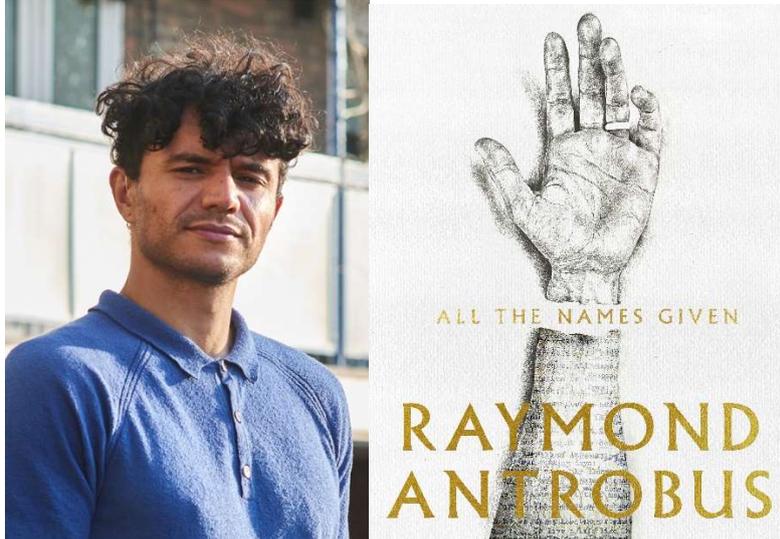


All the Names Given **by Raymond Antrobus**



Raymond Antrobus MBE FRSL was born in London, Hackney to an English mother and Jamaican father. In 2019 he became the first ever poet to be awarded the Rathbone Folio Prize for best work of literature in any genre. Other accolades include the Ted Hughes award, PBS Winter Choice, A *Sunday Times* Young Writer of the year award, Somerset Maugham Award and the *Guardian* Poetry Book Of The Year 2018, as well as a shortlist for The Griffin Prize and Forward Prize. In 2018 he was awarded The Geoffrey Dearmer Prize, (judged by Ocean Vuong), for his poem 'Sound Machine'. Also in 2019 and 2021 his poems ('Jamaican British', 'The Perseverance' and 'Happy Birthday Moon') were added to the UK's GCSE syllabus. He is the recipient of fellowships from Cave Canem, Complete Works 3, Jerwood Compton and the Royal Society of Literature. He is also one of the world's first recipients of an MA in Spoken Word education from Goldsmiths University. He is an advocate for several D/deaf charities including 'Deaf Kidz International' and 'National Deaf Children's Society'.

Reviews

'Raymond Antrobus's second collection, *All the Names Given* (Picador), builds on themes in his award-winning debut, *The Perseverance*, including meditations on the d/Deaf experience. In this book, Antrobus brings history to bear on the present through references to poets ranging from William Blake to Kamau Braithwaite, exploring love, marriage and brotherhood, as well as colonial inheritance, racism, ableism and intergenerational trauma. In "Plantation Paint", Antrobus responds to "Plantation Burial", an artwork by the 19th-century painter John Antrobus, and wonders how one might make sense of a surname "so anciently English that it has become foreign to itself". The speaker asks: "Tell me if I'm closer / to the white painter / with my name than I am / to the black preacher, / his hands wide to the sky, / the mahogany rot / of heaven". These lyric poems are also linguistically

innovative, spanning standard English, Jamaican patois and British sign language ... Moving deftly between tenderness and violence, hope and grief, praise and lament, this is a deeply evocative collection that will linger in the reader's mind.' - Mary Jean Chan, *The Guardian*

'*All the Names Given* is a meditation on communication: not only on what is communicated, but also how. Whether using his text as spoken word, gesture, or image, Antrobus blends these lines of communication into a seamless flow of poetry, investigating racial and cultural identities, familial relationships, and the spaces of silence among language.

