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Sati in Philadelphia: The Widow(s) of Malabar

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In post-Revolutionary Philadelphia, as in many U.S. cities, vigorous debates about the morality and efficacy of theater engaged segments of the population. Although the city had been the site of some of the British colonies' earliest professional playacting and housed the Southwark, a stage built in 1766, the association of theater with British culture, among other concerns, made the reestablishment of dramatic activities a hard sell. With the support of important Federalists and other elites, however, by 1790 Philadelphia had begun mounting regular seasons of theater, staffed originally by a troupe from New York, the Old American Company.¹ That company was made up primarily of British-born actors who had performed in the colonial theater and who most famously put on the first productions in 1787 of Royall Tyler's *The Contrast*, the best-known and most widely performed American drama before 1800.² As that company had in New York, so in Philadelphia they occasionally offered a performance of a British or other foreign drama altered slightly to fit American situations or on rare occasions a complete play written by an American, either an original work (as with *The Contrast*) or a translation.

One of the first such plays of the latter type put on in Philadelphia was David Humphreys' *The Widow of Malabar*,³ a drama that takes place in India and deals with the practice of sati, the ritual immolation of a woman upon the death of her husband. Rarely discussed in early American studies, this play has a curious theatrical history tied to several transatlantic and transnational circulations. In choosing to represent sati on the newly national American stage, Humphreys

appears to be ignoring the local scene but may in fact simply be writing a very different kind of “American” play than the better-known and more parochially set *Contrast*. By examining the politics of local presentation and publication as well as the subject matter of *Widow*, one can pursue a number of questions about nationality and identity in the play. For one thing, this “American” play can be situated in a global context, one that includes Philadelphia and the new republic but in addition embraces London, Paris, Berlin, and the western coast of India. For another, its failure to be sustained on the stage after 1791 must be understood less as a commentary on the quality of its script and more as a phenomenon inflected by the peculiarities of theatrical text circulation, patterns of allegorization connected to an earlier iconographic tradition, and the developing colonialist discourse on sati. Most important, examining the play in its international theatrical context allows us to retrieve a work too easily dismissed in the past as irrelevant to American literary study and to confront the often contradictory notions embedded in such study as to what “America” means to a postwar, postcolonial society. This essay, then, seeks to historicize the play in multiple, overlapping contexts as a first step toward a recovery of *Widow* for contemporary analysis.

Although his version is outwardly a translation of a French play, Antoine-Marin Lemierre’s *La Veuve du Malabar*,⁴ Humphreys also adapts his source to create a compelling, if declamatory, text whose ostensible subject reflects a variety of political and theatrical conditions both at home and abroad. His play is, first of all, a nationalist act, not only as a claim for the validity of American letters but also for its comprehension of Lemierre’s theme of liberty in an American context. At the same time, *The Widow of Malabar* is a transnational text in its recognition that America has no distinct meaning of its own but must be defined as both shaped by and shaping global forces. For Humphreys, the colonialist trope of Indian sati serves as the chief lens through which a postcolonial United States may represent itself and its relations both to its own people and to the peoples of the world. At the same time, however, sati in *The Widow of Malabar* provokes other representations of the United States that Humphreys may have hoped would be suppressed by his usage of it. Therefore, despite its seeming alienation from the American scene, Humphreys’ imitation of a French author’s depiction of Indian sati proves to be problematic for playgoers of the new republic.

For students of American literature, Humphreys is best known as one of the Connecticut Wits, a group of poets who produced the long satire *The Anarchiad* and their own, sometimes ambitious, poetical works.⁵ During the war, he served briefly with General Nathaniel Greene, then was reassigned as an aide-de-camp to George Washington in upstate New York, remaining with Washington until the conclusion of the war in 1783. For the period of 1784–86, Humphreys traveled abroad to assist Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in their European missions to secure commercial treaties with France and Britain.⁶

While living in France, he might have seen a production and quite likely acquired a copy of Lemierre's *La Veuve du Malabar*, then enjoying a long revival on the French stage. Written and first produced in 1770, Lemierre's five-act tragedy was revived and printed in 1780 and thereafter remained a staple of the French theater into the era of France's own revolution.⁷ A German *trauerspiel* based on *La Veuve*, titled *Lanassa*, appeared in Berlin in 1782.⁸ Nevertheless, until Humphreys took his copy of Lemierre's French original back to the United States, no one had produced an English translation for either the British or the U.S. stage. Working again with Washington and living at Mount Vernon and later in New York, he wrote a translation, which he styled an "imitation," in 1788.⁹ He must have circulated the play in manuscript at first because, by the time he published the play in his first edition of *Miscellaneous Works* in 1790, it was already a few months after the play had been performed twice by Lewis Hallam Jr.'s Old American Company in Philadelphia.¹⁰ A revival of Humphreys' version in 1791, for a total of three performances in Philadelphia, made his play the most popular American-authored drama produced in that city until Thomas Wignell's troupe at the Chestnut Street Theatre offered the third performance of *The Contrast* in 1796. By the end of 1791, *Widow* had also played in New York and possibly Baltimore, a circulation (albeit by the same company, the Old American) rarely accorded an eighteenth-century American-authored play.¹¹

Meanwhile, as Humphreys' play was realized in Philadelphia, Lemierre was trying to survive the revolution that swept his own country. Lemierre was one of several playwrights writing during the revival of the Voltaire style in the 1750s and 1760s; like those of his predecessor, his plays condemn tyranny and celebrate liberation, even if they deflect the provenance to Asia or classical Rome or even Switzerland, as in his *Guillaume Tell* (1766). As France Marchal-

Ninosque observes, many of Lemierre's tragedies are saturated with references to liberatory struggles from oppression and often use frequent repetition of key words—*barbare*, *cruel*, and *tyrannie*, to name but a few—to make their point.¹² In *Le Jeune Bramine's* (the Young Brahmin's) opening speech in *La Veuve*, for example, the troubled Hindu character refers to the preparations for the sati as “un spectacle cruel,” the widow to be sacrificed as “la victime nouvelle,” and the whole procedure as “barbare” (6). The cumulative effect of such language may have less to do with the literal enactment of sati (although that cannot be ignored) than it does with the interest of the French audience to be aware of cruelty and barbarism at home. *La Veuve du Malabar* was one of the last of Lemierre's tragedies to premiere before his works fell into royal disfavor in 1770.¹³ With its restoration to the theater in 1780 and its publication, the play remained in repertory in France into the 1790s. Two years after Lemierre's death in 1793, an edition of his plays appeared in two octavo volumes, and a larger edition of his complete works, including his poetry, appeared in 1810.¹⁴ Since then, however, Lemierre has lacked for both revivals of his plays and critical commentary.¹⁵ Yet in 1790, when Humphreys' translation first appeared in Philadelphia, Lemierre would have been recognized as a playwright committed to antityrannical themes and rhetoric—a perfect model for an aspiring patriotic American playwright to follow, and one that was not British.

