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Opening Extract from...

You

Written by John Haynes

Published by Seren

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from John Haynes ‘You’

And there’s the ECWA school and that’s Miss Bosse
turning at her wall map of the ancient
trade routes that the Buzus used to cross,
all that blank sand she tries with so much passion
in her English to make real beyond
the blowing door-cloth and the lizard sprawled
out flat and still and listening on the wall

as if its nodding birthmark-indigo
and orange head nodded in empathy
with her, with you, your letters traced into
a tray of sand, your hush in Jesus’ holy
name, your walk back home on paths through guinea
corn, the floating pile of textbooks balanced
on your head with all the nonchalance

that comes of something learnt and then forgotten
that it has been, like the history
of who the person is lost in the person
bearing it, then in the words somebody
tells the tale in, then the mimicry
inside the nerves of that, its whispers to
some inner, mouthed, imaginary *you*,

ECWA: Evangelical Church of West Africa
Buzu: used in colloquial Hausa for *Tuareg* traditionally involved in the trans-Saharan trade before the European presence in West Africa.

who's coming still towards me through the sky,
seat-back and plaits reflected in the cabin
glass, the wing stretched over bevelled sea,
although the plane's not there at all, has been
recalled long since, in fact, because of some
ground to air threat out of Algiers. And so
my empathy is wrong. It isn't you.

You come alone – National Express to Southsea
South Parade, the street, the bed-sit, Jack
that creepy landlord ringing Dad to okay
forcing up the window, and I'm back
to find my gas-fire on, the mattress dragged
up close to it, and among shaking huge
wild table-leg and chair-back shadows: you

swathed in my coat and woollen hat under
the duvet, and already gone back home
as people do so far asleep – Kagoma
or our house in Zaria, the dream
wasp fizzingly inside a mango skin
as loud as is this gas fire coming through
the skin and sleep of *was* and *here* and *you* –