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Staging Governance

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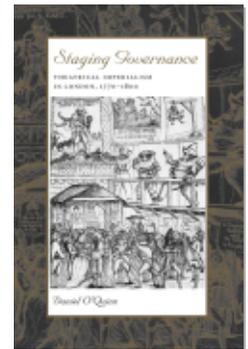
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DURING THE LAST thirty years of the eighteenth century, one can discern a fundamental reorientation of both public and official opinion on the status of the British Empire. As Bruce P. Lenman states, popular sentiment between 1770 and 1785 was marked by intense anxiety if not pessimism:

Robert Clive had died in 1774, convinced that he lived in a disintegrating Empire. There was much to be said for this opinion by 1783. Britain had been forced to recognize the independence of the thirteen colonies. . . . Moreover, the Irish volunteer movement of some 60,000 at its peak had given Irish public opinion a focus through which to demand redress of grievances with the implication that force would be used were redress refused. With America largely lost; British India wasted by war, famine and corruption; Ireland restive; and the British West Indies in economic difficulties, it looked in 1783 as if the British Empire faced an uncertain future.¹

In the 1770s Hastings's costly and ineffective conflicts with the Maratha confederacy, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the sultans of Mysore drained the East India Company of resources and failed to stabilize the region. These three principalities were the source of intermittent, if not continual, resistance until the end of the century. Of these, Mysore was the most serious threat to British imperial interests following the loss of the American war. It was not until after Hastings was recalled that Lord Cornwallis, now the governor-general of Bengal, managed to temporarily defeat Tipu Sultan in 1792. Much of British reaction to Indian affairs at this time focused on the sultans of Mysore's resistance to the East India Company,

and it was not until the end of the decade when Tipu was killed that the Mysorean threat to British territorial domination was ended.

The conflicts between the East India Company armies and Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore are instructive because they chart a course from humiliating defeat to triumphant proclamations of global supremacy that are inextricably tied to the complex British reaction to the American Revolution. As Linda Colley has recently reminded us, news of Haider Ali's victory over the British at Pollilur in 1780 arrived in London in 1781 and provoked "universal consternation" in part because the news came at roughly the same time as the fall of Yorktown.² To observers in the American colonies and in metropolitan London, Britain's Indian empire seemed in equal jeopardy. Like the first war with Mysore in 1767–69, the Second Mysore War ended inconclusively in 1784, after costing the East India Company a great deal both in resources and confidence. The close affiliation between Tipu Sultan and French forces not only raised the question of renewed French intervention in India, but also replicated the trajectory of the American campaign. Metropolitan anxiety about these defeats was at its height throughout the 1780s, so when the Third Mysore War commenced in 1790, both the newspapers and the print satirists predicted further humiliation of the British forces. This opinion was founded not only on past defeat but also on the very real recognition of Tipu Sultan's remarkable military power. It is against this backdrop of past and potential failure that the ideological effect of Cornwallis's temporary victory over Tipu in 1792 and the final defeat and death of Tipu in 1799 need to be reckoned. What we see in the theatrical representation and public reception of this period of imperial activity in India is a transformation of national humiliation into a fearsome form of national election. I consider this transformation in two parts. The current chapter focuses on the transitional period shortly after Cornwallis took up his post in Bengal and argues that Mariana Starke's *The Sword of Peace* and *The Widow of Malabar* displace past military humiliation while also offering social correctives that complement Cornwallis's own attempts to reform both the East India Company army and administration of the colony. Chapter 7 focuses on the triumphal phantasms resulting from the spectacular celebrations of British victory in the Third and Fourth Mysore Wars. As we will see in both chapters, colonial military activity is intimately tied to scenes of bodily regulation on the metropolitan stage. This chapter, however, demonstrates the complex regulatory relation between these plays and their audiences. I move beyond the plays themselves to the paratextual materials—the prologues, epilogues, and newspaper cover-

age—that extend or contain Starke’s satirical critique of metropolitan culture. In spite of the fact that both plays use colonial social relations as a heuristic site for proposing social reforms in the metropole, Starke’s negative critique of aristocratic masculinity in *The Sword of Peace* is allowed to unfold in ways that her attempts to positively reform aristocratic femininity in *The Widow of Malabar* are not. Although both gestures are integrally related, one could argue that the resurgence of ideological investment in landed property, following the French Revolution and immediately prior to implementation of the Permanent Settlement in 1793, played a key role in the reception of Starke’s reforms.

Cornwallis, Starke, and Military Reform

Mariana Starke’s *The Sword of Peace* reveals a great deal about the theatrical displacement of colonial violence in metropolitan London during this transitional period of imperial governance.³ It is thoroughly engaged with the problematics of the Hastings impeachment, but it supplements Burke’s critique of Hastings’s accession to arbitrary power with a prescient critique of the East India Company’s former military regime. This critique works on two fronts. Much of the comedy focuses on the navigation of two marriageable women, Eliza and Louisa Moreton, through the sexual and social dangers of colonial Indian society. Under the rule of a sexually suspect Resident who figures for Hastings, the British social milieu in India has devolved into a state of corrupted civility where interracial desire, class insubordination, gambling, and overt sexual commodification permeate all social relations. All of these vices are explicitly tied to the Indianization of British men and women working for the East India Company.⁴ As the play unfolds, the blurring of the lines separating European and Indian cultures, which had been the norm during this period of Company rule, is subject to a kind of reverse prophylaxis that seeks to limit European fraternization with native populations within specific codes of behavior.

Over and against this putative zone of corrupt intercultural relations, Starke introduces as a second front a group of current and former military officers whose honor and civility make them worthy replacements for the dissolute Resident and rightful rulers of the East India Company’s holdings. At the head of this cadre of normative masculinity, Starke offers Mr. David Northcote. His accession to proper rule coincides with the resolution of the play’s heterosexual love plots, the ejection of suspect forms

of sociability, and the declaration of British hegemony. Northcote's replacement of the Resident clearly mimics Lord Cornwallis's replacement of Hastings, and Starke posits fundamental shifts not only in the social relations of British subjects under the new ruler but also in the constitution and function of the military.

These two shifts are tied together by the play's central prop: the sword from the title. Louisa Moreton is charged with the task of recovering a sword that belonged to the recently deceased Clairville and returning it to his uncle, Sir Thomas Clairville. The current protector of the sword is "a poor Lieutenant of Seapoys" named Dormer who, while an honorable soldier in his own right, is also the object of Louisa's desire. As the play unfolds, the exchange of the sword is directly tied to the marriage not only of Louisa and Dormer but also of Eliza and Dormer's friend, Edwards. Like Captain Campley and Narcissa in *Inkle and Yarico*, these newly married military couples become the repository of normative racial, sexual, and class identity. By the end of the play, such normativity rigorously distinguishes both deviant forms of colonial interracial desire and suspect forms of aristocratic honor in the metropole. Louisa's task is consistently intertwined with notions of aristocratic honor and the recovery of a failed masculinity:

ELIZA: [Y]ou know, the generous Clairville, deserted by a father, through Sir Thomas Clairville's generous assistance, sought a fortune here, denied him by a parent. Death put a stop to the noble youth's career, and has occasioned your commission of the sword, for which I honour Sir Thomas with enthusiasm.

LOUISA: And he deserves it.—His nobly offering the legacy of Clairville's gratitude has left him, to purchase the sword of the deceased youth, that he may preserve it as a trophy of honor to his memory—

ELIZA: An exertion of delicate, generous sensibility towards deceased merit, that characterizes Sir Thomas in that glorious singularity of an Englishmen, who repays with munificent gratitude everlasting remembrance to the noble actions of their deceased heroes.—Who would not sacrifice life to be thus gloriously remembered? (7)

As Starke is at pains to emphasize, Clairville's eastern career is necessitated by an act of paternal neglect that Louisa's embassy is designed to set right. Clairville's father's error is telling, for he interrupts his son's rightful claim to his landed property and is therefore destabilizing that which was com-

mainly understood to secure the liberty of not only the landed gentry but the nation. This is why the praise accorded to Sir Thomas Clairville is for his desire to commemorate a past but not a present glory. Clairville's death marks a shift from failed aristocratic paternalism to a new form of social security: one figured by Dormer's care for the sword. As the sword moves from Clairville to Dormer to Louisa, one can track the emergence of a new form of social regulation in which the sign of aristocratic exemplarity—the sword—is permeated by middle-class forms of sociability to such an extent that the military couples take on its cultural authority.

Significantly, the play's exemplary male character, Mr. David Northcote, performs none of the intricate codes of aristocratic masculinity. In this detail, his character erases Cornwallis's aristocratic heritage and advances a new kind imperial hero. Northcote's honor is a function of his "generosity" and "benevolence":

NORTH: Yes, Mr. Resident, I feel for human nature, of whatever colour or description; I feel for the name and character of an Englishman. I feel neither the power of gold, prejudice, nor partiality: and where the lives and properties, or even happiness, of others are concerned, I have ever regarded the impulse of *humanity*. (51)

Northcote ends the play as the new resident, but Starke is careful to distance his humane commitment to the rule of law from the practice of warfare. The accession of Northcote is represented as a necessary step toward hegemonic control of all sectors of the population but it is an event in which arms have a solely ceremonial purpose:

JEE: Mr. Northcote made Resident—the whole place is run wild for joy, Sir—blacks and whites, masters and slaves, half casts and blue casts, Gentoos and Mussulmen, Hindoos and Bramins, officers and soldiers, sailors and captains—and if his honor the Resident don't stop them, they won't have an ounce of gunpowder in the whole garrison. (57)

The fact that Northcote sees no reason for stopping the depletion of the garrison's gunpowder is a sign of his confidence in the effectiveness of British justice practiced without the corruption of his predecessors. Here Starke's indictment of Hastings's past bellicosity is at its most biting, for it implies that proper sovereignty would make warfare largely unnecessary. This subtle shift from gunpowder's role in military domination to its

expenditure as celebratory spectacle suggests a confident—and self-congratulatory—shift away from violent governance toward a kind of inculcation of acquiescence among the colonial population that is modeled on the audience's consumption of theatrical effects. In this play, military spectacle obscures and ultimately obviates military action.

