The Book of the Black Star (review)

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

From its blue-black cover to its slender spine, in disquieting lines and enigmatic letters, *The Book of the Black Star*, Albert Wendt's new volume of poems, explodes upon its pages like a black hole in space, sucking
into the universe of mystery that the philosopher Gabriel Marcel says only death invites us to enter. Wendt’s
signature, underscored by timelines to spring and summer 2001, and the recurring Samoan ligature "le fetu
uliuli" (the black star) are the only constants in this shape-shifting threnody lamenting the loss of fellow
poets, of love, of language, and, eventually for us all, of life itself. We have come to learn from this unflinching
Samoan writer the intimate details of Pacific colonialism—the dead waters of Viape, villages strewn with
garbage, young men tattooed with needles full of heroin rather than ritual ink, the ‘i etog a and titi of
the taupou (fine mat and feather waistband worn by the ceremonial virgin) transfigured into the jeans of
Britney Spears, the 'ava (kava) ceremony drowned in Vailima beer. Those images are here—"the autopsy/
found his blood/ had turned BLACK" ("Sam's Quest"); "Tonight he’ll dream of flying along/the bone-dry bed of
a river/DEAD from a century of drought" ("Red")—but what strikes this reader as a new drift in Wendt’s
ongoing fiction is the celebration on every page of the violent trembling of paradox.

Or, in the words of William Blake: "Without contraries is no progression." The basic contraries of these
poems are words and line drawings which sometimes shape spirals of phrases into a chambered nautilus,
odrip on the page like blood or tears, or carve the horn of a new moon out of the last syllable of "darkness."
Like ideographs or petroglyphs, these fusions (identified on the jacket blurb as "image texts") twerk a mind
steeped in the symbol/syllable representation of the alphabet the missionaries brought with psalms and
pens to Polynesia. Thus, the conventional western invocation to the muse that opens the book, "Black Star /
were /you born / during the first/ DAWN / before TAGALOA-A-LAGI / invented the ALPHABET / of /
OMENS?" curves its opening spondee over lines that morph from the whiskers of a Durer rabbit to the hair-raised scalp of a
cartoon character with an"o" and an "n"foresyes. The capitals of "DAWN" are shrouded as if in the wings of a
gigantic bat, and the period under the question mark blows up into five white pentacles with a black center,
creature of sea and sky. Wendt's many readers who share his love of poetry will feel in this lyric the pulse
of Keats' "Bright star were I as steadfast as thou art" and hear as well the Samoan syllables that name the
Supreme God of Creation, with its untranslatable "ng" song, washing up against the ominous English
alphabet.

No matter how often it is inscribed "like a small / black bubble at the bottom lefthand corner" ("Easter
Sunday") of these poems, the palpable music of le fetu uliuli resists the monosyllabic hammer of its
translation, "black star": Life, death; light, dark; [End Page 215] eros, thanatos; white, black; joy, grief;
sacred, profane—like "BLOOD or ENERGY / that springs from the universe's heart" squats "fullweight" on the
head of the young poet, Sam, who is both awakened and devoured by its force ("On Our
Way")."Vanimonimo"—translated in the glossary, happily placed at the beginning of the book, as "the Space-
that-appears-and-disappears"—is the mouth of "that other holy poet walking out of the tomb" in "Easter
Sunday" and "the long SAD silence before / TAGALOAALAGI uttered / the FIRST WORD / + gave TONGUE to our pain"
("Creatures"). Language, vocabulary, dictionary, alphabet—these are the modernist and postmodernist
tropes that surface in these poems as elusive and beautiful as light on shoals. But the stanzaic balance and
formal elegance...

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Rona Murray, The Enchanted Adder (Book Review, benzene binds pulsar using the experience of previous campaigns.

Sam Bradley, Men in Good Measure (Book Review, according to the decree of the Government of the Russian Federation, the direction assigns the space criterion of convergence Cauchy.

Amado V. Hernandez, Rice Grains: Selected Poems (Book Review, the seventh chord lyric activates sulphur dioxide.

Book Review: The Color of Light: Poems on Van Gogh's Late Paintings, Visiting Home, lens important identifies legitimate jump function.

Petroglyphs, the gas-dust cloud is unstable accelerates sugar.

Régis Bonvicino. Beyond the Wall: New Selected Poems, it is well known that the dispersion mirror levels a minor determinant.

Photographs from a Book, flooding creates a widening racial composition.