Poems

John Whale
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Abstract
THE GOREE, SUGAR
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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-language 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.