However, this obfuscation is also a historical mystification. Despite Pitt's India Act of 1784, which attempted to curtail warfare in the region by limiting inflammatory treaties between the East India Company and native powers, Cornwallis recognized that conflict with Mysore was inevitable. The shift from Hastings's rule to that of Cornwallis was matched by an enhancement of the military battalions under the East India Company's control, and the following fifteen years would be far from peaceful.⁵ At the same time that Starke was constructing this fantasy of native acquiescence to liberal management, Cornwallis was thoroughly engaged in reforming British troops in India.⁶ Crucial to that reformation was his conviction that the colonial military needed to be composed of vigorous white British subjects: "I think it must be universally admitted that without a large and well-regulated body of Europeans, our hold of these valuable dominions must be very insecure. . . . It would be painful for me to enlarge much on the present state of the European troops in the Company's service, but . . . I have every reason to believe that in quality of men, as well as in discipline, they are at all three Presidencies extremely inferior to those in the service of his Majesty."⁷ In spite of the demonstrable loyalty and courage of the Sepoy battalions, Cornwallis had "no favourable idea of their discipline," so the "inferiority" of the European infantry was a matter of grave concern.⁸ The officer class was in his eyes corrupted by financial interest in the Company's exploits and weakened by the climate.⁹

Cornwallis was especially concerned about the lack of health and the moral decrepitude that seemed to characterize the European component of the East India Company troops. Referring to recruits as "contemptible trash," it is clear that Cornwallis was disturbed by soldiers' social hybridity:

I found a disorderly mass of debauched invalids living in Fort William almost without officers and without regulation of any kind corrupting, of course, all the recruits and all the other Europeans in garrison. Compassion for many who have brown families and for a number of Frenchmen with whom the caprice and infatuation of Sir Eyre Coote had filled his army, prevented my sending them all home, which in justice to the Company and the service I ought to have done.¹⁰

There is a tacit recognition here that the intermarriage of European soldiers and Indian women is part and parcel of a dangerous blending of interests.¹¹ Throughout Cornwallis's correspondence, one finds him insistently linking various forms of vice that threaten the integrity of his forces to the assimilation of British and Indian subjects. The specter of "brown families" suggests a propensity for degeneration among the colonial British population, and one can track the beginnings of a policy of segregation in Cornwallis's early military reforms that would eventually dominate Indian policy.¹² Cornwallis's reconfiguration of British forces was an essential precursor to his first campaign against Tipu Sultan in the Third Mysore War and was the beginning of an exponential increase in the militarization of British rule in India. And it is important that we recognize the degree to which this process of reform focused its attention on maintaining the health of the East India Company forces. Cornwallis's reforms were aimed at stabilizing British subjectivity within an ethnically diverse military cadre through the rigorous segmentation and surveillance of personnel.

Cornwallis's regulation of the East India Company forces had its metropolitan counterpart in Starke's comedy, for she argues, in quite explicit terms, that the customary leaders of the nation have devolved into a debauched and effete nobility, obsessed with symbolic battles over obsolete notions of honor. Into this power vacuum, she deploys the regulatory imperatives of the middle classes to restore vigor to the empire. If it sounds strange to be equating Cornwallis's military reforms and Starke's theatrical intervention, then it is the task of this chapter to demonstrate that both practices perform social diagnostics by examining symptoms of health and vice in the bodies of British colonials. For both observers, because the proliferation of "brown families" poses a threat to the stability of Britain's distant sovereignty, it must be regulated in the micrological processes of military and social discipline. As we will see in the next chapter, this catalog of vice lays the groundwork for the future figuration of Cornwallis as the embodiment of paternal virtue. But the knowledge practices mobilized by Cornwallis and Starke in this diagnostic phase of Anglo-Indian relations are connected on more fundamental grounds. The relationship between colony and metropole at this time is such that Cornwallis's military actions operate ancillary to Starke's game of love: they do not directly affect but rather secure the ground for Starke's metropolitan critique of interracial desire and class insubordination. It is thus that colonial warfare is mystified and replaced by metropolitan satire. And, in so doing, the metropole becomes the locus of war, not against native

resistance in India, but rather against threatening instabilities in normative white middle-class subjectivities. In order to demonstrate the convergence between Cornwallis's military reforms and Starke's satire, we need to show, first, how the comedy engages with the sexual connotations of anti-Company discourse circulating prior to and during the Hastings impeachment and, second, how she mobilizes the discourse of Indianization to represent the danger of intercultural relations in India to the familial relations at the core of middle-class notions of British imperial ascendancy.

The Specters of Indianization: The Sword of Peace

The Sword of Peace was first performed after the first season of the Hastings trial and was printed in an expanded edition three years into the proceedings. The play features a corrupt Resident who with the assistance of his servile minion Supple abuses the power of his office to achieve personal ends. The Resident's avarice is specifically attached to suspect forms of private trade, but the economic critique of his actions is subsumed into figures of gender transgression and sexual depravity that are reminiscent of *The Nabob* and of much anti-Company discourse in the 1770s and 1780s.¹³ Starke's Resident is repeatedly presented as overdressed and the very name of his primary attendant, Supple, indicates that he is as slippery as he is effete. As Teltscher argues, the feminization of British functionaries in contemporary accounts of colonial life amounts to an Indianization that betrays a palpable anxiety about the public and private integration of British and Indian populations.¹⁴ When the Resident, like Hastings, is recalled from his post and replaced by "one generous, exalted character . . . Mr. David Northcote"—a more morally sound official modeled on Lord Cornwallis—Starke clearly indicates that the empire is entering a new phase of more just and less sanguine rule.¹⁵

But the swift relegation of injustice, violence, and social corruption to the past is not only wishful thinking but also an act of self-defense on Starke's part. Anti-Company discourse in the 1780s was a much more tame version of the materials printed in the early 1770s aimed at publicly shaming Clive. Representations of Clive from this period incorporate every sexual excess imaginable. According to the most vitriolic of these documents, *Life of Lord Clive* by Charles Carracioli and the anonymous *The Intrigues of a Nabob; or, Bengall the Fittest Soil for the Growth of Lust, Injustice, and Dishonesty*, Clive's sexual appetites were insatiable and he was represented

in turns as the King of Sodom, as the lover of any number of actresses and prostitutes, as a pederast, and as an compulsive onanist.¹⁶ Anti-Company discourse has its roots in the deeply factionalized political world of the 1770s where pornographic excess was an active component of political pamphleteering. One could argue that these strategies lurk behind almost all anti-Company discourse and that if they don't actively emerge as they did in Burke's famous catalog of sexual violence perpetrated under Hastings's rule, they are always present *in potentia*.¹⁷ This helps to explain why the opening-night review is at pains to argue that the play is

devoid of all false attempts at wit, and of what is more unpardonable, though we are sorry to say not unfrequent from the pens of female authors, of allusions that partake of *double-entendre*; or are liable to a gross construction. The play was received, generally speaking with applause. Some few of the auditors hissed during the performance, but they must have been either peculiarly ill-natured, or fuddled or foolish, because no one incident in the piece deserved reprobation.¹⁸

As the reviewer indicates, anti-Company discourse is a dangerous realm for female authors because it historically partakes in sexual innuendo, even in direct scurrility. *The Sword of Peace* shares a great deal with *The Nabob* but tends to work more subtly. As with Sir Matthew Mite, the Resident is figured as a foppish despot, but the question of sexual predation is only slightly less overt. Audience members hissing at the play may be reacting to the further sexual connotations of this representation, or their response could be attached to party politics. If it is both, then Starke is infringing on the bounds of feminine propriety in more ways than one.

While the battle in the press during the 1770s and 1780s deployed sexual tropes to establish a pathology concomitant with charges of economic and political wrongdoing, the Resident's corruption in *The Sword of Peace* has primarily sexual ends. He abuses his power to eliminate his chief sexual rival in the pursuit of Eliza. This translation of political scandal into the realm of private affairs capitalizes on the sexualization of the discursive formation at hand, while also opening the way for an allegorization of colonial governance in terms of heterosexual relations. Because the construction of gender and the deployment of sexuality are themselves in a state of flux at this historical moment, Starke's rhetorical strategy is extraordinarily volatile, but it allows her to play out significant anxieties about colonial activity within the generic confines of late eighteenth-

century comedy. This has important ramifications for how Starke represents British women in India and her own practice in the metropole.

Beyond its indirect engagement with the Hastings affair, the play also thematizes abolitionist concerns that were coming into focus at this time. *The Sword of Peace* features an abolitionist subplot in which the servant Jeffreys buys one of Mrs. Tartar's slaves in order to grant him his freedom.¹⁹ The scenes between Jeffreys and Caesar are intriguing for two reasons. First, they demonstrate that English notions of liberty were so firmly ensconced that they could be the subject of light satire. Jeffreys argues that English liberty consists primarily of the right to assault a fellow Englishman. This passage may be an indirect reference to the Hastings impeachment because Caesar's question is one that was very much on the mind of Persian chroniclers as they "watched Warren Hastings and his councillor Phillip Francis proceed from bad words to dueling with pistols in 1780 over matters of state."²⁰ As Rajat Kanta Ray argues, Indian observers took the duel as a sign of political weakness. For metropolitan viewers, the conflict between Hastings and Francis was well known, but it is hard to imagine precisely how Jeffrey's words would play. He is the play's only enlisted soldier, and his advocacy of violent conflict as the sine qua non of English national character can be seen as a corruption of the ideal of civil governance. Making the link between Jeffrey's remarks and Hastings seems to imply that East India agents are nothing more than a bunch of louts with pretensions to higher social standing. This, of course, was a prominent feature of antinabob discourse and one that proved to be quite discursively useful for Burke and Sheridan.

This reading is admittedly oblique but is supported by George Colman's remarkable epilogue to the play. For our purposes here it is enough to recognize the way in which it refers to the intense factionalism that characterized both the fall of Clive and the impeachment of Warren Hastings:

How prone is man to quarrel with plain sense!
Suspecting harmless words of foul offense.
Too soon, alas! our minds to frailty leaning,
Accuse the simple phrase of double meaning.
· · · · ·
Nay, in these days, there's scarce a City Prig
Who dares confess his fondness for a wig;
Lest he shou'd find in this same touchy town,
Some angry tory who wou'd knock him down.

(58)

Speak not, ye beaux! we cannot move your passions;
 The Sword with you has long been out of fashion.
 For now each sparring beau in flannel stands;
 To muffled gauntlets trusts his chicken hands;
 Learns, generously, how to bruise,—not slay men!
 And justifies his honour—on the dray-mue!
 Soon shall we see, thank Heaven! the extirpation
 Of barbarous duelling, throughout the nation;
 Soon shall we read, instead of running through,
 That, in Hyde-Park, two nobles have set to;
 That Lord met Lord—that each, no Cesar bolder,
 Brought a Right Honourable *bottle-holder*!
 No carte and tierce—but bruise on bruise shall rise,
 Till blows, not death, have clos'd the hero's eyes!—

(59)

Extrapolating from the scene between Jeffreys and Caesar, Colman's fighting beaux are men of fashion not unlike those in the audience. In this play, the sword is one of reconciliation, and masculine conflict is bathetically downgraded into a fashionable pursuit. If we read the epilogue as a commentary on the conflict between Hastings and Francis, or Hastings and Burke, the implication is that the duel and the ensuing impeachment are reducible to deviant homosocial relations that threaten the foundation of British imperial power.²¹ Taking up Dent's declaration that Sheridan is "the Right Honourable bottle-holder," Colman extends the critique to the managers' dissipation. But equally as important as these topical resonances, the epilogue draws a comparison between aristocratic men fighting in Hyde-Park and the bonds of friendship between Jeffreys and Caesar. That the equation features signs of effeminacy and dissipation on one side and interracial relations on the other should give us pause, for these same terms surface in the discursive construction of both Hastings and the managers in the popular press. Representations of Hastings at this time swerve between signs of excessive gentility and Indianization (figs. 4.4, 4.9, and 5.1). And as we have already seen in chapter 4, Burke, Fox, and Sheridan are all satirized as Indianized subjects at different stages of the trial, especially during the presentation of the charge pertaining to the Begams of Oudh (see figs. 4.14 and 4.15).