Lemierre's original work is written in rhymed couplets, in a declamatory and emotional style—what would later be called “melodramatic”—without a single leavening moment of comedy to interrupt the mood of doom and frantic attempts to resist it. The playwright, drawing possibly on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travelers' accounts of sati in India,¹⁶ centers the action on a woman named Lanassa, a recent widow, who has been condemned by the chief Brahmin priest of a Malabarian coastal city to mount the funeral pyre of her husband and throw herself in. Outside the city, a French colonial army awaits to take control peacefully, assuming that the governor can give assurances that all allegedly barbaric Indian customs will cease. Although the widow is resigned to her fate, her lady in waiting, Fatime, is not; Persian by origin, Fatime argues against acquiescing to self-immolation. It turns out that the widow herself had once fallen in love with a French officer but had been forced by her family to marry an older Indian man. Thus for the widow, death becomes a

meaningless form, even a defilement of her original love. In addition, the widow's priestly brother, who only reveals himself as such to her well into the play, also has doubts about the practice of sati and seeks to undermine the authority of the chief Brahmin through some show of resistance. But the high priest, as Humphreys styles Le Grand Bramine, remains adamant that custom must be followed. At the last minute, the French general enters the city, stops the ritual, recognizes Lanassa as his old lover, and causes the high priest to be arrested. The play ends with the brother's delight that sati has been stopped and the general's proclamation that under the beneficent Louis XV, the inhumane and violent practices will be replaced with "l'humanité."

For French audiences, the implied nationalism of having the savior be French as well as the affirmation of France's imperial mission would have made it popular in a theater that, during much of the eighteenth century, had condemned what it saw as foreign barbarism. Lemierre frames his drama as a Western critique of the "tyranny of custom," as the American translates Lemierre's "l'empire des coutumes," of a non-Christian, Asiatic people but holds out hope that enlightened youth in India will accept the superiority of Western rationalism. At the same time, Lemierre also speaks to contemporary France, since Parisian spectators understood *La Veuve* as attacking the power of the clergy in France, asserting French patriotism, and to some lesser degree affirming feminism under an enlightened society.¹⁷

The attack on regressive institutions and the appeal to Enlightenment liberation would naturally attract a Revolutionary American playwright, as would the distinctly French character of the presentation. Humphreys' imitation follows Lemierre's original quite closely, borrowing Lemierre's French scenic structure and making only slight changes to the women's names: Lanissa for Lanassa, Fatima for Fatime. He uses blank verse rather than rhymed couplets, a more congenial choice for English-language tragedy in the late eighteenth century; he sometimes moves stage directions and occasionally alters speeches to stress a point. But by transporting a French drama to the United States, Humphreys must have recognized that it would be received in Philadelphia with different nuances if it were advertised as a play "by a citizen of the United States" instead of as a foreign original.¹⁸ For U.S. audiences in 1790 and 1791, rather far removed from imperial contentions on the subcontinent, there remained sufficient sympathy for the country's wartime ally that Federalist skepticism over the 1789 revo-

lution would not have interfered with the play's reception—despite the French hero—especially given its announced American authorship. In addition, Lewis Hallam Jr. promised elaborate pyrotechnics with the funeral “pile,” as it was advertised, which, according to one observer, were when realized “full of *majestic horror*.”¹⁹ Even with its Asian setting, the attraction for U.S. audiences centered on the play's reminders of the country's wartime links to France and liberty.

But the most overt appeal made to U.S. spectators was to its declared progressive attitude toward women. In the 1780 edition, Lemierre says nothing about the condition of women in his introductory dedicatory poem. For the productions of Humphreys' version, Hallam and the actress Mrs. Henry delivered a prologue and epilogue, respectively, written jointly by Humphreys and his fellow Wit John Trumbull that explicitly compare the situation of American women with that of those in the play. As one can hear in the quoted strains of the prologue, the authors suggest that India, Central Asia, and western North America are all allied in their resistance to an enlightened view of women:

Oh! born to bless, and meliorate mankind,
With manners winning, and with taste refin'd,
What wrongs, ye fair! your gentle bosoms bore,
In each rude age—on ev'ry barbarous shore!
Doom'd the mean vassals of unfeeling lords,
By Western Savages, and Tartar hords!
Through Asian climes, see custom reason braves,
And marks the fairest of their sex for slaves. (118)

Not only does the prologue establish the liberality of American society with respect to women, but it does so in a context whereby Eastern and Western natives are conflated. Indeed, as noted elsewhere, the dramatic situation figured in James Nelson Barker's Pocahontas play, *The Indian Princess* (1808), in which a Native American woman is won over to English customs by a European suitor and the arguments of her brother, who shares Western scorn for “barbaric” manners, is prefigured in Humphreys' imitation of Lemierre.²⁰ In other words, “Indian” at first means Asian but as in the prologue comes to be associated with “Western savages.” Thus, despite the remoteness of the setting of *The Widow of Malabar* for U.S. audiences, the play speaks directly to desires to exterminate Native practices by claiming the body of the Indian female for a transnationally figured “civilized” identity.²¹

In contrast to “Indian” entrapment in tyrannical custom, the American fair, by Trumbull’s and Humphreys’ reckoning, live in a land

where genial science shines,
 And Heav’n-born freedom, human souls refines;
 Where polish’d manners social life improve,
 And teach us to respect the sex we love;
 Confirm their claims in equal rights to share,
 Friends in our bliss, and partners in our care:—
 And hail, ye fair, of ev’ry charm posses’d—
 With better fates, and nobler genius born,
 Your sex to honour, and your land adorn. (119)

As Susan Branson has pointed out, the elevation of the status of women was identified in Philadelphia as a French influence.²² Before Mary Wollstonecraft’s manifesto and William Cobbett’s antifeminist reaction to those “fiery Frenchified dames,” Philadelphians were exposed to a more generally agreeable feminism based on contrast to barbaric and tyrannical Asian custom. In a sense, though, Humphreys makes Lemierre’s play his own by fortifying a theme of particular interest to Philadelphia viewers, who were eager to establish themselves as a transatlantic and sophisticated audience capable of comprehending world politics and their own role on the international scene.

The play’s proclaimed feminism works within the limits of Lanissa’s character, one constrained not only by the situation but also by the allegorical boundaries established for woman-as-nation. The widow first speaks for herself in act 2, where she simultaneously unveils her own sense of injustice and her powerlessness to resist what feels like fate. Having told her servant Fatima of her premarital love for the young European, his departure, and her having been “forc’d / To smother flames which I could not extinguish,” she expresses the metaphor of desire turned literal emblem of female entrapment:

Had I elsewhere been born,
 I should have ceas’d to be a SLAVE, A WRETCH!
 The man who forc’d me to his arms, when living,
 Would, when he died, at least have left me free. (131)

For Humphreys, feminism begins with a voiced wrong but most clearly expresses itself as male action on behalf of woman rather than

women's own acts of transgression, rage, or liberation. Insofar as she represents a "barbarous" nation, even though herself "civilized," liberation must come from the outside, not her own actions. The key for male supporters of wronged women, then, is to hear the woman's voice.

