

FLESH

Key themes and ideas in the play

- Memory** The play is about the collective European memory of slavery. A non-linear narrative has been used to reflect the pattern of recall and the overlap with imagination. The play is set in London: the fact of slavery, and Europe's relationship with Africa, is an inescapable sub-text which constantly threatens to overwhelm the principal narrative.
- Christianity** Religion was key in slavery and its abolition, being used both to justify the institution and as a motivation for those who called for its end. Christian imagery of martyrdom, and of the scapegoat taking on the sins of many through suffering, as well as the rôle of women in the story of redemption, have been consciously written into the text.
- Guilt and redemption: David/Kwame feels guilt because he has survived. David & Sarah's relationship is a metaphor.
- Humanity** What it is to be human, to be humane or to be animalistic, is also a running thread (Africans were often written of in the period as less than human). To empathise with the suffering of another is a central element in both humanity and Christianity.

PROLOGUE

MUSIC CUE: chords and riffs (bluesy) ghostly to suggest memory.

A man emerges out of the shadows; as he speaks, the lights come up to reveal that he is surrounded by the key figures from his past: his mother, his sister, his lover, the other Africans who sold him into

slavery, the master of the slave-ship, the men who terrorised him, the London merchant who owned him, a revolutionary from Dominque, and the English abolitionists.

David X When people look at me, my neighbours, the women at church, shop-keepers, I know they think of me as an African. But I have lived here, here in London, for forty years! My wife is English, my children know as little of Africa as the water of the Thames. My first day here! It was as if I had been sold into Hell *and* Heaven!

MUSIC CUE: Telemann (serving for English jig), cross cut with the darker rhythms of the African drums.

ACT I Scene 1



1: LONDON, 1770

The Boy is 14 years old, and is being jostled and pushed by the London crowd, which—in all its Eighteenth Century richness—calls: the gentry shop, and tarts, shopkeepers and ballad-singers ply their wares.

General scene of merchandising and selling, actors make improper sexual advances to members of the audience, etc, etc, esp senior members of the Church of England and any stray politicians who may have ventured in from the Houses of Parliament.

- Hawker *Morning Star*¹! *Morning Star*! Mr Fox's latest speech to the honourable and right honourable members in full, complete with satirical illustrations by Mr Rowlandson.
- Hawker 2 I've got these beautiful oranges just in from the warm south. Come on, girls, come and sample my wares.
- Clothier Beautiful silk, ladies and gents, just in from the far east...
- Vintner Gin! Gin! Drown your sorrows and forget your sins. Tuppence the half-pint...Gin! Gin!
- Hawker 3 Steady on there, sir! Only squeeze me when I'm yours!

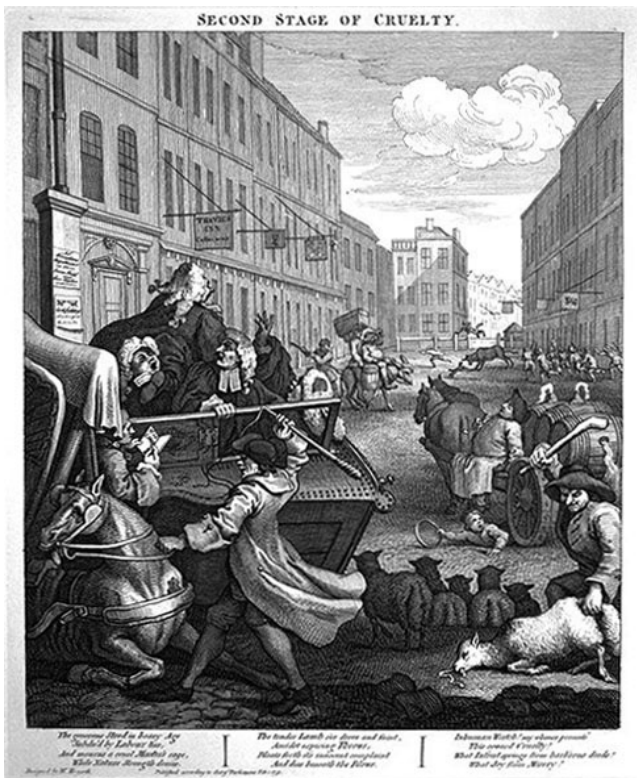
David has disappeared in the chaos. An actor/ballad seller steps forward to sell his printed ballads. There should be a hint of the nightmarish about this scene—it's not realistic, but almost horror, yet often comic and then a representation of memory. The Actor's speech below could give material for physicalisation?

- Actor 1 A ballad: 'Corinna', by Mr Swift:
'Corinna, pride of Drury Lane,
For whom no shepherd sighs in vain; ...
Now picking out a crystal eye,
She wipes it clean, and lays it by ...

¹ Not to be confused with the organ of the late Communist Party of Great Britain, the *Morning Star* was also an 18th Century newspaper which, among other things, published Wilberforce's Parliamentary speeches.

Untwists a wire; and from her gums
A set of teeth completely comes ...
Pulls out the rags contrived to prop
Her flabby dugs, and down they drip. ...
With gentlest touch, she next explores
Her shankers, issues, running sores: ...
Or to Jamaica seems transported,
Alone, and by no planter courted...'

Sharp change.



Clothier A new consignment, ladies and gentlemen, of the finest calico, just in from our manufactories in India.

Lydia (*excited*) Mother! We must have ten yards of this new fabric.

Maria Oh, can we mother! We both need new dresses.

Turner (*to Mrs T, while feeling the stuff and assessing its quality*) Don't buy it here. We've imported a thousand yards of exactly the same stuff. At a fraction of the cost.

FLESH

Lydia But papa, this pattern is more modish. And I simply can't wear this any longer.

Maria Or this. Look at it. I look like an old woman.

Lydia Do you want us to look like old women, father?

Turner It is over-priced. I can have a man at the warehouse bring over some swatches of our fabrics later in the week; the company deals in thousands of calicos.

Lydia What you think, father, to be fashionable is seldom the case. Your customers are of a different quality to us.

Maria we will never be married if you let us look like this

Lydia DO you want us to die old maids, Mother?

Maria do you mother, do you?

Hettie You two. Leave your mother alone. (*apologising*) I am sorry, madam, they should not have bothered you. (*a working person in the market*) These children. They have no manners. They behave like this! And she expects me to run around like their grandmother. Tsh! They have no idea!

Mrs T Hettie

Hettie Ma'am?

Mrs T That fish you gave us on Tuesday, was it from Stevensons?

Hettie It was Ma'am.

Mrs T It was off. The pepper you insist on using did not hide the fact. Tell him he is not to take such liberties with my household or I will move our account elsewhere.

Hettie Ma'am.

Mrs T We will have beef this evening.

Hettie Ma'am.

Turner And make sure it's nice and rare, blushing at the heart, like a maiden.

Hettie Sir.

Turner And Hettie?

Hettie Sir?

Turner Where's my new boy? I want him with me at my meeting.

Hettie He's with Sarah, sir (*points*).

Our focus shifts

Sarah Keep up.
 Tart 2 What a lovely young man.
 Sarah Don't look at her. Keep walking!
 Tart 2 I see you've been busy, love!
 Tart 1 Didn't know you had it in you, dear!
 Sarah You keep your hands off him.
 Tart 2 (*calling to another tart*), Touch him, go-on, his skin's like silk. (*The two tarts paw at him*)

Turner Sarah...?
Turner crosses

Tart (*Arrogantly and teasingly to Turner, deliberately misreading his arrival*) Business, darling?
 Tart Special rate for a clean young man like you.
 Tart Buy one, get one free! (*Tarts laugh and exit*)

Turner How's my new purchase?
 Sarah (*keen to exonerate the boy from any harm that might befall him*) Still a little quiet, sir. But most helpful. He's been with me at the marketing all morning, sir, and has a keen eye for a bargain...(*the boy remains dumb*) with a little more training, perhaps...

