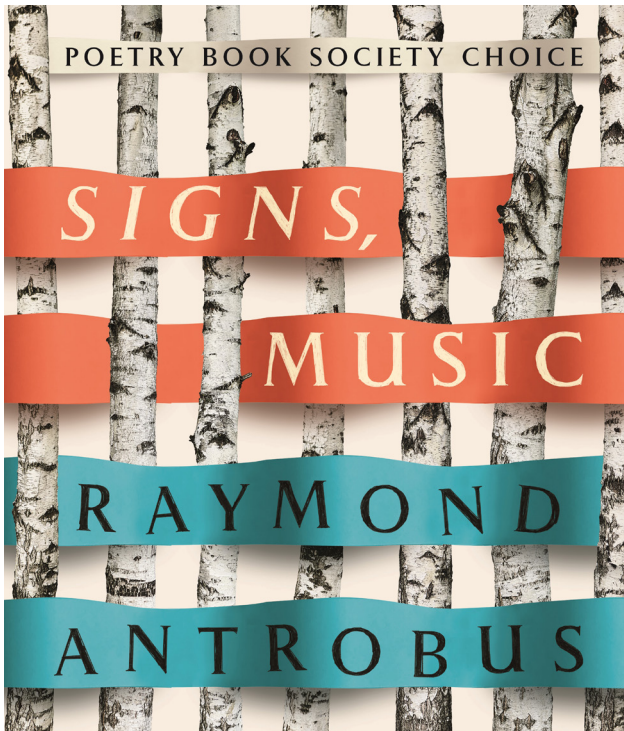


T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

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.



Signs, Music (Picador Poetry, 2024) by Raymond Antrobus.
bit.ly/signsmusic

Reviews

'Antrobus's fourth collection taps into the age-old subject of parental anxiety in our troubled world. Adopting a casual rhythm, the two long autobiographical poems address his child before and after birth, from the perspective of a loving and dutiful father: "I burp and feed you and bounce and read and sing and nothing / gives you rest your cries tear air I hold you up / my mind a swung bell." Antrobus captures ordinary life with an episodic, unconstrained energy, taking us to Oklahoma, New York, a gender-neutral restroom, Bloomsbury Square, Cape Town, and the Serpentine Gallery. The familiar details – sleep deprivation, name-choosing, baby-monitors – loom large. Themes of deafness, sign language and heritage prevail, as the poet remembers his father: "He was / a man of vague poetic-sounding sayings, / allowed himself a looseness, a non-commitment / to specificity." While Antrobus is committed to life's specificity, there is looseness in the book as it mulls over the

conflict between belonging and unbelonging, the joy of a new life and a world disfigured by prejudice.'
– Kit Fan, *The Guardian*

'This tender offering from Antrobus [...] delves into new fatherhood, with an ominous, deeply felt question hanging over it: "why have children / when the world is ending?" The collection is split into the anticipation, and then the reality, of a new baby, as Antrobus lays bare the fears, challenges, and shortcomings every bit as fully as the wave of affection and awe a first child trails in its wake: "The sun is rising and there's nowhere to hide." Time is an encroaching presence, as is the apocalyptic political landscape into which the child is to be born: "New dads are marching / at the climate change protest".' – *Publishers Weekly*

About the poet

Raymond Antrobus, shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize 2024 for *Signs, Music* (Picador Poetry), was born in Hackney, London, to an English mother and Jamaican father. He is also the author of *To Sweeten Bitter* (Out-Spoken Press, 2017); *The Perseverance* (Penned in the Margins / Tin House, 2018); and *All The Names Given* (Picador Poetry / Tin House, 2021). He has also written two illustrated books for children: *Can Bears Ski?* and *Terrible Horses*, both published by Walker Books. A number of his poems were added to the UK's GCSE syllabus in 2022. The BBC Radio 4 documentary *Inventions in Sound*, which accompanies *All The Names Given*, was produced by Falling Tree Productions and won a Best Documentary Award at the 2021 Third Coast International Audio Festival. Antrobus now lives in Margate.



T. S. ELIOT PRIZE 2024 READERS' NOTES

What do you think?

- To what or whom is the friend faithful in extract #1 of 'Towards Naming'?
- What's the nature of the fear in extract #2 of 'Towards Naming'?
- What are the stories about naming babies in your family or amongst your friends? What does it mean to be named after someone else?
- There's information online about the sign language referred to in the extract from 'The New Father' at signbsl.com and bit.ly/rnibsignnames. What do you know about diglossic poetry? What does this poem say about language and precision? Why is 'music' in italics at the beginning of the poem and non-italic text at the end?

