

EXTRACTS FROM THE SCRIPT OF TESTAMENT TO A TRADE



Scene 4

Contemporary Oxford

Projection: Christchurch, Oxford

NOEL with a newspaper satchel.

MARINA is sitting on the ground, keeping warm under a coat/blanket - homeless.

NOEL Oxford Mail! Oxford Mail! I have a spot, you know - with my stand. But I like to wander a bit. Oxford's a beautiful city - full of beautiful people. So you know, I go to find them. Seek them out, you know. Actually, I like it here in particular - because she comes here. You know, with her group. She's on her way now. See her every week, I do. I have a bit of fun, you know, join in - like to play her at her own game a bit, you know. Bit mischievous - but she doesn't always give all the facts you know - the full picture. I like to think I help. I elaborate for people, you know. Here - here she comes!

Enter GUIDE on the High St at University Schools, holding up folded umbrella for tourist group. She speaks in a loud voice.

GUIDE Now, is everybody here? Can you all hear me? Right, then lets begin. In fact, Oxford has an even grander history than many people imagine. In October 1665 King Charles II came to Oxford. Hurrah!

NOEL Hurrah! Indeed!

GUIDE Now, as there was Plague in London and Westminster Parliament came to Oxford.

NOEL Parliament! Very important.

GUIDE Originally, Parliament was to have met in the University Schools. But instead, the King commanded both Houses to attend him in the great-Hall at Christ Church.

NOEL For which you would be better getting the bus to St Aldates. Because the parking is terrible.

GUIDE Now, you probably think all there is to know about King Charles is Cavalier King Charles Spaniels and ...

NOEL Countess of Castlemaine, Nell Gwynne, Lucy Walter

GUIDE .. mistresses! But, there was more to him than that.

NOEL Also appearing - Duchess of Portsmouth, Elizabeth Killigrew, Catherine Pegge, Lady Greene ...

GUIDE The Company of Royal Adventurers to Africa! Subscribers include His Majesty King Charles II, his brother the Duke of York and his cousin Prince Rupert, and their business was...

NOEL Slavery



- GUIDE ... The supply of slaves to the English colonies. The company issued a new gold coin - the guinea - to commemorate its activities.
- NOEL Fetching. A wonderful activity to commemorate, don't you think?
- GUIDE They founded the Royal African Company in 1672. Then along came the Barbados planters - Henry Drax, John Hallett, Sir Christopher Codrington - complaining about the monopoly to supply slaves held by the Royal African Company. They commissioned ships to get their own. But more about Codrington later on.
- NOEL Codrington! Yeah - you wait to hear more about him!
- GUIDE Now, let's move on! (*indicating MARINA*) Please excuse this ... obstruction. Even in Oxford there are those people who refuse to work, or live properly, decently. Now mind how you go, lets cross here ... (*exits*)

NOEL looks uneasily / guiltily at MARINA, then exits.

Scene 8

Moldova

Olga (in her early twenties) sits stage right on a bar stool in a cheap red dress. Her hair is piled high.

- OLGA: In the clubs and the bars of Kosova they call me a lot of things - whore, slut, tart, but never Olga. That's my name. Olga. (*pause*) I come from Moldova, part of the Soviet Union. It's been eight years since the bombs finally stopped coming but my country is still torn apart by fire and shells. Poverty drove my father first to despair and then to drink. My mother works in the market from eight in the morning until ten at night. She earns 10 Moldovan lei a day for twelve hours hard labour. There wasn't enough to feed us and she was always in debt. When she wasn't too tired to speak we would talk about our cousin, Marina, who was making a new life for herself in England, in Oxford where everyone has enough to eat and everyone is happy. So I made up my mind I would go.

Olga puts on a drab wrap-around dress and ties it. She lets her hair down and moves centre stage to join her friend Liliana, looking equally drab, who is sorting pieces of metal into different trays. Olga starts working too.