Turner I am due at a meeting around now, I will take him with me. Does he speak at all?

Sarah (*dismayed, for she has been found out*) No sir, I don't believe he does.

Turner Any English at all? I thought he spent time in the colonies?

Sarah He seems... punched, sir. (*recovering*) I heard him singing last night, but it was like something I've never heard before. Mrs Turner told me to keep him quiet: she said it sounded unnatural and was filling her with a fear of the devil himself. I stopped him, sir, like she asked, but then he just cried. Quietly, sir...

Turner Very well. He will pick up the language of this place in due course, if he knows what's good for him. In the meantime, his stupidity is no disadvantage. I didn't buy him for his wit. (*gesturing to the boy*) Here, follow me.

Sarah (encouraging him) Go with him, he's our master. Go!
Turner (throwing a bundle of papers into the boy's hands) Carry this, then you can be a useful ornament. Come!

Return to the actors, applause, lines, perhaps.

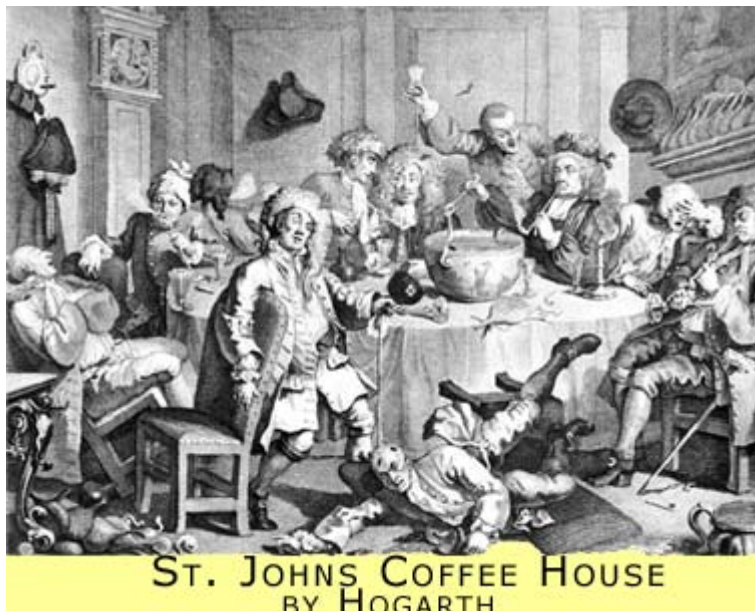
Actors The men she meets with frequent Rubs; 17
Are always from Religious Clubs;
Their Favour she is sure to find, [55]
Because she pays 'em all in Kind.

Corinna wakes. A dreadful Sight!
Behold the Ruins of the Night!
Corinna in the Morning dizen'd,
Who sees, will spew; who smells, be poison'd

MUSIC CUE, first phrase of the Telemann bourée with drums, reprising the London music used above, to cover the scene setting.

Segué:

Scene 2



Later that first morning

A COFFEE HOUSE or AN ALE HOUSE IN THE CITY

Turner joins a conversation that is in full flow.

Merchant 1 Last quarter my agent bought fifty prime men from one of their kings for a handful of shells and a music box. I sold them in Barbados for ten times the costs. Ten times. Imagine that. That's including shipping and insurance. (*Turner joins the party*)

Turner) Gentlemen

Merchants) Turner/ Sir

Merchant 3 (*ignoring the interruption/ picking up the previous thread*) You were lucky there. I budget on each slave costing £3 a head; if they're strong men, I can have them marketed in Charleston for £20 each. Even with the wastage that's a healthy profit.

Merchant 2 You get less for the women and children

Merchant 3 and fewer survive the journey

Merchant 1 but you get a good price for those who do.

Merchant 3 (*leaning over, and pawing the boy's face*) Like this pretty creature.

Merchant 2 But what will you do with him in a couple of years' time when he's rutting with your maids. Your fine new house will be a rabbit hutch stuffed with mulattoes;

Merchant 3 (*with a hint of pleasure at the thought*) these unchristian savages have no morals

Turner (*hastily*) My wife intends to have him baptised.

Merchant 2 Before or after he understands what the priest is saying?

Merchant 3 Boy. (*he clicks his fingers*) 'dost thou renounce the Devil? '

Merchant 1 'and all his works'

Merchant 2 'the vain pomp of the world?'

Merchant 1 'the covetous desires of the same?'

Merchant 3 'and the carnal desires of the flesh?' (*beat*)

Merchant 1 (*becoming bored again*) I suppose I had no idea at the time what my parents were signing me up to.

Merchant 2 I'm not sure I do now. (*they laugh*)

Segué:

Scene 3

TURNER'S HOUSE, SERVANTS' QUARTERS

David's second night in England

David sings as he begins to undress for bed.

MUSIC CUE: David sings a Twi song, sad, evoking his utter separation from his home.

Sarah He sang again the second night. I was ready for it this time, and made well sure all the doors were shut so Mrs T wouldn't be disturbed. I loved to hear him sing: it was like the clouds or the sea or the hills or the fields or some thing else ... and it could make me cry or just smile, holding my sadness next to me...

David (*...David continues to sing*) *As he sings, he slowly removes his new European clothes, and the music and the unclothing of him take him back into his memory...*

The Mother joins in the lament, so that in time they are singing together...

It is David's memory of Ghana, five years earlier

Mother You can now sing it as well as me. Go and help your sister.

David (*calling*) Aduah. Aduah!

Mother Aduah!

Aduah Yes, ma?

Mother Help your brother with the washing.

Aduah Oh, ma.

Mother Tch! Oh ma!

Their mother is joined by some neighbours. David steps back and watches.

Mother Akwaaba!
 Women 2 Akwaaba!
 Woman 1 Wo ho te sɛn?
 Mother Me ho yɛ!

 Mother It is a beautiful day!
 Woman 1 Yes, thank God.
 Woman 2 Thank God indeed.
 Woman 1 Your boy has grown well. (*They turn and look at him. A moment: we see the memory.*)
 Woman 2 *Aane!*
 Mother *Meda ase.* And I thank God. When he came, I knew he was strong. His body fought inside my belly to escape: I felt I was carrying the earth inside me.
 Woman 1 My Kweku was like that.
 Woman 2 And my Ama too!
 Woman 1 Her! How she has grown!
 Woman 2 I thank God, my daughter is the most beautiful girl in the village!
 Woman 1 She has good hips, and a waist so slender and agile, it dances when she walks. When I watch her around, I forget today, and see *you*, a beautiful girl, ten years ago!
 Woman 2 (*assent*) But you are not the only one to notice her now. My husband says the boys are like dogs. Sniffing. Even your Kutu has noticed her.
 Mother Him! Notice a woman! (*Laughter*) My husband looks at his crops, he says the leaves hang like a little boy's *koti!* (*Laughter*) Before the snip! (*More laughter*) But we help him. He is also my son. (*sighs of resignation*)

Her older son (Kutu) rushes on, scared and urgent.

Mother Kutu, boy, what do you want?
 Kutu (*Breathless*) They have come...
 Woman 1 Disturbing your mother.
 Kutu ...the men...
 Woman 2 Rushing around like a girl!
 Kutu You must leave! They've come from the coast. They have come for people. You must go, now, with the children. They will take you.

