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About this Volume

This volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* includes an editor's introduction by Charles Rzepka, essays by Peter G. Buckley, Jeffrey N. Cox, Jerrold E. Hogle, Robert Hoskins, Debbie Lee, and Charles Rzepka.

This Praxis volume began as two modern stagings of the 19th century play *Obi; or Three-Finger'd Jack*. The first staging was at the Playwright's Theater in Boston, on July 18, 2000. It included, besides staged portions of the play, papers read by Charles Rzepka, Peter Buckley, Jeffrey Cox and Debbie Lee. These papers formed the backbone of this Praxis volume. The second production was at Arizona State University, at the year 2000 Conference of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR). It included the papers mentioned above and also the essay by Robert Hoskins included in this volume. Video excerpts of the Boston production are included as well, linked to plain text versions of the *Obi* melodrama and *Obi* pantomime. A scholarly edition of the *Obi* pantomime is forthcoming from Romantic Circles, edited by Jeffrey N. Cox.

The text is encoded in HTML, but features no frames and a limited use of tables. It will work best with Netscape 4.0 or Internet Explorer 4.0 or higher or a comparable browser; earlier browsers may not display everything properly. Because you may enter and exit these files along multiple paths, you may need to use the back-arrow button on your browser to return to your starting point. The full text of the volume, like all hypertexts in the *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, is fully searchable.

The essays and other files were marked up in HTML by Joseph Byrne at the University of Maryland. The volume cover and contents page were also designed and marked up by Joseph Byrne.

All the images used with the Obi volume derive from the Sylvester Harrison/Edward Orme engraving depicting Maria DeCamp and Charles Kemble in the *Obi* pantomime production of the cave scene. The Harrison/Orme engraving is used courtesy of the Harvard Theater Collection.

About the Romantic Circles Praxis Series

The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** is devoted to using computer technologies for the contemporary critical investigation of the languages, cultures, histories, and theories of Romanticism. Tracking the circulation of Romanticism within these interrelated domains of knowledge, **RCPS** recognizes as its conceptual terrain a world where Romanticism has, on the one hand, dissolved as a period and an idea into a plurality of discourses and, on the other, retained a vigorous, recognizable hold on the intellectual and theoretical discussions of today. **RCPS** is committed to mapping out this terrain with the best and mo st exciting critical writing of contemporary Romanticist scholarship. The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** was formerly known as **Romantic Praxis: Theory and Criticism**. The name was changed in November 1999.

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Obi

Introduction: *Obi*, Aldridge and Abolition

Charles Rzepka, Boston University

1. *Obi, or Three-Finger'd Jack* began life on 2 July 1800 as a pantomime at the Little Theater in the Haymarket, a summer venue for the Covent Garden company of London. It was based on the true story of Jack Mansong, an escaped Jamaican slave whose original African name, according to some sources, was Karfa. The tale of Three-Fingered Jack had been popularized by Dr. Benjamin Moseley in *A Treatise on Sugar* (1799) and by William Earle, Jr., in *Obi; or, the History of Three-finger'd Jack* (1800). According to these accounts, Mansong had run away from his master in 1780 and organized a group of escaped slaves into a feared band of robbers and marauders. Their hide-out was a cave in the mountainous interior of the island. Subsequent to his escape, Mansong lost two of his fingers in a skirmish with the authorities: hence his nickname.

2. In December of 1780, the governor of Jamaica issued a proclamation offering a reward of 100 pounds for Jack Mansong's capture, to which the Jamaican House of Assembly added another 200 pounds, with a promise of freedom to "any slave that shall take or kill the said Three-fingered JACK. . . . and if any one of his accomplices will . . . bring in his head, and hand wanting the fingers, such accomplice shall be entitled to a Free Pardon, and his Freedom" (quoted by Cundall, 36). Jack was captured and killed soon afterward, and his head and three-fingered hand, preserved in a bucket of rum, were brought to Kingston as evidence in order to claim the reward.

3. "Obi" is short for *obeah*, a West African form of sorcery in which Jack was thought by most of the slave community, and even by some of the planters themselves, to be an adept. He had supposedly been instructed in the art by his mother. "Obi" also referred to the horn or fetish by which *obeah* practitioners exerted their magic powers. These powers could supposedly be directed at enemies in the form of a wasting disease, or confer invisibility or superhuman strength on the *obi* sorcerer or sorceress.

4. Relying on Moseley's and Earle's accounts, comic actor John Fawcett wrote the *Obi* pantomime for the Covent Garden company's 1800 summer season at the Haymarket, in the West End of London. With music by Samuel Arnold, a well-known composer for the London stage, the pantomime was, literally, performed in mime, with signboards, songs and choruses. Mimed action flourished in England during this period, especially in the so-called "popular" theaters, partly because English law prohibited the performance of plays with spoken dialogue—including Shakespeare—from all but two theaters in the realm, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, both located in the West End. The Haymarket Theater was permitted to perform spoken-dialogue plays with the Covent Garden company in residence, but in order to cash in on the new popular forms, including pantomime and melodrama, the house would sometimes stage works of the more "popular" sort. The original cast of *Obi* was entirely white, performing the roles of slaves in blackface—a device deeply offensive to today's audiences, whatever their race. I am indebted to my colleague and specialist in West Indian literature, Larry Briener, for his suggestion that we re-create the effect of the original cross-racial make-up by using black and white half-masks. (Kitty, a mulatto, wears a black-and-white striped mask.) Cross-dressed roles, such as Tuckey, played by a woman, and the Obi Woman, played by a man, were also common at this time, as were "breeches" roles for young women like Rosa—in order to show off their legs! (see fig.1)

5. The *Obi* pantomime dominated the London stage that summer, and one of its songs, "A Lady of Fair

Seville City," even became the equivalent of a modern "Top-Ten Hit."[1] The pantomime continued to play in London at both the patent and the popular theaters as well as throughout the provinces for at least the next three decades. The silent role of Jack, which substantially boosted the career of a young Charles Kemble in the original production (Williamson, 29-31), raised the stage profiles of numerous character-actors to follow. The most famous of these was Richard Smith (see fig. 2)

6. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the English Abolition Movement began to catch its second wind. (Its first phase had resulted in the passage of the Anti-Slave Trade Bill in 1807.) At some point in the late 1820s a theater manager in Edinburgh named William Murray, who had begun to feature Ira Aldridge in his productions, apparently re-wrote the pantomime as a melodrama "expressly" for Aldridge, giving the character of Jack a voice for the first time.[2] Murray supplied Aldridge with stirring denunciations of hypocritical Christian slave-owners and speeches that justified the mayhem he visited upon them by depicting the atrocities that English slave-traders had perpetrated when they raided Jack's village in Africa.

7. Melodrama had been gaining ground as a popular form for several decades, resourcefully pushing the limits of governmental restrictions on the performance of spoken-word dramas by providing spoken dialogues accompanied by music, either as introduction or as background to speeches: thus the origin of the term "*melo*-drama." Like other popular tragi-comedies of its day, the *Obi* melodrama featured a morally ambiguous outcast as violent antihero. For this reason it appealed strongly to the resentments and sympathies of England's lower-class audiences, many of whom had been victimized by the cruel, laissez-faire form of capitalism then raging unchecked throughout England. Laborers were agitating for the reform of parliamentary representation, the extension of the franchise to middle- and working-class citizens, and the legalization of labor unions. For the most part, laborer audiences were to be found in the vast industrial and commercial areas of the English provinces—in the Midlands, the seaports, and especially in the working-class neighborhoods and slum-districts of Britain's growing manufacturing towns. Accordingly, the *Obi* melodrama, with the black American acting sensation, Ira Aldridge, in the role of Jack Mansong, was not the sort of thing that the posh West End theaters of Covent Garden and Drury Lane were likely to take to heart—and they did not. Except for a handful of appearances at the so-called "legitimate" theaters, Aldridge was effectively banned from the West End for most of his career, even after his triumphant tours of Europe and Russia in the 1850s.

8. Ira Aldridge, the great African-American tragedian, was born in New York City on July 24, 1807, where he attended the African Free School.[3] As a young man he fell in love with the stage and for a brief time appeared with the African Grove Theater in Lower Manhattan, until it was closed by the white authorities in 1824. Soon afterwards, Aldridge left for England, where he soon became the toast of the provincial theaters, especially in the role of Othello (see fig. 3). Billed as "the African Roscius," after the famous actor of Republican Rome, Quintus Roscius (who had been born a slave), Aldridge became a spokesperson for the enslaved and oppressed members of his race, and battled the forces of racism, overt and covert, personal and institutional, both in his own life and in the stage roles that he made his own, principally those of Shakespeare's tragic heroes.

9. Aldridge's early career intersected with, and contributed to, the movement for the abolition of slavery in England and its possessions, a nation-wide effort that eventually resulted in the passage of the Abolition Bill in 1833. Aldridge went on to tour the European continent, garnering numerous honors, including a knighthood from the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and transforming Russian acting technique with his naturalistic style. In addition to electrifying audiences with his Othello, he became famous for his performances as Shylock, Macbeth, and King Lear, all in whiteface. He died in 1867, while on tour in Poland, and was buried in the city of Lodz, where his grave is cared for to this day by the Society of Polish Artists of Film and Theater. He left four children, one of whom, Amanda Aldridge, went on to

become the singing teacher of Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson.

10. Ira Aldridge is one of only thirty-three distinguished actors of the English stage—and the only actor of African-American descent—to be memorialized with a bronze plaque at the Shakespeare Memorial Theater at Stratford-upon-Avon. The melodrama version of *Obi, or Three-Finger'd Jack*, based on the pantomime of 1800, not only showcased Aldridge's astonishing talents at a critical stage of his career, but remained a part of his repertory well into the middle of the nineteenth century.

11. As for Jack Mansong, he went on to become a hero (or, perhaps, anti-hero) of nineteenth-century English popular culture, appearing in children's books and domestic theatricals, as well as on provincial stages, and achieving something of the status of today's Batman or Spiderman.

12. The taped performances of material from the *Obi* pantomime and melodrama that appear in this number of *Praxis* have been excerpted from a videotape of a dress rehearsal of *Obi: A Play in the Life of Ira Aldridge, the "Paul Robeson" of the 19th Century*, which was performed at the Boston Univerity Playwrights' Theater on 18 July 2000 and funded by the Boston University Humanities Foundation. This performance consisted of a number of important scenes, songs, and dances taken from both of the *Obi* plays and arranged within a narrative framework written by the show's director, Vincent Siders. Within this framework, Mr. Siders offered reflections on the difficulties of interpreting and staging historically significant but culturally offensive works like *Obi*, as well as non-narrative, contextual commentary (e.g., musical "sampling" from Public Enemy) on the action itself.[4] In addition, earlier versions of the first four essays in this *Praxis* number, by Charles Rzepka, Jeffrey Cox, Peter Buckley, and Debbie Lee, were read aloud as part of the evening's performance.

13. The one-night Boston performance of *Obi: A Play in the Life*, which drew a standing-room-only crowd,[5] was the basis for the version performed on 14 September at the 2000 Conference of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, in Tempe, Arizona.[6] This performance, which was also funded by the Boston University Humanities Foundation, was directed by Jerrold Hogle of the University of Arizona, who, in the essay concluding this volume, has provided us with his perspective on Obi and the difficulties of staging it.

14. The pantomime text used in both the Boston and the Tempe performances was the one published in London by Duncombe and Moon, probably c. 1825, while the melodrama material came from an edition published in London by Thomas Hailes Lacy, probably c. 1850. The pantomime text has been edited for this special *Praxis* number by Jeff Cox and the melodrama text by Charles Rzepka. (**Boldface** in the pantomime and melodrama texts indicate action that was videotaped at rehearsal.) Some deviations from the original scripts were made in performance. The most notable of these is to be found in the lyrics to the song sung by Tuckey in Act I, scene 2 of the melodrama, "Opossum Up a Gum Tree."

15. This song had been popularized by the English comic actor, Charles Mathews, after a visit to America during which he allegedly heard it performed by Aldridge himself at the African Grove. When Aldridge arrived in England he was requested to sing it in numerous performances on the English stage. In Murray's melodrama, however, it is assigned to a minor, comic character. The history of this song, and its precise relationship to early African-American, West African, and English folk music traditions, is obscure. No musical setting has survived for the words as they appear in extant published versions of the *Obi* melodrama. For both the Boston and the Tempe productions, therefore, a version of this song originally published by Mathews with musical accompaniment was substituted for the version that appears in the Lacy edition (Nathan, 46-47). As will immediately become obvious, the first verse of the Mathews text differs substantially from that of Lacy. In addition, the director of the Boston

production, Vincent Siders, chose not to have Tuckey sing the last verse of the song. Jerrold Hogle, director of the Tempe production, decided to keep it.

16. One minor but interesting variation in the Boston performance text was the substitution of the word "invincible" for "invisible" in Jack's last long speech before the end of Act I, scene iii, in the Obi Woman's hut. In the Lacy edition Jack says to the Obi Woman, "Quick, quick! More of your charms, which in the eye of superstition make me invisible." Lacy is supported by Dick's edition, but contradicted by the text published in the *Oxberry Weekly Budget*, which reads "invincible." The Oxberry text, which is all but useless for performance purposes because of its fine print and tabloid format, lists the putative author, William Murray, among its Dramatis Personae (in the role of Captain Orford), and appears to have been published earlier (1843) than either Lacy or Dick. For this reason, the director and producer decided to substitute the Oxberry "invincible," although a case could be made for either variant.

17. The papers read as part of the Boston and Tempe productions of *Obi: a Play in the Life of Ira Aldridge* are here reproduced in the order in which they were originally presented. "*Obi* Now" was written primarily as an introductory meditation on the general rationale for contemporary stagings of historically significant but offensive works, and of these two versions of the *Obi* play in particular. In "Theatrical Forms, Ideological Conflicts, and the Staging of *Obi*," Jeffrey Cox examines the conventions of pantomime and popular theater, the laws governing dramatic performance in England, and the impact of nationalism and abolitionism at the turn of the century as they shaped the writing, production, and reception of the original *Obi* pantomime. Professor Cox has published widely on English popular theater in the Romantic period, and has edited many of its plays. His book *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and their Circle* was recently published by Cambridge University Press.

18. Peter Buckley, of Cooper Union, specializes in Colonial and nineteenth-century popular entertainment in America. His scholarly monograph on popular entertainment in early America appears in the *Cambridge History of the American Theater*. In "*Obi* in New York: Aldridge and the African Grove," Professor Buckley provides new information and valuable historical perspective on the performance history of the *Obi* pantomime at the short-lived African Grove Theater in lower Manhattan, Ira Aldridge's first acting venue. As Professor Buckley demonstrates, the popular repertoire of the African Grove and the impact of early debates over slavery and abolition helped to shape both the personality and the stage-presence of the young African American tragedian. Debbie Lee, of Washington State University, has written on the inter-relations of literature, culture, and disease, as well as on early African exploration, and served as editor of *Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*, published by Pickering and Chatto. Her book, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, has recently been published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Professor Lee's paper, "Grave Dirt, Dried Toads, and the Blood of a Black Cat: How Aldridge Worked his Charms," links the practice of *obeah* and its representation on stage to the tale of Jack Mansong as it was first introduced to English readers in Moseley's *A Treatise on Sugar*. The scope of her analysis, however, includes the cultural, political, and religious significance of race, slavery, and the idea of Africa in the imperial British imaginary.

19. Musicologist Robert Hoskins, of Massey University in New Zealand, has probably made the greatest single contribution to our knowledge of the origins, circumstances of production, and production history of the *Obi* pantomime and melodrama, as set forth in the comprehensive introduction to his facsimile edition of the original *Obi* score, published in 1996 by Stainer and Bell. We feel quite fortunate, therefore, to have secured his participation in this project. In "Savage Boundaries" Professor Hoskins examines the numerous thematic allusions and correspondences that Samuel Arnold planted in the music he wrote for the original *Obi* pantomime. As Hoskins makes clear, these resonances extend

well beyond the limits of standard word-painting to embrace deeply embedded cultural presuppositions about racial Othering, gender, and archetypes of the *hortus conclusus* or earthly paradise as expressed in English stage representations of the slave, planter society, and West Indies scenery. Finally, Jerrold Hogle, who directed the Tempe production of the *Obi* plays, describes the practical—and ideological—challenges of directing the *Obi* material on a contemporary stage. Professor Hogle, of the University of Arizona, is a distinguished scholar of English romanticism, with numerous books and articles to his credit, whose interests have turned recently to popular literature and drama, including nineteenth-century melodrama, especially in the Gothic mode. His book, *The Undergrounds of the Phantom of the Opera: Sublimation and the Gothic in LeRoux's Novel and its Progeny*, has recently been published by St. Martin's Press/Palgrave. Professor Hogle's contribution, Directing *Obi* in 2000, is especially welcome in light of the decision of Mr. Siders, director of the Boston production, not to contribute a formal essay to this collection.

20. I would like to end this introduction by acknowledging the performers and crew involved in staging the Boston production of *Obi*. To each of them I offer my profoundest thanks! The full program of the production, along with stage credits of all the performers, is included in this special number of *Praxis*. Video clips of selected scenes from the production can be viewed online at Romantic Circles (view clips).

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Notes

[1] For a detailed account of the original *Obi* pantomime performance, its music, and its critical reception, see Hoskins.

[2] This is according to the information contained in a Northampton playbill of 1830. See Marshall and Stock (89). The playbill mistakenly gives Murray the first initial "J."

[3] The information about Ira Aldridge provided in this esssay has been taken from the scholarly biography written by Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock.

[4] Those who wish to obtain a copy of the entire dress rehearsal videotape should send a check for $10.00 to cover copying, postage, and handling to Professor Charles Rzepka, English Department, Boston University, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. The check should be made out to "Charles Rzepka."

[5] This performance was previewed in several Boston-area newspapers. See, e.g., *The Boston Globe* (July 6, 2000), p. E2; *The Boston Herald* (Friday, July 14, 2000), p. S13; *The Bay State Banner* (July 13, 2000), pp. 13, 16; and *The Boston Phoenix* ("Eight Days a Week" section, July 14, 2000), p. 5. See also the review of the performance by Barbara Rizza Mellin in the NAACP bi-monthly magazine, *The New Crisis* (September/October 2000), pp. 44-46.

[6] See Burroughs for a review of this performance.

Obi

Obi Now

Charles Rzepka, Boston University

1. I first raised the possibility of staging scenes and songs from the early nineteenth-century musical play *Obi, or Three-Fingered Jack* in casual conversation with Jeff Cox, of the University of Colorado at Boulder, in the late spring of 1999. Jeff's expertise in the field of Romantic popular theater enabled him to help me appreciate the many difficulties such a staging would have to overcome: gathering crew and auditioning for roles, casting (race-appropriate? race-indifferent?), finding exotic props, making period-appropriate costumes and using period-appropriate make-up (blackface!?), not to mention the standard hurdles like setting rehearsal schedules, finding theater-space, choreographing, and a thousand other apparently insuperable obstacles—not least of them, funding. But we had only a vague idea of the difficulties that would arise specifically in today's highly-charged atmosphere of racial and identity politics. What we did know was that staging *Obi* would, without a doubt, be painful—and worst of all, painful less for us than for others.

2. So I'd like to begin this introduction by addressing the question that my gifted Afro-American director for the Boston production, Vincent Siders, first put to me after having read the opening scene of the *Obi* pantomime: Why? Why stage such offensive material? And why now, at a millenial moment when we should be more aware than ever both of the desperate need to put such things behind us, and the dreary prospect that awaits us if we do not—another thousand years, perhaps, of the same intractable legacy of bigotry, hatred, and oppression.

3. Why? Why *Obi*? and why now?

4. First, to educate—and not just to inform, although you will find plenty of historical information in this *Praxis* volume, but really to "educate," in the literal sense of to "lead out." Of all the arts, theater excels at leading us out of ourselves, out of the here and now, and imaginatively into other existences, other mental universes.

5. But why would anyone wish to be "led out" into a historical reality as sad and painful as slavery? Why revive these degrading events and demeaning stereotypes?

6. One of the first questions we ask ourselves when faced with any historical event, painful or not, is, "What was it like? What did it feel like?" At least, that is true for me. And I think this curiosity about the past is deeply related to our need for identity, for a sense of self. But knowing who we were does not just help us understand who we are—it also enables us to decide who we want to be—and who we do not want to be. Knowledge of the past can liberate us in this way, however, only to the extent that we exercize our historical imaginations on it. We must, as Percy Shelley put it, "Imagine what we know." People who lack the ability to imagine themselves into their own pasts lack identities. They suffer from what we call "amnesia." The stories of their lives sound to them as though they had happened to someone else.

7. Of course, sometimes it is a blessing to forget, to make the past "not me." Working with Vincent and talking with my colleague from the School for the Arts at Boston University, Jim Spruill, and his wife, playwright Lynda Patton, as well as other members of the New African Company in Boston, has made me more aware than ever that for Afro-Americans, the historical experience of slavery and racism

requires no great effort of the imagination to re-live in the present: its painful legacy is ubiquitous—in racial profiling, in hate crimes, in discrimination at every level of society. Why add the pain of past experience to that of the present? What could possibly justify it? For one thing, there might be value in coming to understand how this legacy originated, how it grew, how it came to be accepted, and—more important—what steps were taken by heroic individuals to make it no longer acceptable, and to stop it from being passed on. But more of that in a moment.

8. For Euro-Americans, understanding the historical experience of slavery requires more difficult efforts at imaginative identification—we were not the slaves, after all, but the enslavers. Such efforts are not impossible for people of good will. But there is another effort at identification that is the special responsibility of Euro-Americans—an effort that is, in some ways, even more painful than imagining what it must have been like to be black in the slave-holding West. I mean the painful effort of identification with our own forebears' bigotry, callousness, and cruelty—an indifference to suffering made all the more appalling, it seems to me, by their negligent, everyday acceptance of it. What shape does our own obliviousness, our own indifference take, here, now, at the beginning of a new millenium? What moral astigmatisms afflict us that only physicians of the future will have the lenses to correct? Imagining what we know makes us ask ourselves these quesions.

