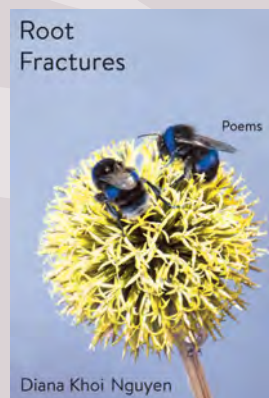


# Scribner Poetry Sampler

2 0 2 3 – 2 0 2 4

*A new poetry program featuring works from* \_\_\_\_\_





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# A note from the editors

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*Kathy Belden*



*Chris Richards*



*Emily Polson*

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Dear Reader,

As editors, a central part of our calling has been to champion writers who speak to the breadth of the American experience. For over a century, Scribner has had a proud tradition of publishing exceptional writers who have helped to define American literary culture—from F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway to Jesmyn Ward and Jennifer Egan.

But there are certain frequencies of American life that only poets seem attuned to. Some of the most exhilarating, prophetic, innovative, and fearless writing today is happening in poetry. And as the soaring numbers of poetry readers show, people are responding.

To deepen our commitment to publishing America's finest writers and to serve this growing readership, we are proud to announce Scribner's inaugural poetry list. Over the next year we will present three exhilarating collections from Airea D. Matthews, Sam Sax, and Diana Khoi Nguyen.

We'll launch our program in May with Airea D. Matthews's *Bread and Circus*, a book of autobiographical poems that interrogate American inequality, which Hanif Abdurraqib has described as "a stunning collection of work, both ahead of its time and abundantly on time." In September, we'll publish Sam Sax's *Pig*, which Fatima Ashghar has praised as a "complicated and haunting portrayal of body, home, desire, nation and beast." And the inaugural list will be capped off by National Book Award finalist Diana Khoi Nguyen's *Root Fractures*, a moving and ceaselessly innovative book that traces how a family makes meaning and endures in the wake of intergenerational trauma.

Together, these three voices form a raucous choir of what it means to be American today. We hope you enjoy this preview of their books. Going forward, we will publish three new collections each year. These books will be goads, guides, and balms for readers, and we are excited to see how these poets will shape Scribner in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Kathy Belden, Chris Richards, and Emily Polson



# Bread and Circus



A powerful collection of autobiographical poems from Yale Young Poets Award Winner and Philadelphia's Poet Laureate Aira D. Matthews about the economics of class and its failures for those rendered invisible by it.

**Aira D. Matthews** is Philadelphia's current poet laureate. Her first collection of poems is the critically acclaimed *Simulacra*, which won the 2016 Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Gulf Coast*, *VQR*, *Best American Poets*, *American Poet*, *LitHub*, *Harvard Review*, and elsewhere. Matthews holds a BA in economics from the University of Pennsylvania as well as an MFA from the Helen Zell Writers' Program and an MPA from the Gerald Ford School of Public Policy, both at the University of Michigan. A Pew fellow, she is a professor and directs the poetry program at Bryn Mawr College.

MAY 30, 2023 // 9781668011454 // HARDCOVER // \$26.00

## March, 1969

back at the church the best man draped the groom's shoulders. passed a flask of hundred proof. a mother fondled her fake pearls. walked the aisles in search of a soloist to replace the cousin who canceled an hour earlier. *will you sing His Eyes on the Sparrow or Amazin' Grace*, she asked each guest.

across town on Hanover Street,

a young woman in a taffeta and lace gown huddled on the cold tile of a YWCA bathroom stall. she heard the lobby phone ring incessantly. the receptionist trumpeted her name over the intercom. she balled up wads of Angel Soft and blotted the Revlon fleeing her lash. for the last two hours, the cost of the dress, flowers, drinks, the soloist, the hall, and her mother's second mortgage to fund the matrimonial circus paraded across an embedded reel. thoughts of a fatherless baby pushed her to decision.

that inevitable bride called a yellow taxi to deliver her to fate. outside, a homeless prophet touched her shoulder while she waited, reassured: *it's better for the baby girl, Honey.*

three hours later, an understudy organist played the sorriest wedding march. the bride tripped down the aisle. busted her knee wide open. bled through her stockings and silk slip. her groom, many swigs in, balanced by his best men, could barely stand. her mother ran to the altar to lift her daughter, her sole investment. while an unholy congregation craned their necks and swished their church fans, advertising a local funeral home, to watch a lovely commodity reluctantly agree to her own barter.