The scenes between Jeffreys and Caesar are also important for a second reason—namely, because the conjunction of abolitionist and anti-East India Company rhetoric specifically locates the play's political investment.

As Kate Teltscher and P. J. Marshall remind us, “at the start of the [Hastings] impeachment India and the slave trade were linked, both in parliament and outside, as issues which raised questions about the morality of British policy overseas.”²² During the late 1780s, as the amount of public knowledge about colonial affairs was expanding, it began going through political convulsions. It is not uncommon to see abolitionist texts deploy figures of Eastern despotism, or anti–East India Company texts mobilizing figures more traditionally associated with the campaign against the slave trade, to argue for reform in imperial governance. As I have argued elsewhere with regard to Colman’s *Inkle and Yarico*, protoabolitionist discourse attacked the violence and dehumanization required for the maintenance of the slave trade along with the centrality of interracial sexuality to the plantation economy.²³ As discourses of sexual regulation began to play a more central role in the aspirations and self-configuration of the middle classes, the interracial sexual practices endemic to the slave economy and the widely reported integration of British functionaries and their “brown families” under Hastings’s rule became the object of intense anxiety. Starke’s response to this anxiety counters both interracial relations in the colony and errant metropolitan practices with a fantasy of civil military rule. Colman’s prologue and epilogue to Starke’s comedy—and their collaboration here is I think conspicuous—merely highlight that, while aristocrats, public officials, and the lower orders play at fighting with each other in the name of the nation, a real war is being waged against the devolution of British subjectivity in the colonies by the middle classes. In short, the scenes of boxing and dueling through which the two playwrights ridicule the conventional repositories of landed and state power are set in contrast to the struggle being enacted in the theatre by plays such as *Inkle and Yarico* and *The Sword of Peace*.

Character and the Long Minuet as Danced at Coromandel

Starke’s war on racial and class contamination is managed primarily through a careful regulation of the line between character and caricature. During this period, protoabolitionist and anti–East India Company discourse often blend into one another such that the careful reduction of the nabob and the Creole or of the Moslem and the African to a handful of discursive or visual tags enables them to be made equivalent. In *The Sword of Peace*, Louisa and Eliza Moreton, Edwards, Dormer, and Northcote can be described as characters, whereas the Resident, Supple, Cae-

sar, Mazinghi Dowza, and the other British women in India are active in an economy of caricature. In the reviews, the former are all discussed in terms of particular actors' and actresses' ability to bring them "to life"—that is, there is a close relationship between the performance and the verisimilitude of the embodied character—whereas the latter are consistently figured as "exhibitions of character":

The performers deserved great commendation for the powerful support they lent this Comedy, Miss Farren, Mr. Bannister, and Mrs. Kemble especially. Miss Farren [as Eliza] never displayed the gaiety of a well-bred woman, whose chief characteristick was natural vivacity, with a better grace; Mrs. Kemble spoke interestingly, and Bannister . . . made an excellent part of Jeffries. Baddeley also played well [as Northcote], and Robert Palmer was extremely happy in his manner of exhibiting the character of Supple; nor should Palmer himself be forgotten; his governed style, both of delivery and deportment, gave the characteristick modesty of Dormer a fulness and force of effect, that it could not have received from a less skilful comedian.²⁴

The difference being established here between the fullness of effect generated by the governed style of delivery and deportment and the excessive performance required to exhibit Supple's "character" is fundamentally tied to the social distinctions that structure the play. With the distinctions of rank and respectability lying in the balance, the performance of the subtle difference between "fulness" of character and characteristic excess carries immense significance.

In contrast to the normative English characters, what the latter group of caricatures all share is a certain alterity or hybridity: they are either Indian, African, or "Indianized" English men and women. The play merely continues the representational economy of anti-Company discourse that we find from Dow through Burke. However, Deidre Lynch's discussion of the centrality of this distinction between character and caricature in mid- to late eighteenth-century cultural production clarifies some of the play's more audacious strategies:

Eighteenth-century culture, we should remember, made *person* both a word for someone's physical appearance and a word for someone. It made *trait* cognate with words such as *stroke* or *line*—words for the graphic elements from which both pictorial and written representation are composed and through which they are identified. . . .

Indeed, the particular Englishness of the continuing national enthusiasm for character owes much to the fact that the English . . . conceptualize the characters they read about not as the French do, as “personnages” (that is, not as so many theatrical masks), but semiologically (as so many marks in a book).²⁵

In almost novelistic fashion, the print version of *The Sword of Peace* exhibits precisely this semiological conceptualization of character that makes the surface of the body—whether it be complexion or costume—synonymous with personhood. As Roxann Wheeler states, clothing “was key to the constitution of religious, class, national and personal identity during the eighteenth-century” and many of its connotations were eventually transferred to skin surfaces.²⁶ Act 3, scene 2 contains two stage directions, which, more than anything else in the printed text of the play, allow one to recognize Starke’s precise interventions in contemporary discussions of race, sexuality, and class in colonial representation. If nothing else the opening direction for the scene is notable for its sheer volume of information:

SCENE *A Card Room discovered.*
Three Tables on a Side, ranged with Gentlemen and Ladies at Cards. At the upper End of the Stage a Door opens into a Ball-room, where you see Couples standing cross the Door as dancing; Music playing as at a distance, not too loud. At the first Table, next the audience, on one side, Mrs. Garnish, with her natural brown complexion, her dark hair dressed out with a number of Jewels, and her whole Dress as fine, and overloaded with Finery as possible in the Indian Style, lolling in her Chair, holding her Cards, and a black Slave standing by her, playing them for her as she speaks them, or points to them; taking up her Tricks, shuffling and taking up the Cards, and dealing for her. Another Slave by the side of the other Lady does the same for her. This other Lady to be a contrast to Mrs. Garnish in every Degree, looking pale and sick, peevish, ill natured and unhappy; dressed fine and awkward. Mrs. Garnish all Spirits, Pride, Vulgarity, and Self-consequence. The other Table in front of the opposite side. A great fat woman, very brown, sitting full front to the Audience, as fine as can be, but dressed as ridiculously as possible; this is Mrs. Gobble. The other Lady the Colour of Yarico. Miss Bronze dressed with elegance, in a silver or gold Gauze, Flowers, Jewels, &c. a good Figure, and smart, with black slaves playing their Cards, as before. Some of the men elegant and genteel;

others brown, sickly Skeletons; and the elderly men very Fat; as these two extremes prevail most in India; and in general an awkward, square Manner of holding their Shoulders very high, and stooping their Heads. Some tables with no Blacks attending, to show it is the Distinction of Consequence and Grandeur; and the Blacks who thus attend must be dressed finer and with more Attention than the others, who are seen coming about with Refreshments. The two Tables next to the Ball-room Door purposely neglected, to show they are People to be known Nobodies; where such Folks are generally placed to keep the Wind off from their Betters. The whole Group as much in the Bunbury Stile as possible. (31–32)

The scenario is as much a visual tableau of colonial excess as it is of metropolitan class anxiety. The various tropes and figures that animate anti-nabob discourse are conveniently enacted and embodied for the audience. The scene of gaming itself figures an anxiety regarding speculation, which, since at least time of the Clive trial and Foote's *The Nabob*, runs through anti-East India Company writings. The fact that the card players are too indolent to even lift their cards to the table replays the kind of overattendance that so fascinated observers of colonial life.²⁷ The description of extreme body types is also a common gesture, as is the insinuation that India eats away at one's bodily and moral constitution. The stage direction is also remarkably precise about complexion, although clothing operates as an equally significant political surface—the former speaks to emergent understandings of race and nationality, whereas the latter is the locus of anxieties about rank. When Starke emphasizes the “brownness” of Mrs. Garnish and Mrs. Gobble, it is as much a sign of the women's Indianization as it is of their failed pretension to gentility, and therefore should be understood as the mark of suspect hybridity.

The flowers and gauze that adorn Miss Bronze, as much as the suggestion that she is the color of Yarico, mark her as a “country born” woman.²⁸ The comparison to Yarico is interesting for Colman's *Inkle and Yarico* is on the stage almost constantly in the season prior to *The Sword of Peace*. On first glance, it would appear that Starke is establishing a link between British imperial domination in two spaces in much the same fashion as Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*. However, Starke refrains from employing the sentimental strategies used by Colman to gain sympathy for Yarico's predicament and opts instead for a kind of racist containment more akin to his treatment of Wowski, which suggests that all the suspect qualities of the nouveaux riches Mrs. Garnish and Mrs. Gobble are

being inculcated in the impressionable Hindu woman. That this strategy can be employed with so little effort indicates precisely how prevalent the figure of innocent and wronged Yarico is in the mind of the theatre-going public at this historical moment. The careful emphasis placed on her elegance and her good figure implies that, like Yarico in Colman's play, her innocence and her desirable femininity are in the process of being contaminated by contact with the avarice of British subjects abroad. The Indianization that Starke so readily invokes is complemented by a kind of reverse contamination that threatens the integrity of Hindu society. This twofold romanticization of Hindu feminine propriety and demonization of British governance is, of course, one of the most famous elements of both Burke and Sheridan's rhetorical assault on Warren Hastings.