9. The only way to enjoy the pratfalls and silliness of the sentimental comedy around which the story of *Obi* is woven is to refuse to see that, beneath, behind, around it all, and supporting it all, is the abomination that was black slavery. And yet, some of us, perhaps most of us—black and white—do forget. Some of us even laugh. Comedy and slapstick will do that—and so will good acting. That is both the beauty, and the danger, of theater. The stage is, fundamentally, an amoral medium of identification, a tool to enlist imaginative sympathy, regardless of who wields it. That is why, over the centuries, governments have tried to ban it, to censor it, to prevent it from falling into the "wrong" hands—as did the English government in the era when the *Obi* pantomime premiered.

10. If the performance of *Obi* has any scholarly—or moral—value, then, it will lie only partly in conveying facts about the past—about slavery, or about the conventions of pantomime, or the history of English popular theater. Most of its educational value will lie in its ability to make visible to us our own acts of denial in the present, our own cultural amnesia, as we watch ourselves being "led out" into other, historically specific acts of denial, other moments of waking sleep, in the past. But that is, after all, what theater is good at, isn't it? Making us dream awake?

11. So, that's one reason: to educate.

12. Secondly, to celebrate. The impact of Ira Aldridge, the great Afro-American actor and the first American actor of any race to achieve truly international fame, cannot be ignored when we consider the history of the *Obi* plays. Without him, it is quite possible that the *Obi* pantomime would not have been revised and reworked as a spoken-word melodrama, or if it had, that it would never have become the sensation it became. But even more importantly—and this goes back to theater's ability to educate, to "lead out"—we cannot fully appreciate the towering achievement of Aldridge unless we understand —imaginatively—what he was up against.

13. Which brings me to my third reason: to inspire. In early nineteenth-century England and America, the stereotypes of the black man in the white mind had closed off nearly every serious avenue of theatrical advancement for black actors—a situation that was to be repeated over and over again in the history of black entertainment, and a situation that continues to this day, in one form or another. Many of these demeaning roles were considered benign—even positive and uplifting!—back when the *Obi* pantomime was first performed. And then came Ira Aldridge.

14. Aldridge helped put an end to all that by taking on, with unprecedented power and conviction, the most sacrosanct—and violent—roles of the white Bard—roles like Othello and Macbeth and Richard the Third, as well as Lear and Shylock—and by popularizing new roles like that of the despised Jack Mansong. In Jack, the violent, rebellious slave of the planters' worst nightmares was given a voice of righteous denunciation, the same voice already accorded the Gothic revenge-figure of white popular drama. And that voice was, literally, the voice of Ira Aldridge. Speaking through Aldridge, Jack legitimized his formerly unmotivated violence by indicting the legal and religious fictions that had provoked it. In short, we cannot fully appreciate the heroism of Ira Aldridge as a black actor in a white world of theater without understanding the historically embedded racism that made up the very cultural air he breathed. And that fuller appreciation cannot help but enhance the power of Aldridge's example to inspire us to emulate him.

15. Why *Obi*? To educate, to celebrate, to inspire. And why now? July 2, 2000 was the 200th anniversary of the premiere of the *Obi* pantomime in London. July 24 was the 193rd anniversary of the birth of Ira Aldridge. Aldridge's prodigious talent can be reckoned by this birthday: when he first took the stage at the African Grove Theater in New York as Rolla, the rebellious Peruvian chieftan of Sheridan's *Pizzaro*, he could not have been more than 15 years old. When he first appeared as Jack Mansong at the Theater Royal, Edinburgh, he was barely a decade older, and already a name to be reckoned with.

Obi

Theatrical Forms, Ideological Conflicts, and the Staging of *Obi*

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1. When John Fawcett's pantomime *Obi; or, Three Finger'd Jack* opened at London's Haymarket Theatre on 2 July 1800 for what was then a spectacular run of 39 performances in a single summer (the longest single season run for any play at the Haymarket between 1789 when Colman the Younger took charge of the theater and 1811 when Colman's *Horses of Quedlinburgh* tied *Obi*),[1] England was in the midst of a decades long argument over the institution of slavery. While the first bill to abolish slavery had been introduced by William Wilberforce on 12 May 1789, Parliament did not abolish the slave trade until 1807, and even then slaves already held were not emancipated. When the great black actor Ira Aldridge took up this play, now adapted as a melodrama,[2] England was still a slave-owning nation: an Emancipation Act was not passed until 1833 and slaves were not completely liberated in British colonies until 1838. Taking the stage throughout the period of England's debates over slavery, *Obi* in its various versions offers one way to gauge the response of English audiences to slavery and to those it oppressed. More particularly, *Obi* can reveal how difficult it was to find an appropriate form for bodying forth upon stage the horrors of slavery, as the genres and the institutional structure of the British theater worked to control a potentially radical message that was perhaps finally released not so much through the revisions that the text underwent as through the acting—what Henry Louis Gates would call the "signifyin[g]"—of Ira Aldridge (*Signifying Monkey*).

2. The basic story staged in *Obi* certainly had the potential for offering a radical message. After all, Jack Mansong or Three-Finger'd Jack had been an escaped slave who for two years, 1780-81, raided the eastern end of Jamaica and evaded capture until Governor Dalling and the House of Assembly issued proclamations calling for his apprehension. While he seems to have largely worked alone, the fact that he could rely upon the local slave population not to betray him suggests he could be read as an emblem of a larger revolt. Moreover, he was known as an adept at *Obi* or obeah, a hybridized form of witchcraft practiced in Jamaica which, as Alan Richardson has shown (5-12) was quickly linked to slave revolts, in part because uprisings such as the Jamaican Tacky Rebellion had been led by obeah men.[3] In the context of such events as the Haitian Revolution and what Eugene Genovese calls the "Great Maroon War of 1795-96," (67)[4] undertaken by escaped slaves in Jamaica, Three-Finger'd Jack had the potential to provide the London stage with an emblem of slave revolt. William Earle, Jr., for example, published *Obi; or, The History of Three Finger'd Jack* the same year as the play was first produced, where he argued that Jack was "as bright a luminary as ever graced the Roman annals, or ever boldly asserted the rights of a Briton." In retelling Jack's story, Earle has his narrator proclaim:

> Jack was a man! The precepts of his country were instilled into his heart, and he did no wrong. Conscience smote him not; he knew it not. He was not hardened, for he was awake to feeling. He would do no harm to woman, child, or any defenceless being. He was not dead to the ties of nature, for he loved his mother. He was not dishonourable, for he would not lift his hand against a son of Africa. He loved his countrymen, and the stream of consanguintiy [sic] flowed warmly to his heart. The men of Europe were his foes, and he would hunt the world to revenge himself on the sanguinary sons of the white cliffs. From this short sketch I would have you say with me:
> Jack was a Man!!
> Jack was a Hero!!! (97)

Clearly, Jack had the potential at the time to stand for a radical response to slavery. However, various features of the London stage made it quite difficult for this potentially radical ideological content to find a clear dramatic representation.

3. First, we must remember that the London stage of the time was subject to prior government censorship. Ever since the passage of the Licensing Act of 1737, any play offered on the London stages had to be submitted to the government's Licenser of Plays before it could be performed, and the Licenser at the time, John Larpent, tended to ban all political references from the stage. As I have argued elsewhere, the government seems to have been concerned that audiences would act out any potentially radical message. George Colman the Younger, who managed the Haymarket when *Obi* was performed, later made this attitude clear when he became Licenser of Plays. Before a Parliamentary panel, he indicated that the word "reform" should not be spoken on the stage because it might provoke a political disturbance in the theater; he in fact objected to "anything that may be so allusive to the times as to be applied to the existing moment, and which is likely to be inflammatory" (66).[5] It is, in fact, surprising how many references to the debate over slavery make it onto the stage at this time, which suggests that there was a growing consensus that some sort of regulation of slavery, if not its outright abolition, was needed.

4. There was also a difficulty in finding a form appropriate for representing slavery and Jack's revolt against it. We might think that a historical account of the horrors of slavery and of a man's resistance to it would be a prime subject for tragedy,[6] but Jack Mansong's story would be given quite different dramatic forms. John Fawcett, an enormously popular comic actor at Covent Garden as well as the Haymarket, made his playwriting debut with *Obi*.[7] Drawing his story from Benjamin Moseley's *Treatise on Sugar, with Miscellaneous Medical Observations*, Fawcett made the somewhat controversial decision to stage his play as a pantomime, where the story is told through gesture and song. The Haymarket theater where he staged *Obi* was one of three patent theaters in London, that is, they were theaters licensed by the government to provide what was then called "legitimate drama," a complex phrase that suggested a protected legal status, conventional dramatic forms, and a lack of ideological controversy (Sutcliffe 1-7). When the pantomime of *Obi* established itself as a hit during the summer of 1800, the appropriately named review, *The Dramatic Censor* (3 [1801]: 15-16), was aghast at what it saw as the victory of dumb show on a stage dedicated to the glorious words of British drama. The play was seen as relying upon "illegitimate" forms of stagecraft—music, powerful action, scenery, special effects. The struggle between word and action, image, and special effects is perhaps always present in the drama: we can see it in the arguments between Ben Jonson and his set designer over staging court masks in the seventeenth century as well as in discussions about the relative merits of special effects and play-like dialogue in movies today. At the time *Obi* was produced, the defenders of the patent theaters still had hopes of containing the victory of sight over sound to one moment each year: the staging of the Christmas pantomime, or harlequinade, an almost ritualized form that staged the liberatory antics of Harlequin as he defeats various figures of conventional authority in order to win his love; these plays were so popular that they brought in enough money during their winter run to pay for productions of Shakespeare and other classic writers during the rest of the year, and thus the defenders of the spoken drama were willing to stage them as holiday fare if they were able to return to the conventional repertoire at other times.[8]

5. These patent or licensed theaters had a problem, however. Their licenses gave them control over the spoken drama. It was, for example, illegal to stage Shakespeare outside these three major theaters. As other theaters sprang up, they were forced to rely upon the tactics of pantomime, music and spectacle. What became clear is that, just as moviegoers today would prefer to go see the new installment of *Mission Impossible* (which could essentially be done as a silent movie) over the new film version of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, so audiences then flocked to the new drama of sight and sensation over

the older theater of the word. The result was that canny men and women of the theater such as Fawcett began using the tactics of these new theaters for plays at the patent or major theaters. Throughout the period, we hear complaints about the use of spectacle, pantomime, music, and even animal acts on the major London stages as they attempted to hold onto their audience; the introduction of horses into a revival of Colman's *Blue-Beard* and then into Matthew Lewis's "Grand Romantic Melo-Drama in Two Acts," *Timour the Tartar* (Covent Garden 1811) were seen as a particular low point, mocked in Colman's *Horses of Quedlinburgh*, for example. Just as critics then felt that Fawcett demeaned the Haymarket theater by offering the pantomime of *Obi,* we might feel that a pantomime done in blackface could not possibly body forth an important representation of slavery. I think, however, that Fawcett's play with its turn to an unconventional form provided an opportunity to put on stage some potentially radical material.

6. This is not to suggest that Fawcett's play embraces Jack and his revolt. The play opens with a rather idyllic evocation of slavery at "an Extensive Plantation in Jamaica," for its opening song both laments the fact of slavery—as the white man brings his gold to purchase slaves from the African slaver and as the Africans are exiled from their homeland—and praises the kindness of the white slave owners: "if white man kind massa be, / He heal the wound in negro's heart." These slaves love their master because he rarely beats them, he keeps them well fed with couscous, and he "save us from Three-finger'd Jack" (I, i, p. 5). The black characters who are given the most positive portrait are Sam and Quashee who stand against Jack. Quashee in particular, who converts to Christianity in order to defeat Jack and win freedom for himself and his family, is offered as the anti-revolutionary figure in the play who will succeed because he accepts the white man's religion and because he proves to his white masters that he is worthy of freedom by doing their bidding.

7. There are, however, features of the play that work against its overarching conservative message, as aspects of Jack's story and of his culture break free from the play's ideology. Jack, like the Gothic villain-heroes of the day such as Lewis's Osmond in *The Castle Spectre* (Drury Lane, 1797) and the hero of Maturin's *Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand* (Drury Lane, 1816), is a character who is condemned by the play's final moral vision but who is also intensely attractive given his courage, the power of his personality, and the depth of his suffering. Fawcett reveals Jack's charismatic power as he uses *Obi* to cow a robber band (I, iii) and his physical, even military prowess as he repeatedly defeats his British pursuers. Again, while the play seems to call for the victory of Western culture over African culture, we also see on stage a slave celebration involving the hybridized figure of Jonkanoo, the lead masquerader in a dance troupe who wore a costume involving an elaborate headdress such as a horse head, a house, or a canoe. In that this scene (I, vi) would have been perhaps the most spectacular in the play, involving music, a procession, singing, and dancing, this counter-cultural celebration would carry great weight on stage. The same is true of the practice of obi; the play may celebrate Christianity, but it is obi which is given the most impressive moments on stage, particularly in Act I, scene iii.

8. Two features of the pantomime form might also have contributed to a radical reading of the play. First, the very lack of dialogue allows a response to certain scenes not restricted by authorial pronouncements. The songs in the play can, of course, function to establish a controlling moral vision; for example, at the close of the play, the chorus sings of Jack's defeat, "Here we see villainy brought by law to short duration— / And may all traitors fall by British proclamation" (II, ix). However, Jack's actions on stage pass without such comment, and thus the audience is left to interpret him as it will, as is suggested by the reaction of the Dramatic Censor which clearly admires Jack more than it feels Fawcett does; we can glimpse the appeal Jack could have in an interesting turn of phrase in Earle's dedication of his work "To him who shall applaud Jack through the varied scenes of his life" ("Advertisement"). We need also remember that Jack was played by the leading man in the company, initially Charles Kemble, brother of John Phillip Kemble and Sarah Siddons. These aspects of the staging of the play encourage our identification with Jack rather than our judgment of him. Again, for

us, the most controversial aspect of the play is that it was performed in blackface, a practice with a long history but one we connect with nineteenth-century American minstrel shows. On the London stage of 1800, however, and particularly in a pantomime, there is a possibility that Jack as a blackface figure in revolt would have been connected by the audience with the most popular pantomime figure, Harlequin, who donned a black mask to pursue his own form of revolt, as his anarchic antics liberate the erotic and target those who oppress the poor. It is possible that the original audiences for this play would have linked Jack with this wildly beloved figure of revolt.[9] While, in the end, I think that Fawcett's pantomime played to a majority sentiment in the audience—that the slave trade was immoral but that existing slaves were not treated badly and had the advantage of being introduced to Christianity—in performance there would have been a more radical subtext to the play.

9. While the pantomime remained popular in the early years of the nineteenth-century, it was eventually recast as a melodrama. While we tend to think of melodrama as a form present throughout Western drama, from Euripides to the movies, which is marked by rather flat, stereotyped characters and strong moralizing, melodrama was created as a word and a form in the late eighteenth century. Rousseau coined the term for his *Pygmalion*, a piece in which an actor pantomimes a series of emotions to appropriate music. "Melo-drama" literally means music-drama, and, in the hands of writers such as Pixérécourt in France and Colman and Morton in England, it became a mixed form of spoken drama into which continuous background music and songs were introduced. It was the most powerful of the "illegitimate" forms of drama that came to challenge the primacy of the verbal drama of the established tradition. In many ways, the melodrama versions of *Obi* strike me as both less interesting and less potentially radical than Fawcett's original pantomime, but they take on considerable interest since Ira Aldridge made the role of Jack, now also known as Karfa, one of his standard parts. The melodrama, as it converts the action of the pantomime into words, resorts to more stereotypical and even racist characterizations. The play also works to alienate our sympathies for Jack by making him guilty of crimes that the historical record makes clear he did not commit. Most importantly, we are told he attempted to rape his master's wife and he also plots against his daughter (I, i, p. 5; I, iii, ,9-10), while Moseley, in the source text for Jack's story, explicitly states, "though he had a mortal hatred to white men, he was never known to hurt a child, or abuse a woman" (199).

10. Still, Aldridge could find enough in the character of Jack to make him into a titanic and sympathetic figure. Most importantly, Jack is given a voice in the melodrama, and he uses it to protest his enslavement and to argue that his actions are acts of revenge for the fact that slavers have killed his wife and torn him from his family and his homeland. He sees his acts as sacrifices to "the memory of my broken-hearted wife, my helpless infants, and the wrongs of my poor country" (I, iii, 10). When he is going to murder Rosa, a planter's daughter and the heroine of the play, she asks for mercy, and Jack responds, "You whites are ever ready to enforce for one another that civilized, that Christian law of mercy which our dusky children never yet partook of"(II, vi, p. 22). He accuses the white man of working to "enslave in every clime where his accu[r]sed arts find access" and he seeks to create in his cave an alternative world where "no white man finds an entrance, but as Karfa's slave . . . . The times have changed, and the white man must now labour for the black" (II, iv, pp. 18-19). Jack's revolt is given a motive—albeit one that had become a dramatic cliche, as sympathy was sought for slaves on the basis of the loss of family rather than the fact of slavery itself—and a vision of a world radically altered, where black triumphs over white.

11. Aldridge was particularly suited to release the power of this role from its moralizing context. We know from contemporary accounts that audiences were ready to hear powerful moments in a play free from any overarching moral, aesthetic, or ideological framework,[10] so Jack's speeches may have resonated beyond the conventional plot that frames them. Moreover, Aldridge was known for his portrayal of conflicted Gothic figures, such as Maturin's Bertram, and more importantly for his handling of key

tragic heroes such as Othello who by definition offer a heroism that violates some moral norm; in other words, Aldridge specialized in roles where we might sympathize with a titanic figure despite the play's ultimate judgment of him. Aldridge was also adept at discovering within the restricted roles created for characters of African descent a powerful voice of protest. For example, one of his most famous roles was that of Mungo in Isaac Bickerstaffe's *The Padlock*, originally performed in 1768 and long popular in slave-holding Jamaica (Hill 79). This play, with a story-line taken from Cervantes, is about a jealous old man trying to control the desires of his young fiancé. The play features the slave Mungo who protests his enslavement, noting of white men that "My pain is dere game" (I, vi, p. 87) and who imagines a world of freedom where "tyed in his garters / Old Massa may swing" (II, ii, p. 96). As Aldridge's biographers put it, such moments "gave Aldridge the scope and opportunity to develop the character of a simple, apparently stupid, slave into a rebel against slavery" (Marshall and Stock 75). We can be sure that Aldridge did even more with the role of Three-Finger'd Jack. Whatever the text finally seems to say, Aldridge would have focused upon those moments in which Jack voiced his protest against slavery and his white oppressors. That is, Aldridge would have engaged in what Gates has identified as a particularly African-American mode of literary response, a kind of ironic repetition and revision he calls "signifyin[g]" (*Signifying Monkey*). While Gates is concerned with how African-American writers take up aspects of both an African and an English language tradition in order to remake them as their own, we can see how Aldridge could do the same with a British play: whatever the intentions of the authors of the *Obi* pantomime and melodramas, in Aldridge's hands this play could become a vehicle for protest.

12. That the play would have been recognized as being remade by Aldridge as his own is signaled by an interesting meta-theatrical intrusion into the text. One of the songs interpolated into the melodrama version of *Obi* is "Opossum up a gum tree," a song which in some of its versions protested slavery and celebrated the cleverness of the oppressed. This song had been made famous in England by the great comic actor and impersonator, Charles Mathews, who claimed to do it in imitation of Aldridge as a set piece in his *Trip to America*. While it appears that Mathews made up his story of how he came to borrow the song from Aldridge (Aldridge 11), it became linked to Aldridge and audiences came to demand that it be included in his performances; Aldridge would end up doing imitations of Mathews's imitations, repeating his repetition with a difference and turning the tables on the impersonator. While in *Obi* "Possum up a gum tree" is sung by Tuckey rather than Jack, its presence in a vehicle for Aldridge provides a kind of metatheatrical signature, a way of signifyin[g] that this has been made into his play. Moreover, the song, which celebrates various tricky characters, allows us to see Jack not as a villain but as a trickster, an avatar of the great African trickster divinity Esu-Elegbara. In the hands of Ira Aldridge, this play which had a mixed ideological message in the time of abolition becomes a strong statement for emancipation, and beyond that for the end of American slavery and the liberation of Africans everywhere.

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Notes

[1] For performance information, see Avery et al, and Burling, esp. 171-74, 202-206. *Obi* continued to be popular in the theater: it received twenty performances the next summer and fifteen in 1802; it continued long in the repertoire of the theaters in London, the provinces (it was a hit on the York circuit in 1801 and 1802), and the United States. Despite local interest, it did not play in Jamaica until 1862, and then only for one performance of a much altered version (See Hill).

[2] We know that Aldridge played *Obi* in March 1830 at the Theatre Royal Bristol in a "new and beautiful Melodrama, founded on fact, and written expressly for the African Roscius by J. Murray, Esq." Of course, this "new" melodrama was in fact an adaptation of Fawcett's pantomime. *Obi* had been part of the repertoire of the African Theatre in New York, so it is possible that Aldridge performed in the play prior to his move to England, probably in 1824; we know he was playing the part as late as 1860. See also Marshall and Stock, 89, 250.

[3] On *Obi*, see Rzepka, Hoskins and Cox ("Introduction").

[4] See also James.

[5] See also Cox ("Ideology and Genre"), Connoly, and Nicholson.

[6] There were attempts to write tragedies that treated slavery, including Thomas Southerne's 1695 adaptation of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (and later revisions of his play) and *Inkle and Yarico: A Tragedy of Three Acts* (1742) ascribed to Mrs. Weddell, but there are surprisingly few such works.

[7] He also wrote an adaptation of Kotzebue's *Perouse; or, The Desolate Island* (Covent Garden, 1801), two ballets, *The Fairies' Revels; or, Love in the Highlands* (Haymarket, 1802) and *The Enchanted Island* (Haymarket, 1804), a melodrama with Thomas John Dibdin entitled *The Secret Mine* (Covent Garden, 1812), and a version of *The Barber of Seville* written with Daniel Terry (Covent Garden, 1818).

[8] On the harlequinade, see Mayer.

[9] For a possible link between Harlequin and portrayals of "blackness," see Gates (*Figures in Black*), 51-52. See also Lott, Cockrell, and Lhamon.