Identity, in all its complexities, is explored in this collection, with silence itself becoming a pillar in that construction. That silence is investigated by the [Caption Poems], which are spaced throughout the collection and give a textual voice to the moments between poems. Formally inventive, these pieces bring to the fore precise silences which so often fall between the gaps of reader recognition.' - Beth Cochrane, *The Skinny*

The Acceptance

Dad's house stands again, four years
after being demolished. I walk in.
He lies in bed, licks his rolling paper,
and when I ask *Where have you been?*
We buried you. He says *I know,*

I know. I lean into his smoke, tell him
I went back to Jamaica. I met your brothers.
Losing you made me need them. He says
something I don't hear. *What?* Moving lips,
no sound. I shake my head. He frowns.

Disappears. I wake in the hotel room,
heart drumming. I get up slowly, the floor
is wet. I wade into the bathroom,
my father standing by the sink, all the taps
running. He laughs and takes

my hand, squeezes, his ring
digs into my flesh. I open my eyes again.
I'm by a river, a shimmering sheet
of green marble. Red ants crawl up
an oak tree's flaking bark. My hands

are cold mud. I follow the tall grass
by the riverbank, the song, my deaf Orisha
of music, Oshun, in brass bracelets and earrings,
bathes my father in a white dress. I wave. *Hey!*
She keeps singing. The dress turns the river

gold and there's my father surfacing.
He holds a white and green drum. I watch him
climb out the water, drip towards Oshun.
They embrace. My father beats his drum.
With shining hands, she signs: Welcome.

[Illustration of sign for 'Welcome' in BSL]

Text and Image

Tabitha; *y haven't u told me u luv me*
Raymond; *I'm literally writing you love poems*

you're trying to send me a portrait
of a lady on fire but the link won't load

so I don't know what it shows
and you're in the cinema rustling

in the dark and we think we aren't
doing things the old way, our marriage

is new age, no more you complete me crap,
have your own life and I have my life

and it's tricky and easy while we're doing
long distance but how can I show you

my love is unfolding if my words
can't reach you glowing and wild?

Horror Scene as Black English Royal (Captioned)

One night, in the shower, you look at your hands and they are
your great-great-great Grandfather's owner's hands. They are
leaning on the walls of his boiling house

[sound of camp fires]

Your feet are the whitest sugar and you don't know where to
step or what you're really holding when you sneak into your
Grandmother's bedroom, her jewels hanging by the mirror

[sound of secret room]

Is all of this what your great-great-great-Grandfather would have thrown you overboard for? Does it matter? Does your blood have to make all this old centurion noise?

[sound of fractures]

You won't strain to hear who or what is at the bottom of the ocean. What ship will turn, sink, rot burn, your mouth when you speak your reparation receipts?

[sound of sinking]

Your tongue tasting the iron bit, the River Nile, the Gulf Coast, the Thames, the Abeng horn. When you cry, what rhythm, the crown? What is this sound, erupting from the whitest black blood in the land?

Discussion Ideas

- Is dream-within-a-dream of 'The Acceptance' a one off, or a recurring dream do you think? What is being accepted here?
- More details about Oshun <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oshun> - this is another river god poem (read Kayo Chingonyi's poem 'Nyaminyami' alongside.) Who is the goddess of your local river? What poems have been written to them? If you can't find any, what powers or stories of theirs *should* be celebrated in a poem?
- Can marital bickering (of the sort illustrated in the first couplet of 'Text and Image') be resolved by the writing of poems to each other? Would you rather receive an apology or a poem? What other poems or works of art are written from one spouse to another? If you were the partner in question, would you want the poem-novel-play etc made public or kept private? Would you advise a friend to marry a writer?
- What is 'this old centurion noise' in 'Horror Scene as Black English Royal (Captioned)'? An Abeng horn is used to impart important news <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abeng> What news does this poem impart?
- What BSL do you know? Teach yourself a sign or two here - <https://www.british-sign.co.uk/>

Other books by Raymond Antrobus

The Perseverance (Penned in the Margins, 2018)

To Sweeten Bitter (Out-Spoken Press, 2017)

Shapes & Disfigurements (Burning Eye, 2012)

If you liked Raymond Antrobus, try ...

- Benjamin Zephaniah
- Ilya Kaminsky
- Rachel Long

Raymond Antrobus online

www.raymondantrobus.com