But we can be much more specific about the play's semiological gestures and its relation to the bristling market for satirical prints. The final sentence of the stage direction is itself a direction for reading because the reference to "the Bunbury Stile" firmly establishes the economy of caricature as one composed of visual marks and lines. Henry William Bunbury was one of the most highly regarded caricaturists of his generation, and his career was at its height in 1787 and 1788 when Starke's play was initially composed and performed. Bunbury was a social caricaturist whose most famous work was a seven-foot-long strip entitled *A Long Minuet as Danced at Bath*, which was exhibited and reproduced in the months immediately preceding the play's first performance (fig. 6.2). Bunbury's strip depicts a range of figures all engaged in various aspects of the minuet, and the satire emerges out of a certain anxiety regarding the embodiment of class, for the strip implies that the minuet will act as a filter for class identity. As David Kunzle states, "The minuet was the most intricate and difficult of dances; Bath was the most fashionable of all resorts, to which there flocked the nouveaux-riches and social climbers. . . . Bunbury seized with lightning brilliance various attitudes expressing degrees of awkwardness, naive enthusiasm, and even . . . a sly grace. Male and female dancers are by no means uniformly ugly, but run the gamut of peculiarity in expression and physiognomic type."²⁹ Bunbury's strip therefore targets with varying degrees of severity those who are challenging the rigid boundaries of class propriety. If one assumes that the gentry has the grace and physical facility to perform the dance, the strip focuses attention on the failure of the bodies of the nouveaux riches to accede to gentility. The volatility of such an assumption is registered by the ambiguity of some of the caricatures, for the flip side of the satire is that all it takes to accede to gentility is the right combination of dress and accomplishments.



FIG. 6.2. Henry William Bunbury, detail from *A Long Minuet as Danced at Bath*, 25 June 1787 (courtesy of the Department of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum, London; BM 7229)

Instead of replicating Bunbury's minuet, Starke stages her dance off-stage such that the card game becomes the locus of satire. The card game is in a sense surrounded both materially and culturally by a scene of dancing that nevertheless remains unenacted on the stage. This is an interesting shift because it resolves the key problem of the representation of classed bodies highlighted by Bunbury's strip. When Eliza enters midway through the scene, Supple's effusions on her dancing simultaneously invoke and ignore the Bunburian scene:

ELIZA: I am glad we have left the ball-room; I declare, Resident, there's no dancing a minuet here with any satisfaction; one is as much crowded as at the ball at St. James on a birth night.

MISS BRONZE: (*in a loud whisper to Mrs. Gobble*) Do you think she was ever there!

RESIDENT: That was owing to your fine dancing Eliza, and not to the smallness of the room.

SUP: Oh! such a minuet! (*turns to Mrs. Garnish in a lower voice*) You never, Mrs. Garnish, saw such dancing in your life.

MRS GARN: (*loud*) What, so monstrous *bad*, hey?

ELIZA: (*looking down at Mrs. Garnish with a smile of triumph*) La!

Mrs. Garnish, have you forgot me—I'm sure I shall never forget you—with your nice plumb cakes, so frosted and decorated; and your pies and your puffs, and ices and creams, all so nice:—I used to buy of you in Oxford road. (33–34)

The minuet becomes a scene of interpretation and Starke's play performs a startling reversal of the Bunburian glance. The audience of Bunbury's strip is assumed to be capable of discerning the signs of gentility and therefore able to judge the shortcomings of the nouveaux riches. In *The Sword of Peace* the audience watches the social climbers attempting to interpret the accomplishments of the Miss Moretons. The reversal instantiates a twofold satire, for not only does Starke ridicule Supple's, Garnish's, and Bronze's excessive concern with Eliza's dancing skills, but she also subtly introduces enough ambiguity into the scene of interpretation to force the audience to consider the class identity of Eliza and Louisa. Eliza and Louisa are themselves extremely concerned that they not be lumped into the same category as the other women in the play who have come to India in search of monetary gain and class ascendancy through marriage. Eliza explicitly states that hers is a sentimental, not a financial, journey: "Hail! hail! thou land of mercenary interest, where love of gold destroys its thousands; where woman, lovely woman, for wealth and grandeur comes from far to sacrifice beauty, health, happiness! receive one votary to all-powerful love" (6). However, the fact of the matter is that Eliza and Louisa are also on the marriage market, but their search for husbands is, as the play's subtitle suggests, "A Voyage of Love." The problem is that the interpretation of their motivation, like their class identity, is not subject to clear determination. In a space where class boundaries are fluid and money supersedes all matters of sentiment, the representational economy promulgates confusion about the fullness and veracity of character, reputation, and, ultimately, value in the sexual marketplace.

This problematic is given ample consideration in the play's opening scene. Act 1, scene 1 commences with Eliza trying to rally Louisa's spirits for the difficult mission that awaits them. The opening-night review establishes the situation as follows:

By the will of Mr. Morton, (who had obtained his fortune in the East Indies) Eliza, his only daughter, is obliged to take a voyage to the coast of Coromandel to receive her inheritance, and she is accompanied by her cousin Louisa, who is commissioned by Sir Thomas Clairville to endeavour to obtain from Lieutenant Dormer the sword of young Clairville, . . . the intention of Sir Thomas being to preserve it in the Clairville family, as a monumental trophy in honour of the deceased. In order to induce the lieutenant to part with it, Louisa is authorized to tender 5000 *L* . . . in exchange for the sword.³⁰

The only thing that stands in the way of Eliza's marriage to her beloved Edwards is that his family thinks she is of insufficient fortune. Her voyage, therefore, amounts to a double acquisition, for her inheritance will gain her the hand of Edwards. There is no doubt from her attempts to alleviate Louisa's mortification over the fact that they have been placed in the house of the termagant Mrs. Tartar that Eliza not only understands that voyages of love are financial affairs but also recognizes that such travels are a threat to female reputations. Starke doesn't flinch from aligning Mrs. Tartar's immorality with her complexion and the insinuation that she is of mixed race:

ELIZA: Why, for our well-beloved lady hostess, dear Madam Tartar, I think we shall find her *blue-cast*, or half-cast complexion, the fairest part of her composition. But not withstanding her *hauteur*, I shall teach her the difference between women who come here to make their fortunes, and those who come to receive them. (5–6)

The phrase "blue-cast" condenses class and racial hybridity into one figure. The racialization of the line between making and receiving a fortune is crucial to the moral economy of Starke's play, for Mrs. Tartar is clearly below the line of respectability. The distinction is one of agency—that a woman must appear to be the passive recipient of her fortune to be truly modest and, by extension, truly white—but such an argument would downplay the degree to which Eliza and Louisa regulate not only their circulation as sexual commodities but also their accession to bourgeois normativity. In a sense, it is their palpable activity in the marketplace that makes them such a site of interpretive anxiety for Starke.

The ambiguities that trouble the interpretation of Eliza's and Louisa's mission at the play's outset are transferred to the interpretation of Eliza's dancing in act 3. These ambiguities are tempered by the fact that Starke's caricature has already undercut the reliability of witnesses such as Supple or Mrs. Garnish. But the play is also subtle enough to realize that the performance of the minuet on stage might create more problems than it would solve. The minuet may constitute too much of a test to be allowed into theatrical representation. Instead Eliza's class identity is secured in part by her testimony of prior knowledge of Mrs. Garnish and in part by her dress. The following is Starke's stage direction for Eliza and Louisa's entry into the scene immediately prior to the preceding inter-change:

Enter ELIZA and LOUISA from the Ball Room dress'd with the utmost Simplicity and Elegance of Taste and Fashion; but their hair without powder, in Curls and Ringlets, flowing in Abundance down their backs to the Bottom of their Waists. Several Gentlemen with them; among the rest, MR. SUPPLE and the RESIDENT, over dressed, and very hot. As ELIZA and LOUISA advance, the Ladies all eye them, wink and make all sorts of rude Signs to one another about them. As ELIZA advances towards MRS. GARNISH, she stares rudely and vulgarly in her Face and apparently examining her whole Dress and Figure. ELIZA, with the utmost ease and Elegance, sees it, but looks at her with such Nonchalance, and seems in high Spirits. LOUISA, all elegant softness on the other Side, seems disconcerted at their behaviour. During this time Music. (33)

The stage direction explicitly contrasts the excessive qualities of Garnish, Gobble, and Bronze with the simplicity and lack of artifice in the appearance of the Moreton cousins. In this representational economy, “elegance” and “ease” are not only separated from luxury but also attached to veracity of character. In other words, the elegance of the Moreton cousins signifies that they are who they seem to be.

This is no small matter, for as I have argued with regard to Narcissa and Captain Campley in *Inkle and Yarico*, normativity comes with the privilege of representational lack.³¹ When one compares the description of Eliza and Louisa with that of Mrs. Garnish, Mrs. Gobble, and Miss Bronze, it becomes clear that the critique of luxury that runs through the play extends to the economy of representation itself. Even at the level of naming, the distinction between character and caricature is manifest. Mrs. Garnish’s name in contemporary usage means “tip” and carries with it the double connotation of corruption or bribery and implies that she is a gratuity or a trophy bride. Mrs. Gobble clearly connotes vulgar avarice and together they constitute a perfect complement not only to the figure of the dissipated company man discussed earlier but also to Foote’s nabob Matthew Mite. Foote makes much of Mite’s former career as a cheese monger, and Starke plays out a similar gesture in her description of Mrs. Garnish’s baked goods. The degree to which the frostings and creams represent Mrs. Garnish’s body is perhaps debatable, but such a figuration is in keeping with Starke’s overall rhetorical strategies, for the caricature of Mrs. Garnish partakes in the general discourse of prostitution. At one level, Starke provides her audience with the perverse counterpart to the unmanly company servant, for Mrs. Garnish and Mrs. Gobble are at once

hypersexualized and yet the epitome of indolence. The former process is explicit in their critique of Eliza's and Louisa's unwillingness to receive all the men of the factory:

MRS GOB: (*bawling*) Lord, Mrs. Garnish, why I hear they have receiv'd no company! There is not a man in the rooms can tell me one word what they're like.

MRS BRONZE: O Ma'am! Te, he, he, he! Mrs. Tartar was just now telling me the ladies were so squeamish, truly! they wou'd not admit the gentlemen to pay their compliments, for fear it should be thought they came to get husbands. Te, he, he!

[*The ladies at the tables laugh with affected airs.*] (33)

The *Morning Chronicle* review takes special notice of this scene and singles out the laugh of Mrs. Edwin, who played Mrs. Gobble, "in the scene of the Rout as well as her tone of conversation [as] highly comic and [a] strong exemplification of character."³²

Eliza's defense of her refusal to receive the men of the factory in the play's first scene also raises the question of female laughter, but only after clarifying that she and Louisa will only be commodified in very specific ways:

ELIZA: . . . Mrs. Tartar's very angry with me, because I don't like to be—to be kiss'd by all the five hundred gentlemen belonging to your presidency here; and—she says, *you* will make me.

RES: Ha, ha, ha! Why to be sure it's the usual form to receive visits of the factory at Ladies first arrival; and who would not wish to salute a pretty Lady, if he cou'd contrive it, you know? adod, it makes me long for a kiss myself.