[10] For example, in 1810, Colman wrote to one of his partners about a play that was being prepared for the Haymarket, expressing his "utter astonishment" that "Over the Water Charley" was to be sung at the

close: "This is putting a lighted match to a barrel of gunpowder. . . . Surely you must be aware, with all the world, that this is a rebel song?" (Qtd. in Sutcliffe, p. 6). The song alone, independent of context, was enough to stir up the audience.

Obi

Savage Boundaries: Reading Samuel Arnold's Score[*]

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1. Thomas Arne's clarion call "Britons never will be slaves" ("Rule Britannia") rings a cracked tone when we consider Britain's deep involvement in the slave trade.[1] But if racial discourse occurs in a range of English comic operas and pantomimes composed during the later eighteenth century, then it is to Samuel Arnold we must turn for musical representations of slaveholding society in the British Carribean.[2]

Jamaican Paradigms

2. Samuel Arnold (1740-1802), London's most popular theater composer during the last thirty years of the eighteenth century, composed three stage works set in the sugar islands.[3] The first, a completely renovated score for George Colman's 1777 cut version of Gay and Pepusch's *Polly* (1729), sequel to *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), was a much anticipated hearing of this work which had originally been banned by the censor.[4] *Polly* follows the heroine's progress from slavery to freedom and paradisal happiness in a transracial marriage. Her island landfall in search of Macheath, now masked as a Moorish pirate, finds her trapped in the vices of white slavery and plantation violence; to find paradise she leaves the Old World of plantation shame to chart the New World of the primitive. Polly's discovery of paradise comes when she reinvents herself as white-into-Indian, stepping backwards in time into the wilderness and into the arms of Cawwawkee.[5] Polly explores the idea of nature as culture and for the audiences of 1777, Cook's Oceanic voyages offered a paradigm and iconography—as in Hodges' depiction of Cook's welcome to the Pacific (see fig.1)—for the heroine's cross-cultural encounter and the quest for a lost Eden. The moment where Polly "sheds her skin" to be born again comes when she sings a version of Eve's Spring song—serving to re-awaken the restorative memory of Eden—from Thomas Arne's oratorio *The Death of Abel* (1744). Interestingly, Arnold's score (ms.mus.97 Houghton Library, Harvard University) is probably the only authentic orchestral source of this song to survive (see ex.1). *Inkle and Yarico*, composed a decade later (1787) to a libretto by George Colman junior, rewinds the plot of *Polly*. Yarico rescues Inkle, a white trader, and they live together in her garden-cave. The idyll is very short lived, however, and paradise is lost when Inkle returns with Yarico to Jamaica where he attempts to sell her into slavery. The daring aspect of Arnold's score (Longman & Broderip, 1787; facsimile edition, Belwin Mills, N.Y., 1978) is the way he displays Yarico's unquestioned moral superiority. Yarico wants her identity and her love for Inkle to merge and the paradoxical result is, that although he betrays her, she will not give him up because that would be to falsify herself (see ex.2). *Inkle and Yarico* was a deliberately emancipationist work and its enormous popularity helped to mobilize the abolitionist cause led by Wilberforce.[6]

3. *Obi* (1800), one of Arnold's late stage works, is woven into the imperial age. The site of the plantation is assumed ripe for commercial exploitation and political control. The moral and civic imperative is to impose the unquestioned superiority of Western civilization on new lands and peoples. This mind-set in itself assumes juxtaposition and conflict of opposites—civilization versus savagery and a tamed, pastoral nature versus an untamed wilderness. Thus Afro-Caribbean society and Jack as black insubordinate by definition became that dangerous or unpleasant Other.

Savage Boundaries

4. In *Obi* the idea of the plantation as Eden and of the wilderness as outside Eden is established in terms of the emotional and imaginative geography of the music. Within the borders of the plantation the music is associated with peaceful, safe, restorative nature while, conversely, music coming from without is linked to menace and spectacular acts of violence.

5. This very clear map-sense can be illustrated by the opening turn of events. The overture, set in Jack's territory beyond the plantation, opens in a mood of somber expectation, while later cross-references to the "cannibal feast" music in Linley's 1781 pantomime *Robinson Crusoe* define Jack and the maroons as brute savages in a beastly wilderness (see ex. 3a and ex. 3b). The slave women's duet ("The white man comes"), starting a long vocal ensemble of continuous music for Scene 1, migrates from the bitter memories of being taken from home and passing from hand to hand, to the sanctuary of the plantation and a kind master. This reconciliation occurs as the tears shed at "O be it very very sad to see poor Negro child and father part" transpose into a bracing trumpet-like motif at "He heal the wound in Negro's heart". Choric rejoicings ("Good massa we find"), sung by the slaves harvesting sugar-cane, affirm an Edenic present and in this redeemed phase of things Rosa enters to a lyric flute-led rondo graced with melodic figuration and sixteenth note motion standing for a carefree state of nature; intensified episodes represent Rosa's sexual attraction to Captain Orford who, all too soon, is signalled back to camp (4a and ex. 4b). As Orford crosses over the plantation border the music springs into the violence of Jack's first attack. He returns to the extended lyricism of Mozart's A major Andante from String Quartet in D (K575), artfully cut and pasted by Arnold (see ex.5).[7] The music radiates a sense of full summer beauty and this affirms Orford's spiritual survival and the plantation as an ultimate home. Yet more, Mozart's score serves to define Orford against Jack's violence and cruelty as the embodiment of peace and civilization in rather the same way as John Webber portrays Cook as a peacemaker and martyr-hero in his famous painting *The Death of Captain Cook* (1782); in a detail from this painting (see fig.2) we can easily substitute the beach scene for Jack's murderous attack (in some sources Orford is said to be stabbed, in others shot). Scene 1 closes into the shadow of night when, under a waning moon, the slaves sing a retaliatory chorus against Jack and the sacrilege of Obeah ("Swear by the silver crescent of the night").

6. Soon after, Orford and Rosa declare their mutual love in dance-style while hunting horns signal the formation of a celebratory sporting party. The music gallops buoyantly over the home border but wrenches once again into violence as Orford advances under the crags into the comfortless area where Jack strikes; the episode ends with lumpy figurations depicting Jack dragging Orford's body down into his den.

7. Beyond the plantation Jack stalks the rocks of the wilderness to music possessing an appropriate head-on strength and the power to terrorize. Yet it is the Obeah-woman who creates a unique musical aura. She appears in her under-earth to the reptilian chromaticism of Mozart's D minor String Quartet finale (K421/417b) and the strange end-phrase repeated notes sound incantatory as she calls up the maroons to do the devil's work. The effect of this passage comes alive in the hearer's imagination as a kind of dog-breath in the dark (see ex.6). Obeah equals preternatural force for evil and at key points it is associated with music that feels perilous. The interlude for maroons lurking in the night, for example, is set to the complete "Surprise" movement of Haydn's Symphony #94; the uncoiling variations, spiked by unusual chromatic tips, are consonant with the slouch and lunge of the raid and, altogether, there is a sense of displacement meant to emphasize moral inversion and collapse. It is likely that Arnold maintained Haydn's original orchestration, which in passages including trumpets, horns and kettledrums along with full strings and woodwind, must have sounded terrific in the tiny auditorium of the Haymarket Theater.

Down Under

8. Rosa, cross-dressed as a sailor, advances into the mountains in search of Orford while a musical storm breaks to mark the dangerous turn in events. The storm music converts into a borrowing from the D minor Andante of Haydn's Piano Trio in D (transposed to the storm's C minor) as, exhausted, Rosa enters a cave for shelter (7a and ex. 7b). Jack startles her; he is alternately abusive and sensual; he takes her down below. Caliban-like, Jack drinks and becomes drowsy; Rosa sings him to sleep then explores the cave to find Orford who is moaning in the dark; she screams at the sight of his wounds. Jack awakens; he ties Rosa's wrists and locks Orford's cell, then sleeps. Rosa burns the rope that binds her and steals the key; the lovers climb an escape ladder; Jack lunges at Orford who knocks him down.

9. Arnold's score tracks each detail of the scene with enormous economy. For example, the tiptoe music following Rosa's lullaby stops and starts to accommodate Orford's groans, Jack stirring in his sleep, Rosa recalling the lullaby to quiet Jack, opening the door to Orford's cell, and so on. Structurally the whole is bound together by an initial 16-bar Andante plus 4 bars of song-recall (see ex.8). Following this is heard a 16-bar development of the Andante, then 11 (8 + 3) bars of new material, plus 8 bars of the initial Andante and 8 of the new material.

10. The music for the first part of the action swells to its peak when Rosa sings and this is the moment depicted in Harding's watercolor of 1800, engraved 1801 (see fig.3).[8] Thereafter, the focus shifts away from Rosa and Jack to Rosa and Orford with the music withdrawing abruptly into the tiptoe sequence which leads to Orford's cell and the ensuing escape. The climacteric lyricism of Rosa's song invites us to understand in this scene that Jack not only occupies the seductive position of demon-tempter but that Rosa comes to see him as an object of desire. Harding's watercolor encourages the idea of transgressive sexual attraction. Jack lies bare-chested in loose garments with one muscular arm raised above his head; a phallic drinking-horn hangs around his neck and a sash, which may later be used to bind Rosa's wrists, is tied around his waist. Skeletons of a turtle and crocodilian reptile associate Jack with sorcery while snakeskins relate him to the serpent in Eden. Rosa's desire becomes palpable in response to the presence of this predatorily sexual racial Other; she sings a sleep-song ("A lady in fair Seville city") about illicit lovemaking with melodic end-phrases rubbed by horny horns (see ex.9). The ballad is in pseudo-Spanish *ronda de enamorados* (lover's ronda) style with pizzicato strings representing a guitar, or the lyre depicted by Harding, and thereby a wealth of susceptive associations (for example David and Saul or Orpheus in Hades). Withdrawal by sudden modulation into the passage of tiptoe music serves both to arouse Rosa's awareness of Orford's presence and to sedate her memory of transracial desire.

11. In the dreamscape of this song-episode, effectively a kind of inverted seraglio-fantasy, Jack is proffered and retracted as sexual symbol while Rosa experiences the victimized position of slave. But if we glimpse in Rosa's desire the idea of the sexual racial Other, then can we ask if Jack's embitterment is only possible because of the institution of servitude from which he has rebelled? Or is it that only slavery, or something very like it, can suppress the symptoms of a larger freedom—the freedom of explorations of alternative possibilities, of fearless sexuality, and of an expression beyond the taboos both of race and class?

Cry Freedom

12. At the mid-point of the pantomime a government proclamation is announced granting freedom to any slave who conquers Jack. The music gathers momentum as Quashee declares he will fight, becomes Christianized, enjoys the slave festivities, explains the proclamation to his children, and prepares to leave. The plantation, therefore, is not just a garden but the paradisal site of benign rule, Christian faith

and emancipation—after all, Christian marriage strengthens family ties and compromises the sale of slaves. Contrapuntally, the scene subscribes to European notions of cultural supremacy and Otherness with Quashee turned from "savage" to "civilized" and very much in awe of colonial authority. A solemn D major movement marks Quashee's scrutiny of the proclamation. When he traces the printed word "Freedom" the music dips to D minor with a glow of woodwind to color the phrase and for the moment we are aware that nothing highlights freedom—or indeed creates it—like slavery (see ex.10). The episode closes when Quashee's wife sings "My cruel love to danger go," a sad song of farewell. The ache of the music stretches beyond the stage action to suggest the dimensions of her suppressed fears for race survival. This song, at the heart of the drama, creates a space through which slave experience begins to take a shadowy, suggestive shape and, being so situated, it suggests the possibility of a different, though unpursued, kind of discourse.

13. Jack's last scene is sounded to warrior music springing from three impactive chords, presumably to represent the three fingers of his mutilated hand (see ex.11). A sudden collapse indicates his fatal wounding and as he dies the music falls to a bare octave (see ex.12). Marches draw us back into the safe boundary of the plantation and a final chorus of relief and rejoicing ("Wander now to and fro") which is peppered with C major shouts of "God save the King". The episode parallels Christianity's victory over Obeah and the triumph of plantocratic society over any potential cultural danger. And yet the plantation now is at once honor-bound to grant a slave his freedom and blood-stained by exacting a price (a legally fixed compensation) for Jack's death.[9] Fundamentally *Obi* is a morality tale about the meeting of two perceived entities—the West and Afro-Caribbean peoples. These entities are personified, variously, into forces of good and evil that engage in a prolonged contest. Even more, West Indian slave history is fundamentally about the idea of Western civilization and its creation of an Afro-Caribbean Other onto which are projected and tested its various priorities and expectations. If the final chorus stands for Enlightenment imperialism, then the setting remains an exotic paradise, whether lost or found or rejected outright.

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Notes

[*] This essay concentrates on the music for the original pantomime. Most of the vocal items mentioned (but only some of the instrumental) are performed in the video clips linked to melodrama version of *Obi*, included with this Praxis volume.

[1] Arne's "Rule Britannia" ends his patriotic masque *Alfred* (1740); it achieved instant popular success. By 1750 the established population of 13 British colonies was 236,000 blacks, almost all of them slaves, and 934,000 whites.

[2] Racial representations—including "harem" operas by Thomas Arne (*The Sultan*, 1759) and Charles Dibdin (*The Seraglio*, 1776), "Captain Cook" pantomimes by Thomas Linley (*Robinson Crusoe*, 1781) and William Shield (*Omai*, 1785), and Dibdin's *The Padlock* (1768) which includes trauma songs sung by Mungo, a black

servant (sung by the composer in blackface)—all partly influenced *Obi*. We know that Arnold had Linley's score of *Robinson Crusoe* in mind because of an actual borrowing (Sheridan and Linley's adaptation encodes Crusoe as Cook) and clearly Shield and John O'Keeffe's *Omai, or A Trip round the World*, which gave currency to the idea of Cook's deification, is another crucial model. In *Obi*, Arnold and Fawcett translate Cook's embodiment of peace and civilization to Orford; and the familiar topos of the European confronting the native on the Pacific beach relocates to Jack's mountainous hideout. See *Fig.2*, also ns. 5 and 8.

[3] Arnold established his reputation at Covent Garden with *The Maid of the Mill* (1765) but his greatest successes belong to his twenty-five years (from 1777) as composer for the Little Theater in the Haymarket. Arnold was also a noted conductor, organist and editor of Handel's works.

[4] A modern edition by Robert Hoskins for Artaria Editions (AE100) is forthcoming; see www.artaria.com

[5] Cook's voyages drew attention to the existence of native peoples and for Londoners in 1777 Cawwawkee had a living prototype in Omai, the first (and much fêted) Polynesian to visit England (from 1774 to 1776). See also ns. 2 and 8.

[6] Colman's Libretto was tapped from Richard Steele's *The Spectator*, Tuesday 13 March 1711, via Richard Ligon's *History of the Island of Barbados* (1673); also Weddell's *Incle and Yarico: A Tragedy of Three Acts* (1742). Colman's model for Yarico may have been Phillis Wheatley (1753-84) who was taken from Africa as a child and brought across the Atlantic to British North America; she was in London in 1773 to publish a volume of poems. In her writings Wheatley asks how was it that the empire of the free became an empire of slaves.

[7] Arnold freely adapts the slow movement of K575 into the sequence of measures 1-5, 19-29, 40-42, and 9-19, this constituting somewhat less than two-thirds of the original. Mozart's chamber music was little known in London at this time and Arnold's adaption may well have been the first public performance of this work in England (Mozart's score had been imported by Longman & Broderip after 1791).

[8] Harding's cave seems to have been partly inspired by the "banditti" paintings of Salvator Rosa and also Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's scene design "Inside a Jourt" (snow hut, Kamchatka) for *Omai* (extant maquette in Victoria & Albert Museum, London, E.157-1937). Jack in his tunic is arguably a variant of Sir Joshua Reynolds's famous painting of Omai (c.1775) as Nature-prophet draped in flowing robes and standing in a Tahitian Eden. See also ns. 2 and 5.

[9] In this sense the pantomime predicts British abolition of the slave trade passed by act of Parliament in 1807.

Qdk

Qdk'kp'Pgy '[qtm<'Crftkfig'cpf'vjg'Chtkecp'I tqxg

Rgvgt'Dwemg{.'Vjg'Eqqrgt'Wpkqp'hqt'vjg'Cfxcpego gpv'qh'Uekgpeg'cpf'Ctv

1. On May 21, 1801, less than a year after its opening at the Haymarket, New York's Park Theatre staged the first American performance of Fawcett's serio-pantomime *Obi*. Offered as part of the manager William Dunlap's benefit night, The Park pulled out all the stops in placing the durable Hodgkinson in the lead as Jack and casting the Junior Hallam as Captain Orford. Expensive new sets were constructed and entr'acte specialists Laurence and Morton were jobbed in for the Negro dances. Though three other performances are recorded for the remainder of that season, *Obi* cannot, however, be termed a ringing success with Manhattan's public. Over the next quarter century the pantomime re-appeared almost annually on some American stage (garnering in 1813 "A Gentleman, the original for the Haymarket, London" as Obi Woman, presumably Abbott) but statistically, at least, it remained far less popular than other slave or Indian dramas. The first American cast of *Obi* had been responsible for staging Sheridan's version of Kotzebue's *Pizarro* (minus the final death scene) only the year before, and the Peruvian chief always held premiere place. *Obi* was also performed less often than the beloved Afro-Indian drama *Inkle and Yariko* (by George Colman Jr., which had its U.S. premiere at the Park Theatre in 1796) or Issac Bickerstaff's more comic *The Padlock* (1768). The pantomime version of *Obi* certainly seems immediately less radical than the plain spoken heroics of Colman Jr.'s *The Africans* (that included a slave market scene) or Thomas Morton's *The Slave,* both of which allowed for substantially larger play of the sentimental.

2. In this tremendously telescoped account of early slave drama in New York City there is little evidence of American exceptionalism as measured by the strength of audience interest in the themes of emancipation, colonial independence or, indeed, race. It is best to think of the Park Theatre, in personnel and stagecraft, as occupying the farthest orbit in Britain's constellation of theaters, but one which shared completely in that frothy mixture of sentimental song, dance, scenic effect and kinetic action that sustained the minor theaters in the period. From the scanty records we possess it is difficult to give the Park Theatre's version of Fawcett's *Obi* an especially radical reading or to provide it with a transgressive national contextualization. As with English productions, the opening plantation scene disclosed contentment and deference threatened only by the ominous mention of Jack. Yet Jack remained without an antislavery voice, literally *in panto* and ideologically in the text; ending as a severed head removed the body that had been so active in the drama. The usefulness of Christian conversion was made central to the battle of good over evil, and Jonkonnu demonstated that slave pleasures are at the master's behest, perhaps reenacting the largely white audience's claims of sovereignty as patrons over the performance.

3. This then is where one might leave the story of *Obi* in New York were it not for the introduction of an entirely new cast of characters in the early 1820s: William Brown, the proprietor of the first African-American Theatre, the famous English comedian, Charles Mathews and Ira Aldridge, destined, once he left America, to become the first great black tragedian—an "African Roscius." Let us look at the figures sequentially.

4. William Brown was a highly regarded ship's steward sailing the packets out of Liverpool. In 1817, he retired to shore opening with his wife a social club —a "free and easy"—for other black stewards and sailors in the backyard of his house at 38 Thomas Street. After complaints from the neighbors about the open air antics, that included singing and dancing, he moved indoors and, in September 1821,

performed his first full theatrical production of *Richard III*. After this success he moved north to the corner of Mercer and Bleecker, at the edge of settlement, to open a Garden and Theatre, termed "African" by the press, that featured some of his own pantomimic productions and the singing and acting of the talented James Hewlett. The true novelty of Brown's move was that the garden was a fully commercial venture, charging standard prices, before a racially mixed audience. Brown attempted to stake out his share in the tremendous expansion in the city's staged commercial culture in the early 1820s. In the three years after 1821, New York witnessed the opening of two new theatres, the Bowery and the Chatham, as well as seven new sites of minor amusement, effectively tripling audience capacity and attracting a new kind of crowd. These sites would create a permanent place for the new forms of melodrama, for Yankee and Indian acts, and establish the long foreground for the rise of minstrelsy. Their arrival, in other words, marks the ascendency of "minor" forms in the Anglo-American stage tradition and their eventual transformation into the national forms of American popular culture.

5. Much scholarly interest has been directed at Brown's own January, 1822 drama *King Shotaway*; this play celebrated the insurrection of the black Caribs of St. Vincent (1795). (From what little we know it was not an antislavery vehicle but rather an anti-English, anti-imperialist drama for which there would have been no shortage of ideological assent.) However it seems just as remarkable that Brown tried to create, on limited resources, the full range of theatrical forms including sailors' hornpipes, Scottish and topical airs, pantomime as well as Shakespeare. James Hewlett also choreographed two different Indian ballets in 1822. It was within this mix that Ira Aldridge first appeared before the public (at some point between January and August of 1822) as Rolla, the rebellious Peruvian in *Pizarro*.

6. As one might expect Brown did not receive the full respect of the press for his range and ambition; indeed from the start his entrepreneurial enthusiasm had been linked to other African-American claims to political power and public recognition. What was for Brown an opening in the expansive territory of commercial culture became for the established press an exercise in social and political presumption. Here is Mordecai Noah's notice of Brown's first garden in *The National Advocate*:

> Among the number of ice cream gardens in this city, there was none in which the sable race could find admission and refreshment. Their modicum of pleasure was taken on Sunday evening, when the black dandies and dandizettes, after attending meeting, occupied the sidewalks in Broadway, and slowly lounged towards their different homes. As their number increased, and their consequence strengthened, partly from high wages, high living, and the elective franchise, it was considered necessary to have a place of amusement for them exclusively. Accordingly, a garden has been opened somewhere back of the hospital called the African Grove; not spicy as those of Arabia (but let that pass), at which the ebony lads and lasses could obtain ice cream, ice punch, and hear music from the big drum and clarionet. The little boxes of this garden were filled with black beauties "making night hideous" and it was not an uninteresting sight to observe the entree of a happy pair. The gentleman, with his wool nicely combed, and his face shining through a coat of sweet oil, borrowed from the castors; cravat tight to suffocation, having the double faculty of widening the mouth and giving a remarkable protuberance to the eyes; blue coat, fashionably cut; red ribbon and a bunch of pinch-beck seals; white pantaloons, shining boots, gloves, and a tippy rattan. The lady, with her pink kid slippers; her fine Leghorn, cambric' dress with open work; corsets well fitted; reticule hanging on her arm. Thus accoutred and caparisoned, these black fashionables saunter up and down the garden, in all the pride of liberty and unconscious of want. In their dress, salutations, familiar phrases, and compliments, their imitative faculties are best exhibited. . . ."

