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John Howard Lawson's

A Hindoo Love Drama (1914)

Leroy Robinson

In “John Howard Lawson at Williams College”1) I included a brief summary of A Hindoo Love Drama, a five-act verse play that Lawson completed just before his graduation in June 1914, when Lawson was not quite twenty years old. Lawson showed this play to Mary Kirkpatrick, a dramatists' agent, who in turn showed it to famous actors Cornelius Otis Skinner and E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe, all of whom Lawson had seen perform. Although A Hindoo Love Drama was never produced, it was Lawson's introduction to commercial theatre under the aegis of Mary Kirkpatrick, who became his mentor and oriented him toward show business.

A Hindoo Love Drama has never been published. The present article presents the first detailed summary of this early play of John Howard Lawson’s, and a note on how Lawson came to write it. Historians of American drama are thus provided with further information about John Howard Lawson's life and writing that has both historical and biographical importance.2)

A Biographical Note

In 1908, when he was fourteen years old, John Howard Lawson wrote a verse drama entitled Savitri, “A Mythical Romantic Drama of Mythological India, Founded on Edwin Arnold’s poem of Savitri, one of his Indian Idylls.” Lawson’s Savitri, a beautiful princess, inspires love and praises love eternal.

1) Bulletin of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Humanities, Vol. 20, No. 1 (September 1979).
2) A Hindoo Love Drama was made available to me on microfilm by the curator of the Lawson papers, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The note is based on John Howard Lawson's unfinished and unpublished autobiography, parts of which his daughter Susan Amanda Lawson has permitted me to read. Although quotation marks are almost always omitted, the language of this note closely follows Lawson's. A similar version of this note has been published in “John Howard Lawson's College Essays on 'John Webster' and 'Romantic Comedy' (c. 1913—1914)” in Keiei to keizai, March 1981.
When Death (Yama the Destroyer) comes to take her fate-doomed husband the Prince, Savitri is willing to die with him. Death, impressed, lets the Prince live. The main theme of Savitri is: "One good soul can break all decrees." The main emphasis of the play is on Savitri’s beauty, goodness and purity.

In 1910, when he was sixteen years old, John Howard Lawson entered Williams College as the youngest man in the Class of 1914. In his first two years at Williams he published in the Williams Literary Monthly several poems on love, about which he still had a romantic, idealistic view.3)

In his motivation for writing, the real and the ideal were mixed. He was practically concerned with making friends and gaining prestige. Yet he also wanted to fulfill his soul. His romantic view of love was not a figment of his imagination. It was a moral imperative. And he tried to apply it to the hard business of living.

He was still in the Cloud Cuckoo Land of his childhood, but there was a contradiction in his emotional life. His mind moved uneasily in many directions, but his adolescent heart was painfully concerned with sexual images. His dreams were full of vague sexual imagery—vague in its wording but compulsively real in the body’s needs. He had a burgeoning and irrepressible desire but only a painfully limited range of possibilities of expressing it.

He had overcome some if not all of his awkwardness with girls. He accepted a rigid distinction between good girls and bad girls. He knew several good girls. According to the rules, he stole occasional modest caresses, but these good girls were too coy, too careful, too armored in virtue to meet his romantic requirements.4)

In the summer of 1913, when Lawson was not quite nineteen years old, he joined his family for a summer vacation5) in a rented cottage on a hill near a Westchester County country village, Pleasantville—and his adoles-

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3) Much of the language that follows is John Howard Lawson’s, taken without the use of quotation marks from his as yet unpublished autobiography, parts of which his daughter Susan Amanda Lawson has permitted me to read.

4) In New York he watched prostitutes on Broadway, but he sweated with fear at the possibility of going to a room with one of them. That was so alien to him he could not even think of it.

5) He was working part-time that summer at Reuters and commuted to New York with his father, then Reuters’ manager.
cence came to an improbable climax.

At eighteen, Berenice Dewey, the girl next door, was a perfect incarnation of his dreams. She was a pastoral dream, impossibly lovely, impossibly intellectual. She read all the books Lawson read—philosophy, drama, poetry. She enjoyed intellectual conversation. She wrote poems. And she was fabulously beautiful. She was slim and black-haired, and her beauty was as ethereal as a fairy tale.

John Howard Lawson could not believe her when he first saw her, and the wonder grew when it turned out there was a perfect mating of interests and illusions. It all happened with the effortless grace of a dream. When he asked her to marry him, Berenice said of course as if there had never been any question about it. They became engaged. But Lawson was afraid to touch her.

When Lawson returned to college in the fall, he and Berenice wrote letters to each other every day, letters which began dearest or darling and then proceeded with poetic abstractions. This idyll lasted for a few months.

Then Lawson received a letter from Berenice saying she had made a mistake and that she really loved a boy she had known since childhood.

Lawson hurried to Pleasantville and pleaded with her hysterically. She convinced him that pleading was to no avail. He suggested that he speak with Berenice and the other boy. As soon as he saw Berenice and Billy together, Lawson realized they had a physical relationship. He was sick with jealousy.

Lawson and they talked soberly for many hours. The three of them were serious people and they were more honest than they had ever been.

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6) In “Liberal Arts” (Chapter IV of his unfinished autobiography) Lawson says she had read more than he had.

7) In “College” (Chapter III of his autobiography) Lawson says: “I do not exaggerate her beauty. It was less ethereal but no less stunning when she became one of the ornaments of the Ziegfield Follies a few years later.”

8) Their engagement angered both their families. Lawson’s father felt his son was throwing his life away. Berenice’s stepfather, an artist, thought they were young idiots and was bored by the solemn conferences that Lawson’s father insisted on holding.

9) Lawson adds: “Incredible as it may seem.”

10) Lawson’s friends at Williams were astonished by his engagement, for he was obviously the most bashful one among them. They looked at snapshots of Berenice and wondered how he had the courage to propose to her.
Leroy Robinson

Lawson felt that he had lost everything and that whatever he could salvage or cherish depended on the outcome of that conversation. He proposed that the three of them be friends for the rest of their lives. Under the circumstances this was an improbable romantic proposal, but to a large extent they made it true.

In a sense Lawson won a victory, for what came out of it was a relationship with Berenice which was far less fragile than the vows they had exchanged. Whether Berenice had ever thought of him as her friend until then, Lawson later doubted, but now she saw it and believed it with total sincerity.

During the rest of Lawson's final year at college, Berenice wrote to him everyday, even after she was married in the summer of 1914. Her letters were now more intimate than anything she had dared to write to Lawson when they were engaged. These constant letters from Berenice had a great deal more sense than her letters had had before. They stirred Lawson's emotions.

Many years later, Lawson thought it was easy to laugh at the sorrows of a mooncalf. But disappointment in love hastened the process of his growing up. The immediate effect of his disappointment was beneficial. He renounced love, which had tortured his mind, and he found his energies released for more independent thought. He says his mind was absorbing new ideas so fast that he could not digest them. He engaged in greater literary activities at Williams.

These activities at Williams meant a great deal to him, but they were not enough to cure his wounded spirit. The loss of love was also a romantic experience. It did dispose of his dreams but made them more subjective and unrealizable. He felt a creative need to express the passion that was denied physical expression.

