

# Cato: A Tragedy

AND SELECTED ESSAYS



*Joseph Addison*

# Cato: A Tragedy

AND SELECTED ESSAYS

Joseph Addison

—

*Edited by Christine Dunn Henderson*

*and Mark E. Yellin*

*With a Foreword by Forrest McDonald*



LIBERTY FUND

*Indianapolis*

This book is published by Liberty Fund, Inc., a foundation established to encourage study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals.



The cuneiform inscription that serves as our logo and as the design motif for our endpapers is the earliest-known written appearance of the word “freedom” (*amagi*), or “liberty.” It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash.

© 2004 by Liberty Fund  
All rights reserved

Frontispiece, by Sir Godfrey Kneller, Bt (1646–1723), is from the National Portrait Gallery, London.

The engraving on page 2 is reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

“The Life and Character of Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis” is reproduced by courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Printed in the United States of America

2 4 6 8 10 C 9 7 5 3 I  
4 6 8 10 12 P II 9 7 5 3

Liberty of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Addison, Joseph, 1672–1719.

Cato: a tragedy, and selected essays / edited by Christine Dunn Henderson and Mark E. Yellin; with a foreword by Forrest McDonald.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-86597-442-X (alk. paper)—ISBN 0-86597-443-8 (pb.: alk. paper)

I. Cato, Marcus Porcius, 95–46 B.C.—Drama. 2. Rome—History—53–44 B.C.—Drama. 3. Suicide victims—Drama. 4. Politicians—Drama.

I. Henderson, Christine Dunn, 1967– II. Yellin, Mark E. III. Title.

PR3304.C5 2004

824'.5—dc22

2003065886

Liberty Fund, Inc.  
8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250-1684

# Contents

<i>Foreword by Forrest McDonald</i>	vii
<i>Introduction by Christine Dunn Henderson and Mark E. Yellin</i>	xi
<i>Editors' Note</i>	xxv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxvii
Part I: Cato, A Tragedy	i
Part II: Selected Essays	101
Tatler 161 (April 20, 1710)	103
Tatler 162 (April 22, 1710)	108
Whig Examiner 5 (October 12, 1710)	112
Spectator 55 (May 3, 1711)	118
Spectator 125 (July 24, 1711)	123
Spectator 169 (September 13, 1711)	127
Spectator 215 (November 6, 1711)	131
Spectator 219 (November 10, 1711)	135
Spectator 231 (November 24, 1711)	139
Spectator 237 (December 1, 1711)	144
Spectator 243 (December 8, 1711)	148
Spectator 255 (December 22, 1711)	152
Spectator 256 (December 24, 1711)	156
Spectator 257 (December 25, 1711)	162
Spectator 287 (January 29, 1712)	167
Spectator 293 (February 5, 1712)	173

Spectator 349 (April 10, 1712)	178
Spectator 446 (August 1, 1712)	182
Spectator 557 (June 21, 1714)	186
Guardian 99 (July 4, 1713)	190
Guardian 161 (September 15, 1713)	194
Freeholder 1 (December 23, 1715)	198
Freeholder 2 (December 26, 1715)	202
Freeholder 5 (January 6, 1716)	207
Freeholder 10 (January 23, 1716)	214
Freeholder 12 (January 30, 1716)	220
Freeholder 13 (February 3, 1716)	226
Freeholder 16 (February 13, 1716)	230
Freeholder 29 (March 30, 1716)	235
Freeholder 34 (April 16, 1716)	239
Freeholder 39 (May 4, 1716)	243
Freeholder 51 (June 15, 1716)	249
<i>Appendix: Lewis Theobald's</i> The Life and Character of Marcus Portius Cato Uticensis (1713)	253
<i>Index</i>	273

## Foreword

THE FORMATION of the American republic was such a farfetched undertaking that, when it was done, many could regard it as a heaven-sent miracle. The winning of independence on the field of battle was monumental enough, but that was just half the task. The other half was to establish a regime that would provide a maximum of liberty consistent with the public safety. Compounding the problem was that Americans were unreservedly committed to a republican form of government, and no extant models of that kind of government were available.

The more-educated and better-informed citizens looked in every conceivable place for guidance, and they found but little. There was the Bible — which almost everyone read — but its only political advice was that monarchy was bad, and Americans had already reached that conclusion. Political theorists abounded, but the dicta of Locke and Montesquieu were not applicable to American conditions, nor were those of Plato and Aristotle. The Scotsmen David Hume and Adam Smith were relevant but far from adequate. By default, that left the history of the ancient Roman republic, and all educated Americans were familiar with that history, but its essence was a tragic tale of decline into tyranny.

