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Republican Theatricality and Transatlantic Empire

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And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?

Benjamin Franklin, Constitutional Convention, 1787

Introduction: New World Drama

Early American literature is a field constructed in retrospect: texts written and circulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in British North America can be construed as "American" (part of the canon of US literature) only insofar as one looks back upon them from the vantage of US nationhood. Given the cultural and historical force of precisely this nationalist perspective, it is no surprise that literary studies of the colonial and early national periods have primarily involved the sifting of literary texts for signs of nascent and burgeoning "American" identity. Yet critical work on early North American drama in English has been particularly stymied by such an approach because much of the drama staged and circulated in the pre-national and early US national periods was written and first performed in England rather than America, thus causing critics to regard it as English rather than American literature. Examining the performance history of early American drama enables a markedly different picture of literature of the period to emerge—one in which literature is defined less by nationhood than by a larger, transatlantic network of economic, political, and cultural relations. In this essay, I step away from the neat (although anachronistic) conjunction of nation and literature that has guided critical work in the field of early American literature in order to examine the form and meaning of dramatic texts and performances in relation to a transatlantic nexus of ideas and debates concerning the politics of republicanism and imperialism during the first British Empire in both England and North America.
Roman Republic, Roman Empire

Joseph Addison's play *Cato* first appeared on the stage in London in 1713. The drama centers on the heroic demise of the Roman republican senator Cato as he is besieged by the advancing armies of the tyrannical Julius Caesar. In its central focus on Roman republicanism (in the figure of Cato) and Roman empire (in the figure of Julius Caesar), the play exemplifies early eighteenth-century British interest in the politics of republicanism and imperialism as well as a characteristic turn to the historical and literary example of Rome for inspiration in sorting through the meaning of these terms. Although Addison was known for his Whig (anti-absolutist, social contractarian) politics at the time, *Cato* evidently held bi-partisan appeal for London audiences who enthusiastically endorsed the play's patriotic sentiments (Cowan 2004; Lofts, 1965). The play debuted toward the close of the War of Spanish Succession and both Whig and Tory audience members sought to demonstrate their allegiance to the principles of liberty and love of country that the play trumpeted. Samuel Johnson famously reports that when the play first appeared, the Whigs applauded every time the word "liberty" was mentioned in order to "satirize" the Tories; the Tories, in turn, "echoed every clap to show that the satire was unfelt" (Johnson, Trotter, and Reynolds 1783 II: 348). *Cato* had an equally important afterlife in the colonies of North America, including, most notably, a performance for and by the weary troops of George Washington's army at Valley Forge in 1778 (Furtwangler 1980; Fuller 1999). Theater had been banned by the first Continental Congress in 1774, together with gambling, horse-racing, cock-fighting, and extravagant funerals. The passage of the ban occurred in response to Britain's Coercive Acts and was joined with a trade embargo against Great Britain and non-consumption rules governing the sale of British commodities; the ban was intended to foster virtue through discipline, and, in a proto-nationalist mode, to weaken the colonists from British corruption and luxury (Withington 1991; Silverman 1986). It is worth noting that a fair amount of theater was performed during the Revolution, including the performance of *Cato* at Valley Forge (Brown 1995). Notwithstanding the ban on theater, George Washington was an avid fan of theater and *Cato* was a favorite play of his and of the broader public as well. *Cato* was performed often in professional and amateur venues from 1732 through the 1790s (Shaffer 2003; Litto 1966). Nathan Hale's celebrated last words as he faced execution by the British—"I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country"—cite Cato's words in Addison's play: "What pity is it / That we can die but once to serve our country!" (4.3.91-2). As Jason Shaffer has argued, Hale surely knew the play and may have even participated in performing it while he was a student at Yale (Shaffer 2003: 6). Furthermore, historian Bernard Bailyn has influentially argued that a "Catonic image" (an image of oppositional republican virtue) was central to the political theory of the American Revolution, an image derived from both Addison's well-known play and the popularity of John Trenchard and Richard Gordon's *Cato's Letters*—a series of newspaper columns extolling freedom of speech, the right to
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property, and the dangers of government corruption — that were widely circulated and cited in the colonies (Bailyn 1992:44).