Lawson wrote Berenice a letter describing Savitri, the verse play he had written in 1908, when he was fourteen years old. He decided to write another play on a related theme. He wrote it at night, sometimes continuing

11) Lawson says that it is a rare thing for a woman on her honeymoon to write daily letters to another man. Every evening as she and Billy sat by their oil lamp, Berenice wrote a comic account of the day's adventures to Lawson. Later, when he was in Europe, she continued to write to him regularly and when he returned to the U. S. A. their friendship lasted until her sudden death from pneumonia in 1933.

12) Lawson says: "When I was a child."
until he was interrupted by the call to morning chapel. He finished the play just before he graduated from Williams College in June, 1914.13)

Fifty years or more later, when he was in his seventies, Lawson looked back on A Hindoo Love Drama and saw that its imagery was conventional but that the drama had urgency, a kind of fever which was the product of his adolescent grief.

Lawson's heartache in 1913–1914 was more than the collapse of a juvenile delusion. He later suspected that, although its manifold consequences were difficult to analyze, it had a lasting effect on his character, creating an ambivalent attitude toward sex, a conflict between an idealization of sex-love and a cynicism expressed in brutal pursuit of sex adventure, a conflict which was part of a deeper, unacknowledged conflict between the world of his mind and the real world.

John Howard Lawson never forgot Berenice Dewey. He had many recollections of her—the glittering show girl in the Ziegfield Follies, the gay frantic woman she became, the gifted minor poet in her last years before her sudden death. But the clearest image he had was of Berenice as the girl in the summer fields.14)

A Hindoo Love Drama

A Hindoo Love Drama, "Narrating the Mythical Adventures of Nala and Damayanti, based in part upon Ancient Hindoo poems" (namely the Mahabharata as translated by Edwin Arnold), is a blank verse drama: prologue, five acts (eight scenes), and epilogue.

The Prologue is set in a palace in the heart of India "100 Years Ago":

Massive gilded pillars. Dim arches lighted by swinging censors which give

13) Using the "fictitious" name Rabindranath, Lawson submitted the Prologue of A Hindoo Love Drama in competition for the Williams College Poetry Prize of 1914. He did not complete the whole play in time to meet the deadline of this contest, so submitted only the Prologue as an "independent entity" having no "intimate connection" with the story and whose purpose is "atmospheric" rather than explanatory.

14) Lawson says that Berenice knew that he kept that image of her. She wanted to keep that part of herself, too, but it was lost in the tangle of lies and compromises that became her life. But it enabled her to give Lawson a confidence which she could not give to anyone else.
vague flickering light. Arched door with rich silken draperies flowing fold upon fold in a sea of color. Dim recess from which peer eyes of grotesque idol, the outline of its form vague. Before idol, tripod on which burns a smoking fire.

Black men with great spears guard the entrances. Gentlemen of the court lie and loll and squat all about the room. Veiled women, lying listlessly on rich cushions, whisper together. Before the idol, a priest with a long white beard, wearing a loose flowing robe, stands, his hands pressed together solemnly as he smiles with vacant eyes.

On a raised dais there is a golden throne inlaid with gems. All about the throne hang bowls of slowly dripping perfume. On the throne sits the rajah, middle-aged, face weak and dull. His chin rests upon one clenched fist. His other hand plays nervously with the many chains around his neck. Upon the steps of the throne sits a young Minstrel, deep in thought, lyre upon knee, dress gay and clownish, face solemn, eager eyed. Upon string instruments of strange Oriental shape, two musicians play a low thrumming.

The Rajah rises impatiently: "There is nought of balm/In such mournful music." The musicians cease playing. The Rajah wants the "bliss of some aetherial sound/Or laughter-bubbling flood of fragrant song" to ease him of his heart-ache and his pain, not this "passionless and listless minstrelsy." The musicians cower, then, touched on their shoulders by the black men's spears, they exit in a hurry.

The Priest turns slowly from the idol, speaking slowly, solemnly, enigmatically: "There is no music that can still the brain and lull the throbbing spirit, except one--the heart that beats in calm and harmony." Silence.

The Rajah wonders what harmonious heart is, but his courtiers only mumble they know not, and the veiled ladies give a ripple of laughter. The Rajah, disgusted, touches the Minstrel with his jewelled foot: "And you whom men call the silent one?"

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15) In the 1920 draft of Roger Bloomer Janet lies listlessly on rich cushions.
16) The Minstrel is the prototype of the eager-eyed young poet Roland Rood in Atmosphere (1914) who becomes Roland Ross in Souls (1915) who becomes Roger Bloomer in Roger Bloomer (1923).
17) To this the Minstrel says "Bah!" and the Rajah asks: "You mock me?" The mockery theme appears frequently in Lawson's plays, the mocker usually cynical and pessimistic.
Speak, minstrel, you who know the lore
Of sacred books and nature's dimmest things.
Tell me why I grow weary, why my heart
Is sore and not at ease. These forty days\(^{18}\)
I've sought some means to cure me of my ill...
All entertainment that my realm affords;
Minstrels and mummeries and dancing arts
Have failed to give my ailing spirit balm--
A hundred daily sacrifices made
To ease the curse that eats my secret soul
Have been unanswered by the angry Gods--
What is it ails me, foolish minstrel, tell?

...men say that you are wise
In knowing human souls\(^{19}\) -- I am not sick
In flesh, but by a weariness and pain
That eats my spirit -- I have heard men say
There is a special Hell where every man
Walks wearily, his hand upon his breast,
His heart a chalice of unending flame\(^{20}\)
That burns aloft among the starless roofs
Of that inferno -- such a woe have I,
Incurably--

I, whose command
Is law for fifty thousand, who might pluck
The bleeding hearts from all their human breasts
To pleasure my desire and command--
And yet my heart's ill is unremedied.
Bah ! I have maidens bathed in myrrh and musk;
Jewels brightly gemmed upon their dusky limbs
Shine through their garments swooning with perfume
Like stars that glitter in a rainbow wreath--
All thrilling and benumbing of the sense--
Alack, their eyes are sweet with mystery--

\(^{18}\) Lawson uses the number 40 in most of his plays.
\(^{19}\) In most of his pre-1923 plays Lawson has characters who consider themselves wise in knowing human souls.
\(^{20}\) The image of the burning heart frequently appears in Lawson's plays
And yet my heart burns with a sick desire
Insatiate—

The Minstrel, who earlier advised the Rajah to see a doctor for what ails him, now muses, then speaks bold and clear:

Alack, my Lord, philosophers have said
That joy is fickle, fleeting as the wind;
And think you I can make a recipe
For happiness? It is a changing thing
Like passing shadows on the waving grass.
I cannot tell of it in subtle words—
It is a thing of mystery and grace.
Men know of it whose souls can understand
Whose spirits are alive to feel the thrill
Of great imaginings—the heart to love—.
You have the narrow thought and base desire
Of petty things—You, Rajah, you who yearn
For happiness and seek to feel the thrill
Of great transfiguring—You cannot know
The yearning and the glory of great souls,
The simple heart and wisdom-visioned eyes
Of them that pierce the veiling firmament
To mingle with the brotherhood of stars;
Beyond the farthest gate of windswept moons
There stands a bloody angel with his wings
Outstretched all scarlet—and his eyes are fire—
The angel of man's passion and desire.
And they that know the brush of his great wings
Touch light and burningly upon their brows—
Theirs is the Hell and bliss of hidden things,
The agony and fever of great love;
Immortal glory that transcends the pain
Of mortal passions—as one tempest-tossed
Whose soul transcends the torture of the storm
And feels a calm amidst the wrench and wrack
Of wind and wave—They who have felt his wings
Upon their brows know laughter, lust and languor
Transfigured in a twilit mist and balm
To something more immortal...
I touched a maiden's garment as she passed,  
And all the earth swooned to me, and the stars  
Sang Hallelujah with a thunderous sound—  
I trembled and I knelt as one that prays  
In passion at some temple's shrine of shrines  
And all the earth breathed dimly in the dusk—  
Ah, Rajah, I could tell you tales of love  
That burn through all the mists of old romance  
As burn from lovers' kisses in the dark,  
Flame pure as moons and fiercer than the sun  
In its first golden radiancy of rising,  
To thrill your soulless lips with new desire—  
You who have kissed the lips of dancing girls,  
And bound your body with their strangling hair,  
And thought that love was thus— or happiness  
Lay in their soulless sighs...  

