men in linen fragments holding coin altar,
i write moulting, burning
heaving metamorphosis, symbol seeds,
the pivot smoulders
individuation by machete, to turn
return, not to same, circle, and broken
not disappearance, legibility spilling
downward in waterfalls, psyche ecology,
wound watershed, blood sap flesh vein,
pulse not spent

to throw something together, to throw
together, to throw light, free throw, unseat,
overcome, to dash, to abandon, to project, to
exert, to build throw, throw my weight
around, stone's throw, throw in the towel,
throw caution, throw doubt

throw money at something, throw money,
someone, throw under the bus, throw up,
throw out, throw away, throw some, maroon
cartographies, plantknowledge, map, drawing
steward turned sovereign, language the whip,
child wanders, collect coin, name fountain
altars, domestic revolution, writing indivisible
from turning sky, you watched mytheyes,
mouthed become, the bus, throw up, throw
out, throw away, in the throes of it, throw a
spanner, in the works, under the bus, down
gauntlet, the book, to the wolves

to the wind, abandon, and i was thrown,
build a language, language with rocks,
concrete glissant language, curl dash
down, the gauntlet, exerting free throw, hurl



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excerpt 2 from *PIVOT*

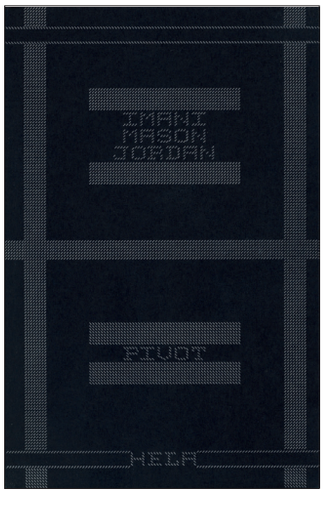
majority achievement, the few absented, of
spirits burst, the many, whose only
achievement, which means, a minority of,
outlaw, soon every tract, the woods sought
outlaw, reproductive, the nervous, strain
functionaries, minor achievement, destitute
aristocrats, forced importafricans, analogy,
supposition, of pregnant women, of infant
morality, mortal labour, mortality population, minority
jungle, their bonds, their bonds,
over one thousand, fissure, breach curl coil,
bend, spiral dash rush

sprint

scatter

discard, throw away, dispose, reject

doubtlight, suspicionflicker, uncertainty,
edge, border, verge, brink eggstorm,
ridicule protest, eruption, erode, wear,
dissolve, diminish exert, apply, assert,
deploy expel, eject, force out, discharge
explode, burst, detonate, erupt exit,
departure, escape, leave
fight



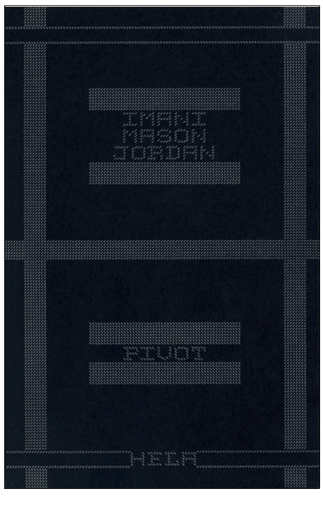
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excerpt 3 from *PIVOT*

impenetrable and stern, excessive aloofness,
with the habit and manner of reserve, taught
her necessity, selfcontained, lying,
deceitful, loquacious mendacity, to be
engaged in doing, to sit alongside,
reconciliatory, drenched, dying in an alpine
prison, to win the only successful slave revolt
in history.



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