

TLC Showcase

JASON YOUNG

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Introduction to *Joanna Bromley*

'Joanna Bromley' is a follow-up to my feature film script titled 'The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano'. Joanna was the mixed-race daughter of Olaudah Equiano (aka. Gustavus Vassa) in 19th century England. She married an Englishman by the name of Henry Bromley on the 29th August 1821 at Shoreditch Church in London and became Joanna Bromley. She died at the age of 61 on the 10th March 1857 and was buried in Stoke Newington in London. Unlike today, she was around at a time when it was not credible to be mixed-race in society. However, she was shielded by her wealth inherited from her African father and she could possibly be a spiritual ancestor of all mixed-race English women today. Whereas the intention with 'The Interesting Narrative' was to put Equiano front and centre of my story, my intention with 'Joanna Bromley' was to present a woman of colour on the screen in Jane Austen's England.

My first attempt to bring Joanna Vassa alive on the screen was in the short period drama, 'Joanna Vassa'. Prior to that, I brought another woman of colour to the screen in a short period drama titled 'Dido Belle'. This was before the 2014 feature film, 'Belle', but after that landmark film and since the wedding of Meghan Merkle to Prince Harry I decided to turn the 'Joanna Vassa' project into the feature film project, 'Joanna Bromley'.

Frankie Bailey was appointed by The Literary Consultancy to provide an assessment of my 133-page feature length script. The feedback was extremely helpful because it identified the strong points as well as areas that were more suitable for radio. Whilst I think it is important to see Joanna Bromley as a woman of colour in Jane Austen's England, there were elements of the Olaudah Equiano story that were more suited to a radio play format. There has already been a radio play on Equiano featuring David Oyelowo and his wife, Jessica. However, I did do an animation on Equiano back in 2007 for the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade act titled 'The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano', which was followed up by a documentary on Equiano's childhood in Benin titled 'Equiano in Africa' the following year. A radio play version of my Equiano story was broadcast online this year.

Extract from *Joanna Bromley* by Jason Young

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JAMES CULLEN steals a glance at his mixed-race granddaughter, JOANNA VASSA.

JAMES

I talked with Rev. Bromley you know.

Her eyes light up.

JOANNA

Yes, grandfather.

They exchange looks.

JAMES

He seems to have a high opinion of you.

A smile plays upon his lips.

JAMES

But I told him you're a woman in big demand now
that you have an inheritance.

She cuts through his play acting and says:

JOANNA

If he makes me an offer of marriage then I shall
accept it.

He looks at her and then smiles to himself.

JAMES

You are six and twenty years of age, my dear. And he has asked my permission to pay you his addresses. And to make you an offer of marriage.

Her face lights up in a smile.

JOANNA

Then I accept his offer. He's the only man I've met who thinks with me.

James smiles to himself.

JAMES

I could never get anything out of him in conversation, you know. But he really wanted to know something of your mind. I should think a Congregational minister would suit you, my dear. You have my blessings.

Joanna smiles at him in gratitude.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Joanna is walking down the road towards Henry's Congregational church.

EXT. RECTORY - DAY

Henry opens the door and reaches out his hand to receive Joanna.

HENRY

Welcome.

She voluntarily kisses him on the cheek.

He guides her inside.

INT. PASSAGEWAY - DAY

Joanna and Henry look at an engraving of his grandmother that is hung on the wall.

JOANNA

Who is that woman, Henry?

HENRY

My grandmother.

Joanna studies her.

JOANNA

She's beautiful.

HENRY

Do you not care to get your own portrait done?

She lowers her eyes.

JOANNA

No.

HENRY

Why is that?

She turns and walks a few paces.

JOANNA

I should like to live my life now rather than leaving myself behind in a painting. I don't understand why so much time and energy goes into something that

makes life no better for anyone else. It's a language I don't understand.

He smiles at her.

HENRY

I suspect you want to change the world for good just as your father wanted to end the world of slavery.

She stares into the distance.

JOANNA

It pains me that slavery is still alive on the plantations.

