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## The Afterlives of Enslavement: Histories of Racial Injustice in Black British Theater\*

### Abstract

Over the past five years, a number of Black British women authors have written “postcolonial ghost plays”. This article focuses, to varying degrees, on four: *ear for eye* (2018), Debbie Tucker Green’s dissection of enslavement and its afterlives; *Rockets and Blue Lights* (2020), Winsome Pinnock’s historical film-within-a-play about the Middle Passage; *The Gift* (2020), Janice Okoh’s semi-biography of an African girl who became Queen Victoria’s ward; and Selina Thompson’s *salt.* (2018), an autobiographical performance piece tracing her ancestors’ enslavement. Ghosts and haunting, which I examine from multiple perspectives, appear across this range of theatrical genres. With their multiple, doubled, spectral, interpenetrating stories, Tucker Green, Pinnock, Okoh and Thompson’s postcolonial ghost plays reactivate the past of enslavement that is not past, that is still active in the form of racial and social injustices today. Ghosts, prevalent across the plays, represent the dead who, plumbing the depths of the Middle Passage, are denied a resting place. The ghost, the figure of the living dead *par excellence*, also reflects the dehumanization of trafficked Africans, from whom their masters sought to subtract all subjectivity. Ghosts, too, reveal the work of mourning performed by the living, for those who were never properly buried. This mourning, or remembrance, exposes and disrupts enduring structures of injustice, searching for reparation. Ghosts, or revenants, represent the resilient resistance to injustice, returning, refusing to rest. Finally, ghosts, neither fully past nor present, absent or present, symbolize indeterminacy and instability, illustrated in the plays by subjects determined to take control of their own identities and destinies. Together, these plays demonstrate how we must look back to the roots of historical racism, in order to look forward to its eradication.

A teenager lazed back on his chair. Arms crossed. Legs spread. Face scrunched. Reluctantly, he listened. Standing over him, his mother. Brow crosshatched. Finger jabbing. She was giving him “the necessary advice from a Black mother to her Black son” (Sharpe 84): instructions on how to behave if stopped by the police:

SON So if I put my hands up –

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\* I extend my grateful thanks to Selina Thompson, for generously having provided insights into the staging of their performance.

MOM a threat, threatening.  
SON Slowly?  
MOM Provocative. [...]  
SON By my side – ?  
MOM Attitude.  
SON (Hands) in pockets?  
MOM Concealing.  
SON Jacket pockets –  
MOM obscuring  
SON pants pockets –  
MOM cocky  
SON hands together –?  
MOM Masking [...] (tucker green 4-5)

Onlookers reinforced the warning, raising their hands, lowering them, putting them in their pockets. Others bowed their heads, dismayed. Glanced sideways, disbelieving. Looked up, exasperated.

Ninety minutes later, on a screen stretching across the stage, one by one people read laws and regulations, straight to camera:

The fugitive slave who has been on the  
run for one month from the day his master  
reported him to the police,  
shall have his ears cut off and shall be  
branded... on one shoulder.

If he commits the same infraction for  
another month,  
again counting from the day he is reported,  
he shall have his hamstring cut  
and be branded...  
on the other shoulder.

The third time

He shall be put to death. (131-2)

These two scenes bookend *ear for eye*, the 2018 play by UK playwright debbie tucker green. The laws – this one quoted directly from the Code Noir issued in 1685 by France’s Louis XIV– which were read in the Royal Court production by “*various Caucasian UK*

*actors/non-actors*” (129) – strictly controlled the lives of enslaved people in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> The fact that these incontestably savage practices were enshrined in law instead of being outlawed, illustrates unequivocally the institutionalization of brutality upon which the plantocracy was founded, and serves to explain how historical racism – “badges of slavery” (Hartman 2002: 763) – are stamped onto police, judicial and other public infrastructures, in the invisible “everydayness” of systemic racism and social inequality as experienced today by Black people in the USA, UK, France and other post-slavery nations (Hartman 2002: 772).

In *Ghosts of the African Diaspora*, a publication to which much of the thinking in this essay is indebted, Joanne Chassot notes the striking number of “ghost stories” written by African American women (2).<sup>2</sup> Over the past five years, a marked number of Black British women authors, no doubt frustrated that theater in the UK on the subject of enslavement has predominantly been authored by African American playwrights, have written what one might call “postcolonial ghost plays”.<sup>3</sup> Here, I focus to varying degrees on three plays: a historical film-within-a-play, Winsome Pinnock’s *Rockets and Blue Lights* (2020); Janice Okoh’s *The Gift* (2020), based partly on the life of an African girl who became Queen Victoria’s ward; and autobiographical performance, Selina Thompson’s *salt*. (2018). The figure of the ghost and/or the dynamic of haunting enable these plays to “own” an understanding of British imperialism, and to explain its “impact on the moral and political content of British national identity”, as Paul Gilroy would articulate it (\*). Ghosts in these plays demand justice for the crimes of human trafficking and enslavement committed centuries ago, whose deathly afterlives continue to haunt contemporary societies in the form of endemic racial and social injustice. Across this range of theatrical genres, ghosts and haunting are solicited as a dramaturgical structuring principle; as an acknowledgement that racial discrimination today constitutes a legacy of the racist ideologies that served to justify the colonization by European powers of people in the Americas, Asia and Africa; and as a testament to the resistance to injustice which, like a revenant, refuses to rest.

Evidence suggests that humans have conducted burial rituals for at least three hundred millennia (Pettitt). According to numerous belief systems, the souls of those who meet with premature or traumatic deaths and are not buried with the obsequies due to every human, are condemned to wander. Cultural theorist Marina Warner describes ghosts as restless: they haunt, because they petition the living to help them finally to rest in peace (2003: 210). In *Specters of Marx*, one of the works credited with marking the “spectral turn” towards ghost studies as a field of enquiry, Jacques Derrida writes, “Nothing could be worse, for the work

of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where – and it is *necessary* (to know – to make certain) that, in what remains of him [*sic*], *he remains there*. Let him stay there and move no more!’ (9, Derrida’s emphasis). This essay does not treat ghosts in a supernatural sense; it understands ghosts as a double of the self; the self’s consciousness or conscience. “Ghosts are brought forth from the imagination, are they not? [...] The unburied are restless”, says a character in Pinnock’s *Rockets and Blue Lights*, to which I come presently (37). Ghosts represent the “work of mourning” by the living, performed for those who were not properly buried; ghosts expose and disrupt enduring structures of injustice, and search for reparation.