Mother Where are our men?!

MUSIC CUE: two djembe: violence, terror, movement.

Kutu Gone! Everyone has gone. (*Desperate with panic*) You must run! Hide!

Mother My children! (*To Kutu*) You, go.

MUSIC CEASES

Mother They will take you instead.

Kutu Ma!

Mother Just go!

MUSIC CUE: djembe remise a couple of bars to cover the exiting of the actors from the stage.

(The other players scatter, leaving the mother and her two younger children cradled in her arms. She resumes the song. Slowly, we are taken back to London...

MUSIC CUE: djembe cease. David sings.

...and as David returns to the present, his singing becomes a deep and quiet weeping. Sarah makes to comfort him, but is awkward. .

Segué.

Scene 4



One of the mornings of David's first week in London
MORNING, The KITCHEN OF TURNER'S HOUSE.

David is largely silent through this scene. Hettie speaks in the heavily accented voice of one only recently taken from her island home. At moments of feeling, she slips into rich dialect.

Hettie cooks, David peels potatoes or something similar. A bell rings, Sarah rushes on.

Sarah *(Exiting...)* That'll be Mrs Faulkner and her daughter. I'll just see to them, and be down for the tea shortly. *(To Hettie)* If the bell rings, send him up with the tea things.

Hettie *(chopping vegetables)* Pass me another turnip. *(David looks at her blankly. She points, he passes the vegetable).* This... *(she holds it up)*... is called a turnip. Strange, cold, wet country with its mean, cold food. Turnip! *(contemptuously, she spits out the words)*

Brrussels Sppprouts! Paaaarsnip! Who but the English would think to eat a parsnip! Oh, and 'no spices, Hettie', and 'more sugar, Hettie' and 'Good English Roast Beef' every bloody Sunday, and cooking the meat so it's still bleeding when you eat it, like it's flesh that's just been cut from the animal. *(In contemptuous amazement)*

These people! These people are the animals, eating raw meat like a pack of wild dogs. So. You got anything to say for yourself? No, thought not. You just sit there a bit longer then, you shadow—listen to your mammy talk while she cook, hmh? *Idiot-boy!* The way you just take it all. I hear what they call you and you just take it!

David
Hettie

I understand you. I am not a dog.

So he can talk. *(David says nothing. Hettie begins slicing some meat, with controlled venom. Then she challenges David)* You're still there, aren't you? Living in something you saw years ago. Get out of it. Leave it. If you dare. *(She continues to slice meat)* You think you are the only one to have suffered? You think I never had to hitch-up, hitch-up my skirts? You think I didn't sit in the dark, wondering what animal would come out of the shadows?

**SUDDEN LIGHTING CHANGE: A DIFFERENT SHIP,
THE ONE WHICH BRINGS HETTIE FROM THE
COLONIES TO ENGLAND**

Two drunken sailors are wandering through the lower-deck. They pick two women at random, and throw them around. It is clear that their intention is sexual violence. Hettie's manner is defiant.

Sailor 1
Sailor 2

I'll have this one!

And I'll take her friend

At the end of the brutal abduction of the women, the sailors are frozen with their captives, and

MUSIC CUE: *Hettie sings 'Zion', solo, then tutti. It is strong, insistent and assertive. This moment is about*

the Caribbean. It speaks of self-respect, independence and resistance. It rises to a crescendo, and sudden silence.

**A BELL RINGS, TWICE. SUDDEN LIGHTING
CHANGE: BACK IN THE KITCHEN**

Hettie You think every day I don't wake up and wish I were not back home instead of in this cold stinking town. You! You and every other man in my life—what have you ever done except sit there. Or leave. Or just fail. (*A hint of sexual tension in her anger here, possibly.*) (*A bell rings.*)

David I have to go. (*The bell rings again, more insistently this time. Sarah enters.*)

Sarah (*To David*) Where have you been. She's been ringing for ages. (*Affectionately*) They want their tea in the gazebo. You are to serve it: best behaviour. Here, I'll help. (*Gathering the tea things together*) You'll need that, and the sugar, too. And don't forget, the milk goes in first.

Hettie (*To their departing backs*) He's nothing but a *idiot-boy* (auntie-man). And she's his little whore.

Scene 5



TEA SCENE

Immediately following-on

The new gentry sit and take tea in the gazebo in the garden.. David serves.

MUSIC CUE: Telemann Bourée, delicate and solo violin.

Mrs T	Here, (<i>handing over a book</i>) I am done with <i>The Rewards of Constancy</i> .
Guest	Madam, you are most kind. Here is <i>The Fatal Connection</i> , and Sophia has just finished <i>The Mistakes of the Heart</i> .
Mrs T	Thank you, so much, my daughters will be delighted. Won't you my dears?
Daughter Maria	Yes, mother. Lydia has started writing a novel herself.

Guest (slightly shocked) Why how... courageous, madam.
 Lydia It is called *The Pope's Cellar*.
 Maria And she's invented this horrible Catholic vicar
 Lydia POPE!
 Maria Pope! – called *Antoniano XV*. He kills all the
 protestants. And then suddenly an *enormous*...
 Mrs T (cutting her off) I think that's more than enough of that,
 Maria. Mrs Faulkland will have to wait until it is
 published, darling. (Embarrassed pause)
 Guest May I say how impressed I am with your new boy?
 Mrs T Thank you, you are kind.
 Guest A fashionable acquisition, and a fine-looking creature.
 Guest Girl Mother, I think we should get one. He'd look splendid
 around the house when visitors come, and we can
 always use a boy for hard work.
 Guest (avoiding the issue) What have you called him?
 Mrs T David. I think he was given that name by a previous
 owner. My husband says they all have
 unpronounceable names when they first arrive. He says
 that as well as them all looking the same, they all sound
 the same, and that their language sounds like an infant's
 attempt at speech.
 Maria It's all 'goo-goo gaa-gaa'.
 Guest Dr Spencer says African languages have fewer words
 than English. Indeed, our superior intelligence is proved
 by the vast number of words we have. (Pause. Drink
 tea. See if the audience laughs)
 Mrs T How interesting. (directing them inside) You must come
 and see the new forte piano Mr Turner has just
 purchased. Lydia has been taking lessons from an
 Italian gentlemen and is now beginning to play with
 some accomplishment. Maria does not play, but she
 has a tolerable voice...

*David is left on his own, in an empty stage. He turns to
 the audience, preparing us for a ségué into from the
 London house to the African coast*

David They talk and talk about nothing: 'buying', 'wearing',
 'shopping', 'eating': they seem... *inhuman*: and yet

every time I see them, they remind me of my sister and mother. One evening, when I was returning from one of the bedrooms, I had to pass Miss Maria's room, where she was preparing for bed. Her mother was there, combing her hair. I suppose this happens every night, but it was the first time I'd seen it. And it was the first time I'd seen women doing those things women do since I left home. Her mother, sitting there, with love, just combing her hair, stroke, after stroke, after stroke...

'Lights' come up on David's mother and his sister, in Africa, on the coast, and go down on Mrs T and Maria. This is post-capture, and David's family and others are in captivity. David is back in Africa as a boy, he is in the scene, but not the focus of it, watching the intimacy between his mother and sister. The Mother and the sister are in a group of others held in captivity: they sing

MUSIC CUE: the Ewe song 'Tou tou' from the Volta Region of Ghana. It is a sorrowful lullaby which speaks of intimacy between women, and the inevitability of men's violence.