When her brother reveals himself to her, she mocks him for his participation in the priestly class that sentences her to death—he cannot be one who hears. Traditional claims of kinship fall away in a moment: "Th' endearing names of brother and of sister, / Here lose their charms, and urge me to expire." Her cry of injustice then inspires the Young Brahmin to reconsider his relations to the laws he has inherited; wronged woman now becomes the brother's rallying cry for broader social revolutions:

My eyes at last are open'd—eyes, I thought
To succour thee—what signify your customs?
Shall I regard your laws? I'll brave them all,
In such a cause. (136)

Sentimental attachment, given speech by Lanissa's "sweet voice, humanity" and sight through the Young Brahmin's "open'd" eyes, overcomes all custom, and thus for Philadelphia viewers establishes brother-sister sympathy as the key to female liberation. With the rising interest in the shared sentiment of siblinghood in postwar U.S. culture, the Young Brahmin's declaration on behalf of women would strike a sympathetic chord as the enlightened brotherly response that defies patriarchal containment.²³

Despite the limitations on the play's feminism, Humphreys' *Widow* goes further than his source in identifying treatment of women as the most important sign of national health. In Lemierre, the rhetoric of the Young Brahmin focuses largely on custom; in the brother's eyes, the widow, in her suffering and helplessness, appears as much an example of "l'esclavage & la mort" (slavery and death) that all suffer under Brahminism as she does the object of a particular crime that must be righted in the name of women (8). Humphreys, by slight editing and compacting of speeches, reminds the audience members throughout that they are to see the primary victims as women and the chief protectors of women as young men. For example, in act 1, scene 2, Lemierre's Young Brahmin begins his retort to Le Grand Brahmine (the Great Brahmin) thus:

Il est vrai; cependant pour peu qu'on soit sensible,
 Avouez avec moi qu'il doit paroître horrible
 Qu'on réserve à la femme un si funeste sort,
 Et qu'elle n'ait de choix qui l'opprobre ou la mort. (7)

(It's true; nevertheless, if you have any sensitivity
 You must agree with me it appears terrible
 That reserved for woman is a disastrous fate
 And that she has no choice but disgrace or death.)

while Humphreys' equivalent character begins immediately:

But Father! cruel is poor woman's fate,
 No choice is left, but infamy or death. (122)

The meaning is more or less the same, but by eliminating the two-line delay in French before woman is mentioned, Humphreys attends to the treatment of females immediately. Again, in act 2, scene 3, Humphreys' editing eliminates many of Lemierre's rhetorical effects for more direct claims that center both the rights of women and the obligations of brother-men to sustain them:

Let's fly from India, and its barbarous laws,
 To realms where reason guides the human race,
 Where nature's God those real duties shew,
 Which neither mortals, years, or climes can change. (138)

Thus even in a play about India, Philadelphia audiences grasp immediately their position vis-à-vis the humanity of women and young men's rightful position against repressive patriarchal custom.

This kind of minor alteration, coupled with his prologue, suggests that Humphreys intended to elevate the comparative treatment of women in the United States beyond those not only in India but elsewhere, including Europe. In other words, he asks his audience to observe the implied difference in treatment of women in the playhouse boxes and the alleged abuses suffered by women in the "India" of the stage as a measure of the New World's overcoming the tyranny of Old World custom with the Revolution. That the ultimate liberators of Malabar are French only serves to suggest that "tyranny of custom" could as easily refer to prewar British America as precolonial Malabar. The measure of difference can be found in the respect accorded the North American "fair," always the sign in the late eighteenth cen-

ture of a nation's civility. American nationalism thus represents itself in international terms as the universal asylum for women, even if the narrative situation requires that the liberators be "French."

But of course, love of things French could not last for all citizens, especially the Federalist elite whose support propped up theatrical activities in Philadelphia. Indeed, several factors play into the development of an increasingly rancorous local political scene. As the capital of the new United States, the city supported a significant Federalist presence that looked for and found, in the rising tide of violence in France, plenty of reasons to condemn the old ally and tout relations with the old enemy, Great Britain. At the same time, as a growing manufacturing city, Philadelphia had strong political participation by artisans and workers, leading to its eventual dominance by the Democratic Republicans. But before that day, with the slave revolt in Haiti—in particular the flood of refugees from Cap François in 1793—and the yellow fever epidemic, often blamed on French West Indian immigration, there was a considerable backlash by Federalists in Philadelphia against France and supporters of things French.²⁴ Further performances of Humphreys' *Widow of Malabar*, with its French hero, were in jeopardy. Yet the pages of Philadelphia newspapers announced that on 2 July 1794 the new theater on Chestnut Street would present a performance of *The Widow of Malabar*.²⁵

But that *Widow* was not the version seen only three years before. In another transatlantic circulation, a second English "imitation" arrived on U.S. shores, one by the young British playwright Mariana Starke. Opening at Covent Garden in London, Starke's play, titled *The Widow of Malabar, a Tragedy*, was published in that city in early 1791 by the Minerva Press.²⁶ This meant that by mid- to late 1791, copies of Starke's *Widow* were circulating in the hands of U.S. readers. The first American publication of this version was printed by Enoch Story of Philadelphia with a publication date of 1792 and was used in his anthology, *The American Theatre, Being a Collection of Plays, Taken from Bell's Theatre, and Performed by the Old American Company, Philadelphia*. One might inquire what need there was for a British *Widow* when an American one had just graced the boards of the old theater and could be purchased through a copy of Humphreys' *Works*.²⁷

A reading of Starke and a comparison with both Lemierre and Humphreys provide some clues. Unlike Humphreys or Lemierre or (most probably) any of the other European imitators of *La Veuve du Malabar*

(and there were Italian and Polish versions, as well as German, among others), Starke had actually lived in India, the daughter of an English provincial governor there, Richard Starke. The family relocated to Surrey, and while in her twenties, Starke wrote and produced the first of her India-set dramas, *The Sword of Peace*, in 1789; *The Widow of Malabar* followed in 1790.²⁸ Starke's version of Lemierre had modest success in London and remained in repertory for a few years; while not a huge hit in the United States, it appeared occasionally in Philadelphia between 1794 and 1805 and at least once in Boston. Starke today is better known for her later travel writings (although *The Sword of Peace* has drawn some recent attention), but the playing of her *Widow* on the boards of the United States, in preference to Humphreys', provides a lesson in the internationalization of the American theater—and its paradoxical sensitivity to local custom.²⁹

Given the dates of publication for Humphreys and Starke, as well as the general lack of reception for American writings in Britain, there is no textual or other evidence to suggest that Starke had Humphreys' version before her in translating Lemierre—in fact, what stands out in comparing the two versions is difference. Whereas the American styles his imitation very much in the French mode, Starke announces in her advertisement that she has no intentions of merely translating Lemierre. “The Authoress,” she declares, “was well convinced, that neither the Plot, nor the long declamatory Scenes of the French Play, would have been approved, or even tolerated, by an *English* Audience.” Therefore, she continues, she has constructed a “Drama in some measure her own” (9). For example, Humphreys, while he makes additions or alters the original's stresses to emphasize his theme of the emancipation of women from patriarchal tyranny, follows Lemierre so closely that he keeps the French author's scenic structure, in which new scenes are announced every time a new speaker enters or an old one exits. This style, associated with French dramaturgy, had had its British imitators earlier in the eighteenth century, notably John Dennis, but it had gone out of fashion on the British stage by the mid-1700s.³⁰ Starke, following modern practice, more loosely converts Lemierre's five-act tragedy into a three-act play, shorn of most of the scene changes.