- OLGA: (*Pulling a newspaper advertisement from her pocket*) Are you excited?
- LILIANA: You have the advertisement... from the Makler?
- OLGA: Here in my hand! (*She reads from it*) "Nightclub work abroad. Visa: Schengen. Excellent pay and conditions."
- LILIANA: How should we recognise him?
- OLGA: He knows how to get to Oxford. He will be very smart.



LILIANA: Such a long shift. I'm tired.
OLGA: It will be alright
LILIANA: I'm afraid.
OLGA: Don't be afraid, Lily.
LILIANA: I've never been abroad
OLGA: Neither have I. It will be an adventure!

Lights flash or sound of a hooter to indicate the end of a shift. Olga and Liliana put on their coats and move stage left.

LILIANA: He said he would be waiting for us. He's not here
OLGA: Wait a minute.
LILIANA: He's not coming.
OLGA: He will come.
LILIANA: We could go home now Olga. It would be as if we had never called him.
OLGA: You are really looking forward to going back to wait on your husband and his new wife in your own home?
LILIANA: *(sheepish)* No...
OLGA: You like bringing them breakfast in your bed?
LILIANA: Of course not... but the children ...
OLGA: So you want them to starve, is that it? *(Pause)* Look, here he comes!

A man in a leather jacket and a cap enters. He looks around furtively.

DORU: *(to Liliana)* You are Olga?
OLGA: I am Olga.
LILIANA: I think I know you?
DORU: I doubt it.
LILIANA: Yes, I'm sure of it. You are Doru Sogova.
DORU: You want me to take you to England?
OLGA: We want to go to Oxford
DORU: I can take you there.
LILIANA: It will be alright Olga... I know him.
OLGA: How much?



DORU: I will get you a job.

OLGA: Yes... nightclub work!

LILIANA: We were at the same school.

DORU: You can earn a lot of money in England.

OLGA: We don't want to do anything illegal.

LILIANA: I think it will be alright.

DORU: I have a friend there. He has a bar.

OLGA: *(excited)* A nightclub?

DORU: I can take you there.

OLGA: We don't have any money.

DORU: You can pay me when you get there, in monthly instalments from your wages.

OLGA: We will earn that much?

DORU: Oh yes, in Oxford you can earn a lot of money.

OLGA: When can we go?

DORU: Call me on this number *(he hands her a piece of paper)*, when you are ready.
(He looks around shiftily and leaves)

LILIANA: Olga. Now I think about it I didn't like him much at school.

OLGA: It will be fine. When we get to Oxford my cousin will look after us. Marina - she's a nurse, a good person. She will take care of us.

LILIANA: I'm not so sure, Olga. What have we done?

OLGA: We are going to the Promised Land. To England!

Scene 9

Contemporary Oxford: Codrington Library

Projection: All Souls, Oxford

Enter GUIDE, and NOEL. MARINA sits at the side, smoking.

GUIDE Now, we've crossed the High Street and we are at All Souls. You will see the front quadrangle has been virtually unaltered since it was finished in 1441.

NOEL *(to imaginary tourists)* You can take *my* picture if you like. I've been totally unaltered since *[actor's birthdate]*



- GUIDE We are privileged to visit the magnificent Codrington Library, designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor. It is built on the ground floor with a vaulted cellar underneath. The Codrington Library is so named because of the bequest in 1710 from Sir Christopher Codrington. From his will the college received ten thousand pounds; six thousand of which was to finance the building of a new library; the remaining four thousand was to purchase books.
- NOEL So, go on then, tell us - where did Sir Chris get the money?
- GUIDE In addition he bequeathed his own library estimated at 12,000 volumes. The Library was not actually completed until 1756. The money was made out of sugar from Barbados.
- NOEL Money made out of sugar?
- GUIDE Of course, it wasn't literally money made out of sugar. Ha ha! Not sugar paper! (*gradually fading out with this speech*) Christopher Codrington led a very interesting life. He entered Christ Church College, as a Gentleman Commoner, and became Fellow of All Souls. He joined the army, became captain of the First Foot Guards, and was engaged in some of the campaigns of his "good master, William III" including the siege of Namur, 1695. He was governor of the Leeward Islands; was involved in an attack on Guadaloupe, and he founded a college in Barbados which is still going strong today. We mustn't forget the fat sheep! Ha ha! On the 5th June 1705 Queen Anne renewed and extended the lease on the island of Barbuda for 99 years to Christopher Codrington. The rent for this lease was "one fat sheep yearly if demanded". Ha ha ha!
- NOEL I take it you know about what happened in Barbuda? Sugar plantations, worked by black slaves. That's what paid for this.
- He notices MARINA*
- You alright there love? (*Pause. NOEL goes to give MARINA some money, then stops. Awkward silence.*) Fancy a cuppa tea?
- MARINA OK. Yes, thank you. That would be nice.