Toutou ou gbovi
Toutou ou gbovvi
Papa mou la homin o
Maman mou la homin o
Ao Naïma vin yin
Bonou, bonou kpo

Min kè poo,
Fèmi vi yé a
Gblon in nam
Nin ma po é na wo
Ao viyin oun gba fan vio
Ao Naïma vin yin
Bonou, bonou kpo.

Mother	(sings as she combs/prepares her daughter's hair)
Aduah	Mother, I am afraid.
Mother	I know, child.
Aduah	What will happen to us?

Mother (*She makes a gesture of powerlessness*) Whatever happens, it is God's will: you must remember that. When bad things happen— because they will—you must remember that. And you must think of home. You must remember home. Always. Our home, the river where I played when I was your age, the songs I have taught you, the stories, your father's name, my face. Your language. Your name. It is who you are, they will never take that from you. And you must teach these things to your daughters, and you must teach your sons what it is to be men, because they will be amongst devils. (*Un ange passe. The mother returns to combing her daughter's hair, and singing.*)

MUSIC CUE: *reprise of Tou Tou...*

Af'Owner (*The African owner bursts on.*)

Af'Owner (*violently*) You. Quiet.

Af'Owner That noise. Enough.

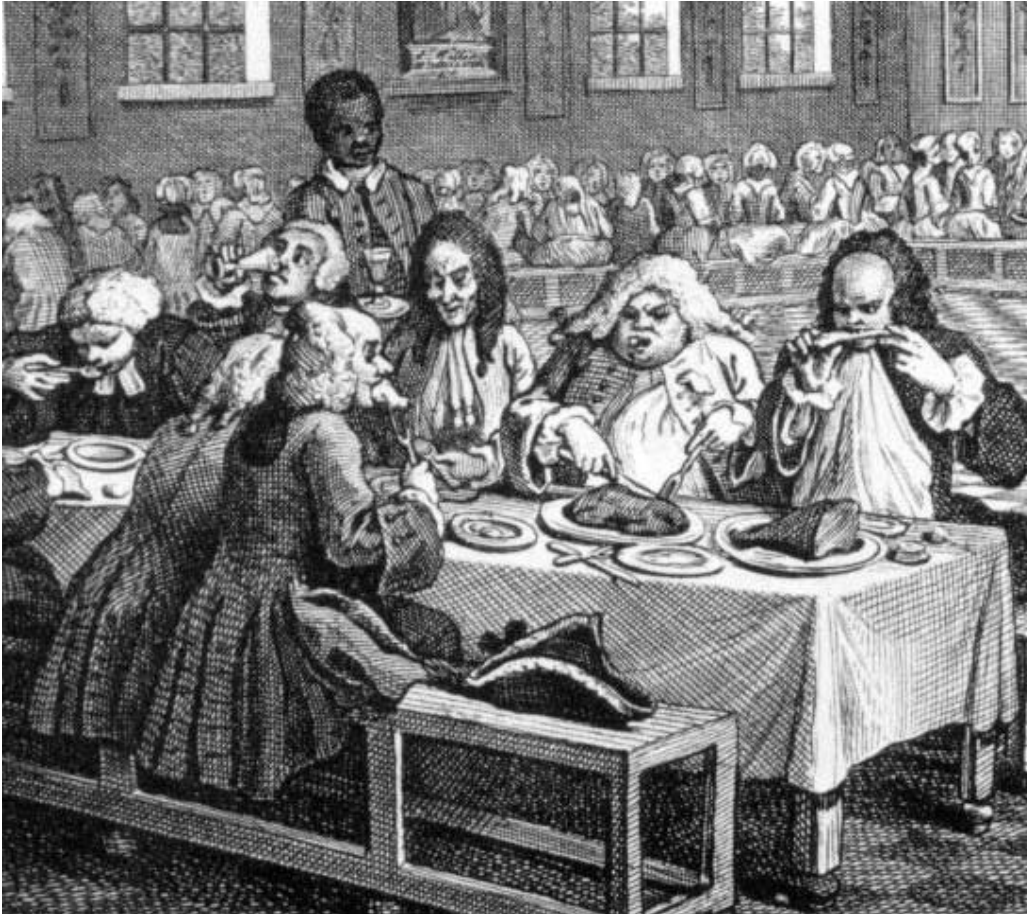
Mother How can you do this? How can you do this to your own people. (*She spits in front of him*).

Afr/Owner (*with slow menace, and to the Mother—having sized her up and measured her usefulness and value—cutting through the intimacy of the mother-daughter scene which David is watching*) We'll take this one.

Mother [protests and screams]

David They saw me standing, watching. (*Moment: Mrs T and Maria look back from their intimacy into David*) They do not know what I know, they have no idea what I was thinking.

End of Act 1



ACT II Scene 1

Music, London docks: flat drum and Vaughan Williams' a minor tune, jaunty and vaguely maritime.

A month as passed since David first arrived in London. It is still 1770..

The Pool of London—Turner confronts for the first time the reality of his life. Mr Turner is inspecting a consignment of goods recently arrived from the new world. Seagulls call, the river laps, sailors cuss and swear...

Atkins *(directing sailors)* Move the rum later—it can wait. get the sugar ashore now, all of it, into Jackson's wharf. Get a move on! I want the best stuff off the ship by nightfall.

Atkins *(walking in, as if from outside, into the lower-deck of one of his own ships)* Mind your step, there, sir. The companion-way's a touch slippery, sir.

Turner Thank you, Mr Atkins.

Atkins It must give you much pride, sir, each time you see your own ships.

Turner In truth, Mr Atkins, I see them so rarely, for they are always at sea—this is the first time I have been on-board this vessel in seven years.

Atkins Well, sir, she has seen some stretches of the ocean since then. To business, then, sir. This is the sugar. I was able to get this at a significant discount, as you can see from the books *(shows him the accounts)*...

Turner *(noises of gratitude and agreement)*

Atkins *(a hint of anxiety, for he has taken a risk on this deal)*
And here is a sample of the three gross barrels of rum. I am reliably informed there's a growing market for this, sir, and as you can see, the rate I got it at makes it an easy punt. They were practically giving it away. But it's top stuff, sir. As you can see, if you'll share a glass?

Turner Well, since the sun is over the yard-arm!

Atkins Precisely, sir!

Turner Cheers!

Atkins Your good health, sir! (*they drink, the sailor greedily, Turner with the politeness he has learnt*)

Turner I'm not surprised they were giving it away. Do people actually pay money for this?

Atkins (*some nervousness*) It is considered an flavoursome alternative to gin, sir. I have a vintner lined-up who's offered an excellent deal, giving me a mark-up of £5 the barrel.

Turner That certainly makes it significantly more palatable. (*Change of gear*) Well, sir, having looked at your account books, and sampled the products, I am pleased with the passage.

Atkins (*relieved, naturally*) Always a pleasure, working with you Mr Turner, sir.

Turner Have one of your men bring over the account books...

Atkins Sir.

Turner ... and keep me advised of how much you finally settle for on this, this rum.

Atkins Sir.

Turner ...I don't want to be squeezed on that margin, since it's so good we might as well keep it on the plump side.

Atkins Sir.

Turner (*finally turning to go, and seeing it only in the half-light or possibly tripping over it*)

Atkins Oh/what is this (*ad lib*)

Atkins (*embarrassed*) I'm sorry, sir, it should have been stowed.

Turner But what is it?

Atkins It's for the other goods, sir. The middle passage (*Turner hasn't got it yet*). The flesh. The people, sir.

Turner You chain them?

Atkins The men make trouble, sir. And try to escape.

Turner I see/ of course/ [or just silence] [*ad lib*]

Atkins (*change of gear*) Would this afternoon be satisfactory for the delivery of the accounts, sir?