Reply in writing

Write a poem in a mixture of two or more languages – or dialects, or accents, or registers. If you need a subject, try writing about a pre-verbal child.

Find out more

Other books by Raymond Antrobus

All the Names Given (Picador Poetry, 2021)

The Perseverance (Penned in the Margins, 2018)

To Sweeten Bitter (Out-Spoken Press, 2017)

Something to watch

See Raymond Antrobus talking about and reading from *All the Names Given*, shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize 2021 on the Eliot Prize YouTube channel:

bit.ly/tseliotprizeyoutube

Visit raymondantrobus.com

If you like Raymond Antrobus's work, try...

- Zaffar Kunial
- Jack Underwood
- Lisa Kelly

About the T. S. Eliot Prize

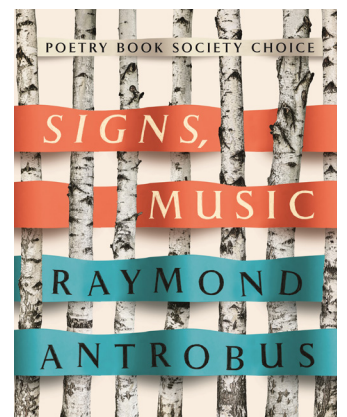
The T. S. Eliot Prize, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year, is awarded annually to the best new poetry collection published in the UK and Ireland. The Prize was founded by the Poetry Book Society in 1993 to celebrate the PBS's 40th birthday and to honour its founding poet. It has been run 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

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 or for the live stream at bit.ly/eliot24livestream
- 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
- Read **John Field's authoritative reviews** of every shortlisted title in full at 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
- Follow the T. S. Eliot Prize on **Instagram, X** and **Facebook**: [@tseliotprize](https://twitter.com/tseliotprize)

Extract #1 from Towards Naming

No offence,
says my faithful friend, sitting by the large
café window, *but why have children*
when the world is ending? Outside
four men sit around a table and when a dog
passes them, they lean over and ruffle
its fur and ears, one of them skinning a roll-up.
No one asks the dog's name but smoke
from the man's cigarette wafts into the café.
Behind the glass, I hold my breath.

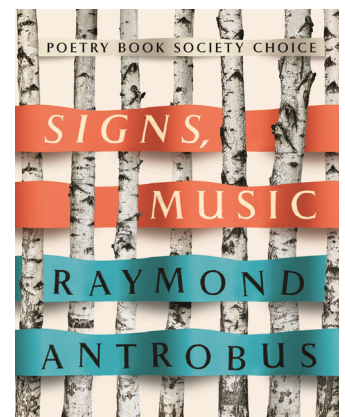


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bit.ly/signsmusic



Extract #2 from Towards Naming

Your mother wants to call you Sebastian
but that's the name of the bully that snuck
into my backpack and stole my FIFA 98.
It's also the name of the Jamaican steel-
pan playing crab in *The Little Mermaid*
and the saint who had his chest pierced
with arrows. I can't name you
after anything I fear happening.



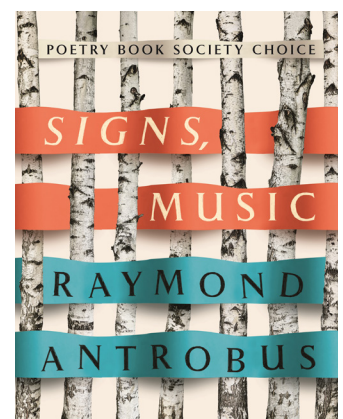
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from *The New Father*

The first word my son signed
was *music*: both hands, fingers conducting
music for everything – even hunger
open mouth for the choo-chew spoon
squealing *mmm* – *music*. We'd play
a record while he ate *music* when
he wanted milk so I pour and hum
a lullaby or 'I Don't Know'
by Bill Withers because it's O.K.
not to know what you want
and I want him to know that. *Music*
is wiping the table after the plates *music*
is feel my forehead for fever is whatever
occurs in the centre of the body, whatever
makes arms raise up, up.

The second word my son signed
was *bird* – beaked finger to thumb, bird
for everything outside – window, sky, tree,
roof, chimney, aerial, airplane – birds.
I saw I had given him a sign name.
Fingers to eyes raising from thumbs – wide
eye meaning *watchful of the earth*
in two different roots – Hebrew, Sanskrit.
I love how he clings
to my shoulders and turns
his head to point at the soft body
of a caterpillar sliding across the counter,
and *signs*, *music*.



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