# What Cato Did: Suicide, Sentimentalism, and the Drama of Emulation

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**Abstract**:

Much recent criticism of Joseph Addison's *Cato* (1713) regards the tragedy as determinedly resistant to its eponymous protagonist's stoic heroism. *Cato*, it's argued, critiques Cato. But this wasn't how Addison's immediate contemporaries experienced the play. For many commentators, Addison's Cato was a model not only to be applauded but imitated. In this essay, I take seriously this disconnect between current interpretation and immediate reception. I first attend to the tragedy's fifth act, where we see a concerted attempt both to flag the protagonist's fallibility and also to place a critical frame around the problematic spectacle of stoic suicide. In the second part of the essay, I then consider how it was that an instrumentalist view of the play nonetheless become canon. Here, I trace Richard Steele's appropriation of *Cato* to his project to reform the stage, a project that staked its claims for the cultural and moral efficacy of the theater on an avowedly emulative (and sentimental) model of drama; and I argue that Addison's belated insistence on his protagonist's all-too-humanness works to sentimentalize the character and so paradoxically opens up the very possibility of imitation that it seemingly seeks to foreclose.

**Keywords**:

exemplarity, emulation, suicide, sentimentalism, theater

**Prologue: Suicide as Exegesis**

On Wednesday 4 May 1737, the writer Eustace Budgell, a cousin of Addison's, took two coaches from his home in Clerkenwell, London, to the Dorset stairs of the Thames. He loitered in the timber yard there for some time – long enough be conspicuous – and passers-by noticed him stooping on occasion to gather up the stones he found on the wharf, stones he carefully placed in his pockets. Eventually, Budgell took a boat bound for Greenwich. Despite the protests of the watermen, he insisted on sitting in the stern of the vessel, where, he claimed, the air was coolest, and as the boat passed under London Bridge he threw himself overboard. It would take a full week for the river to return his body.[1]

There would be nothing especially remarkable about Budgell's suicide – prompted by his mounting debts and legal entanglements – were it not for the unfinished couplet he supposedly wrote to justify it: "What Cato did and Addison approved | Must sure be right." These lines became, in a grim irony, Budgell's best remembered: "every one knows that hackneyed sentence," declared the *Westminster Magazine* in 1775.[2] And regardless of whether or not Budgell actually wrote the couplet – which isn't recorded until 1752 – it posits his suicide as an act of exegesis, a disquieting reading of one of the century's most applauded works of drama.[3] Indeed, as an after-the-fact invention that

I would like to thank Cedric Reverand, Michael Edson, and the journal's anonymous readers for their very helpful feedback on the first version of this article.

1 For reports of Budgell's death see *London Evening Post*, 10-12 and 12-14 May 1737; *Universal Spectator*, 14 May 1737; and *Weekly Miscellany*, 20 May 1737.

2 *Westminster Magazine* (May 1775): 254.

3 Contemporary reports of Budgell's death make no mention of the couplet. The earliest record I can find of it is in *Read's Weekly Magazine*, 14 October 1752. The following year it is quoted in the biography of Budgell printed in *The Lives of the Poets of Great-Britain and Ireland*, 5 vols. (London: R. Griffith, 1753), 5:14, where it is appears as: "What Cato did, and Addison approved | Cannot be wrong." It is in this phrasing that couplet chiefly circulates. That Budgell's suicide note only appears at mid-century

consciously entwines in the cultural memory the suicides of Addison's tragic hero and Addison's cousin, the couplet is all the more compelling, for it discloses how far *Cato* – which closes with its protagonist taking his own life rather than submit to the victorious Caesar – could be and was understood as a play in which suicide is cast as the very epitome of heroism.