Turner (*snapping out of it*) Yes, of course. Of course. And don't forget, keep me informed with the progress on the marketing of the rum.

Atkins Sir. (*they leave*)

MUSIC CUE?

Scene 2



SEGUÉ, TURNER'S HOUSE:

Later that day

SARAH VIGNETTE

It is evening. Sarah is lighting candles.

Sarah A man is a man. It's not the colour you look at is it? It's the shape of his leg, and the light on his skin. When the sun catches him through the kitchen window—I didn't see the colour: I saw the smoothness of his flesh, and the way it's wrapped tightly over his bones, as if there's nothing spare.

Her reverie is interrupted by the daughters.

Maria *(they are giggling about sex in that way that girls do)*
 He's mine!

Lydia Maria!

Maria I dreamt about him last night. *(As if reading a novel)* His dark body was in my arms...

Lydia Maria!

Maria And why not? Mrs Templeton has a lover.

Lydia She's an actress, Maria. And you are too young. And he's a servant. And father wants us to marry.

Maria As if we are noblewomen! Poor father. I want a real man. *(She visualises)* Powerful. Hard. Not some fop he thinks will make the family reputation.

Lydia Thank God the family reputation does not rely on you. First novels, and now negroes.

Maria You're the one interested in novels.

Lydia You read them too! And in any case he's not powerful, and he isn't hard. There's something sad about him.

Maria You mean those eyes.

Lydia Aren't they beautiful?

Maria Soulful.

Lydia Melancholic.

Maria So I'm not the only one with a weakness...

Lydia You silly little girl!

Maria I'm jealous!

Lydia Don't you dare!

Maria *(exiting)* David! David!

Lydia *(running after her)* I'll tell Mother what you said about your dream.

They collide with their father and mother.

Girls *(Stifling giggling)* Father/mama.

Turner Maria. Is there a problem?

Maria No, father.

Turner Lydia?

Lydia No, father.

Mrs T Then try behaving...like women.

Girls *(stifled giggles)* Yes father *(exeunt, giggling)*

Turner *(calling after them)* And both of you should be upstairs by now.

Scene 2, section 2 (see appendix for the author's cut)

MR AND MRS T pass across the stage

Mrs T *(She deals her husband a card)* There is a new singer at the Haymarket;

Turner *(noise of assent)*

Mrs T Farinelli, I think he's called. I'd like to ask Sarah to get us tickets. A box will be expensive, of course, but everyone is talking about him. Mr Handel found him shortly before his death, apparently.

Turner I was at the docks today

Mrs T *(the briefest of questions)* I will have the cost added to our account?

Turner *(his silence is taken as assent)*

Mrs T Sarah. Book the tickets tomorrow.

Sarah Ma'am.

Mrs T How is the business?

Turner It keeps us in opera tickets.

The household repairs to bed.

MUSIC CUE: er... music needed here.

DOMESTIC SCENE

That evening

(David is shutting down the house for night. Sarah. Sarah now views this strong and sensitive creature with new eyes: no longer is he a boy she has to mother)

Sarah *(To David)* I thought you might like a drink before you go to bed.

David Please, I would like that. It is kind of you. *(she pours two glasses)* Thank you.

Sarah You are so polite. When you first got here I thought you couldn't speak. Or didn't speak English.

David I learnt before I got here. When I was on the other side of the sea. After the first of my journeys.

Sarah I've never really met anyone like you before. You know, foreign. I grew up in a village, I found London a bit of a shock when I first got here. Frightening.

David I've been in worse places. (*Pause. He regrets his anger*) I also grew up in a village.

Sarah Did it have a river?

David Oh yes! I used to swim in it when I was little!

Sarah Me too! Though my mother put a stop to that when she found out. Girls aren't supposed to, here.

David Tell me more about your village.

Sarah Well, it is surrounded by fields, they go a beautiful golden yellow in the autumn, when everyone helps with the harvest. Or they used to. It's changing a bit now. And there's a lovely church—very old—where all my family are buried, in the church yard, not inside of course, we've never had enough money! Next to the church is the parson's house—the parson taught me to read & write. And opposite the church the river flows into a pond...

David In my village, the earth is red: bright red, almost the colour of the bricks of this house. And on the edge of the village, we also grow our food: plantain and *aboro*², and many other foods.

Sarah Aboro?

David Aboro. It is yellow, and shaped like this, and stuffed with shiny little seeds all around the outside. It has big green leaves, like green leather. We do not have a church, though. (*Beat—un autre ange passé.*) I would build a church, now, if ever I get back. I'd build it with my own hands.

Sarah (*awestruck*) The palms of your hands are white...

David Yes, of course. Did you not notice before?

Sarah (*takes his hand, fascinated*) Let me see.

David (*surprised, strangely flattered*) I don't know why it surprises you.

² Maize.

Sarah I suppose because my hands are just one colour, a kind of pinky-white. Though they do go red a lot of the time.

David But look at your hair. What colour do you think your hair is?

Sarah (*grimly*) Brown!

David No, look, here is a bit of red, and here there is a hair that is yellow...

Sarah Blonde!

David Some blonde! and this is almost black here, and here... (*they freeze realising the inevitable. Then they kiss*)

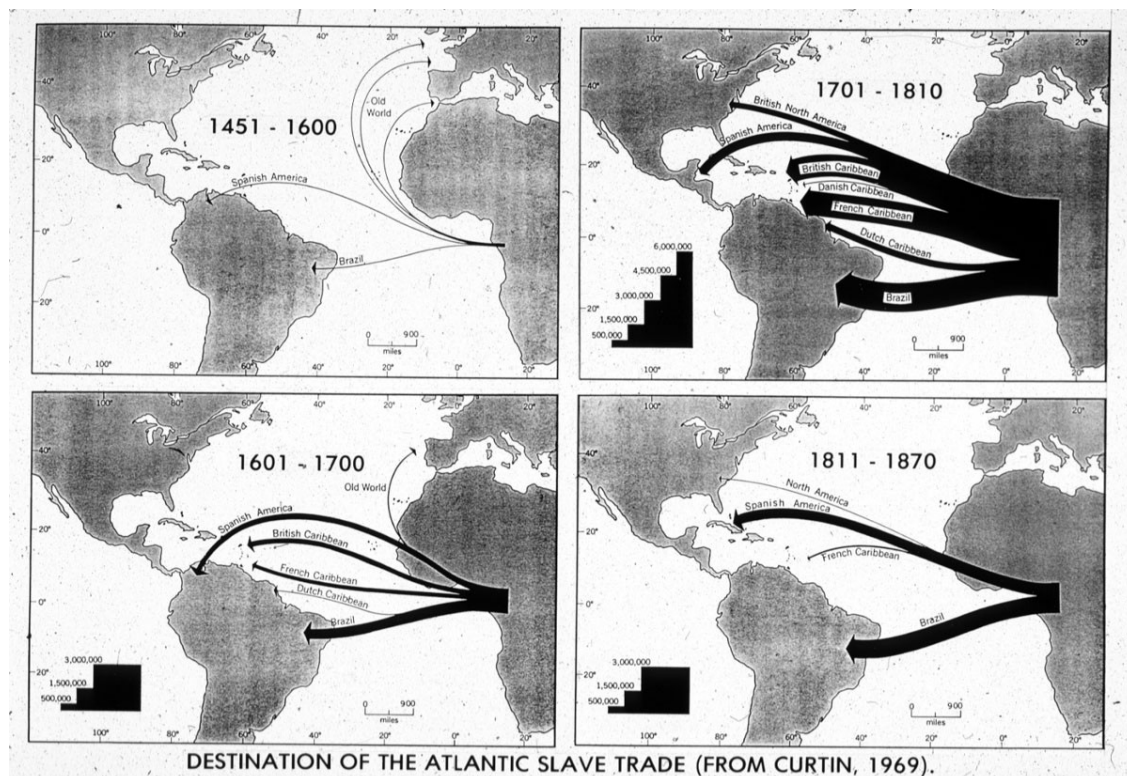
David (*He pulls it out to show her*) Here, there is a grey hair.