7. The ground of this racism is the suggestion that the faculty of imitation permits the urban African-American to co-opt social spaces and graces not rightfully theirs. To be sure comedy is always implicit

in the uneasy appropriation of fashion and refinement; social pretension remains funny. But here in 1820 the new figure of the black dandy (later Zip coon) takes the full weight of patrician concern about plebeian behavior and the break down of deference at the beginning of the Jacksonian era. Noah establishes in his prose commentary on black acting (on stage and street) the basis for minstrelsy's later comic appropriation of the rituals of civility and citizenship—the stump speech, the militia drill, and the Ethiopian Opera (Hay 17).

8. How might Brown have countered this discourse? Perhaps by returning with a surfeit of signification, by overacting the part. While a steward Brown was known to act with a degree of super-refinement, and he was indeed pretentious in the sense he wanted to beat other entrepreneurs of amusement at their own game. This even went so far as hiring in January, 1822 the assembly room of Hampton's hotel adjacent to the Park Theatre for a full rival production of *Richard III*.

9. These cultural skirmishes took place during years of heightened racial feeling. The vestiges of legal slavery were being removed from New York state and property qualifications were being cut from the elective franchise (White 75). Most ominous of all was the northward spread of the revolutionary violence of the Caribbean in the Denmark Vesey insurrection in Charleston during 1822. The theaters in New York City answered with a topical return of stage African dramas (Collins 100).[1] There were local revivals of *Inkle and Yariko, The Padlock, Othello, The Africans* and new vehicles such as Macready's *The Irishman* in London. *Obi* was revived at the Park Theatre on New Years Day 1823, the day set aside in the local African-American community to commemorate the abolition of the slave trade.

10. Brown replied with his own version of *Obi* that June. How might an African-American cast, playing before a racially mixed audience, have handled the easy subservience of the slave characters in the final years of legal servitude in the state? How might the players have provided the local color, as it were, to the gratuitous Negro dances? How might one control racial representations while giving a large section of the public what it expected? Nothing that we know of his staging of *Obi*, which is admittedly very little, tells us immediately that he was aiming for new kinds of "realism" to counter comic exaggeration.

11. Some clues to Brown's strategy may be found if we work backwards or rather forwards from his staging of the first play that evening—Moncrieff's *Tom and Jerry*—a musical, farcical romp based on Egan's incredibly popular *Life in London*. *Tom and Jerry* had been a hit at London's minor Adelphi Theatre in 1821 and had recently opened to a long run at the Park (March 1823) with Edmund Simpson as Corthinian Tom and Joe Cowell as Jerry Hawthorne. The most popular feature of the play proved to be the "descent" into London's working class East End. Fights and chases provided the "rich bits of low life" including a comic Negro dance between "African Sal" and "Dusty Bob." The Tom and Jerry craze spread to three other performance sites in the city before ending up automatically, one might say, at Brown's Theatre. Here, for the first time as a manager, Brown was faced with the task of offering real "Africans" dancing blackface parts (McAllister 281).

12. Brown made three telling changes. First, for the Negro dance, Brown cast a man, Mr. Jackson, as African Sal. Since no other theatre employed cross dressing this was perhaps a way to shift the center of comedy from complexities of race to the absurdities of gender (McAllister 282). Second, on June 7, he included a slave market scene ("Life in Limbo, Life in Love; on the Slave market, Vango Range in Charleston") in which a white actor was employed to auction off the cast (Odell 3:70). Given the Vesey rebellion only eight months before, how could this remain directly comic rather than appearing grotesque or wearing the aspect of travesty? Third, on the folWithin that year's revival in stage African parts, the accomplished English Comedian Charles Mathews brought his own celebrated one-man delineations of comic social types to America. Mathews too tapped the novel resources of the

vernacular, producing detailed character sketches in ways later considered "Dickensian." While in New York he located new "rich bits of low life" to add to the expanding trade in transatlantic comic novelties. In his *Mr. Mathews' Trip to America* (English Opera House, 1824) Mathews portrayed three black types: a stage coach driver, a fiddle player and a black Shakespearean actor, the latter apparently seen at Brown's theatre. Mathews thus occupies an odd place in the long foreground to minstrelsy.[3] As an Englishman he added a distinctive and more certain American note in the portrayal of "Africans" whereas before most early models had been Caribbean. The last sketch about the actor proved remarkably durable, for it introduced "Opossum up a gum tree" by way of the imaginary audience mishearing "oppose them" in Hamlet's famous soliloquy. For years after, the legend stuck that Mathews had visited Brown's theatre and had actually seen Ira Aldridge as the Prince of Denmark. At long last the work of scholars over a quarter century has unglued every part of this baseless fabrication.[4]lowing Monday, the auction reemerged as "Life in Fulton Market," which may have included the breakdown dancing Long Island free blacks were known to perform at New York's principal marts. Here perhaps Brown aimed at a rough realism, appropriating the local resources of vernacular culture.[2]

13. But not, of course, its real historical effects. Mathews's comic, lowlife turns, with their strings of ethnic and class malapropisms, took off on both sides of the Atlantic at the moment where Brown left off his local productions. Other actors, including the young Edwin Forrest, began to "black-up" regularly as part of their required stock of national types (Ager 108). On August 8, 1823, the last recorded night of an independent black-owned theatre for nearly a century, the African company concluded their performance with "the Grand Serious Dramatic pantomime of OBI: Or, 3 Finger'd Jack" (McAllister 360) and on January 19, 1824, Hewlett gave his own final "At Home" in imitation of Mathews as a benefit for the cause of Greek independence. Hewlett and Aldridge then moved to England, inaugurating a long tradition of African-American performers exchanging the diurnal racism of the United States for the more exotic racialism of Europe. In Britain, as we know, Aldridge felt compelled to cater "to the desire of numerous parties" and to perform the Opossum sketch at the Theatre Royal, Bristol in 1830 (Marshall 44). Was he now playing "Mathews" delineating an "Ira Aldridge" who had never existed? In 1840 Aldridge announced he would perform Mathews's sketch of a black actor from the *Trip to America* (McAllister 366). Was Aldridge a compelling enough actor of tragic roles to hold up a mirror, not just to nature, but to the transatlantic, comic popular culture that had forged the racial representations within which he was forced to work (MacDonald 232)? Let us hope he felt he was.

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Notes

[1] John Collins has observed that the *Obi* revivals of that year might have been especially resonant in the immediate political circumstances since the Charleston slave rebellion found a notorious leader in a man named "Gullah Jack."

[2] This appropriation is part of a much larger story concerning the birth of minstrelsy in New York and the role of local black culture. See the author's "The Place to Make an Artist Work: William Sidney Mount and New York City." The most comprehensive study of early minstrelsy remains Hans Nathan's *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*. However, William J. Mahar's *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* certainly includes much new material.

[3] For a detailed account of the text versions of Mathews's black delineations see Hodge.

[4] Some parts of the fabrication remain standing since some scholars believe Mathews was personally attentive to local black dialect rather than merely picking up ideas from existing written forms. Part of the debate is in Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America*, Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*, and James Hatch, "Here Comes Everybody: Scholarship and Black Theatre History."

Obi

Grave Dirt, Dried Toads, and the Blood of a Black Cat: How Aldridge Worked His Charms

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1. When the great black actor Ira Aldridge took the role of Three Finger'd Jack, he stepped into a play that carried two of the most politically charged symbols of the day: sugar and obi. The pantomime opens against the elaborate backdrop of a sugar plantation with slaves fearfully whispering about the power of obi and Three Finger'd Jack, while the melodrama has the overseer saying, "let the sugar canes take care of themselves . . . and a fig for Obi, and Three finger'd Jack" (4). Both stage versions thus begin by reminding audiences that the tortured relationship between the two races could be summed up in the battle waged between white sugar and black obi. Jack binds these two symbols, but only because the reconciliation exists in the cultural history sandwiched between them. It is a rich history, one that I'd like to explore by turning to the story's source.

2. *Obi, or Three Finger'd* Jack originated with Benjamin Moseley, a British surgeon, who studied medicine in London, Paris, and Leyden before he settled, in 1768, in Jamaica. Moseley soon became surgeon-general of the island and made a fortune from his tropical medicine practice, with a clientele composed of plantation owners and slaves alike. He was respected enough to treat Lord Nelson for Malaria in 1780 and to see his best known work, the 1787 *A Treatise on Tropical Diseases and on the Climate of the West Indies*, go into five editions and be translated into German. But he steadily gained a reputation for losing the lives of patients rather than saving them, and things got worse once he returned to England. Although appointed to the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, he increasingly became known for his unscientific thinking, sparked by the embarrassingly vocal campaign he led against Edward Jenner's cowpox vaccination and by his *Treatise on Sugar*, published first in 1799 with a second edition in 1800. His main purpose in the *Treatise* was to give a history of sugar cane cultivation and consumption, but there are a number of aspects to the book that seem to make no sense at all, and others that are mired in subtle cultural nuances, including the story of *Obi, or Three Finger'd Jack*.[1]

3. For instance, the story of *Obi* appears in the *Treatise on Sugar* under a section entitled "Medical Observations" along with other tropical diseases like yaws, yellow fever, and the plague.[2] This seems like an odd place to recount a story of obi and slave rebellion, until one realizes Moseley was just following conventional wisdom by classifying obi as a disease. Such a classification was, in fact, based on several well-founded reasons. For one, Europeans believed that obi practitioners, and particularly old women, had exclusive knowledge of herbs and plants, which they used as medicine to either cure or kill.[3] This explains the scene in the melodrama when Jack's mother chants,

    Magic fire duly placed
    In square within a circle traced,
    Boil the mystic herbs I've brought,
    Till the Obi charm be wrought;
    Bones I've raked from the burial ground,
    When night and the storm were black around;
    Give strength to my work, till I've fixed my dart,
    Like a cankerous thorn in the white man's heart—
    Till I pierce him and wring him in nerve and spleen

> By the arrows felt, but never seen.
> Then by flame unbodied burn him,
> Then his sinews quiver and ache anew
> And the cold sweat falls like drops of dew,
> Toil him and moil him again and again,
> Sicken his heart and madden his brain;
> Till strength, and sense, and life depart,
> As I tear the last pulse from the white man's heart. (8)

The power of obi registered here shows up as early as 1788 in the Privy Council investigations into the practice in Jamaica. Here, testimony was heard from a number of white men thought be experts on such matters, like Edward Long, author of the infamous *History of Jamaica* in 1774. Long was called on to answer a series of questions that register the strange mixture of fear and ignorance that only obi could evoke, like, "By what Arts or by what Means, do these Obeah-Men cause Deaths, or otherwise injure, those who are supposed to be influenced thereby"; "What are the symptoms and Effects that have been observed to be produced in People who are supposed to be under the Influence of their Practices"; "Are the Instances of death or Diseases produced by these means frequent?" (329). Obi induced diseases were frequent indeed, especially as the period wore on, as literary and travel texts amply record. The 1823 fictionalized travel account *The Koromantyn Slaves*, for instance, describes one West Indian plantation's brush with obi:

> I found indeed the Black population of the estate in a deplorable condition: and of those who survived, the largest proportion were evidently labouring under the pressure of mortal disease. And so it proved: the mortality continued after my arrival; several being frequently buried in one day; others sickening, and declining under the same symptoms. Thus the plantation seemed quickly becoming depopulated . . . . I ventured to him my suspicion of the Obeah practice being the foundation of the evil; and was happy to find my suggestion attended to, both by the surgeon himself and several White residents on the estate; as the Obeah practice was known a long time to have existed in that part of the island. (179)

Diseases and deaths, and thus the depopulation of the slave labor force, were the subject of fiction because they were a terrifying prospect for planters, especially since purchasing new slaves could be expensive, and after the slave trade was abolished in 1807, illegal.

4. But what hit the raw nerve of medical men like Moseley trying to make a living treating tropical diseases was that obi practitioners threatened to run them out of business. As plantation owners put pressure on West Indian physicians to cure their slave populations, slaves themselves put little faith in Western medicine. They preferred instead to understand the constitution of their minds and bodies in terms of the traditional medical practices imported from Africa and then transformed in the West Indies. The little property and money slaves managed to scrape up was often spent on doctoring with obi men or women, who in turn became financially independent. The more profitable obi became, the more white medical men complained. Dr. Thomas Dancer, in his 1801 book *The Medical Assistant; or Jamaica Practice of Physick*, grudgingly wrote "these Obeah people are very artful in their way, and have a great ascendancy over the other negroes, whom they persuade that they are able to do many miracles by means of their art; and very often get good sums of money for their imaginary charms" (269). Even in Africa itself, writers moralized on obi as nothing more than a means to a financial end. John Adams, a sailing captain and trader along the Gold Coast, wrote that fetiche men and priests of Obeah made a handsome living by "cheating" tribesmen "out of their property." But the obi practitioner's self-commodification was also admired by people such as John Gabriel Stedman and William Blake. The most celebrated figure in Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against*

the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in fact, is "Graman Quacy," whom Blake ended up engraving for the narrative. Stedman describes Quacy as "one of the most Extraordinary Black men in Surinam and Perhaps in the World" (581-82): "By his insinnuating temper and industry this negro not only Obtained his Freedom from a State of Slavery . . . but by his Wonderful artifice & ingenuity has found the means of Acquiring a verry Competant Subsistance." Quacy had evidently internalized obi's medical power and financial benefits. By selling his "*Obias* or *Amulets*" to the "Corps of Rangers & all fighting free negroes," Stedman writes, "he not only has done a Deal of Good to the Colony but fill'd his Pockets with no inconsiderable Profits Also" (582).[4]

5. Despite the perceived capitalist irony of obi practice, where practitioners seemed to chase money at the expense of real medical knowledge, obi, was considered a merciless disease that worked its way through the body with sinister swiftness. It also had the nasty habit of taking over the victim's mind. The Jamacian traveler Robert Renny wrote that obi's symptoms "arise from causes deeply rooted in the mind," and similarly, Dr. Adair reported to the Privy Council investigators in Antigua that obi was a "disease originating in a depraved Imagination" which could "suspend, and even destroy, the vital Powers" (Renny 192; Privy Council 337). European physicians had little choice but to root it in the recesses of the imagination because obi was such a medical mystery, and yet so powerful. Indeed, the medical power of obi completely overwhelmed European medicine for the duration of the Romantic period. This was true in 1788, when the Privy Council concluded that obi was a disease "which no Medicine can remove . . . whose Operation is slow and intricate, [and] will baffle the Skill of the ablest Physician" (330); it was true again in 1807, when Robert Renny wrote "A Negro, when seized with illness, inquires of the Obeah-man the cause of his sickness, whether it will prove mortal and within what time he shall die or recover . . . but if no hopes are given of recovery, immediate despair, which no remedy can remove, takes place, and death is the certain consequence" (192); it was true again in 1823 when the author of *The Koromantyn Slaves* observed of obi, "Every means were resorted to, of medicine, good nursing, rest, nourishment, indulgence, and kindness, to preserve the lives of the feeblest: still the mortality continued with little remission" (179). And, of course, it was true for Moseley, as he said in his *Treatise on Sugar*: "No humanity of the master, nor skill in medicine, can relieve a negro, labouring under the influence of Obi. He will surely die; and of a disease that answers no description in nosology" (194).

6. But if Moseley called obi a disease, he called sugar a cure. In fact, the whole idea behind the *Treatise* was that sugar was good for Europe. He insisted that sugar and disease carried a direct relationship, that sugar had "considerable influence in disposing the body to receive or resist disease" (165). And this had always been true, according to Moseley. As he provided a history of sugar, he chronicled its curative properties. "When first introduced into every country," he wrote, sugar "was only used medicinally" (75). It helped moisten the mouth of people with fevers and opened the bowels. "There is more nourishment in a pound of sugar, than in a load of pulse, or vegetables," he said (165). Even more, "the inclination of the mind" depended on sugar (166), and in this way, sugar was like obi: both worked through the body and in the mind. For this reason, both sugar and obi were more than just medicine; Moseley considered both an "art." But while he called obi a "nefarious art" (194), he conversely called sugar an exemplary one, saying, "every kind of sugar whatever is made by art . . . the art of refining sugar, and making what is called loaf-sugar, is a modern European invention" (64).

7. In trying to promote sugar consumption, and thus the continuance of slave culture, Moseley associated himself with those who discouraged meat eating. Among the voices in this camp was the natural historian Edward Bancroft, whose 1769 *Essay on the Natural History of [Dutch] Guiana*, compared British meat eating with Caribbean cannibalism. Though Bancroft claimed that the "Carribees" of Guiana "never eat any of the human species, except their enemies killed in battle," he argued that the casual consumption of chicken and beef, in which the average Briton daily indulged, was actually worse than the flesh-eating Caribs who at least ate only their enemies (260). Bancroft asked his readers

to "survey, without an involuntary horror, the mangled carcasses of inoffensive animals, exposed in a *London* market, who have been killed to gratify our appetites" (262). And so in one swift move, Bancroft conflated native cannibalism with British consumption. Writing thirty years later, Moseley implicitly used the cannibal metaphor to discourage meat eating. Animal food, he said, referring to the slaughters in London of swine and cattle, "is not necessary for the pleasurable existence, and bodily health of man; for mental pleasure and health, perhaps, quite the contrary. Yet the streets of London seem to oppose these facts with proofs shocking to reflecting minds. Blood flows in every gutter" (159).

8. Then, Moseley went far beyond the claims of Bancroft. In Moseley's twisted logic, eating meat turned Londoners into blood-thirsty savages, while sugar transformed them into a refined civilization. "The sugar plantation," he hyperbolically stated, "represents the days of Saturn . . . [who] collects his rays from equitorial climes; diffuses their genial warmth over frigid regions of the earth, and makes the industrious world one great family" (173). By comparing a diet of sugar with one of meat and blood, Moseley hailed "SUGAR CANE" as "the heart of the solar world," by which he meant the "civilized world," since "the savageness of the wildest animals is softened by diet; and it sometimes appears as if ferocity would sleep quietly in the frame, unless awakened by sensation excited by the colour, scent, and taste of blood" (1800, 166). To illustrate this, Moseley's *Treatise on Sugar* carried the remarkable story of a vegetarian tiger and its dramatic plunge from sugared civility to blood savagery:

   > A Mr. Benjamin Parker in Kingston Jamaica "had a Spanish-main tyger, which he brought up on milk and sugar, and bread,—from the time it was newly born, until it was nearly full grown. It slept in his room, frequently on his bed, and went about the house like a spaniel. He was taken ill of a fever. I directed him to be bled. Soon after the operation he fell asleep, with the tyger by his side, on the bed. During his sleeping, the arm bled considerably. The tyger, which as yet had never seen blood, or tasted animal food, while Mr. Parker was sleeping, had gnawed his shirt sleeve, and the bloody part of the sheet into a thousand pieces. He had also detached the compress, and got at the bleeding orifice of the vein, and licked up the blood running from it. The impatient animal, forgetting in a moment his domestic education, and the kindness of his master, began to use the arm with some roughness with his teeth, which awaked Mr. Parker. On his rising up in his bed, the tyger and master were in mutual consternation. The tyger gave a spring, and jumped on a high chest of drawers on the room; from that, to the chairs, and tables, and ran about the house in wild and horrible phrenzy. I arrived at the house at the time of this confusion. The tyger escaped into the garden:—where he was shot. (167-68)

9. Throughout his works, Moseley is particularly bad at matching up his claims with appropriate examples, and this story is certainly no exception. The vegetarian tyger is not convincing as an example of sugar tamed savagery because the story strikes readers as poignant and tragic: it is the domesticated tiger, not Mr. Benjamin Parker's ravaged arm and bloody bed sheets, and certainly not Moseley's mock-heroism, that has readers' sympathy. However, what is most interesting about the story is that it appeared only in the second edition of the *Treatise on Sugar*, where it completely replaced the story of *Obi, or Three Finger'd Jack*. It seems that Jack was originally meant to illustrate this same principle: that sugar cures innate savagery. No one can say for sure why Moseley replaced Jack with the tiger, but perhaps in his revision of the *Treatise* between 1799 and 1800, when the story of Jack became a hit on the British stage, Moseley understood that Jack embodied sugar tamed savagery even less than the vegetarian tiger did, and thus he deleted Jack as his prime example.[5]

10. Yet curiously enough, a key scene in the melodrama carries these provocative connections, originally brought together by Moseley, between tigers and slaves, sugar and blood. Jack stands in front of his mortal enemy Rosa, the plantation owner's daughter, whom Jack has just made his slave in an

underground cavern. He refers to himself as "Karfa" (his African name) as he menacingly says to Rosa, "I suffer not the eye of mortal to track the haunt where, like the tiger of his native deserts, Karfa crouches till fate places the victim in his grasp" (18). Though he evokes Moseley's tiger, Jack's character argues against Moseley's call for a sugared civilization because it is sugar, and not blood, that ignites Jack's savagery. When Ormond, the plantation owner, explains Jack's history, the audience gets a glimpse of the sugar estate's role in Jack's psychologically tortured life:

> Long had he been on the estate, and long had every art been tried to soothe his savage nature, for Heaven knows I pitied the unfortunates, and strove by kindness and humanity to mitigate their cruel lot. With Karfa, alone, my efforts failed; each day but added to his ferocity; crime followed crime, until the villain dared to attempt the honour of my wife. The signal punishment which awaited him drove him to madness, and under the shade of night he burst his bonds, broke into my chamber, and before my sight murdered my unhappy wife. (5)

For his part, Jack is completely clear about the role of blood and sugar in his life, about what element he most thirsts after, and why, as he tells Rosa, "You have doubtless heard of Karfa's cruelties; but know, it is not merely thirst of blood that fires me,—a nobler passion nerves my arm—vengeance!" (17).