The Minstrel retreats to the arch, where he stands outlined against the rainbow curtain, then he laughs and disappears. The Rajah stands on the lowest step of his throne and leans for support against an aged courtier. Tense silence is suddenly broken by a ghastly shriek of laughter from the veiled ladies. The Rajah feels a stinging in the air "like mists that rise from dank untrodden forests" and he feels a strangling in his throat.²¹ He dashes an incense censor to the floor. Then,  

Six dancing girls do a strange and mysterious measure growing wilder and wilder until they throw themselves like a bouquet of flowers about the Rajah's feet. He leans over one of the dancers, caresses her face, and then pushes them all away, mumbling: "You have kissed the lips of dancing girls/And thought that love was thus." Sent away, the dancers drift across the stage like petals in the wind and disappear.²²  

The Rajah orders the return of the Minstrel, who TELLS the meaning of love.  

Love is a flame, a flower, a fleeting form,  

²¹) Images of strangulation frequently appear in Lawson's plays.  
²²) In his childhood play Savitri Lawson had included many more than six similar dancers. In The International (1928) similar dancers reappear.
A swoon of memory or a flash of yearning,
Light as the spume upon a storm-swept sea,
Frail as the woven tissue of the dawn—
A thing inscrutable, a mystery
Threaded into the web and woof of Fate,
Like silken lines upon a tapestry. 23)

The Minstrel then thrums upon his lyre and sings:

There is a song so radiant
Of rich and rare perfume
That all the lips that breathe of it
  Become like petalled roses
  And every word discloses
The flower's thrilling bloom.

There is a song so beautiful
Within the mortal heart
That all who know its mystery
  Grow white with wistful weeping
  As one who sobs in sleeping
Or sighs in prayer apart.

There is a song so glorious
That all the stars above
Stop in their course to chant of it—
  Ringing across the spaces
  And mists of moonless places
Triumphally of love.

(Later the Minstrel says that love is all his trade—there is no song beside.)

The Priest announces the hour of the sacrifice. The Rajah, impatient, says the sacrifice wearies him. Let those that serve him make the sacrifice without him. In the distance there is the low rumbling of drums

23) In his poem “History” (Williams Literary Monthly, January 1912) Lawson refers to deeds “registered by dim decrees of Fate.” In his poem “Invictus” (Williams Literary Monthly, February 1912) Lawson says he cannot be conquered by chance or death or doom, and despises Fate that threatens or defies. The concept of Fate often appears in Lawson’s pre-World War I plays.
and the sound of clashing cymbals.24)

All the members of the court except one depart in a solemn procession led by the Priest, who in each hand carries a torch lighted at the tripod in front of the idol. The marchers in this processional keep time to the rattling of drums and cymbals which has grown louder and which continues throughout the remainder of the Prologue.25) The veiled women are escorted out by the black guards with long spears.

The Rajah wonders if it is lack of love that makes him weary of himself and full of craving for he knows not what.26) "And is it lack of love that makes me pale/Like one that lies upon a bed of pain/And sighs for death?"27) The stage grows dimmer. As the Minstrel speaks, the stage grows darker, lighted only by torches around the Rajah's golden throne.

I could tell tales to make you whole again,28)
To fill you with the pulse of ancient love
Songs of an old-time passion and delight
Of love that struggled in the net of fate
Like some bright-winged bird that lies enmeshed,
Of love that soared above the clouds of Time
Into the ether of eternal life...

There is a story that the sages know29)
Of far Nishadha's Prince in olden time
His name...was Nala, called the Fair,
Because his limbs were good, and his eyes
Were brave—-His love was Damayanti, called
The Faithful One, because her love was strong

24) Almost every Lawson play includes music heard offstage (or on).
25) This processional is prototypical of aspects of Processional (1925), particularly in its 1920 and 1921 drafts.
26) Many later Lawson characters crave for they know not what.
27) Lawson's mother, who died when he was seven, suffered from breast cancer, and, bed-ridden for years, must have lain upon a bed of pain, and perhaps she sighed for death.
28) The theme of wholeness or self-integration is one of the dominant themes in most of Lawson's work.
29) In his poem "Her Letter" (Williams Literary Monthly, 1911) Lawson refers to himself as a "doting sage, whose heart is dull and cold."
And flamed within her heart unquenchably.
The tale is one to make the heart beat warm
With pity and with passion, and the mind
Read some dim language in the books of Fate,
Unknowing its true purport, but oppressed
With hidden yearnings and immortal fears—
A tale of love so deep and undefiled
That men who know of it grow wise with tears
Dreaming it through their unforgetting years...

As the Minstrel has been reciting, his voice has grown softer, his
thrumming becoming fainter. Gradually the stage becomes quite black as
the torches fade. When the Minstrel speaks his last words in the Pro-
logue, there is utter darkness, the only sound his indistinguishable voice
and the low thrumming of his lyre.

*

Scene 1 of Act I of A Hindoo Love Drama, “The Lovers”, is set in
the garden of the palace at Nishadha in spring.

A high wall with an immense Oriental gateway partly open, showing deep
woods. A trellised arbor banked thickly with heaps of gorgeous flowers.
The stage, covered with smooth, rich greensward, is scattered with luxuriant
flowers; here and there, large flowering bushes. The buttress of the palace
projects out about ten feet. A stucco wall is painted grotesquely with birds
and dragons. In a pagoda-like balcony dangles a bell. A huge arched door
is hung with purple trappings. Branches of an immense tree overshadow
part of the stage, leaving the arbor with its shining foliage particularly
bright in the sunlight.

30) In his poem “Invention” (Williams Literary Monthly, November 1911) Lawson
wishes to do the dim desires of God, who makes “Our quenchless hopes and
yearnings burn like sacrificial fires”.

31) Most of the elements of this setting reappear in various early plays by
Lawson. The Oriental gateway appears in a fantasy scene in The Mad Moon
(1916, 1917). The boudoir in The Spice of Life (1919) contains many bouquets
of gorgeous flowers. The grotesque birds come alive in Roger Bloomer’s
nightmare in Roger Bloomer (1923). In A New England Fantasy (1924) Tommy
Weed and Priscilla Emerson are pursued by a grotesque dragon.
Under the immense tree lies the Minstrel, now clad in fantastic scarlet, thrumming on his lyre a continuation of the low music accompanying the closing of the Prologue.