Few human genocides have provoked more “confusion or doubt”, more un-mourned deaths, more wandering souls, than the transatlantic slave trade, where European imperial powers trafficked West Africans to the Americas. On a journey lasting around one month to Brazil, three or more to the Caribbean or North America, captives were packed into overcrowded holds, “up to your neck in somebody else’s shit and vomit”, as one of Pinnock’s characters describes; whipped until sores were “carved out” on their backs (40). Succumbing to the smallpox, tuberculosis or dysentery that rampaged throughout their cramped and squalid quarters, or to the inhuman treatment, an untold number never arrived on the other shore. The prolonged debate surrounding precisely how many people were captured and how many died, compounds this “confusion or doubt”.<sup>4</sup> Those thrown overboard were denied burial rites, somewhere to “remain”. Moreover, Chassot explains that eye-witness accounts of the Middle Passage and the fate of the deceased are extremely scarce.<sup>5</sup> The plays to which I turn conjure, remember, gain strength from the ghosts of the dead who, plumbing the watery depths of the Middle Passage, are denied a resting place.

### ***Rockets and Blue Lights***<sup>6</sup>

In this play past atrocities haunt the present, as the ghosts of those who were subjected to maltreatment and injustice help the living today to assert their own subjectivity and agency. The focal point is one of the eighteenth-to-nineteenth-century artist J.M.W. Turner’s most famous works, *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying (1840) – Typhoon coming on*, known as *The Slave Ship*. In the prologue, the protagonist Lou views the painting on display for the bicentenary (2007) of Britain’s abolition of the slave trade (1807). In silhouette against a blazing sun, a three-masted schooner pitches into an ominous storm.<sup>7</sup> Lou observes the “elegant suggestion of bloodshed in a captured sunset” (10). Indeed, midst the sea spray and swirling gulls in the foreground, she notices the shackled ankles and chained

wrists of drowning or floating bodies. Turner is thought to have based *The Slave Ship* on the *Zong* Massacre (1781), where around 130 men and women were jettisoned overboard the *Zong* (formerly the Dutch vessel the *Zorgue*), a slave ship run by Liverpool merchants trafficking around 450 captives (it was built to hold 220) from the African Cape Coast (Sharpe 34-9). Allegedly owing to a navigational error near the Caribbean, the ship ran low on food and water. Since, under maritime insurance law, slaveholders could not claim compensation for captives who died from “natural death” including starvation, the captain ordered the slaughter of a quarter of the captives, to spare the rest (Armstrong\*). In the event, the insurers refused to underwrite this “cargo” loss. The case went to court, where the jury finally settled in favour of the slavers, deeming the crew’s decision to save part of their stock as justified and thereby demonstrating “the extent to which British law had been corrupted by the nation's support of the transatlantic slave trade.” (Rupprecht 265). The *Zong* became a centrepiece in abolitionist propaganda where William Wilberforce, feted in the 2007 bicentenary of the Slave Trade Act for which he campaigned, insisted that it was typical, rather than aberrant (Baucom 64).<sup>8</sup> Christina Sharpe proposes that the fact that Turner’s painting does not specify one particular boat “allows it to stand in for [...] every slave ship and all the murdered Africans in the Middle Passage.” (36); she argues that *The Slave Ship* becomes “one version of one part of a more than four-hundred-year-long event” (37). However, the painting tells nothing of the lives of the lost individuals. A character in Pinnock’s play accuses Turner’s painting of as much: “The only person we can see has her head submerged in the water. I look at this painting and I don’t think about what’s just happened to those poor men, women, children. They’re invisible.” (10). Nor are individual stories reflected in the many historical accounts, which tend to emphasize facts and statistics, running the risk, argues Chassot, of depicting the ship as a “soulless, empty husk” (71).<sup>9</sup> *Rockets and Blue Lights* rehumanizes those who were dehumanized during the Middle Passage, offering visibility to the realities and individualities of their lives, their suffering and their struggle.

The play shifts between four time periods, providing a dramaturgical means for the past to haunt the present. Scenes set in 2006 show rehearsals for *The Ghost Ship*, a feature film directed by Black director Trevor King, funded by the Abolition Legacy Foundation to commemorate the bicentenary, and starring the Black actor Lou. African American marine archaeologist Reuben (Lou’s love interest) is consultant on the film. Then, scenes set in 2007 include events staged during the bicentenary. Notably, Black schoolteacher Essie takes a group of children on a Coffle Walk, and to see *The Slave Ship*, exhibited on the reproduction

boat used in the film.<sup>10</sup> Scenes set in 1781 are taken from *The Ghost Ship* film-within-the-play. Here, Olu, a captured African played by Lou, is dragged from the hold of a slave ship and, after violently resisting, is thrown overboard, joining adults and children thrashing for their lives (18). Finally, scenes set in 1840 are also taken from *The Ghost Ship* film-within-the-play, and feature Turner, who gains passage on a merchant ship bound for Africa, in order to conduct research for his painting. Characters in the nineteenth-century scenes from the film (which is enacted on stage rather than being projected as a film) include Meg, who ran away from her master when he brought her to London from the Caribbean; and Lucy, an African freed during the Middle Passage by a Black sailor Thomas, now her husband.

The film-within-the-play is entitled *The Ghost Ship*. While Turner's title, *The Slave Ship*, draws attention to the slavers' murderous acts and their prisoners' fate, Pinnock's modification emphasizes remembrance for lives lost, and the haunting impact of the slave trade on society today. When visiting Turner's painting, Lou encounters Essie and her pupils. For Lou, the hands reaching through the sweeping surf "search for ours" (47). In turn, Essie says to her pupil Billie, "We pay tribute to the dead because they weren't ever afforded the dignity of burial rites" (47). Historian Stephanie Smallwood places the relentless accumulation of unresolved, incomplete deaths in the Middle Passage within the context of West-African religious beliefs, describing how the Atlantic regime "took captives from fully realized humanity and suspended them in a purgatory in between tenuous life and dishonourable death." (151). Not performing prescribed mortuary practices has far-reaching consequences, since the unmemorialized dead cannot undertake the essential transmigration to the realm of the ancestors, where they are threaded to the unborn. They cannot become woven into the protective web that channels death into the renewal of life, and protects communities from the unmitigated loss of their members. A death at sea lacks a consecrated burial ground, the medium through which these vital connections between ancestors and heirs are maintained (40). Trapped, unable fully to die, unfulfilled souls languish in an unknown purgatory, haunting their living kinspeople, while incapable of supporting them (152, 199). *Rockets and Blue Lights*' haunted ontology remembers the drowned of the Middle Passage, recognising their tormented restiveness.

