

BERNARDINE EVARISTO

Britain: A Continuum

Circles of rouge on his white-powdered cheeks,
the Master of Ceremonies strides on stage
in a goat's hair periwig and a ship in full sail
as hat. He is all afro-foppery.

“Welcome. *Willkommen. Bienvenue*
to the Britannia Retrospective,” he gushes at rows
of style-journos, pens hovering over faux-zebra notepads.
“First off down the runway, amid flashing strobe

and 70s funk is couture from the salons of Rome.
We have pink lurex togas, ~~cap 745 and 494, g14-g8D6 s1ink dx,~~

of iron bracelets, necklaces, tattered culottes (tie-dyed),
and tattooed backs. Slave-wear, ma'am, easy
to maintain and retrieve if stolen. Whooaah!

It's getting kind of tropical under this wig. Our cue
for Victoriana. A sitar and damp pianola
accompany a ballet of tweed saris, tartan turbans,
whalebone bodices over shalwar kameez, and pyjamas,

leading us into a trance-dance finale
of 90s jungle inspired by old bi-pedal exports
and jewels returning to the crown. A melange
of plumed cloth caps, grass stockings, big-batty

leopard skin bustles, pinstripe agbadas
and fur-lined yashmaks for all those johnny-just-comes
who have sailed to these shores since time
immemorial.... And so...

under a solitary spot, with a twirl and a flourish, I bow.
You've been a fabulous audience, I take off my hat to you.
It is the ship we all came on, after all.
Here, catch it. It is yours."