Beyond that, however, are several other differences that would have made this version a more acceptable one to Philadelphia in 1794 than the one that first opened in 1790. The most important distinction

arises from Starke's conversion of the French colonial military to an English one. Whereas in Lemierre and Humphreys (and Carl Martin Plümicke) the general is named Montalban, a distinctly continental name (Plümicke identifies him as "General ber europäischen Truppen"), here he is Raymond, "General of the English forces." Reflecting a shift in subcontinental politics toward British hegemony in India, Starke's version writes the French entirely out of the play. Asserting British nationalism *and* imperialism, the London *Widow* eviscerates the Frenchness of presentation and content, employs more traditional English dramatic techniques, and otherwise colonizes Lemierre's play for Britain. The heroine is now named Indamora, distinguishing her from both Lemierre's original and the German translation, in both of which she was called Lanassa. As the Covent Garden prologue, written by T. W. Fitzgerald, makes clear, the point of the play is to celebrate Britain's "FREEDOM" and its "MONARCH *great*" by way of contrast to "*Bramin Law*" (12, 11).

Appearing in the first full season of the Wignell company at the new theater, this new version of *Widow of Malabar* capitalizes on the rising tide of anti-French sentiment in Philadelphia. English plays about Asiatic tyranny from earlier in the century (such as Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane*) frequently were seen as referring as much to France as to the Turks or Tartars, and this one may have been experienced in the same fashion. While Starke's purgation of French characters is the most substantial change, her shifts in style from declamatory to conversational carry some importance. Written in a manner more congenial to the actors from English theaters who were replenishing American companies, including Wignell's in Philadelphia, Starke's *Widow* would be preferred as more in line with their training and David Garrick's naturalistic acting style than Humphreys' more direct translation, which resembles the declamation of American collegiate oratory. The actress who premiered the role of Indamora in London, Ann Brunton, and whom Starke praises in her introduction to the London edition, came to Philadelphia later under the name Mrs. Merry. She performed in a 1798 revival of Starke's play, and later, under a second married name, Mrs. Wignell, in an 1805 production.³¹ Therefore, because Ann Brunton Merry was the most popular actress on the American stage, managers would likely want to cast a particular play—Starke's—to that performer's particular experience and skills. These are only a few of the many reasons managers found to discour-

age U.S. dramatic authorship, as if “American” did not really exist as a theatrical category.

In fact, the substitution of Starke for Humphreys is a further episode in the politicization of American theater. Although just two days before Starke’s version premiered Wignell had mounted a new American play, Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* (another local drama set elsewhere), the theater remained very cautious about performing new American works. Heather Nathans describes, for instance, the extraordinary pressures both for and against the performance of Philadelphian John Murdock’s play *The Triumphs of Love* in 1795—a play that had its single hour upon the stage and then was heard no more.³² These intratheatrical politics are related to the forces that maintained the economic support of theater in Philadelphia, the predominantly Federalist elite. For the premiere of Starke’s drama, however, manager Thomas Wignell was exceedingly cautious. Not only did he not identify the author in his advertising, but he also followed the performance of this British *Widow* with a French-language farce, *L’Americain, ou l’Homme Raisonable*.³³ Therefore, he seemed to recognize that too great a declaration for a play with British heroes might upset some significant portion of the audience, both recent French migrants and French-leaning Democratic Republicans.

Nevertheless, while Wignell and his comanager Alexander Reingle then and later seized opportunities to demonstrate American patriotism through transparencies of Liberty or pantomimes celebrating the president or late Revolutionary figures, the de facto politics of the stage were essentially pro-British and elitist and only mildly supportive at best of French, American, or mechanic-class authorship.³⁴ A member of the American mechanic class, like Murdock, who wanted to mount a play would have faced enormous challenges to do so, given the elite contempt for the artisanal and working classes and the fear that members of that class would support a French Revolutionary position. For someone like Humphreys, with impeccable credentials as a diplomat and military officer, access to the stage would have met with less resistance than Murdock experienced, as was seen in 1790, but his version’s American authorship and its French sentiments and manner would have been deterrents to further representation. For theatrical management it was easier to toss in a French farce in the afterpiece than to continue to highlight an American play in the main drama. In short, plays—almost regardless of subject—themselves

play in the arena of national authorship and international allegiance, turning the New Theatre in Philadelphia into a zone of contending professional identities that nearly—but never completely—erases the Indian scene from consideration.

To be sure, despite the intratheatrical politics, the expression of that stage India was important, with every nuance provoking potential differences of reception. Some of the differences among the three versions can be observed in the last lines of each, spoken by the European general, whether Montalban in Lemierre and Humphreys or Raymond in Starke. In all three, the widow has been rescued from the pyre by her European lover and the high priest is prevented from carrying out the ceremony, to the delight of the intended victim's brother, the young priest. The general in all three provides a gloss on the stoppage of the rite. First, Lemierre:

Vous, Peupes [*sic*], respirez sous de meilleurs auspices:
Des faveurs de mon Roi, recevez pour prémices
L'entire extinction d'un usage inhumain.
LOUIS pour l'abolir s'est servi de ma main:
En se montrant sensible autant qu'il est né juste,
La splendeur de son regne en devient plus auguste.
D'autres chez les vaincus portent la cruauté,
L'orgueil, la violence, & lui l'humanité. (54)

(You, people, will breathe under better conditions:
From the favors of my king, receive as a beginning
The complete elimination of an inhuman custom.
LOUIS, in order to abolish this rite, makes use of me;
In his demonstration of sensitivity and justice,
The splendor of his reign, his superior majesty,
While other conquerors display cruelty,
Pride, and violence, he shows humanity.)

Montalban justifies his intervention on the grounds of humanity and the French Enlightenment; he forgoes any reference to religion while proclaiming the “humanité” of the French king. For Humphreys, the same essential ideals hold, but with a slight twist that redirects the conclusion of this play toward a U.S. audience:

YE people, ye shall live with happier laws—
Receive as the first favor of my prince,

Th' entire extinction of this savage rite!—
 Louis for this employ'd my hand; for he
 Alike for greatness and for goodness known,
 Diffuses blessings from the rising day
 To yonder Western World—the land that loves him:
 While other conq'rors carry rage and lust,
 And horrid carnage—he humanity!— (173)

As with Lemierre, Humphreys accepts the plea to rationalism as justification, but he adds the line to confirm that Louis's humanity—now that of Louis XVI—spreads to America, the “Western World,” where the king and his nation are adored. For the American, imitation of Lemierre honors the context of the author and the “imitation” of rationalist claims for humanity in the post-Revolutionary United States.