Ghosts appear, from the prologue onwards. Examining Turner's painting, Lou gasps, "Did you see that? The woman in the painting. She moved. [...] There! She did it again. She pulled her head out of the water. She looked right at me." (14). In parallel, in *The Ghost Ship* film, Olu's ghost appears in Turner's studio (36). These ghosts represent the uncommemorated dead whose fate Smallwood describes. In addition, they are apt in the

context of the transatlantic trade, since the reality of the captured Africans is often described as a “living death”. In literal terms, as the *Zong* Massacre demonstrated, a slave ship’s crew had the right of life or death over its captives. Moreover, owing to the unliveable conditions, the hold, deep down inside the ship, was a deadly place, a kind of lived-in grave as the famous engraving *Stowage of the British Slave Ship Brookes* (1788) illustrates, portraying the ship as a coffin, or sarcophagus. Indeed, the Portuguese nickname for the slave ships was *tumbeiro*, “floating tomb” (Miller 314). The Middle Passage itself is also described as a grave, abyss or chasm (Thompson 50). This image is apt, too, because as Smallwood explains, the open ocean disabled cognitive tools supplied by African epistemologies, which attributed dangerous and supernatural powers to the unknown, feared watery realm (125). The objectification of the captives also suggests reification and death. In the engraving the bodies resemble both corpses, and stowed cargo units: objects bought cheap on the African coast, and sold dear in the Americas. *Rockets and Blue Lights* narrates how the Africans were forced to “stand in an auction block while men bid for [them] like they’d bid for a cow at market” (30). The play’s premiere, staged at Manchester’s Royal Exchange, a theatre constructed within a former cotton-trading hall with implicit associations with slave trade, would have “resonated” and “echoed” with this reduction of humans, to goods (Pinnock 2020a). In *Slavery and Social Death*, sociologist Orlando Patterson describes how the banning of languages, practices, adornments and other markers of social existence by cultures of enslavement throughout time results in a “social non-person”, condemned to live a psychic death, alienated from the heritage of forebears and unable to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory (5). Smallwood, similarly, uses the terms “annihilation of the self” and “complete disintegration of personhood” to describe the context of the transatlantic slave trade (60, 125). In *The Ghost Ship*, Meg reminisces, in her proscribed indigenous language, about skirts from her native country made of “peacock feathers” and “woven straw” that looked like “spun gold”, and masks “fashioned from clay then stained with colours that corresponded to the various river gods” (27). Reuben describes how this entire culture was “erased” (45). Lou’s grandfather, Clarke, captures this death-in-life when recounting that his grandfather’s grandfather never spoke of being enslaved, “because once he was stripped of personhood it could not be given back to him.” (61) The ghost, the figure of the living dead *par excellence*, aptly represents the Africans trafficked across the Middle Passage, from whom their masters sought to subtract all subjectivity.

Coinciding with the introduction of transatlantic enslavement and equally written out of history, was a politics of survival: endurance against all odds, relentless resistance, defiant

subversion and insurrection, which began no later than when people were first captured on the African coast, as Olu's vehement struggle illustrates. Thomas describes Lucy's brand on her shoulder as "a sign of what you have survived, that through it all you remained human and tender." (35). The very fact that the Code Noir from which I quote at the start of this essay legislated against fugitives who absconded not twice, but three times, testifies to their fighting resolve. The ultimate rebellion, explains the guide on the Coffle Walk that the schoolchildren do with Essie, was to "jump in the sea and fly to their ancestors rather than be captured." (47). Prisoners took charge of their own destiny in the hope of journeying to the realm of the ancestors. Placing Olu's, Meg's, Lucy's and Thomas's lives at the heart of *Rockets and Blue Lights*, Pinnock replaces the dominant abolitionist narrative of the bicentenary, the centrepiece of which was Wilberforce's Slave Trade Act, with the enslaved people's fight for their own emancipation. The ghosts of those who defied, battled and campaigned, return to haunt *Rockets and Blue Lights*. Meg, describing herself as one of the "furies" – Greco-Roman goddesses of vengeance, often of the murdered – warns that the ancestors, incensed by "the wrath of Mumbi, the goddess of the earth", "will have their revenge one day for the afflictions visited on their children." (63, 28).<sup>11</sup> Decker, a sailor aboard the ship on which Turner voyages, says, "I long for the forgetfulness of old age because I long to forget all that I have seen and done." Lucy, formerly enslaved, retorts, "Tell him that we do not want him to forget. Tell him that we need him to remember." (77) Ghosts represent both mourning and a furious warning, a battle cry for justice that refuses to be silenced.

Pinnock evokes the memory of atrocity as a homage to unmemorialized victims and their grieving descendants; and as a call to account for perpetrators of the crimes, and the societies on which those crimes are founded. Scenes from *The Ghost Ship* recount how men, women and children were forced to "work [...] on a plantation under the hot sun without water all day, [their] skin blistered and had an overseer whip [them] back on [their] feet when [they] fainted" (31). Lucy describes how, before being rescued by Thomas, she had other children, one of whom was bought by a lady as a pet for her son (34). Meg relates how she buried her new-born, to spare him a life of slavery. Her master heard the baby's cries, snatched him, and cut out his tongue (63). Unlike Meg's baby, whose ability to speak was viciously removed, those who were enslaved find a voice in *Rockets and Blue Lights*, returning to haunt, and demand their suffering be heard. Pinnock finds theatrical modes to transmit stories that History has either deliberately left at the bottom of the ocean, or rendered academic and theoretical, rather than present, embodied and emotional.

The “spectral moment”, according to Derrida, is the “dis-located time of the present [...] a radically dis-jointed time, without certain conjunction.” (*Specters*, 20). Since ghosts represent the dead, they fold past into present. The structure of *Rockets and Blue Lights*, where different centuries echo, double and haunt each other, is spectral. Thomas says to Turner, “This sea has swallowed ancient worlds alive, and one day she’ll belch them out again. Belch out all her secrets” (23-4). In one of the play’s most visually arresting and symbolically evocative moments, Turner “*opens a trap door [in his studio] and pulls back repulsed at the stench from below. The sound of groans and pained suffering.*” (76). However hard History tries to erase the past, the putrid, airless hold of the galleon that Turner painted, haunts successive centuries, “belching out” its secrets. Haunting intrudes into and disrupts authorized master narratives, enabling drowned stories to surface. “History seeping through the walls”, says Lucy (67). The past is a ghost, passing effortlessly through partitions. 1781, 1830, 2007: “A date is a specter ...[a] revenance of impossible return”, writes Derrida (*Sovereignities* 18). On the one hand the past of the Middle Passage, slavery or any atrocity, can never be returned to accurately or faithfully, when retold. On the other, if unresolved, the past, like a revenant, will return to haunt.

