

On April 14, 1713

CATO

A

TRAGEDY.

As it is Acted at the

THEATRE-ROYAL in *Drury-Lane*,

BY

HIS MAJESTY'S SERVANTS.

By Mr. *ADDISON*.

MEN

Cato.

Lucius, *a senator*.

Sempronius, *a senator*.

Juba, *prince of Numidia*.

Syphax, *general of the Numidians*.

Portius, *son of Cato*.

Marcus, *son of Cato*.

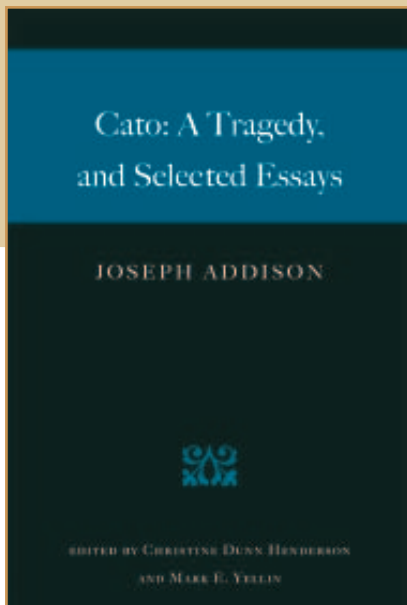
Decius, *ambassador from Caesar*.

Mutineers, Guards, &c.

WOMEN

Marcia, *daughter to Cato*.

Lucia, *daughter to Lucius*.



“The finest tragedy ever written in the English language.”

—Voltaire

The tragic play that inspired generations toward a pursuit of liberty is not widely read today—a tragedy in and of itself.

Successful from its premier, *Cato: A Tragedy* is the account of the final hours of Marcus Porcius Cato (95–46 B.C.), a Stoic whose deeds, rhetoric, and resistance to the tyranny of Caesar made him an icon of republicanism, virtue, and liberty. Cato opposed Caesar’s tyrannical assertion of power and took arms against him. As Caesar’s forces closed in, Cato chose to take his own life, preferring death by his own hand to a life of submission to Caesar—a choice that became a subject of reflection for thinkers such as Plutarch, Dante, and Montaigne.

Joseph Addison’s theatrical depiction of Cato in 1713 enlivened the glorious image of a citizen ready to sacrifice everything in the cause of freedom, and it influenced friends of liberty on both sides of the Atlantic. The Revolutionary generation found in Cato an archetypal character, a preeminent example of republican citizenship and of the character necessary for a free people, as evidenced by these historical examples:

- One of George Washington’s favorite plays, *Cato* was performed for the troops at Valley Forge by order of Washington himself.
- Captain Nathan Hale’s last words before hanging were “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country,” a close paraphrase of Addison’s “What pity is it that we can die but once to serve our country!”
- Historian Forrest McDonald says that “Patrick Henry adapted his famous ‘Give me liberty or give me death’ speech directly from lines in *Cato*.”

Both play and author relegated to relative obscurity—until now

Despite its enormous popularity and influence in the eighteenth century, Addison’s play has fallen into neglect in recent years. There has never been a scholarly edition of *Cato: A Tragedy*—it has been available only in a stage edition or in anthologies.

Addison himself was perhaps best known as an essayist. With his boyhood friend Richard Steele, Addison co-founded the successful and widely read periodical *The Spectator*. Through publications like *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The Tatler*, and *The Freeholder*, Addison sought to educate England’s developing middle class of merchants and tradespeople in the habits, morals, and manners he believed necessary for the preservation of limited government and a free, commercial society.

Now you can study Addison's play and his essays in one scholarly volume.

This new edition from Liberty Fund finally gives Joseph Addison his due as a political thinker whose ideas were important to the understanding of liberty held by our Founders.

Editors Christine Dunn Henderson and Mark E. Yellin have produced a scholarly edition of *Cato*, and they complement the play with selected Addison essays which simply, precisely, and lucidly develop many of its themes, such as liberty, self-government, justice, opposition to tyranny, honor, patriotism, and integrity. The play can also serve as a companion piece to William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

Announcing the first scholarly edition of the play *Cato: A Tragedy*

46 CATO, A TRAGEDY

Juba
What say'st thou, Syphax?
By heavens, thou turn'st me all into attention.