For Charles Moore, writing in his 1790 treatise *A Full Inquiry into the Subject of Suicide*, such an interpretation represented a gross and dangerous misreading. Observing in alarm that Budgell's couplet had "been caught up by many suicides … to justify his own murder," Moore accused Budgell of "falsely and mischievously" construing the play's "sentiments."[4] Such a view is certainly in line with recent criticism of the tragedy, which – taking its cue from Addison's assessment of Cato Uticensis in *Spectator* 169 as "rather awful than amiable" – regards the tragedy as determinedly resistant to its eponymous hero's uncompromising stoicism.[5] Developing Laura Brown's insight that the play posits Cato as the static, emotionless, public center around which the other characters act out a dynamic, sentimental drama, the likes of Julie Ellison, Lisa Freeman, and Laura Rosenthal have in different ways advanced a reading of *Cato* that takes Juba, the Numidian prince who so desperately seeks to fashion himself in Cato's image, to be the play's structural and emotional axis:[6] "I'm charm'd whene'er thou talk'st! I pant for

isn't in itself surprising: it was only at this time that the suicide note emerged as discernible genre, in the popular press especially. See Eric Parisot, "Suicide Notes and Popular Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century British Press," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47.3 (2014): 277-91.

[4] Charles Moore, *A Full Inquiry into the Subject of Suicide*, 2 vols. (London: J. F. and C. Rivington et al., 1790), 2:114, 116.

[5] *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 2:166. See also *Spectator* 243 for Addison's critique of stoicism.

[6] Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ., 1981), 155-56; Julie K. Ellison, "Cato's Tears," *ELH* 63.3 (1996): 571-601; Lisa A. Freeman, "What's Love Got to Do with Addison's *Cato*?," *Studies in English Literature* 39.3 (1999): 463-82; Laura J. Rosenthal, "Juba's Roman Soul: Addison's *Cato* and Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism,"

virtue! | And all my soul endeavours a perfection," he rhapsodizes in response to one of Cato's speeches.[7] On this account, the tragedy folds into its own dramatic structure a pre-emptive mechanism that works to neutralize the kind of literalist hermeneutic articulated and enacted by Budgell: it invites its audience to emulate not Cato (an impossible and even problematic ideal) but rather Juba emulating Cato. As a proxy spectator, Juba models for playgoers how to become "Roman" passionately but judiciously and without the need for heroic suicide. *Cato* isn't really about Cato.

As persuasive as this reading certainly is, it runs up against the fact that most of Addison's immediate contemporaries – that is, *Cato*'s first audiences – simply did not experience the play in such terms. Alexander Pope, who read the play in draft, wrote that its final two acts gave "a view of virtue itself great in person, colour, and action", while one pamphlet response gushed: "I view, with Joy and conscious Transport fir'd, | The *Soul* of *Rome* in One Great Man retir'd".[8] The Whig *Flying Post* (30 April – 2 May 1713) reported that the play had "met with so favourable a Reception from the Town, that from thence we may conclude the Glorious Principles of the Roman Hero to be more favour'd and approved of, than could be imagined … How wonderfully must this Example work up the Passions of a generous Briton". The "Sentiments" of the audience were not "their

*Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32.2 (1999): 63-76. For other anti-Catonic readings of the play see J. M. Armistead, "Drama of Renewal: *Cato* and Moral Empiricism," *Papers on Language & Literature* 17.3 (1981): 271-83; Richard Terry, "Revolt in Utica: Reading *Cato* against Cato," *Philological Quarterly*, 85 (2006): 121-39; Christine Dunn Henderson and Mark E. Yellin, ''Those Stubborn Principles': From Stoicism to Sociability in Joseph Addison's *Cato*', *The Review of Politics* 76 (2014): 223-41; and Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, "Tragic Aesthetics: Eighteenth-Century Tragedy and Passive Spectatorship," *Textual Practice* 31.7 (2017): 1217-35, 1228-30.

[7] Joseph Addison, *Cato*, in *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*, ed. A. C. Guthkelch, 2 vols. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), 2.4.59-60.

[8] Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 1:173; [George Sewell], *Observations Upon Cato, A Tragedy* (London: A. Baldwin, 1713), 23. See also Charles Gildon, *Cato Examin'd* (London: John Pemberton, 1713), 20.

own", affirmed the *Briton* (29 April – 2 May 1713), but rather "those the Poet gave the Hero of his Tragedy, so Just, so Majestic, so Powerful". And, not to be outdone, this interpretation of Cato's character was shared (or claimed) by the Tories, too. As Pope famously recounted (*Correspondence,* 1:175), Lord Bolingbroke, then secretary of state, presented the actor Barton Booth with a gift of fifty guineas for playing the title role.[9] To be sure, this effusive praise of the play's title character was no endorsement of suicide. But when the female voice of the 1733 poem *The Fair Suicide* lauded Cato for having "stab'd himself Immortal" and openly looked to him as a validating model for her own actions, she, like Budgell, was doing no more than pushing the emulative logic of such panegyric to an extreme.[10]