The King’s Ancient Body Servant Taralika enters, dressed sombrely in dark brown with grey ornamentation, holds up a silver wand, and, his aged voice a little cracked, announces the King. The Minstrel plays a triumphant crash upon his strings.

The King does not enter. From the arbor comes a loud snoring.

Taralika in his aged falsetto says: “The whisper of / Some haunting spirit come to work us ill.” The snorer is Evil Magician Viratsena, “of the hunchback and eagle eyes” and “of the bearded face and spider hands”. Three somber demons guard Viratsena while he sleeps “And haunt them that disturb him evermore / With prickly heats and direful dreams and ills / Of flesh and spirit.” He has power to curse “most potently with weird and magic rites.”

Viratsena enters. Taralika says the King and Queen will come soon: “As kindred vines upon a common stalk / Their love is mighty and immutable.” Viratsena sneers, as Taralka goes on in an awestruck, trembling voice:

Men say the Gods descended from the skies,
The Four Immortals, Yama, Indra, Agni
And dread Varuma, ruler of the waters,
Descended...to bless the marriage
...And grace the nuptial feast with gifts...
And promise of eternal happiness
Because they loved with such transcending love.
Men say the Gods did grant them that their passion
Should last beyond the bound of mortal fervor
Unchanged through an eternity of summers.

Two black men pull back the purple curtains. King Nala enters.

32) In Lawson’s color scheme for Souls (1914, 1915) scarlet represents passion.
33) In many Lawson plays there comes a moment when a crash of music is played, not necessarily triumphantly.
34) King Nala is the Minstrel of the Prologue. In Servant-Master-Lover (1915, 1916) one actor is asked to play four roles, including the three in the title. (Nala is the reverse of Alan, the name of Lawson’s first child.)
So does his brother Pushkara, who is about the same age, handsome, dark, with keen shifty eyes and a nervous manner. Pushkara says Viratsena is famous for his prophecies and "intercourse with sprites and shadow shapes." Nala calls this strange and wonderful, but, when the magician leaves, Nala calls him a strange soul with an evil-looking eye, whom he would not trust.

Queen Damayanti appears on the balcony.

Damayanti is very beautiful, young, lithe, womanly. She wears a gold and jewelled crown showing amidst the tangle of her dusky hair. She wears a veil. She carries a jewelled sceptre with which she strikes the bell, which tinkles with a silver sound mingling in with the cadence of her laughter. When she sees King Nala, Queen Damayanti lowers her eyes.

Damayanti climbs over the low railing of the balcony in order to jump down into Nala's arms, but frightened she dares not. Nala encourages her and jumps up to kiss her foot.

Nala says: "You are as beautiful/As some fair Goddess caught in mid-descent/Twixt heaven and earth.../Foam-risen rapture of a drifting dream..." Damayanti laughs: "How can you see so much/Of sweet divinity in.../A frightened damsel...?" But she leaps. Safely.

On the ground, Damayanti picks a white flower out of a bed of roses and kisses it and gives it to Nala: "It is the symbol of my heart of hearts/Forever thine." Nala says a flower droops and withers in an hour but love can know no changing or decay. In sequence, both say: "...fragrance in the wind, breath of poppies and of sleepy flowers...scented music of your hair...garden glimmers with the blue of May...the fairy brightness of your face...summer humming in the air, whispering of spirits as they pass...liquid

35) She says she has just met an ancient courtier who stared and sighed as if it (she) were a ghost or fairy thing, and fell upon his knees in haste as one who feels a sword-thrust in the back, and wept most solemnly upon her shoes, as if possessed. (Here Lawson may be imaging his feeling upon the loss of Berenice Dewey.)

36) In Servant-Master-Lover teen-ager Cinders has the Servant kiss her foot. In The Mad Moon Tommy Weed kisses the foot of Priscilla Emerson.

37) In A New England Fantasy Tommy Weed calls Priscilla Emerson a Goddess. In Nirvana Bill Weed laments that the days of goddesses are past.
laughter of your voice... honied-sweetness of the flowered grass... My eyes can only see your dream-lit eyes.” Nala says: “Your name is like a rainbow in the spray/ Of foamlipped waterfalls that shine across/The mist-begotten fabric of my dreams.”

Then the handsome young King and the beautiful young Queen exit.

As they leave, unknowingly observed by Viratsena, the stage grows darker. At evidence of an approaching storm, the darkness increases. Viratsena strokes his beard and malignantly says he hates Nala “By all the forked tongue of leaping flames/ That shine in Hell and burn consumingly.”

Pushkara enters, distraught: “You of the searing eyes and flaming tongue/ Are you a demon, prophet, bearded gnome?” Viratsena says he is the echo of Pushkara’s evil heart of Pushkara’s secret and infamous desire. Pushkara does not like Viratsena’s vile enigmas of love and lust: “Speak plainly or I’ll kill you where you stand.” He draws a crooked sword which flashes strangely in the semi-darkness. Viratsena laughs harshly: “Your sword will strike upon me bloodlessly/ I am immune to strokes of biting steel.” Then with sudden grandeur Viratsena towers aloft, a great figure.

Pushkara’s brain is on fire so he cannot think. He acts as one in nightmare agonies acts all unknowingly. He is wracked with nameless things. Viratsenasneers: “It is the natural throbbing of your lust; your carnal passion and desire...—-a bestial madness.” Viratsena promises to give the Queen’s body to Pushkara, who grasps the magician with sudden passion: “Desire of Damayanti burns my heart.../ Gain me fulfillment of

38) In Roger Bloomer Roger calls Louise Chamberlain his rainbow girl.
39) Pushkara adds that Viratsena pries into the hearts of men and speaks unwhispered and undreamed of things to thrill and thrall their souls. In Atmosphere and Souls psychologist Howells pries into the souls of men and women.
40) Viratsena here describes himself as a spirit of incarnate ill who haunts the dwellings of those he hates in a disguise of dull deformity.
41) In Orwell's Burmese Days (1934) Flory imagines the young lady he loves physically involved with another man and his mind fills with images of lust. It may have been so with Lawson when he realized that Berenice Dewey was physically involved with another man.
my cursed will/And I will sell my soul to Hellish depths... There is a flash of lightning. Viratsena gives a wild laugh:

The storm is breaking. All my devils ride
Upon the thunder and the crashing wind
To work the purpose of my secret hate
And blasted will—I'll cast my sudden spell
Of Magic on the spirit of the King,
Control his soul so that a sudden pall
Shall fall upon his mind like some disease
Or creeping terror of insanity.

A second flash of lightning reveals Pushkara standing above the hunched figure of the magician against the purple curtains. A third flash of lightning reveals Nala and Damayanti in the garden hastening toward the palace, clinging to one another.

* 

Scene 2 of Act I of A Hindoo Love Drama, “The Riddle”, takes place a few days later in the King’s alcove within the palace.

The alcove, back center, covers one half the width of the stage and is raised above the level of the stage. It is ten feet deep. It is circular. Its floors are covered with gaily colored rugs and cushions. Its walls are amber color which shines dimly, the alcove comparatively dark in Oriental dimness. The central part of the alcove is covered by a scarlet canopy which projects from the wall and is supported by two poles. In contrast, the front of the stage is brightly lighted by lamps of curious texture. The floor here is also covered with rugs. There is a large curtained archway.