## Swindle

Learn the suits, Ace:  
 a club looks like a three-leaf clover  
 a spade is an upside-down heart  
 a diamond looks like two kissing triangles  
 a heart is a goddamn heart.  
 A hand is five cards:  
 one card, each finger.  
 The Ace is the highest  
 followed by head cards—  
 King, Queen, Jack—then  
 count back by 10.  
 That's the rank.

You get what I'm givin'?

Bring a Barbie doll  
 something to play with.  
 Circle the players from afar.  
 Eye your sneaky Uncle Nate  
 nigga tucks cards under his cuff.  
 Pull on his sleeve, ask for a hug  
 if it feels stiff say you're thirsty.  
 Don't crawl under that table  
 'less you want a gun in my mouth.  
 Don't sniff the powder on the felt.  
 And, boy, don't touch those chips;  
 they worth more than us both.

You see what I'm sayin'?

Aim for loose play  
 every motherfucker's hungry.  
 When the game is tight  
 stakes get too fat, too quick.

You'll lose before the draw.  
 Spy those hands, Ace. Tell me  
 what you see. Scratch your chin  
 rub your nose, pull on your ear—  
 we got a code.

Eat.

Thing is that Ace is tricky  
 hinges on what's held;  
 it can play high or low.  
 A full house ain't shit.  
 Bend the straight.  
 Fuck a pair.  
 Fear that flush.  
 If you see those head cards  
 in order with the same suit  
 grab your baby doll  
 go to the bathroom  
 flush the toilet twice  
 stick one finger down  
 your throat  
 bloat your cheek, run out  
 force lunch on the table. Say:

*Daddy, my head hurts.*

We make dust, baby boy.  
 Only lose what little you left.



## On Origin and Use

When the division of labour has been once thoroughly established, it is but a very small part of a man's wants which the produce of his own labour can supply. He supplies the far greater part of them by exchanging that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he has occasion for. **Every man** thus lives by exchanging, or becomes, in some measure, a merchant, and the society itself **grows to be** what is properly a commercial society.

But when the division of labour first began to take place, this power of exchanging must frequently have been very much clogged and embarrassed in its operations. One man, we shall suppose, has more of a **certain commodity** than he himself has occasion for, while another has less. The former, consequently, would be glad to dispose of, and **the latter** to purchase, a part of this superfluity. But if this latter should chance to have nothing that **the former** stands in need of, no exchange can be made between them.

The **butcher** has more **meat** in his shop than he himself can consume, and **the brewer** and **the baker** would each of them be willing to purchase a part of it. But they have nothing to offer in exchange, except the different productions of their respective trades, and **the butcher** is already provided with all **the bread** and beer which he has immediate need.

**the number of cattle** which had been given in exchange for them. **The armour** of Diomedes, says Homer, cost **only nine oxen**; but that of Glaucus cost a hundred oxen. **Salt** is said to be the common instrument of commerce and exchanges in Abyssinia; a species of shells in some parts of the coast of India; dried **cod** at Newfoundland; tobacco in Virginia; **sugar** in some of our **water** India colonies; hides or dressed **leather** in some other countries; and there is at this day a village in Scotland, where it is not uncommon, I am told, for a workman to carry **nails** instead of money to the baker's shop or ale-house. The man who wanted to buy salt, for example, and had nothing but cattle to give in exchange for it, must have been obliged to buy salt to the value of a whole ox, or a whole **sheep**, at a time. He could seldom buy less than this, because what he was to give for it could seldom be divided without loss; and if he had a mind to buy more, he must, for the same reasons, have been obliged to buy double or triple the quantity, the value, to wit, of two or three oxen, or of two or three sheep. If, on the contrary, instead of sheep or oxen, he had metals to give in exchange for it, he could easily proportion the quantity of the metal to the precise quantity of commodity which he had immediate occasion for.

