

BERNARDINE EVARISTO

Heart of Exile: Looking for Kwaku

London: 'A market for many peoples coming by land and sea'

– Bede, AD 730

Satellite the worlde of cartographers,
betraying land mass so the nerve centre
is grander than the subject body, yer Majesty;
earth's sphere made one-dimension
on my injured map, new borders of Sellotape.

How can I trust the ghostly blue-veined hand?
Grey threads of my mother's clan,
palette translucent in a slanting attic light,
goose-feather quill in precise calligraphy,
apex and stem on Standard European Paper?

You are not the stuff of our legends.
I finger the routes in my palm, dark
with my father's carbon, lifelines span Good
Hope, Mogadishu, Carthage, footprints
tracked prey, traders bartered up

rivers not then charted by Dr Livingstone –
blank spaces all. Clans not yet severed
by the intricate jigsaw of this continent; a web
of veins clutch my aching neck. What becomes
of fractured hearts? Sickness in the family.

Somewhere on the skulled coastline, your sad
profile, Kwaku, unconquered kilometres
of 900 AD now shrunk into a 1:9 million

projection, at the tip, Gibraltar's two-way trail,
fleeing the throne of old Ghana, Uncle's poison,

via lamp-lit boulevards of the moor's Spain,
now on a barge on the Thames, deathly
the white forest at Gravesend, the vicious
bitterness of this thing called snow –
you cannot believe you have come to this.

Crouched behind trees, men, alert as eagles
watch, iron spearheads glint, the boat creeks
on iced water and sinking inside a cotton robe,
your lips are petrified, *I cannot turn back*. Not
seaman but wanderer, in this Age of Darkness.