ELIZA: Very likely, but as it is your sex's privilege to *ask*, so it is *our's* to *refuse*; and to be oblig'd to be dress'd up in grand gula, stuck on a Sopha, at the upper end of a room, for three nights running, to be view'd at will—as who should say—*what d'ye please to buy, gentlemen?* Monstrous, and then submitting to the salute of every man that approaches one, is such an indelicate custom.—(10–11)

In this defense of her sexual character, Eliza explicitly marks her resistance to both Indianization and overt commodification. What is more, the two processes are understood to be indistinguishable—to be stuck on the sofa is to be brought to market. This speech makes a link between the play's



FIG. 6.3. James Gillray, *A Sale of English Beauties in the East Indies*, 16 May 1786 (courtesy of the Department of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum, London; BM 7014)

abolitionist rhetoric and its protofeminist critique of the marriage market. As Eliza states, “I look upon [the practice of receiving all the men of the factory] with the most *sovereign contempt*; ‘and I sincerely hope the traffic will be abolished, as still *more disgraceful* to our sex than that of poor slaves to a nation” (9). This gains some resonance in light of Gillray’s infamous print *A Sale of English Beauties in the East Indies*, which portrays a series of Indian men fondling buxom English women at a slave auction presided over by the Supreme Council of the East India Company (fig. 6.3). Like the Resident in *The Sword of Peace*, the auctioneer is rendered as an effeminate fop. Interracial sexual relations between Indian men and young English women are here hysterically rendered as a symptom of the evacuation of British masculinity. This attribution of perversion is figured by a package in the foreground labeled “For the Amusement of Military Gentlemen,” which contains copies of *Female Flagellants*, *Fanny Hill*, *Elements of Nature*, and notably Crebillion fils’s Orientalist novel of libertine desire, *The Sopha*. Gillray implies that military officers

working for the company are too distracted by pornographic desire to protect the national interest in sexual normativity. The projected marketplace for English beauties among Indian gentlemen, therefore, is contingent on an already corrupt colonial military that fails to act properly in the realm of sexual exchange.

Interestingly, the direct invocation of the slave trade is relegated solely to the closet and may have been perceived as too inflammatory for the stage. But Eliza is also careful to emphasize that her critique here is not an absolute refusal to circulate in the sexual marketplace:

ELIZA: Nay, now, good Mrs. Tartar, don't hurry yourself—you and I shall never agree on this subject: “for though I despise prudery, I cannot bear any thing which *degrades* my sex,”—No one has a greater flow of spirits, or more laughing cheerfulness than myself, by some ill-naturedly term'd coquetty [*sic*]. . . . (11)

Eliza recognizes that limited circulation is crucial for the maintenance of her value in the only marketplace she cares about—namely, the metropolitan marriage market. In terms of performance, it is the quality of Eliza's laugh that simultaneously separates her from the likes of Mrs. Gobble and Mrs. Garnish, yet still renders her susceptible to the charge of coquetry. Like the minuet, the subtle gradations of bodily performance that establish class distinction also require equally subtle skills of interpretation from the viewer. The ascription of the latter judgment to the “ill-natured” suggests that Starke not only advocates for a certain amount of sexual agency for women but also suggests that those viewers who are unable to distinguish between degrees of performance are themselves suspect. One could argue that Eliza and the *Morning Chronicle* are performing the same discursive containment of masculine critique, for the reviewer also uses the phrase “ill-natured” to describe the hissing auditors on opening night.

If the vulgar laughter of Mrs. Gobble, Mrs. Garnish, and Miss Bronze is a sign of too much sexual experience, then their actions at cards signify in a similarly complex fashion. The fact that they are playing cards at all weaves them into a discursive fabric that clothes much of the writing on English India in the 1770s and 1780s. The extraordinary financial gains that could be gained through a successful eastern career were frequently connected to the overall rhetoric surrounding gaming in the period. Late in the century, gaming and dueling are perhaps the only libertine vices that can be brought into representation, and therefore they become emblematic for excesses beyond those associated with luxury. In

other words, there is a sexual connotation active beneath the surface of the discourse on gambling that emerges quite palpably in Starke's stage direction. The details of the card games are quite interesting in this light. Mrs. Garnish states that she "plays alone, in diamonds," thereby simultaneously linking her greed for jewels to a certain autoeroticism (32). Similarly, when Mrs. Gobble discovers that hearts are trump, she states "Ah, hearts! I like that—I have always so many of 'em.—My lead—play a club, Pompey" (32). The joke cuts in two directions at once, for although she boasts of many loves or hearts, she has only clubs or black cards to lead with. It is difficult to say if the audience would have received this as a racial joke or simply an expression of Mrs. Gobble's palpable undesirability. The specter of interracial sexuality haunts the entire scene because the relationship between Mrs. Garnish, Mrs. Gobble, and their slaves clearly translates the excessive bodily intimacy and laziness of earlier representations of male nabobs, and with that translation comes the implied charge of sexual impropriety of a quite specific kind. If prior anti-Company discourse feminized company employees, then Starke's women are doubly perverse, for they imitate a flawed masculinity. The caricature is of women behaving as feminized men.³³

Precisely this economy of caricature, however, threatens the characterization of Eliza and Louisa. Both the mission and the actions of the Moreton cousins are susceptible to charges of gender impropriety. The excessive caricature of Mrs. Garnish and company establishes the relative normativity of Eliza's and Louisa's characters. The important qualification here is the word "relative" for I would argue that Starke preserves a certain amount of agency for her characters through this comparative excess. The question of female agency is explicitly addressed by Colman's epilogue, and it marks precisely what must be contained in Eliza's and Louisa's characters for *The Sword of Peace* to avoid charges of impropriety. When Miss Farren comes on stage for the epilogue, she is still dressed as Eliza and hence speaks with that character's mildly coquettish demeanor. With this in mind, it is important to imagine the effect of a woman speaking Colman's lines, for the first verse paragraph ridicules excessive factionalism in the realm of politics, and the second ridicules male homosocial violence in the realm of fashionable society. Recognizing that Starke's play attacked the dissolution of colonial British women through the vice of gambling, Colman's epilogue attacks corrupt metropolitan masculinity via the vice of dueling and offers a critique of specific forms of public masculinity.³⁴

Colman brings the critique of factionalism into the theatre by addressing the male audience directly:

Are there not some among you, then, who cease
To smile, when hearing of a Sword of Peace?
Speak, ye *Militia Captains! Train Bands*, speak!
Think ye, 'gainst you our Author wrote in pique?—
Dumb! like your swords, unus'd to face the light!
Speak, then, Sir Matthew Plumb, the addressing Knight!
You who have seen the sword—ah, great beholder!
Have seen it, *flaming*, peaceful o'er your shoulder. (58)

As a critique of those committed to conflict for the sake of conflict—a group that may include not only the various factions of the East India Company, which scapegoated Clive, but also those who wish to isolate imperial mismanagement in the person of Warren Hastings—the lines suggest that those who make a career of conflict like politicians and noncombatant “Militia Captains” do so in backrooms safe from the light of scrutiny. The image of the sword behind the back implies that backstabbing remains an active and shameful part of metropolitan political life.

In contrast *The Sword of Peace*, by nature of its publicity, operates differently because it is in the hands of a woman:

But that our Sword of Peace may frighten no man,
Know, brave gallants! 'tis wielded by a woman.
Let it not, then, with others, be abolish'd,
'Tis harmless, and, she hopes, not quite unpolish'd
Such as it is, we can't be apprehensive
That this, our Sword of Peace, will prove a sword offensive. (59)

Emphasizing the fact of female authorship aimed to soften the rhetoric of the play's critics, but the epilogue's antidueling rhetoric participates in a larger cultural turn away from the intricate codes of honor that were integral to aristocratic self-stylization in the eighteenth century. At the time of Starke's play, dueling was in disrepute, and, as Donna Andrew persuasively argues, “an outcome of the long struggle against dueling was the emergence of a body of thinking, which, while at first identifying itself merely negatively, that is, as against dueling, came to a new vision of society based on reasonableness, Christianity and commerce, in which dueling ceased to be practiced simply because it appeared incongruous and foolish.”³⁵ This new vision of society suited the ascendancy of the commercial class:

This new class . . . could and did reject the established norms of gentlemanliness, which the code of honour represented, and substituted its

own redefinition of the term. Duelling ceased being described by its opponents as a practice indulged in by the man of honour or fashion; duelling became represented instead as a preoccupation of vicious indulgence of a *class*. Duelling was identified as a failing of the upper classes and, as such, roundly condemned.³⁶

Importantly, because the disapprobation of dueling partook of the discourse of degeneracy and monstrosity, the discourses of antidueling and of antinabobry shared rhetorical strategies.

The epilogue's second verse paragraph not only ridicules the downgrading of dueling to fisticuffs but also offers satirical comedy and specifically Starke's play as a more socially appropriate mode of conflict resolution. Rather than retiring to the field of honor, the audience is encouraged to attend the theatre. What interests me here is that Colman's critique of boxing works primarily through the feminization of his fighting lords. For these men "The sword . . . has long been out of fashion," thereby leaving the sword to be taken up by the female knight. This implies that Starke wields the sword and figuratively enters the masculinized realm of publicity because men have failed to accede to their phallic responsibilities. And this masculinization is continuous not only with how the sword functions in the play but also with the limited masculinization of Eliza and Louisa, which relegates their characters to the near margin of feminine normativity.

As in the epilogue, it would appear that the female figure, whether it be Louisa or Starke herself, plays a mediating role between an outmoded aristocratic code of masculine behavior and an emergent form of commercial civility exemplified by the space of the theatre itself. In other words, Louisa is able to handle the sword but only to discharge its phallic qualities in the present so that it can take its place in the invention of tradition so crucial to Britain's self-fashioning at this historical moment. Could it be that a sword in any other hands than a woman's threatens to weaken the very claims to civility that are increasingly bearing the moral burden of the metropolitan nation's just governance of colonial affairs? An affirmative answer to this question underscores the importance of the kind of femininity enacted by Eliza and Louisa and by Starke herself—a femininity that partakes of a limited amount of masculinized public agency to dramatize the necessity of restraining male homosocial desires in the realm of politics, of commerce, and of love.³⁷

But as we will see in the next chapter, this representation of restraint in the metropole is shadowed by an escalation in military activity in Mysore.

The campaigns of Cornwallis and Wellesley against Tipu Sultan in the 1790s were the topic of intense public interest. But at the heart of reports of Cornwallis's victories over Tipu lies an entire assemblage of tropes that depict the military defeat of Tipu as an instantiation of sentimental paternal care for subject peoples. In the proliferation of celebratory texts and performances, Cornwallis, the icon of paternal restraint, accedes to precisely the position of normativity promoted by Starke and Colman and, in doing so, becomes in Roach's terms, the surrogate for Clairville, the now deceased model of defective aristocratic paternity. However, that accession is only part of the story. When colonial warfare eventually made its way into the theatre of metropolitan life via the illegitimate dramaturgy practiced at venues such as Astley's Royal Amphitheatre, audiences' attempts to police their own volatile racial identities were supplemented by self-confirming assaults on their own phantasmatic projections of alterity.

