

PETER GRIMES

*An opera in three acts and a prologue
derived from the poem of*

George Crabbe

Words by

Montagu Slater

Music by

Benjamin Britten

op. 33

CHARACTERS

Peter Grimes, a fisherman *tenor*

Boy (John), his apprentice *silent*

Ellen Orford, a widow, schoolmistress of the Borough *soprano*

Captain Balstrode, retired merchant skipper *baritone*

Auntie, landlady of "The Boar" *contralto*

Niece 1

main attractions of "The Boar" } *sopranos*

Niece 2

Robert Boles, fisherman and Methodist *tenor*

Swallow, a lawyer *bass*

Mrs. (Nabob) Sedley, *mezzosoprano*

a rentier widow of an East India Company's factor

Rev. Horace Adams, the rector *tenor*

Ned Keene, apothecary and quack *baritone*

Hobson, carrier *bass*

Dr. Crabbe *silent*

Chorus of townspeople and fisherfolk

Scene: The Borough, a small fishing town on the East Coast

Time: Towards 1830

Edizioni Boosey & Hawkes, Londra
Rappresentante per l'Italia Casa Ricordi, Milano

PROLOGUE

Interior of the Moot Hall, arranged as for Coroner's Inquest. Coroner, Mr. Swallow, at table on dais, clerk at table below. A crowd of townspeople in the body of the hall is kept back by Hobson acting as Constable. Mr. Swallow is the leading lawyer of the Borough and at the same time its Mayor and its Coroner. A man of unexceptionable career and talents, he nevertheless disturbs the burgesses by his air of a man with an arrière pensée.

Hobson (*shouts*)

Peter Grimes!

(Peter Grimes steps forward from among the crowd.)

Swallow (*reading*)

Peter Grimes, we are here to investigate the cause of death of your apprentice William Spode, whose body you brought ashore from your boat, "The Boy Billy", on the 26th ultimo. Do you wish to give evidence?

(Peter nods.)

Will you step into the box. Peter Grimes. Take the oath.

After me. "I swear by Almighty God"

Peter

"I swear by Almighty God"

Swallow

"That the evidence I shall give"

Peter

"That the evidence I shall give"

Swallow

"Shall be the truth"

Peter

"Shall be the truth"

Swallow

"The whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Peter

"The whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Swallow

Tell the court the story in your own words.

(Peter is silent.)

You sailed your boat round the coast with the intention of putting in at London. Why did you do this?

Peter

We'd caught a huge catch, too big to sell here.

Swallow

And the boy died on the way?

Peter

The wind turned against us, blew us off our course. We ran out of drinking water.

Swallow

How long were you at sea?

Peter

Three days.

Swallow

What happened next?

Peter

He died lying there among the fish.

Swallow

What did you do?

Peter

Threw them all overboard, set sail for home.

Swallow

You mean you threw the fish overboard?...

When you landed did you call for help?

Peter

I called Ned Keene.

Swallow

The apothecary here?

(indicates Ned)

Was there anybody else called?

Peter

Somebody brought the parson.

Swallow

You mean the Rector, Mr. Horace Adams?

(The Rector steps forward. – Swallow waves him back.)

All right, Mr. Adams.

(He turns back to Peter.)

Was there a certain amount of excitement?

Peter

Bob Boles started shouting.

Swallow

There was a scene in the village street from which you were rescued by our landlady?

Peter

Yes. By Auntie.

Swallow

We don't call her that here....You then took to abusing a respectable lady.

(Peter glares.)

Answer me....You shouted abuse at a certain person?

(Mrs. Sedley pushes forward. Mrs. Sedley is the widow of a retired factor of the East India Company and is known locally as 'Mrs. Nabob'. She is 65, self-assertive, inquisitive, unpopular.)

Mrs. Sedley

Say who! Say who!!

Swallow

Mrs. Sedley here.

Peter *(fiercely)*

I don't like interferers.

(A slight hubbub among the spectators resolves itself into a chorus which is more like the confused muttering of a crowd than something fully articulate.)

Chorus

When women gossip the result
Is someone doesn't sleep at night.

Hobson (*shouting*)

Silence!

Swallow

Now tell me this. Who helped you carry the boy home?
The schoolmistress, the widow, Mrs. Ellen Orford?
(*Renewed hubbub. Ellen steps forward to Swallow.*)

Women's Chorus

O when you pray you shut your eyes
And then can't tell the truth from lies.

Hobson (*shouts*)

Silence!

Swallow

Mrs. Orford, as the schoolmistress, the widow, how did you come into this?

Ellen

I did what I could to help.

Swallow

Why should you help this kind of fellow – callous, brutal, and coarse?
(*to Grimes*)

There's something here perhaps in your favour. I'm told you rescued the boy from drowning
in the March storms.

(*Peter is silent.*)

Have you something else to say?

No? – Then I have.

Peter Grimes, I here advise you – do not get another boy apprentice. Get a fisherman to
help you – big enough to stand up for himself. Our verdict is – that William Spode, your
apprentice, died in accidental circumstances. But that's the kind of thing people are apt
to remember.

Chorus

But when the crowner sits upon it,
Who can dare to fix the guilt?

Hobson (*shouts*)

Silence! Silence!

(*Peter has stepped forward and is trying to speak.*)

Peter

Your honour! Like every other fisherman I have to hire an apprentice. I must have help –

Swallow

Then get a woman help you look after him.

Peter

That's what I want – but not yet –

Swallow

Why not?

Peter

Not till I've stopped people's mouths.

(*The hubbub begins again.*)

Swallow (*makes a gesture of dismissal*)

Stand down! Clear the court. Stand down!

Peter

“Stand down” you say. You wash your hands.

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The case goes on in people's minds

The charges that no court has made

Will be shouted at my head.

Then let me speak, let me stand trial,

Bring the accusers into the hall.

Let me thrust into their mouths,

The truth itself, the simple truth.

(He shouts this excitedly against the hubbub chorus.)

Chorus

When women gossip, the result

Is someone doesn't sleep at night.

But when the crowner sits upon it,

Who can dare to fix the guilt?

(Against them all Constable Hobson shouts his:)

Hobson

Clear the court!

(Swallow rises with slow dignity. Everybody stands up while he makes his ceremonial exit. – The crowd then begins to go out. – Peter and Ellen are left alone.)

Peter

The truth – the pity – and the truth.

Ellen

Peter, come away!

Peter

Where the walls themselves

Gossip of inquest.

Ellen

But we'll gossip, too,

And talk and rest.

Peter

While Peeping Toms

Nod as you go.

You'll share the name

Of outlaw, too.

Ellen

Peter, we shall restore your name.

Warmed by the new esteem

That you will find.

Peter

Until the Borough hate

Poisons your mind.

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Ellen

There'll be new shoals to catch:

Life will be kind.

Peter

Ay! only of drowning ghosts:

Time will not forget:

The dead are witness

And fate is blind.

Ellen

Unclouded,

The hot sun

Will spread his rays around.

Both

My voice out of the pain,

Is like a hand

That I can feel and know:

Here is a friend.

(They walk off slowly as the curtain falls.)

Interlude 1

Dawn

ACT I

Scene 1

Street by the sea: Moot Hall exterior with its outside staircase, next door to which is "The Boar". Ned Keene's apothecary's shop is at the street corner. On the other side breakwaters run down to the sea.

It is morning, before high tide, several days later.

Two fishermen are turning the capstan, hauling in their boat. Prolonged cries as the boat is hauled ashore. Women come from mending nets to take the fish baskets from other fishermen who now disembark.

