

Rachel E. Vernon



The Exile

This is not how
I dreamed it
This home
Away
From home
Is not
My home.

Imaginings of
Those who
Spoke
My true name
Warmed my dream
While Thomas coughed
And William raved.

I would survive.
I would return
To my people
Who would speak
The hidden language
Of my soul.

And now
In this place
I
No less a
Stranger
Than my English Kate.

My tongue
Cannot
Remember
The cadences
Of my youth.

My father
cannot hide
his hurt
at this
Black stranger
Needing
An interpreter
To greet him.

He has lost
His son
And I
My father.

Cabosher Cudjo's son
Is dead.
His African
Tongue, ways, dress
Crucified
At Islington.

His Easter form
Is Phillip Quaque,
Cleric
With no father
But God
And Englishmen.

They formed me
Into
This clerk
In holy Orders
This priest of
The Church of England.

No blows
But every word
Every look
An excision of
Heathen
Backward ways.

No babbling,
Phillip.
The King's English!
Sit walk speak
Become
An Englishman.

Nothing now left of
Birempton Cudjo's son.
Dead
As Corboro and Cudjo.