Ghosts – spirits of the dead – are the dead’s doubles. Spectrality is created by Pinnock both with alternating, interpenetrating scenes, and by pairing characters across centuries. Lucy bears the scars from the whipping she received in the hold, with the cat o’ nine tails; Reuben notices that the eczema from which Lou suffers has made her back bleed (66). The mirroring stories of Lou (twenty-first century), Olu whom she plays (eighteenth century) and Lucy (nineteenth century) demonstrate how, in a literal sense, collective trauma is inherited by successive generations in the form of what literary theorist Marianne Hirsch terms “postmemory” (106) – illustrated here by the ancestral trauma that Lou’s skin somatizes; and how historical racism, legislated four centuries ago and persisting in racial discrimination today, plays out on Black lives. Lucy and Tom, who met on a slave ship, become the ghostly ancestors of Lou’s grandparents, who arrived from the Caribbean in the wave of immigration following the docking in London in 1948 of the Empire Windrush. Her grandfather recalls having to have three jobs in order to survive: “I worked like a slave. [...] A slave like my grandfather’s grandfather.” (60). Centuries after the abolition of slavery, endemic racial and social injustice still return to haunt. Thomas finds a job as a cook on a merchant ship, *The Glory*. Lucy warns him, “They’ve given it a new name, scrubbed it clean, removed the shackles from its hold, but they can’t get rid of the stench.” (41). Thomas soon discovers that *The Glory* captures Africans, trafficking them to Brazil, where slavery is still legalized.<sup>12</sup> In

the sky, The Glory's crew spot rockets and blue lights, a warning signal from a Royal Navy vessel seeking out slave trafficking, now illegal under British law. Fearing prosecution, the crew throw the captured Africans overboard. In his attempt to unchain and save them, Thomas attacks a sailor, Decker. Aided by Turner, Decker regains control and Thomas himself is manacled, gagged, and later sold into slavery. Pinnock's play is called *Rockets and Blue Lights* – a work that Turner painted the same year as *The Slave Ship* – to indicate that the legacies of enslavement endure centuries after 1781, after 1807, after official Emancipation. Pinnock's play embodies what Smallwood calls “the blurred and bloodied boundaries between captivity, commodification, and diaspora.” (8). Thomas freed Lucy, but is himself enslaved, in a spectral cycle of entrapment where the African diaspora is still subjected to the aftermaths of the slave trade.

In Pinnock's spectral dramaturgy, the past is unfinished. When Meg's ghost visits Lou on the day of the film awards for which *The Ghost Ship* has been nominated, she asks if times are now better. Lou does not reply (63). The continued erasure or devaluation of African and diaspora cultures is highlighted when Olu's life story and the “amazing scenes about the Sons of Africa”, as Reuben describes them, are edited out of *The Ghost Ship*, to showcase Turner's biography, which is likely to be a bigger box office draw in what Lou damningly calls the “abolition theme park” of 2007 (10). The chronic denigration of African diasporic lives was spotlighted shamefully in 2018 when it was exposed that many members of the Windrush generation, who contributed vitally to rebuilding Britain after the Second World War, and subsequently to the country's health, transport and other public services, had been wrongly denied legal rights and medical care, stripped of jobs and homes, even deported (Grierson). Sharpe conceptualizes *wake* – the track left on the water's surface by a ship, as a “frame of and for living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery.” (2). The *Zong*, the logic of dehumanization, the “stripping” of “personhood” that began in the Middle Passage, haunts the present with racial injustice, like a revenant ghost ship.

The closing lines of *Rockets and Blue Lights* are sung by Thomas as he toils on a Brazilian plantation, guarded by a Portuguese overseer:

I survived the slave castles at Bonny, the  
*Zong* and Baptist massacres. [...]  
I survived the fires of New Cross and Grenfell;  
Death in custody, through all this I lived. (79)

From the sixteenth century onwards, Africans were imprisoned in barracoons such as those at Bonny off the Biafran coast, before being deported and enslaved like Thomas is, well after slavery was abolished in Britain. In 1830, five hundred insurgents were killed when the Great Jamaican Revolt, mounted by 30 000 enslaved people led by Baptist deacon Samuel Sharpe, was brutally suppressed. In 1981, thirteen Black teenagers at a birthday party perished in a fire the reasons for which have never been confirmed, although eye-witnesses spoke of arson (White). In 2017, seventy-two people in Grenfell Tower social housing, most of whom were working-class and of African or Asian descent, were killed in a fire disastrously exacerbated by highly flammable insulation that had recently been installed (O'Hagen). In 2020, Black people accounted for eight per cent of deaths in police custody, whereas they account for three per cent of the UK population (Afsal). While in no way comparable in terms of historical context, least of all scale, each tragedy commemorated by Thomas's song underscores what Sharpe calls the "the precarities and afterlives of slavery", in a still racially and socially unequal world (5). "[T]he distinction between the past and the present founders on the interminable grief engendered by slavery and its aftermath", writes Saidiya Hartman, positing that the "time of slavery" is not over (2002: 758).

As the play ends, the cast joins Thomas in reciting the names of the victims of racial attacks, "*overlapping each other to create a brief echoing effect as though conjuring ghosts.*" (79) Like the doubled characters, these names testify to a genealogy of racist injustice spanning centuries. This chorus, however, is not just a melancholic lament, a pathological return to a paralysed past possessed by ghosts, a "necropolitics of slavery" (Jones Jr. 388). It is a transformative hymn, a productive raising of Black consciousness, an ethical imperative to affirm life, and presence. As Thomas's shanty insists, despite genocide, enslavement and systemic racism, against "nearly impossible odds" (Smallwood 64), he, they, survive. Mourning ancestors becomes affirmative in so far as it opens the possibility to transform the future. Lou exclaims to *The Ghost Ship's* director, "It's bad enough that you've got me playing a ghost. A fucking ghost, Trev. [...] We're always playing ghosts in one way or another. We're not seen as real functioning people. When is this shit going to stop" (38-9). The film-within-the-play's title, *The Ghost Ship*, might play to the "abolition theme park" portrayal of slaves as faceless ghosts, agonising victims, "black people in chains, again, beaten and degraded" (Jones Jr. 383), perpetuating the erasure of their personal stories in favour of a white saviour narrative. But Pinnock's play itself salvages collective memory, reclaims the past from the sea, placing centre-stage the individuality and humanity of Black people, notably women. *Lou's* name is a semi-homophone or anagram of *Olu's* and *Lucy's*,

tying her inextricably to her past. But it also resembles that of Captain *Sola* Andrews, whom she plays in a popular science fiction television series. A Black woman, not a slaver, is now captain, navigating her rocket into the future, more cognizant of how the world was shaped in the past, and confident of how she can shape world-making in the future.