Captain Balstrode sits on the breakwater looking out to sea through his glass. Balstrode is a retired merchant sea-captain, shrewd as a travelled man should be, but with a general sympathy that makes him the favourite rentier of the whole Borough. He chews a plug of tobacco while he watches.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women:

Chorus

Oh hang at open doors the net, the cork,

While squalid sea-dames at their mending work

Welcome the hour when fishing through the tide

The weary husband throws his freight aside.

Fishermen

O cold and wet and driven by the tide,

Beat your tired arms against your tarry side.

Find rest in public bars where fiery gin

Will aid the warmth that languishes within.

(Several fishermen cross to “The Boar” where Auntie stands in the doorway.)

Fisherman

Auntie!

Auntie

Come in gentlemen, come in.

Boles

Her vats flow with poisoned gin!

(Boles the Methodist fisherman stands aside from all this dram drinking.)

Fisherman

Boles has gone Methody!

(Points and laughs.)

Auntie

Aman should have

Hobbies to cheer his private life.

(Fishermen go into “The Boar”. Others remain with their wives at the nets and boats.)

Women’s Chorus

Dabbling on shore half-naked sea-boys crowd,

Swim round a ship, or swing upon a shroud

Or in a boat purloined with paddles play

And grow familiar with the watery way.

(While the second boat is being hauled in, boys are scrambling over the first.)

Balstrode

Shoo, you little barnacles!

Up your anchors, hoist your sails!

(Balstrode chases them from the boat. A more respectable figure now begins, with much hat-raising, his morning progress down the High Street. He makes straight for “The Boar”.)

Fisherman *(touches cap)*

Dr. Crabbe.

Boles *(points as the swing door closes)*

He drinks “Good Health” to all diseases!

Another Fisherman

Storm?

A few Fishermen

Storm?

(They shade their eyes looking out to sea.)

Balstrode *(glass to his eye)*

A long way out. Sea horses.

The wind is holding back the tide.

If it veers round, watch for your lives.

Chorus of Fishers

And if the spring tide eats the land again

Till even the cottages and cobbled walls of fishermen

Are billets for the thievish waves which take

As if in sleep, thieving for thieving's sake –

(The Rector comes down the High Street. He is followed as always by the Borough's second most famous rentier, the widow, Mrs. [Nabob] Sedley. From "The Boar" come the two 'nieces' who give Auntie her nickname. They stand in front of the pub taking the morning sun. Ned Keene, seeing Mrs. Sedley, pops out of his shop door.)

Rector *(right and left)*

Good morning, good morning!

Nieces

Good morning!

Mrs. Sedley

Good morning, dear Rector.

Ned

Had Auntie no nieces we'd never respect her.

Swallow

Good morning! Good morning!

Nieces

Good morning!

Mrs. Sedley

Good morning, your worship, Mr. Swallow.

Auntie *(to Keene)*

You jeer, but if they wink you're eager to follow!

(The Rector and Mrs. Sedley continue towards the church.)

Ned *(shouts across to Auntie)*

I'm coming tonight to see your nieces.

Auntie *(dignified)*

The Boar is at its patron's service.

Boles

God's storm will drown your hot desires!

Balstrode

God stay the tide, or I shall share your fears.

Chorus

For us sea-dwellers, this sea-birth can be

Death to our gardens of fertility.

Yet only such contemptuous springtide can

Tickle the virile impotence of man.

Peter (*calls off*)

Hi! Give us a hand!

(*Chorus stops.*)

Peter

Haul the boat!

Boles (*shouts back*)

Haul it yourself, Grimes!

Peter (*off*)

Hi! Somebody bring the rope!

(*Nobody does. Presently he appears and takes the capstan rope himself and pulls it after him [off] to the boat. Then he returns. The fishermen and women turn their backs on him and slouch away awkwardly.*)

Balstrode (*going to capstan*)

I'll give a hand, the tide is near the turn.

(*Going to capstan.*)

Ned

We'll drown the gossips in a tidal storm.

(*Peter Grimes goes back to the boat. Balstrode and Keene turn the capstan.*)

Auntie (*at the door of the Boar*)

Parsons may moralise and fools decide,

But a good publican takes neither side.

Balstrode

O haul away! The tide is near the turn.

Ned

Man invented morals but tides have none.

Boles (*with arms akimbo watches their labour*)

This lost soul of a fisherman must be

Shunned by respectable society.

Oh let the captains hear, let the scholars learn:

Shielding the sin, they share the people's scorn.

Auntie

I have my business. Let the preachers learn:

Hell may be fiery but the pub won't burn.

Balstrode and Ned

The tide that floods will ebb, the tide, the tide will turn.

(*The boat is hauled up. Grimes appears.*)

Ned

Grimes, you won't need help from now.

I've got a prentice for you.

Balstrode

Aworkhouse brat?

Ned

I called at the workhouse yesterday.
All you do now is fetch the boy.
We'll send the carter with a note.
He'll bring your bargain on his cart.

(shouts)

Jim Hobson, we've a job for you.

Hobson *(enters)*

Cart's full sir. More than I can do.

Ned

Listen, Jim. You'll go to the workhouse
And ask for Mr. Keene his purchase.
Bring him back to Grimes.

Hobson

Cart's full sir. I have no room.

Ned

Hobson, you'll do what there is to be done.

(It is near enough to an argument to attract a crowd. Fishermen and women gather round. Boles takes his chance.)

Boles

Is this a Christian country?
Are pauper children so enslaved
That their bodies go for cash?

Ned

Hobson, will you do your job?

(Ellen Orford has come in. She is a widow of about 40. Her children have died, or grown up and gone away, and in her loneliness she has become the Borough schoolmistress. A hard life has not hardened her. It has made her the more charitable.)

Hobson

I have to go from pub to pub
Picking up parcels, standing about.
My journey back is late at night.
Mister, find some other way
To bring your boy back.

Chorus

He's right. Dirty jobs!

Hobson

Mister, find some other way...

Ellen

Carter! I'll mind your passenger.

Chorus

What! And be Grimes's messenger? You?

Ellen

Whatever you say, I'm not ashamed.
Somebody must do the job.
The carter goes from pub to pub,
Picking up parcels, standing about.
The boy needs comfort late at night,
He needs a welcome on the road,
Coming here strange he'll be afraid.
I'll mind your passenger!

Ned

Mrs. Orford is talking sense.

Chorus

Ellen – you're leading us a dance,
Fetching boys of Peter Grimes,
Because the Borough is afraid
You who help will share the blame.

Ellen

Whatever you say...
Let her among you without fault
Cast the first stone
And let the Pharisees and Sadducees
Give way to none.
But whosoever feels his pride
Humbled so deep
There is no corner he can hide
Even in sleep!
Will have no trouble to find out
How a poor teacher
Widowed and loney finds delight
In shouldering care.
(as she moves up the street)
Mr. Hobson, where's your cart?
I'm ready.

Hobson

Up here, ma'am. I can wait.

(The crowd stands round and watches. Some follow Ellen and Hobson. On the edge of the crowd are other activities.)

Mrs. Sedley *(whispers to Ned)*

Have you my pills?

Ned

I'm sorry, ma'am.

Mrs. Sedley

My sleeping draught?

Ned

The laudanum

Is out of stock, and being brought
By Mr. Carrier Hobson's cart.
He's back tonight.

Mrs. Sedley

Good Lord, good Lord –

Ned

Meet us both at this pub, "The Boar"
Auntie's we call it. It's quite safe.

Mrs. Sedley

I've never been in a pub in my life.

Ned

You'll come?

Mrs. Sedley

All right.

Ned

Tonight?