Under the scarlet canopy, Nala and Pushkara, lying among the colorful cushions, are hardly visible in the dim light. They have been playing dice for two days but are still deeply engrossed in the game.

Nala's face, drawn and pale and wild-looking, is studied with malignance by Pushkara. Viratsena, his eyes set and bright, makes strange motions: “The King plays with demon-driven dice/Obeying the mandate of my secret spell.” Nala throws: Six. Pushkara throws: Seven. Nala laughs hoarsely: “Take

42) In Success Story Sol Ginsburg sells his soul to the Devil.
the jewels." Pushkara gives a triumphant cry. Pushkara throws: Four. Nala throws: Three. Nala says: "This is madness. My brain is bursting with an inner heat. My limbs are faint. My pulse throbs most wildly." (Damayanti enters and urges Nala to cease gambling. She sees his eyes heavy-lidded with unrest, his brow fevered: "Your face is as the mask molded upon the face of one deceased/A thing of sallow wax.") Then on a single throw Nala gambles his kingdom and his crown. Nala throws: Ten. Pushkara throws: Eleven. Nala says: "Brother." Pushkara says: "King!"

When Nala loses Damayanti to Pushkara he falls limply and lies prostrate, as does Damayanti. When Nala awakens, Damayanti says it was a dream, the phantom of a nightmare agony. Nala, his brain clouded, only vaguely remembers some mad orgy with unruly dice. Then with sudden realization he shrieks aloud.

Pushkara says the dicing was fair. He claims Damayanti. At Nala's reluctance, Pushkara reminds him no king has ever broken his oath. With sudden passion, Damayanti speaks to Pushkara:

You speak of honor...
Of faith, you who would snatch a sneaking gain
From some wild passion-drunken game...
Played without consciousness or thought or aim,
Played in a madness...
Played darkly in a fog of thoughtlessness...
I ask you to withdraw this foul disgrace
Upon the repute
Of your ancestral monarchs.

Damayanti says Pushkara will have possession of her without her love; he will have control of an unwilling living thing who will claw and scratch like some unruly beast against the enforced mandates of his will.

Pushkara, refusing to withdraw his claim, says Damayanti has accused him of vile heartlessness. He shall be merciful: "I shall delay to exercise my right to hold you forfeit to me as my slave..." Within forty days and nights, Nala must answer a strange and subtle riddle, which Pushkara asks Viratsena to supply, adding that the riddle be unanswerable.

Silence. From the darkness gleams a ball of light. A mysterious voice speaks: "What is that light that darkness cannot quell/More pure than moons and fiercer than the sun/In its first golden radiancy of rising.
What is that light so all-surpassing? Tell!" The voice ceases speaking. The ball of light fades.

Nala commands that a steed be fetched:

And I shall find this thing for which I quest, though it elude my path
Like those strange mists upon Egyptian sands
That hold forth promise of fair fruitful lands
And fountains flowing fast and colored marts
Of busy cities...

Damayanti promises to wait for Nala, who will always be her heart of hearts. Nala and Damayanti kiss farewell.

**

In Act II of *A Hindoo Love Drama*, "The Flight", the time is twelve days later, the place the harem of the palace:

The room is circular, its ceiling in the form of a dome. Hung from the center of the dome is a single great jewelled globular lamp from which curl clouds of rose-colored smoke. A small fountain plays continually. Around the fountain are carved wooden chairs. The walls are entirely of curtains trailing irregularly from the roof. The predominating tone of these curtains is dark red unrelieved by any note of brighter color. These hangings are parted, showing a long and gradually diminishing corridor which seems to run back indefinitely.

The stage is carpeted. A massive lounge, with a great gold back rising eight or ten feet as a sort of screen, gives the appearance of a large throne, ascended by a flight of three steps. Upon the steps of the lounge lies Sakoontala, her young dark hair loose and tangled and thick. By the fountain sit three maidens (Vasumati, Gautami, Elad), their hair braided and enclosed in tight caps of silk, folds of which hang loosely down their backs.

As one of these maidens plays a stringed instrument, all four sing demurely:

43) The structure of *Standards* is based on quest, as is that of *Roger Bloomer.*
44) When Roger Bloomer speaks of going to Baghdad, this may be the image in his mind.
A maiden played upon a lute,
    Sweetly, Sweetly,
Supple fingers, fair to see,
White as carven ivory,
Crept across the golden strings
Sweetly as a bird that sings--
Whir and wash of crystal springs,
    Sweetly, sweetly.

A Prince exiled from far Kluxan
    Sadly, sadly,
Listened to her harmony.
Young and woe-begone was he
Full of tragedy and sighs
    Sadly--till her laughing eyes
Greeted him with sweet surmise
    Sweetly, sweetly.

As a flame that sinks and dies
    Slowly, slowly,
So the music of her lute
Flamed and flickered, slowly mute
Fingers faltering--

Sakoontala interrupts. Enough of this most inordinately long, most mel-
ancholy song. Sobs! Sobs! Weary of this weeping mood of sickly sen-
timent, she prefers a gayer tune, a trifle ribald, rollicking.

Has she no heart? Doesn't she weep to see their Queen harassed by such
distress and tanglements most pitifully? Sakoontala suggests it is the lot of
all mankind, for sages long ago said marriage is unhappiness.45) Elad recalls
how happily Damayanti used to live. "Now every day is passed in fear of
death, in dread of base betrayal." Sakoontala's mood becomes fierce. She
loves Damayanti more than the other maidens can know. Her heart burns
for her, sitting with dry eyes and pale, proud face, sweet with a majesty
of silent grief. Amidst their shallow sympathy, Sakoontala's love is deeper; it
is enshrined within her.

45) In "Savitri" a scoffer named Cridelo early says much the same thing
but later comes around to the idea that marriage is good. Many of the mar-
riages in Lawson's plays are unhappy ones.
Sakoontala says the new king means ill. There is a strange unnatu-
ralness brooding about his eyes like reptile's eyes or eyes of beasts that
gleam malignantly, a brutishness. Gautami cries: "What a tangled web/
Life is! A thing of clamorous confusion."

Damayanti appears. She staggers.

Damayanti is distraught, her face wildly flushed, her hair dishevelled.
"Yes, yes, the eyes that bulge." She faints. The maidens throw water
upon her. She explains. 'Tis her vagrant nerves made tense by waiting
and unhappiness. She is much dismayed, distressed as one that treads the
darkness of a wilderness and sees amidst the swaying underbrush the eyes
of beasts glare out, dull eyes that bulge.

Damayanti strengthens herself. Amongst the roses in the garden, she was
frightened by Pushkara. He seemed to lose himself. A sudden passion
took him. Then his eyes bulged, dull and wicked, with a lurking glint of
lust. Then he seized her, grasped her with a sudden crr, and mumbled
incoherently of love and truth, a jumbled madness. She fought free of his
arms. Soon he sobbed and fell on his knees, still mumbling madness.\footnote{46)

Damayanti sends a man to look for Nala.\footnote{47)}

The king's coming is announced. Sakoontala advises Damayanti to
face him. If she flies, what will be gained? "...with bold looks and
subtleness/Cajole him.../The wanton minds of men can be controlled/
By wit and poise, however treacherous/The thought that lurks within their
evil brains." Damayanti hopes that Pushkara, his mind inflamed with
drink, will loose his secret tongue.