### **Janice Okoh, *The Gift* (2020)**

Ola's ghost appears to Turner, demanding restitution for the crimes perpetrated against her and her fellow captives during the Middle Passage. A ghost story "in reverse", *The Gift* stages a present-day Black woman who visits the nineteenth century, holding past injustices accountable for historical racism experienced today.

Act One of *The Gift* opens in 1862 in Brighton, England, as African entrepreneur James Davies and his wife Sarah host afternoon tea. Sarah is the real-life Omoba Aina, an Egbado woman of "royal African blood" who, we learn in the play, was captured in Africa as a small girl by a neighboring army which slaughtered her family, and enslaved her. Her master, King Gezo of Dahomey, offered the child as a "gift" to Royal Naval Captain Frederick Forbes, who was on a diplomatic mission (Myers). Upon her arrival in England, aged seven, she was renamed Sarah Bonetta, and made a protégée of Queen Victoria, who bestowed gifts on her and later became her daughter Victoria's godmother.

Unlike the other plays analysed here, *The Gift* is a laugh-out-loud comedy, chockful of gags and gaffes, teeming with stinging satire. In Act Two, structural engineer Sarah and university academic James, a professional Black couple who have recently relocated to rural north-west England, are paid a visit by new neighbors, Harriet and Ben. Despite falling over herself to be politically correct with her new "BAME" neighbors, Harriet consistently misfires. She expresses surprise that Sarah and James adopted the child of a white friend who died, saying, "I mean, I don't think you could do it, you know, this way around if you went through the system" (68) White people – like William Wilberforce – save helpless Black people; the reverse, for Harriet, is inconceivable. Sarah and James explain that, actually, they identify as "culturally white": their influences, friends, music, food – "bangers and mash and toad in the hole" (71) – are quintessentially English; and they grew up in white neighborhoods. The stage version, directed by Dawn Walton in a coproduction between Eclipse Theatre and the Belgrade Coventry, presented them on a leather designer settee among carefully curated soft furnishings – the archetypal modern middle-class British couple.

The temperature of the play drops dramatically when the neighbors' slippery, subtle, at times less-than-subtle "racism without racist epithets" in Eduardo Bonna-Silva's terms (43)

– what Selina Thompson calls the “smooth slick polite confused racism of [her] liberal friends” (26) – is exposed as the cornerstone of an overarching, overbearing, overwhelming structure: systemic racism. James has a black eye which, he explains to Harriet and Ben, he sustained while practising his hobby, boxing. But Harriet and Ben already know from gossiping neighbors that James was assaulted by the police. It finally emerges Harriet, who had heard the couple’s little girl screaming, alerted the police, who proceeded to assault James in front of his four year-old (78-9). The teatime setting of all three acts exposes how the niceties and genteel sophistication of the British ruling classes whitewash centuries of “theft, pillage, and bondage” in Sharpe’s words (102). Sarah Bonetta was spared her fate under an African slave-owning king. The Victorian characters laud this act of benevolence, while never mentioning the many millions of people enslaved by the British. It is true that, as Smallwood states, slavery existed in precolonial Western Africa, where enemy populations were traditionally taken captive when defeated. However, from the fifteenth century onwards, the arrival of the Europeans, who “turn[ed] surplus war prisoners into valuable commodities” by shipping them across the Atlantic, represented “a shift of enormous proportions. [...] a dramatic and abrupt shift in the scale of slave trading.” (Smallwood 23, 31). As they sip from their porcelain teacups, upright and trussed in their corsets, the polite society on stage veneer atrocity with gentility.

Act Three collapses present into past as Sarah anachronistically appears in one of Queen Victoria’s palaces alongside her namesake, Sarah Bonetta. Since only Sarah Bonetta and not the Queen can see Sarah, the latter appears as a vision. This “spectral moment” destabilizes the cognition of temporal order as a linear sequence, illuminating the impact of the past on Sarah’s life. However many centuries Black people have lived in the UK– *Rockets and Blue Lights* shows a Black population living in London in the early nineteenth century, and Hakim Adi’s *Black British History* traces British Africans back to Roman times – the legacy of white supremacy established during the colonial era haunts British society today. Sarah says, “You see, we keep coming and coming, we, the African English, but we’re not wanted [...]. So we’re crushed and killed and incarcerated.” (92). She continues, describing the “many forms” of the colonial legacy:

Forms that push us down. Lessen us. Forms designed to make them feel superior [...] trippings-up and misunderstandings and belittlings and lying and underestimatings and distrustings and underminings and shrinkings [...] Piling on top of each other, pushing us down, overwhelming us until the madness sets in.” (93)

She remarks that this racism is endemic across British society: “It starts in schools with the undermarking. At work with the underpaying. Last to be interviewed.” (95). Sarah seems to echo Black activists and academics including Hartman who warns, in an oft- yet never over-cited statement, “black lives are still imperilled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery – skewed life chances, limited access to health and education and premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.” (2008: 6). Joining this protest, Sharpe highlights the “continuous and changing present of slavery’s as yet unresolved unfolding” (14). The “social death” of the captured and enslaved Africans, persists into the present in the form of what Sharpe calls “ontological negation”, or non/status (14): a society, where racist discrimination and social oppression are quotidian realities, “piling on top of each other, pushing [...], overwhelming”. Act Two ends as Sarah removes her clothes. No matter how educated, professional, wealthy or “culturally white” she becomes, her skin is branded, like Lucy’s in *Rockets and Blue Lights*, like Afua Hirsch’s, author of *Brit(ish): Race, Identity and Belonging*. The marks, scars, spectres of slavery and colonialism haunt Sarah, in a society still structured by historical racism.