Mrs. Sedley

All right.

(She moves off up the street.)

Ned

If the old dear takes much more laudanum
She'll land herself one day in Bedlam!

Balstrode *(looks seaward through his glass)*

Look! The storm cone!

The wind veers

In from the sea

At gale force.

Chorus

Look out for squalls!

The wind veers

In from the sea

At gale force.

Make your boat fast!

Shutter your windows!

And bring in all the nets!

All

Now the flood tide

And the sea-horses

Will gallop over

The eroded coast

Flooding, flooding

Our seasonal fears.

Look! The storm cone

The wind veers.

A high tide coming

Will eat the land

A tide no breakwaters can withstand.

Fasten your boats. The springtide's here

With a gale behind.

Chorus

Is there much to fear?

Ned

Only for the goods you're rich in:

It won't drown your conscience, it might flood your kitchen.

Boles (*passionately*)

God has his ways which are not ours:

His high tide swallows up the shores.

Repent!

Ned

And keep your wife upstairs.

Omnes

O Tide that waits for no man

Spare our coasts!

(There is a general exeunt – mostly through the swing doors of “The Boar”. Dr. Crabbe’s hat blows away, is rescued for him by Ned Keene, who bows him into the pub. Finally only Peter and Balstrode are left, Peter gazing seaward, Balstrode hesitating at the pub door.)

Balstrode

And do you prefer the storm

To Auntie's parlour and the rum?

Peter

I live alone. The habit grows.

Balstrode

Grimes, since you're a lonely soul

Born to blocks and spars and ropes

Why not try the wider sea

With merchantman or privateer?

Peter

I am native, rooted here.

Balstrode

Rooted by what?

Peter

By familiar fields,

Marsh and sand,

Ordinary streets,

Prevailing wind.

Balstrode

You'd slip these moorings if you had the mind.

Peter

By the shut faces

Of the Borough clans;

And by the kindness

Of a casual glance.

Balstrode

You'll find no comfort there.
When an urchin's quarrelsome
Brawling at his little games,
Mother stops him with a threat,
"You'll be sold to Peter Grimes!"

Peter

Selling me new apprentices,
Children taught to be ashamed
Of the legend on their faces –
"You've been sold to Peter Grimes!"

Balstrode

Then the Crowner sits to
Hint, but not to mention crimes,
And publishes an open verdict
Whispered about this "Peter Grimes".
Your boy was workhouse starved –
Maybe you're not to blame he died.

Peter

Picture what that day was like
That evil day.
We strained into the wind
Heavily laden,
We plunged into the wave's
Shuddering challenge
Then the sea rose to a storm
Over the gunwales,
And the boy's silent reproach
Turned to illness.
Then home
Among fishing nets
Alone, alone, alone
With a childish death!

Balstrode

This storm is useful. You can speak your mind
And never mind the Borough commentary.
There is more grandeur in a gale of wind
To free confession, set a conscience free.

Peter

They listen to money
These Borough gossips
I have my visions
Fiery visions.
They call me dreamer
They scoff at my dreams
And my ambition.
But I know a way
To answer the Borough
I'll win them over.

Balstrode

With the new prentice?

Peter

We'll sail together.

These Borough gossips

Listen to money

Only to money:

I'll fish the sea dry,

Sell the good catches—

That wealthy merchant

Grimes will set up

Household and shop

You will all see it!

I'll marry Ellen!

Balstrode

Man – go and ask her

Without your booty,

She'll have you now.

Peter

No – not for pity!...

Balstrode

Then the old tragedy

Is in store:

New start with new prentice

Just as before.

Peter

What Peter Grimes decides

Is his affair.

Balstrode

You fool, man, fool!

(The wind has risen. Balstrode is shouting above it. Peter faces him angrily.)

Peter

Are you my conscience?

Balstrode

Might as well

Try shout the wind down as to tell

The obvious truth.

Peter

Take your advice –

Put it where your money is.

Balstrode

The storm is here. O come away.

Peter

The storm is here and I shall stay.

(The storm is rising. Auntie comes out of "The Boar" to fasten the shutters, in front of

the windows. – Balstrode goes to help her. – He looks back towards Peter, then goes into the pub.)

Peter

What harbour shelters peace?
Away from tidal waves, away from storm
What harbour can embrace
Terrors and tragedies?
With her there'll be no quarrels,
With her the mood will stay,
A harbour evermore
Where night is turned to day.

(The wind rises. He stands a moment as if leaning against the wind. – Curtain.)

Interlude II

Storm

Scene 2

Interior of “The Boar”, typical main room of a country pub. No bar. Upright settles, tables, log fire. When the curtain rises Auntie is admitting Mrs. Sedley. The gale has risen to hurricane force and Auntie holds the door with difficulty against the wind which rattles the windows and howls in the chimney. They both push the door closed.

Auntie

Past time to close!

Mrs. Sedley

He said half-past ten.

Auntie

Who?

Mrs. Sedley

Mr. Keene.

Auntie

Him and his women!

Mrs. Sedley

You referring to me?

Auntie

Not at all, not at all.

What do you want?

Mrs. Sedley

Room from the storm.

Auntie

That is the sort of weak politeness
Makes a publican lose her clients.
Keep in the corner out of sight.

(Balstrode and a Fisherman enter. They struggle with the door.)

Balstrode

Phew, that's a bitch of a gale all right.

Auntie *(nods her head towards Mrs. Sedley)*

Sh-h-h.

Balstrode

Sorry. I didn't see you, missis.

You'll give the regulars a surprise.

Auntie

She's meeting Ned.

Balstrode

Which Ned?

Auntie

The quack.

He's looking after her heart attack.

Balstrode

Bring us a pint.

Auntie

It's closing time.

Balstrode

You fearful old female – why should *you* mind?

Auntie

The storm!

(Bob Boles and other fishermen enter. – The wind howls through the door and again there is difficulty in closing it.)

Boles

Did you hear the tide

Has broken over the Northern Road?

(He leaves the door open too long with disastrous consequences. A sudden gust howls through the door, the shutters of the window fly open, a plane blows in.)

Balstrode *(shouts)*

Get those shutters.

Auntie *(screams)*

O-o-o-o-o!

Balstrode

You fearful old female, why do you

Leave your windows naked?

Auntie

O-o-o-o-o!

Balstrode

Better strip a niece or two

And clamp your shutters!

(The two 'nieces' run in. They are young, pretty enough though a little worn, conscious that they are the chief attractions of "The Boar". At the moment they are in mild hysterics, having run downstairs in their night clothes, though with their unusual instinct for precaution they have found time to don each a wrap. It is not clear whether they are sisters, friends or simply colleagues: but they behave like twins, as though each has only half a personality and they cling together always to sustain their self-esteem.)

Nieces

Oo! Oo!

It's blown our bedroom windows in.

Oo! we'll all be drowned.

Balstrode

Perhaps in gin.

Nieces

I wouldn't mind if it didn't howl.

It gets on my nerves.

Balstrode

D'you think we

Should stop our storm for such as you –

Coming all over palpitations!

"Oo! Oo!"

Auntie, get some new relations.

Auntie *(takes it ill)*

Loud man, I never did have time

For the kind of creature who spits in his wine.

A joke's a joke and fun is fun,

But say your grace and be polite for all that we have done.

Nieces

For his peace of mind.

Mrs. Sedley

This is no place for me!

Auntie

Loud man, you're glad enough to be

Playing your cards in our company.

A joke's a joke and fun is fun,

But say your grace and be polite for all that we have done.

Nieces

For his peace of mind.

Mrs. Sedley

This is no place for me!