_Cato_ is thus a dramatic text that migrated from metropolis to colony and exerted considerable cultural influence in both locations. My interest in this essay lies in the transatlantic migration and staging of this play and more specifically in what I will argue is the mobility of republicanism at the center of the play. Ultimately, I suggest, the mobility of republican political identity serves as the basis of a developing ideology of empire. While the politics of republicanism within the play seem antithetical to imperialism, I argue that a transatlantic performance history of _Cato_ enables one to trace a shifting and developing ideology of imperialism that indicates, in turn, how and why colonial North Americans — far from repudiating imperialism — sought to link republic and empire. While objecting to their subordinate position within the British Empire, many colonials came to believe, with Thomas Jefferson, that the United States could and should conjoin imperialism with republicanism to form an American “empire for liberty” (Jefferson to James Madison, April 27, 1809). While a number of critics have analyzed and contextualized performances of _Cato_ both in England and the colonies (Freeman 1999; Rosenthal 1999; Aravamudan 1999; Ellison 1999), my particular interest lies in connecting the dots between English and colonial performances of _Cato_ and in thereby discerning the relation between republican ideology and empire — that is, in focusing specifically on the nature and meaning of the transatlantic migration of the play and the way in which its varied performances staged the developing ideology of empire in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Addison's _Cato_ was written and first staged, the British had occupied territory in North America and the West Indies for close to one hundred years; moreover, a growing sense of the importance of this colonial arena to the welfare of England occasioned debate over the nature of empire itself. Nicholas Canny has characterized the first British Empire — the (primarily) Atlantic commercial and territorial empire in the period prior to the American Revolution — as "more the product of accident than design." Long-distance trade evolved into empire, Canny suggests, and "shape was imposed on what had been accomplished by chance only after state authorities came to appreciate the commercial importance of the various colonies, fortified posts, and trading routes throughout the world that had been established by private adventurers" (Canny 1998: xi). In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, then, both the state and the English people became increasingly aware of Britain's imperial nature and began to publicly debate the nature of empire as well as its benefits and dangers for English liberty. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, the English turned to classical example in attempts to understand the relation between republican ideals and imperial ambitions (Orr 2001; Pagden 1982; Weinbrot 1993; Armitage 2000). If the Roman republic served as the mythical origin of British liberty, the Roman Empire, in turn, served as a cautionary example of the danger that expansion posed to the republican state. The _libertas_ of the Roman state was ultimately destroyed by _imperium_ — by the overweening
ambitions of Sulla, Marius, and finally the tyrannical Julius Caesar. According to this argument, the extension of territorial empire through military force ultimately overburdens the republican state to the point that the military becomes the location of despotic power and excess rather than the protector of freedom. As David Armitage writes: “for the classical – above all, Roman – historical and moral traditions within which the majority of early-modern British theorists had been educated, libertas and imperium remained seemingly incompatible values... the problem of how to achieve empire while sustaining liberty became a defining concern of British imperial ideology” (Armitage 2000: 125). Thus, in 1701, the economic theorist Charles Davenant (son of Restoration playwright William Davenant) explained that “while common wealths thus extend their limits, they are working their own Bane, for all big Empires determine in a single Person” (Davenant 1771: 3–4; cited in Pagden 1982: 17). Expansive empire led directly to tyranny and away from liberty.

Addison’s Cato centers precisely on the mytho-historical transition from Roman republic to Roman empire, as the republican leader Cato commits suicide in the face of his inability to prevent Caesar’s corrupt and imperialist takeover. As James Johnson writes, the history of Cato “marked the end of Republican Rome and the birth of the new imperialistic stage of Roman history” (Johnson 1967: 95–6). Addison’s play is set in Utica, a colonial outpost in North Africa, where the Roman senator Cato and his allies, including his two sons and his daughter Marcia, are encamped, awaiting the seemingly fatal attack of Caesar’s oncoming forces. Yet much of the plot centers on a figure other than Cato, namely, the Numidian Prince Juba, who has aligned himself with Cato and is also in love with Cato’s daughter, Marcia. Both Cato’s fellow senator and apparent ally – Sempronius – and Juba’s own general, Syphax, are in fact conspiring against the Republican cause in favor of Caesar. Juba resists both Sempronius’ villainy and Syphax’s anti-Roman oratory: Syphax attempts to dissuade Juba from his adoration of Cato and all things Republican – not least of which is Marcia. It is thus worth noting that significant plot strands of the play are centered on romance, sedition, and the figure of Juba. Cato, meanwhile, demonstrates Stoic fortitude in his commitment to the republic above his commitment to his family: most famously, when his son Marcus dies in battle, Cato does not mourn; however, he does shed tears for the death of the Republic. At the close of the play he tragically turns his sword upon himself as Caesar approaches; as he dies, he gives his consent to Juba to marry his daughter Marcia. One possible, if not unavoidable reading of the play, then, would center on the incompatibility of liberty and empire. Cato’s tragic death points to the danger posed to the republic of imperial ambition in the figure of Caesar. Cato, for many commentators on the play, represents an ideal figure of republican virtue who stands in stark contrast to Caesar’s imperial villainy.