Ordinary people knew about ancient Rome, too, not from books but from an enormously popular play by Joseph Addison, *Cato*. Though the seventeenth-century Puritanical prejudice against stage productions still lingered in parts of New England, eighteenth-century Americans elsewhere were avid playgoers, and *Cato* was by far their favorite play. It was first performed and published in London in 1713. It was soon republished in Glasgow, Dublin, Belfast, Edinburgh, Göttingen, Paris, and Rome; at least eight editions were published in the British-American colonies by the end of the cen-

tury. The play was also performed all over the colonies, in countless productions from the 1730s until after the American Revolution.

That most of the founding generation read it or saw it or both is unquestionable, and that it stuck in their memories is abundantly evident. Benjamin Franklin, as a young and aspiring writer, committed long passages from it to memory and then attempted to write them out, in hopes that Addison's writing style would rub off on him. Mercy Otis Warren based her own play, "The Sack of Rome," directly on *Cato*. Patrick Henry adapted his famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech directly from lines in *Cato*. Nathan Hale's celebrated last words, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country," echoes a remark by Cato, "What a pity it is that we can die but once to save our country."

*Cato* was the favorite play of George Washington, who saw it many times and quoted or paraphrased lines from it in his correspondence over the course of four decades. The first known occasion when he cited it was when he identified himself with one of its characters in a letter to Mrs. George William Fairfax in 1758. In 1775 he wrote to Benedict Arnold to commend his heroism in the ill-fated Quebec expedition: "It is not in the power of any man to command success; but you have done more — you have deserved it." In Act 1, scene 2, Cato's son says, "'Tis not in mortals to command success. But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it." One of Cato's most quoted sentiments was "'When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway,' the post of honor is a private station." Washington expressed that thought on numerous occasions, including the letter he wrote to Alexander Hamilton in 1796 opening the correspondence through which the two wrote the renowned Farewell Address.

The impact of the play upon Washington and others is illustrated by the fact that, during the dreadful winter at Valley Forge, he had it performed for his troops to inspire them with determination, despite a congressional resolution condemning stage performances as contrary to republican principles. Moreover, in 1783, when his officers encamped at Newburgh, New York, threatened to mutiny — as Cato's troops had done in the play — Washington appeared before them and quite self-consciously shamed them into abandoning the enterprise essentially by rehashing Cato's speech.

At first blush, *Cato* would scarcely seem to offer much consolation to Americans in their efforts to establish a durable republic. The story recounts Cato's noble but vain efforts to save the remnants of the Roman republican Senate from the usurping arms of the all-conquering Caesar, "who owes his greatness to his country's ruin." In the end, Cato commits suicide, and the republic perishes as well.

Yet one of the subplots of the drama offered a ray of hope, at least for the more sanguine of the founders, for it provided a means of escaping a dilemma. Both classical and modern theorists of republics held that their actuating principle was public virtue — virtue in the sense of selfless, full-time, manly devotion to the public weal. Many Americans had been governed by such public spiritedness during the war and made great sacrifices for the cause of independence, but in normal times people were too individualistic and too avaricious to sustain that level of commitment. Besides, Americans believed in original sin, which in eighteenth-century terms meant that they believed men were driven by their "passions" — drives for self-gratification — and that the "ruling" passions of most public men were ambition and avarice, the love of power and the love of money.

One of the characters in *Cato* provides a way around that human frailty. Juba, a young Numidian in Cato's camp (who incidentally was the character with whom Washington identified in his early letter), is concerned that he may have incurred Cato's displeasure by being preoccupied with his love of Cato's daughter at such an inappropriate time. He says, "I'd rather have that man approve my deeds, than worlds for my admirers." Just before, he had recited what were famous lines about honor, "the noble mind's distinguishing perfection / that aids and strengthens virtue where it meets her, / and imitates her actions, where she is not." Honor in these verses is a substitute for virtue: a preoccupation with earning "the esteem of wise and good men." Addison thought the point so important that he wrote an essay in *The Guardian* explaining and elaborating it. Genuine virtue, he declared, was exceedingly rare, but all could aspire to honor. To put it differently, Addison, through Juba, advises people to follow the opposite course from what Shakespeare's Polonius recommends in *Hamlet*. Polonius says to his son Laertes, "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day,

thou canst not then be false to any man.” Shakespeare put the words in the mouth of a prattling fool, and Addison tells us that they are indeed foolish words. Rather, he says, be true to the wise and the virtuous, and then thou cannot be false to thyself.