Auntie

Loud man –!

(Some more fishermen and women come in. Usual struggle with the door.)

Fisherman

There's been a landslide up the coast.

Boles *(rising unsteadily)*

I'm drunk. Drunk!

Balstrode

You're a Methody wastrel.

Boles *(staggers to one of the nieces)*

Is this a niece of yours?

Auntie

That's so.

Boles

Who's her father?

Auntie

Who wants to know?

Boles

I want to pay my best respects

To the beauty and misery of her sex.

Balstrode

Old Methody, you'd better tune

You piety to another hymn.

Boles

I want her!

Balstrode

Sh-h-h.

Auntie *(cold)*

Turn that man out.

Balstrode

He's the local preacher.

He's lost the way of carrying liquor.

He means no harm.

Boles

No, I mean love!

Balstrode

Come on, boy!

(Boles hits him. Mrs. Sedley screams. – Balstrode quietly overpowers Boles and sits him in a chair.)

Balstrode

We live and let live,

And look we keep our hands to ourselves.

(Boles struggles to his feet. – Balstrode sits him down again, laying the law down.)

Balstrode

Pub conversation should depend

On this eternal moral;

So long as satire don't descend
To fisticuff or quarrel.
We live and let live, and look
We keep our hands to ourselves.

(And while Boles is being forced into his chair again, the bystanders comment:)

Chorus

We live and let live, and look
We keep our hands to ourselves.

Balstrode

We sit and drink the evening through
Not deigning to devote a
Thought to the daily cud we chew
But buying drinks by rota.

All

We live and let live, and look
We keep our hands to ourselves.

(Door opens. – The struggle with the wind is worse than before as Ned Keene gets through.)

Ned

Have you heard the cliff is down
Up by Grimes's hut?

Auntie

Where is he?

Mrs. Sedley

Thank God you've come!

Ned

You won't blow away.

Mrs. Sedley

The carter's over half an hour late!

Balstrode

He'll be later still: the road's under flood.

Mrs. Sedley

I can't stay longer. I refuse.

Ned

You'll have to stay if you want your pills.

Mrs. Sedley

With drunken females and in brawls!

Ned

They're Auntie's nieces, that's what they are,
And better than you for kissing, ma.
Mind that door!

All

Mind that door!

(The door opens again. Peter Grimes has come in. Unlike the rest he wears no oilskins.)

His hair looks wild. He advances into the room, shaking off the raindrops from his hair. Mrs. Sedley faints. Ned Keene catches her as she falls.)

Ned

Get the brandy, aunt.

Auntie

Who'll pay?

Ned

Her. I'll charge her for it.

(As Peter moves forward the others shrink back.)

Chorus

Talk of the devil and there he is

A devil he *is*, and a devil he *is*.

Grimes is waiting his apprentice.

Ned

This widow's as strong as any two

Fishermen I have met.

Everybody's very quiet!

(No-one answers. Silence is broken by Peter, as if thinking aloud.)

Peter

Now the great Bear and Pleiades

where earth moves

Are drawing up the clouds

of human grief

Breathing solemnity in the deep night.

Who can decipher

In storm or starlight

The written character

of a friendly fate –

As the sky turns, the world for us to change?

But if the horoscope's

bewildering

Like a flashing turmoil

of a shoal of herring,

Who can turn skies back and begin again?

(Silence again. Then muttering in undertones.)

Chorus

He's mad or drunk.

Why's that man here?

Nieces

His song alone would sour the beer.

Chorus

His temper's up.
O chuck him out.

Nieces

I wouldn't mind if he didn't howl.

Chorus

He looks as though he's nearly drowned.

Boles (*staggers up to Grimes*)

You've sold your soul, Grimes.

Balstrode

Come away.

Boles

Satan's got no hold on me.

Balstrode

Leave him alone, you drunkard.

(Goes to get hold of Boles.)

Boles

I'll hold the gospel light before
The cataract that blinds his eyes.

Peter (*as the drunk stumbles up to him*)

Get out.

(Grimes thrusts Boles aside roughly and turns away.)

Boles

His exercise
Is not with men but killing boys.

*(Boles picks up a bottle and is about to bring it down on Grimes's head when Balstrode
knocks it out of his hand and it crashes in fragments on the floor.)*

Auntie

For God's sake, help me keep the peace.
D'you want me up at the next Assize?

Balstrode

For peace sake, someone start a song.

(Keene starts a round.)

Auntie

That's right, Ned!

(The round is:)

All

Old Joe has gone fishing and
Young Joe has gone fishing and

You Know has gone fishing and
Found them a shoal.
Pull them in handfuls,
And in canfuls,
And in panfuls
Bring them in sweetly,
Gut them completely,
Pack them up neatly,
Sell them discretely,
Oh, haul a-way.

(Peter comes into the round: the others stop.)

Peter

When I had gone fishing
When he had gone fishing
When You Know'd gone fishing
We found us Davy Jones.
Bring him in with horror!
Bring him in with terror!
And bring him in with sorrow!
Oh, haul a-way.

(This breaks the round, but the others recover in a repeat. – At the climax of the round the door opens to admit Ellen Orford, the boy and the carrier. All three are soaking, muddy and bedraggled.)

Hobson

The bridge is down, we half swam over.

Ned

And your cart? Is it seaworthy?

(The women go to Ellen and the boy. Auntie fusses over them. Boles reproaches.)

Ellen

We're chilled to the bone.

Boles *(to Ellen)*

Serves you right, woman.

Auntie

My dear

There's brandy and hot water to spare.

Nieces

Let's look at the boy.

Ellen *(rising)*

Let him be.

Nieces *(admiring)*

Nice sweet thing.

Ellen *(protecting him)*

Not for such as you.

Peter

Let's go. You ready?

Auntie

Let them warm up

They've been half drowned.

Peter

Time to get off.

Auntie

Your hut's washed away.

Peter

Only the cliff.

Young prentice, come.

(The Boy hesitates, Ellen leads him to Peter.)

Ellen

Goodbye, my dear, God bless you.

Peter will take you home.

Omnes

Home? Do you call that home?

(Peter takes the boy out the door into the howling storm. – Curtain.)

ACT II

Interlude III

Sunday Morning

Scene 1

Scene as in Act One. The Street, some weeks later.

A fine sunny morning with church bells ringing. Some of the villagers are standing outside the church door. The street is deserted till Ellen and Grimes's new boy, John, come in against the stream of villagers crossing towards the church. Ellen is carrying a workbasket. She sits down between a boat and a breakwater and takes her knitting from the basket. One or two late-comers cross and hurry into the church.

Ellen

Glitter of waves

And glitter of sunlight

Bid us rejoice

And lift our hearts on high.

Man alone

Has a soul to save,

And goes to church

To worship on a Sunday.
(The organ starts a voluntary in church, off.)
Shall we not go to church this Sunday
But do our knitting by the sea?
I'll do the work, you talk.

(Hymn starts in church.)

Chorus *(off)*

Now that the daylight fills the sky
We lift our hearts to God on high
That he in all we do or say
Would keep us free from harm to-day.

Ellen

Nothing to tell me,
Nothing to say? Then shall I
Tell you what your life was like?
See if I'm right. I think
You liked your workhouse with its grave
Empty look. Perhaps you weren't
So unhappy in your loneliness?
When first I started teaching
The life at school to me seemed bleak and empty
But soon I found a way of knowing children –
Found the woes of little people
Hurt more, but are more simple.

(She goes on with her work. John says nothing.)

Chorus

May he restrain our tongues from strife
And shield from anger's din our life
And guard with watchful care our eyes
From earth's absorbing vanities.