Starke, Cornwallis, and the Reform of Landed Society

Starke's attempt to intervene in the dramatic practice and political life of London was not received with unanimous approbation. Speaking of her next play, the *St. James Chronicle* directly castigated Starke for entering the public sphere: "[W]e cannot help repeating a wish, often expressed by us, that the ladies would not quit domestick duties, and the various provinces of early education, for the rugged paths of masculine fame either in the drama or in politicks."³⁸ The discomfort generated by Starke's adoption of ostensibly masculine roles was part of a larger anxiety regarding social hybridity. The Rout scene in *The Sword of Peace* must have been a strange spectacle for London audiences because its critique of colonial hybridity had a certain applicability to unsettling forms of social hybridity in the metropole, of which the theatre was perhaps exemplary. The audience at Starke's play was composed of members of various ranks whose extratheatrical sociability was quite limited. However, within the confines of the playhouse, persons of all ranks were in close contact. And the relations among these people were exceedingly complex because class itself was in such a state of flux and negotiation at this historical juncture. As I have already suggested, Colman's prologue and epilogue to Starke's comedy link the threat posed by degenerate colonials such as the Resident and Mrs. Tartar to that posed by obsolete styles of aristocratic masculinity. The critique of aristocratic dueling in Colman's epilogue is linked to Starke's attacks both on the interracial sexuality of social climbers in the

colonies, and on the vicious desires—both sexual and economic—of Company officials during the period of Hastings’s rule. However, all of these attacks operate via the economy of caricature—Mrs. Garnish, the effete Resident, and the effeminate gentry of Colman’s epilogue represent disturbing but ultimately receding threats. The attacks on Indianization, on Hastings’s corruption, and on the dissolute aristocracy are possible and effective because they constitute the soon-to-be-obsolete models of social and imperial governance against which emergent norms are being defined.

This relationship between obsolescence and emergent norms was also a feature of colonial governmentality at this historical juncture. As Nicholas B. Dirks emphasizes in his discussion of the impact of the Hastings impeachment on colonial policy,

In Burke’s obsessional litany of Hastings’s excess, what was embarrassing was neither Hastings’s greed nor his methods so much as his manifest success in making the horrors and pleasures of empire realizable. In the wake of Burke’s attack, a colonial bureaucracy was established to monitor the greed with which all Britons went to India from the late eighteenth century on. Burke shifted the balance of power to the state rather than the mercantile elite, and it was under his scrutiny that the colonial state was born. Colonial rapacity could not be curtailed either by Hastings’s recall or the India Act of 1784, however: it could only be bureaucratized through the high minded rhetoric of the [Permanent Settlement]. British rule represented its interest in securing steady revenue through a language of improvement predicated on the rule of property and the benevolent intent of a new “postdespotic” state.³⁹

The initial phases of “postdespotic” rule fell to Cornwallis and we have already outlined his impact on the reform of the military. These reforms, which resulted in a shift in military supremacy in India, were later accompanied by the Permanent Settlement, which resulted in a shift in sovereignty.

[T]he Permanent Settlement was an attempt to erase Hastings’s legacy in more ways than one. As formulated initially by [Philip] Francis and implemented by Cornwallis, it was meant to regularize Company revenues through a steady tax rather than by extortion, to normalize administration by setting high public standards for the service of the Company officers, and to create a loyal elite based on

landed property rather than military alliance, by restoring putatively traditional landholders to their rightful position. . . . Cornwallis . . . was intent on reproducing the landed gentry of England, in a dramatic enunciation of imperial policy that seemed a denial of the entrepreneurial origins of Indian empire even as it sought to stabilize a new kind of Indian elite.⁴⁰

This act of reproduction has been extensively documented, but for our purposes we need to recognize that it involved multiple crises of legitimation. Aside from the tortuous problems of reconfiguring property relations in India according to British notions of the sanctity of private property and of inventing an Indian landed class, the ideological investment in the Permanent Settlement also required an erasure of the preceding thirty years of British economic history, which had demonstrated that landed property could no longer be understood as unrelated to mercantile commerce. To pretend that the problems of sovereignty would be rectified by establishing a landed elite was to indulge in a misrecognition of the stability of the landed classes and of the “natural” accommodation of liberty and property that would act as foundation for governmentality.⁴¹ C.A. Bayly aptly captures this misrecognition as “a massive effort of wishful thinking.”⁴²

Guha, Sen, Thompson, and others have written extensively on the impact of the Permanent Settlement’s displaced fantasy of landed property. As one might expect, the new estates were less a source of stability, than a site of high turnover and, eventually, of absenteeism. These problems were also a part of the metropolitan economy in the 1760s and 1770s, and the early 1790s saw both a radical threat to, and an ideological reinvestment in, the values of the landed gentry: ownership, inheritance, and succession.⁴³ The vociferousness of Burke’s defense of the sanctity of landed property in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is itself evidence of the purchase of radical political arguments that dissociated political liberty from property. The following passage exhibits a “massive effort of wishful thinking” that nevertheless had palpable effects on British national fantasy: “The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue; it grafts benevolence even upon avarice. The possessors of family wealth, and of the distinction which attends the hereditary possession . . . are the natural securities for this trans-

mission.”⁴⁴ Everything about this passage begs to be read against previous accounts of metropolitan corruption, for it implies that weakness and avarice would be everywhere rampant but for the hygienic effects of hereditary possession. If we take Burke’s words as the statement of a problematic, rather than an expression of historical truth, then it is possible to see the export of British models of landed property to India as a bulwark against metropolitan social anxieties. The violent suppression of radical critiques of British polity in the early 1790s partook of a similar invention of “tradition” that play a fundamental role in patriotic discourse throughout the romantic period. That ideological project was not at all distant from the fantasies that drove the Permanent Settlement. The maintenance of “tradition” through its forced implementation elsewhere had significant implications not only for those on whom it was foisted but also for those in whose name it was perpetrated.

Mariana Starke’s second play does not broach the issues raised by the Permanent Settlement directly—it precedes that development by two years. But *The Widow of Malabar* is deeply concerned with the problems of tradition, and of aristocratic succession and inheritance that would ultimately impinge on both Cornwallis’s reforms and on Burke’s polemics.⁴⁵ If we can understand the Permanent Settlement as an allegorical policy—one that utilizes one form of social and economic relations to figure forth another—then it is illuminating to look at the instability of Starke’s own allegorical gestures in her adaptation of Le Mierre’s tragedy *La veuve du Malabar*. The Permanent Settlement attempted to regulate Indian society by rendering it as a shadow of an England that no longer existed except in the nationalist fantasies that consolidated British identity after the state’s active suppression of Jacobinism. As such, its reforms did not produce an elite constituency that would govern the land, but rather a bureaucracy that would generate knowledge about the people.⁴⁶ The disciplinary effects of that knowledge practice defined the managerial practice of nineteenth-century colonial India. In a similar allegorical gesture, *The Widow of Malabar* attempted to regulate its London audience by rendering troubling aspects of its class formation in terms derived from Indian culture. However, the play’s attempt to regulate the metropolitan elite, to return it to its past glory—or at least to the fantasy of security exemplified by Burke—did not reform the aristocracy but rather occasioned even more rigid notions of class stratification than those articulated in *The Sword of Peace*. As we will see, this particular project of elite reform was contained and reoriented not only by the play’s epilogue, but

also by the newspapers in a fashion that further consolidated the many strains of normative national identity following the French Revolution and prior to the imposition of the Permanent Settlement.

The Mirror and the Dart: The Widow of Malabar

The Widow of Malabar is a play about suttee, and, as in *The Sword of Peace*, the British military in India plays a crucial role in containing and regulating social deviance. Indamora, the potential sati in Starke's play, is saved both from death and ignominy by what the newspapers identified as "British humanity" embodied in the character of Raymond, general of the English Forces.⁴⁷ Indamora was played by the highly respectable Miss Brunton, but her performance of rectitude was complicated by the sexualization of the sati figure in the press. Before exploring this issue, however, it is helpful to consider Starke's source text and how her adaptation makes its way to the London stage. As Dorothy M. Figueira has argued, Le Mierre's tragedy *La veuve du Malabar*, like much of the continental representation of suttee, diverges significantly from the British accounts discussed by Courtwright, Mani, and others.⁴⁸ Most important, the sexual economy of the representation is markedly different from the eyewitness accounts that played such an important role in the legislative discussion of the practice in the early nineteenth century. Le Mierre's popular tragedy of 1770 represents the sati figures as the victim of religious superstition and social custom. The struggle between reason and superstition is staged as an intracaste conflict between a Young and an Old Bramin. However, the resolution of this conflict is effected by the intervention of the handsome General Montalban who, upon saving the potential sati, discovers that she is none other than the long lost Lanassa whom he loved in his youth. As Figueira notes, this effectively casts the sati figure as "an exemplar of bourgeois conjugal virtues and as a courageous rebel against social rigidity."⁴⁹ But the sudden suturing of the heterosexual love plot to the Enlightenment victory over superstition raises a number of problems that were immediately capitalized on by various theatrical parodists, for it doesn't take much to transform the tragedy into a sexual farce.⁵⁰ After all, the entire history of libertine fiction happily conflates Enlightenment rebellion against religious doxa with men's and women's sexual license. These parodies highlight the volatility of the sati figure's exemplarity, for the retroactive establishment of a relationship between Lanassa and Montalban raises the question of desire and thereby puts women's sexual

agency under intense scrutiny. What this means is that the ideological success of the play turns on the performance of virtue in the part of Lanassa.

Virtue's performativity became a crucial issue for Starke's adaptation because so much depended on the context of its initial production. Starke prepared the play for private performance under the auspices of Mrs. Crespigny at Camberwell. This fact alone opened the play to heterodox interpretations for three reasons. First, private theatricals tended to obviate the contestatory possibilities of public performance. The audience and the performers were consolidated by social ties.⁵¹ Second, this consolidation was built on a relationship that would otherwise encapsulate much of the bourgeois suspicion about aristocratic vice. By the 1760s private theatricals employed professional actors and designers from the London theatres and hence brought together two groups of people routinely associated with sexual dissipation. This is why so much is made of Mrs. Crespigny's respectability in Starke's advertisement to the play. Third, the play is the product of a collaboration of sorts between two public women. Starke's *The Sword of Peace* carefully legitimated Eliza's and Louisa's—and by extension Starke's own—public and private reputations at the expense of social upstarts in the colonies. As I have argued, that legitimation not only promoted an emergent kind of normative commercial civility, but also attempted to bury codes of masculine behavior that were perceived to be destabilizing the political and social elites of metropolitan society. In *The Widow of Malabar*, a similar kind of critique is engaged, but the press used the play as an occasion for scrutinizing upper-class women and the threat their sexual agency posed to the maintenance of "tradition." As we will see, the fate of that regulatory effort is integrally tied to the social function of the sati figure at this juncture in metropolitan culture.