He walks over to her to comfort her.

HENRY

It's no use trying to change the world if you can't enjoy living in it.

They exchange looks in a moment of silent understanding.

INT. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - DAY

The service is over and Henry and Joanna are receiving congratulations from members of the congregation.

Two middle-aged women stand at a distance watching proceedings. They are NANCY and LOUISE.

LOUISE

Who is that woman with Rev. Bromley?

NANCY

Name's Vassa. Some foreigner I gather. Her father was an African slave.

LOUISE

I suppose he'll have to dig deep in his pockets to pay for his wedding.

NANCY

Oh she comes with a dowry. Her father left her with an inheritance.

Louise casts a cursory glance over Joanna as if to evaluate her.

LOUISE

Still. It's not natural for the daughter of a slave to seek a place in our society.

NANCY

Apparently, he says, she is like the other half of his soul.

LOUISE

I've never liked it when strangers come and rise above their station.

Nancy observes them.

NANCY

I wonder what their children will be like?

EXT. NORTHAM COUNTY, DEVON - DAY

Henry rides his horse up to the front of his parents' house. He dismounts, reins up the horse and goes inside.

INT. BROMLEY FAMILY HOUSE - DAY

Henry is breaking the news of his engagement to his mother, ANNE BROMLEY, and sister, CATHERINE BROMLEY. Both of them are un-beautiful Englishwomen who are very particular and have their own peculiarities.

ANNE

Engaged? To the daughter of a slave?

CATHERINE

It's terribly vexing, mother. What business has this woman marrying a respectable clergyman? It's that Wilberforce and his negroes again.

HENRY

She's a beautiful woman, mother. And I'm in love with her.

Catherine turns away from him in revulsion.

CATHERINE

Oh, it's horrible. It shouldn't be allowed.

Anne looks at her son and sees how serious he is.

ANNE

When do you plan to get married?

HENRY

Twenty ninth of August. The ceremony will take place at St. Clerkenwell's in London.

Catherine rolls her eyes in disgust.

CATHERINE

London! I suppose you'll end up living in a street with queer people.

HENRY

No. I shall take up an appointment in Appledore. So I'll be close enough to keep an eye on both of you.

Catherine is not so swayed.

CATHERINE

I can't think how this all came about.

HENRY

She has an attractive face and cuts a fine figure.

CATHERINE

Yes, but I wouldn't have thought she was someone to fall in love with. Are you in love with her?

HENRY

Yes, I am.

CATHERINE

Oh, Henry. Couldn't you marry some local woman?

He looks into Catherine's eyes as if to impart some of the joy that he has into her.

HENRY

A man must marry where his heart takes him, young sister. Even if it is the daughter of a slave. Albeit a rich one.

He walks over to his mother.

ANNE

Well I wish you both the best of happiness.

HENRY

Thank you, mother.

About the Writer

Jason Young is a graduate of King's College London and published his first short story titled 'The Dark Angel' in the Writers' Forum magazine in October 2002. He went on to write a short period drama titled '[Dido Belle](#)' to bring a woman of colour in British history onto the screen. This was followed up by another short period drama titled '[Joanna Vassa](#)' to present a woman of colour in Jane Austen's England. Joanna Vassa was the daughter of the 18th century African abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano, whom Jason wrote a short animation about titled '[The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano](#)'. He has gone on to write a feature-length animation of the first black English classical composer by the name of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor titled '[The Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Story](#)', as well as a short biopic on the first Black British local preacher in the Primitive Methodist Church in 1809 in Staffordshire by the name of Samuel Barber titled '[Tunstall](#)'. His most recent project titled 'Cato Street to Newgate' is about a Jamaican man in Jane Austen's England by the name of William Davidson and his participation in the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820. A radio play version of the story titled '[The Cato Street Conspiracy](#)' was broadcast online back in May to commemorate the bicentenary of the hanging of William Davidson on the 1st May 1820 as well as to celebrate over two hundred years of the black presence in Britain.