Ellen

John, you may have heard the story
Of the prentice Peter had before.

Chorus

So we, when this day's work is done
And shades of night return once more.
...Amen.

Ellen

But when you came, I
Said, Now this is where we
Make a new start. Every day
I pray it may be so.

(Morning prayer begins and the Rector's voice is heard from the church.)

Rector

Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as many as are here present, to accompany me with a pure heart and humble voice, saying after me, Almighty...

Congregation

Almighty and most merciful Father; We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.

(The church service continues through the ensuing scene.)

Ellen

There's a tear in your coat. Was that done
Before you came?
Badly torn.

(Mrs. Sedley stops to listen on her way to church.)

That was done recently.

Take your hand away.

Your neck, is it? John, what

Are you trying to hide?

Rector and Choir *(in church)*

O Lord, open Thou our lips;

And our mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

O God make speed to save us;

O Lord make haste to help us.

(Ellen undoes the neck of the boy's shirt.)

Ellen

A bruise.

Well...it's begun.

Rector and Choir

Glory be to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning is now...

Ellen

Child, you're not too young to know

Where roots of sorrow are

Innocent you've learned how near

Life is to torture.

Rector and Choir

Praise ye the Lord;

The Lord's name be praised.

Ellen

Let this be a holiday,

Full of peace and quietness

While the treason of the waves

Glitters like love.

Storm and all its terrors are

Nothing to the heart's despair.
After the storm will come a sleep
Like oceans deep.

Choir

O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord
O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord
O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord,
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

(Peter Grimes comes in excitedly from the harbour.)

Choir

O ye Light and Darkness, bless ye the Lord
O ye Nights and Days, bless ye the Lord
O ye Lightnings and Clouds, bless ye the Lord,
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Peter

Come boy.

Ellen

Peter – what for?

Choir

O ye Wells, bless ye the Lord
O ye Seas and Floods, bless the Lord,
O ye Whales and all that move in the waters
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Peter

I've seen a shoal. I need his help.

Ellen

But if there were then all the boats
Would fast be launching.

Peter

I can see
The shoals to which the rest are blind.

Choir

O all ye Fowls of the Air, bless ye the Lord
O all ye Beasts and Cattle, bless ye the Lord
O ye Children of Men, bless ye the Lord
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Ellen

This is a Sunday, his day of rest.

Peter

This is whatever day I say it is!
Come boy!

Ellen

You and John have fished all week
Night and day without a break
Painting boat, mending nets, cleaning fish,
Now let him rest.

Peter

Come boy!

Ellen

But your bargain...

Peter

My bargain?

Ellen

His weekly rest.

Peter

He works for me, leave him alone, he's mine.

Ellen

Hush, Peter, Hush!

Choir

O ye Servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.

O ye holy and humble, bless ye the Lord

Ananias, Azarias and Misael, bless ye the Lord

Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be,

World without end. Amen.

(The sounds dies down. – In church the lesson is being read. – Ellen speaks to Peter, away from the boy.)

Ellen

This unrelenting work

This grey, unresting industry,

What aim, what future, what peace

Will your hard profits buy?

Peter

Buy us a home, buy us respect

And buy us freedom from pain

Of grinning at gossip's tales.

Believe in me, we shall be free!

Choir

I believe in God the Father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,

Who was conceived...

(Fades into background.)

Ellen

Peter, tell me one thing, where

The youngster got that ugly bruise?

Peter

Out of the hurly burly!

Ellen

O your ways

Are hard and rough beyond his days.
Peter, were we right in what we planned
To do? Were we right, were we right?

Peter (*roughly*)

Take away your hand.

(*then quietly*)

My only hope depends on you.

If you – take it away – what's left?

(*Ellen moves unhappily away from him.*)

Ellen

Were we mistaken when we schemed

To solve your life by lonely toil?

Peter (*in anger*)

Wrong to plan?

Wrong to try?

Wrong to live?

Right to die?

Ellen

Were we mistaken when we dreamed

That we'd come through and all be well?

Peter

Wrong to struggle?

Wrong to hope?

Then the Borough's

Right again?

Ellen

Peter! You cannot buy your peace

You'll never stop the gossips' talk

With all the fish from out the sea.

We were mistaken to have dreamed...

Peter! We've failed. We've failed.

(*He cries out as if in agony. Then strikes her. The basket falls.*)

Choir

Amen.

Peter

So be it! – And God have mercy upon me!

(*The boy runs from him. Peter follows. Ellen watches. Then goes out the other way. – Behind closed doors and half-open windows neighbours have been watching. Three now emerge. First Auntie, then Ned Keene, finally Boles.*)

Auntie

Fool to let it come to this!

Wasting pity, squandering tears.

Ned

See the glitter in his eyes!
Grimes is at his exercise.

Boles

What he fears is that the Lord
Follows with a flaming sword.

Auntie

You see all through crazy eyes.

All

Grimes is at his exercise.

Boles

Where's the pastor of this flock?
Where's the guardian shepherd's hook?

All

Parson, lawyer, all at prayers.

(The service is over and people gradually collect outside the church door.)

Ned, Boles and Auntie

Now the church parade begins,
Fresh beginning for fresh sins.
Ogling with a pious gaze
Each one's at his exercise.

(Doctor Crabbe comes first.)

Auntie

Doctor!

Ned

Leave him out of it.

Mrs. Sedley *(coming from church)*

What is it?

Ned

Private business.

Mrs. Sedley

I heard two voices during psalms
One was Grimes, and one more calm.

Boles

While you worshipped idols there
The Devil had his Sabbath here.

Mrs. Sedley

Maltreating that poor boy again.

Balstrode

Grimes is weatherwise and skilled
In the practice of his trade.

Let him be, let us forget

What slander can invent.

Chorus

What is it?

Auntie, Boles and Ned

What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

(As people come out two by two, they circulate the village green singing their couplets as they reach the centre. First come Swallow and a fellow lawyer.)

Chorus

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

Fellow Lawyer

Dullards build their self-esteem
By inventing cruelties.

Swallow

Even so, the law restrains
Too impetuous enterprise.

Fisherwoman

Fishing is a lonely trade
Single men have much to bear.

1st and 2nd Nieces

If a man's work cannot be made
Decent, let him stay ashore.

Chorus *(over all)*

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

(Balstrode pauses by Ned as he walks round.)

Rector

My flock – oh what a weight is this
My burden pastoral.

Mrs. Sedley

But what a dangerous faith is this
That gives souls equality!

Balstrode

When the Borough gossip starts
Somebody will suffer.

Chorus

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

(During the hubbud Boles climbs a little way up the steps of the Moot Hall.)

Boles

People –...No! I will speak...!
This thing concerns you all.

Chorus *(crowding round Boles)*

Whoever's guilty gets the rap
The Borough keeps its standards up.

Balstrode

Tub-thumping.

Boles

This prentice system's
Uncivilised and unchristian.

Balstrode

Something of the sort befits
Brats conceived outside the sheets.

Boles

Where's the parson in his black?
Is he here or is he not?
To guide a sinful straying flock?

Chorus

Where's the parson?

Rector

Is it my business?

Boles

Your business to ignore
Growing at your door
Evils, like your fancy flowers?

Chorus

Evils!

Rector

Calm now! Tell me what it is.

(Ellen comes in. She is met by Auntie who has picked up Ellen's abandoned basket and its contents.)

Auntie

Ellen dear, see I've gathered
All your things. Come rest inside.

Boles and Chorus

She can tell you, Ellen Orford.
She helped him in his cruel games.

Rector *(holding his hand up for silence)*

Ellen please.