Yet, as Lisa Freeman argues, such a reading is problematic insofar as it idealizes Cato despite the fact that, with his suicide, he enacts the failure of republicanism rather than its triumph. More importantly, as Freeman points out, any simple idealization of Cato and republicanism requires that one ignore the romance plots within the play, and in particular, depends upon overlooking a significant element of
the play's resolution, namely the union of Juba and Marcia. Eighteenth-century critics, as well as later commentators, have been quite content to discount Juba's role in the play: as Freeman indicates, contemporary critics objected to the love scenes as derogations of the heroic plot line centered on Cato. Indeed, Freeman analyzes a Bowdlerized version of the play that was written some years later in which all of the love scenes were excised — a play titled *Cato Without the Love Scenes*. A focus on the union of Marcia and Juba transforms the meaning of the play considerably, however, shifting its terms from tragedy to include an additional element of comedy or futurity: a future horizon opens in the marriage of Juba and Marcia within the play despite the loss of horizon that the death of Cato and the Republican state would seem to imply. Freeman reads the future possibility inaugurated with the marriage of Juba and Marcia as indexing a transition from public to private concern that is markedly nationalist: "The almost tragi-comic conclusion of Addison's *Cato* thus signals a turn away from the larger-than-life aspirations and dreams of empire toward the domestic and private as the grounds for developing the virtue and strength of the nation." (Freeman 1999: 466). On this reading, the critique of imperialism within the play is articulated not only through the tyrannical figure of Caesar and the tragic death of Cato, but also more redemptively through the vindication of domestic, privatized virtue in the form of marriage. The domestic and implicitly nationalized scene of marriage stands as a bulwark against the ravages of heroic and imperial drama.

I cite Freeman's argument in order to emphasize the importance of both Juba and the romance plot to the play, but I would argue that this aspect of the play's resolution does not necessarily point in the direction of nationalism so much as toward a new account of empire. Specifically, I would suggest that the play offers up the possibility of a republican empire — an empire in which *libertas* and *imperium* are not at odds. My reading of republican empire in the play hinges on the dying words of Cato in which he sanctions Juba's marriage to Marcia. As he speaks to Marcia, Cato redefines what it means to be a Roman: "Juba loves thee, Marcia. / A senator of Rome, while Rome survived, / Would not have matched his daughter with a king, / But Caesar's arms have thrown down all distinction. / Whoe'er is brave and virtuous is a Roman" (5.4.87–91). In this brief passage, the meaning of the word "Rome" shifts from referencing a geographical location to referencing a political ideal that is no longer associated with geography but rather with individual character and sentiment. Rome has two different meanings within a single line: "A senator of Rome, while Rome survived." The first Rome is a place, the second is the realization of a political ideal. Rome as a city certainly survives, but it is no longer the embodied location of republicanism. What seems crucial is the fact that Rome is both idealized and realized at once here; it is idealized as a geographically located Republic in the world, but it is realized as a new form of highly mobile and internalizable ideal of virtue. Rome no longer produces Romans; rather, Romans (individuals) carry some notion of Rome within. *Rome* (republican liberty) now exists both nowhere and everywhere; it is dispersed across an imperial horizon.
Why might one characterize this virtualization of Roman republican identity as imperialist or related to forms of empire? In the prelude to the play, written by Alexander Pope and spoken by Juva, we are told that Addison "bids our breasts with ancient ardor rise, / And calls forth Roman tears from British eyes" (15–16). Pope thus suggests that Roman tears have a metaphorical and thus mobile status: they can literally appear in British eyes because to be Roman is to subscribe to an ideal rather than to be associated with a place. Moreover, one might infer that British eyes are British, not because of their relation to a geographically defined Britain, but because of their capacity to shed Roman tears: British eyes are British because they shed Roman tears. In this version of empire, persons rather than territories are colonized. As such, the ancient Roman notion of empire as military tyranny and state over-extension is no longer necessary: an imperial army, for instance, is no longer needed for the control of territorial acquisitions. On this model, persons (and their emotions) produce geography rather than vice versa. This enables both the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the world: Britishness inheres in the weeping eye of the republican.