In his public life, Washington followed Addison’s advice, and so did Hamilton, and so did a host of other founders; and in the doing they overcame their private shortcomings and behaved virtuously enough in public to establish a regime of liberty that would endure.

FORREST McDONALD

## Introduction

JOSEPH ADDISON'S *Cato, A Tragedy* captured the imaginations of eighteenth-century theatergoers throughout Great Britain, North America, and much of Europe. From its original performance on April 14, 1713, the play was a resounding success. Embraced by an audience whose opinions spanned the political spectrum, *Cato* was a popular and critical triumph that had tremendous appeal both as a performance and as a published text. In the second half of 1713, the play was staged more than twenty times in London alone, and before the century's end, twenty-six English editions of Addison's tragedy had appeared. *Cato*'s popularity continued to spread throughout the eighteenth century, and the play appeared in performance and published translation in countries such as Italy, France, Germany, Holland, and Poland. With its themes of liberty, virtue, and resistance to tyranny, Addison's *Cato* inserted itself into eighteenth-century consciousness, providing many of the words and images that informed republican sensibilities during this period in Britain, Europe, and the British colonies in North America.

Despite the play's enormous influence, Addison's reputation was not exclusively as a playwright; indeed, he was best known to contemporaries and succeeding generations as the master of the essay form. Samuel Johnson, while not completely without criticism of *Cato*, singled out Addison's writings as a model of expression. In his *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson declared, "Whoever wishes to attain an English style familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison."<sup>1</sup> A

1. Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*. In *Johnson: Prose and Poetry*, selected by Mona Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), 88r.

creative force behind coffeehouse periodicals such as the *Spectator*, the *Guardian*, and the *Freeholder*, Addison wrote more than 400 essays on matters such as taste, manners, literature, theater, politics, and the observation of daily life in London. With readerships of several thousand, these periodicals were powerful tools in shaping public mores, sensibilities, and discourse in the eighteenth century. In his work as an essayist, Addison further explored and developed many of the themes that were raised in his *Cato*. This volume presents Addison's *Cato* with a brief selection of some of his essays that further develop themes announced in the play.

### *The Life of Joseph Addison*

Addison was born in 1672 in the Wiltshire hamlet of Milston, where his father was the church rector. In 1687, he matriculated at Oxford, studying first at Queen's College before being elected to Magdalen College. At Oxford, he acquired a reputation for poetry and criticism; his studies focused on the classics, with an orientation more to Latin than to Greek. The early acts of *Cato* can be traced to Addison's days as a student. After leaving Oxford in 1699, Addison traveled for four years through France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and Holland. Upon his return to Britain, he soon came to the attention of key Whig political figures such as John, Lord Somers, and was commissioned to write *The Campaign*, a long poem commemorating Marlborough's 1704 victory over the French at Blenheim. Addison quickly rose through the Whig political ranks, holding government positions including the position of Commissioner of Appeals (recently vacated by John Locke), Under-Secretary of State, Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Chief Secretary for Ireland, and eventually Member of Parliament for Malmesbury.

During this period, Addison began his career as a popular essayist, ultimately becoming the acknowledged master of what was then a relatively new form. He contributed to the *Whig Examiner* (1710), which responded to the Tory paper *Examiner*, and worked with his boyhood friend Richard Steele on the *Tatler* (1709–11). From there, Addison and Steele joined forces on the paper that truly cemented

Addison's reputation, the *Spectator* (1711–1712, 1714). After his run with the *Spectator*, Addison penned the final act to the four acts he had already written for *Cato, A Tragedy*; during *Cato*'s initial London staging, Addison continued producing essays, working with Steele on the *Guardian* (1713) and composing several pieces that dealt explicitly with themes from *Cato*. Addison struck out on his own for the *Freeholder* (1715–16) essays, which took a decidedly more political tone. His last set of essays, in *The Old Whig* (1718), was marred by a personal break with his longtime collaborator Steele over matters of public policy. Addison was a prolific author; in addition to his coffeehouse essays and *Cato*, he composed poetry in both Latin and English, hymns, an opera, another play, literary criticism, and a variety of translations of classical authors. Joseph Addison died in 1719 at the age of 47.

