Poems

John Whale

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Abstract
THE GOREE, SUGAR
The Goree, Sugar

John Whale

THE GOREE

When the Goree went up in 1802
the rum-soaked flakes sent cattle
reeling through the floodlit crops.
You could see angels flaming in the sky
all the way to Warrington.

Over the many-linguaged town
of Liverpool all heaven was ablaze.

You'd have to go a long way south
through blistering siroccos
and choking sahel dust
to find a night as close as this.
It must be more than cotton.

It must be more than cotton.
SUGAR

The crisp edge of the white cube gave way slowly against his palate and the sweet melt spilling over teeth on either side of his tongue like a coolness or spreading heat (it was always impossible to tell) suddenly didn’t happen at all. There was instead a thickness, a gelatinous resistance pulling the tip of his tongue towards it, and where the sweetness should be, not exactly a bitterness as such, not like the yellow staining glob of serum which made him salivate and wince in the crowded clinic way back in sixties Liverpool – no, there was a thickness in this which tasted salty first then sweet, like the cuts he’d licked in boyhood, from his own elbows and knees, and now the sugar came home to him with all the dark taint of molasses, the smell drifting from Tate & Lyle, and the remembered difficulty he’d had understanding their tins of Golden Syrup – the small cloud of flies gathering over the body of a dead lion and the wisdom of the quoted words: OUT OF THE STRONG CAME FORTH SWEETNESS. But all he could think of was the juices draining inside the rotting carcass, laid out under an African sun, and that sickly smell carried on the wind which seemed to him much more than sugar and, somehow, very close to home.