In the remainder of this essay, I aim to give substance to this reading of the play by suggesting that such a reading makes far more sense or, one might say, has more force from the perspective of a seat in the Philadelphia theater than one in the London theater. Although Whig and Tory audience members may have competed with one another in London as to who could clap the loudest — who could signal most forcefully their allegiance to the ideals of Rome and thus to Britishness — I would suggest that, figuratively speaking, colonials might have had reason to clap even louder than the Whigs and Tories. In other words, the concept of a mobile British-republican identity, lodged in one's heart and tear ducts, might have had the strongest allure for those individuals who saw themselves as the heirs of English liberty far from the soil of England. In what follows, then, I adduce a number examples of the importance of the mobility of republican sentiment for the colonial staging of Cato and for a theory of empire that held significant sway in colonial North America and the early US republic.

Cato Reborn

In the colonial context, critics have typically translated the figure of Cato into the American patriot who resists the tyranny of a British Caesar. The Valley Forge performance of Cato has assumed iconic status in this respect: George Washington is seen to emblemize an American Cato in the eyes of his troops and the colonial public. Albert Furtwangler, for example, writes that it "is certain...that Washington did see the play at Valley Forge, and that it called attention to his own character" (Furtwangler 1980: 50); Jason Shaffer writes that "the performance renewed the vows of loyalty between Washington and the Continental Army" (Shaffer 2003: 19).
Moreover, Shaffer, among others, argues that Washington “fashioned a public image based on... a Catoic stoicism... a form of performance in everyday life underscored by Washington’s fondness for quoting Cato in his official and personal correspondence” (ibid: 18–19). Interestingly enough, however, Washington, at the age of 26, describes himself as identifying with the figure of Juba rather than with Cato. While serving in the French and Indian Wars, he writes a somewhat amorous letter to the wife of his best friend, Sally Fairfax: “I should think our time more agreeably spent believe me, in playing a part in Cato, with the company you mention, and myself doubly happy in being the Juba to such a Marcia, as you must make” (Washington et al. 1931 II: 195). Historians and critics have tended to dismiss Washington’s specific identification with Juba in favor of a presumptive identification between Washington and Cato. Garry Wills, for instance, describes Washington’s identification with Juba as youthful errata: “though Washington could identify himself with Juba in his youth, the play’s obvious moral paradigm is its title character” (Wills 1984: 135). From a contemporary perspective, it is evidently difficult to imagine Washington not as the great white father but as the weeping African prince, in large part because of the racial dynamics at stake in that image. Clearly, Washington’s reference to Juba primarily concerns romance rather than race or even politics: like Juba, Washington seeks the love of a woman he is forbidden to approach. Yet I would suggest that the dynamics of racialization (so evident from our perspective) may be less salient in Washington’s reference to Juba than the condition of coloniality. In other words, perhaps Washington’s identification with Juba is facilitated by his shared position as the creole subject of empire, a subject of empire who claims a right to Roman liberty by virtue of his peripheral relation to England within the British Empire. As the subject of empire, and particularly as the willing and even heroic subject of republican empire, Washington in the role of Juba makes as much sense as, and perhaps more sense than, Washington in the role of Cato.