Addison was born into a world that had recently witnessed the tumult of the English Civil War and the beheading of Charles I, followed by Cromwell's Puritan commonwealth. Britain's political instability continued in Addison's early life, with the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which another king—James II—was forced by Parliament to flee the country. The mature Addison's writing career spanned the period of British history marked by the conclusion of Queen Anne's reign in 1714 and the inauguration of the Hanoverian succession. This was a time of political upheaval and uncertainty, filled with resistance and uprisings by Jacobites who retained loyalty to the Stuart family line. Disturbances of this nature were a challenge to the very legitimacy of the Hanoverian succession. These years were characterized by intense factional conflict between Whigs and Tories over political control, with 1710–14 being the final years of Tory control before the extended period of Whig dominance that began with the accession of George I to the throne in 1714. Addison himself was politically associated with the Whigs, yet *Cato* is remarkable for the manner in which both Whigs and Tories embraced it as sympathetic to their causes; leaders of both parties were present at the opening performance, and Alexander Pope's account of the premiere describes Whigs and Tories competing to appropriate the play to their own causes. During the

first performance, Whigs loudly applauded each mention of “liberty,” and between acts, the Tory Bolingbroke publicly gave Barton Booth — the actor who played Cato — fifty guineas, for defending the cause of liberty against a perpetual dictator. That Addison himself wanted the message of the play to transcend party politics can be seen in his commissioning a Tory, Pope, to write the play’s Prologue and a Whig, Sir Samuel Garth, to compose the Epilogue.

*Addison the Essayist*

The eighteenth century saw the rise of a new literary form — the essay — whose growth can be attributed to several causes. With the lapse of government monopoly control of publishing licenses in 1695, there was a proliferation in all sorts of literature, including periodicals, which relied upon brief pieces of writing. This same period also witnessed greater commercial activity and the rise of a new merchant class with opportunities that had not previously existed for leisure and for conversation. Men and women of this new bourgeoisie frequently gathered for conversation in coffeehouses, which functioned as slightly more democratic versions of the *salon*, and there they discussed political, moral, literary, and aesthetic matters. Periodicals provided the coffeehouse patrons with topics of light conversation as well as gentle guidance in sensibilities, manners, and other matters of taste. Describing the periodical essay, Samuel Johnson said, “For this purpose nothing is so proper as the frequent publication of short papers, which we read not as study but amusement. If the subject be slight, the treatise likewise is short. The busy may find time, and the idle may find patience.”<sup>2</sup> Addison and Steele’s *Spectator* was among the most prominent of contemporary periodicals. Typically, three to four thousand copies of each edition of the *Spectator* were printed, and some accounts claim that sales exceeded fifteen thousand at times. Even these approximate figures are misleading, though, for each copy would be passed from one reader to the next, and Addi-

2. Johnson, *Lives*, 873.

son himself estimated that at least twenty people read any single purchased copy.

Situating the *Spectator* in the tradition of influential Renaissance texts such as Giovanni della Casa's *The Book of Manners* and Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, Johnson described the purpose of Addison's essays in the following manner: "To teach the minuter decencies and inferior duties, to regulate the practice of daily conversation, to correct those depravities which are rather ridiculous than criminal, and remove those grievances which, if they produce no lasting calamities, impress hourly vexation. . . ." <sup>3</sup> In *Spectator* 10, Addison described his own ambition somewhat differently. He writes, "It was said of Socrates that he brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out the Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in the Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and Coffee-Houses." Citing Seneca and Montaigne as his models, Addison sought not only to educate his audience, but also to regulate their passions and to promote self-discipline, moderation, and pursuit of the public interest. Addison was by no means alone in his desire to influence and shape his readers' tastes and sensibilities. To name but a single example, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, also sought to mold his readers' intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities through his 1711 *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Shaftesbury's primary audience, however, seems to have been the gentlemanly class, whereas Addison focused his attention on a decidedly more middle-class audience.

Addison's essays were instrumental in spreading the culture of politeness, learning, and sensibility throughout the middling classes, and also in restoring order to a Britain still reeling from the tumultuous events of the seventeenth century, which had called into question the legitimacy of traditional forms and institutions of authority. Through his work as an essayist, Addison attempted to refine his

3. Johnson, *Lives*, 872.

readers' sociability and to instill in them a sensibility about what was pleasing and likely to be approved by worthy others. These themes recur throughout *Cato's* dramatic action, with Cato's judgment emerging as the objective standard by which others measure their actions and judgments. To cite but two examples, Syphax draws attention to Cato's "piercing eyes," capable of seeing to the essence of things and "discerning our frauds" (I.iii). Cato also offers his own standards as a type of universalizable rule, proclaiming that "in Cato's judgment, / A day, an hour, of virtuous liberty / Is worth a whole eternity in bondage" (II.i). The play's themes of theatricality, imagination, and idealized spectators are echoed in *Spectator* 231's "in our solitudes, we should fancy that Cato stands before us, and sees every thing that we do" and in Addison's *Spectator* 10 assertion that his work is addressed to "everyone who considers the world as theatre, and who desires to form a right judgment of those who act in it." The dozen or so *Spectator* papers beginning with number 411 are particularly significant in this context, for they discuss the pleasures of the imagination in a manner deeply influential upon the rest of the eighteenth century.