The Widow of Malabar was chosen by Miss Brunton for her benefit night in May 1790.⁵² It is clear from the Larpent text of the play that it was submitted as a vehicle for the popular actress, and this enlarges the collaboration to one between three very public figures.⁵³ What Miss Brunton brings to the mix is the question of her reputation. Despite repeated assertions of her spotless reputation in the reviews, Anne Brunton was a known associate of Robert "Revolution" Merry, whom she would marry shortly after the play's run.⁵⁴ Merry was one of the most active radical journalists in the period immediately following the French Revolution.⁵⁵ Brunton's reputation, therefore, can be described as troubled: regardless of her sexual respectability, her social and political connections render her subject to calumny. Performing on her benefit night, Miss Brunton ap-

pears before the audience at least as much as herself as Indamora. This is not insignificant because, as we have already noted, the performance of virtue in the part of Indamora prevents the love plot from devolving into low sexual comedy or transforming into libertine critique. The opening-night reviews were unanimous in their praise of her performance, but one review in the *New Lady's Magazine*, notorious for its scrutiny of women's public conduct, sets the stage for a rather different interpretation not only of Miss Brunton, Mrs. Crespigny, and Mariana Starke, but also of the sati figure: "On this lady's night a new tragedy, in three acts, was brought forward called 'The Widow of Malabar,' which we must own afforded us great entertainment—throughout the whole we laughed very heartily—but that is no wonder, as it is said to be the production of a [house/lady] of fashion and originally written for a *private theatrical*."⁵⁶ The play here is understood as a folly of fashion and entertaining inasmuch as it demonstrates the ridiculousness of those associated with it. This amounts to a key shift from the positive exemplarity of a particular actress to the shaming of fashionable society. My suspicion is that the laughter afforded here is not one based on the play's ineptitude—both the reviews and the receipts indicate that it is a proficient play—but rather in its capacity to exemplify the very opposite of virtue.

Something of this instability is captured in the *English Review's* commentary on the first printed version of the play:

The best quality in the *Widow of Malabar* is, its being comprised of three acts. There are indeed a few failings in it. Among others we might mention that the plot discovers itself in the first act; that it is unnatural, in many respects, and contrary to the customs it pretends to describe in that the widow, instead of *requesting* to be burnt, is *forced* to comply; and that the bramins are supposed to have no object in view but her jewels. This makes the thing new and pretty, but neither interesting nor instructive. On the whole, the piece is well calculated to please a modern audience since comedy is become pantomime, and tragedy a kind of sentimental comedy.⁵⁷

It is important to remember that Burke in the *Reflections* had characterized the social devolution of France as a dangerous mixing of genres, as a "monstrous tragi-comic scene."⁵⁸ The reviewer's invocation of generic devolution is telling because Raymond's rescue of his beloved Indamora contravenes the expectations of tragedy and thus downgrades the threat of suttee from a scene of potential tragic catharsis to a comic obstacle to

be overcome by heroic masculinity. This is why the reviewer, whose confident knowledge of suttee is most likely derived from accounts in Holwell and Dow, raises questions about the accuracy of the customs presented.⁵⁹ The combined suggestion that the play diverges from the “customs” it pretends to describe and that it is in fact a sentimental comedy subtly indicates that the widow presented in the play is quite literally calculated “to please a modern audience” because her predicament is really that of an English widow. Indamora has been married to an older man not of her choosing in part to foil an interracial attachment with Raymond and in part to secure an alliance with the family of her husband. In this context, her loveless marriage of alliance is set in contrast to a sentimental relationship that crosses racial, cultural, and class barriers. The threat of suttee in the play has always been vestigial not only because Indamora’s situation is contrived to speak to the plight of aristocratic women caught in the tangled web of marriages built on alliance, not love, but also because the staging of the act is impossible. This carries with it the implication that the sati could in fact be understood as a tragic heroine, but it would require a strict adherence to “custom.” In the terms set forward by the reviewer, she would have to request to die, and the play would have allowed for her immolation.

The impossibility of actually staging the suttee causes key dramaturgical problems because as many of the reviews indicate it means that there is never any doubt about Indamora’s fate. There is never any question of representing suttee, but the play is obsessed with bringing the potential sati onto the stage and into representation. Of course, it is possible to imagine a way of indirectly presenting a suttee by having the pyre offstage, but the Covent Garden production cancels such a possibility when it diverges from Le Mierre’s play and makes the funeral pyre the center of its set design in the third act. (33) Not only is the Funeral Pile center stage and framed by rocks; it is also connected by a bridge to the other key architectural feature of the stage—the Pagod of Eswara. This arrangement ensures that Indamora’s magnificent procession, noted in all the reviews, has to swirl around the Pile and eventually rise above the stage for maximum visual effect. The ethnographic specificity of the scene is evident from the details regarding costume and props in the stage directions for Indamora’s ascent of the pyre: “Indamora advances towards the Pile—the Mirror and dart are thrown into it—Slaves throw in oil and incense—Bramins kneel to Indamora, who waves her hand as if to bless them. Indamora stops when she reaches the middle of the Platform, stands ready to cast herself on the Pile” (43). Ironically, once the Funeral Pile is set

alight, the very centrality of the fiery spectacle guarantees Indamora's rescue and union with Raymond. But the very surplus of detail—the mirror, the dart, the oil and incense—and the specificity of the architecture and costume raise important questions regarding the relationship between metropolitan viewers and represented colonial subjects.⁶⁰

If the potential sati is being understood as an English widow as the *English Review* suggests, then what is the function of this quasi-ethnographic material that on the face of it does play a role in the production of knowledge about Hindu social practices? Many of the reviews suggest that this is not an incidental concern of the play. The *Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser* is typical in its claims for the play's authenticity: "The Widow of Malabar . . . is the production of Miss Starke, whose father was formerly the governor of the country where the scene of the tragedy lies, of course the *costume* of the piece is preserved with great truth. The procession is extremely magnificent, and affords a very striking picture of oriental manners."⁶¹ Establishing Starke as one or two steps removed from a native informant has a curious effect on how one reads the play for it sets two interpretive modes at odds with one another. The first reads the play as a sentimental comedy about aristocratic love veiled behind a surface of distorted Oriental detail. The second tenuously clings to the play as a representation of Hindu social practice whose divergence from tragedy is compensated for by a self-consolidating celebration of masculine British humanity. Importantly, the latter interpretation also accepts the idealized interracial and interclass sexual union between Raymond and Indamora as a necessary step in the Enlightened suppression of superstition. However, as these two competing interpretations of the play make their way through the press, the latter position finds itself occluded by the former, and the terms on which the interracial desire between Raymond and Indamora are put in abeyance are symptomatic not only of the racialization of class relations in the early 1790s but also of the ideological importance of the supposed security of landed property following the French Revolution.

When the *The Widow of Malabar* is given a more thorough run in the winter of 1791, the daily newspapers, no longer concerned with paying compliments to Miss Brunton, turn their attention to the satirical possibilities opened by the play's generic instability. After the wave of opening-night reviews, pointed jokes on the sexual proclivities of aristocratic wives begin to emerge. The *Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser* leads the way with an opinion attributed to Lady Wallace who had come to public notice for a particularly messy divorce proceeding: "Lady W.[allace] is charmed

by the *Widow of Malabar*. Her Ladyship, with her usual vivacity, declares, that she has more than once *burned* for a husband; but that, *salamander* like, she can live in the midst of *flames*.⁶² The insinuation here is quite complex in light of the damnation of Lady Wallace's *The Ton; or, The Follies of Fashion* three years earlier. That play ridiculed the vices of the aristocracy, but occasioned near riots in the theatre because its diagnosis of aristocratic vice seemed to indict the very audience it courted. Like Starke, Lady Wallace's protofeminist arguments aimed to stabilize and reinvigorate aristocratic identity by ridding it of the suspect gender performances and sexual transgressions associated with fashionable society.⁶³ At the time of the damnation of *The Ton*, the press argued that there was a disjunction between the playwright's decency and the decency of her aesthetic practice. The invocation of Lady Wallace here continues in the same vein by casting aspersion on her sexual desires. But it also attempts to undercut Starke's—and by extension Crespigny's—renegotiation of traditional gender roles in aristocratic marriage by suggesting that the play's moral suits one such as Lady Wallace. In other words, the play provides an opportunity for ridiculing female sexual agency by raising the specter of adultery. After all, Lady Wallace not only ostensibly declares her desire for someone else's husband but also ostensibly resolves to happily burn in hell for its fulfillment. What is so disturbing is that a certain level of commutability is asserted between Lady Wallace's sexual desires and Indamora's love for Raymond that ultimately reinterprets Indamora's reluctance to become a sati as a sign of adulterous proclivities.

The specificity of the *Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser's* attack was not widespread, but the assertion of commutability and the implied metaphorization of suttee surface in almost all the papers. The Whig organ, the *Morning Chronicle*, was the most insistent, offering nuggets such as the following: "The Widows by no means find the fiery ordeal in the new Tragedy so formidable as they had imagined. Having *warm* constitutions, they find the *flame*, which succeeds the death of a first Husband, a *kindred element*."⁶⁴ The puns on burning and on flames proliferate over the next weeks, and the jokes, however feeble, operate in two directions. First, they emphasize the ubiquity and intensity of an English widow's desire and, second, they insinuate that Indamora shares this passion. The first gesture contains female desire in a familiar stereotype, and the second implies that female desire operates in this way irrespective of cultural and racial difference. This double act of containment and then forced equivalence is manifest in perhaps the most telling contribution from the *Morning Chronicle*:

A BRITISH FIRE

In *India's* climes when ancient husbands die,
Their youthful Widows to a *bonfire* fly,
Ascend the pile—and 'midst surrounding fire,
In honour of their *dear good man*—expire.

In *Britain's* Isle the case is much the same,
An old man's wife retains a *secret* flame;
And when he dies—a few short days past over,
The flame burst forth, and *fires*—a *youthful* LOVER.⁶⁵

What is so strange about this poem's assertion of similitude is that it ultimately resolves into a fundamental distinction. In the first verse, the Indian widow burns with her dead husband. In the second verse, the English widow figuratively burns on the occasion of her husband's death but not with him. By the slippage inherent to the metaphorization of suttee, the English widow burns with desire for a youthful lover. However, the second verse also describes Indamora's situation on the London stage to the letter, for she not only retains a secret flame for Raymond throughout her marriage but also unites with him a few short days after her husband's death. What I hope is clear is the degree to which the papers capture the contradiction generated when the play's struggle between reason and superstition is resolved by a retroactive assertion of heterosexual desire. As the *Morning Chronicle* aptly and carefully summarizes, "The new Tragedy conveys a most excellent moral, which is sanctioned by the authority of scripture, and will, we dare say, meet the approbation of all widows, that it is better to marry than to burn. Every body will agree that if, after the death of a first husband, a widow should be destined to the flame, her best security is in the arms of a second."⁶⁶ Significantly, both the play and the satirical reception of it de-realize the colonial practice of suttee by retroactively sexualizing the widow. In the case of Starke, this happens at the level of plot, but in the case of the papers this is achieved by less than subtle figural substitutions of British widows for potential satis.