Ellen

What am I to do?

Boles and Chorus

Speak out in the name of the Lord.

Ellen

We planned that their lives should
Have a new start,
That I, as a friend could
Make the plan work
By bringing comfort where
Their lives were stark.

Rector

You planned to be worldly-wise
But your souls were dark.

Ellen

We planned this time to
Care for the boy;
To save him from danger
And hardship sore, and
Mending his clothes and giving him
Regular meals.

Mrs. Sedley

O little care you for the prentice
Or his welfare!

Boles

Call it danger, call it harship
Or plain murder!

Ned

But thanks to flinty hearts
Even quacks can make a profit!

Nieces

Perhaps his clothes you mended
But you work his bones bare!

Auntie

You meant just to be kind
And avert fear!

Balstrode

You interfering gossips, this
Is not your business!

Hobson

Pity the boy!

Swallow

You planned to heal sick souls
With bodily care.

Ellen

O pity those who try to bring
A shadowed life into the sun.

Ellen, Auntie and Balstrode

O Lord, hard hearts!

Chorus

Who lets us down must take the rap
The Borough keeps its standards up.

Omnes (*without Ellen, Auntie and Balstrode*)

Tried to be kind!

Murder!

Tried to be kind and to help!

Murder!

Rector

Swallow – shall we go and see Grimes in his hut?

Swallow

Popular feeling's rising.

Rector

Balstrode, I'd like you to come.

Balstrode

I warn you we shall waste our time.

Rector

I'd like your presence just the same.

Mrs. Sedley

Little do the suspects know,
I've the evidence. I've a clue.

Chorus

Now we will find out the worst.

Swallow (*points to the nieces who join the crowd*)

No ragtail no bobtail if you please.

Boles (*pushes them away*)

Back to the gutter – you keep out of this.

Rector

Only the men, the women stay.

Swallow

Carter Hobson, fetch the drum.

Summon the Borough to Grimes's hut.

Chorus

To Grimes's hut!

To Grimes's hut!

(Hobson sounds his drum and the men line up behind Swallow, the Rector and Mrs. Sedley. – Balstrode lags behind. Behind them come the rest of the crowd.)

Chorus

Now is gossip put on trial,
Now the rumours either fail
Or are shouted in the wind
Sweeping furious through the land.
Now the liars shiver, for
Now if they've cheated we shall know:
We shall strike and strike to kill
At the slander or the sin.
Now the whisperers stand out
Now confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife:
What's done now is done for life.

(The crowd has gone – Auntie, nieces and Ellen remain.)

Nieces

From the gutter, why should we
Trouble at their ribaldries?

Auntie

And shall we be ashamed because
We comfort men from ugliness?

All

Do we smile or do we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

Auntie

When in storm they shelter here
And we soothe their fears away.

Nieces

We know they'll whistle their good-byes
Next fine day and put to sea.

Ellen

On the manly calendar
We only mark heroic days.

All

Do we smile or do we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

Ellen

They are children when they weep
We are mothers when they strive
Schooling our own hearts to keep
The bitter treasure of their love.

All

Do we smile or do we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

(Curtain.)

Interlude IV

Passacaglia

Scene 2

Grimes's hut is an upturned boat. It is on the whole shipshape, though bare and forbidding. Ropes coiled, nets, kegs and casks furnish the place. It is lighted by a skylight. There are two doors, one (back center) opens on the cliff, the other, downstage, opens on the road. The boy staggers into the room as if thrust from behind. Peter follows, in a towering rage. He pulls down the boy's fishing clothes which were neatly stacked on a shelf.

Peter

Go there!

Here's your sea boots. Take those bright
And fancy buckles off your feet.

(He throws the sea boots down in front of the boy.)

There's your oilskin and sou'wester.

Stir your pins, we must get ready!

There's the jersey that she knitted,

With the anchor that she patterned.

(He throws the clothes to the boy. They fall on the floor around him. The boy is crying silently. Peter shakes his shoulder.)

Peter

I'll tear the collar off your neck.

Steady. Don't take fright, boy. Stop.

(Peter opens the cliff-side door and looks out.)

Look. Now is our chance!

The whole sea's boiling. Get the nets.

Come, boy!

They listen to money

These Borough gossips,

Listen to money,

Only to money.

I'll fish the sea dry,

Flood the market.

Now is our chance to get a good catch

Get money to choke

Down rumour's throat.

I will set up

With house and home and shop.

I'll marry Ellen,

I'll...

(He turns to see the boy still sitting on the rope coil, weeping. He tears off his coat and throws the jersey at him.)

Coat off! Jersey on! My boy

We're going to sea!

(He gives the boy a shove, which knocks him over;

he lies sobbing miserably. – Peter changes tone and breaks into another song.)

In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home

Warm in my heart and in a golden calm

Where there'll be no more fear and no more storm.

And she will soon forget her schoolhouse ways

Forget the labour of those weary days

Wrapped round in kindness like September haze.

The learned at their books have no more store

Of wisdom than we'd close behind our door.

Compared with us the rich man would be poor.

I've seen in stars the life that we might share:

Fruit in the garden, children by the shore,

A fair white doorstep, and a woman's care.

But dreaming builds what dreaming can disown.

Dead fingers stretch themselves to tear it down.

I hear those voices that will not be drowned.

Calling, there is no stone

In earth's thickness to make a home,

That you can build with and remain alone.

(Hobson's drum, at the head of the Borough procession, can be heard very distantly

coming towards the hut. Peter doesn't notice.)

Sometimes I see that boy here in this hut.

He's there now, I can see him, he is there!

His eyes are on me as they were that evil day.

Stop moaning, boy. Water?

There's no more water. You had the last yesterday.

You'll soon be home

In harbour calm and deep.

(In the distance can be heard the song of the neighbours coming up the hill.)

Chorus *(off)*

Now! Now! ...

(Peter rises, goes quickly to the street door, and looks out.)

Peter

There's an odd procession here.

Parson and Swallow coming near.

(Suddenly he turns on the boy, who doesn't move.)

Wait! You've been talking.

You and that bitch were gossiping.

What lies have you been telling?

The Borough's climbing up the road.

To get me. Me! O I'm not scared

I'll send them off with a flea in their ear.

I'll show them. Grimes ahoy!

Chorus *(off)*

...Or are shouted in the wind

Sweeping furious through the land.

Peter

You sit there watching me

And you're the cause of everything

Your eyes, like his are watching me

With an idiot's drooling gaze.

Will you move

Or must I make you dance?

(The boy jumps up and begins dragging nets and other tackle through the cliff door.)

Chorus *(off)*

Now confronted by the fact.

Bring the branding iron and knife:

What's done now is done for life.

Peter

Step boldly. For here's the way we go to sea

Down the cliff to find that shoal

That's boiling in the sea.

Careful, or you'll break your neck

Down the cliff-side to the deck.

(Rope in hand he drives the boy towards the cliff door.)

Chorus *(off)*

Now the liars shiver, for

Now if they've cheated we shall know:

We shall strike and strike to kill
At the slander or the sin.

Peter

I'll pitch the stuff down. Come on!
(He pitches ropes and nets.)

Now

Shut your eyes and down you go.

(There is a knocking at the other door. Peter turns towards it, then retreats. Meanwhile the boy climbs out. When Peter is between the two doors the boy screams and falls out of sight. Peter runs to the cliff door, feels for his grip and then swings quickly after him. – The cliff-side door is open. The street door still resounds with the Rector's knock. Then it opens and the Rector puts his head round the door.)

Rector

Peter Grimes! Nobody here?