In the timeless time of Act Three, Sarah becomes a vision, appearing in the past to condemn colonial abuses and highlight their legacies. Equally, Sarah Bonetta and Queen Victoria might appear in the present, as ghosts. Ghosts in *Rockets and Blue Lights* represent the restless souls of the unburied, who demand restitution. Ghosts in *The Gift* represent the past of atrocity and abuse, which society today has failed to bury. The whitewashed walls, white panelled windows, cabinet and drapes, white Victorian settee, armchairs and tea table, and silver tea set of the first and third acts in the stage production, offered a ghostly ambiance. Victorian England in Janice Okoh’s play becomes a menacing, threatening ghost, an afterlife of enslavement, that haunts the present. At the same time, ghosts in *The Gift* represent an opportunity for emancipation from oppression. Sarah conjures her ancestor Sarah Bonetta in an attempt to revisit and revise History. Sarah Bonetta exists, Sarah says, as just “a few pages” written in English history books, a “portrait of [Queen Victoria’s] benevolence” (97). While she is lavished with the Queen’s generous gifts, she herself is a reified, thingified “gift”. While not enslaved, she suffers “social death”, the key characteristic according to Patterson being the stripping of one’s name: the most universal symbol of an individual’s identity and of their relation with kinspeople (55). Sarah encourages Sarah Bonetta – Aina – to resuscitate herself from “social death”, erasure and devaluation by writing back into history the centuries of resistance to which the fictional Lucy, Thomas and

Meg in *Rockets and Blue Lights* also contribute. Aina has a spear, a gift from a West-African Yoruba Chief. Queen Victoria shows Aina how to use it, claiming she knows better than the Chief who is “quite wrong”, and saying, “Such a funny little thing, isn’t it? To think after all their years of existence, this is all they could come up with.” (94). Sarah entreats Aina to “Kill the Queen. Go down in our history as the one who gave us our freedom.” (98) Aina “lunges at QUEEN VICTORIA with the spear and stabs her with it.” (100). A Black woman, representing the emancipatory acts and movements of resistance that have been relegated to footnotes for four centuries – the Haitian Revolution, the Jamaican Revolt, struggles for independence from imperial rule<sup>13</sup> – lances the boil of colonialism, exorcizes the spectre of racism. Freedom and justice are not handed to the oppressed as a “gift”: they are fought for. In any case, the oppressed do not want a “gift”. As Patterson states, “all kinds of obligations are established” when gifts are offered (212). They want what is due to them: rights. Sarah returns to the past to look forward to a future where resistance and hard-won struggles for rights are recalled, and inspire.

In Act Three, Queen Victoria tries coaxing her goddaughter, Victoria – Aina’s daughter – from under the tea table. Unwilling to amuse the Queen, to be her plaything like her mother is, or like Lucy’s son in *Rockets and Blue Lights*, who is sold as a pet, little Victoria scurries off. Ghosts symbolize social death, ontological negation in an unliveable society. Neither fully past nor present, absent or present, ghosts also symbolize indeterminacy and instability. As Derrida writes, hauntology involves “radical critique, namely a procedure ready to undertake self-critique [...] explicitly open to its own transformation, re-evaluation, self-reinterpretation”. The ghost-as-critique ruptures epistemes, disabling the totalising power of nation, culture and identity. The ghostly or spectral are elusive, disjointed, dispersed, never explicit or definite (*Specters* 33, 35, 82, 110). By rehabilitating her ancestors as resistance fighters rather than enslaved victims or grateful beneficiaries of charity, Sarah might open an anti-identitarian, post-racial future where she can be “culturally white”. Aina’s daughter doesn’t play ball with Queen Victoria, perhaps enabling her modern-day double, her namesake Victoria – Sarah’s daughter – to choose their identity with as much ease, as those who enjoy the benefits of white privilege.

### **Selina Thompson, *salt*.**

My concluding analysis returns to the primal moment of transatlantic slavery: the Middle Passage. In this autobiographical performance art piece, first performed by Thompson at London’s Southbank Centre before being restaged at the Edinburgh Festival and

embarking on a national tour which included staging at the Royal Court Theatre, the author-performer, dressed in modest white underlinen that plantation labourers might have worn, explains that her birth parents and adoptive parents are – like Pinnock’s – “descended from enslaved people” (14). Given the subject matter, it is no doubt no coincidence that Dawn Walton, director of *The Gift*, also directed *salt*. In 2016 Thompson boarded a cargo ship, embarking on part of the triangular trade route between Europe, Africa and the Americas. Leaving from Antwerp, Belgium, her boat travelled down the West-African coast, stopping in Benin, Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Senegal – locations from where Africans were deported. Visiting Elmina in Ghana, she made a pilgrimage to the “slave castles” evoked by Thomas in *Rockets and Blue Lights*, which were represented in *salt*. with the kind of wreath brought by visitors paying their respects. From Africa Thompson flew across the Atlantic to Jamaica, then journeyed to plantations in North Carolina and Georgia before taking another freighter back across the Middle Passage in reverse, to Antwerp. The double voyage across the Atlantic and back is significant both in relation to *salt*. and to *Rockets and Blue Lights*. Her aim was to “REMEMBER THE DEAD” (25). Ghosts do not feature in the classic manner that they do in *Rockets and Blue Lights*, but Thompson says, as they sail down the African coast, “Sometimes at night [...] the dead come up through the ship for me.” (28) In her introduction to the playtext, performer Alexandrina Helmsley writes, “Here is a work of exhuming the dead. *salt*. traces their ghostly forms so that we might honour their meticulous, industrial decimation.” (in Thompson 7). Like *Rockets and Blue Lights*, *salt*. heeds ghosts, recalls their suffering, and calls for justice.

In Thompson’s production, Europe is a continent founded on the “meticulous, industrial decimation” of African people, mercilessly and mercenarily sacrificed for selfish capitalist gain. While for Lucy in *Rockets and Blue Lights* sugar, from plantations where people were forced to work, “is bitter aloes in [her] mouth” (42), the focus in Thompson’s play is salt, rather than sugar. The giant rock of pink salt at the centre of the stage, with its hard edges and obstinate immovability, became the European continent that Thompson smashed at so violently with her sledgehammer, that she and the front rows of the audience had to wear protective goggles. “Europe is awash in blood. Every penny of wealth, each brick of each intimidating building, the pavement slabs of quiet city streets and the soil beneath rolling green hillsides is built on suffering, massacre, death.” (19). While much US scholarship notably that of Hartman, Smallwood, Sharpe and others is invaluable for expanding historical, sociological and affective understandings of the Middle Passage and enslavement, Pinnock and Thompson portray the uniquely Black European experience, where

members of the African-Caribbean diaspora have journeyed back across the Atlantic, settling in Europe. As Thompson highlights, discrimination and disadvantage have followed them on both legs of their journey. Like *The Gift*, *salt* exposes the centuries of colonialism that still haunt European cultures today. In early versions of the show, a wall made from white salt bricks, stage left, resembled the immense neoclassical architectural projects in metropolitan centres of empire such as London or Paris – or indeed the imposing white décor of *The Gift* – financed by the massive wealth accumulated thanks to free labour in the colonies; and baked into every brick, under every whitewash, is the sweat and tears of enslaved people. Slavery “shaped the world”, says Thompson (29). Her act of demolition sought to expose the crimes of a continent, to deconstruct the white – white as the walls – supremacy on which they were founded.