Washington, moreover, was not alone in his reference to Juba. While images of and references to Cato had enormous currency in colonial North America, so too did the figure of Juba. Specifically, Juba’s words in a dialogue within the play with his Numidian general, Syphax, attained paradigmatic status in early America. In the dialogue, Syphax (who is secretly conspiring against Cato) attacks Juba’s worshipful regard for Cato and Roman virtue by recourse to what we might call cultural nationalism or nativism. Syphax asks Juba: “Where is the worth that sets this people [Romans] up / Above your own Numidia’s tawny sons? / Do they with rougher sinews bend the bow? / Or flies the javelin swifter to its mark, / Launch’d from the vigor of a Roman arm?” (1.253–7). Syphax argues that Juba should be loyal to his noble father and to the African people rather than to Cato. Juba responds that his admiration and loyalty is dictated by Cato’s transcendent virtue rather than by any physical condition of his own birth or the strength of his soldiers. Responding to Syphax’s account of the Numidian soldiers’ physical force, Juba states:
These [abilities of the soldiers] all are virtues of a meaner rank,
Perfections that are plac'd in bones and nerves.
A Roman soul is bent on higher views:
To civilize the rude unpolish'd world,
To lay it under the restraint of laws;
To make men mild, and sociable to man;
To cultivate the wild licentious savage
With wisdom, discipline, and liberal arts;
The establishment of life: virtues like these
Make human nature shine, reform the soul,
And break our fierce barbarians into men.
(1.263–73)

Here Juba is the figure of creole civility: unconstrained by his physical location in the world – by his identity as an African – Juba is capable, as Cato tells him later in the play, of exhibiting a "Roman soul" (4.5.48). This dialogue was reprinted in countless editions of speech manuals and textbooks for young men and women in early America, including Noah Webster's A Grammatical Institute of the English Language: An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking (1790); Dana Joseph's A New Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking (1794); and Caleb Bingham's The American Preceptor (1796). The central didactic message of the dialogue that the textbooks aimed to convey concerns the nobility of rising above geographical and physical constraint to obtain transcendent forms of virtue and civility. Juba's words resonate with imperialist ideology, invoking, for instance, the invidious distinction between civility and barbarism that will, during a later stage of British and American imperialism, take familiar discursive shape as the doctrine of the "white man's burden." What is striking at this moment, however, is early American interest in identifying with Juba's cause – in finding Juba's Roman soul to be exemplary for the creole colonial struggling for position in the first British Empire and for the early American national seeking to claim legitimacy as the heir of English liberty and Roman republicanism.

Viewing Juba rather than Cato alone as exemplary is thus a significant interpretive move with respect to the politics of imperialism. As Julie Ellison has persuasively argued, Catonic discourse is embodied less in the singular figure of the republican hero than in a "cluster of narrative or dramatic relationships": "Cato's discourse comprises not a discrete set of beliefs or attitudes, but a recurring arrangement of positions defined by the interdependent presence and absence of gendered sentiment" (Ellison 1999: 73). The affective force of the masculine sentimental bond between Juba and Cato arises from the displacement of the father–son bond onto the ideal of the Republic as Cato weeps not for his son Marcus' death but for that of the Republic. Thus, while the heroic Cato dies, his republican ideals gain affective force in the figure of Juba: republicanism here consists in the combination of Cato's stoicism and Juba's sentiment. Ellison's observations concerning the plotline of republicanism are particularly salient in colonial North America, where the role of Juba had resonance for
those living on the periphery of empire. A 1744 volume of poetry published in Boston includes the anonymous verse, "Written in the back Leaf of Mr. Addison’s Cato: Given to a Lady," which idealizes Juba as a man who has "all great Cato’s soul dilat[ing] his breast." The poet describes Marcia and Juba as the "happy pair" that "alone shall prove / The finish'd transports of immortal love." Far from rewriting the play without the love scenes, early Americans looked to Juba’s sustained sentiment for both Cato and his daughter, Marcia, as evidence of their own position as the bearers of republican virtue — as those who might, like Marcia and Juba, embody the future life of republican ideals.