Scene 10

Oxford Coffee House, September 1788

SHERIDAN is smoking from a long clay pipe and sipping coffee. WILLIAM AGUTTER enters.

- SHERIDAN It is Reverend Agutter, isn't it?
- AGUTTER I don't know you, do I?
- SHERIDAN I was at your sermon yesterday.
- AGUTTER And...
- SHERIDAN Egad, you fairly walloped that defenceless pulpit.



- AGUTTER You jest, sir? I take it you do not approve. The slave trade - 'Tis no mere 'play', sir.
- SHERIDAN Believe me, sir, there is no such thing as a 'mere' play. A play is the very quintessence of literary experience.
- AGUTTER You write plays, then?
- SHERIDAN *(PRESENTING CARD)* Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan at your service, sir.
(PAUSE) You have not heard of me?
- AGUTTER The theatre is not a place I would choose to frequent, sir.
- SHERIDAN Oxford is so delightfully provincial.
- AGUTTER Your card declares you to be a 'Member of Parliament'.
- SHERIDAN That, too. One cannot work all the time.
- AGUTTER And you wish to write a play to decry the evil of slavery?
- SHERIDAN I most certainly do not! Do you have no sweet tooth, sir?
- AGUTTER You must open your eyes, Mr Sheridan. We all must. This disgraceful trade takes children, women, girls from their homes, sir. We tear families apart and we ship them in conditions less humane than we would provide for cattle to serve our lust for profit. Those ships are an abomination. The Quakers have been right to condemn slavery, as they have done for years - and you should hear John Newton, a former slave trader, now won back to God. No testimony would have more authentic power to re-educate your sensibilities. He can tell you first hand or, our own Oxford man, William Dolben.
- SHERIDAN Isn't he your MP?
- AGUTTER For our University. He is meeting me here.
- SHERIDAN He, too, shares your passion?
- AGUTTER He is drafting a bill.
- SHERIDAN No! Not more filibuster fodder. We are inundated with petitions this year. Don't you know Warren Hastings is to be impeached, His Majesty King George is all but unable to govern, Pitt is not to be trusted an inch, The French even less so and you concern yourself with... To control slavery? Priorities, man! Priorities!
- Enter DOLBEN*
- DOLBEN You need to know the crying evil of the middle passage, Sheridan.
- SHERIDAN I don't believe we've met.
- DOLBEN I have seen you in action from the other side of The House. My bill could use your support.
- SHERIDAN I have no time for lost causes. *(Beat)* Is Oxford entirely populated with men who have forgotten how to laugh?