## Working-Class Bedtime Story, 1981

every morning, two hours after  
     the gate closed on her night  
 shift, a gowned woman wiped  
     oil from ladder rungs, sharpened  
         two hatchets with a dull whetstone  
 & steadily climbed through  
     troposphere to reach the far edge  
     of her roof. positioned just so—  
         legs in kenebowe, arms dual  
         wielding—she'd cut the sun  
         from its cosmic string, watch  
     it gyrate in midair. light  
 don't down nowhere easy.  
     taking swing after swing  
         until the ax head flew &  
     sun dimmed & fell  
 through that roof  
     onto a parlor floor  
         where that woman  
 collapsed, sheerly  
 done in. while  
     her curious young 'un  
         with a feral stare  
             sat silent in the dark  
         corner chair,  
     picking flint-flakes  
 of ash from her  
 nappy-ass hair.

## etymology

because my mother named me after a child borne still  
 to a godmother I've never met I took another way to be  
 known something easier to remember inevitable  
 to forget something that rolls over the surface of thrush  
 because I grew tired of saying  
 no it's pronounced . . . now I tire of not  
 conjuring that ghost I honor say it with me: Airea  
 rhymes with sarah  
 sarah from the latin meaning a woman of high rank  
 which also means whenever I ask anyone to hold me  
 on their lips I sound like what I almost am

hear me out: I'm not a Dee or a river  
 charging through working-class towns where union folk  
 cogwedge for plots & barely any house at all  
 where bosses mangle ethnic phonemes & nobody corrects one  
 word because the check's in the mail so let's end  
 this classist pretence where names don't matter  
 & language is too heavy a lift my e is silent  
 like most people should be  
 the consonant is sonorant  
 is a Black woman or one might say the spine

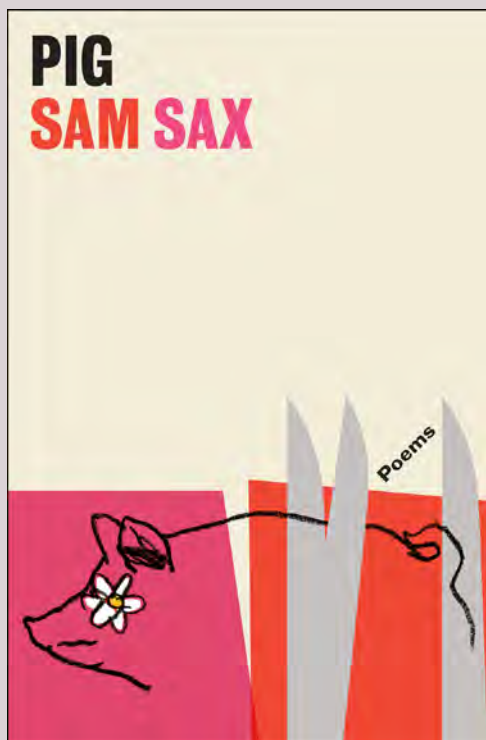
I translate to "wind" in a country known for its iron  
 imply "lioness of God" in Jesus's tongue  
 mean "apex predator" free of known enemy  
 fierce enough to harm or fast enough to run  
 all I'm saying is what I've already said:  
 the tongue has no wings to flee what syllables it fears  
 the mouth is no womb has no right to consume what it did not make

## Severance

200 years after Franklin signed  
 the Declaration of Independence  
 Amtrak purchased the crumbling stone  
 viaducts and decrepit bridges between  
 Boston and Washington. In five years  
 the federal government would surface  
 245 miles of track, lay 171,000 ties,  
 renew 2,868 joints, interlock  
 5,800 switch timbers and order 492  
 Amfleet cars including sixteen sleek  
 Metroliners like one of the two  
 housed at Trenton Rail Station  
 where the authorities found  
 my father in stuporous nod  
 while on the official clock.  
 Having decided several offers  
 of rehab enough, Amtrak severed  
 all contractual encumbrances.