Transmitted trauma is palpable throughout *salt*. Like a revenant, trauma becomes perpetual, because it is perpetuated by the enduring logic of racism. In *Saltwater Slavery*, Smallwood states that the Middle Passage was so horrific an experience that African Diasporas can never “completely escape the saltwater” (7). In *Rockets and Blue Lights*, Thomas and Lucy’s daughter Jess says, “I have a fear of drowning. I’ve drowned in my dreams several times.” (42). Lucy’s terrorising experience of the Middle Passage is transferred to her child. For Lou, the trauma erupts through her skin, causing eczema. “They think it’s just history, but it isn’t” (46), she says, as Sarah in *The Gift* could equally say. In *salt*. Thompson alludes to the “residual trauma [she] inherit[s]” (41). She cannot rinse from her mouth the taste of brine, the trauma of murder, abuse and the stripping of personhood. The past, unfinished, returns and haunts. Helmsley captures the enduring scars, still keenly felt: “The ongoing impacts of slavery remain unfathomable; they are formless down to the depths of the ocean, right down to the watery, sub-atomic reckonings with grief.” (in Thompson 8).

This trauma is caused not only by the history of enslavement to which Thompson’s ancestors were subjected, but also by the persistence, today, of the racist ideologies used to legitimate slavery. On the cargo boat, the ship’s Italian captain asks Thompson and the Black filmmaker with whom she is travelling, to call him “Master”, a title which in an instant transports them to their ancestors’ dehumanizing experiences (26). During dinner, looking them straight in the eyes, he uses a highly offensive racist insult. “I am growing accustomed to a timeline, an endless feed of black pain, black rage and black people having to assert that black lives matter because black death is normal”, she says (20). Despite the fact that Black people constitute an integral part of European society and culture going back centuries, as all

of the plays discussed here demonstrate, discrimination and abuse are part of the lived experience of Black people today. Thompson's play not only conjures ghosts from the past to pay homage to the ungraved dead; she herself feels like a "dead living thing" in a society founded on the racist ideologies that enslaved her ancestors (50). As with tucker green's *ear for eye*, *Rockets and Blue Lights* and *The Gift*, past atrocities committed against African bodies, cultures and societies crash into the present. Édouard Glissant describes linear History as "a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone 'made' the history of the World." (64). He seeks to replace "the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History that would run its unique course" with "the subterranean convergence of [Caribbean] histories" (66). These playwrights illustrate how, rather than progressing ineluctably from the past towards modernity, former colonial empires perpetuate cycles of erasure and oppression.

The ghosts of those killed in the Middle Passage demand to be heard. Ghosts also make present ancestors who, when properly commemorated as I have stated, can provide solace and support to the living. Ghosts do not adhere to the European Enlightenment rationalism that distinguishes past from present, the dead from the living, spirit from flesh, sacred from secular; the same rationalism that also categorized the white "race" as superior to other "races" (Boule). Thompson's conjuring of her ancestors' spirits thus bears a subversive anticolonial force. Moreover, as Toni Morrison explains, ancestors, discredited as a form of knowledge because Black people are discredited, can be "benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom." Morrison favours "conscious historical connexion" with ancestors, over total "self-reliance" (343-4). In *salt*. Thompson senses that her ancestors watch over her:

Hands in my hands, on the back of my neck, hands in the small of my back, surrounding me and lifting me up, reminding me of all it took to bring me here. Of the need to continue to live. Of how sacred it is to be a descendant of those that were never supposed to survive" (51).

Theatre theorist Sarah Gorman describes Thompson's *salt*. in terms of a "politics of self-care" (82). Like Thomas in *Rockets and Blue Lights*, Thompson takes comfort and strength from the fact that, in spite of the industrialized, systematized brutality of slavery, she "continues to live" thanks to the strength and counsel of her ancestors. "That the spirits would guide us home", she says (47).

The entire performance of *salt*. could be seen as summoning spirits, Thompson as an officiating priest. The first scene is entitled "Opening the Ritual" and on stage a wooden work

bench, or altar, beneath a neon triangle representing the triangular trade, bore a bottle of water containing a sprig of rosemary – a symbol of remembrance –, a pestle of finely-ground salt and an incense burner from which, against the black background, ghost-like wisps of white smoke drifted. “*The space has been spiritually cleansed, and is ready for the spirit work that is to take place*”, the stage directions indicate (14). Towards the end of the performance, Thompson invited audience members to take a crystal from the rock she had shattered. “To take it is to make a commitment to the radical space of not moving on, and all that it can open.” (51). Once ghosts have been heeded, reminds Derrida, they “move no more”. “I choose to not move on. I refuse to get over what is not yet over”, says Thompson (22). And in an interview she says, “I’m just gonna really sit with all of this pain, all of this trauma, all of this intergenerational baggage, I’m really gonna sit with its global impact, its temporal impact and I’m gonna stay there for a bit.” (2017). I draw to my conclusion by proposing that we, too, must “move no more”, “stay there for a bit.”

Thompson asks:

What should a site of mourning for the enslaved look like?

What might hold the long, long memory?

What would be both a covenant to never let such things happen again

And a refusal to forget?” (37)

The full stop after *salt*. indicates a desire to end the sentence. And the grief. But the lower case “s” suggests that the story starts *in medias res*, that it is preceded by a history of which it is inextricably part, which has not ended, which cannot be forgotten. At the beginning of this essay Derrida asks the restless ghosts of the dead, now offered due obsequies, their “remains” finally laid to rest, to “remain”, to enjoy their long-awaited rest. While they must “move no more”, nor must we, and perhaps this injunction is marked by the full stop. Warner summarizes the culture of remembrance, that Derrida’s “spectrality” theorizes:

Mourning, melancholy and the macabre have tinged the pallor of spectres, but it seems that we might be entering a new phase in the history of our connections with the dead, that memory has become the crucial and necessary means to achieve peace with the past, so that we no longer wish to lay the ghosts, but rather to bring them back for prolonged acts of reconciliation (2003: 214).