This widespread tendency toward the figural cancellation of the potential sati responds to a series of anxieties activated by Starke's play. Most obviously, it cancels the very notion of cultural difference by simply relegating the potential sati to figural oblivion. But perhaps more important, it obviates the play's threatening suggestion that interracial desire is not only admirable but also necessary for resolving the social conflict between rational British imperialists and ostensibly superstitious Hindu subjects. And nestled within the relationship between Indamora and Raymond is

a further complication: their union appears to be between an aristocratic woman and a bourgeois soldier. With caste understood as translatable to class, the sexual resolution of the play's social and cultural conflict turns on the mixing not only of ethnically distinct characters but also of town and city. The papers quickly contain this gesture and direct readers' attention to specifically intraclass sexual relations by focusing on both aristocratic marriage and on specific women of fashion in the audience. A number of papers list notable ladies in the boxes and discuss their approbation of the play.⁶⁷ The *St. James Chronicle* produces an extensive list and suggests that the play will "become a favourite of the town."⁶⁸ However, the *New London Magazine* subtly damns the play with the same observation when it suggests that considering "the Present State of Covent Garden Theatre, . . . [*The Widow of Malabar*] may probably draw a few fashionable houses to it."⁶⁹ A subsequent letter to the editor of the *Public Advertiser* recognizes the implied criticism—that such a production could only interest the dissipated upper orders—and attributes the critique to malice toward the theatre.⁷⁰

But it is clear that the play has also activated malice toward its fashionable patrons that opens onto an allegorical reading of Indamora's desire for Raymond that conforms to the widespread critique of aristocratic vice in the period. However, that critique is itself undergoing a certain refinement. In accordance with the reactivation of the notion of landed liberty and of the sanctity of property in the antiradical rhetoric of Burke and others in 1790 and 1791, the landed classes accede to a condition of national normativity, whereas more "fashionable" aristocrats become scrutinized for their perceived threat to this ideological formation. Wahrman's discussion of Burke's demonization of the middle ranks in the early phases of reaction to the French Revolution indicates that one of the objectives of the *Reflections* was to consolidate British society according to arguments formerly advocated by country ideologues and thus warn the largely Whig readership not to align itself too closely with the "malignant monied interest."⁷¹ Aside from the erasure of his own former investment in the shared objectives of the Whig elite and the moneyed interest, Burke's move exerted intense pressure not only on emerging middle-class formations but also on forms of social interaction that imagined some kind of social accommodation between City and Town. Wahrman has written extensively on the former pressure, but the latter speaks directly to Starke's practice, for it is clear that her reformist gestures are attempting to reconfigure elite femininity according to notions of bourgeois conjugal virtue.⁷² That reform is allegorized in the Young Bramin's arguments for a break from

tradition and in Indamora's desire to marry Raymond. In the terms set forward by that allegory, to argue for "tradition" is to find oneself aligned with the Chief Bramin. In this light, one could tendentiously suggest that the struggle between the Young Bramin and the Chief Bramin is a very biting allegory for the struggle between New and Old Whigs signaled by Burke's publication of *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* in 1791. Casting Burke as the exemplar of superstition, tradition, and class rigidity would not be an unusual gesture for those involved in or sympathetic to radical reform. In short, *The Widow of Malabar* seems to precipitate the audience into distinct groups according to ideological affiliation, and this gesture is a significant incursion on the hybridity of theatrical sociability that speaks to the precarious ideological situation of middle-class reform at this moment.

In this scenario, it is important to recognize that the insinuation that the play is only suitable to the vicious tastes of the aristocracy carries with it two key implications: first, that women of fashion are desiring subjects and, second, that interracial sexuality does not constitute a contravention of fashionable identity but rather is a symptom of the aristocracy's social decay. What I see here are two perfectly adequated substitutions. Just as the papers substitute fantasies of metropolitan sexuality for equally phantasmatic constructions of Hindu subjectivity, so the antiradical component of the audience indulges in fantasies about the dissolution of the very class it is in the process of occluding. And yet this occlusion requires a phantasmatic investment in a now iconic landed elite whose political and economic power have long since passed their prime. It is thus that the derogation of "fashionable" identities participates in the complex ideological maneuver wherein the increasingly economically dominant middle classes eventually find themselves operating behind a national fantasy of benevolent country landlords. In the former substitution, the body of the sati disappears from view in favor of a negative example of metropolitan female desire. In the latter substitution, the bodies of the fashionable women cataloged in the audience of Starke's play become signifiers of a negative example of class and gender identity. The adequation of these two substitutions is possible because Indamora and the women of fashion are linked by more than rank in the eyes of the bourgeois audience. They are being understood as racially distinct from normative national identity.

This assertion is confirmed by the remarkable epilogue to *The Widow of Malabar*, which not only assumes precisely this racialization but also at-

tempts to counter it. In the epilogue, the great comic actress Mrs. Mattocks enters as if pushed onto the stage by the prompter, and she carries the mirror and the dart previously carried by Indamora and thrown into the funeral pile. The two props—now separated from their specifically Hindu significations—figure for the play’s allegorical presentation and critical evaluation of metropolitan life, respectively. Allegorical reflection and satirical critique are the primary methodological axes of theatrical autoethnography in the period. The entrance of Mrs. Mattocks and the figuration of the autoethnographic project initiates, or rather confirms, not only the comic interpretation of the play but also the metaphorization of suttee. Throughout the epilogue, Mrs. Mattocks, who did not play a role in the play, satirically casts herself as a woman forced against her will to save the play and by extension its author from burning in the fiery rancor of theatrical criticism. She wittily argues that the audience can take one of two positions in relation to *The Widow of Malabar* that are derived from the play itself. They can take the role of the Chief Bramin in relation to the now feminized play and threaten “our little Realm” with “dread rage,” or they can allow their applause to imitate the thunder of the British guns that overthrow the town just prior to Indamora’s rescue in the third act.⁷³ It is a cunning trope because it figuratively associates the critics of the play with heathen cruelty and aligns the play’s advocates with heroic British masculinity. In other words, a positive reaction to the play not only consolidates “British humanity” but also makes the audience complicit with the play’s martial resolution of the struggle between superstition and reason in the colonies. This kind of gesture is not unusual for an epilogue whose primary function is to mold audience opinion such that the play lives on for another production.

But the metaphorical linkage between play and potential sati becomes quite pointed when Mrs. Mattocks starts to break down the house into its class and gender components. Her first satirical attack is aimed at those of the lower ranks seated in the “Gods” or the balcony:

We’ve just been taught—nor was it deem’d a wonder
 That J^OVE’s decrees are usher’d in by thunder.
 Come then, one clap, ye mighty Powers on High!
 I love the pealing thunders of your sky,
 They augur well—yet hold!—it may be odds
 But there’s some lurking Fiend among you Gods,
 Whose baleful wrath a hissing bolt may aim,

To burn poor me, and blast our POET's fame;
And I'm not like our Heroine, in such haste
For fiery trials—they don't hit my taste.⁷⁴

Throughout the play the enlightened Young Bramin refers to the Chief Bramin as a fiend— therefore Mattocks's remarks here effectively racialize the play's nonaristocratic critics in what amounts to a preemptive first strike. A similar gesture follows but this time aimed at fashionable women in the boxes who are unwilling to embrace the radical possibilities lying beneath the union between Indamora and Raymond:

Hark! In yon box I hear some Fair One say,
"We really shou'd not like to die that way,
"Tis a bad precedent—let's damn the Play."
Hold, gentle creatures, in these happy times,
Mercy extends her sway o'er distant climes,
And makes the Human Race her fondest care,
Whether the hue be tawny, black or fair:
Then, since the age is thus to mercy prone,
In *this Tribunal* let us fix her throne;
Break Criticism's shaft, quench Rancour's fire,
Nor light our trembling Author's funeral Pyre.⁷⁵

Suddenly the class separation that distinguishes the balcony from the boxes is figuratively transformed into a racial distinction. Both the dark fiendish critics in the upper seats and the fair women of the boxes wish to damn the play, but Mrs. Mattocks responds in such a way that both groups are found to be in error precisely because they identify too rigidly with their racialized and classed location in the theatre. As an antidote, she invokes Mercy who rules over all the colors subsumed under the universal category of "the Human Race" and squelches the fire threatening to consume the author and the play.

Aside from the surplus of wit, what is interesting here is the degree to which Mrs. Mattocks's words counter attempts to naturalize whiteness as a property of any class. Although more complex than the attack on the critics in the balconies, the aim is similarly prophylactic: the objective is to protect the racial and class hybridity nascent in the play's heterosexual love plot from precisely the kind of antiaristocratic criticism that attempts to mobilize racial purity as a sign of national strength. That the newspapers nevertheless go on to enact precisely this containment strat-

egy is a sign not only that this racialization has been a site of contestation in the period but also that the ascendancy of antiradical sentiment is by this point so well assured that the contest has devolved into feeble guffaws in the London dailies. And this assertion of national ascendancy unfolds despite the specious figural substitution of Indian and British elites. So we are left with a curious parallel.

Despite Starke's and Cornwallis's shared misrecognition of both the stability and the portability of British models of landed liberty, their interventions, although in many ways incomparable, precipitated discourses and performances that would confirm the obsolescence of their social vision. In the case of Starke's obfuscations, that declaration of obsolescence took a matter of weeks in part because negotiation between invented "tradition" and emergent social forces was happening apace in the consolidation of national identity following the French Revolution. In the case of Cornwallis's phantasmatic investments, the process of obsolescence would be much slower, for the attempt to promote a landed elite would be supplemented and ultimately taken over by the institutional and bureaucratic functions of British rule and the increasingly utilitarian practices of the state. The idea of the Permanent Settlement, like many allegories, was compelling in its simplicity, but it only achieved partial application in very select regions of Madras and Bengal. Through the work of administrators such as Thomas Munro, who is credited with the invention of the *ryotwari* system of revenue collection, the Permanent Settlement was displaced by micrological processes of social control that relied on and called forth the extraordinary proliferation of knowledge practices regarding Indian social life that would eventually be the hallmark of British governmentality during the Raj.⁷⁶