- AGUTTER *(Ignoring him)* Greetings, Dolben. Coffee?
- DOLBEN Thankyou. Has the Almighty sent Britain's greatest orator to Oxford - this is Sheridan, Agutter!
- AGUTTER I had no idea. I'll get your drink.
- SHERIDAN Make sure that's not from Martinique. You'll get two evils for the price of one: bonded men and Froggy booty. *(PAUSE)* So, what of this bill? Are we to ban all slaves by the next Sabbath? *(BEAT)* Your church might find itself in something of a fix if my information holds good.
- DOLBEN Alas, no. My bill will be but the first erosion of that sinister cornerstone of our British wealth.
- SHERIDAN Gadzooks, Man, you can't be opposed to wealth AND an M.P.!
- DOLBEN A pox on you, Sheridan! But I need your vote. Listen! I sailed on *The Brookes*, a medium-sized slave ship.. They packed those slaves as tightly as books on a shelf. Most of the six weeks of the passage they were at the mercy of crews much the worse for rum. On the high seas it doesn't help to be sober. The 'lucky' women were only raped. I cannot get their pathetic screams out of my mind or the ever-present stench of those foul holds; human excrement, sweat, blood, brine and rotting boards. I assure you, Sheridan, even your heart would be touched. My bill is expedient. I have set out the premises for limiting the cargo sizes of the slave vessels. It is nothing more than a beginning. Full abolition will have to come if we are ever to hold up our heads as Christians. We start by legislating to limit overcrowding. That way we may give some relief to those poor wretches.
- SHERIDAN But, dash it, man, they are only negroes for God's sake!
- AGUTTER For God's sake indeed!
- DOLBEN My bill plans a maximum of "Not quite One to a Ton".
- SHERIDAN One to a ton?
- DOLBEN My ship, *The Brookes*, was two hundred and ninety-five tons. The Act, if it is passed, will only allow future captains to carry two hundred and ninety-five slaves per voyage.
- SHERIDAN And how many did you take?
- DOLBEN I am ashamed to say *(BEAT)* - six hundred and nine!
- SHERIDAN That represents quite a drop in income for the hard-working traders. I doubt the owners will support our party if we pass your Act. We all depend on commerce, Dolben - even you!
- DOLBEN Come now, sir. We have to act now to improve the way these slaves are treated. One ship, in Sir Chaloner Ogle's fleet, was taken by pirates. Their captain refused the ransom the pirates demanded. Do you know what they did?
- SHERIDAN Pirates are capable of anything...
- AGUTTER ... as, indeed are we!



DOLBEN They burnt his cargo, Mr Sheridan! Burnt his cargo! Can you picture that for your theatre? Not a cargo of spices, - sugar, cotton or barrelled rum ...- Hundreds of living people...Oh yes, mere "negroes", as you put it - Nevertheless men, women and children chained screaming together as they choked and burned to a death unworthy of wild animals.

AGUTTER You are silent, sir.

DOLBEN Silence shows God is indeed inside us all - Even playwrights! *(PAUSE)* They are not like us, though they might be - given our privileges.

AGUTTER Tell him about Vassa.

DOLBEN We attended a talk in Birmingham given by Gustavus Vassa.

AGUTTER He was once a slave.

DOLBEN He is trying to publish a book he is writing about his experiences.

SHERIDAN Don't be ridiculous. Black people cannot write.

AGUTTER You are wrong, Sheridan.

SHERIDAN *(slowly)* I will not oppose your bill, sir. I question your sense of priority in these troubled times, sir, but I will not oppose.

DOLBEN You'll endorse?

SHERIDAN That is endorsement, - my word as a gentleman.

AGUTTER That word again!

DOLBEN Forgive me if I do not thank you, but I will shake your hand.

Scene 12

Kosova

OLGA is on stage with IVAN, the black man who has just bought her

IVAN: You have passport?

OLGA throws it across to him

IVAN: You will treat me with respect. I pay good money for you. You are mine now. *(He opens the passport)* It doesn't even look like you!

OLGA: That's what I said. The Albanian... he said it didn't matter.

IVAN: I will keep it anyway.

OLGA: I am going to England.

IVAN: I don't think so. Tonight you dance... show me how you dance.

OLGA: I don't want to dance.



IVAN: The tart doesn't want to dance. *(He starts to remove his belt)* Then I will have to teach you a lesson...

OLGA: I'll dance.

Music plays and OLGA sways to the music.

IVAN: Not bad but not good either.

OLGA sulks

IVAN: No supper for you tonight. You will do as I say in future. *(pause)* I have a special friend coming tonight.

OLGA looks downcast

IVAN: He wants to meet you and you will be very kind to him. He is a very good customer. He pays well.