It was 1977 when my father stumbled  
 from the station into a recession but  
 first into Pete Lorenzo's bar  
 to pilfer time through a bottle  
 then plot provision—  
 three square, four souls—  
 strategizing who to feed  
 to whom.

## Pig



From the brilliantly talented National Poetry Series and James Laughlin Award winner comes a third collection of poems that uses the humble pig as a lens to explore the body, faith, desire, and power.

**Sam Sax** is a queer, Jewish, writer and educator. They are the author of *Madness*, winner of The National Poetry Series and *Bury It*, winner of the James Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets. They're the two-time Bay Area Grand Slam Champion with poems published in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Granta*, and elsewhere. Sam has received fellowships from The National Endowment for the Arts, The Poetry Foundation, Yaddo, and is currently serving as a Lecturer in the ITALIC program at Stanford University. Their first novel *Yr Dead* will be published by McSweeney's in 2024.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2023 // 9781668019993 // PAPERBACK // \$17.00

## A BRIEF & PARTIAL HISTORY

the first pig wasn't a pig at all. was wild, *sus scrofa*.  
 practiced cannibalism, coprophagia. was named  
 darling in the garden & evolved from an ear of corn.  
 eve said pig & the world was. the first drawing  
 of any animal was made by a man using blood  
 & flowers to throw up the pig on a cave wall.  
 the first meal made from a pig was breakfast.  
 the last meal, supper. the first meal made for a pig  
 was all god's green earth, the acorn orchards  
 planted in jagged rows, the detritus of lesser species.  
 the word pig comes from the middle english, picbred  
 meaning acorn, but pig existed before we had tongues  
 to name it. today we might call them soy & hormone  
 factories. the first book written about pigs was published  
 in 3468 BCE, the last will be this, until it isn't.  
 you who have but one mouth with which to take  
 apart meat, to name yourself & the inherited species,  
 do your work with care, as i have tried & failed here.  
 in the beginning pig offered its body so the world  
 might be built & when this world ends,  
 pig will inherit.

## CAPITAL

the market loves you

the market with its invisible hand    loves you

the market lifts the hem of your garment and speculates

the market bleeds    behaves erratic as a beehive doused in gasoline

the market ventures on diamonds and coffee beans

the market is volatile as the climate which is volatile because of the market

five little piggies went and were butchered one by one

the market exists for the fancy of financiers

market prices are fixed and nonnegotiable    sign here

the individual was invented to sell automobiles

a corporation is a synonym for an individual who dreams in rare earth metals

christ threw merchants out of his churches

today he can be worn around the neck for change

your suffering reverberates at the same frequency

as everyone else in your consumer identity category

people are resilient as market trends

people are points on a grid

people throw themselves from buildings and bridges because of the market

the market loves you as data on a map

as something that eats

the market drinks jet fuel    shorts futures

the church passed laws that said jews were allowed to be

moneylenders only

and here we are, all of us, a few of us, most of us dead  
 the market knows what you want in bed  
 the thread count of your linens  
 the market wants you but not your opinions  
 doesn't want you to inquire into what money *is*

this little piggy went to market and returned to its repossessed duplex  
 this little piggy went to market and came back with half its meat harvested  
 this little piggy went into a field and became the market  
 vendors are currently hedging stock in its tenderloin  
 algorithms are being written out in back fat  
 O market    O maker  
 not long ago    at a school in chicago a few men sat around  
 an ornate wood table and hatched a plot in bloody mattresses  
 to set up a cage and called it data  
 wrote out equations to funnel monies off into imaginary rooms  
 and here we are all these years later eating crow calling it chicken  
 fellating war, famine, carbon emissions  
 O individual    don't be terrified, the market loves you  
 O maker  
 there is no bottom line