Hettie She wants her bed warmed. Now.

Scene 3

THE DOCKS

Much later, Turner returns to the docks.



MUSIC CUE: violin solo, folk. Solemn and melancholic.

Boy (conducting Turner below deck) Mr Atkins has gone ashore, sir. He won't be back, well, until tomorrow morning, sir. And then he won't be in much of a condition to help you. He has ... he has a lady he visits, and I think things get a bit out of hand at times, sir. We weren't expecting you, you see, until next week.

Turner It's fine. I think it may be better that way.

Boy Sir. (pause)

Turner Tell me what you use this space for.

Boy Well this is the lower-deck, sir. We use this for the stowage of goods on passage. Of course, it's empty just now, with us having cleared our stock, and waiting for what we'll take to the Gold Coast, sir.

Turner And then. When you leave Africa.

Boy We use it for the goods, sir.

Turner (Cueing) Yes...

Boy The others, sir. We keep them down here.

Turner I want you to tell me how we handle them. Those... those goods.

Boy I'd rather not, sir.

Turner It's why I'm here. I need to know.

Boy (It comes tumbling out, for he is only a boy)

It's awful, sir. I hate that part of the route—the middle passage, I hardly sleep on that westward leg. It's the smell and the noise and the things that happen. We can't even let them use the heads, sir, like the sailors do (they'd throw themselves over the side rather than stay on the ship—I've seen it: men, grown men jump into the sea, miles from land) so they go in the corner, there next to that bulkhead. There's a latrine there, sir. It's empty now, but a week into the journey and it's half full with, with shit sir. Shit and piss. Shit and piss and god knows what else. And the smell. They say they can smell us coming two days before we come alongside. But it does for them, sir: the air is so foul down here. Twenty of them died in the last passage, and they just get tipped over the side like they're gash. I had to do it, once. The men made me. A girl my age, threw her over

the side with the potato skins. She floated. She floated, sir. There was hardly any wind, and she wouldn't go away—just floated there. The gulls (*this is difficult*) I saw the gulls, sir, peck out her eyes.
Turner (A pause) And it is always like that?
Boy Yes.

MUSIC CUE: chords and riffs (blues)

Boy Always.
Turner Thank you. (*He turns to go, and the boy makes to do his bidding*) No. Stay. Please. I'll see myself out.

Scene 4

NIGHTMARE SCENE
The middle passage

Sarah He wakes up in the middle of the night, sweating. Sometimes he screams. He talks to himself in that other language of his. I cannot reach him. He is too far away from me.

DANCE/DRAMA
We enact David's nightmare

MUSIC CUE: *djembe begin the triplet and crotchet rhythm on the fourth movement of the dancers across the stage.*

Sarah and David dance, showing how their relationship is tortured by his experiences. In between their movements, there are hideous memories from David's time on board the slaver: there it is dark, and we are half way across the Atlantic. The lower-deck of a medium-sized merchantman is crammed with flesh; the men are shackled together in twos, the women lie more freely. There are open latrines in a corner. The stench is unimaginable.

THE DANCE REMISES

The mariners are doing what approximate to evening rounds in this floating hell.

Mariner 1 *(kicking an inert body)* Mr Atkins, this one's gone.
Atkins Deal with it.

THE DANCE REMISES

Woman *(desperately, as she realises what the sailors are about to do with her husband, and in her own language) he is not dead. He still breathes.
(The ill man is thrown overboard).*

Mariner 1 *(Brutally)* I don't understand you, you stupid bitch.

THE DANCE REMISES

The flesh screams.

Slaves *Please! Please!*
Mariners *NO!*

Atkins *(with fury)* Pack them in boy, tighter, tighter. I cannot waste space. That one, get rid of it.

THE DANCE REMISES

Woman *(with resignation, in her own language³) You are monsters.*

Woman *This is hell.*

THE DANCE REMISES

Sailor *(screaming)* I said, dance. Dance! ⁴

³ Preferably Twi.

THE DANCE REMISES

MUSIC CUE: The rhythm changes. Faster. Add cowbell. Then...

David falls out of the group, unable to dance.

MUSIC CUE: Drums cease as David collapses.

Sailor Beat him!

MUSIC CUE: a single djembe marks each stroke of the whips.

David is beaten and collapses on the deck.

MUSIC CUE: drums cease.

Mariner 2 Where have you been hiding?

Mariner 2 bring him here (*unbuckles belt*) this one's mine.

THE DANCE REMISES

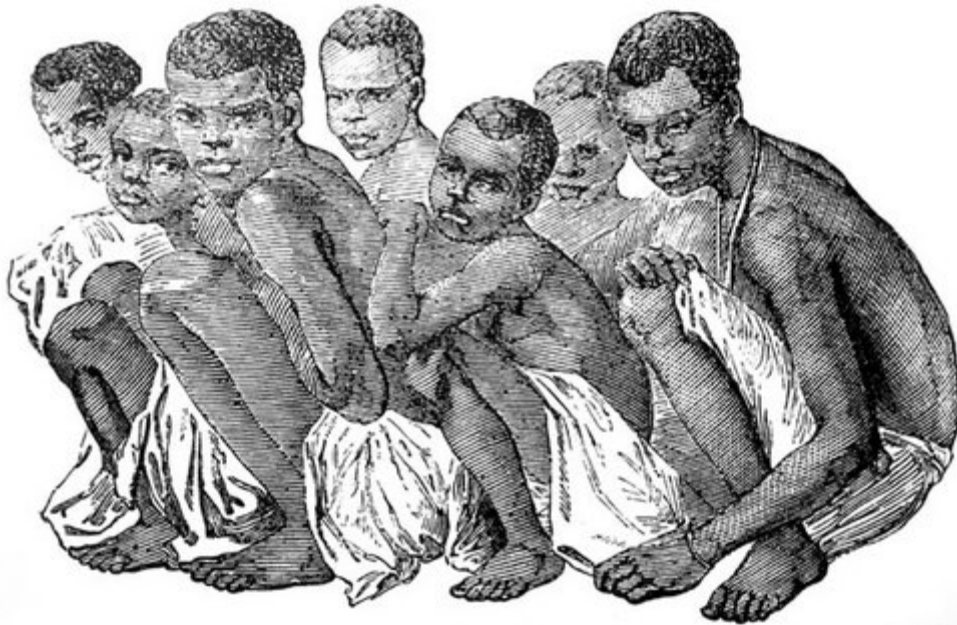
Sarah brings him out of his dream.

Sarah David! (*her words break the mystery of the dream*)

MUSIC CUE: Chords and riffs (bluesy)

End of Act Two.

⁴ 'The captains needed to keep the slaves in acceptable physical condition if they were to be sold at high prices, so each morning after breakfast the slaves were "danced" on deck, in order to give them exercise. Still shackled together, the men were forced to jump up and down until often the flesh of their ankles was raw and bleeding from the iron chains which bound them together.' <http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/students/his3487/lembrich/seminar53.html>. 19 Feb 2007.