In this essay I take seriously the reading of Cato's exemplarity given to us in Budgell's suicide note. To do so is to confront the radical disconnect between *Cato*'s immediate reception and the dominant interpretation of the play in our own moment. Put simply, it is to ask why, if *Cato* evidently calls into question the stoic posture and death of its hero, so many of its early readers and spectators took the play otherwise and instead cherished Addison's Cato as a model to be applauded and even imitated. In what follows, I attend first to the tragedy's fifth and final act, which I take to be almost a discrete work of drama in itself. Here, we see a tempering of the play's Plutarchan source and an interpolation of the Christian into the classical that bespeak Addison's concerted attempt both to flag his protagonist's doubt and fallibility and also to place a critical frame around

[9] See also the pamphlet *Mr Addison Turn'd Tory* (London: J. Baker, 1713), which juxtaposes the manifold virtues of the play's title character with the corruption and warmongering of the Duke of Marlborough.

[10] *The Fair Suicide: Being An Epistle from a Young Lady, to the Person who was the Cause of her Death*, 2nd edn. (London: Richard Wellington, 1733), 9.

the (unshown) spectacle of stoic suicide. Act 5, that is, seems at first glance actively to anticipate and counter the very instrumentalist account of the play – with its avowal of Cato's exemplarity – that was to become almost canon upon its premiere at Drury Lane in April 1713.

Turning in the second part of this essay to the question of how and why this account prevailed, I consider *Cato*'s appropriation by the Whig project to reform the stage, a project – pushed by Richard Steele especially – that staked its claims for the cultural and moral efficacy of the theater on an avowedly emulative (and sentimental) model of drama. Though this agenda is articulated chiefly in the play's paratexts, it nonetheless returns us once more to the *Cato*'s final act. There, I want to suggest, Addison's sudden insistence on his protagonist's all-too-humanness paradoxically opens up the very possibility of imitation that it seemingly seeks to foreclose in that – inadvertently or otherwise – it relocates Cato within a sentimental economy in which exemplarity is a matter rather of sympathetic identification and appropriate feeling than of irreproachable excellence.

**Cato the Sinner, a Tragedy in One Act**

Addison struggled to kill Cato. It was, so John Oldmixon tells us, the writer John Hughes who finally compelled Addison to pen his tragedy's final act in 1712-13. Apparently eager to see the play reach the stage, Hughes sought and received Addison's blessing to finish it, only to find, just days later, that his offer had prompted Addison to undertake the task himself.[11] The fifth act was thus written at considerable speed – "in less than a

[11] John Oldmixon, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: J. Pemberton, 1728), 6.

Week's time," according to Steele – a full decade after Addison had produced a draft of the first four acts and as much as two decades after he had first conceived of a tragedy on the subject, while at Oxford; it is also by far the shortest act of the play, at just 202 lines (eleven percent of *Cato*'s total number).[12] For these reasons, it invites a reading less as the culmination of a dramatic arc and more as a discrete play in its own terms, a coda or even afterpiece to the four-act tragedy Addison had written far earlier. Act 4, after all, reaches a fitting conclusion: Cato, resplendent in his disinterestedness and patriotism, weeps not for his son, Marcus, over whose bloodied corpse he declaims, but rather for the fallen Republic; he even twice bids his friends and family "farewel" (4.4.145, 151).