When we get to Starke, however, we encounter an important shift from the previous two writers. Whereas in the French and American versions the high priest lives, simply banished from the scene, in Starke he commits suicide—much as Barker's Indian character, the unadaptable Miami, does in the 1808 Jamestown fantasy of compliant Natives. The death of the priest suggests that the simple displacement of custom is insufficient; what is required is obliteration of both ritual and advocate. As Raymond intones,

There fled a soul which, had Religion's sun
 Unclouded beam'd upon it, might have grac'd
 And comforted the Land.—My Indamora,
 This genial sun shall shed his rays on thee;
 Make all thy budding virtues blossom fair,
 And, with their fruits, bless Raymond and thy Country.
 Whilst thou, young Priest, who, 'spite of Errors mists,
 Discovered and pursued bright Virtue's paths,
 Thou, in yon Temple, henceforth reign supreme,
 And, on its altars, fix the CHRISTIAN CROSS. (47)

For Starke, French humanity is insufficient to override pagan custom; she rewrites the end to assert an overt Christianity that makes no appearance in the other two plays. Thus the substitution of Starke for Humphreys in Philadelphia goes even beyond strict national identity to a reinstatement of conventional Christian religion (and not “nature” religion as in Humphreys' Enlightenment phrasing) as the reason for rejection of barbarous rites. For audiences, the message is clear: abjure

the French Revolution for traditional values, most especially those of English Protestantism. For the stage managers, a further message takes hold: save things French for a comic afterpiece.

But what of sati in these plays? Can it be said to represent anything more than an exotic subject with pyrotechnical stage effects by which to draw in jaded spectators, or something other than a mild feminism? For writers in the West, nothing worked better to illustrate the self-proclaimed differences between themselves, as representatives of “civilized” nations, and those of “barbarous” lands than the practice of widow immolation. Although the recent critical literature on sati focuses more on nineteenth-century debates within India and domestic reaction in Britain, the practice had been publicized through travelers’ accounts with increasing frequency in the century before Lemierre wrote *La Veuve* in 1770. None of these plays should be taken as true accounts of sati but instead as uses of sati for ideological purposes in transmitting nationalist and other localized concerns to audiences with only remote connections to India itself. There is no evidence, for example, that Starke ever witnessed a sati during her residence in Madras. Even so, each writer becomes complicit in a discourse that uses the contested bodies of actual women as tropes for issues closer to home. As Gayatri Spivak observes, in the discourse surrounding sati, the female subaltern often does not speak, even if many others do.³⁵ For Lemierre, the preparation for burning—which in truth makes for a very static drama—could be made theatrically gripping by the presence on stage of a pyre, something that Humphreys and Hallam saw as drawing audiences, in a practice also employed by Starke.³⁶ Enacted sati on European and American stages appeals to the erotics implied in violent female death, particularly in the exhibition of an attractive woman in the throes of lost love being consumed by fire as a substitute for consummating by sex. The silent, dead Indian women, therefore, serve in their combined anonymity as a theatrical flat for the three-dimensional Western actress, pulled at the last minute from the alcohol fire of a stage-property “pile.” At the same time, while audiences in Paris, London, Berlin, and Philadelphia all congratulate themselves on not being barbarous, they potentially see somewhat different realities in the spectacle of rescued virtue.

For French and British audiences, the Lemierre and Starke versions respectively evoke the literal presence of their own colonialist armies in India, a reality that for Berlin and Philadelphia would not appertain.

Still, literate Americans could hardly be said to be unaware of Malabar as anything more than a French or British author's stated setting. As consumers of British news, U.S. readers would have followed the colonial wars in India and read in their own papers of political and military developments there. In U.S. newspapers one could find references to sati itself—often clipped from British papers, as in the *Georgia Gazette* in 1765 with a paragraph on Indians' "folly and cruelty" in "a horrid fact which happened last year, when a very rich young widow burnt herself alive on the same funeral pile with her dead husband."³⁷ As traders, American shipowners and shopkeepers made Malabar a port of call or a source of goods—"45 Hogsheads Pepper of Malabar" could have been found in F. Coppinger's Front Street store in Philadelphia.³⁸ And while few native persons from India called the United States home, some Americans would have had the opportunity, either through direct trade or perhaps encounters with sailors of many nationalities, to interact with non-European Malabarians. Still, for playgoers in Philadelphia, and even those in Europe, India was primarily a play space, a setting or point of reference for other entertainments on their stages, as it is for instance in the popular farce *The Mogul Tale*, by Elizabeth Inchbald. The issue, then, is how that play-India is used and with what relevance to the literal spaces of South Asia and the United States.

In current critical literature, sati—both the act of immolation and, in its original meaning, the woman who mounts the pyre—is a contested figure, around which a number of debates and interests circulate. Although outlawed, at least partially, by the British colonial government in 1829, sati and its status within India in the eighteenth century presented complex problems to observers. For one thing, sati was not a universal practice but appears to have been limited largely to upper-caste Hindus; for another, it seemed to be practiced more commonly in some geographic regions than others; and for a third, governance of India was a multiparty affair, with Indian Islamic rulers, local Hindu overlords, British East India company officials and troops, and French colonial forces all holding some measure of power in an often fluid landscape of shifting allegiances. As sati became a more visible rite to European eyes and the object of humanitarian-imperialist protest, the rite turned for some into a rallying point for various Indian nationalisms as well as the demarcation of alleged Indian barbarity. British policy until 1829 involved a negotiation between a stated desire not

to offend the religious sensibilities of colonized populations and the criticism that it indulged a form of murder or coerced suicide. Among Indians themselves, particularly in the early nineteenth century, the burning of the sati was both condemned and defended. Its status as religiously authorized or justified was ambiguous at best, and debates often swirled around conflicting interpretations of Hindu religious scriptures and commentaries.³⁹ At the time that Lemierre, Humphreys, Plümicke, and Starke wrote their texts, there was as yet no settled body of opinion in the West on it, other than as a practice that “civilized” people might look upon (or turn their eyes from) in horror.

If the interest in *The Widow of Malabar* were only ethnographic, the play would have been seen simply as a curiosity and no more for European audiences thousands of miles removed from the scene of action. That some version or other remained in repertory in France, England, Germany, and the United States for as much as a decade or more in each case suggests that the local audiences saw something of themselves in the sati-and-rescue situation. The initial dramatization of the victimized Indian woman—as read by European eyes—is layered over in the palimpsest of European concerns, converted, in the bodies of the French (and later other white) actors who play Indian roles, into an allegory of more immediately apprehended suffering or injustice. As noted above, the original French audiences—at least those from 1780 onward—responded to Lemierre in the context of the struggle over clerical power. Lanassa, in that reading, is not an Indian woman but a French one, held in thrall by superstitious, self-interested priests who demand obeisance to outmoded and antilibertarian traditions. As in the many attacks by Diderot and others on religious institutions, especially the convent, Lemierre’s treatment of sati was understood to decry the possession of European female bodies for the perverse enjoyment of a corrupt clergy.⁴⁰ The transition of the play’s popularity into the era of the Revolution continues the same critique, but perhaps expanded to the politics of the ancien régime; thus *La Veuve du Malabar* serves to attack all traditional hierarchies based on privilege, with Lanassa now playing France herself, in need of rescue by a revolutionary Enlightenment, figured in the disinterested but committed Montalban. The future centers on the Young Brahmin, the brother of Lanassa, for his rejection of tradition and affirmation of *liberté*.