## LISP

there are more *s*'s in possession than i remembered / my name hinges  
 on the *s* / is serpentine / has sibilance / is simple / six-lettered /  
 a symbol / different from its sign / sound shapes how we think  
 about objects / the mouth shapes how sound spills out / how  
 the speaker's seen / a sigmatism is the homosexual mystique /  
 my parents sought treatments / i was sent to a speech / pathologist  
 / sixth grade / a student / she gave exercises / i was schooled /  
 practiced silence / syllabics / syntax / my voice sap in the high  
 branches / my voice a spoonful of sugared semen / i licked silk  
 when i spoke / i spilt milk when i sang / when i sang sick men tore  
 wings from city birds / so i straightened my sound / into a masculine  
*i* / the *s* is derived from the semitic letter shin / meaning my swishiness  
 is hebraic / is inherited / it's semantic / no matter what was sacrificed  
 / the tongued isaac / a son against the stone of my soft palate / still  
 i slipped / my hand inside my neighbor's / waistband & pulled back  
 pincers / sisyphus with the sissiest lips / split-tongued suidae / sassy  
 & passing for the poisoned sea / now when i say please / may i suck  
 your cock / i sound straight / as the still second hand / on a dead  
 watch.

## MISS PIGGY

great porcine drag queen  
 you who grew erudite in the slaughterhouse shadow  
 eyelashes like black swords teased up to challenge heaven  
 eternal in your powdered foundation  
 refusing every day the knife's inevitable & unkosher ending  
 be-snouted fount of youth! seminal queer iconoclast!  
 pearls to bed, pearls in the junkyard, pearls on television  
 diva of late night, of talk shows, of prime time  
 door-kicker for the nonconventional romance  
 shown us how to love across identities arbitrary as phylum & species  
 bless that impossible coupling!  
 how you took an entire frog inside you & remained the same bad pig!  
 who'd karate chopped anyone dumb enough to disrespect *HI-YA*  
 what little faggot wouldn't look upon you & be seen or saved or salved?  
 you who never questioned you were destined for stardom  
 O miss miss! O great swine demimonde! O dame pig!  
 i'm yours till i end you, my religion how i understand us all now  
 we are ourselves & the hand inside that guides us  
 we who are given voice by that same spirit that gives voice  
 to everyone you have ever loved

## XENOTRANSPLANTATION

my friend's got a pig heart in him.  
my friend's got part of a pig's heart,  
a piece, his heart's part pig.  
the aortic valve is the dog-god  
guarding the tube blood runs  
through once it's been scrubbed  
clean. one of two semilunar  
valves, which sounds like a part  
of a moon, a piece. my friend's  
got moons in him separating  
the two major atria. my friend's  
full of ballrooms, those dark  
vaulted ceilings. my friend's a vegan.  
my friend's a vegan with a pig heart  
thumping club music. my friend  
believes the pig in him is vegan  
since it eats what he eats,  
speaks when he speaks. the pig  
heart pulses in his chest  
like a reflection of the moon  
in a puddle out behind the club  
once we've finished dancing.  
my friend takes drugs so his body  
doesn't reject the organ. my friend  
takes drugs so he can go on  
dancing. his pig grown to be  
sewn into a man's ribs, unnaturally  
selected, no god could have

predicted this in any garden.  
still holy the bit of tissue  
that lets him live & live.  
thin filament that set another  
seventeen years going inside him.  
if you listen with one ear  
to his chest you can hear  
the pig heart singing, calling  
out to any listening animal:  
all i. want is. to live. & live.  
& live. & live. & live. & live.



# Root Fractures



A National Book Award finalist's second collection, a haunting-in-poems of a family's past upon its present.

Poet and multimedia artist **Diana Khoi Nguyen's** debut poetry collection *Ghost Of* was a finalist for the National Book Award and winner of the 2019 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. A Kundiman fellow and member of the Vietnamese diasporic artist collective, *She Who Has No Master(s)*, Nguyen's other honors include a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and an award from the 92Y "Discovery" Poetry Contest. Currently, she teaches creative writing at Randolph College Low-Residency MFA and is an Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

**JANUARY 30, 2024 // 9781668031308 // PAPERBACK // \$17.00**

## From **Đổi Mới**

We don't talk explicitly enough about power and money in relationships.