Additional colonial reference to Cato and the mobility of republicanism in the play is evident in the so-called liberty funerals — street theater that took place in colonial urban centers during the Stamp Act Crisis in which mock funerals for the figure of Liberty were publicly staged. As Shaffer indicates, these funerals often consciously deployed Catonic imagery: "In the pageant of the liberty funeral, Britain represents the advancing, offstage Caesar; Freedom stands in for Cato, the sacrificial symbol of patriotism" (Shaffer 2003: 14). And indeed, at least one newspaper described such a funeral with specific reference to Addison’s Cato. Cato is thus explicitly a figure for the death of liberty. Yet, however strong the analogy, the liberty funerals often included a significant twist on Addison’s Cato. Rather than remaining supine for interment, the figure of Freedom occasionally emerged from the coffin in the final stages of the street drama, and emerged specifically in the figure of a young woman. At the close of the dramatic parade, Freedom stood up from the coffin "in the form of a young woman, 'Liberty Revived,' prompting a festival celebration of Liberty breaking out of Old Freedom’s Catonic chrysalis" (Shaffer 2003: 15). The transformation of Freedom from the dead figure of Cato to the living figure of a young woman mirrors the displacement of liberty from Cato’s sword to Juba’s breast. As Cato states, "Caesar’s arms have thrown down all distinction" — that is, liberty is now free to migrate into the breast of a Numidian prince or a North American maiden; indeed, it may best be lodged in this dislocated and reborn figure rather than in the morbid image of Cato, who is unable to separate the Rome within from the dying Rome without.

American Empire

Jack Greene has argued that the first British Empire (prior to the American Revolution) has been significantly misrepresented by historians who "used the coercive and centralized model of imperial organization derived from late nineteenth and early twentieth-century empires" to understand (or misunderstand) earlier forms of Atlantic empire (Greene 2002: 268). On the later model, power flows from a metropolitan center and subjugates a colonial population. Yet this model does not apply to the earlier period, Greene argues, which might be better conceptualized in relation to the form of composite monarchy in which states negotiated relations
of amalgamation and incorporation. In the case of the British Empire of the eighteenth century, the principle relation of amalgamation was above all commercial: ties of commerce bound the periphery to the metropole. However, this commercial logic was understood to be related to liberty as well: rather than a coercive metropolitan force controlling the colony, voluntary relations of trade united colony and metropole. According to David Armitage, this notion of empire—a commercial empire uniting libertas and imperium—is one which not only was not forcibly imposed upon a colonial population by metropolitan muscle, but also originated in the periphery itself:

The concept of the British Empire as a congeries of territories linked by their commerce, united with common interests and centered politically upon London, was...originally provincial, and arose among unionists in Ireland, planters in the Caribbean and officials in the mainland colonies over the course of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. It was the product above all of a group of colonial administrators, merchants and politicians, for whom an appeal to a common interest with Britain was a necessary strategy to encourage equal treatment for their compatriots...Their strategic use of the British Empire as the conceptualization of these interests explains the widespread use among these provincials for the language of the common good, frequently cast...in the idiom of neo-Roman republicanism. (Armitage 2000: 181–2)

Armitage thus reverses the vector of power that is typically ascribed to colonial ideology of empire: rather than emanating from the metropole, the ideology of empire, on this account, arises in the periphery and is adopted in the metropole. In somewhat different terms, Kathleen Wilson has documented the popular understanding of commercial empire in England during the mid-eighteenth century, identifying a widespread vernacular adoption, in different locations within England and in the colonial periphery, of the language of commerce, liberty, and empire (Wilson 1994). It is important to stress the commercial nature of British empire as it developed in the eighteenth century, and the extent to which commerce was viewed as the terrain upon which imperium and libertas could be reconciled: the two merge, more specifically, in the model of commercial, maritime empire that the British increasingly come to embrace during this period. Moreover, it is significant that the commercial, maritime model of empire finesse the thorny problem of territorial occupation, and thus of military expansion (Armitage 2000). In its colonial incarnation, Cato has a similar effect of finessing the difficult issues of territorial occupation and military authority by transfiguring political authority into republican sentiment—into an idiom, as Ellison emphasizes, of emotion that does political work. The idiom of neo-Roman republicanism—of creole republicanism embodied in the figure of Juba, and in the marriage of Juba and Marcia—held enormous appeal for a colonial population who used this account of empire to assert their right to British liberty, and, eventually to British territory in North America as well. The mobility of republican sentiment in Cato bears resemblance to the doctrine of commercial, maritime empire insofar as it emphasizes voluntary relations of amalgamation (marriage, republican allegiance
among diverse peoples) as well as mobility and expansiveness: yet, significantly, the concept of republican empire at stake in *Cato* is neither commercial nor maritime, save by analogy. As such, Catonic discourse served, in colonial North America, to articulate claims of empire that eventually took on territorial dimensions. In American hands and hearts, as I suggest below, the affective bonds of republicanism were used to elaborate and sustain the colonials' claims to rightful ownership and rule of North American land.