The breadth of topics to which Addison turned his attention as an essayist is remarkable. In the essays selected for this volume, besides the essays that are included for their explicit discussion of *Cato*, issues such as patriotism, virtue, fame, liberty, prudence, fortune, integrity, the nature of government, honor, faction, and education are raised. Other Addison essays explore a wide range of topics, including literary criticism, satire, religion, and the role of women in society. Addison likened the essay form to a woods "with many great and noble objects" in which one "may ramble . . . and every Moment discover something or other which is new to you" (*Spectator* 476). In the advertisement to a 1776 edition of the *Spectator*, Johnson encapsulated the breadth, character, and influence of Addison's essays in the following manner: "The Book thus offered to the Public is too well known to be praised: It comprizes [*sic*] precepts of criticism, sallies of invention, descriptions of life, and lectures of virtue. It employs wit in the cause of truth, and makes elegance subservient to piety: It has now for more than half a century supplied the English nation, in

great measure, with principles of speculation, and rules of practice; and given Addison a claim to be numbered among the benefactors of mankind.”

### *Cato, A Tragedy*

Addison's *Cato, A Tragedy* is based on the final days of Cato the Younger (95–46 B.C.), also known as Cato of Utica. Cato the Younger was one member of a patrician family who were historically strong supporters of Roman republicanism and traditions. Most noteworthy among his ancestors was his great-grandfather, Cato the Elder or Cato the Censor (234–149 B.C.), famous for his oft-repeated refrain of “Carthago delenda est” (“Carthage must be destroyed”) and for upholding a simple life of agrarian virtue. Like his great-grandfather, Cato the Younger epitomized a commitment both to liberty and to the republic, and he came to exemplify virtue in late Roman republican politics. Cato's reputation for stern virtue and unwavering principle was widely known. “It is said of Cato,” wrote Plutarch in his *Life of Cato the Younger*, “that even from his infancy, in his speech, his countenance, and all his childish pastimes, he discovered an inflexible temper, unmoved by any passion, and firm in everything . . . to go through with what he undertook.” The mature Cato was also known for his austerity in personal habits, eating simply and frequently refusing to wear a tunic under his toga or to wear shoes. He was widely regarded as the embodiment of the Stoic virtues of self-control and stern discipline, as well as an inflexible adherent to principles of justice. According to Sallust, Cato “preferred to be, rather than to seem, virtuous; hence, the less he sought fame, the more it pursued him” (*The War with Catiline*, LIV.6).

Cato's concern for Roman liberty led him to oppose Pompey when he feared Pompey's power had grown too great, then to join with Pompey against Julius Caesar once he began to appreciate the threat to Roman liberty that Caesar represented. A leading figure in the Senate, Cato was a member of the *Optimates*, a political faction that sought to maintain the traditional authority of the Senate within the republic as a protection against the dangers of both mob

rule and the tyranny of a single individual. The *Optimates* stood in opposition to the *Populares*, who advocated political and economic reform by means of land redistribution. Caesar had embraced the *Populares'* political agenda early in his career, but it was through his military success and his ability to command his troops' continued loyalty that his political power truly grew. Prior to outbreak of the civil war that would eventually end the republic, a triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus shared power. With the death of Crassus, though, that alliance crumbled. Caesar's legions crossed the Rubicon to take control of Rome, while Pompey withdrew from Italy—Senate in tow—to Greece and to the fateful meeting at Pharsalus.