This isn't by any means to suggest that Addison considered *Cato* complete in 1703. For all that the intervening years saw first his rapid rise to political office and then his collaboration with Steele on the *Spectator*, his inability to finish the play speaks to the difficult and discomfiting challenge he had set himself. The problem that confronted Addison was how to represent Cato's death in both dramatically effective and morally acceptable terms. "The Modern Tragedy excells that of *Greece* and *Rome*, in the Intricacy and Disposition of the Fable," Addison observed in the *Spectator* in 1711, "but, what a Christian Writer would be ashamed to own, falls infinitely short of it in the Moral Part of the Performance" (1:164). As he sought to complete *Cato*, a modern tragedy based on

[12] Richard Steele, "To Mr. Congreve, Occasion'd by Mr. Tickell's Preface to the Four Volumes of Mr. Addison's Works," in Joseph Addison, *The Drummer; or, The Haunted House*, 2nd edn. (London: John Darby, 1722), xvi. In the preface to his *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, 4 vols. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1721), Thomas Tickell states that Addison 'took up a design of writing a play upon this subject, when he was very young at the University, and even attempted something in it there, though not a line as it now stands' (i. xiii–xiv). Jacob Tonson and Colley Cibber both seem to have read the first four acts in 1703-4. See Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men: Collected from Conversation*, ed. James M. Osborne, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), #817 (i. 332), and Colley Cibber *Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian and Late Patentee of the Theatre-Royal* (London: John Watts, 1740), 267.

classical history and which culminated in a scene of stoic suicide, Addison had to grapple with how best to foster its "Moral Part." He must have known that Cato Uticensis, as the Roman suicide *par excellence,* had been a lightning rod for concerns about the moral and theological implications of suicide as far back as Augustine's *City of God,* which decries Cato for ending his own life simply because "he begrudged Caesar the glory of pardoning himself."[13] This Augustinian critique was rehearsed time and again in the growing body of clerical literature that attacked "self-murder" in the first years of the eighteenth century. Cato's death, wrote one clergyman, "proceeded not from Reason, but a Stomachful Resentment" and "a Weakness of Mind."[14] To stage Cato's suicide was perforce to expose the friction between classical past and the Christian present.

Plutarch's account of the suicide – Addison's only source for the death scene – posed a particular problem. In *Lives*, a fulminating and far-from-stoical Cato first strikes a rightly suspicious servant for refusing him his weapon; then, his sword hand injured in that act, he fails to wound himself mortally and resorts in desperation to tearing out his entrails with his bare hands. A century earlier, George Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* (published in 1631 but likely written around 1605) had followed Plutarch with lurid fidelity; so too did *Cato Uticense,* the opera by Carlo Francesco Pollarolo and Matteo Noris that Addison saw at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo in Venice in 1701.[15] But

[13] Augustine, *City of God, Volume I: Books 1-3,* trans. George E. McCracken, Loeb Classical Library 411 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1957), 103.

[14] Richard Willis, *The Occasional Paper: Concerning Self-Murder. No. X* (London: M. Wotton, 1698), reprinted in *The History of Suicide in England, 1650-1850, Part 1: 1650-1750,* ed. Paul Seaver and Kelly McGuire, 4 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 2:352-53. See also John Adams, *An Essay Concerning Self-Murther* (London: Thomas Bennet, 1700), John Prince, *Self-Murder Asserted to Be a Very Heinous Crime* (London: B. Bragge, 1709), and John Edwards, *Theologia Reformata*, 2 vols. (London: John Lawrence, 1713), all in *History of Suicide*, 3:70, 85, 89-90, 258, 295.

[15] George Chapman, *Caesar and Pompey*, 5.2, in *The Plays and Poems of George Chapman: The Tragedies*, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1910). For Addison's

the spectacle of a violently agitated Cato clawing out his own bowels in a fit of suicidal frenzy could hardly be accommodated to the generic protocols of early eighteenth-century English tragedy; nor did it lend itself to the conception of Cato's character Addison carefully nurtures in the opening acts of his play or to the visual austerity of his practice of tragedy more generally, which is rather one of words than actions. The English stage's predilection for "dreadful butchering" was "absurd and barbarous", he wrote in *Spectator* 44: "To delight in seeing Men stabb'd, poyson'd, rack'd, or impaled, is certainly the Sign of a cruel Temper" (1:187).