For Humphreys, an imitation of Lemierre, no matter how linguis-

tically faithful to the original, could hardly have promoted the same reading of the Indian situation. Without a convent tradition or a national church—although Protestantism functioned as a tacit national religion—the new United States presents a different field of view, one in which the thralldom of the female would evoke other memories or sites of contestation. Indeed, sati confronted in America might have prompted a literal reading of the experience of a woman in flames. Pompa Banerjee has noted that there are uncanny parallels in European travelers' accounts of sati to accounts of witch burnings, even when the European observers fail to make the connection between the two sacrificial rites.⁴¹ To be sure, the burning of criminals, even witches, was not practiced to any degree in colonial America, but readers of popular literature, particularly captivity narratives, might have stored images of white captives thrown to the flames by "Indian" captors. One such event occurs in the *urtext* of captivity, Mary Rowlandson's *Narrative*. Rowlandson recounts in her Fourth Remove the doleful tale of Goodwife Joslyn, the pregnant woman who begs her captors to allow her to return home, with the result that "they knocked her on [the] head and the child in her arms with her. When they had done that, they made a fire and put them both into it."⁴² In another circulating account, this time from the Ohio territory in the mid-eighteenth century, a band of Delawares recaptured a white female captive trying to escape and allegedly forced her into a fire as a lesson to other whites they held.⁴³ With the asserted brutality of Native Americans well entrenched in the popular imagination through oral tradition and the wide circulation of Indian war and captivity narratives, including reprints of Rowlandson, American audiences might have made the easy transposition from one set of Indians to another. After all, Philadelphians were used to seeing Natives on their stages, as in the "Dance of Savages" that appeared at the Concert Room in May 1788.⁴⁴ And if spectators did not at first make the connection between Indians and Indians, the prologue by Humphreys and Trumbull ensured that they did.

But there are ironies to that reading as well, occasioned by the American Indian policy of Washington's administration, particularly as formulated by Secretary of War Henry Knox. With Native tribes in the Northeast and Middle Atlantic states more or less defeated and subdued, the new republican government turned its military eyes to the South and the trans-Appalachian West. As with European colonial

armies in India, American policy toward its own Native population often faced two ways—toward a doctrine of Native rights and toward annihilation, to be justified on economic grounds. In 1789 Humphreys himself was sent by Washington to Georgia and Florida to negotiate with the Creeks—a trip that failed to secure a treaty. In 1790, the year that Humphreys' play opened in Philadelphia, an army of the United States, led by General Josiah Harmar, moved into Ohio to defeat the Wabash peoples and was itself defeated; in 1791, a second and larger expedition under the leadership of General Arthur St. Clair sent to the same region met an even more massive defeat at the hands of the Miami chieftain Little Turtle. Only in a third campaign, led by Anthony Wayne, did the United States get its way in the region of western Ohio. Therefore, during the premieres of both Humphreys and Starke on American stages, Euro-American troops were attempting to suppress "Indian customs," where the term might better be rephrased as the "right to live on tribally claimed lands—if at all." The image of the wronged woman, a character on stage both Indian and not, held captive by a "savage" people and needing liberation (as Pocahontas would be enacted in 1808), would through the figure of the sati salve the consciences of American audiences by justifying American military and economic tactics employed against Native American peoples.⁴⁵

In that sense, then, the performance of sati on stage in Philadelphia amounts to a self-congratulatory gesture, a distinction of U.S. white culture from that of "savages" found in all parts of the globe, including its own hemisphere. Indians East and West throw virtuous women—wives, mothers—to the fire, but we, in an enlightened, civilized republic, do not (even though "we" do anyway, as in the famous slaughter by fire of Pequot women in 1637). The enacted colonization of India, the suppression of its customs by a colonizing force, and the rescue of its women by the colonizers all have their parallels in the occupation of North America and the myths of founding.

Yet curiously and ironically, there is another discourse stream that flows through the embodiment of sati on an American stage in 1790, one that embraces the Indianness of the widow rather than simply denouncing that of her persecutors. The embracing of the Indian woman is in fact her erasing, through the iconographic rendition of America or Columbia as a Native or nativized woman subject to the entreaties, rapes, and other tyrannies of the European male. Thus the presence of a young woman on stage, under duress, evokes for audi-

ences the dozens of political illustrations from the period of the Revolutionary War that signified the brutality felt by a feminized, Indianized America facing foreign tyranny.⁴⁶ Lanissa's literal South Asian Indian existence has been forgotten in the costume of the Indian-playing white female whose figural existence to U.S. audiences signifies more the native peoples of America than the native peoples of India. At the same time, however, by adopting the Indian as white America, Humphreys' *Widow of Malabar* causes the American Native, too, to disappear.

In this reading, then, the French origin of the American drama now has particular meaning to a new republican United States. In the early days of New England, Massachusetts used an emblem with a Native American male pleading, "Come over and help us."⁴⁷ English Christians saw themselves, then, as saviors of a benighted people who desired the spiritual values of Calvinist Protestantism to overcome the superstition of their heathenism. Over time, as the English began to distance themselves from their American cousins, the iconography shifted to representing the English colonies as an Indian female, the dependent counterpart to Britannia, looking to the mother country for support and guidance. With the adoption of the Indian costume by the Tea Party participants, the process of reverse identification, whereby the othering of American Creoles by British observers could be adopted by white Americans themselves, was now complete.⁴⁸ The Indian was the emblem not of the savage other but of the white American, now to be distinguished from the tyrannical enforcer of "savage" customs against the will of a victimized people.

In the sati situation of 1790 Philadelphia, then, the "Hindus" are the British, Lanissa and her brother are the displaced Indians cum Americans, and the French are themselves, in a reenactment of the Revolutionary War. Republican America, then, represents the amalgamation of "Indian" stoic resignation to suffering and "French" enlightenment, producing the future people who abjure the savagery of custom—even British—for the hybrid virtues of the postcolonial state. Thus in the way Lanissa is both Indian and not, Hindu and not, so too American identification with her—victimized frontier white woman, abused savage female, and tyrannized nation—involves multiple and ironically competing registers.

With the importation of Starke's *Widow of Malabar*, the potential immolation and ultimate rescue of the sati shifts the symbolic context

for interpretation. Of the four versions discussed here, Starke's is the most overtly nationalistic. Lemierre, Humphreys, and Plümicke pose ideals that supersede nationality; France, in the case of the first two, or Europe for the German writer, is identified with certain ideals rather than precisely with a nation-state. As discussed above, Starke quite overtly de-Frenchifies her text for nationalistic purpose. To be sure, she also makes a case for the right treatment of women, and although the theme is not brought forward as forcefully as in Humphreys' play, she reduces the total victimization of the widow and increases her agency of resistance to submission.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Starke's very act of replacement of a French (European) force with an "English" one asserts a deliberate nationalist frame for comprehending her heroine. Placed upon a Philadelphia stage in 1794, then, the British *Widow*, despite the covert nature of the advertising, plays against the American, robbing the sati of her prior associations and replacing them with others.