ACT III

Twenty-five years later
LONDON 1795

Scene 1

Scene 1 *Lights on a single strong woman*

Abol'tnist 1 For me, it was never about anything more complicated than love. The merchants never understand that. I admitted as much once, to a man from Liverpool who'd spent his whole life in and around docks and ships. Can you imagine! I think my exact words were 'I love these people.' It was as though I'd admitted to some unwholesome desire. I think he decided that his goods were in danger, not from parliamentary abolition, but from the predatory needs of a spinster! But the truth is that when Love ravishes your soul, it spills over into your whole being, and you want to love the whole of creation, in all its complexity and colours, in all its light and its darkness.

Lighting change

LONDON

Turner, surrounded by abolitionists. Elsewhere in the acting area, Mrs T and her neighbour play cards. Abstract scene: five more strong speeches about slavery. These speeches assail Mr Turner. This demonstrates his further confrontation with truth.

Abol'tnist What amazes me—amazes me—is that everything is so normal. I live in a house, I have nice neighbours, we take tea together, we go to shops, my children take

music lessons... and only I seem to be able to smell the stench on which it is all based: the putrefaction of human flesh.

- Abol'tnist (*reading a report*) Mr Wilberforce then said "How then can the House refuse its belief to the multiplied testimonies before the privy council, of the savage treatment of the negroes in the middle passage? Nay, indeed, what need is there of any evidence? The number of deaths speaks for itself."
- Philippe In San Domingo, slaves are rising now in the cause of Liberty! Napoleon's army—Napoleon's army—is losing! 40,000 trained soldiers defeated by a militia of negroes and mulattoes armed with what they can find and trained by justice.
- Woman Our luxury is based on the destruction of families: children are ripped from their mothers, brothers from sisters. Wives separated from husbands. They are like us. Why can't you see that? (*The weight of truth is behind these words*)
- Woman We are all guilty⁵.
- Turner walks away, he is troubled (but in denial), and moves over to where his wife and a friend are gossiping.*
- Guest
Mrs T Every sermon now seems obsessed with Africans! You should join us at Holy Trinity—Mr Turner insisted we move parishes after Lydia developed her obsession...
- Guest 'Free our Negro Brother'!
- Turner (*Seeing David*) Why does he have to be everywhere in this house? (*The women stare, shocked, and exit*)

⁵ 'We are all guilty', William Wilberforce; cited, *In Our Time*, BBC Radio 4, TX 0900, Thursday 22nd February 2007.

Guest *(throwaway line)* Your husband is a man of such acute sensibility!

Scene 2

TURNER'S HOUSE: THE KITCHEN

Hettie is entertaining her friend from the Caribbean.

Philippe *(Reflecting)* The world has changed. *(He helps himself to a piece of chicken)* The old order has died. It rots in a hundred tombs in the capital cities of Europe. The heads of those who thought their fat and pampered bodies *(he takes a bite out of a chicken leg)* better than their fellow men roll down cobbled streets in Paris, Brussels, Bonn and Vienna. *(He throws the chicken bone into the audience)* The people have taken the reins. God is dead! You are a good cook.

Hettie I hate this country.

Philippe It is run by reactionaries and the poor lack the hunger for change.

Hettie They still look at me as if I am some sort of animal; after all these years, I am still a tourist attraction.

Philippe Not to the radicals: they know that all men are created equal! I will introduce you to some of the better sort of Englishmen. They all welcome *me* like a hero. Everyone I know here treats me as a hero, even some of your milords—perhaps only because our rebellion is also against the French!

Hettie It is so cold here. I miss the sea, I miss the mountains. I miss my family.

Philippe Jamaica is a beautiful island. I know it well. I was in hiding there for a while.

Hettie You still running?

Philippe *(he chews thoughtfully on another mouthful)* No.

Hettie Looking for a port?

Philippe Every man needs a woman.

Hettie I don't want to die here.

Philippe When I leave, I'll take you with me. I will go back when we've won. But I have a job here for a few years: here, I spread the truth about liberty. Can you imagine? A black republic. No king. No queen. No slaves. No half-castes doing the bidding of the masters. And every one of the *grandes blancs* sliced into pieces, (*he cuts a slice of whatever he's eating*).

Hettie I have to get on with the cooking. The dinner won't make itself.

Philippe We're all slaves to something.

Hettie Even you? The conquering black Napoleon?

Philippe (*laughs*) No, that is someone else. I am only another revolutionary!

Hettie A mere common soldier?

Philippe Well, maybe a common colonel! (*they laugh*)
(*David enters*)

Hettie Here's another revolutionary for your army, Napoleon.

Philippe (*standing, introducing himself*) Phillipe.

David David, they call me David.

Hettie (*Lapsing into dialect in her contempt*) Dis idiot boy, his name David, bakra name. (*She returns to SBE*) He's a slave in his head, and a free man by accident.

Philippe (*with compassion*) Brother, you were born in Africa?

David (*silent assent*)

Philippe Transported?

David (*silent assent*)

Philippe Then you'll have suffered much, seen things I can only think of in my nightmares. You must tell people—your story. Tell people and write it down. It is your duty. To those who suffer, to those who died. To yourself, man.

(*Sarah enters*)

Sarah David, Mr Turner wants you in his study.

(*David leaves*)

Hettie (*To his departing back*) That bwoy won't do anything about anything.

Sarah (*finally snapping*) Why are you so vicious? Have you any idea what he's been through?

Hettie Me? White girl? And what do you know?

Sarah (*I've read*) What Mr Wilberforce says.

Philippe Mr Wilberforce! Mr Wilberforce and his gang of spinsters. We don't need white men to set us free! We are making our own freedom.

Scene 3

THE STUDY OF TURNER'S HOUSE

Turner David. Mr David. Have a seat. You've been with us for some time now...

David *(interrupting, perhaps celebratory)* It's been over twenty-five years, sir! You bought me in 1770.

Turner *(cutting him short)* Please stop mentioning that.

David I'm sorry, sir.

Turner I don't own you, now.

David I know.

Turner So I would be grateful if you stopped mentioning it.

David Sir.

Turner And I didn't purchase you. You were given to me.

David Sir.

Turner Things have changed. I have decided to let you go.

David 'Let me go'?

Turner It's wrong. I should never have brought you here.

David But, sir, I don't have anywhere else to go. This is the only place I've ever lived in this country. *(Pause)* I have a job here. I work around the house.

Turner Work around the house? You are everywhere in this house. Everywhere I look I see you, like a shadow.

David I will remain below stairs, sir.

Turner You shouldn't be here. I don't want you here any more. I want you to leave. *(Beat)* By the end of the quarter. I will provide you with some introductions. You'll find work somewhere. *[Exit]*

MUSIC CUE: Chords and riffs (bluesy)

As Turner walks off, David is left alone. The revolutionary, Phillipe, walks on and reminds him

Phillipe Tell your story. Write it down. Don't let their lies continue.

Scene 4

SEGUÉ: *LONDON, A PUBLIC MEETING. A large number of people harangue some dignified and persuasive speakers.*

MUSIC CUE: *Vaughan Williams' theme, solo violin, then djembe: forte, piano, then fade.*

Abol'tnist It is unspeakable. Nothing you have seen in England compares—human beings are chained together like cattle. They live below decks in unsanitary conditions which merely precipitate their early demise. They are chained together for weeks, hardly ever moving

Heckler Rubbish. They are exercised daily!

Abol'tnist Exercise! Do you know how they are exercised, sir? They are ordered to dance: when their hearts are oppressed as if they are in the grave, they are ordered to dance! The men, sir, are not unshackled for this travesty of liberty, and *still* they are ordered to dance. Dance! With iron chains at their feet, they are forced to dance. The men's flesh is cut to the bone by the action of the shackles.