11. Jack was not the only one to contradict Moseley's claim that sugar was the cure to European ills. Moseley, in fact, represented simply one side of a debate about sugar and blood in Britain's antislavery movement, a debate that early nineteenth-century audiences would have been fully aware of, as Timothy Morton and Peter J. Kitson have recently discussed. In this antislavery view, sugar was produced at the expense of slave blood, and thus eating sugar made British consumers cannibals. Much antislavery literature of the period was concerned with sugar's intimate link with slave blood. In so doing, it emphasized the dismemberment, brokenness, and complete consumption of the slave body, as in the single most popular antislavery poem of the period, William Cowper's "The Negro's Complaint," which addresses the pain of Africans from their own point of view:

> Why did all-creating Nature
> Make the plant, for which we toil?
> Sighs must fan it, tears must water,
> Sweat of ours must dress the soil.
> Think, ye Masters, iron-hearted,
> Lolling at your jovial boards;
> Think how many backs have smarted
> For the sweets your Cane affords. (lines 2-15)

The slave's body fluids and his emotions—sweat, tears, and sighs—nurture the sugarcane which, in turn, the unthinking white consumer drinks down. Sugar and slave brokenness were major themes in *The Anti-Slavery Album*, a volume printed in 1828, but which included poetry from throughout the period by a number of prominent poets, such as Cowper and Hannah More. Amelia Opie's "The Black Man's Lament," for example, considers that the sugarcane's "tall gold stems contain / A sweet rich juice," and for this "the Negro toils, and bleeds, and *dies*" (1-4). And sugar's sweetness opposes the bitter life slaves endure in Timothy Touchstone's *Tea and Sugar, or the Nabob and the Creole*:

> This is the sweet ingredient, SUGAR call'd.
> Made by the sweat and blood of the enthrall'd,
> Bitter their cup, alas! who makes this sweet,
> Poor Slaves! whose hearts, in sad affliction beat . . . (2:63-66)

The "sweat and blood" signals the dismemberment and mutilation of the slave body which had been made explicit in the popular press. The speaker in "The Dying African," a poem printed in *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1791, says

> Here my faint limbs have borne the bloody gash,
> Here have I sunk beneath the tyrant's lash:
> But still, while rolling on the parched land,
> I felt the tortures of his ruthless hand:
> Soft sons of luxury, I toil'd for you,
> To grace your feast, and swell your empty shew:
> The rich ingredients of your costly boards,
> Our sweat, our pangs, our misery affords:
> Think, think, amid your heaps of needless food,
> How much is tainted with your brother's blood. (lines 31-40)

The bloody, gashed limbs echo another poem by Cowper, "Charity," in its grim description of "merchants rich in cargoes of despair," who "buy the muscles and the bones of man" (138, 140). But as Cowper's poem—and hundreds like it—indicate, the jarring equation of refined sugar and sacrificial blood ignored slaves' power at the expense of emphasizing their brokenness.

12. The remedy for this powerlessness and brokenness was, ironically enough, obi itself. For while Europeans called obi a disease, much of the cultural knowledge of the practice indicated that rebel slaves like Jack classified it as a cure to the condition of slavery. After all, the object of obi's healing practice was the obi bag, itself a symbol of brokenness *and* political power. This would have been extremely important to the role of Jack, since the all the stage adaptations make clear by their very title that Jack is synonymous with his obi: "Obi **OR** Three Finger'd Jack." And, it is by way of the obi bag that Moseley introduces the story of Jack in his *Treatise on Sugar*. He begins, "I saw the obi of the famous Negro robber, Three finger'd Jack, the terror of Jamaica in 1780 . . . His Obi consisted of the end of a goat's horn, filled with a compound of grave dirt, ashes, the blood of a black cat, and human fat, all mixed into a kind of paste. A cat's foot, a dried toad, a pig's tail, a lip of virginal parchment of kid's skin, with character marked in blood in it, were also in his Obian bag" (1799 edn, 195).

13. Moseley's striking description of Jack's obi is indicative of the times. The obi bag became an obsession for early travelers to the West Indies, so much so that it is almost impossible to find an account that does not list these macabre objects. Robert Renny records in 1807 "Obi is usually composed of a farrago of materials, most of which are enumerated in the law made against the practice of this art, in the year 1760, such as blood, feathers, parrots' beaks, dogs' teeth, alligator's teeth, broken bottles, grave dirt, rum, and egg-shells" (192). Another account adds to this list "images in wax, the hearts of birds, liver of mice, and some potent roots, weeds, and bushes, of which Europeans are ignorant."[6] And Moseley, in his *Treatise*, describes how obi doctors heal their patients with these fragments: "These magicians will interrogate the patient, as to the part of the body most afflicted. This part they will torture with pinching, drawing with gourds, or calabashes, beating and pressing. When the patient is nearly exhausted with this rough magnetising, Obi brings out an old rusty nail, or a piece of bone, or an ass's tooth, or the jaw-bone of a rat, or a fragment of a quart bottle, from the part; and the patient is well the next day" (1799 edn, 172).

14. In the eyes of many Europeans, the health of rebel slaves like Jack depended specifically on refuse, broken pieces, fragments, partial objects; that is, obi bags that were powerful in their very brokenness and detachment from wholeness. Although the obi charm stemmed from African religious practices, once it was transplanted to places like Jamaica, the bag took on a new range of symbolic meanings. It came to stand as a stark example of the condition of slaves all over the colonies. And of all the West

Indian characters depicted in the period, Jack himself best exemplifies the symbolic connection between slavery and the fragmented quality of the obi bag. Having only three fingers, he is identified with and yet powerful through dismemberment. Dismemberment is the metaphor for his life, too. When he defends his actions to Rosa, it is in terms of broken homes, broken bodies, broken spirits and broken lives. He says,

> I had a daughter once; did they spare her harmless infancy? Where is my wife? was she spared to me? No! with blood and rapine the white man swept like a hurricane o'er our native village, and blasted every hope! Can aught efface the terrible remembrance from my soul, how at their lordly feet we begged for mercy and found it not. Our women knelt, our infants shrieked in vain, as the blood-stained murderer ranged from hut to hut, dragged the husband and father from their homes, to sell them into bondage! the vext spirits of my wife and child hover o'er me like a holy curse, and claim this due revenge. (22-23)

15. Jack may be broken, but like the obi bag, he is full of rebellious energy. He is therefore undeniably linked to Obeah ceremonies where slave rebellions, insurrections, and other threatening acts were organized, as Alan Richardson has shown in a groundbreaking article. In fact, running parallel to the discourse that joined obi and disease was another that merged obi and rebellion. Such discourse offered up images of Europeans in mental chains and blacks at liberty. For instance, M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Mery, in his two volume *Description de la partie française de Saint-Domingue* of 1797-98, described how during *Vaudoux* ceremonies slaves would explicitly ask for "the ability to manipulate the spirit of their masters." One of the ways this happened was through what he called "the magnetism" created in white masters who gazed too curiously on this practice of blacks and slaves (1:68). Then, in 1809, the abolitionist poet James Montgomery warned his fellow Britons of obi's power in his poem *The West Indies*:

> Tremble Britannia! While thine islands tell
> The appalling mysteries of Obi's spell;
> The wild Maroons, impregnable and free,
> Among the mountain-holds of liberty. (4:316)

Besides white slavery and black freedom, obi ceremonies also performed the more symbolic function of resurrection. Not suprisingly, this aspect of obi was noted in the 1788 Privy Council investigations, where obi practitioners claimed they could raise the dead. The Council reported that "to prepossess the Stranger in favour of their Skill, he is told that they can restore the Dead to Life; for this Purpose he is shewn a Negro apparently dead, who, by Dint of their Art, soon recovers; this is produced by administering the narcotic Juice of Vegetables" (333). Though the Privy Council doubted these claims, to cast doubt was to miss the point and thus the central paradox of the practice. Because slavery was not just a disease, but a form of social death, obi could both cure and reanimate—through medicine, rebellion, or the symbolic power of the obi bag.

16. Which brings us back to Aldridge. One of the marks of a first rate actor is his or her ability to animate. Another is the talent to embody two conflicting ideas at once, and the role of Jack, filled as it is with the vast cultural knowledge about the ironies of obi and the contradictions of sugar, certainly would have provided Aldridge with this. For no matter how much Benjamin Moseley wanted, in his *Treatise on Sugar*, to classify obi a disease and sugar a cure, to replace the rebellious Jack with the vegetarian tiger, to promote plantations and defend slavery, these things were beyond his control once they hit the stage. The fascinating power of the obi bag, the brokenness that longed for the no longer attainable whole, emerged complete in the character of Jack as played by Aldridge.

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Notes

[1] Moseley has been mentioned in several recent scholarly works. See Bewell, Morton, and Lee and Fulford.

[2] This is from the 1800 edition. All quotations are taken from the 1800 edition unless otherwise indicated.

[3] See Bush, 75-76; Privy Council Papers, 333.

[4] Curiously, Stedman also credits Graman Quacy with discovering a root. "Besides these & many other Artful Contrivances he had the Good Fortune to find out the Valuable Root known Under the name of *Qwacy Bitter* of Which this man Was Absolutely the first Discoverer in 1730, & Notwithstanding its being less in Reput in England than formerly is Highly Esteem'd in many other Parts of the World for its Efficacy in strength'ning the stomach, Restoring the Appetite &c." (582).

[5] Moseley doesn't entirely remove the story of Jack from the second edition, but puts the story of the vegetarian tiger, which does not appear at all in the first edition, in place of Jack. In the second edition, Moseley relegates the story of Jack to an appendix called "Miscellaneous Medical Observations."

[6] From "*Songs, Duets, & Choruses, in the Pantomimical Drama of OBI, OR THREE FINGER'D JACK*: invented by Mr. Fawcett, and Perform'd at the Theatre Royal, Hay Market, To which are prefix'd Illustrative Extracts, and a Prospectus of the Action."

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1. This entire new study of *Obi; or Three-Finger'd Jack* revolved at first around two "performances." These were stagings of segments from different versions of this play, in which the segments were interspersed with oral presentations of the other essays in this collection. The first such "production" combining scenes and papers was performed on July 18, 2000, at the Playwrights Theater at Boston University. Produced by Professor Charles Rzepka (who has ably led this whole enterprise from its beginnings to this collection) and directed by Vincent Ernest Siders of the New African Company and TYG Productions, the Boston version—as I will refer to it from here on—presented itself as primarily a celebration of the life and career of Ira Aldridge, the African-American actor who played the role of Jack Mansong, among many others, in England during the 1820s and after. It featured a cast of talented professionals and students, including a Jack played by Jovan Rameau, a Harvard MA who had just performed Shakespeare with the American Repertory Theater, along with musical direction and piano accompaniment by Ryan Sandburg and many-faceted technical direction by Karen Stanley. Vincent Siders himself provided the narration and some critical reflections that bridged the scenes he chose and linked them to the academic papers, all of which were first delivered during this production, save for the piece by Robert Hoskins, who could not come over from New Zealand that July. I attended this unique and impressive performance myself, since Professor Rzepka had already asked me to help with another version after learning that I was Program Chair for an upcoming conference in our field.

2. This second production would be—and was—staged for the year 2000 Conference of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR), in part because *Obi* was a significant (though now usually forgotten) piece of theater first performed during what most scholars call "the Romantic period" in English and European culture (roughly 1789-1836). With a modicum of theater experience in my background far smaller than Vincent Siders' (hence my reliance in many of his choices), I agreed to direct and narrate what I will henceforth call the NASSR production, aided by funds remaining from the grant that Dr. Rzepka had obtained from Boston University's Humanities Foundation to support both presentations. This later one, based closely and admiringly on the Boston version but also revising it here and there (for reasons I will discuss below), was staged on September 14, 2000, in Neeb Hall at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe, Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix. A plenary event for all the attending faculty and students at an academic conference co-sponsored by Arizona's three state universities, this production of scenes and papers added Robert Hoskins to the panel of experts (now five in all) and featured students from the University of Arizona (or UA) Schools of Music and Dance and Theater Arts, with UA student Walter Belcher as Jack, musical direction and piano accompaniment by Sean Schulze, and technical direction by my UA colleague Professor Jeffrey Warburton. Complete cast, crew, and panel lists for both versions accompany this essay. Both, in any case, were well received by their audiences and, just as Professor Rzepka had hoped (see his essay), served effectively to return attention to this complex popular drama while raising all the theatrical, cultural, racial, colonial, and widely political questions prompted by a work that began in 1800 as a highly imperialist and racist serio-pantomime and "changed its tune" in some important ways by the time of the altered melodrama version that featured Ira Aldridge in the 1820s. The basic structure was the same in both productions. With both directors interested in reviving the stage conventions in England from 1800 to 1830 as well as examining the cultural implications of this play as it changed over that time, each version was divided into two halves with an intermission between them. The first half focused on sung or pantomimed sequences from the 1800 play, with commentary on these

moments provided by Charles Rzepka, Jeffrey Cox, and at NASSR by Robert Hoskins (especially since Hoskins is an expert on the songs and incidental music for the 1800 *Obi* composed by Samuel Arnold). Both directors felt that the serio-pantomime as scripted by John Fawcett could best be highlighted, given our limited budgets, by the opening and closing musical choruses (I.i and II.ix) and by selected scenes: the first meeting between Rosa and Captain Orford at the plantation (also in I.i); Tuckey's comical dumb-show announcing the initial wounding of the Captain by Jack (later in I.i), as well as the bringing of the wounded Captain back to the plantation house (which I abbreviated and overlaid with narration to make time for a fifth paper in the NASSR version); the Overseer's sung charge to the plantation slaves to find and capture Jack (the end of I.i); the duet between Quashee and his anxious spouse as he sets off with his rifle (I.v); the solo lament of Quashee's Wife—who calls herself "Ulalee" in her song—after he goes (II.i, but sequenced by us right after his exit); and Rosa, disguised as a sailor-boy, singing "A Lady in Fair Seville City" (a popular "hit" at the time) in Jack's cave in an effort to lull him to sleep so that she can find the wounded Orford now held by him (II.iv)—a Jack, stinking-drunk at this point, who is never given a voice in the 1800 version, spoken or sung. Both directors felt that these moments, once contextualized by narration and papers, epitomized the key features of the first *Obi* play from its pantomime style through its types of light-opera choruses and solos through its setting of black characters against each other through its contrasting the heroism of Rosa and Quashee over against the seemingly dissipated villainy of Jack, unquestioningly assumed at the beginning and unmitigated by the end. Noting that the original 1800 play was performed (yes, offensively to us) by all-white players, most of them in black face, Vincent Siders and I agreed on having each of our performers wear an eye-mask (black or white) that symbolized his or her race in the play, whatever the race of the performer. That way the original face-masking was somewhat retained and emphasized but was also equalized so that "whiteness" and "blackness" were both presented as mainly imposed cultural roles for the characters in this play from 1800 through the 1820s. In other respects, though, the characters were costumed according to period and class styles around 1800, partly depending on what we could purchase fairly cheaply or obtain on loan from a theater or theater arts department.

3. The second half in both productions featured Jack, also called "Karfa"—now given an eloquent voice and left entirely unmasked (unlike everyone else)—as he might have been played by Ira Aldridge in a melodrama rendition of the 1820s. We therefore followed the script, now full of dialogue, used for a production of that decade at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden (the same as the 1820s version). Our narration in both cases mentioned where choruses and other scenes, such as the play's opening, were the same from version to version, keeping us from having to repeat any feature from 1800 still in use over two decades later. Even though both of our productions made no costume changes for the second half (except when I chose to remove a black mask and wig worn by Jack in the first half of the NASSR production), the scenes we chose from the 1820s consequently emphasized the altered or new elements in this version compared to the earlier one. These included the early dialogue between the planter (here called Ormond) and the Overseer, later shown to be quite slanted, on why the former so hates and fears Jack, now the would-be rapist and the murderer of the planter's wife in the not-so-distant past (I.i in the 1820s script above); Tuckey's singing of the long-time folk song "Opposum Up a Gum Tree" (I.ii), one of the few musical moments *not* used in the 1800 version; an extended scene between the fervently anti-white Obi Woman and Jack in her wilderness hut, where "Karfa" first expresses his motives from his standpoint (I.iii); the expanded dialogue between Jack and Rosa in his cave just before she again sings "A Lady in Fair Seville City," where he asserts the justice of his now turning a white "boy" into a *black* man's slave (II.iii-iv); and the crucial final sequence centered on Rosa and Jack as he drags her across the wilderness from his cave, having discovered her real identity this time, with the plantation party of slaves in hot pursuit (II.vi).

4. This half provided apt moments in both productions for Peter Buckley's comments on Ira Aldridge's acting background in the culture of black American theater and for Debbie Lee's observations on the extent to which actual (or fabricated) obi traditions were used in this play. Both directors and

companies, though, worked to build both second halves—and indeed both evenings—towards the final Jack-Rosa sequence where he finally makes her and the audience visualize the "blood and rapine" in which he was snatched from his family, along with others, back in Africa. Partly because we both asked our "Jacks" to play this moment to emphasize how *Aldridge* gave Jack a rich voice and a commanding presence in the 1820s, the ultimate thrust of the whole production in each case thus became the transformation in cultural awareness and attitudes that allowed for this major change, even though we also had to note that Jack is shot dead by Tuckey this time as he finally struggles with the slaves who have caught up to him at last, in this version even more clearly because they have been promised their freedom and a reward if they capture him, dead or alive. In this fashion both productions emphasized the difference between this semi-tragic, action-based ending of the 1820s and the gleeful chorus at the end of the 1800 version (the finale of our first half), where all the surviving characters festively celebrated a renewed British supremacy in Jamaica, in part by displaying the decapitated head of Jack before themselves and the audience—a conclusion entirely removed from this play by the 1820s.

5. Despite all this common ground in both of our productions, however, there were some sharp differences in the ways the Boston and NASSR versions chose to enact and stage certain sequences, even if several moments did remain virtually identical. In the rest of what follows, I want to focus on these differences, not in order to make a case for one set of choices as "better" than another, but to foreground the cultural issues and practical problems involved in restaging and offering scholarly commentary on this conflicted and changing play for two different types of audiences in the year 2000. This drama and its history are clearly more than curiosities that reopen forgotten aspects of theater and popular middle-class entertainment, not to mention the career of a major black actor, from 1800 to 1830. *Obi* is a revealing touchstone that shows us, if not great art, at least some of the undersides of British and imperialist culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that we have too often overlooked in our studies of "Romanticism." Moreover, it confronts us with the extent to which our attitudes today, however distant from those dominant in Britain in 1800 and the substantially different 1820s, are still haunted by the history of racism and slavery in the West, so much so that our choices in representing such material are always complicated by many facets of cultural memory depending on who we are, where we live, and whom we are addressing at the turn of the twentieth into the twenty-first century. The differing choices I now proceed to describe are ultimately indicators of our troubled cultural identities, different for different groups, that can only benefit from facing the cultural history revealed in *Obi; or Three-Fingered Jack*, yet must also confront the mixed angry-and-guilty attitudes that surface when these roots of our present existence are exposed for what they were—and to some extent remain.

6. The different choices made in each production initially stemmed from each director considering the composition and likely concerns of his prospective audience. The Boston version came close to being abandoned, despite the persistent efforts of Dr. Rzepka and all involved, because its audience was sure to come in large measure from that city's black community, as well as from Boston University or Harvard students, in a racially mixed New-England hub with a long and lingering history of conflicts between ethnic groups. Some possible African-American directors and players, even considering the presence of modern commentary, were understandably resistant to reviving a flatly racist, Jim-Crowish play, blatantly so in its 1800 version and more than occasionally so in the revision of the 1820s despite the latter's abolitionist elements. At least the first half of the production would have to show that the 1800 play celebrated, far more than it condemned, the existence of slavery in the West Indies, provided that "white man kind massa be" (which was obviously not required by law) and "No lay stick on negro's back" (which *this* plantation master avoids only "when he good"). Consequently, Vincent Siders began the Boston production by having Quashee's Wife and Sam's Wife, soon joined by Quashee and Sam themselves, sing the entire opening chorus in fixed positions with restrained gestures as though they were almost ghostly museum figures, very much suspended in the past, in no way even seeming to

endorse sugar-plantation enslavement, whether it or not was under a non-violent master. Moreover, after these performers had transitioned from the initial lament over the loss of their extended families in Africa ("The white man comes") and shifted into their celebration of "kind massa," Siders as narrator interrupted them deliberately, calling on them to stop, and critiqued the obvious ironies so as to raise the question of whether such deeply offensive scenes should even be revived and discussed at all, thus leading quite effectively into Dr. Rzepka's eloquent response, "Why *Obi*?" For the Boston audience, clearly, no strategy could have been better. In that setting any positive valuation of slave history, however burlesqued or ironized, could only have been insensitive and hurtful, not to mention taking too much attention away from the evening's focus on Ira Aldridge.

7. I made a somewhat different choice for the opening chorus of the 1800 *Obi* because our NASSR audience was so different from the one in Boston. As academics (mostly white, to be sure), our observers were more interested in something approaching historical recreation, a reenactment of the cultural conditions and theater conventions, as well as the ideologies and imperialism, of a period and a "Romantic" England they had all studied for years. I knew they would be especially intrigued by the controversy in 1800 (noted in Jeffrey Cox's paper) over the staging of the play: whether to present it in the jaunty, even carnivalesque, serio-pantomime style being allowed to invade London's Haymarket Theater—one of only three venues then licensed to present Shakespeare—or in the style of "serious drama" ("high" culture compared to which serio-pantomime and *Obi* were relatively "low," however popular and lucrative). Though I as narrator also interrupted the opening chorus before its end to raise the questions that led into "Why *Obi*?", I therefore directed the NASSR performers to be more offensive (for our times, at least) than Vincent had wanted them to be. The opening duet ("The white man comes") remained a lament with the two wives standing in place before a plantation-house slide on the back stage-wall above them, although their arm-movements were more expansive in keeping with the typically broad gestures of the serio-pantomime style that all the first-half scenes emphasized in the NASSR version. But once the two couples launched into "Good massa we find," I had them dance with Arcadian gaiety (this setting being a sort of Eden in 1800, as Hoskins would note), then cross the stage in a music-hall chorus-line, each holding out three fingers (warning the audience about the "Jack" they all fear), and then fall on their knees near the edge of the stage when they start to reprise "Good massa"—with my interruption coming only at that point, when I (of course) asked them to rise from such abject positions. Samuel Arnold's music, as well as 1800 pantomime conventions, seemed to demand movement here, as I found to be the case in other scenes as well. I could count on our NASSR audience to catch the harsh irony in this approach at once and simultaneously to feel the offensiveness while associating it with both the British racial attitudes prior to Parliament's abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the popular theater conventions of the time. With that prospect in mind, I could also use the contrast between stationary lamentation and celebratory movement to play up the double ideological game that the 1800 *Obi* tries to play from the start, where slavery is briefly condemned, but only as a tearing-apart of families, and white owners are themselves cast as ambassadors of civilization who bring advanced cultivation, fair labor practices, Christianity, protection, and refined dancing to near-savage black "others" supposedly more raised up than held down by such provisions.