As Pushkara enters, three maidens cover their faces with their veils
and leave, but Sakoontala remains to bind Damayanti's hair with soft silks
and scatter it with scents of violets.

Damayanti flippantly tells Pushkara she scents her hair with most sweet
unguents gathered from the herbs that grow upon some far Egyptian stream
--the Nile\footnote{48})--and she sprinkles it with down distilled from honey-flavored

\footnote{46) A similar scene appears in Roger Bloomer when financier Rumsey tries
to grasp file clerk Louise Chamberlain.}

\footnote{47) He is Rabutsa, a tall Negro eunuch, most faithful.}

\footnote{48) In Servant-Master-Lover the teenaged heroine is surnamed Niles. In The
International Alise is said to be born at the crossing of two rivers; perhaps
the Blue and White Niles.}
flowers. Pushkara says Damayanti's hair is a "dew of love and Paradise/
A breath of blessing-laden loveliness/Burdened with magic and wanton madness,/A thing inflaming, warm, unspeakable." Damayanti has to push Pushkara back a little.

Damayanti sits on the throne. Pushkara looks up to her. His eyes behold such loveliness they grow dim and his brain reels. Damayanti says maybe the room is too hot. Pushkara tells her that her lips are rubby-like, her eyes brighter than diamond lustres, her fairy face a tissue (?) of fair jewels. Damayanti recites (like a school child): "An ancient book/The Book of Righteous Councils/Which sages read to me when I was small/Says true hearts are better than fair faces." Pushkara, who also knows this book, says: "Your mind is wise and beautiful/Your heart full of sweet deliciousness/Your body wondrously fair/A thing of ultimate perfection."

"Perfection?" asks Damayanti, who, stretching out her arm, bares it to the shoulder: "What of this great scar upon my arm?" When she was but a babe she was bitten by a tiger. The ugly wound has never altogether healed. For Pushkara, this wound makes the texture of Damayanti's heaven-tinted skin more beautiful: "You move within an aureole of grace/Where even blemishes become divine."

Pushkara says Damayanti's eyes fill him with madness, the touch of her hand sends his veins astir with running flame. He wants her to speak the word love to him. Damayanti says it is too soon to change from hate to love. She needs forty days. (Pushkara: "You mock me") She adds, temptingly, that Nala most likely will not find the answer to the riddle. Pushkara says the riddle is in his eyes. He thirsts for her lips. He offers to tell the answer for a kiss. The answer is: "Love, flaming bright, unconquered, death-despising." Damayanti touches her lips to Pushkara's, then tries to draw away, but he holds her closer, so she tears herself away. She says his eyes are tigerish. He says she will be whipped and sent upon her way naked upon the road. She shrieks. The maidens rush in to help her to elude the king.

49) In The International Alise is also scarred, but on the hands.
50) See Shelley, Prometheus Unbound, Act II, Scene 3, Line 39: "heaven-defying minds." In The Pure in Heart Lawson uses the phrase "death-despising" to describe the love of two young lovers who die together.
A soldier describes Damayanti's escape from the palace: in the crystal room, she slid down a rope of silk knotted from torn and tattered draperies, rocked in the wind, battering her tender flesh against the crooked wall. Then she flew into the forest.

Pushkara collapses beside the fountain.

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In Act III of *A Hindoo Love Drama*, "The Brothers," the time is one week later, the place the Grand Hall of the palace.

Great pillars of high-vaulted arches. The throne, a massive ivory thing, has back and arms carved with minutely wrought carvings. Behind the throne, a great arch opens to sunlight, which illuminates the space in front of the throne. Glimpses of gardens. Over the throne, a gold and purple canopy is decorated with a device of lions and pale trees. Between the pillars hang purple draperies.

There is a throng of courtiers and soldiers in many-colored garments. Pushkara sits on the throne. On a smaller chair on the royal dais sits Viratsena.

Nala's voice is heard: "A dagger for the slave that first stands in my way." Soldiers gather around Pushkara. Nala bursts in, dagger drawn, and, after sending one soldier reeling, stands in the center.

Pushkara says: "Brother." Nala thinks that word were best unsaid. Why does he come with such a wild questioning aspect? Nala says he has sought in vain the answer to the riddle—-to pluck from tiger's jaws or snatch from flames or scale the skies to seek among the tempest-tattered stars. He jumps on Pushkara and clutches him by the throat.

Two or three soldiers pin Nala's arms to his side, and Pushkara orders him bound and tortured, but Viratsena rejects that idea. Nala curses: "May all the spirits of the air destroy you." Pushkara orders soldiers to pour oil on Nala and burn him, but Viratsena rejects that idea too. Nala is taken out, but he warns of a reckoning to come.

Viratsena says Pushkara acts too hastily. Let Nala go, placated, assured they speak truth, and he will go forth with his ardor unallayed seeking for the light of his life, Damayanti, then Pushkara can get his vengeance and the woman too, then Pushkara can make mock of Nala by embracing Damayanti before his very eyes. This idea excites Pushkara, who imagines holding
Damayanti close, his lips against hers, winding his fingers through her raven hair, possessing her while Nala strains at his bonds, tortured, destroyed, confounded utterly.

Pushkara soliloquizes:

She on whose love my heart was madly set
The flower and the dream of my desire
She has eluded me
Escaped my wooing and my sweet embrace
Left me this empty shell of power here
...I cannot wait for her through loveless days
The burning of my lust brooks no delay
To wait is agony...

/Viratsena's/magic wand
Can fetch her, borne upon a drifting cloud
Let her suddenly be revealed to me
In that same guise of frightened loveliness
...atremble...face all flushed
Her bosom heaving and her eyes aflash
Her tempting lips red, warm and maddening
A vision of bewilderment and fear
And helplessness.

Viratsena says Pushkara asks too much: "Instant possession...is far beyond my power..." He promises Pushkara shall possess Damayanti: "Tis writ upon the Book of Destiny/In lettering of fire and of brass." Pushkara again soliloquizes:

The thought of her in absence burns my brain
And brands my very heart as red hot steel
Corrodes the flesh of victims on the wrack.
The dream of her is woven in my life
So deeply and so strangely part of me
Sometimes it would seem the words I speak
Seem mingled with the cadence of her laugh,
The ripple of her silver-sounding voice,
As clamoring of many-noted chimes
Sounding together intermingly.

Viratsena tells Pushkara to send courtiers abroad throughout the land
to seek Damayanti, chain her to a chariot wheel and lead her back to pleasure Pushkara awhile. Viratsena calls Nala and Damayanti two loving birds caught in a single net. Nala is only a wanderer. Even if he answers the riddle he can be put off by some subtle pretext, for Pushkara has the power.

Pushkara has Nala brought before him and freed. The brothers eye each other moodily. Nala leaves. In the distance there is the mournful sound of a drum.

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In the first scene of Act IV of A Hindoo Love Drama, "The Wilderness," the setting is a forest glade.

Wild and tropical underbrush. Strangely twisted and distorted trees, with the dim mist of intermingling branches. The brightness of luxuriant flowers. A hillock is formed by a slanting, sloping stage. Down the slope, between bushes and flowers, flows a brooklet of water. Overhanging the brooklet, a peculiarly large tree sheds shade over a large part of the stage.

Damayanti enters.

