

THE PERSEVERANCE

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ALSO BY RAYMOND ANTROBUS

POETRY PAMPHLETS

To Sweeten Bitter (Out-Spoken Press, 2017)

Shapes & Disfigurements Of Raymond Antrobus

(Burning Eye Books, 2012)

The Perseverance

Raymond Antrobus

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The Perseverance

‘There is no telling what language is
inside the body’

ROBIN COSTE LEWIS

Echo



My ear amps whistle as if singing
to Echo, Goddess of Noise,
the ravelled knot of tongues,
of blaring birds, consonant crumbs
of dull doorbells, sounds swamped
in my misty hearing aid tubes.
Gaudí believed in holy sound
and built a cathedral to contain it,
pulling hearing men from their knees
as though Deafness is a kind of Atheism.
Who would turn down God?
Even though I have not heard
the golden decibel of angels,
I have been living in a noiseless
palace where the doorbell is pulsating
light and I am able to answer.



What?

A word that keeps looking
in mirrors, in love
with its own volume.

What?

I am a one-word question,
a one-man
patience test.

What?

What language
would we speak
without ears?

What?

Is paradise
a world where
I hear everything?

What?

How will my brain
know what to hold
if it has too many arms?



The day I clear out my dead father's flat,
I throw away boxes of moulding LPs:
Garvey, Malcolm X, Mandela speeches on vinyl.

I find a TDK cassette tape on the shelf.
The smudged green label reads *Raymond Speaking*.
I play the tape in his vintage cassette player

and hear my two-year-old voice chanting my name, Antrob,
and Dad's laughter crackling in the background,
not knowing I couldn't hear the word "bus"

and wouldn't until I got my hearing aids.
Now I sit here listening to the space of deafness —

Antrob, Antrob, Antrob.



‘And if you don’t catch nothing
then something wrong with your ears —
they been tuned to de wrong frequency.’

KEI MILLER

So maybe I belong to the universe
underwater, where all songs
are smeared wailings for Salacia,
Goddess of Salt Water, healer
of infected ears, which is what the doctor
thought I had, since deafness
did not run in the family
but came from nowhere;
so they syringed olive oil
and salt water, and we all waited
to see what would come out.



And no one knew what I was missing
until a doctor gave me a handful of Lego
and said to put a brick on the table
every time I heard a sound.
After the test I still held enough bricks
in my hand to build a house
and call it my sanctuary,
call it the reason I sat in saintly silence
during my grandfather's sermons when he preached
The Good News I only heard
as Babylon's babbling echoes.