8. This contrast in styles, right from each opening sequence, was reinforced by our different casting choices, even though these sometimes resulted more from happenstance than design. Vincent and Charles, in addition to Jovan Rameau, employed as many African-American performers as they could find. Quashee *and* the Obi Woman, the latter often played by a male actor historically, were performed and sung by Jean Connally of the New African Company of Boston, and Chris Johnson from Northeastern University enacted Sam throughout this production. These choices added great force to what may be for us the greatest shock in all versions of this play: the setting of black against black, as the devoted male slaves still on the plantation pursue the Jack who has rebelled against their master, in part because they have been converted to Christianity and promised freedom and gold but also because

they have come to see themselves as protecting their wives and children in memory (really!) of their even larger African families, not to mention expressing loyalty to a generally "kind massa." For the NASSR production, I admit, I at first sought to continue and even intensify this shock by offering parts to several African-American students, women as well as men. As interested as several such students were (I say gratefully), even to the point of accepting roles initially, all but Walter Belcher (our Jack) had good reasons to opt for larger parts or better-paying engagements in other venues, which did materialize for these talented performers during our production process. As a result, I finally had to use an all-white cast, save for Walter as Aldridge/Jack, including my own spouse, Pamela, as Quashee's Wife, our elder daughter, Karen, as Rosa, and our younger daughter, Joanne, as both Sam's Wife and Tuckey—all of whom (thankfully) had considerable stage experience, as well as extensive musical training. The NASSR production thus found another way, inadvertently, to reproduce something like the original type of cast for an academic audience interested in the conditions of the first production and the cultural significance of those conditions. One consequence in Tempe was a deliberate picture of a large-scale white supremacy—which controlled *by playing* most of the black slaves—"ganging up" on Jack Mansong, reinforcing his sense of oppression the more he is allowed to speak in the 1820s segments. A related effect, too, was a vision of Aldridge/Jack in the second half finally educating a crowd of whites out of their complacency *even on stage* by awakening them all—and a *very* white Rosa especially—to what the horrors of slavery really meant in ways the Anglos surrounding him had not recognized before. Once again, these differences in each production had their distinct advantages for their contexts, especially for the audience to which each version was carefully tailored.

9. Such very basic differences led inevitably to others in the final renderings of many scenes, even as these segments on paper remained mostly the same in both productions. At the point where the Overseer sings his master's exhortation to the faithful slaves to go hunt Jack down in the 1800 play, for example, Vincent placed all four players (including Quashee, Sam, and Quashee's Wife) on the same level with the Overseer, who sang to them simply by turning towards his stage left, perhaps so that all the characters could be readily seen as, sadly, "on the same team." I chose to play up the subordination of the slaves at this moment, partly to underline the Overseer's thoughtless irony (unintended by him, but intended by Michael Conran playing him) as he appeals to them in the name of their "dear native land and children"—their *race*, essentially—to make all of *that* their prime motivation for seeking the head of a black escapee. Neeb Hall at ASU, I found, was mainly a lecture room, with a shallow stage down front, not as intimate as the Playwrights Theater in Boston. It therefore had a substantial "pit" space below the apron of the stage, quite wide until the first row of spectators, a space I had already decided *not* to use for the piano (which I positioned below the stage to its right to allow the NASSR audience better sight-lines). I placed the exhorted slaves down in this pit looking up at the Overseer, who only later drew them up on stage when he finally united them in their quest, whereupon they scattered slowly in different directions as a frightened and uncertain posse after having promised (as apparently "low-lifes" must) to "no swear loud," since Jack might then hear them coming.

10. In addition, I echoed this insistence of white power in the 1800 duet scene where "Quashee he load his gun," to the dismay of his wife, after being christened and promised freedom in return for Jack's head. As it happened, Jean Connally as Quashee in Boston was given no props and was placed in some isolation by Vincent near the front of the stage to start this scene—making him seem alone as a black man seeking another black's head for a white reward—until he turned towards his wife (here a white performer) to soothe her before denying her appeal. With resourceful help from Professor Warburton and jack-of-many-trades cast member Seamus O'Brian, I was able to give the white Gerry Petersen's Quashee an imposing flintlock rifle, which I even had him load on stage. I then asked him to stand with it in the manner of a stock white frontier hero, this time closely clung to by his wife throughout their scene together, so that his being an instrument of white conquest would be emphasized alongside what, for the character, is sincere dedication to a cause in which he believes, even in the face his spouse's pleas, finally on behalf of their infant child. The motif of family preservation that speaks *against*

slavery in the 1800 version, the main justification for Ulalee's extended solo after Quashee departs, was thus pointedly set against the valuing of Anglo-British supremacy in the face of black defiance. Quashee in the NASSR production remained unwaveringly resolute, however, since the imperial theme is ultimately given decisive weight, in my reading of the 1800 script, when Quashee, by now freed but still a willing subject of the Empire, exchanges his rifle for a cutlass in the penultimate scene and visibly starts to cut Jack's head off as the lights come down in preparation for their bright resurgence at the finale of the 1800 pantomime.

11. The first play's finale itself ("Wander now, to and fro") was also interpreted in notably different stagings. In the Boston production, the severed head was brought on right as the lights came up and placed at the front of the stage, all by Ulalee, the principal soloist in the finale. Quashee then paraded proudly onto the stage immediately, along with every other living character, moving downstage to display the head with his upstage arm only for a brief period after his wife has reminded everyone of his heroism. At this point the head was again placed at the edge of the apron while everyone knelt for "God Save the King" prior to coming forward for a communal final chorus, during which the head almost disappeared from view. The effect was one of racial divides healed (or prevented) and violence gradually effaced, with the scapegoating of Jack underscored for a time but his destruction deemphasized—finally to be reversed, as I will soon show—while this version of the finale swelled to a climax. The NASSR production, by contrast, delayed the entrance of both Quashee and the head during this whole sequence, waiting for that revelation until all were reminded that "Quashee gave the blow." In what was for me a crucial change, I gave that soprano-solo sequence back to the character who is assigned it in the original 1800 script and score: Rosa, rather than Quashee's Wife. Though I admire Vincent Siders for giving Ulalee more of a powerful voice here, I believe that Quashee is supposed to be granted his ultimate seal of approval from the white daughter and heiress of the plantation, not to mention the future Mrs. Orford, as the scene begins moving decisively towards a celebration of Anglo supremacy with Negro consent. Very much in line with that drive, I had Quashee enter only at this moment and, in a wild-eyed victory stance, brandish the severed head center-stage before the audience and the other characters. Though he knelt momentarily with the head during "God Save the King," as he must, the NASSR Quashee kept it and rose again to his feet as the final choruses were sung, holding it aloft above himself and everyone as high as he could, like Cellini's famous statue of Perseus displaying the grisly face of Medusa, as the finale ended. I believe that the 1800 *Obi* was similarly monumental, graphic, and insistent to its audience in cathecting all racial conflict and arguments over slavery ultimately onto the severed head of Jack (its Medusa) and, though his sacrificial destruction, seeming to eradicate this teeming cacophony from the Empire with deliberate force, supposedly to the benefit of slaves and masters alike. Staging the 1800 finale so "in your face" in the NASSR production allowed that particular "circulation of social energy" (in Stephen Greenblatt's words) to be partly reenacted in the year 2000 with an effective balance of repulsiveness and imperialistic force. That British audiences apparently "lapped this up" in droves just over two hundred years ago is one of the horrors of cultural history, along with slavery, that this whole revival rightly makes us confront in the development of Western "civilization" and the "Romantic" era.

12. Meanwhile, an additional reason for making the 1800 ending so deliberately offensive was the contrast that could thus be established during the NASSR version's second half with the 1820s melodrama, certainly with its ending but also with its entire revision of Jack into a speaking character with a fuller and sadder history. For the initial reduction of Jack to a silent object (ultimately only his lifeless head) to be reversed as strongly as I wanted it to be, I felt the NASSR first half needed to end with that reduction blatantly displayed—though Vincent Siders had moved in this direction with a postlude to the final 1800 chorus, done in silent-movie style, where all the cast members tossed the head between them under flickering lights before the intermission began. The 1820s changes would then seem more pronounced, particularly as Jack spoke more and more for himself, first undercutting Ormond's initial rendering of "Karfa's" past life in the melodrama and then explaining his own violence with the greater

violence done to himself and his family, which the Planter and the 1800 play had completely obscured. The contrast attempted in the NASSR production succeeded with its audience, I believe, in part because of the above decisions about the first half of the evening, but also in part because I chose to keep most of the scenes from the 1820s version very close to the way they were played in the Boston production, as strongly and rightly constructed as that was to bring out the quality of Ira Aldridge's presence as Jack once this character was allowed to speak more of the truth about slavery. The 1820s scene between the Obi Woman and Jack (slightly reduced for NASSR) and later the several between Jack and Rosa were thus, in Tempe as in Boston, played in pools of amber light that isolated pairs of characters, each time on a larger stage kept entirely in darkness, so that the audience might concentrate on the words and gestures with which Jack, in a series of soliloquies, tries to make his interlocutors see and feel what his experiences have been. Vincent Siders and I were fortunate to have the talents of Jovan Rameau and Walter Belcher, both with arresting stage presences and quite resonant voices, so that such powerfully altered sequences could truly be climactic revelations for Rosa and the audience alike and the almost Shakespearean grandeur that Ira Aldridge brought to these scenes in the 1820s could be revived in our renditions as much as possible—again by actors experienced with Shakespeare, as Aldridge (then especially noted for his *Othello*) most certainly was.

13. Even so, there were two major moments in the 1820s half of the Boston and NASSR productions that were rescripted and staged quite differently by the two directors for quite specific reasons. First, Tuckey's musical sequence near the beginning of the melodrama ("Opossum Up a Gum Tree") was extended backwards into the preceding dialogue by Vincent Siders, who also cut the final verse of the song itself as it appeared in the 1820s script and score. I chose, partly for reasons of running time, to narrate what happened in the dialogue and then to have Tuckey perform the entire song with only his/her spoken lines immediately preceding it. These were equally valid reactions, in my view, to a multi-layered moment in the revised play. Tuckey, frequently performed in the past by a young woman good at trickster roles (Jeannette Ryan and Joanne Hogle, in our cases), is the most betwixt-and-between character in the piece, even more than the Obi Woman, also usually played by a gender-crossing actor. He is a once-enslaved but now free black; no longer a slave but still only a servant; a spokesman for freedom but the final shooter of Jack; a playful critic of many situations (like the Fool in *King Lear*) but devoted to the safety and interests of his white master, Captain Orford; and inclined to flirt both with the opposite (or is it the same?) sex and with women of different or mixed races (or are the races the same when both players in a flirtation scene are white or black?). In the melodrama version of *Obi*, Vincent and I agree, Tuckey extends this fluid status by becoming a vocal critic of race relations during the one big scene focussed entirely on him.

14. The question is where that stance begins and ends here. The Boston production made this critique plain, but implicit by including Tuckey's flirtation with the mixed-race free servant "Kitty" in the plantation kitchen (Erika Dyer, wearing a white/black mask), in which she both admits his raffish appeal and chides him for being a "dingy spark" too black for her, despite her own *legally* black status. Jeannette Ryan's roll-with-the-punches approach to Tuckey led the character into jauntily admitting the problems in his status once he was alone on stage; at this point Vincent Siders had him interrupted by an audience request, music-hall style, for "Opossum Up a Gum Tree," which he then performed to and with the audience as a generalizing number about tricksters which rose above issues of race. In my approach for NASSR, however, I saw this song—despite its long previous history outside *Obi* (again, noted by Jeffrey Cox)—as brought in to comment on Tuckey's own multi-racial situation, among other things, since a free but "too low" black is like the opossum that is sometimes forced up a tree and sometimes on the run, living by his wits. I therefore asked Joanne to move, uninterrupted, right from Tuckey's brief monologue on how "we poor blacks have a weary time of it" into a song definitely about that very subject. Even more important, I had Joanne bring Tuckey right out to the edge of the stage, pointing directly at the audience, and quite sardonically sing the third verse of this number, the one cut (surely because of its offensiveness) in the Boston rendition. In that verse, which begins with "Black

boy him love Jill Jenkins," Tuckey cuttingly objects to the prevailing cultural onus against interracial relationships and reminds his hearers that he stands a good chance of being "beat" (like the slave he once was) for what he just attempted with Kitty, were it ever widely known. This moment, to my knowledge, would have been unprecedented in the history of *Obi* and quite rare before the 1820s in performances of this song. It is a major indication, which I felt should be included and underscored, of how much attitudes had shifted, though not completely, between the 1800 and the 1820s versions of this play. It also shows how the levels of being "between" cultural positions that came out, however briefly, even in the 1800 script rose more and more to the surface the longer this play was performed with increasingly transformed attitudes towards its troubling subject matter. It was Ira Aldridge, after all, rather than performers of Tuckey (see Cox again), who ultimately became the most famous in England for performing "Opossum" on stage, often apart from *Obi*, as he continued to give voice to the conditions of a still-enslaved race well into the 1860s.

15. The biggest difference between both recent productions, though, was in how each director chose to end the second half and indeed the whole evening. Following Jack's final speech on his past to Rosa, Vincent Siders did stage the closing fight scene between the pursuing blacks and their object of pursuit—but only up to a point. Once Tuckey shot Jack and the latter fell, as in the script, he was then allowed to rise up again (as in the film *Fatal Attraction*), and when Quashee moved to knife him once more, Vincent intervened as narrator, much as he had in the opening chorus of the 1800 play. Donning part of the Obi Woman's costume and thus assuming the powers of *obeah* in a positive way, Vincent asked Jack to rise from his final position in the melodrama and to keep living forever on an eternal stage, permanently embodying the memory of all that his and Ira Aldridge's stories encompassed, from the oppressive to the revolutionary dimensions, all of which could then remain strongly in the cultural memory. Vincent further drew Tuckey from the on-stage crowd and had him put the rifle down in exchange for a new cultural role in the future where s/he would speak the truth, still a trickster, about the multiple and complex lives of African-Americans through different stages in their history. In this way the black-against-black problem in this play was resolved in favor of a redirected, communal, and African-American sense of time, reconstructed both from and against *Obi* to redress the imbalances that Anglo accounts of Western history have too often left in force. Finally, Vincent invited all the remaining cast members and the audience to envision an *obeah*-generated condition in which the wounds inflicted by the *Obi* plays and what they represented could be healed without the significance of this drama being forgotten. We in the audience left with the sense that history may have occurred in certain ways, but that future directions for humanity are a matter of group choice that is not predetermined. We have the capacity, this Boston production reminded us, to recast the fictions by which we have covered history with cultural mythologies—in the way Vincent Siders finally remade *Obi*—and to propose revisionist mythologies that are inclusive instead of racist and equalizing rather than hierarchical. Such a process, begun that evening, could indeed, if achieved, become an even more transformed *Obi* for the twenty-first century.

16. I hope it is clear how much I admire and applaud that choice for ending the Boston production. I also hope I can adequately explain why I chose a different way of closing the NASSR version. We in Arizona also moved directly from the final Jack-Rosa scene into the action sequence where Quashee challenges Jack, Jack struggles with him, Sam joins the fray, Jack recovers Quashee's knife in the melee, and Tuckey comes on to fire a rifle at Jack as he is about to dispatch both his other pursuers. At that point I chose to freeze the on-stage image at the moment Jack, arching upwards in a stabbing motion, is hit by the bullet. I then posed the still-unresolved questions for all of us that this whole refashioned play *and* this final image leave us to pursue today: Has this outcome sufficiently turned from comic to tragic? Have the changes from one version to another led to enough further progress by now? *In what ways* can Jack's story still live for us so that it leads to productive change and does not become a forgotten anachronism? I did not leave the actors frozen for too long and did ask them to rise as I had when I intervened in the opening chorus. But I went on to note that there are more remaining

questions, some of which were key subjects in the rest of the NASSR conference that had three days yet to run. Given the very academic—and thus "accurately reconstructive"—setting that we were all in, I could not bring myself to change the ending of the *1820s play* as Vincent so powerfully did. At the same time, though, I could stop its progress before it was finished and, with Jack's moment of death held in suspension, could raise the lingering issues of this work with that sad and now deeply-layered figure fully in view and, I hope, burned into the memories of the audience along with the cultural problems we still have to solve in the wake of what *Obi* depicted and still depicts.

17. All of us involved in restaging this drama knew and still know how fraught with contradictions it is for us as a new century begins and how carefully we needed and still need to avoid burying these problems by viewing such a play too simply or forgetting about it because it is not "great classic drama" (as Professor Rzepka and I are the first to admit). Even Vincent Siders agrees that it should not be forgotten, since it shows how a whole Anglo-Western culture can justify oppression by calling it civilization and then how that same culture can at least begin to undeceive itself. Still, *Obi* in the year 2000 does pose the question of how we face what we claim to have repudiated when that repudiation may not be complete enough for enough people—and how we position ourselves in a cultural history of racial injustice, of which the different versions of *Obi* are stages in a development that continues to unfold. If a revival of *Obi* is unsettling, that is all to the good in the view of all of us who participated. We cannot claim we are fully beyond it any more than we can accept its premises even in the 1820s. We also continue to disagree about how to approach it, even between black and white to some extent, given the issues it still raises. But there is also the fact that blacks and whites have been brought together somewhat by facing such a play and the quandaries it provokes, with due consideration for differing points of view. Certainly none of us remain the same after having wrestled with *Obi; or Three-Finger'd Jack* and its history of both myopia and change. Both directors are immensely grateful, as I am to Vincent, to all our cast members, musicians, technicians, sponsors, colleagues, and families, every one of them extraordinarily dedicated and talented in facing a difficult task. Yet we all hope that the difficulty does not stop with this effort or dissipate in some sort of complacency for any of us. The transformation of *Obi*, especially as Ira Aldridge played it, is the history of a cry for better world, and none of us should evade the responsibility each of us has to answer that cry in the years to come.

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OBI; or, THREE-FINGER'D JACK

A SERIO-PANTOMIME, IN TWO ACTS.

ACT I.

SCENE I | SCENE II | SCENE III | SCENE IV | SCENE V | SCENE VI

[NOTE: Scenes that have been dramatized on video are in ***bold*** *and bracketed with an icon [ ]. To download the files, just click on the icon at the beginning or end of the section. Please note that these files are quite large and will take a few moments to download]*

SCENE I—*View of an extensive plantation in Jamaica. A private gate,* 3 E.R.H. *A large house,* L.H. *The centre representing Slaves and Oxen, in figures, tilling the ground, At the back are sugar houses, and a practicable wheel, representing a mill at work,* R.H. *in perspective.*

QUASHEE'S WIFE *discovered,* R.H. *and* SAM'S WIFE, L.H.

DUETT. The white man comes, and brings his gold—
The slaver meet him on the Bay—
And, oh, poor negro then be sold,
From home poor negro sails away.
Oh, it be very, very sad to see
Poor negro child and father part—
But if white man kind massa be,
He heal the wound in negro's heart.

Enter QUASHEE, SAM, *and other* Male *and* Female Slaves

CHORUS OF NEGROES.

Sing ting a ring terry—sing ting a ring terry—
Good massa we find, ting a ring.
When buckra man kind, then negro heart merry—
Sing ting a ring, wing terry.

TRIO.

We love massa—we love massa, when he good,
No lay stick on negro's back—
We love much kouskous he gives for food
And save us from the Three-finger'd Jack.

CHORUS.

Sing ring a ring, terry, &c.

Enter OVERSEER, L.H.

SONG—OVERSEER.

Black ladies and gentlemen, please to draw near,
And attend to the words of your grand Overseer,
Leave work till to-morrow, my hearts, in the morning,
Be jovial and gay,
For this is the day,
That our master's, the good Planter's daughter was born in,
'Tis your lady's birthday,
There-fore we'll make holiday,
And you shall all be merry.

CHORUS.

Sing ting a ring, sing ting a ring, wing ting a ring terry—
Huzza-huzza-huzza!

PLANTER. Yes—yes, he has landed! he's now on his way from the shore to embrace me—

OVERSEER. Who is it?

PLANTER. Captain Orford, from England—

OVERSEER. What, landed to-day?

PLANTER. Yes—the son of my oldest and very best friend.

OVERSEER. Then he comes with the troops they have lately expected—

PLANTER. Right. Prepare for his welcome—see nothing neglected.

Exeunt all except Overseer, L.H.