Addison had form in adjusting history to suit his dramatic vision; his libretto *Rosamond* (1707) revises the legend of Henry II's mistress, "Fair Rosamond" Clifford, dispatching her to a convent (she should die) and reconciling the king and queen (who should remain at odds).[16] Albeit less playfully, and in the negotiation of tragic rather than comic imperatives, act 5 of *Cato* likewise sees Addison significantly depart from his source to secure the generic character of his play. The act opens with Cato discovered alone, "*sitting in a thoughtful posture: In his hands* Plato's *book on the Immortality of the Soul. A drawn sword on the table by him*" (5.1). After a forty-six-line soliloquy – almost a quarter of the act's total length – in which he ponders the afterlife, the prospect of eternity, and the act of suicide, he is interrupted by his son, Portius, whom he greets testily but then addresses with affection. Cato then departs to his bed, with Portius convinced that he "will not cast away a life | So needful to us all, and to his country" (5.3.2-3). Marcia, his daughter, asks providence to "Watch round his couch, and soften

description of Pollarolo's and Noris's opera see his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* [1705], in *Miscellaneous Works*, 2:59.

[16] See Brean S. Hammond, "Joseph Addison's Opera *Rosamond*: Britishness in the Early Eighteenth Century," *ELH* 73.3 (2006): 601-29, 609-16.

his repose" (5.3.10) and the senator Lucius arrives to describe the tranquil scene of "godlike" Cato's bedchamber – "Some power invisible supports his soul … A kind of refreshing sleep is fallen upon him" – and once more reassures the gathered company that "we all are safe | While Cato lives—his presence will protect us" (5.4.28-31, 37-8). There is even, unexpectedly, renewed hope, with Portius excitedly returning to the stage to report the arrival of a ship from Pompey's son that promises aid to Cato, but this news is immediately punctured by an offstage "groan," a sound of "agonizing pain" (5.4.60, 67). The "*back Scene opens, and discovers* Cato," who has fallen upon his sword; he is "*brought forward in his chair*," sanctions the betrothals of Portius to Lucia and Juba to his daughter Marcia, and then dies, leaving Lucius to speak the final words of the play.

Addison thus puts considerable distance between his play and the Plutarchan spectacle of Cato's suicide, in which he is found "weltring in his Blood, great part of his Bowels out of his Body, himself not quite dead, but looking ghastly."[17] Gone, most especially, is what Catharine Edwards calls "the two-phased nature of Cato's end" (the sight of Cato's fortitude so pleased the gods, wrote Seneca, that they wished to see him die twice).[18] Gone, too, is the hiding of Cato's weapon (Portius makes only a half-hearted attempt to remove it), his striking of a servant, and his erratic behavior in general. All that remains of Plutarch's account is Cato's reading of Plato's *Phaedo* – a text that opposes the stoic practice of suicide, as Christian commentators were quick to point out – and the sleep that directly precedes his death.[19] Instead, Addison keeps all action from the

[17] Plutarch, "The Life of Cato the Younger," trans. Stephen Waller, in *The Fourth Volume of Plutarch's Lives. Translated from the Greek, by Several Hands* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1693), 655-6.

[18] Catharine Edwards, "Modelling Roman Suicide? The Afterlife of Cato," *Economy and Society* 34.2 (2005), 200-22, 218; Seneca, *Moral Essays, Volume I: De Providentia. De Constantia. De Ira. De Clementia*, trans. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library 214 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ., 1928), 13.

[19] See Adams, *Essay Concerning Self-Murther*, in *History of Suicide*, 3:90.

audience's view, in particular Cato's now single and effective act of self-wounding. And he cultivates a drama of surprising stillness and serenity, which, though briefly punctuated by the sound and then the discovery of a dying man, ends as it begins: with the protagonist seated in his chair. Admittedly, a further trace of Plutarch can be discerned in Cato's flash of anger towards the intruding Portius: "Retire, and learn obedience to a father, | Or know, young man!—" (5.2.10-11). Yet, even this half-articulated threat is attenuated by the addition of a six-line speech to the third edition of the play (published a matter of days after the first), in which Cato declares, "'Tis well! Again I'm master of my self" (5.2.13). Lifting this line almost verbatim from Stephen Waller's 1693 translation of Plutarch's "Life of Cato," Addison strategically quotes his classical source in order to push the tragedy still further away from it.[20] Addison's Cato, unlike Plutarch's, remains more squarely the stoic.

