

SAMPLER

Weightless Words

ALSO BY ALFRED CELESTINE

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Passing Eliot in the Street, [London]: Nettle Press, 2003

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Alfred Celestine

Weightless Words
—selected poems—

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Confessions of Nat Turner

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Preface

It is winter.
The house on Crow Street is empty.
It smells of death.
It is stuffed with incident.
A child in rags
Descends like a hawk suddenly.
An old woman,
Her legs bowed, strips the remains.
It is raining.
She collects useless items, she
Remembers joy,
Remembers how he ate hard bread.
The sun falls down
Without grace: and someone else rents
This house, this death.

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1

Father
Those unwashed
Do not participate
Between reality and its
Report.

2

We can
Do without him.
Our heritage is not
Obscure texts.
Our humour is not
Vulgate.

3

Facts like
Locks without keys
Remain unopened.
There are other rooms, other myths
Waiting.

4

Statement:
I hunt the stump.
I question its body.
I feel disgust. The river soaks
Its roots.

12

5

The tribe
Of Word gathers
A few steps away. Blood
Introduces Poem and falls
Asleep.

6

Warning:
The procedure,
Like a fixer, fastens
Image to paper, but without
Rancour.

7

I move
Pure, specific.
I talk of thirsts, not light.
Who is he, but skilful fiction:
Skin, bone?

8

The earth
Alone mirrors
Vulgar crow who evokes
This image: bonds confess, bonds sing
Our blues.

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9

Dark man
Pulls energy
From air like a wireless.
He transmits: primitive. My feet
Shut up.

10

The soul
Has its sandbars.
These days, when I stand still,
Not part of the stream, I remain
Human.

11

Midday.
The sky is clear.
The sassafrass tree sleeps
Without shame. Sometimes I can feel
Almost.

12

A crow,
Dying of thirst,
Wanders from field to field,
Reminiscing about its past,
Its droughts.

14

Jacob strums
 It's doing what must be done
 And keeping up appearances
 To become a part of what is.

The stars are hysterical with green omens.
 The wide water parts, and he slips
 Further and further down into perfection

Because song is naked, and terror
 Because it's organic, because it's rooted
 Spreads deep into our bowels and cannot be sung.

It does not have a name this tune
 We have nothing to cleanse our wound

When a string breaks with its own song.

He sees pilgrims, horrific puritans,
 Lost, like a crow flying beyond its field.

Doubt ripens.
 Doubt sleeps in the mouth of rivers.
 It has the colour of mustard greens.
 It has, of course, two sides;
 They sway within us like complaint.

Who wants to translate suffering, and who
 Weeps for your old juju man now?

Here among hot ash each generation
 Like smoke searching for its gone fire
 Rises to tell us what we want.

The narrow gate closed.
The yard filled with enraged masters.

Dead Eye harboured horizons.
His face loomed in the half-moon.

There were rumours of owls.
There were pockets of blood.

Red cauldron of ignorance boils
Over with screams.

The crowd was like small white teeth. Standing there,
Digesting their own sins,

They spoke of refusals,
The necessity of remaining pure.

The flame grew hungry; the rope bit
Savagely into Dead Eye's wrists.

Hundreds of things connected them.
Fear divided.

The past was a bull's eye:
The beginning, the end.

They heard something approach and stop.
The tar smiled; the feathers snickered.

Dead Eye stood still.

He cut from each defeat a thread.

He emerged
A black phoenix

Intoxicated, sinister.

15

Water is the element of black bull:
Half-beast, half-man.

It was trapped in a wet labyrinth.
Its mother opposed the past.

Shrieks, prophecy.

Fallen, it escaped sordid fables.
Her body rented in two spheres.

It pulled broken plough for years. My name,
Its babel, earth.

Me: half-literate and ferocious
Hibernated.
The cold fire of this page considered
Ash, its coherent
Message failed to convince us
And rekindled doubt.

Roots clutched blind routines, halved my limbs
And lay grinning.

Old beast, with a pocket full of peanuts,
Paced alone.
Thought of waxed partridge wings, then called
Back dead memory.
The river wound past its mud hut.
Black birds like rain spoke.

I dream the dark once more, the moon
In Gabriel.

16

Then Mattie, as she was crossing corn fields,
On the road to Jerusalem, died.

The years between hope and despair
Suddenly opened, and images
Poured like rain.

Perhaps the ripe pomegranate.
Perhaps the rock partridge
Lifted the weight

And rooted, broke slowly into flower.
She conjured her life
Cruelly inarticulate.

He touched them.
How did he know these things?

A moving dark,
Crawling like a spider,
Healed their wounds with herbs.

18

A wild ass in barbaric Babylon
Wandered thirty years belted by death
Before he perfectly

Walked into his own ambush.

Was he the One?
The black bull, the handful of pure water?

Mother waited for the master,
Full of the ways of God,

Her feet were hungry for revenge.

17

The earth has no place for the yeast
Of imagination.

It is a place of poltergeists.

And again: Big Mama in whom the Lord
Sang now and then like a magpie,
Testified,
Rolled in red dust of the threshing floor.

Shut in, behind the bars of sanctity,
We stamped, like livestock, common burdens.

In the dark of the sun,
Like Pasiphæe, with the same conviction,
She danced the Holy Ghost and moved
Down the line and shouted.