She is in ragged clothes, torn and bloody. Her feet are bare. Her hair, dishevelled, hangs far down her back. She goes silently to the brook and, dipping her hands in the water, bathes her face and feet—"How blessed and cool the running water/A breath of snowy heights"—then sighs and sinks limply upon the greensward. The blinding hotness of the day has parched her skin and made her eyelids ache. "Would I could die. Life is a hopeless thing."

There is the noise of breaking bushes. Running down the slope, enters Sunanda, an enchanting figure in brown, with elfin grace and the wild shyness of a dryad. Her long brown hair streams behind her. On seeing Damayanti she gives a cry of astonishment, then a soft whistle like that of a bird.

Damayanti asks her: "Are you a spirit or a fay/Or mockery of my

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51) In The Mad Moon Tommy Weed describes himself as only a wanderer.
52) A similar slanting, sloping stage is used in The International.
53) In The Mad Moon Tommy Weed, as Pan, calls Priscilla Emerson a dryad.
heat-aching sight/Or something evil to delude me?” Damayanti touches Sunanda's flesh and finds it warm. She has the aspect of a fay, her eyes are as dewy clear as forest pools, she is a vision of the winged wind, alive amidst these woodland solitudes, where Damayanti thought there would be naught but creeping things and slime and rotting wood and loneliness, a place of parching days and starless nights.

Sunanda, childishly, says:

Do you not love these jungle places?
They fill me with an awe strange delight,
These tangled trees, this realm of mystery.
You find but ugliness
And slime and death where wonder is alive
...where lilies show white-breasted loveliness
Asleep in naked beauty on the bank
Of shade-begotten streams.
/Have you never seen/
A flower grow and bloom in the full
Unfolding mystery on mystery
As some enchanted castle might enfold
Soft swinging gates until the inner shrine
The secret sanctuary of the heart
The place of solemn magic incense-veiled
Lay suddenly and blindnessingly revealed?

Sunanda has sat days upon a mossy place, moveless in sweet contentment, and watched

A flower spring and grow.
Lay awhile and sighed and wept
Unspeakably oppressed and very weak
/As one who suffers/
...sweet troubled dreads
Wakens blessed yet terrified and unrefreshed
...I have lived since I was born among these woodlands.
I often make pretense that I am Queen
...The priests have told me that the trees and pools

54) In Atmosphere and Souls characters reveal the secret sanctuaries of their hearts in shrine-like settings.
Are Gods and Goddesses whereto they pray,
The guardian spirits of the solitude.
I prefer to think them servile things
Bowing before my mortal dignity:
“All Hail Sunanda”.

Sunanda tells the weak and travel-worn stranger to come with her. Her father is a holy man skilled in medicine, who will help Damayanti, whose limbs are stiff. 
Sunanda says her life is very strange:

I live with strangers, bearded yellow men
Who eat the berries of the jungle trees...
A stranger race from distant northern lands.
Blood-drinking tigers are the gods they serve.
The tiger is the king of all their gods.
They worship him with human sacrifice.
The sun they worship as the tiger’s father.
And all our women praise the elephant
As being the early parent of our race.

Yes, Sunanda believes all this. Her father is now Sun Priest of this tribe of savages well-versed concerning worship, creed and faith. Many years ago they found this place after much strife and bloodiness in conflict with the Eastern villages. They fled and settled in these sylvan haunts far from the hot hostility of men. Her father was a captured Brahmin Prince. The savages made him brother of their Prince “By right of blood-transfusion.” Her mother was a fair slave woman of the tribe who died, but her father has body-guarded her from harm. “They have a custom here of sacrifice/Of new-born babies fresh from their mothers’ arms/As living victims to the Tiger God”. She would have been sacrificed at the age of two months but her father saved her. He trained her then in the knowledge of the Gods, in ways of religion and the need of prayer, because he loved her mother.

Sunanda says her father will also protect Damayanti.

55) In A New England Fantasy and Nirvana Priscilla has stiff legs.
56) In his autobiography Lawson mentions that when his mother died when he was seven his father tried to be both father and mother to him and gave him the training that his mother would have wanted him to have. Lawson says that his father worshipped his mother.
The second scene of Act IV of *A Hindoo Love Drama*, "The Goddess", takes place in the camp of a nomad tribe in the jungle of west Bengal.

The tent of the chieftain is barbaric in gaudy colors, loosely constructed of draperies and dyed skins. There is a great bamboo triangle, under which is a rudely constructed stone altar. From the altar, smoke. There is a pile of fruits and berries and twigs, some fallen on the ground.

There is a temple made of rough logs placed upon a stone foundation. In the wall of the temple are niches cut in the logs. In these niches are wooden statues colored grotesquely, giving the appearance of barbaric absurdity characteristic of the lesser Indian idols. Over the door of the temple is the great wooden figure of a tiger, its mouth covered with blood.

Between the tent and the temple, the back recedes into a twilit tangle of jungle.

A boy enters with a basket of fruits, some of which he lays upon the altar. The priest Kanwa enters, and the boy steps back in fear, falls on his face, rises, and backs out. At the altar the priest selects some grapes and tastes them with epicurean refinement and smacks his lips. He kneels before the altar, rises, and stretches his hands to it. He pronounces an invocation in a thunderously impressive voice.57)

Great sun-spirit, light-revealing
Savior of thy servant people,
Healer, helper, Hell-destroyer.
Warrior stars to form thy armies
Panoplies in clouds and rainbows
Served in state by lunar maidens
From the mountains of the moon.
Our ancestors blessed you always
Those unborn shall worship always
Hear them, heal them, help them always.
Great light-giver, lead me always...

57) In *Nirvana* the Reverend Gulick sermonizes with a booming voice.
An echoic medley of mumbles and shrieks comes from all quarters. The noise subsides. Silence. Mumbling—the noise of a crowd approaching. A tall Yellow Man clad in skins, announces the appearance of a stranger maiden. Vatayana, the king of the tribe, enters—a gigantically fierce figure with shaggy black hair—followed by ten or fifteen tattered savages, and Damayanti, fainting and frightened, supported by Sunanda. Damayanti faints and is given water.

Sunanda explains her meeting with Damayanti and childishly requests permission to possess her as her slave. King Vatayana considers Damayanti a worthless runaway and wants to sacrifice her to their Tiger God for Heaven’s favor, prosperity. Sunanda tells Damayanti not to fear, for as Sunanda’s slave she will have nothing to do but rub her limbs with poppy petals till they reek of sleep-sufficing perfume.

Damayanti gestures in despair. As she raises her arms, an old yellow man points to the scar and cries: “The tiger mark!” With great trepidation Vatayana calls this a sign of Godliness. People crowd around Damayanti and kneel before her. She is puzzled: “This mimicry of worship is most strange.”

Damayanti explains the scar. Shortly after her birth, a tiger in her father’s park attacked and maimed her. She was saved, but a woman defending her died. Vatayana tremblingly calls her Goddess and asks her to receive their worship—a human sacrifice, a sweet-smelling babe whose blood is virgin scarlet. Damayanti tries to withdraw, saying she forbids such sacrifice, and faints. Vatayana lets the priests dance around her and perform their spells. He says Damayanti is communing with their ancestors in a trance. He calls for dancing and sacred music. Male dancers perform a holy dance with weird motions.