In the periphery, then, *Cato* thus takes on a new life, emerging from Liberty's coffin in a new shape and form. Significantly, this born-again colonial *Cato* has marked imperial aspirations, or what we might call republican-imperial aims. In early American history and literary criticism, the figure of *Cato* is viewed as emblematic of patriotic heroism and resistance to the over-reaching aims of British empire. Yet, as I have indicated, the inflection that *Cato* and Catonic language assumes in the colonies concerns less the singular figure of *Cato* than that of Juba as well, addressing, in particular, the capacity for Roman-ness to migrate from the body of *Cato* to that of Juba — for republicanism to be reborn in a new body, and in a body that is located in the periphery of empire. As we have seen, George Washington imagines himself as Juba, and *Cato* is reborn as a young woman in liberty funerals. A similar transmig-ration of Catonic imagery across lines of race and gender occurs in the plays of Mercy Otis Warren: in this instance, however, Catonic discourse is more clearly linked to a doctrine of *dominium* or territorial empire. As such, Catonic language articulates both resistance to British empire and the assertion of a new, American territorial empire. Warren cites Addison's *Cato* in the epigraph of her play *The Adulterer* (1773), a play about the Boston Massacre that presents the colonists as republicans and the British as rapacious "tools" of tyranny. *Cato* speaks the passage she cites in the epigraph, as he awaits defeat at the hands of Caesar:

> Then let us rise my friends, and strive to fill
> This little interval, this pause of life,
> (While yet our liberty and fates are doubtful)
> With resolution, friendship, Roman bravery,
> And all the virtues we can crowd into it;
> That Heav'n may say it ought to be prolong'd.
> (2. 219–24; Warren 1918: 228)

Read in the context of British North America, the epigraph seems aimed at opening a new space — at not simply making use of an interval before death, but prolonging the interval such that it becomes the location of a new life. The play itself focuses on the heroic efforts of American patriots to remain true to Roman republican ideals despite the corruption of British ruling forces (especially Governor Thomas Hutchinson). Warren thus seems to open both a temporal and geographical space for Roman liberty in the colonies of North America which will outlive the death of liberty in the hands of the English.
In a second play, Warren similarly points to a new geography of republican liberty. The Group (1775) satirizes the essentially venal nature of the British who are occupying Boston before the revolution. Their task, as they connive together, is "To quench the generous spark, the innate love / Of glorious freedom planted in the breast / Of every man who boasts a Briton's name" (Warren 1995: 46). It is perhaps a familiar claim that the American revolutionary war was waged against Britain in the name of British liberties, yet Warren's language, in this instance, specifically invokes the mobility of republican sentiment that we have seen in Cato: glorious freedom is "planted in the breast" of all Britons, and most especially, as she indicates, in those Britons who occupy the periphery and are uncorrupted by its debased military culture. Further, the organic imagery of republican freedom "planted" in peripheral British breasts implies a relation between empire and territorial occupation that will emerge as central in the war between England and the colonies. In The Group, republican virtue seems to be more particularly, and naturally, lodged in the breast of colonial women who are able to figure the organic nature of republican sentiment, and to retain it, precisely as sentiment over and against a corrupt, military, masculine metropolitan authority.

One effect of the rebirth of liberty in Catonic terms that I have been tracing, then, is the association of liberty with empire (from the periphery) rather than simply with nationalism. Colonial Catonism concerns a mobile republican affect that remains associated with empire. In 1778 Jonathan Sewall penned an epilogue for a performance of Addison's Cato at the Bow Street Theater in Portsmouth, New Hampshire that points toward the association of an American Cato with an American territorial empire:

In Caesar's days had [Cato's] daring mind  
With Washington's serenity been joined  
The tyrant then had bled, great Cato liv'd,  
And Rome in all her majesty surviv'd.  
Rise then, my countrypeople! fight prepare,  
Gird on your swords, and fearless rush to war!  
For your grieved country nobly dare to die,  
And empty all your veins for Liberty.  
No pent-up Utica contracts your pow'rs,  
But the whole boundless continent is yours!  
(Sewall 1890: 4–6)