Humphreys' version had last played in the city in 1791; Enoch Story had printed Starke's version a few months later, but with mixed coding as to its identity; and now Wignell wished to stage a play that could carry the "played in London" cachet that theater managers often used in playbills and newspaper advertisements. Because by 1794 the Terror was reaching its peak and the city was just recovering from the devastating effects of the yellow fever—blamed on French Haitians—the reaction against things French would have made the staging of a French main play problematic. The new context for the drama offers the sati again as America, but now as in need of a new rescuer, this time Great Britain, from captivity to French revolutionary values. The Hindu priests represent what Eastern potentates have often meant on the English stage, French tyranny, but rather than absolute monarchy as the enemy, it is now French Revolutionary violence that is implied. In the Federalist swing toward reunion with the late enemy and in the rise of Anglophilia in the mid- to late 1790s, Starke's play in America reconstitutes the dependent relationship between the former colonial power and its colonies, seen now not as defiant of English power but obedient to, even grateful for it.

In all the allegorical layers, the sati as living Hindu woman either embracing or being forced into the flames that would engulf her dead husband is virtually lost to the Philadelphia spectator; indeed, so too is lost the suffering of the American Indian female, literally subject to

new American imperial power. Nevertheless, the fact that a dramatized incident from South Asia could attract sufficient theatrical attention in the new United States to be mounted in two separate productions speaks to the power that the spectacle of sati held for audiences of the new republic. American theatergoers could see before them images of the entire globe, represented every other night at the Southwark, then Chestnut Street theaters. Thus the playhouse functioned as a window to the world, complementing the trade connections that brought the world to Philadelphia. As viewers looked for themselves, however, they would have found in *The Widow of Malabar* confounding and politicized reflections of American self-identification—as a land of liberty, perhaps, but also, in the dim afterimage, one of dependence, even a land of barbaric cruelty, in the suppression of Native customs and the taking of Native women from their culture in order to reinscribe them with another. And so the suffering of the woman of Malabar or Bengal, even in the hands of a French or American playwright, might have awakened in the consciousness of the American something other than mere entertainment.

No American play in the early republic could be performed in an artistic vacuum. Playgoers did not observe Humphreys' translation of Lemierre as merely that, but as a drama that spoke to them in Philadelphia about the political world of 1790 and 1791, at a time when the city took over the functions of the nation's capital from New York. Similarly, the exchange of Humphreys' text for Starke's indicates the degree to which both global and theatrical politics influenced how the same play could frame rivaling ideologies in the same city. Further, the proliferation of translations internationally displays how one script could become three or more very different dramas, all playing in different cities in different countries. While London audiences sought justification for their imperial mission to India at Covent Garden and Parisians for their Revolution at the Comédie-Française, Americans sought the same for their wars against the Natives at the New Theatre on Chestnut Street. In the trope of the rescued victim of sati, nations on both sides of the Atlantic figured their own conflicted identities not only against the native other but also against each other.

As one of the participants in this transatlantic circulation of texts and tropes, David Humphreys must have recognized that Lemierre's original could, if set into an American's English, make the theaters of the United States into schools for the portrayal of allegories of national

identity instead of houses for amusement only. What he may not have understood, however, were the afterimages of American Indian policy that reversed the polarity of his declarations for the superiority of the American Enlightenment. Thus the tragedy of sati reads as both celebration and condemnation of the country's attempts to free itself from the "tyranny of custom."

Buried within a forgotten play lie national, international, and intra-cultural tensions that make *The Widow of Malabar* more than a literary artifact but rather a sign that by "America" was meant the globe itself, a space in which Old World customs and New World practices, Indians and Indians, French and English and Americans, could be cast into a single drama of imperial absorption. Sati in Philadelphia is not merely an exotic displacement but a domestic site for sometimes contradictory national self-conceptions.

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Notes

I wish to thank Timothy Sweet for his perspicacious reading of this article in an earlier draft and the anonymous readers for their comments.

- 1 Thomas Clark Pollock, *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century* (1933; reprint, New York: Greenwood, 1968), 40–52; Heather Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 14–19, 50–55, 62–70.
- 2 Royall Tyler, *The Contrast*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 6–57.
- 3 David Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works* (New York: Hodge, Allen, and Campbell, 1790), 115–76. Further references to the play are from this version.
- 4 A.-M. Le Mierre [sic], *La Veuve du Malabar, ou l'Empire des Coutumes* (*The Widow of Malabar, or The Influence of Customs*) (Paris: Duchesne, 1780). All further references to Lemierre's play itself are to this edition. All translations are my own.
- 5 The best overall study of Connecticut Wit poetry remains William C. Dowling, *Poetry and Ideology in Revolutionary Connecticut* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990); Dowling, however, says nothing about Humphreys as a playwright.
- 6 See basic biographical material on Humphreys from Frank Landon Humphreys, *Life and Times of David Humphreys: Soldier—Statesman—Poet*, 2 vols. (New York: Putnam's, 1917). See other sources below.

- 7 Edward M. Cifelli, *David Humphreys* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 32–50. Cifelli notes only that Humphreys attended the theater in Paris (49), not specifically Lemierre's play. But because the French play was a staple of the Comédie-Française from 1780 onward, it was entirely likely that Humphreys saw at least one production in Paris. In addition, according to the electronic database César (Calendrier électronique des spectacles sous l'ancien régime et sous la révolution) (Electronic Calendar of Stage Entertainments from the Old Regime to the Revolution), *La Veuve* played twice in Brussels, once in Toulouse, and once in an "unknown location" between March 1784 and January 1785. See www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2/titles/titles.php?fct=edit&script_UID=157621 (accessed 16 February 2007).
- 8 Carl Martin Plümicke, *Lanassa: Trauerspiel in fünf Akten (Lanassa: A Tragedy in Five Acts)* (Berlin: n.p., 1782). Veronica Richel lists nine imprints of the play through 1785, suggesting its widespread popularity in Germany at the time Humphreys encountered Lemierre. Richel, *The German Stage, 1767–1890* (New York: Greenwood, 1988), 116. It is possible that one of the German imprints circulated among German-speaking Americans in Pennsylvania before Humphreys wrote his play, but it is unlikely that Washington's aide would have encountered or used it.
- 9 Humphreys allegedly was quite obsessed during the writing of the play, bothering the other Washington aides with his "stentorian" reading of passages in the middle of the night. "Washington's Residence in New York," *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, 25 March 1847.
- 10 Performances in Philadelphia for 7 May and 10 May were advertised in the *Federal Gazette* on 6, 7, 8, and 10 May, while the 9 February 1791 enactment was announced in the *Gazette* on the day of the performance.
- 11 *New York Daily Gazette*, 17 October 1791. The ad claims that the Old American Company played *Widow* in Baltimore, and the troupe did hold a season there from mid-August to early October 1790, but I cannot confirm it, based on the information in David Ritchey, *A Guide to the Baltimore Stage in the Eighteenth Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982).
- 12 France Marchal-Ninosque, "Le Théâtre d'Antoine-Marin Lemierre, une école des citoyens," ("The Theater of Antoine-Marin Lemierre, a School for Citizens") *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 103 (2003): 49–62.
- 13 Binita Mehta, "La Veuve du Malabar: Une représentation de l'Inde dans le théâtre français," ("The Widow of Malabar: A Representation of India on the French Stage") *Francographies* 1 (1995): 297–300.
- 14 Basic information on Lemierre from Henry Carrington Lancaster, *French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, 1715–1774*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1950), 2:433–66. See other sources below.
- 15 Typical of the dismissal of Lemierre in the earlier twentieth century is the remark, "*La Veuve du Malabar*, 1770, was rather an unfortunate effort at