58) Lawson uses similar echoic effects in most of his early plays.
59) In The Mad Moon and in the early drafts of Roger Bloomer and Processional Lawson introduces “foreign women”.
60) This theme reappears as late as 1928 in Lawson’s Death in an Office, produced as Success Story in 1932.
61) In Souls poet Roland Ross recites one of his lyrics about Lethe-inducing poppies.
62) Two years later, in 1916, Lawson saw Stravinsky’s The Rites of Spring, whose music and dancing in a scene of blood sacrifice inspired him.
Scene 1 of Act V of *A Hindoo Love Drama*, "The Consummation", takes place two weeks later in the camp of the nomad tribe.

It is dark. On the altar there is a bright fire. At the entrance of the chief’s tent is hung a lighted torch. From the door of the temple comes a flicker of subdued light. Among the jungle trees torches move to and fro. A dim female figure leans against the altar. At her feet lies another woman. On the ground before the chief’s tent lies a man. There is the noise of voices and the clash of weapons in confused conflict.

Damayanti (the dim figure leaning against the altar) says it must be almost dawn. Sunanda (lying at her feet) says it was a horrible night. The man lying in front of the tent groans for water. Damayanti says the man is dying and wants to give him water, but steps back in horror when she sees the man’s head crushed and bloody.

The noise of fighting comes nearer and becomes louder, mingled with the groans and shouts of men. Sunanda refers to blood lust and battle fever. The battle surges and wanes, rises and falls again, like the waxing and the waning of the sea—peace and then agony. A soldier rushing in stumbles over the fallen man and staggers across the stage and falls beneath the altar. Breathless, he reports the tribe was driven back by only a few men who used a herd of elephants (lumbering, bellowing beasts) to trample them. Despite the tiger fury in their arms, the tribesmen could not fight. The enemy is coming and will burn their camp. May the Gods defend them! Are those flames yonder or the flush of dawn? In the light Damayanti’s arm can be seen bleeding.

The wounded soldier by the altar points to Damayanti. She, whom they call the Goddess, bleeds. Immortals cannot bleed. If she were Godly she would save them now, in true divinity to bless them, but she looks helpless and humanly. They are being punished for trusting in such deception. Sunanda says Damayanti bravely stood all night and ministered to dying men. The soldier insists: "Filth of some foreign town, she brings disgrace upon our tribe."63)

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63) In *The Mad Moon* and in the first draft of *Processional* foreign women, Spanish and French, both with promiscuous pasts, are said to bring disgrace upon small American towns.
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Damayanti prays: “Great God of Lovers, glowing one, Spirit of Nala, living or in death, upheld in mystery and sorrowing, protect me now.” Vatayana throws her on the ground. She is mortal, a thing of tears and sighs, not born of foam and lightning and cloud-shadows like the Gods. Harboring her has brought war upon them. The people murmur.

Some captured prisoners of the tribe whisper to each other. One prisoner says that Damayanti’s presence is a curse on men, a curse worked by Pushkara, who swore grim retribution. Let them bring Damayanti back to Pushkara, then great blessing will follow.

An Aged Man says the prisoners scheme to gain their own release. Does Vatayana want vengeance? “Take it instantly... Appease the Gods/ For that dishonor you have done them/ By rendering worship to a child of dirt--/ Or else vengeance rankles in grim discontent/ And silent sullenness./" Burn her.”

Vatayana strikes the prisoner: “We do not care for curses of your Gods. She shall be made a tiger sacrifice.” Her blood will be diluted with the blood of the prisoners. Dress her in bridal garments, the tiger God may take her as his new-won spouse. Damayanti says: “So ends it, then, my search for love. Flames. Death. Torture. It is the heritage of love. Parting and Agony.” There is much noise, the confused cries of savages making haste, preparing the altar for sacrifice.

Nala enters, his clothing torn and tattered, followed by a single attendant of gigantic build, both carrying immense naked swords. The gigantic man reminds Nala that it is the 33rd day of his quest. Nala approaches the old priest and speaks monotonously as if repeating something learned by rote: he utters the secret words of the dim riddle in a loud, booming voice.

Damayanti stands forth, clad in gorgeous festal garments of purest white: “Love, flaming bright, unconquered, death-despising.” Nala: “It is the echo of my spirit’s voice.” He puts his arms around her, lifts up his sword, and moves them toward the back. There is a crackling among the branches, then all is silent. The barbarians look at each other sheepishly.

64) In Roger Bloomer’s nightmare fantasy Louise Chamberlain wears similar garments.
Scene 2 of Act V of *A Hindoo Love Drama*, "The Conflict," takes place seven days later in the Grand Hall of the palace at Nishadha. The curtain rises on a scene of great stateliness and ceremony.

The red of a brilliant sunset is seen through the arch. A courtier is silhouetted against the sunlight. Pushkara sits on the throne, harem women languishing at his feet. The noise of a great crowd of people. Guards surround Pushkara, grouping in a circle.

Pushkara says all is not well and in a flash of sudden anger jumps down and plunges his sword into Viratsena's breast. A flash of fire. Viratsena disappears. Pushkara gazes thunderstruck at his bloodless sword. He gasps weakly: "The Spell!"

People enter, then Nala, then Damayanti borne aloft upon a seat of gold. Nala wants to answer the riddle. Pushkara says Nala is trespassing with irreverence. Pushkara orders Nala taken away. The guards leap forward. Nala struggles. All on stage join in the conflict, "a mass of struggling inarticulate humanity."

Nala, one arm protectively around Damayanti, the other poised in the air with his sword, stands on the steps of the throne, towering over his followers. The noise of conflict continues. The issue of the fight is in doubt. The light slowly fades. Gradually there is utter darkness. The noise of strife wanes and dies and melts into the resonant sound of a man's voice, as the stage gradually lightens into the Epilogue.

The Epilogue takes place in the setting of the Prologue. The voice of the Minstrel sounds loud and clear. His first words are spoken in darkness. Then light makes objects slowly visible as torches flicker here and there. On his throne, the Rajah is listening to the Minstrel, who thrums his lyre and says:

And so strife raged awhile betwixt these two
That had been brothers, severed by their love
Of her, the lily-pure one, Damayanti. (65)
Through all the palace halls was battle rife

(65) In *Parlor Magic* two brothers are almost separated because of their love of one woman.
Clatter of swords and gush of scarlet blood
Bright flash of steel and shrieks of wounded men
Struggle and storm and fear--but finally
Pushkara flying was stricken in the back
By some chance arrow--so he fell and lay
Face downward in a clotted pool of blood.

The Minstrel says that Nala was crowned Rajah. (66) And blessing lay upon Nala and Damayanti through their days

Because they loved so mightily and so well
Through tribulation and through sore distress
Flame of white fire in their secret hearts
More pure than moons and fiercer than the sun
In its first golden radiancy of rising
Such love was theirs--unconquered, death-despising.

And through the long revolving years Nala grew wiser and firmer

Transfigured by a strength beyond his own
Exalted to a Godliness and grace
Above mortality of common things
Beyond the bliss that other men have known
Because he knew the pressing of her hand
Because he knew the glory of her eyes
Because his heart had throbbed against her own.

In a sudden change of tone, the Minstrel bows to the Rajah: "So may learning make you wise/And may God make you understand." And the curtain falls on A Hindoo Love Drama.

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66) In another version of this speech Pushkara is said to be bested in face to face combat with Nala.
67) It is possible that the word Rajah enters into the name Roger of Roger Bloomer.