Elder Brown
Emiliano Lebron

When I was young
I remember going to a church
A small church
Just outside the view of the harbor.
This church was an “urban” gospel church
Let’s call it that.
It was a nice little church
A lot of nice people there
And one usher:
Sister Hill.
Sister Hill frightened me
And she always came out of nowhere
Nowhere!
And knew exactly what you were doing at all times.
I was five
I could barely see over the pew
But I always saw Sister Hill
And Sister Hill saw everything
How could that not scare me?
Anyway...
I remember the pastor of that church
His name was Elder Brown
Not Pastor Brown
Elder Brown
Even on the streets he was Elder Brown
In the grocery store?
Elder Brown
I never did know his first name
But I knew that Elder Brown was a prolific preacher
And a loud one
And apparently a very sweaty one.
He always had a towel in his hand
And when he preached, people sat at attention.
You couldn’t sleep through that service
Trust me, I tried.
The way he preached
Could keep anyone awake through that morning
He could preach on the most basic of bible verses
And add so much emphasis
While he was toweling his head
From the sweat that accumulates from what I suppose to be
A response to the mix of lighting, speaking, and his preacher’s robes.
He would stomp his feet
He would speak so sternly
He would repeat himself
With the words “I said”
He would give a strange sibilant sound
His vocal exclamation point.
It woke me up many times
It can catch people off guard.
He would read one verse
And he laid into it:
And Jesus said to his disciples
I said, Jesus said to his disciples [hhuhh]
He said, “I go to prepare a place for you [hhuhh]
A place of many mansions [hhuhh]
If it were not so
I said, if it were not so
I would tell you.”
Can I get an “Amen?”
He was an amazing preacher
Though since I was only five
The intellectuality of his sermons escapes me.
However, his passion for preaching
His very essence
Remains with me forever.
For, you see, Elder Brown knew one thing
He knew that if he was to give an effective sermon
He couldn’t just talk
He needed to declare, with certainty, what he had to say
He needed to emphasize every word
He needed to preach.
He knew that the power of words was not in their meaning
But in how they were spoken.
He knew that if he gave his words power
If he could amplify every word
People would listen.