In Sewall's epilogue, Washington is represented as both Cato (the Stoic hero) and Juba (the sentimental Republican heir). Washington outlives Caesar because of his "serenity" or emotional capacity to believe in Rome without setting foot in Rome; as a result, Rome survives as a new empire, or a theory of empire that circulates from London to Jamaica, to New York, to Portsmouth, and back to London. If Addison's Cato narrates the death of republicanism at the hands of Roman imperialism, the transatlantic migration of the play made clear the possibility of a revised version of
empire within the seeds of Cato's demise: Cato is given new life in the colonial setting and so too is an ideology of empire. If Warren's epigraphic use of Cato gestures toward the opening of a territorial, North American empire, Sewall's epilogue extends this territory with a sweeping wave toward the "whole boundless continent." The final line of Sewall's epilogue thus resonates, prophetically, with the doctrine of manifest destiny; less anachronistically, it articulates a concept of an American (territorial) empire that Thomas Jefferson will describe as an "empire for liberty."

Jefferson's idealization of empire follows from American criticism of the corrupt nature of the British Empire. In other words, Jefferson did not see American nationalism as the antidote to British imperialism; rather, he saw the federative principle joining the colonies in the United States as the basis of an improved imperialism that embodied enlightened republican principles rather than the metropolitan despotism practiced by the British. As Peter Onuf argues, Jefferson believed that "By vindicating their independence, American Revolutionaries would vindicate the imperial idea, the great legacy of antiquity and the great hope of progressive and enlightened peoples everywhere" (Onuf 2000: 59). However, this vision of peacefully united individuals living together on consensual terms was already contradicted by the condition of race slavery in the United States. Thus, if Jefferson's empire is one that gives pride of place to the periphery rather than the metropole, it is also one in which the migration of republican principles across racial lines has been halted. Although he condemns slavery, Jefferson also cannot imagine the integration of African Americans into the republic, and thus suggests that former slaves be deported from the new American empire. Jefferson is not always specific with respect to where African Americans should be resettled, but he proposes at one point that the West Indies and specifically St. Domingo might be appropriate places "beyond the limits of the United States to form a receptacle for these people," although "Africa would offer a last & undoubted resort" (Jefferson 1905 X: 297). He explicitly rejects the idea of locating a colony in the western territories of the US because, as Onuf points out, he imagines that the American people (a racialized, white people) will ultimately take possession of much of the hemisphere (Onuf 2000: 180). Jefferson writes in 1801: "However our present interests may restrain us within our limits, it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws" (Jefferson 1905 X: 297). As Onuf concludes, "Jefferson could not 'contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture' – the presence of Africans – 'on that surface' " (Onuf 2000: 181). Jefferson's account of empire is thus one that deploys the logic that animates Juba in Addison's Cato but rejects it as well. Jefferson views Americans as the heirs of Roman republicanism and an idealized British empire, and the account of mobile republicanism is crucial to this doctrine. On the other hand, Jefferson views race as an insuperable boundary to the mobility of republicanism in a manner that Addison and perhaps Washington, as well, did not.
As David Shields has persuasively argued, much of the language or discourse of imperialism that predominated in eighteenth-century Anglo-American letters (particularly in poetry and drama) has been summarily ignored by critics and historians of American literature. The mythology that America was never an empire, Shields suggests, has been so powerful as to occlude a field of literary production and discourse in the eighteenth century that was centrally concerned with empire (Shields 1990). Thus, in the field of American literature, critics have tended to leap from John Cotton to Ralph Waldo Emerson, with perhaps a glance at Jonathan Edwards en route: eighteenth-century letters have been overlooked because they do not contribute as much as one might wish toward the development of a nationalist American narrative. A consideration of the transatlantic Cato, however, indicates the complex developments and transformations of the concept of empire in the eighteenth century, both in England and in colonial North America. Further, it seems worth emphasizing that the ideologies of imperialism that circulated during the first British Empire are not unrelated to the doctrines of US nationalism that emerge in the late eighteenth century: Jefferson’s nationalism, for instance, cannot be understood without reference to theories of empire. Moreover, the versions of empire that emerge in the language of Washington and Jefferson, as well as, more broadly, in eighteenth-century dramatic and poetic literature, suggest the shifting possibilities that are at stake in versions of empire, particularly with respect to the variety of bodies that comprised the imperial periphery in the eighteenth century. Dramatized in and through these bodies, empire took on a variety of meanings and histories that remain embedded in later American nationalist narratives.

References and Further Reading

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