OLGA: He will pay me?

IVAN: No, he will pay me, to help repay the money that I paid for you. You have a big debt, whore!

OLGA: How did that happen? All I do is work night and day.

IVAN: That's life. Not all girls are as lucky as you. You are privileged to be here with me. I will look after you. I'll feed you and you will have a bunk in the cellar but you must never try to escape or I will have to go to Moldova and find your family. They would have to pay...

OLGA: They don't have any money.

IVAN: I'm not talking about money. *(pause)* Natalia will show you where you will sleep.

OLGA shudders. IVAN leaves. Enter NATALIA

NATALIA: As soon as you have repaid what you owe, you can be an employee.

OLGA: And you will pay me?

NATALIA: Just as long as you behave yourself.

OLGA: I know about this. The other girls have told me. It's just a cover to stop the police asking questions. *(pause)* And if I don't behave myself?

NATALIA: Then you will go to Macedonia.

OLGA: No.

OLGA covers her ears

NATALIA: In Macedonia if you cause trouble you will be shot like an animal and your body dumped outside

OLGA: I'll work hard.

NATALIA: You'll be like all the others, drinking their wages away.

OLGA: I must send money to my family. They are starving.



NATALIA: I've heard it all before.
OLGA: How can you do this work?
NATALIA: It's better for me like this.
OLGA: Were you once like me?

NATALIA looks confused.

Scene 13

Aboard "The Cutlass"

Sounds of canvas, ropes slapping wooden masts, distant shanty, frenzied activity - loading boxes, gulls calling. CAPTAIN and MATE are played by off-stage voices. ADHOBE, MAKURI & other black men and women are on board, packed very tightly together.

CAPTAIN: Are they all stowed?
MATE: Aye, sir.
CAPTAIN: You ignored the new law, Mr Mate?
MATE: Aye, sir. They would've allowed less than three hundred!
CAPTAIN: A third of our capacity, what! They have no notion of what three of these trips mean. 'One-a-ton!' What nonsense!
MATE: Will you be taking a woman, sir?
CAPTAIN: Set a couple of the best aside before the crew choose. Find me new meat, but no babies! That last wench was under ten!
MATE: Sorry, sir. She was the only virgin on that batch.
CAPTAIN: I'm a man, Mr Mate, but not a monster. My wife and I are good Christians!
MATE: Aye aye, sir
MAKURI (*on stage*): The Great Waters go on for ever. At night the stars shine as brightly as small moons. The air is as fresh as spring water.
ADHOBE: Where we sleep the stink makes you wretch. The adults are chained together. They can't avoid splashing others with streams of sick or worse. Half of us make stinky waste like a muddy river. We are packed so tightly there isn't even enough air to breathe. Warriors openly cry.
MAKURI: Last night a woman came ripe with child. They unchained her after she had screamed half the night and took her away. We haven't seen her today. I fear for her little baby.
ADHOBE: I heard my language in the night, but I can't tell who spoke. I called out, but was afraid to shout. They flog men for everything. An old man was flogged. We were made to watch. I don't know what he did. I think he died. The other

boy, a bit younger than me I think died. He sobbed every second he was aboard.



MATE

(a voice from backstage) Here, boy! *(ADHOBE walks to front.)* No, stand there! You stink like a London sewer. Come with me. *(ADHOBE looks blank)* You are to be washed and presented to Captain Parsons. You don't know it now, you poor little bleeder, but you are to be saved for some very light duties. *(Adhobe looks blank. Act as if Mate strokes face and turns his face upward.)* You are a very lucky little nigger!

Scene 17

Oxford, 1780s

MRS WOOD, on projection as before.

MRS WOOD So - she wanted to wash his clothes with Mr Wood's! Well! Well! How am I to stand this? Would she next have him sitting at tea in my drawing room?

MAKURI *(loudly from offstage)* I am Makuri son of Zenargimbo, Chief of all the Mnomball!