Syphax
Marcia might still be yours.

Juba
As how, dear Syphax? 30

Syphax
Juba commands Numidia's hardy troops,
Mounted on steeds, unused to the restraint
Of curbs or bits, and fleetier than the winds:
Give but the word, we'll snatch this damsel up
And bear her off.

Juba
Can such dishonest thoughts 35
Rise up in man! wouldst thou seduce my youth
To do an act that would destroy my honour?

Syphax
Gods! I could tear my beard to hear you talk!
Honour's a fine imaginary notion,
That draws in raw and unexperienced men
To real mischiefs, while they hunt a shadow.²⁰ 40

Juba
Wouldst thou degrade thy prince into a ruffian?

Syphax
The boasted ancestors of these great men,
Whose virtues you admire, were all such ruffians.

²⁰. See *Guardian* 161 (pp. 194–97) and Shakespeare's *Henry III, Part I*, VI.129–40.

ACT II 47

This dread of nations, this almighty Rome, 45
That comprehends in her wide empire's bounds
All under heaven, was founded on a rape.
Your Scipios, Caesars, Pompeys, and your Catos,
(These gods on earth,) are all the spurious brood
Of violated maids, of ravished Sabines.²¹ 50

Juba
Syphax, I fear that hoary²² head of thine
Abounds too much in our Numidian wiles.

Syphax
Indeed, my prince, you want to know the world;
You have not read mankind; your youth admires
The throws and swellings of a Roman soul, 55
Cato's bold flights, the extravagance of virtue.

Juba
If knowledge of the world makes man perfidious,
May Juba ever live in ignorance?

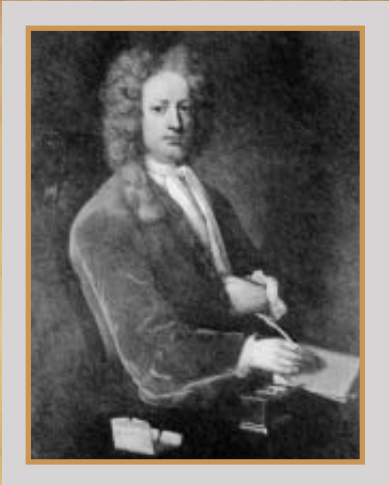
Syphax
Go, go, you're young.

Juba
Gods! must I tamely bear
This arrogance unanswered! thou'rt a traitor, 60
A false old traitor.

Syphax
I have gone too far. [*Aside.*]

²¹. According to legend, after Romulus founded Rome, he and his men needed wives, so they invited neighboring Sabine women to a feast and kidnapped them. This led to war with the Sabines. As part of the peace agreement, Titus Tatius, the Sabine leader, was invited to share power with Romulus, who later killed him (see Livy, *History*, I.9).

²². Grey or white with age.



JOSEPH ADDISON WAS BORN IN 1672 IN MILSTON, WILTSHIRE, ENGLAND. HE WAS EDUCATED IN THE CLASSICS AT OXFORD AND BECAME WIDELY KNOWN AS AN ESSAYIST, PLAYWRIGHT, POET, AND STATESMAN. SAMUEL JOHNSON PRAISED ADDISON'S WORK AS AN ESSAYIST, WRITING, "WHOEVER WISHES TO ATTAIN AN ENGLISH STYLE, FAMILIAR BUT NOT COARSE, AND ELEGANT BUT NOT OSTENTATIOUS, MUST GIVE HIS DAYS AND NIGHTS TO THE STUDY OF ADDISON."

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Meet the Editors

Christine Dunn Henderson received her Ph.D. from Boston College and has taught at Merrimack College and Marshall University. She edited *Seers and Judges*, a volume of essays on politics and American literature. She is a Fellow at Liberty Fund.

Mark E. Yellin, also a Fellow at Liberty Fund, received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University, has taught at North Carolina State University, and has edited Douglass Adair's *Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy*.

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