Heckler Lies!

Abol'tnist It is truth! Here! (*She shows a manuscript*) This is the evidence of those who saw it—trustworthy evidence, and we know they speak the truth—and they give it so that you may see as well.

Heckler Truth? What is that?

Abol'tnist This much is true: I know that these Africans are my brothers and sisters and as such they have their rights!

Heckler Bonapartist!⁶

Abol'tnist Oh I am indeed a revolutionary (*they jeer*) I want to see a real revolution in human affairs—I want to see men

⁶ A follower of Napoleon Bonaparte.

love each other as God intended! (*More jeers, of utter contempt, and the meeting breaks up in chaos*).

The stage empties to leave The Abolitionist(s) gathering the remnants of their campaign together.

David
Abol'tnist (*Pointing to the manuscripts*) Are there many of these? Several. But we need more. If you know anyone who has a story to tell, I have a friend who is compiling the evidence... (*she detects his interest*) Get them to visit one of us. We will tell others. Or they should write it down. Write to the newspapers. Or even publish! We have to tell people what is going on! (*She realises whose story it really is*)

MUSIC CUE: Chords and riffs (bluesy) plus drums.

Abol'tnist Tell your story. Write it down. Don't let their lies continue.

Scene 5

DAVID'S HOUSE

David (*To the audience*) It was never the words or the shapes of the letters that gave me difficulty: somehow my mind learnt them quickly, them and the strangeness of English spelling – 'Thames': T-H-A-M-E-S; 'should,' S-H-O-U-L-D. No. It was never the writing—that was easy.

MUSIC CUE: MUSIC CEASES on a tonic chord

It was the ideas, the story: my memories seemed beyond my control, fighting to escape my head, falling from my mind, crushing each other.

As David tells this memory, actors demonstrate it in dance and movement.

On the first of my sea journeys we were chained together, some in pairs, some in long lines. I was a boy, so they left me alone. But close to me, slept a line of men, all shackled...

MUSIC CUE: 'Zion', three voices

...to each other. In the middle of them was a beautiful man, maybe twenty years older than me. In my mind, in the darkness of that Hell, through the shadows and half light, he was for me a father. His dignity mesmerised me. He never flinched under the beatings: he knew who were men & who were animals. His muscles twitched with contempt beneath his skin, which shone like polished stone.

Half way across, he did what he must have planned from the day he was sold. He stood up, and dragging the others with him, walked out to the upper deck and over the side. A sailor tried to stop him, but he strode on: the white man was just irrelevant. Some of the others did not want to die, but he pulled them with him. I saw all of them fall, and the chains drag them under. They beat me for watching.

MUSIC CUE: the dancer falls, the music stops

That is what my memories were like—they walked out of my head against my will, they flashed through my sight like men falling to the sea.

DAVID AND SARAH'S LODGINGS

Sarah	<i>(Putting aside his manuscript)</i> You never said.
David	I could not talk—what happened to me... The things I saw were unspeakable.
Sarah	All of this. We did these things.
David	Not you, others. But I can talk of it now: I have written it, imagined it, lived it again. You helped me do that.

And I had to tell my story, to write it down. I couldn't
 their lies continue: they made me forget who I was.
(Sarah looks up in incomprehension) I am not this
 David they have made me.

Sarah *(With shocked love)* David! *(With love and
 incomprehension)* David, who are you?

Kwame *(aware of the full extent of self-recognition and identity
 this means)* Kwame. I am Kwame. My name is Kwame
 Ofosu-Osei.

MUSIC CUE: Vaughan Williams theme, in A minor + djembe

Scene 6

LONDON AGAIN: Tarts, merchants, whoring, etc, etc, etc.

Vendor Read the shocking story of Mr Kwame's Ofosu-Osei's
 life in slavery, and his redemption! Here you go madam,
 another thre'pence ha'penny, if you don't mind.

Merchant 2 I've decided to look East. India's where the money is
 now.

Merchant 1 I'm going into iron. It's safer.

Merchant 3 I'm standing for parliament.

Merchant 2 ...an expensive business.

Merchant 3 Not for a man with a good fortune, and no wife...

*Kwame walks through the crowd, to occupy space in the
 centre of the acting area. Slowly he is again
 surrounded by the figures from his past which started
 the play.*

Sarah They bought the book in the hundreds and the money
 allowed us to become quiet, unobtrusive citizens.

MUSIC CUE: Music ceases

Kwame When I re-read it now, I think there were too many characters, and perhaps I didn't mention religion enough: for it is love that redeems us, not men.

MUSIC CUE: Chords and riffs (bluesy)

Now these bones and this flesh, which grew so softly in Africa, can lie down in peace, in the quiet of an English grave, under the softness of English rain. For though I am an African, I am also an Englishman—a free man, and a citizen.

LIGHTS DOWN ON HIM

OPTIONAL CODA, ELSEWHERE IN LONDON.

Hettie sings quietly to herself a song from her home. While she sings, she chops vegetables. The song becomes louder and bolder. Blackout.

A D Hogan, 2007

With the collaboration of the cast.

Performed at Westminster Abbey and Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

APPENDIX

Act II, Scene 2, section 2 (author's cut)

MR AND MRS T settle down to a game of Pontoon

Mrs T *(She deals her husband a card)* There is a new Italian
 castrato at the Haymarket Theatre;
Turner Hit *(strikes the table twice)*
Mrs T *(deals a second card)* Farinelli, I think he's called. I
 have asked Sarah to get us tickets.
Turner *(makes a noise of acknowledgement)* Stay *(he makes*
 the appropriate gesture with his hand, moving it in a
 short horizontal movement parallel with the deck. These
 movements and dialogues intersperse and punctuate
 the dialogue. They take it in turn to deal.).
Mrs T Hit. *(Mr T deals a card)* A box will be expensive, of
 course—hit—but everyone is talking about him. My suit.
 (she deals the next card)
Turner I was at the docks today
Mrs T Hit. Mr Handel found him shortly before his death,
 apparently. Though I think what the Italians do is
 shameful. Hit. And the lies they tell: 'it was the bite of a
 wild swan'. Honestly. Stay. *(she takes over the*
 dealing) Your card. Why do they think anyone believes
 them?
Turner Hit.
Mrs T How many of those bizarre men do they send to sing?
Turner Hit.
Mrs T There were at least a dozen last year.
Turner Hit.
Mrs T There must be thousands of lunatic swans flapping
 around Italy snapping at little boys' unmentionable
 parts...
Turner They *(he means 'we')* should be ashamed.
Mrs T My suit. I suppose the parents must be glad to be rid of
 another mouth to feed. Hit.
Turner A good point, Mrs Turner.

Mrs T Hit. And the men receive fame—even the bad singers
 get an income of sorts. Stay.

Turner Hit. Yes. Indeed.

Mrs T And wherever they end up it will be better than life on
 some desiccated hillside in Sicily.

Turner Hit. *(he is now chewing over several things at once)* No
 existence for a Christian.

Mrs T Hardly a Christian existence at all. And here, they come
 under the civilising influence of a protestant society. We
 might even save them from Popery.

Turner Hit.

Mrs T My suit again, sir. Your luck is out this evening.

Turner The castrato, madam: will it trouble you when you hear
 him sing?

Mrs T Why should it, sir? I didn't wield the knife, did I? All I
 do is pay for the tickets. And even that, sir, is your
 money, not mine.

The household repairs to bed.

A D Hogan, 2007

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