- placing Voltaire's philosophic ideas within a frame of sentimental drama" (Eleanor F. Jourdain, *Dramatic Theory and Practice in France, 1690–1808* [1921; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968], 116–17 n. 2).
- 16 Lancaster, *French Tragedy*, 2:459–60; Marchal-Ninosque, "Le Théâtre," 52 n. 15.
- 17 *Dictionnaire des littératures de langue française*, ed. Jean-Pierre de Beaumarchais, Daniel Couty, and Alain Rey, 2 vols. (Paris: Bourdas, 1994), 2:1370; Frederick Hawkins, *The French Stage in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (1888; reprint, New York: Greenwood, 1969), 2:167, 264–65; Lancaster, *French Tragedy*, 2:462.
- 18 *Federal Gazette and Philadelphia Evening Post*, 8 May 1790.
- 19 *Gazette of the United States*, 15 May 1790. The piece was probably written by someone connected to the theater, as there appeared in the same paper on 3 May a similarly worded piece announcing the production to come. In any event, the 15 May paragraph circulated in other American newspapers as well, appearing in *Worcester Magazine* on 20 May and *Osborne's New-Hampshire Spy* on 22 May.
- 20 James Nelson Barker, *The Indian Princess*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 114–65.
- 21 Jeffrey H. Richards, *Drama, Theatre, and Identity in the American New Republic* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 166–68.
- 22 Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 55–72.
- 23 For this aspect of sympathy in the early republic, see Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), 19–39.
- 24 Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 125–27.
- 25 *Gazette of the United States*, 1 July 1794.
- 26 Mariana Starke, *The Widow of Malabar, a Tragedy* (London: W. Lane, 1791). Lane printed "at the Minerva, Leadenhall Street." The play premiered at Covent Garden at the end of the 1789–90 season on 5 May. It was repeated nine times during the 1790–91 season, including eight performances between 12 January and 23 February 1791, but only twice the next season. Charles Beecher Hogan, *The London Stage, 1660–1800. Part 5: 1776–1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1968), 1250, 1282, 1315–19, 1321, 1322, 1325, 1392, 1455.
- 27 The bibliographic record for Story is somewhat unclear; it seems he may have published Starke's version separately in late 1791 before the 1792 collection of multiple plays. Interestingly, for several months prior to the first performance of Starke's version, Philadelphian Mathew Carey advertised Humphreys' *Miscellaneous Works* volume, pointedly listing his *Widow* as among the contents (*Independent Gazetteer*, 25 January 1794, and subsequent issues).

- 28 Elizabeth Baigent, "Mariana Starke (1761/2–1838)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26314 (accessed 18 November 2005).
- 29 See, for example, Jeanne Moskal, "English National Identity in Marianna Starke's 'The Sword of Peace': India, Abolition, and the Rights of Women," in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790–1840*, ed. Catherine Burroughs (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 102–31.
- 30 For Dennis's justification of the French scenic mode, see his preface to *Liberty Asserted* (London: Strahan and Lintott, 1704), 6–7. It should be noted that Plümicke in his translation-imitation follows Lemierre in scenic notation.
- 31 Starke's version played in Philadelphia on 7 April 1798 (Pollock, *Philadelphia Theatre*, 363); in Baltimore on 19 November 1798 (Ritchey, *Guide to the Baltimore Stage*, 242); in Boston on 24 March 1800 (*Columbian Centinel*, 18 March 1800); and in Philadelphia on 22 March 1802 (*Gazette of the United States*, 22 March 1802) and 22 March 1805 (*Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, 21 March 1805). Both Pollock and Ritchey mistakenly assume the play to be by Humphreys. In all but the Boston performance, Ann Brunton Merry, later Wignell, played Indamora. In Boston, some hoped the version they saw would be Humphreys'. See *Russell's Gazette*, 24 March 1800.
- 32 Nathans, *Early American Theatre*, 95–100.
- 33 *Gazette of the United States*, 1 July 1794. Although there is no author assigned to the farce, it is possible it was written or adapted by Madame Gardie, a dancer originally from Paris, who played the character Theresa and was the only native French speaker in the cast.
- 34 Jeffrey H. Richards, "Politics, Playhouse, and Repertoire in Philadelphia, 1808," *Theatre Survey* 46 (November 2005): 199–224.
- 35 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 66–111.
- 36 As an indication of the theatricality of the *Malabar* pyres for managers, Alexander Placide, in staging the Inquisition-theme pantomime *La Belle Dorotheé, or Virtue Triumphant* for a Boston audience, announced that the heroine, a victim of religious zealotry, would be brought to a funeral "pile representing a perfect picture of those at the funeral sacrifices of the Widows of Malabar" (*American Apollo*, 1 February 1793).
- 37 *Georgia Gazette*, 21 March 1765.
- 38 *Gazette of the United States*, 21 December 1796.
- 39 Among the large number of texts that discuss sati, and in addition to others mentioned separately, I have relied upon the following: the essays in John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley and

- Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1998); Monica Fludernik, "Suttee Revisited: From the Iconography of Martyrdom to the Burkean Sublime," *New Literary History* 30 (spring 1999): 411–37; Catherine Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and David Gordon White (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999); and Jeannette Herman, "Men and Women of Feeling: Conventions of Sensibility and Sentimentality in the Sati Debate and Mainwaring's *The Suttee*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 42, no. 2 (2005): 223–63.
- 40 Lancaster, *French Tragedy*, 462.
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- 43 R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720–1830* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 29.
- 44 *Independent Gazetteer*, 7 May 1788.
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- 47 See the illustration of the colonial seal in Gordon M. Sayre, *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero: Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, from Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005), 91.
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- 49 Marie A. Dakessian notes that while Starke forwards a more feminist message in her imitation of Lemierre than the original allows, she also embraces “her support for the British imperial agenda” (“Envisioning the Indian Sati: Marianna Starke’s *The Widow of Malabar* and Antoine Le Mierre’s *La Veuve du Malabar*,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 36, no. 2 [1999]: 112).