Stopping, and living with ghosts rather than banishing or exorcising them does not represent an indulgent obsession with repaying debts to the past, a “nostalgic lament” (Glissant 64), but

an acknowledgement, attention, alertness that what they represent is as relevant now, as it was in past. Ghosts highlight the paradoxical and parallel imperative both properly to bury the dead, and to keep their memory, the memory of suffering, alive, to ensure that future generations do not endure what they had to. With their multiple, doubled, spectral, interpenetrating stories, Tucker Green, Pinnock, Okoh and Thompson's postcolonial ghost plays reactivate the past that is not past, that is still active. As long as postcolonial nations live in the shadow of the slave ship, as long as some of their inhabitants have to wade in the bloodied foam of historical racism, we must look back to the roots, to look forward to eradication.

That piece of salt sits on my desk as I write. Pink-veined, it is as though the blood of those who met with premature deaths, of those who were flogged, has trickled through it. Brittle and rigid, it is the unrecovered remains piled on the ocean floor – “the trail of bleached bones stretching out across the middle passage” (Thompson 19). Or the bones of the plantation workers on whose tireless backs empires were built. It is the salt of their sweat. Or the mortal thirst of the hold's enchained prisoners. It is the tears of those who died, and those who mourn, which transforms grief into “a practice of counter-memory that attends to that which has been negated and repressed.” (Hartman 2002: 71). The unyielding rock salt's surface is a granular, filigree lace: both adamant and diaphanous, it has a ghostly appearance. Thompson describes grains of salt that “fall softly to the place with no answer [...] like snow in the sea” (50). The ocean is a watery mass grave, suspending the souls of the dead like salt. While the surface is powdered, the crystal is obdurate. Like a tombstone it invites me “not to move on”: to remember, reflect. Glittering, the salt on my desk represents the gold adornments worn by fishermen and salt-makers, that in the fifteenth century first drew the Portuguese to Africa, where gold was “as common as salt” (Smallwood 11), and the diamonds and other natural resources that the Global North continues to extract from the continent today. It represents the riches of African cultures that colonizers systematically erased, devalued and derided.

In a special edition of *Modern Drama* entitled *Slavery's Reinventions*, Margo Natalie Crawford argues against slavery becoming “the all-determining air of black experience” (487-8). In Thompson's play salt is a *pharmakon*, encapsulating both the toxicity of trauma and the therapy of healing (Derrida 1981).<sup>14</sup> At the end of the performance, the remains of the smashed salt lay across the stage like rubble, which Thompson carefully swept away, into a corner. Salt cleanses, it purges. The salt on my desk becomes smashed stone from the toppled statue of a public figure who made fame and fortune by enslaving others, and “all that [this

dismantling] can open”: racial justice, social justice. The salt on my desk can, in a real sense, disinfect wounds. It represents the vital contribution that people from African diasporas have made, since the Windrush generation, to the UK’s health and care sectors. And African Caribbean diasporic cultures – the novels of Caryl Phillips and Zadie Smith; the films of Steve McQueen and Campbell X; the cultural theory of Stuart Hall and Emma Dabiri; the literary and theater theory of Joan Anim-Addo and Lynette Goddard; the plays of the authors I examine here – are as essential an ingredient to British culture, as salt is to food. Finally, this splinter of salt is a synecdoche, one piece of the ecology that binds all humans and non-humans, in mutual dependency. Thanks to these plays, the dead are remembered; we remain with them. And in a very literal sense, states Sharpe, the sodium, chlorine and other components of the human body, which have a residence time of 260 million years, are, “with us still” (40).

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive examination of tucker green's works see Adiseshiah and Bolton.

<sup>2</sup> These include, among others, Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980), Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), and the postcolonial *Ur-ghost* story, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).

<sup>3</sup> See Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth* (1997), Suzan Lori Parks' *Father Comes Home from the Wars* (2015), Jennifer Kidwell and Scott R. Sheppard's *Underground Railroad Game* (2016) and Branden Jacob Jenkins' *An Octoroon* (2017). In the UK Caryl Phillips's *Rough Crossings* was produced to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade (2007). Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda: A Story of Love and Slavery* (2019) adapts Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko* into an Afro-Caribbean opera.

<sup>4</sup> Smallwood's research leads her to conclude that an average of 20% of captives did not survive the journey but on 40% of journeys this figure was exceeded (150).

<sup>5</sup> She includes scant extant accounts by Ukawsaw Gronniowaw, Venture Smith, Jeffrey Brace and Olaudah Equiano (Chassot 40-2). There are poetic re-imaginings of the Middle Passage, for instance Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* (1973), Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), Kwame Dawes's *Requiem* (1996) and M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2008). Representations in visual art include Kara Walker's *Fons Americanus* (Tate Modern, 2019) and Lubeina Himid's *Memorial to Zong!* (Lancaster Maritime Museum, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Directed by Miranda Cromwell, the production ran at Manchester's Royal Exchange for just one week before theater closures forced by the COVID-19 pandemic on 16 March 2020. From June 2020 a reading was available on BBC Radio 3.

<sup>7</sup> The many discussions of this painting include Wood (62) [\*Goldsmiths].

<sup>8</sup> It is important to stress that abolitionists from African diasporas, including Mary Prince and Sarah Parker Remond, contributed crucially to the movement.

<sup>9</sup> Marcus Rediker's comprehensive account of the slave trade combines historical fact with attempts to imagine how captured and enslaved Africans might have felt.

<sup>10</sup> In 2007 a replica of the *Zong!* sailed down the River Thames.

<sup>11</sup> Haunting and furies were included in the production of Juliet Gilkes Romero's *The Whip* directed by Kimberley Sykes for the Royal Shakespeare Company (2020). In the scenography, wooden pillars, that evoked the structure of a slave ship as well as the panelling inside the Houses of Parliament, highlighted how the fate of so many millions of enslaved people was in the hands of British politicians and businessmen. Behind these posts lurked anxious, alienated figures, the women in soiled shift dresses and lace-up boots, the men in stained vests or overalls. These ghostly apparitions, sullied by sweat and dirt, suggested enslaved labourers. In one scene atop a table – denoting the kitchen of a wealthy member of parliament, a soap box during the abolitionist campaigning, and the table between the frontbenches in the House of Commons – one of these figures danced furiously, beating a rolling pin against a pan and roaring her rage. Like Meg in *Rockets and Blue Lights*, she became a Fury, sounding her protest. The ghosts deported, enslaved, abused and murdered people faraway out of sight and mind on the plantations, haunted the metropolitan establishment, sounding their fury and demanding recognition.

<sup>12</sup> Brazil abolished slavery as late as 1869.

<sup>13</sup> For an illuminating example see Gonzalez.

<sup>14</sup> In Trinidadian novelist Earl Lovelace's novel *Salt* (1998), zombies, a Caribbean figuration of the living-dead from whom souls have been stolen by slave masters, find release from their endless labour by eating salt (Warner 366).