I don't know how to separate power and money from love, so I am choosing to separate myself from my mother.

Each day I choose again to remain separated, and it is hard, because despite everything, I \_\_\_\_\_ her.

Fuck filial piety, I tell my therapist, and every week we talk about my desire to reach out to my parents.

I can't. I won't. I shouldn't.

\* \* \*

"If you talk or write about our family, we will be forced to take action," my mother said the last time we spoke. I knew what she meant by "take action," since she had previously threatened to sue for slander.

Truth, like a directional, is relative.

\* \* \*

Let me tell you about my mother.

## Misinformation

*Your brother is lost, my mother says, because we didn't believe him.  
He told us there was loud humming inside the walls—Go to sleep, we  
said. And he couldn't couldn't go to sleep.  
Yesterday, your father and I found dead bees inside the attic. Thousands.*

Once, when he was still alive, I found a dead bee on the windowsill of our bathroom.

Not thinking much of it  
I swept it into the trash with my palm, a motion captured in the  
dust like afterimage.

The next morning: a dead bee on the windowsill  
the other still in the bin.

I told no one.

## Misinformation

*I told your grandfather to take my brothers and go, my mother says, so they wouldn't get conscripted.*

She would stay and help my grandmother with the family business, a pharmacy. One by one, her younger sisters chose to stay and help my mother, dominos falling into place.

*After he left, the war ended, there was nothing, no pharmacy.*

A woman and five daughters hiding in the dark.

Wind swept through

empty alleys, boarded shops.

Asked to ask a neighbor for some rice my mother watched the tanks roll in, boys in uniform razing over the dead who had been swept off to one side.



## Đổi Mới

The longer they remained hiding by the coast, the sooner no one would know where they were any longer, or if they were. Underground where everything is concealed, bà ngoại and her five daughters learned to discern each other's rustlings: an unseen hand lifting black chopsticks, rice against a lip, grain by grain the grain of one sister's whisper disappearing into another. They name each object and each other, mẹ, cơm, đũa, nước, but in such darkness words can stand for so much more: a tether that threads them through to daylight, hands clasped between each body like beads nestled between tight knots, isn't this how storytelling works, where one dream stops before another starts? Each day takes us further away from who we once were to who we soon will be. Into my dry eye I drop an artificial tear as across a global crisis bà ngoại does the same, though her eyes have now clouded like a foggy mirror. She looks away from me as she speaks, and I watch her reflection on the sliding door. Does not our memory furnish the journey of our unfinished existence?



And so generations in a family pass and are like one regenerating organism. Whether schizophrenia manifested in bà cô before the American War or in my cousin in America amid its latest interventions, I can still remember the sound when we were all alive, the echo of cha mẹ's voices down the open halls of the elementary school in summer, my siblings and I shouting out as we pedaled harder to catch up as evening descended in a quiet layer of dust, the hum of all our spokes whirring in the dark, I haven't forgotten what a body looks like as it cycles so far that I can only make it out by the sounds that travel back to me. All cheerful memories are like a single one, quickly forgotten in times of danger. A photograph can jolt one back to a position the body hasn't worn in decades. In old pictures, a girl whose posture I know as mine, except the year is 1964. Behind her, a portrait of her mother's family, and here I find my brother again. If the escape route is long enough, it leads you back to where it first opened.

# MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

- National Media Campaign: Targeting digital, print, and broadcast media for each release
- Exclusive launch story in *Publishers Weekly* in April 2023
- Multi-city author events
- Extensive mailing and outreach to bookstores and libraries with a dedicated poetry space
- Special Scribner poetry landing page announcing the launch
- Premiere digital and print poetry sampler
- National advertising via Poets & Writers, Goodreads, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram
- Explore partnership opportunities with major poetry organizations
- Major social media and Goodreads promotions, giveaways, and outreach
- Devoted social media book and poetry influencer campaign
- Targeted outreach to university programs specializing in poetry
- Video promotional materials featuring author readings

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