MRS WOOD Well! Well! The horsewhip never made any difference with her. However many times I told Mr Wood. However many times. She remained insolent! We brought her to England. We sold him elsewhere before we left. We'd had enough of all that trouble! She complained, of course. She protested all the time. That she was here to nurse the child and not to stand at the tub. Her rheumatism!

AETHIOPEIA JANET enters smiling, singing

AETHIOPEIA JANET *Do not fear night
Do not fear pain
Do not fear poison, sword or spear
Fear only parting*

*Do not fear death
Do not fear war
Do not fear starving, flood or fire
Fear only parting*

*Do not lose hope
Do not lose faith
Do not lose wanting, need or trust
Lose only doubting*

*I am here
Near to you
Somehow, some way
Again we'll be one.*

*The water sings as it flows
The trees sing as they sway
The clouds sing as they float
The grass sings as it grows
Listen to their songs
Listen to their love*

*Listen to your heart
Know where it belongs*



AETHIOPEIA JANET smiles at MRS WOOD.

MRS WOOD The way she spoke to me she imagined herself a free woman, so I said if she wished to be free, she was free in England - they're not called slaves here - and she might go and try what freedom would do for her, and be damned. Oh! (*putting her hand to her mouth*) Pardon my language. It upsets me so. If she wants to see that husband of hers, in the West Indies, she will go back as a slave. These people, if they are people - lazy, insolent, stupid! You have to wonder sometimes whether it's worth keeping them.

AETHIOPEIA JANET laughs and exits.

Scene 20

Oxford Coffee House, 1807

GEORGE, the land lord and proprietor is discussing current issues with a friend and customer (BERTIE)

BERTIE It has finally happened then.

GEORGE A ban on the slave trade?

BERTIE Exactly so. It will hurt your business.

GEORGE If it is enforceable.

BERTIE You think captains will ignore the ban.

GEORGE Without a shadow of doubt. The navy is far too busy with Bony's rampant Frogs to police such well- established trading. I know for a fact - forty ships set out of Bristol already this year.

BERTIE That Wilberforce just didn't give up did he?

GEORGE Stupid man! Brought it up every year since '88! You'd think he was actually related to those Africans.

BERTIE And that Sheridan, too!

GEORGE He was in here, you know. In this very coffee house. It must have been way back in the year Rev Agutter gave that sermon about the evils of the trade.

BERTIE Really! Sheridan in Oxford.

GEORGE Their cause could scarcely be ennobled by his patronage. What a rake!

BERTIE Great character, though, despite talking rubbish ...(IMITATES SHERIDAN) Finished his speech with:
"I would not have a slave till my ground
To fan me when I sleep and tremble when
I wake, for all that human sinews bought
And sold, have ever earned!"



- GEORGE No wonder! Such men could afford all the servants they need, anyway!
- BERTIE True. Can't tell Whigs from Tories, these days! He is worth a pretty penny ... and that Lizzie! Gods and pretty soldiers, man, I'll never forget her coming to sing in Oxford if I live past eighty. He put paid to her public appearances after they married. That's two things I have against him! However he got to be Treasurer of the Navy I'll never know!
- GEORGE There's no man hereabouts that doesn't feel the same way. They say she's had the other king's son in her bed - before she died, o' course. The Regent might have passed her this way. (BEAT) So, will the sugar boycott be ended?
- BERTIE Who knows? It's costing me double this year already. The government make Napoleon look like a lesser evil! No wonder the colonials want to govern themselves.
- GEORGE There is no way the Americans will ever give up their slaves. That's for sure.
- BERTIE The trouble with us British is that we don't know we're winning until we're losing! We're altogether too decent, George. Too kind and decent. No wonder we're exploited. (BEAT) Time for more coffee I think.
- GEORGE With plenty of sugar! More coffee and less depressing thoughts about throwing away trade advantages just because of the ranting of a few Quakers, evangelicals and power-hungry Whigs!
- BERTIE I'll drink to that!

APPENDIX

The images of archive documents in the Appendix are reproduced from the County Archive by kind permission of the County Archivist at Oxfordshire Record Office, Carl Boardman.