Swallow

What about the other door?
(They go and look out. Silence for a moment.)

Rector

Was this a recent landslide?

Swallow

Yes.

Rector

It makes almost a precipice.

How deep?

Swallow

Say forty feet.

Rector

Dangerous to leave the door open.

Ned

He used to keep his boat down there.

Maybe they've both gone fishing.

Rector

Yet

His hut is reasonably kept.

Here's order. Here's skill.

(Swallow draws the moral.)

Swallow

The whole affair gives Borough talk its – shall

I say quietus? Here we come pell-mell,

Expecting to find out – we know not what.

But all we find is a neat and empty hut.

Gentlemen, take this to your wives:

Less interference in our private lives.

Rector

There's no point certainly in staying here,

And will the last to go please to close the door.

(They go out – all save Balstrode who hesitates, looks round the hut, sees the boy's Sunday clothes lying around, examines them, then goes to the path door to shut it. He

goes up to the cliff-side door, looks out, and hurriedly climbs down the way Peter and the boy went. – Curtain.)

ACT III

Interlude V

Moonlight

Scene 1

Scene as in Act One, a few days later.

The time is summer evening. One of the season's subscription dances is taking place in the Moot Hall which is brightly lit and from which we can hear the band playing a polka, and the rhythm of the dancers' feet. "The Boar" too is brightly lit and, as the dance goes on, there will be a regular passage – of the males at any rate – from the Moot Hall to the Inn.

The stage is empty when the curtain rises but presently there is a little squeal and one of the nieces scampers down the exterior staircase of the Moot Hall closely followed by Swallow. They haven't got very far before the other niece appears at the top of the Moot Hall stairs.

A Barn Dance is being played in the Moot Hall.

Swallow *(to Niece I)*

Assign your prettiness to me,
I'll seal the deed and take no fee,
My signature, your graceful mark
Are witnessed by the abetting dark.

Both Nieces

Together we are safe
As any wedded wife.
For safety in number lies
Aman is always lighter
His conversation brighter
Provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes.

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me
I'll call it real property:
Your sister shan't insist upon
Her stay of execution.

Nieces

Save us from lonely men,
They're like a broody hen
With habits but with no ideas;
But given choice of pleasures
They show their coloured feathers
Provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes.

Swallow

I shall take steps to change her mind;
She has first option on my love.
If my appeal should be ignored
I'll take it to the House of Lords.

Nieces

O pairing's all to blame
For awkwardness and shame,
And all these manly sighs and tears
Which wouldn't be expended
If people condescended
Always to have their tête-à-tête's in threes.

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me,
We'll make an absolute decree
Of quiet enjoyment which you'll bless
By sending sister somewhere else.

Niece 2

Ned Keene is chasing me, gives me no peace.

Swallow

He went to the Boar to have a glass
Sister and I will join him there.
If you don't want Ned you'd better stay here.
(He opens the Inn door. – Niece is about to enter when –)

Niece 1

They're all watching. I must wait
Till Auntie's turned her back.
(She escapes to join her sister and leaves Swallow holding the door open.)

Swallow

Bah!
(He goes into "The Boar" alone. – The Barn Dance stops – applause. – The sisters are half way up stairs when Ned Keene comes out of the Moot Hall at the top of the stairs. They fly, giggling, and hide behind of the boats on the shore. [Three boats can be seen as at the end of Act One].)

Ned *(calls after them)*

Ahoy.
(He is half way to their hiding place when a peremptory voice stops him in mid career. – Mrs. Sedley is at the top of the Moot Hall stairs. – A slow Waltz starts from the Moot Hall.)

Mrs. Sedley

Mr. Keene! Can you spare a moment?
I've something to say that's more than urgent,

About Peter Grimes and that boy.
(*She is downstairs by now and has him buttonholed.*)
Neither of them was seen yesterday.
It's more than suspicion now, it's fact.
The boy's disappeared.

Ned

Do you expect me to act
Like a Bow Street runner or a constable?

Mrs. Sedley

At least you can trouble to hear what
I've got to say.
For two days I've kept my eyes open
For two days I've said nothing;
Only watched and taken notes
Pieced clue to clue and bit by bit
Reconstructed all the crime.
Everything points to Peter Grimes:
He is the murderer.

Ned

Old woman, you're far too ready
To yell blue murder.
If people poke their noses into others' business –
No! They won't get me to help them –
They'll find there's merry hell to pay!
You just tell me where's the body?

Mrs. Sedley

In the sea the prentice lies
Whom nobody has seen for days.
Murder most foul it is
Eerie I find it
My skin's a prickly heat
Blood cold behind it!
In midnight's loneliness
And thrilling quiet
The history I trace
The stifling secret.
Murder most foul it is,
And I'll declare it.

Ned (*who is getting bored, thirsty and angry*)

Are you mad old woman
Or is it too much laudanum?

Mrs. Sedley (*like a cross-examining counsel*)

Has Peter Grimes been seen?

Ned

He's away.

Mrs. Sedley

And the boy?

Ned

They're fishing, likely.

Mrs. Sedley

Has his boat been seen?

Ned

Why should it?

Mrs. Sedley

His hut's abandoned.

Ned

I'm dry. Good night.

(The Waltz stops. – He breaks away from her grasp, goes into “The Boar” and bangs the door after him. – Dr. Crabbe emerges from “The Boar”. – Mrs. Sedley retires into the shadow of the boats. – A Hornpipe starts from the Moot Hall. The Rector and other burgesses come down the Moot Hall stairs.)

A Burgess

Come along, Doctor –

(indicates “The Boar”)

We're not wanted here, we oldsters.

Burgesses

Good night – it's time for bed.

Good night! Good night! Good night,

good people, good night!

Rector

I looked in a moment, the company's gay,

With pretty young women and youths on the spree;

So parched like my roses, but now the sun's down

I'll water my roses and leave you the wine.

Burgesses

Good night! Good night! Good night,

good people, good night!

Rector

Good night, Dr. Crabbe, all good friends good night.

Don't let the ladies keep company too late.

My love to the maidens, wish luck to the men!

I'll water my roses and leave you the wine.

(The Rector, Dr. Crabbe and the burgesses gradually disperse to their houses.)

Burgesses

Good night! Good night! Good night,

good people, good night!

(The Hornpipe fades out.)

Mrs. Sedley *(still in the boat shadow, goes on with her brooding)*

Crime, which my hobby is

Sweetens my thinking;

Men who can breach the peace

And kill convention –

So many guilty ghosts

With stealthy body

Trouble my midnight thoughts....

(Ellen and Balstrode come up slowly from the beach. It is clear they have been in earnest talk. As they approach Balstrode shines his lantern on the name of the nearest boat: "The Boy Billy". – Mrs. Sedley doesn't show herself.)

Ellen

Is the boat in?

Balstrode

Yes! For more than an hour.

Peter seems to have disappeared

Not in his boat, not in his hut.

Ellen *(holds out the boy's jersey)*

This I found

Down by the tide-mark.

(It is getting dark. To see the garment properly Balstrode holds it to his lantern.)

Balstrode

The boy's?

Ellen

My broidered anchor on the chest.

(meditative)

Embroidery in childhood was

A luxury of idleness.

A coil of silken thread giving

Dreams of a silk and satin life.

Now my broiderery affords

The clue whose meaning we avoid.

My hand remembered its old skill –

These stitches tell a curious tale.

I remember I was brooding

On the fantasies of children

And dreamt that only by wishing I

Could bring some silk into their lives.

Now my broiderery affords

The clue whose meaning we avoid.

(The jersey is wet. Balstrode wrings the water out.)