Overseer calls on eight *Slaves*, L.H. who enter with sugar canes. He directs them to carry them to the sugar houses. They exeunt, R.H. Enter *Tuckey*, with a letter, L.H. He comes forward, and shews he can't understand the direction. He perceives the *Overseer*, taps him on the shoulder, salutes him as he turns round, beckons him forward, requests him to direct him where he can find the person to whom the letter is addressed. *Overseer* takes the letter, and discovers it to be for the *Planter*, tells *Tuckey* so, and carries it off at gate, R.H. *Tuckey*, pleased at discovering who the letter is for, sees the *Slaves*, who have before gone across with the sugar canes—goes up the hill, looks at them with contempt—showing, though of the same complexion, the superior situation he conceives himself to be in, compared to the *Slaves*—turns round, and observes *Overseer* and *Planter*, who enter from gate, R.H. the latter with letter in his hand. *Planter* enquires of *Overseer* who brought the letter—*Overseer* points to *Tuckey*—*Planter* beckons him—*Tuckey* runs up and salutes him. *Planter* asks if he brought the letter—*Tuckey* answers in the affirmative. *Planter* then enquires where his master is—*Tuckey* points off, L.H. *Planter* then directs him to fetch his master. *Tuckey* runs towards L. but recollects he has not taken proper leave of *Planter*, turns round, bows, and as he is going off, L. returns, and informs *Planter* that his master is coming, pointing to *Captain Orford*, who enters L.H. *Tuckey* salutes him. *Planter* walks down, shows he is happy to see him, and they embrace each other. *Planter* shows him his house, and plantations. While they are looking about, a loud laugh heard R.H. *Captain* enquires the reason—*Planter* informs him the *Slaves* are coming to celebrate his daughter's birth-day, requests him to stay, and

witnesses the sports. *Captain* consents. March. Procession of *Negroes*, R.H. Eight *Negro Boys*, in pairs, with Triangles—Six *Dancing Girls*, in pairs, with Bells. They go round in front of the Stage, and range up R. & L.H. *Quashee* and *Sam* on opposite sides in front. **Enter *Rosa*, and two *Female Attendants*, at gate, R.H. *Rosa* distributes presents to the *Slaves* of ribbons, handkerchiefs, &c. *Planter* comes forward—*Rosa* kneels R. of him. He raises her—brings down the *Captain*, introduces them to each other—their admiration is mutual, which *Tuckey* observes with satisfaction. *Captain* approaches *Rosa*, and kisses her hand. *Tuckey* observing this, appears overjoyed, and runs up the Stage. *Planter* comes down, points to *Rosa*, and asks the *Captain* how he likes her. *Captain* expresses his approbation. *Planter* then asks his Daughter the same question. *Rosa* likewise expresses her approbation of him. A horn sounds without, as a signal for the *Captain* to retire. *Captain* makes an offer to go, but is anxious to stay. *Tuckey* pulls him by the sleeve, and reminds him of the signal. *Captain* appears angry at his interference. Horn sounds a second time. *Captain* still wishes to stay. *Tuckey* urges him to go—he shows more anger at his importunity, but at last decides on going. Kisses his hand to *Rosa*—*Tuckey* catches hold of his other hand, and they both exeunt L.H.** *Planter* and *Rosa* go up Stage. Negro Dance by the Six *Negro Men* and *Women*—at the end of which the *Men* sit down. R. the *Women*, L.H. **A gun heard. *Tuckey* screams, and runs on in a great fright—calls all the *Negro Men* around him, holds up his three fingers, repeating the word "Jack!" at sound of which they all start up, and ask him what's the matter. *Tuckey* tells them that his master has been shot at by Three-Finger'd Jack—they all appear terrified, repeating the work "Jack!"** —retire, and make room for the *Planter*, who comes forward and asks what's the matter. *Tuckey* informs him—and then goes to the *Negroes*, asks them to go to the *Captain*'s rescue. They still appear more terrified, and refuse to go. *Overseer* threatens them, still they refuse to go. *Rosa* now comes down and entreats them—they seem inclined to obey her—go round the Stage, she following them. Another gun heard. The whole of the *Negroes* return towards R.H. *Planter* returns, enraged at their temerity, with *Overseer* and *Tuckey*. *Planter* still reprimanding them for their cowardice. At length *Quashee* and *Sam* come forward, agree between themselves to go, and inform the *Planter* of their determination. *Planter* approves their conduct—shakes them by the hand, and they go off, R.H. preceded by *Tuckey*. *Rosa* comes forward, reprimands the *Slaves*, and they slink off abashed, R.H. She then prays for their success in rescuing the *Captain*, and for their safe return, and overcome with emotion, is nearly fainting. The two *Attendants* support and place her in a chair, who with the *Dancing Negroes* from a groupe around her. **Enter *Captain*, supported by *Planter*, *Overseer*, and *Tuckey*, who is holding his hand. *Quashee* and *Sam* assisting behind, all seeming anxious for his recovery. *Tuckey* gets a chair from L.H. and they place him in it, all forming a groupe around him. One of the *Female Attendants*, leaving *Rosa*, runs to see the *Captain*, observes his wound, is terrified, and returns to *Rosa*. *Rosa* asks if he is wounded—she answers in the negative. *Rosa*, not satisfied, and fearing he is hurt, rushes from her attendants, goes to the *Captain*, finds he is wounded—lays her hand upon his heart, expresses great joy at feeling it bear. *Captain* gradually recovers—finds *Tuckey* at his knees, embraces him for his fidelity. He turns his head, sees *Rosa*, expresses great joy, shewing every token of affection for her, kissing her hand several times. During this the *Planter* is expressing his approval of the courage of *Quashee* and *Sam* in accompanying them. *Tuckey* shews the *Captain* the gate, R.H. and entreats him to go in, and, with *Rosa*, raises him from his seat—as they walk forward, the *Captain*, from the loss of blood, faints into her arms. *Planter* runs to his assistance, and raises him up. They all lead him off at the gate,** R.H. The *Female Attendants* and Six *Dancing Negresses* go off U E.R.H. *Overseer* comes forward, calls on the *Chorus of Negroes*, who all enter L.H. at various entrances.

SONG AND CHORUS—OVERSEER AND NEGROES.

OVERSEER.

Swear by the silver crescent of the night,

Beneath whose beams the negro breathes his pray'r—
Swear by your fathers slaughter'd in the fight,
By your dear native land and children swear.
Swear to pursue this traitor, and annoy him—
This Jack, who daily works your harm,
With Obi and with magic charm—
Swear, swear you will destroy him!

CHORUS.

Kolli kolli kolli, we swear all—
We kill when we come near him—
But we swear loud, for when we bawl,
Three-Finger'd Jack he hear us.

OVERSEER.

Swear to pursue, &c.

CHORUS.

Kolli kolli kolli, &c.

Exit* OVERSEER*, L.H. Negroes slink away, R.H.

SCENE II.—*Inside of Planter's House.*

Enter *Tuckey, Captain,* and *Planter*, R.H. The *Captain*'s dress changed, and much reversed. *Planter* and *Tuckey* get him a chair, which he refuses, assuring them he is better. Enter *Rosa*, with caution, R.H. anxious to ascertain the state of the *Captain*. Enter *Servant*, L.H. calls off the *Planter*—they both exeunt, L.H. *Captain* turns and sees *Rosa*—goes to her, thanks her for her care of him—makes every token of affection, which she receives with timidity, yet with pleasure. He drops on his knees—she gives him her hand. At this instant the *Planter* enters behind, L.H. He runs between them abruptly—they start and rise, much confused. *Planter* asks *Rosa* the meaning of their actions—*Rosa* acknowledges her affection for the *Captain*. *Planter* turns to the *Captain*—interrogates him—*Captain* vows eternal love. *Planter* takes *Rosa's* hand firmly, then the *Captain's*, and blessing them, places their hands together—they express great rapture, falling at his feet. *Planter* raises them, and sends *Rosa* off, R.H. Enter Four *Servants* in livery, with apparatus for shooting. *Planter* invites *Captain* to partake of the sports with him—he accepts the offer—takes his gun—*Slaves* put shot belt round him, and assist him. When prepared with their apparatus, they go off, as if to shoot—*Slaves* following, R.H.

SCENE III—*The Inside of an Obi Woman's Cave, cut in the heart of a large rock. At the extremity is seen, in perspective at the top R.H. a cavity, which may be supposed an entrance. Opposite to this, likewise at the top, L.H. but nearer the audience is seen another cavity, covered with rushes and straw. The whole of the walls are entirely covered with feathers, rags, bones, teeth, catskins, broken glass, parrots' beaks, &c. &c.*

OBI WOMAN *(an old decrepid Negress, dressed very grotesquely) discovered in one corner of the cave, 2 E.R.H.*

Enter to her, through the cavity at back, R.H. six *Negro Robbers*. Before they enter they give each a signal of approach by whistling. *Obi Woman* answers. *Robbers* climb down, and presenting her with some present, as in succession they approach her. She answers, in return, that she will present then with Obi. After they have all passed, and given and received their presents, a tremendous crash is heard U.E.L.H. *Jack* enters from opening at top of tock, L.H. bearing in his hands the *Captain's* sash, epaulettes, gorget, &c. of which he has robbed him. *Robbers* prostrate themselves before him. *Obi Woman* shows signs of joy at seeing him. He presents her with the spoil—she ties the sash round, having first ornamented it with Obi. *Obi Woman* then fills his Obi horn. *Jack* then crosses all the *Robbers*' foreheads to prevent their betraying him, when *Obi Woman* gives horn and scarf. A gun heard over them—they all start up, and fly to their arms. *Jack* orders them to be silent. *Robbers* listen—hear a noise over head, and wish to go. *Jack* prevents them—takes his arms, orders them to lie down upon their faces, arranged in such a manner as to render it impossible for *Jack* to get out the way they came in. While they are in this situation, *Jack* climbs up, and goes out at the cavity, L.H. *Obi Woman* orders them to rise. When they find *Jack* gone, they express great surprise and astonishment. *Obi Woman* then shews them a cavity at the bottom of the cell, and orders them to descend—they go down, following severally and silently. The last one closes the trap, and the *Obi Woman* goes off, 2 E. R. H.

SCENE IV—*Mount Lebanus. At the extremity of the Stage a very high rock, R.H. The sea at the bottom slightly agitated. A boat lying at anchor at some distance, L.H. A cavity at bottom of rock.*

Tuckey discovered on the rock. R.H. with a dead bird in his hand, with which he is descending—the *Captain* discovered at bottom of the rock, as having shot it. *Tuckey* descends with the game, and presents it to the *Captain*. Enter *Planter*, L.H. with four Livery Servants, bringing game they have killed. *Captain* shews them his game: while they examine it, the *Captain* loads his gun. They then look round as if in search of more game, but seeing none, *Planter* proposes to look further. All go off, R.H. *Jack* now pops his head out of a hole at the bottom of a rock, R.H. and watches them—sees the *Captain* and *Tuckey* returning, R.H., runs up the rock, and lies down behind a bush, out of sight. Enter the *Captain* and *Tuckey*, R.H. as if in search of game. *Captain*, unsuccessful, is going, when a bird is seen to fly across the stage from L.H. and alights on top of a rock near which *Jack* has concealed himself. *Captain* and *Tuckey* creep round to L.H. *Captain* fires, and the bird falls—*Tuckey* runs up to get the bird—*Captain* turns from the rock to load his gun, when *Jack* springs up and throws *Tuckey* from the top of the rock into the sea. *Tuckey* screams violently. *Captain* turns—sees him in the water—runs as if to plunge after him— *Jack* still remains on the rock, and makes a horrid yell—presents a pistol as *Captain* approaches—*Captain* retires a few steps much agitated, and eager to go to the boy's assistance. *Jack* threatens to shoot—*Captain* catches up his gun, butt upwards, as if to run up the rock to *Jack*—approaches, when *Jack* fires his pistol and wounds him in the arm. *Captain* drops his gun, and staggers down the stage, L.H. During this *Tuckey* is seen swimming to the boat—gets into it, pulls up anchor, and paddles away L.H. *Jack* comes from the rock and approaches the *Captain*, who endeavors to defend himself. *Jack* demands his powder flask, &c. *Captain* refuses, and makes a faint resistance. *Jack* hears a noise behind R.H. as if of the tread of some persons approaching. *Captain* leaning against L. wing, fainting from loss of blood. *Jack* seizes him, throws him down, and at last drags him into the cave at the bottom of the rock, R.H. Enter *Planter* and Four Livery *Servants*, R.H. *Planter* sees the *Captain's* hat and gun, and in great agitation, looks about for him—not finding him, goes out much distressed, L.H. with hat, &c. *Slaves* take up the gun and cluster round it—holding up their hands with three fingers, and turning up their eyes. *Jack* makes a yell from behind. *Slaves* turn round—see him, throw down gun, and rush off trembling, L.H. *Jack* comes forward, takes up gun, and exits into cave.

SCENE V—*Montego Bay, in Jamaica*

Enter *Planter*, L.H. very much dejected—meets *Overseer*, R.H. *Planter* tells him he fears the *Captain* has fallen into the power of *Jack*. Enter *Tuckey*, L.H. his clothes wet. *Tuckey*, with great horror, tells the fate of the *Captain*. Enter *Rosa*, R.H., she welcomes them on their return. *Rosa* enquires for the *Captain*. *Planter* turns away—she then asks the *Overseer*—he points to *Tuckey*, who stands with his head against the third Wing, L.H., dejected. *Rosa* runs to him, and catches him by the arm, brings him to the front of the stage, and demands of him where the *Captain* is. *Tuckey* tells her of his fate. *Rosa* stands a moment motionless—stares vacantly, then starts, makes an effort to depart, but, overpowered by her feelings, faints in the *Planter's* arms, and is borne off, R.H. Enter *Officer of Government*, U.E.L.H. with *Guards*, attended by *Slaves*, bearing a large Proclamation, on which is written in large characters:—"Reward for killing Three-finger'd Jack! One Hundred Guineas, and Freedom to any Slave who brings in the Head of Three-Finger'd Jack!"

Mode of the foregoing entry:—
Six Soldiers, in pairs.
Chief Officer of Government.
Two Slaves, bearing Proclamation.
Eight slaves, in pairs.

They enter U.E.L.H. March across to R.H. down R.H. Wings, across the front of the stage, and up L.H. Wings—place the Proclamation in C. *Officer* then comes down L.H. takes his situation behind the first six *Soldiers*, R.H. and they all march off, R.H. in the order they entered, leaving the Proclamation standing in the C. of the stage. All the *Slaves* who went off R.H. now re-enter, and the rest of the *Slaves*, with their *Wives* and *Children*, come on L.H. They all view the Proclamation, but shake their heads, and scout away. At length *Quashee* and *Sam* come and look at it on opposite sides—seem as if animated by the Same feeling—point particularly to the word "Freedom," then to their *Wives* and *Children*. They each take up a little *Black Child*, and kiss it very affectionately, and swear to perform the great task. They then take each other by the hand, and come down the stage firmly. *Tuckey*, who has observed all that passed, comes between them, and offers to accompany them. They caress him, and accept his services. Enter *Planter*—he encourages them. *Quashee* goes on his knees, and makes signs of a wish to be christened. *Planter* promises it shall be performed. *Quashee* rises in great glee—tells the rest of the *Negroes*, who all follow the *Planter* off, R.H. making attitudes of dancing, leaving only *Quashee*, *Wife*, and *Child*.

DUETT—QUASHEE AND WIFE.

He.

Quashee he load his gun—
Me go kill Jack, dear—
Hill will no cover sun
When Quashee come back, dear.

She.

War be no certain,
And gun be no true—
Quashee should Jack kill,
My heart break for you.
Sweet music tink a tank,
Stay here delighting,
No go to battle—
Big Death come in fighting.

He.

Me laugh at Obi charm—
Quashee strong hearted.

She.

Ah, me fear many harm,
When you and me parted.
No go, sweet Quashee, me pray—

He.

Yes—go, but long me no stay—

She.

Me drop so when you far away,
Sweet music tink, &c.

Exeunt, R.H.

SCENE VI.—*The extremity of the Stage. Planter's House at back.*

The Two Female Attendants *of Rosa discovered in balcony of House.*

Three rows of benches placed on each side of the Stage—also at the back, below the house, rising in a gradual ascent.

The Scene represents a Negro Ball. All the Slaves *discovered with* Jonkanoo *(the Master of the Ceremonies), as follows.*

Six Dancing Negresses*, with bells, Chorus of* Negro Men *&* Women*, and Eight* Boys*, with Drums and Fifes, ranged on benches at back.*

Chorus of Negro Men *and* Women*, indiscriminately—Chorus, &c. as above—Three* Dancing Negroes—Negro Boys*, with triangles, &c. are arranged on R.H. benches.*

Chorus of Negro Men *and* Women*, indiscriminately—Three* Dancing Negroes—*Chorus, &c. as above.* Negro Boys*, with triangles, &c. are arranged on L.H. benches.*

Jonkanoo *(Master of the Ceremonies) stands c. half way up the Stage. A* Negro *with cymbals R. A* Negro *with cymbals, L. Flourish of Drums and Fifes the moment the Scene is discovered.*

Enter *Planter*, *Overseer*, and *Clergyman*. All the *Negroes* bow to them. *Quashee* and *Sam* advance to the front of the Stage. *Clergyman* follows them in C. They vow to destroy *Jack*—kneel—*Clergyman* blesses them alternately. All the *Slaves* at the *Sam*e time wave their hands, make a particular sort of chattering, by repeating several times the name of "Jack!" *Quashee* and *Sam* are then presented with arms, viz.—a gun and a sabre. Exeunt *Planter* and *Clergyman* R.H.

FINALE. CHORUS OF NEGROES, ETC.
Accompanied with a Dance by the Negro Girls*, under the direction of* Jonkanoo.

SOLO.

We negro men and women meet,
And dance and sing, and drink and eat,
With a yam foo—with a yam foo!
And when we come to negro ball,
One funny big man be massa of all—
'Tis merry Jankanoo.
Now we dance, sing, and eat,
Yam foo, &c.

CHORUS.

Massa he poor negro treat,
Give grand ball, and Jonkanoo.

SOLO.

Jack he did good Captain wound—
Shoot him shoulder, hurt him back—
If by Quashee Jack be found,
Then good bye, Three-fingered Jack.

CHORUS.

Now we dance, &c.

SOLO.

Jack have charm in Obi bag—
Tom cat foot, pig tail, duck beak—
Quashee tear the charm to rag,
Make Three-finger'd Jack to squeak.

CHORUS.

Now we dance, &c.

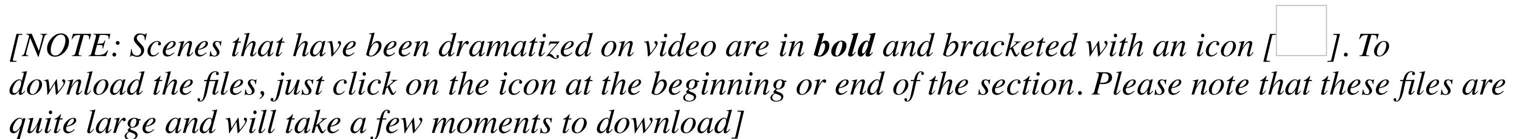
END OF ACT I.

OBI; or, THREE-FINGER'D JACK

A MELO-DRAMA IN TWO ACTS.

ACT I.

SCENE I | SCENE II | SCENE III | SCENE IV | SCENE V | SCENE VI | SCENE VII

*[NOTE: Scenes that have been dramatized on video are in **bold** and bracketed with an icon []. To download the files, just click on the icon at the beginning or end of the section. Please note that these files are quite large and will take a few moments to download]*

SCENE I.—*A view of an extensive plantation in Jamaica.—A gate* L.U.E.—*A large house* R.—*The perspective represents, in figures, slaves, oxen, &c. tilling the ground, and working.—At the back are sugar houses, and a practical wheel, as of a mill at work.*

(NEGROES *discovered at work; they come forward, and the* OVERSEER *sing.*

> Black ladies and gentlemen, I pray you draw near,
> And attend to the words of your grand overseer.
> Leave work till to-morrow, my hearts—in the morning
> Be jovial and gay,
> For this is the day,
> Miss Rosa, the good planter's daughter was born in.
> 'Tis our lady's birth-day,
> Therefore we'll make holyday,
> And you shall all be merry,
> And you shall all be merry,
> Sing ting-a-ring, &c.
>
> CHORUS.
>
> Good massa we find,
> Sing ting a ring, sing terry,
> Where buckra man kind,
> Then Negro heart merry,
> Sing ting-a-ring, terry
> Huzza! Huzza!

OVERSEER. Now, my black beauties, quiet your ebony pipes, and listen to the words of your Grand Overseer. Be it known to all that this is the birth-day of the Lady Rosa, the fair daughter of our own benevolent master, Mr. Ormond.

(NEGROES *shout.*)

QUASHEE. Bless her heart! she bery kind lady, she make fine wife for buckra man.

OVERSEER. Right, Quashee: and there's a buckra man coming to make a fine husband for her—Captain Orford, to whom she has long given her heart, returns this very day to claim her hand.

QUASHEE. Captain Orford! Oh! he good kind man, too; me never forget when he here before, long, long, long time eber since ago: he save poor black much floggee, floggee; me wish him happy long time, marry good old wife, and many good pickaninies.

OVERSEER. And in requital of such good wishes, our good master gives you a holyday. (NEGROES *shout*.) Adieu to labour! Let the sugar canes take care of themselves, and hey for mirth and merriment! (NEGROES *shout*.) And a fig for Obi, and Three-Fingered Jack!

(NEGROES, *evidently alarmed, look cautiously around, and drawing close to* OVERSEER, *exclaim, "Hush!"*)

OVERSEER. What the devil's the matter with you all? Has the name of that three-fingered rascal power to stop your mirth so suddenly?

SAM. Oh, massa, take care, he hear us and make Obi woman kill us.

OVERSEER. Nonsense, nonsense! ye black ninny hammers. Do you think an old woman, as great a noodle as yourselves, can stop your wind-pipes by cramming parrots feathers, dogs' teeth, broken bottles, rum, and egg-shells into a cow's horn, and then mumbling a few words over it, as incomprehensible as your own fears?

QUASHEE. Oh, massa, you say what you please, but Obi woman know ebery ting from top of head to bottom of toe; and if once she put Obi o poor negro man, he no eat, he no drink, he no nothing, but pine, pine, pine, pine, pine and die away.

OVERSEER. Why, ladies and gentlemen, to judge from your aversion to work, Obi seems rather a fashionable disorder, but as to not eating, drinking, or sleeping, I really discover no symptoms of the complaint, so set your minds at rest, and enjoy the sports. See! our master approaches.

(*Shout*. ORMOND *enters,* R.2 E.*, all the* NEGROES *crowd round shouting, and expressing great affection for him*.)

ORMOND. Thanks, thanks, my friends! We may every moment expect the arrival of Captain Orford. The vessel is in harbour, and ere this he must have landed; so haste and prepare to receive him with the respect due to the intended husband of your young mistress.

(*Music*.—NEGROES *shout and exeunt,* V E.L., NEGRO *girls exeunt,* 2 E.R.H.)

OVERSEER. Ay! they can shout loud enough now, though but a moment ago, the very name of Obi and Three-fingered jack struck them as dumb as—

ORMOND. I charge you name not that murderous villain in my presence; you awaken recollections which pain, which agonize me.

