

“In *All The Names Given*, the essential tension is knowledge. Knowledge of self, knowledge of others. These poems make the sublime leap or union of witness to ‘with-ness,’ so their knowledge is not speculative but holds together, beautiful and fraught, the broken burden of honesty: love. Antrobus is a phenomenal poet.”

—ISHION HUTCHINSON, author of *House of Lords and Commons*

“What a beautiful book Raymond Antrobus has written! I love it. So much pain, so much tenderness, so much music and invention and passion in *All The Names Given*. Truly, it is terrific. Antrobus has a special gift of making music from stories and giving his lyrics gravity and urgency that’s inimitable.”

—ILYA KAMINSKY, author of *Deaf Republic*

“These poems are revelations. This collection is so obviously at the forefront of a new canon whose singular and evocative approach to lyricism and imagistic play demonstrates not only the necessity of our multilingual and multimodal realities, but ‘the volume of their power,’ too.”

—MEG DAY, author of *Last Psalm at Sea Level*

“This collection is a brave, tender and generous piece of music, where family is a cord forever troubled by the process of being named. With a knife-like precision, *All The Names Given* manages to caption the speaker’s dance with the ghosts of his bloodline, offering us a haunting study on what we can find in the silences of history when history is recognized as more than a noun, when recognized as something alive and kinetic, something constantly in conversation with the present. I can’t wait to see how this timely book ripples through our world.”

—CAMONGHNE FELIX, author of *Build Yourself a Boat*

All The Names Given

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All The Names Given

Raymond
Antrobus

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*The body as it daydreams goes
towards the earth that belongs to it, from the other earth
that does not.*

—JUAN RAMÓN JIMÉNEZ

Closer Captions

[sound of mouth and arms opening]

Give thanks to the wheels touching tarmac at JFK,
Give thanks to the latches, handles, what we squeeze

into cabins, the wobbling wings, the arrivals,
departures, the long line at the gates, the nerves held,

give thanks to the hand returning the passport, give thanks
to the Lyft driver, the air con, the lightness

of his brown hand at the wheel, the give of rain
on windows asking *where should I live?*

My sister says *stop living in your head.*

Look what that cloud gives. I dream in the back seat

listening to a podcast. The last thing I hear:

Give thanks to your name, Antrobus, to landings

and beginnings, your soul needs time to arrive.

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.*

Antrobus or Land of Angels

*Wherever you are, you touch the bark of trees . . .
different yet familiar.*

—CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ

*I can be fiendish, I can't be English, say ghosts.
Some with shaved heads, some with cane-rows,
muttering themselves into notebooks.*

The barman's eyes in The Antrobus Arms
become sharp gates when I claim to be English.

*My mother, born here
My grandfather, the local preacher.*

*Oh, well then, welcome, he says or land your angels.
(There are enigmas in my deafness.)*

*I stare at the crest of gold lions behind the bar—
I scar the cross of Davidic's line behind the bar—*

hear my ghosts say

Fiendish?—

English?

The barman calls the whole village
and my name does the rounds.
My mother drives us to Antrobus Hall.

Two German Shepherds surround
the car. I climb out, it's raining.
The dogs jump, their paws scraping

a new coat of earth on my chest.
A farmer appears, asks if we're descended
from Edmund Antrobus.

Sir Edmund Antrobus, (3rd baronet)
slaver, beloved father
over-seer, owner of plantations

in Jamaica, British Guiana and St Kitts.
I shake my head, avoid the farmer's eye.

*

My mother and I tread the cemetery
of Saint Mark's, Antrobus,
and see everyone buried here is of Antrobus

We look up and see hawks in the ash trees
and sparrows in the wheat fields
and the rain-soaked stones of Antrobus

and after we walk the slick mirrors
of wet roads, the curves
of Barbers Lane, between trees

I take a photo of our shadows, flung
over the red berry bushes

like black coats.

Language Signs

How shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak in the air

—1 CORINTHIANS 14:8–9

JK Antrobus, grandfather, I dreamt you
returning your reading glasses to your eyes, opening
your bible, pointing at the words you couldn't say.
You pointed at *mercy* and *failure* and then
you pointed at your white hair and your lips and then
at the ceiling of your church as if it were the roof
of your own mouth, and I understood as much as the stone
plaques on the walls or the pews which were wood,
a word that once meant tree.

All the men that raised me are dead, those bastards.
I'm one self-pitying prick of a son. How do I bring
back men who couldn't speak, men lost in books, drinks,
graves? Where do I turn, knowing they left
the hot taps running? I want to say sorry, come to me.
Cut the hedges on your face so I can read your lips.

[sound of connection across time]

On Touch

*Touch has a memory. O say, Love, say,
What can I do to kill it and be free
In my old liberty?*

—JOHN KEATS

Salute the touches of teachers,
dentists and therapists who untangle us

from their chairs. Salute bin men
recyclers, carpenters, plumbers and barbers.

Remember the way of moving
that says your back has been rubbed, your neck

brushed, your front doors cleared, your shelves
stocked. Now you have nothing

but long sides and hedges and a sudden memory
of your first teacher-crush, Miss Walker

touching your curls, saying she liked it like that
soft, short on the sides. You wanted

the world in that shape forever. For years
you always got the same trim from the same barber

which became its own intimacy.

You rub your hands over your own spiky head,

remember your barber, ready to gown you,

fold your ears back and run razors around your sides

so someone you want would touch you later.