Balstrode

We'll find him, maybe give a hand.

Ellen

We have no power to help him now.

Balstrode

We have the power. We have the power.

In the black moment

When your friend suffers

Unearthly torment

We cannot turn our backs.

When horror breaks one heart

All hearts are broken.

Ellen and Balstrode

We shall be there with him.

Balstrode

Nothing to do but wait
Since the solution
Is beyond life – beyond
Dissolution.

(They go out together. – The dance music starts up again. When they have gone Mrs. Sedley goes quickly to the Inn door.)

Mrs. Sedley *(calling through the door)*

Mr. Swallow, Mr. Swallow.
I want the lawyer Swallow.

Auntie *(coming to the door)*

What do you want?

Mrs. Sedley

I want the lawyer Swallow.

Auntie

He's busy.

Mrs. Sedley

Fetch him please, this is official.
Business about the Borough criminal.
Please do as I tell you.

Auntie

My customers come here for peace,
For quiet, away from you
And all such nuisances.

Mrs. Sedley

This is an insult!

Auntie

As long as I am here you'll find
That I always speak my mind.

Mrs. Sedley

I'll have you know your place,
You baggage!

Auntie

My customers come here for peace,
They take their drink, they take their ease!

Swallow *(coming out)*

What's the matter?

Tell me what's the matter?

Auntie *(goes in and bangs door)*

Good night!

Mrs. Sedley *(points dramatically)*

Look!

Swallow

I'm short-sighted you know.

Mrs. Sedley

It's Grimes's boat, back at last!

Swallow

That's different. Hey.

(Shouts into "The Boar".)

Is Hobson there?

Hobson *(appearing)*

Ay, Ay, sir.

Mrs. Sedley

Good, now things are moving; and about time too!

Swallow

You're constable of the Borough,

Carter Hobson.

Hobson

Ay, Ay, sir.

Swallow

As the mayor,

I ask you to find Peter Grimes.

Take whatever help you need.

Hobson

Now what I claims

Is he's out at sea.

Swallow *(points)*

But here's his boat.

Hobson

Oh! We'll send a posse to his hut.

Swallow

If he's not there, you'll search the shore,

The marsh, the fields, the streets, the Borough.

Hobson

Ay, Ay, sir.

(He goes into "The Boar" hailing.)

Hey there! Come out and help!

Grimes is around! Come on! Come on!

Mrs. Sedley

Crime – that's my hobby – is

By cities hoarded.

Rarely are country minds

Lifted to murder

The noblest of the crimes

Which are my study.

And now the crime is here

And I am ready!

(Hobson comes out with Boles and other fishermen. – As the dance band fades out, the people crowd out of the Moot Hall and "The Boar" and congregate on the green.)

Chorus

Who holds himself apart

Lets his pride rise.

Him who despises us

We'll destroy.

And cruelty becomes

His enterprise.

Him who despises us

We'll destroy.

(With two nieces, Mrs. Sedley, Boles, Keene, Swallow and Hobson.)

Our curse shall fall upon his evil day. We shall

Tame his arrogance.

We'll make the murderer pay for his crime.

Peter Grimes! Grimes!

(The people [still shouting] scatter in all directions. – Curtain.)

Interlude VI

Scene 2

Scene as in Scene One.

Some hours later. The stage is quite empty – a thick fog.

Foghorn and the cries of the searchers can be heard distantly.

(The orchestra is silent.)

Voices

Grimes!

(Peter comes in, weary and demented.)

Peter

Steady. There you are. Nearly home.

What is home? Calm as deep water.

Where's my home? Deep in calm water.

Water will drink my sorrows dry

And the tide will turn.

Voices

Grimes!

Peter

Steady. There you are. Nearly home.

The first one died, just died...

The other slipped, and died...

And the third will...

“Accidental circumstances”...

Water will drink his sorrows – my sorrows – dry

And the tide will turn.

Voices

Peter Grimes, Peter Grimes!

Peter

Peter Grimes! Here you are! Here I am!

Hurry, hurry!

Now is gossip put on trial.

Bring the branding iron and knife

For what's done now is done for life...

Come on! Land me!

“Turn the skies back and begin again”.

Voices

Peter Grimes!

Peter

Old Joe has gone fishing and

Young Joe has gone fishing and

You'll know who's gone fishing when

You land the next shoal.

Voices

Peter Grimes!

Peter

Ellen. Give me your hand.

There now – my hope is held by you,

If you leave me alone...

Take away your hand!

The argument's finished,

Friendship lost,

Gossip is shouting,

Everything's said.

Voices

Peter Grimes!

Peter

To hell with all your mercy

To hell with your revenge.

And God have mercy upon you.

Voices

Peter Grimes, Peter Grimes !

Peter

Do you hear them all shouting my name?

D'you hear them?

Old Davy Jones shall answer:

Come home, come home!

Voices (*close at hand*)

Peter Grimes!

Peter (*roars back at them*)

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

(*Ellen and Balstrode have come in and stand watching. Then Ellen goes up to Peter.*)

Ellen

Peter, we've come to take you home.

O come home out of this dreadful night.

See here's Balstrode. Peter, don't you hear me?

(Peater does not notice her and sings in a tone almost like prolonged sobbing. The voices shouting "Peter Grimes" can still be heard but more distantly and more sweetly.)

Peter

What harbour shelters peace

Away from tidal waves

Away from storms!

What harbour can embrace

Terrors and tragedies?

Her breast is harbour too –

Where night is turned to day.

Balstrode *(goes up to Peter and speaks)*

Come on, I'll help you with the boat.

Ellen

No!

Balstrode *(speaking)*

Sail out till you lose sight of land, then sink the boat.

D'you hear? Sink her.

Goodbye Peter.

(Together they push the boat down the slope of the shore. –

Balstrode comes back and waves goodbye. He takes Ellen who is sobbing quietly, calms her and leads her carefully down the main street home. –

The men pushing the boat out has been the cue for the orchestra to start playing again.

Now dawn begins. – Dawn comes to the Borough by a gentle sequence of sights and sounds. –

A candle is lighted and shines through a bare window. A shutter is drawn back. – Hobson and his posse meet severally on the green by the Moot Hall. They gossip together, shake their heads, indicate the hopelessness of the search, extinguish their lanterns, and while some turn home, others go to the boats. – Nets are brought down from the houses by fisherwives.

Cleaners open the front door of the Inn and begin to scrub the step. –

Dr. Crabbe comes from a confinement case with his black bag. He yawns and stretches.

Nods to the cleaners. The Rector comes to early morning prayer. – Mrs. Sedley follows. –

Ned Keene draws the shutters of his shop.)

Chorus

To those who pass the Borough sounds betray

The cold beginning of another day.

And houses sleeping by the waterside

Wake to the measured ripple of the tide.

(Mr. Swallow comes out and speaks to the fishermen.)

Swallow

There's a boat sinking out at sea,

Coastguard reports.

Fisherman

Within reach?

Swallow

No.

Fisherman

Let's have a look through the glasses.

(Fishermen go with Swallow to the beach and look out. One of them has a glass.)

Chorus

Or measured cadence of the lads who tow

Some entered hoy to fix her in their row,

Or hollow sound that from the passing bell

To some departed spirit bids farewell.

Auntie

What is it?

Boles

Nothing I can see.

Auntie

One of these rumours.

(Nieces emerge and begin to polish the brasses outside "The Boar".)

Omnes

In ceaseless motion comes and goes the tide

Flowing it fills the channel broad and wide

Then back to sea with strong majestic sweep

It rolls in ebb yet terrible and deep.

(Slow curtain.)