OVERSEER. Dear sir, your pardon, I knew not—

ORMOND. No, I allude to scenes long past; to scenes of joy and happiness for ever blasted by the ruffian you have named. Alas! this very day, the birth-day of my Rosa, was the one on which I saw her

mother fall beneath the hands of that accursed wretch.

OVERSEER. Good Heavens! was your wife the victim of his cruelty?

ORMOND. Long had he been on the estate, and long had every art been tried to soothe his savage nature, for Heaven knows I pitied the unfortunates, and strove by kindness and humanity to mitigate their cruel lot. With Karfa, (for so was he then named,) alone, my efforts failed; each day but added to his ferocity; crime followed crime, until the villain dared to attempt the honour of my wife. The signal punishment which awaited him drove him to madness, and under shade of night he burst his bonds, broke into my chamber, and before my sight murdered my unhappy wife. Vainly I endeavoured to grapple with the monster—his giant strength dashed me to the earth, and in the confusion the wretch escaped.

OVERSEER. And has no attempt been made to secure the murderer?

ORMOND. Often. But all have failed; the negroes dread his incantations, and many of our colour believe him possessed of some supernatural power; he has neither accomplices nor associates; alone he plunders, alone he combats, and has hitherto ever destroyed his pursuers or retreated to fastnesses where none dare to follow him; still his malice seems levelled more at me than others, and I often fear my daughter's life will fall a victim to his hatred. (*shouts are heard, and distant music announces the approach of* ORFORD.) But hark! the gallant Orford comes. Haste and bid them conduct my daughter hither.

(*Exit* OVERSEER, R.1 E.)

(*Music.—Negro's march*. The MALE SLAVES *enter, with garlands and emblems,* L.U.E. *preceding* CAPTAIN ORFORD *and* TUCKEY. ORMOND *affectionately embraces* ORFORD.)

ORMOND. Orford, most welcome! behold, my daughter comes.

(*Music.—Re-enter* OVERSEER, R.I.E. *followed by* KITTY *and the Female Domestics, preceding* ROSA.)

ORMOND. This is indeed a moment which atones for years of sorrow, a moment which gives a protector to my child in every manner worthy of her.

ORFORD. At least one, sire, who will endeavour to merit such high praise.

ORMOND. Rosa! I know your heart beats responsive to your father's wish.

ROSA. It ever has done so, sire; nor does it now incline to disobey.

ORMOND. My every wish is gratified. Come, friends, to the house, where song and dance shall usher in the hour which gives you, Orford, a new claim on my affection.

(*Music.—*ORMOND *leads* ROSA *to car, and she is carried off in procession, the* GIRLS *dancing,* MEN *shouting* R.H.U.E.)

SCENE II.—*A room in the planter's house.*

(*Enter* KITTY, R.H., *followed by* TUCKEY.)

TUCKEY. Come, my pretty maid, be brisk; Mr. Ormond and the captain intend to go out shooting for a few hours, so fly and bid the servants prepare.

KITTY. Fly, indeed! Quite free and easy. Pray, where did you learn to forget the difference between black and white, my dingy spark?

TUCKEY. In England, my dear, where, truth to speak, though I saw many pretty damsels, I saw none that could in any way compare with you, fine model of perfection.

KITTY. Upon my word, the boy has some sense, and is not so dingy as I at first thought him. Exit. L. H.

TUCKEY. Ah, we poor blacks have a weary time of it, and are as much railed at as if the darkness of our skins were a sample of the colour of our hearts.

SONG.—TUCKEY. "Possum up a gum tree."

AIR,—Native Melody.

Opossum up a gum tree,
His tail his body follow,
Racoon quickly him see
Looking out o' hollow—
Pull him by the long tail,
Opossum squall—opossum squall,
Racoon stick his long nail,
Him louder squall—him louder squeak,
Opossum up, &c.

Opossum him look shy now,
Racoon grin, Racoon grin,
Opossum wink his eye now,
Move him chin, move him chin,
Opossum down him stumble
From the tree, from the tree,
And make him 'gin to tremble,
Racoon he, he, Racoon he, he,
Opossum up, &c.

Black boy him love Jill Jenkins,
Tink he'll wed—tink he'll wed,
His massa chide him thinking,
Beat him head—beat him head,
Black boy him love rum, too,
Make him groggy—make him groggy,
But massa make him come to
When him floggy—when him floggy.
Opossum up, &c.

(*Exit* TUCKEY, L.)

SCENE III.—*Interior of* OBI WOMAN*'s hut. A fire—a bench before it having figure—covered with a white cloth on it. Wand for* OBI WOMAN*—charms, and a handful of feathers in* OBI WOMAN*'s wallet. The fire under an iron pot, suspended by three sticks as in Guy Mannering.*

OBI WOMAN *discovered, sitting near fire, forming an Obi. After performing several incantations, she speaks.*

Magic fire duly placed
In square within a circle traced,
Boil the mystic herbs I've brought,
Till the Obi charm be wrought;

Bones I've raked from the burial ground,
When night and the storm were black around;
Give strength to my work, till I've fixed my dart,
Like a cankerous thorn in the white man's heart—
Till I pierce him and wring him in nerve and spleen
By the arrows felt, but never seen.

Then by flame unbodied burn him,
Then on racking windlass turn him,

Till his sinews quiver and ache anew,
And the cold sweat falls like drops of dew,
Toil him and moil him again and again,
Sicken his heart and madden his brain;
Till strength, and sense, and life depart,
As I tear the last pulse from the white man's heart.

(*Music.—As the* OBI WOMAN *completes her charm, three loud knocks are heard, she trembles, and advancing cautiously to the door, demands, "Who's there?"A voice answers, "Karfa!" She immediately unlocks the door and* THREE-FINGERED JACK *enters.)*

JACK. Well, mother, how work our charms? do they hasten to an end! or still, tortoise-like, so creep to their completion, that the white man's breath is more like to waste with age than be stopped by my revenge?

OBI WOMAN. Son! thy impatience—

JACK. Impatience—impatience, hag! The gods of my fathers frown my delay. Years have elapsed since I sacrificed the wife of the white man, a victim to the memory of my beloved Olinda, whom they tore lifeless from these arms as they dragged me from my native land; can I forget? can I forgive? Never. And long ere this should vengeance have been satisfied, had not a mistaken faith in thy mummery restrained my arm.

OBI WOMAN. Mummery! ha! sayst thou? Rail not on Obi, lest thou feel its power.

JACK. Power? thy power is in the fear of thy votaries—and fear I know not. As Africa receded from my gaze I swore that the first white man who purchased Karfa's services should also feel his hate. Ormond was that man. The wife of his bosom was my first victim, and long ere this should his bones have been mouldering in the grave, but that you promised a sweeter, though a slower vengeance.

OBI WOMAN. And I will perform my promise; Ormond shall die. He but hovers round me for a time, as the fluttering bird struggles to avoid the fascinations of the serpent. But here have I his image made in wax, and as it is molten by a blue fire kindled with dead men's eyes, so shall he waste, waste, waste. (*throws in coloured fire.*)

JACK. In what time, pry' thee?

OBI WOMAN. Perchance a month.

JACK. A month! A day shall not elapse ere the blow be struck! 'Tis the anniversary of his daughter's birth—'tis the anniversary of that, when blasting their revelry, I struck my first strong blow against his peace. Now, 'tis the day on which he purposes to give his daughter's hand in marriage to her lover; and 'tis the day when, bursting like a whirlwind on him, I will sacrifice his every remaining joy to the memory of my broken-hearted wife, my helpless infants, and the wrongs of my poor country. (*crosses to* L.H.—*distant horns heard, as of sporting party.* Hark, hark! ere night those instruments shall sound a sadder note. Quick! Quick! (*giving horn.* More of your charms, which in the eye of superstition make me invisible—and let me to my work. (*crosses to* R.

OBI WOMAN. Here, my son. (*puts a handful of feathers into horn.* Yet be not rash, and trust that Obi —

JACK. Obi! Here is the charm I trust. (*showing a dagger.—Horns recommence.*) No more, no more; they come.

(JACK *rushes out, and the* OBI WOMAN *resumes her seat. The music continues during change of scene.*)

SCENE IV.—*A front wood.*

(*Music.*—ORMOND, ORFORD, TUCKEY, *and* SERVANTS, *cross the stage, as on a shooting party.* TUCKEY *shows* ORFORD *game he has killed;* ORFORD *commends his skill; they then exeunt* R.H.—TUCKEY, *elevated at his master's praise. A pause in the music*—JACK, L.H., *follows them attentively, watching their motions, and expressing his desire of vengeance. Exits,* R.H.)

SCENE V.—*A romantic, rocky view.*

ORFORD *and* TUCKEY *enter* R.H.E., *whilst* JACK *is observed watching them from the rocks.*

ORFORD. 'Tis unfortunate that we have missed our companions, for how to regain the path I know not.

TUCKEY. Nor I either, massa; and I wish we were safe at home again. This is but a wild looking place, and they tell such stories of that three-fingered gentleman, Mr. Jack, that—

ORFORD. Fear not, my little man! fair play, and I warrant you, this "Mr. Jack," is but as other men. (*horns* R.H., *at distance.*) Hark! is not that our party? Haste to the summit of yonder hill and look around.

TUCKEY. And leave you here alone, massa?

ORFORD. Fear not, I will reload and prepare to pursue our sport. Do as I desire you.

(*Music.*—TUCKEY, *somewhat reluctantly obeys, and exits,* R.H.1 E., *whilst the* CAPTAIN, *preparing to load his fowling-piece, crosses to* R.H., JACK *now rushes upon him, wrests his gun from him, and severely wounds him with a dagger, ere he has time to call for aid. The* CAPTAIN *falls at* JACK'S *feet.—Horns sound nearer.—*JACK *looks cautiously and keenly off in the direction of the sound, and all around, then raising the body of* ORFORD, *bears it to his cave, and the scene closes on picture.*)

SCENE VI.—*Inside of Quashee's hut.*

(*Enter* QUASHEE, L. 1 E., *followed by other* SLAVES.)

QUASHEE. Haste, haste, my merry hearts. This night good buckra man give grand dance and much kous kous; 'cause Captain Orford makes himself all one with Missee Rosa; so run and tell merry Jonkanoo to get him big head on, and all dansa, dansa, like mad. (*Exeunt* SLAVES, L. 1 E.) Oh, it be sweet, when work a done, and poor black danse by moonlight, and his pretty black lady.

SONG.—"Ackee, O!" (*from "Paul and Virginia."*)

When the moon shines o'er the deep,
Ackee, O! Ackee, O!
Whisker'd dons fall fast asleep,
Snoring fast asleep.
From their huts the negroes run,
Ackee, O! Ackee,O!
Full of frolic, full of fun,
Holyday to keep.

Till morn they dance the merry round,
To the fife and cymbal;
See so brisk, how they frisk,
Airy, gay, and nimble.
With gestures antic, joyous, frantic,
Dance the merry round,
Ting a ring ching—ting a ring ching,
To the merry cymbal's sound.

Black lad whispers to black lass,
Ackee, O! Ackee, O!
Glances sly between them pass,
Of beating hearts to tell.
What tho' no blush can paint her cheek,
Ackee, O! Ackee O!
Well the eye can language speak
Of passion quite as well.

Till morn they dance, &c., &c., &c. (*Exit* L.1.E.)

SCENE VII.—*The Indian fete by moonlight. The Planter's house illuminated in the background. Lights half down.The* NEGROES *are assembled, some sing the following air, while* JONKANOO *performs a comic*

dance to it. NEGRO WOMEN *are seated during the dance*.

NEGRO GIRL.

We Negro men and women meet
And dance sing and eat,
With a yam foo-foo.
And when we come to Negro ball,
One funny big man be massa of all,
'Tis merry Jonkanoo.

QUASHEE.

Massa he poor negro treat,
Give grand ball and Jonkanoo.

CHORUS.

Massa he poor Negro treat, &c., &c.

(*The sports continue for a time when suddenly the voice of* ORMOND *is heard without exclaiming, "Hold, hold!" The music assumes a hurried character, and* ORMOND, *from* 3 E. R. H., *rushes down the centre of the stage followed by the* OVERSEER *with drawn sword, and* TUCKEY.)

ORMOND. No more of mirth and revelry—no more of song and dance; but arm—arm, my faithful followers, and aid your unhappy master to avenge the murder of Captain Orford.

QUASHEE, SAM, & ALL. Captain Orford murdered!

ORMOND. Ay! by that detested wretch, that blood-stained villain, Karfa!

NEGROES. Three-fingered Jack!

(*Chord.*—NEGROES *appear much alarmed as they pronounce his name*.)

ORMOND. Can it be possible? do you draw back dismayed by the mere name of that detested monster? And yet poor Orford was the black man's friend. Oft at his intercession has the hand of punishment been stayed; and with my Rosa, often has he stood by the bed of sickness, and soothed the sorrows of the poor negro; yet now, subdued by vain and superstitious terrors, ye tremble to avenge the murder of your benfactor. For shame! for shame! Be men; and by one bold effort, let us rid ourselves of this detested wretch.

SONG and CHORUS.

OVERSEER.

Swear by the silver crescent of the night,
Beneath whose beams the negro breathes his prayer,
Swear by your fathers slaughtered in the fight,
By your dear native land and children swear,
Swear to pursue this traitor, and annoy him,
This Jack who daily works you harm,
With Obi and with magic charm,

Swear, swear you will destroy him!

CHORUS.

Kolli! kolli! kolli! we swear all!
We kill when we come near him.
But no swear loud, for if we bawl,
Three-fingered Jack will hear us.

(*At the end of the Chorus,* QUASHEE *advances, leading his wife by one hand, and his child by the other.*)

QUASHEE. (*with great feeling*) Massa! you have been kind massa to me; and Missee Rosa been kind missee to wife and pickaninny here, and I now show you black man's heart beat warm as white. I will go; and if I meet this Jack, Quashee will kill him, or him kill Quashee, only if poor nigger die, you take care of wife and little Massa Quashee.

SAM. Quashee! you long been my comrade at the work, and you shall not go to the fight alone. D—n a heart, I go too. (*extending his hand with emotion, QUASHEE grasps it earnestly.*)

ORMOND. My gallant hearts, your courage shall not go unrewarded; and as the first proof of my bounty, no more my slaves—be free! (NEGROES *shout*.) Fear not his wily strategems—his magic art—all will fail before the arm that's nerved by freedom and by gratitude. This night continue your feast; let not my sorrows taint the few moments you have of mirth. Nay, 'tis my command. To-night celebrate your new-found liberty, to-morrow for vengeance! (*Exit* R.H.)

SOLO and CHORUS.

NEGRO GIRL.

Nigger man go out to fight,
Heaven send him safe home back;
If by Sam and Quashee found,
Then good bye Three-fingered Jack.
Now we dance, sing, and eat,
With a yam, foo-foo, with a yam foo-foo.

CHORUS.

Now we dance, sing, and eat
With a yam foo-foo.

QUASHEE.

Jack have charm in Obi bag,
Tom cat foot, pig tail, duck beak.
Quashee tear the charm to rag,
Make Three-fingered Jack to squeak.
Now we dance, sing, and eat,
With a yam foo-foo, with a yam foo-foo.

CHORUS.

Now we dance, sing, and eat, &c.

(NEGROES *shouting, dancing, &c., &c., and—*

END OF ACT I.

Obi: A Play in the Life of Ira Aldridge
The "Paul Robeson" of the 19th Century

July 18, 2000

7:30 p.m., Playwrights Theater, Boston University
Funded by the Humanities Foundation

Cast
(in order of appearance)

Quashee's Wife	Angela Dilkey
Sam's Wife, Servant, Kitty	Erika Dyer
Quashee, Obi Woman	Jean Connally
Sam	Chris Johnson
Overseer	Edwin Milham
Ormond, the Planter	James Gleason
Rosa, the Planter's Daughter	Julie Tierney
Captain Orford	Robert Deveau
Tuckey, Orford's free black servant	Jeannette Ryan
Jack Mansong, alias "Karfa"	Jovan Rameau

Panelists

Charles Rzepka, *Boston University*
Jeffrey Cox, *University of Colorado, Boulder*
Peter Buckley, *Cooper Union, New York*
Debbie Lee, *Washington State University*

Director/Narrator	Vincent Ernest Siders
Producer	Charles Rzepka
Asst. Director/Choreographer	Jean Connally
State Manager/Costumes/Lights	Karen Stanley
Music Director/Accompanist	Ryan Sandburg Dave
Sound Coordination	Bellenoit
Videotaping	Bob Rothstein

Notes on the Performers

Jean Connally (Quashee, Obi Woman)

Jean has appeared in theaters throughout New England, with the Black Mime Theatre of London and at EuroDisney in France, as well as the prestigious Edinburgh Theater Festival in Scotland in 1998. He has been with the New African Company of Boston since 1994.

Robert Deveau (Captain Orford)

Robert Deveau recently appeared with Beau Jest Moving Theatre in *My Name is Leslie*, as part of the Boston Theatre Marathon. He has been cited by The Boston Herald as "One of Boston's Best Actors".

Angela Dilkey (Quashee's Wife)

Angela graduated from New England Conservatory with a Master of Music in Opera. She has performed in Rossini's *La Cambiale di Matriminio* and in Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Angela spent summer 1997 in Rome performing Puccini, and summer 1998 at Tanglewood singing Bach.

Erika Dyer (Sam's Wife, Kitty)

A May 2000 graduate of Boston University, Erika's recent credits include Eileen from Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* with the Walpole Footlighters, and the upcoming musical review *Gloryland!* with the Company Theatre of Norwell.

James E. Gleason (Ormond)

A student at UMass Lowell, James earned his BM in Music Performance in June 2001. He has performed in *Taming of The Shrew, The New Moon, The Music Man, Rumors*, and *Into the Woods*.

Chris Johnson (Sam)

Chris is a theater major at Northeastern University who has sung all his life, and especially enjoys a capella groups. He has appeared in *Unseen Hand, Life Underwater, Once upon a Matress, Impromptu, Living On*, and *Tyaag*.

Ed Milham (Overseer)

Ed holds a bachelor's degree in vocal performance, and master's degrees in vocal performance and conducting. He is currently the Music Director of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading, and teaches music at Bridgewater State College.

Jovan Rameau (Jack Mansong)

Jovan is a recent graduate of the MA program at Harvard University, where he last appeared in the Spring 2000 American Repertory Theater production of *The Winter's Tale*. He also has numerous film and TV appearances to his credit.

Jeannette Ryan (Tuckey)

Jeannette has performed in many Boston area theaters, including the Publick Theater, Instages, and Boston Baked Theater. She studied at Wellesley College, MIT, and The Boston Conservatory.

Julie Tierney (Rosa)

Julie Peterson Tierney holds a degree in vocal performance from the New England Conservatory. She is a frequent recitalist in the Boston area, and has performed with the Waltham Philharmonic and other groups. She is a student of Bernard Barbeau.

Our Crew

Vincent Ernest Siders (Director, Narrator)

Vincent is the founder of TYG Productions, a member of New African Company, and a graduate of Howard University. Directing/producing credits include *TYG Interactive Theater*, an experimental theatrical experience combining live theater and psychodrama; *Super Sparrow Sleuth*, a children's television program which uncovers the secrets of social etiquette through the misadventures of a child detective; and *Harriet*, a one-woman show on the life of Harriet Tubman, and winner at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, performed and written by Kisha Kenyatta.

Jean Connally (Asst. Director, Choreographer)

In addition to his acting career, Jean is a professional choreographer and dancer, with special interests in mime, movement, *comedia del arte*, and ballet. He has taught workshops for the NAC Theater Workshop, Oversoul Theater Collective, and Boston City Lights.

Karen Stanley (Stage Manager, Costumer, Lights)

Karen, a graduate of Boston University's Theater Division, has worked at the Huntington Theater, and Glimmerglass Opera, and as stage manager for *Boston By Sea*, which tours Boston Harbor.

Ryan Sandburg (Music Director)

Ryan received his MA in Music at the Boston University School for the Arts, with a concentration in performance accompaniment.

Dave Bellenoit (Sound)

Bob Rothstein (Videotaping)

Charles Rzepka (Producer, Program Notes)

Professor Rzepka teaches English at Boston University. He has written articles and books on Wordsworth, Keats, Austen, Thomas De Quincey, and other early nineteenth-century English writers. His most recent work has been in the areas of English popular theater and American detective fiction.

Our thanks also go to: Kate Snodgrass, Patrick Vogelpohl, and Mark Alavier, of the Playwrights' Theater; Annette Fern and Fredric Wilson, of the Harvard Theater Collection; James Spruill and Lynda Patton, of the New African Company; Aleta Pierce, for help with costuming; Larry Breiner, my colleague in the Boston University English Department, for his creative make-up suggestions; Allen Bush, publicity; Kaara Peterson, paymaster; Katherine O'Connor, chair of the Humanities Foundation; and Fran Heaton, her assistant.

The North American Society for the Study of Romanticism
NASSR 2000 Conference: First Plenary Session

Obi; or Three-Fingered Jack (1800-1830)
Selections with Commentary

September 14, 2000

7:30 p.m., Neb Hall, Arizona State University
Funded by the Humanities Foundation, Boston University

Cast
(in order of appearance)

Quashee's Wife	Pamela Hogle
Sam's Wife	Joanne Hogle
Quashee	Gerry Peterson
Sam	Kenneth Marrs
The Planter (Ormond)	Seamus O'Brien
The Overseer	Michael Conran
Tuckey	Joanne Hogle
Captain Orford	Ron Gard
Rosa	Karen Hogle
Jack Mansong ("Karfa")	Walter Belcher
Obi Woman	Ron Gard

Panelists
(in order of presentation)

Charles Rzepka, *Boston University*
Jeffrey Cox, *University of Colorado, Boulder*
Robert Hoskins, *Massey University, New Zealand*
Peter Buckley, *Cooper Union, New York*
Debbie Lee, *Washington State University*

Director/Narrator	Jerrold E. Hogle
Producer (Conference Coordinator)	Mark Lussier
Technical Direction/Stage Management	Jeffrey Warburton
Musical Direction/Accompanist	Sean Schulze
Program Designer/Director's Asst.	Ron Gard

Assistant State Manager	Seamus O'Brien
Costumes/Spotlight	Courtesy, School of Theater Arts, The University of Arizona