The political struggle between Cato and Caesar was a contest between widely divergent characters. Political restraint versus political ambition was but one facet of the conflict between these great Roman figures that was personal, intense, and well known at the time. Each represented a different response to the crisis of the Roman republic, and the tension in the Roman spirit can be seen in the comparison between them. Sallust's *The War with Catiline* offers an extended discussion of their characters. According to Sallust, "They had the same nobility of soul, and equal, though quite different, reputations. Caesar was esteemed for the many kind services he rendered and for his lavish generosity; Cato for the consistent uprightness of his life. The former was renowned for his humanity and mercy; the latter had earned respect by his strict austerity. Caesar won fame by his readiness to give, to relieve, to pardon; Cato, by never offering presents. The one was a refuge for the unfortunate, and was praised for his good nature; the other was a scourge for the wicked, admired for his firmness" (Book VI). Cato stood for preserving republican virtue, tradition, and precedent; for respecting established institutions and the Senate in particular; and for his unwavering adherence to principle. By contrast, Caesar represented energy, innovation, and a willingness to break with precedent in his pursuit of advantage, territorial gains, and personal aggrandizement. If Cato embodied the austere simplicity and the moral conscience of

republican Rome, Caesar personified the lavish grandiosity which came to characterize the Empire.

One example of the contrast between Cato's severity, austerity, and self-restraint and Caesar's humanity, mercy, and generosity was the Catilinarian conspiracy. There, Cato insisted on the conspirators' swift execution, while Caesar pled for leniency and called for their imprisonment rather than their death. Cato argued that the conspirators should be treated as if they had been caught in the act; moreover, since they planned to show no mercy to Rome, they should be shown none by Rome. Cato's oratory carried the day in the Senate, which had initially been swayed by Caesar's entreaties. In Act IV, scene 4, Addison echoes Sallust's characterization when Lucius tells Cato that "the virtues of humanity are Caesar's" and Cato responds that "such popular humanity is treason" and that Caesar's virtues have undone Rome. One aspect of Caesar's humanity was his well-known policy of offering clemency to his defeated enemies, and it is likely that he would have extended clemency to Cato as well. Describing a military dictator as possessing the virtues of humanity may strike the modern reader as somewhat surprising and might have struck eighteenth-century theatergoers as such, too. Audiences in the eighteenth century, however, would have appreciated that the popular, humane figure could be the greatest threat to liberty and that an unbendingly virtuous character such as Cato — willing to sacrifice his own life to freedom's cause — could be liberty's greatest defender.

No discussion of Cato would be complete without some consideration of his relationship to Stoicism, since both to Romans and in an abstract sense, Cato exemplified the life led in accordance with Stoic ideals. Identifying the virtuous life with happiness, Stoicism emphasized the importance of self-command as a means of placing an individual beyond the reaches of the whims of fortune. Stoics believed that self-mastery and therefore true freedom could be attained only by putting aside passion, unjust thoughts, and indulgence and by fulfilling one's duty for the right reasons. Cato's unwavering commitment to his principles and his willingness to apply his standards of judgment to others led many Romans to admire his philosophic

commitment, including Cicero, whose *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* (*On the Ends of Good and Evil*) casts Cato as the spokesman for Stoicism. Given the deep intermingling of morality and politics in the Roman republic, it is not entirely surprising that much of Cato's political standing in the Senate and his place in public opinion was due to his fellow Romans' appreciation of his moral character. This is not to suggest, however, that Cato was above criticism. There were many—including some of his political allies—who disapproved of Cato's inflexibility and his unwillingness to compromise. Even Cicero, generally a great admirer of Cato, commented in *Letters to Atticus* that "the opinions he [Cato] delivers would be more in place in Plato's *Republic* than among the dregs of humanity collected by Romulus" (*Letters*, 2.1). Addison echoes something of Cicero's criticisms in *Spectator* 243's description of Stoicism as "the pedantry of virtue."

The action of the play follows on the 46 B.C. battle at Pharsalus, a critical moment in the Roman Civil War in which Caesar won a decisive victory over Pompey's more numerous forces. After Pharsalus, remnants of the defeated forces and senators coalesced in the North African city of Utica under the leadership of Cato, who became a living symbol of Roman republican liberty. In Utica, Cato's forces formed an alliance with the army of Numidia's King Juba I, who had previously been victorious against one of Caesar's supporters. This time, however, Juba was not so fortunate, and the combined forces of Cato and Juba were defeated at Thapsus. With the military situation around him bleak and untenable, Cato encouraged those closest to him to flee; he then took his own life. Addison's dramatization of Cato's magnificent death scene generally accords with the ancient accounts. According to Plutarch, Cato engaged in philosophic disputation—especially regarding the Stoic paradox that only the good man is free, and that all wicked men are slaves—soon after the defeat at Thapsus. The intensity with which Cato defended his argument left all who were listening with no doubt that he intended "to put an end to his life, and set himself at liberty." Plutarch also