At the same time, however, and as James S. Malek has argued, act 5 offers Cato to the audience anew as a fallible character.[21] This shift is immediately signaled in the anxiety and equivocation that pervade his opening monologue – "What means this heaviness that hangs upon me? | This lethargy that creeps through all my senses?" (5.1.33-33) – and then underscored in two subsequent moments, both of Addison's invention. First, we are given the news that Pompey's son has dispatched reinforcements to oppose Caesar and that the cause is not so lost as Cato has deemed it. Arriving immediately before Cato's offstage suicide – his groan even interrupting Portius's ecstatic vision of his father at the "head" of a new army (5.4.58) – the report significantly

[20] Plutarch, "Life of Cato," 654: "*Now* (said he) *I am Master of my self*." Cato's sword has just been returned to him.

[21] James S. Malek, "The Fifth Act of Addison's *Cato*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74.3 (1973): 515-19.

shapes the audience's experience of Cato's death. As the Tory *Examiner* put it, "He fell indeed with his Country, but not for it; and by dying, effectually deserted her interests."[22] It is not just that Addison casts Cato's suicide as rash or unnecessary but that he actively opens up a space for conjectural history and invites us to consider what doesn't happen, what *might* have happened. In doing so, it's worth noting, he makes exactly the rhetorical move to be found in the anti-Catonic polemic of contemporary treatises on suicide. John Adams, for instance, who devotes an entire chapter to Cato in his *Essay Concerning Self-Murther* (1700), speculates that had Cato lived the trajectory of Roman history might have taken a different course: "*Africa* had not been wholly lost at that time, the younger *Pompey* would have had more time to have strengthened himself" and Caesar might have been defeated, or, even if victorious, Cato "wou'd still have been *a curb upon him*, and at least have made him use his Fortune *moderately*" (*History of Suicide*, 3:91). *Cato*'s final act, its staging of suicide, is similarly subjunctive; where the earlier portion of the play stresses the inevitable shape of history – "what men could do | Is done already," concedes Lucius before the Utican senate (2.1.74–75) – the audience are now presented with the drama of contingency and, still more, of human error.

Second, Addison folds into Cato's final lines an explicit expression of doubt that approaches an admission of fault:

> —I'm sick to death—O when shall I get loose
>
> From this vain world, th' abode of guilt and sorrow
>
> —And yet methinks a beam of light breaks in

[22] *Examiner*, 27 April - 1 May 1713. See also John Dennis, *Remarks Upon Cato* [1713], in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1939), 2:48.

On my departing soul. Alas, I fear

I've been too hasty. O ye powers, that search

The heart of man, and weigh his inmost thoughts,

If I have done amiss, impute it not!

The best may erre, but you are good, and—oh ! *[Dies.* (5.4.92-99)

This moment of deliberate anachronism, of Cato as Christian ventriloquizer, certainly animated many of the tragedy's eighteenth-century commentators. Richard Hurd, Bishop of Worcester and Addison's Regency-era editor, noted that though the "sentiment is not in character," Addison chose "to violate decorum" in the "interests of religion and virtue," while Moore, in his *Full Inquiry into the Subject of Suicide*, applauded the lines for their "delicacy and judgment": "They at once express [Addison's] own sentiments to be unfavourable towards Cato's self-murder, and warn a Christian audience to avoid an imitation of his hero in this last action of his honest and virtuous life" (2:116).[23] What Moore's gloss recognizes is how hard Addison works in act 5 pre-emptively to oppose a reading of the play as legitimizing suicide. The awkward move into a confessional register here marks the play's sudden and overt determination to remove itself and its audience from the very classical ethos its main plot has hitherto staged and fostered.

Malek reads this discordance between act 5 and the rest of the play as symptomatic of the theory of tragedy that Addison progressively elaborates in the *Spectator* (518). There, in number 39 (14 April 1711), he looks above all to Seneca's *De Providentia* for a definition of the genre: "A Virtuous Man (says *Seneca*) strugling with Misfortunes, is such a Spectacle as Gods might look upon with Pleasure: And such a

[23] Joseph Addison, *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, ed. Richard Hurd, 6 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1811), 1:294.

Pleasure it is which one meets with in the Representation of a well-written Tragedy" (1:163). But if mention of the "Virtuous Man" implies an exemplary tragic hero, then in *Spectator* 548 (28 November 1712) – published just a month or two before he returned to work on *Cato* – Addison offers an important qualification: "there is none who in strictness can be called a Virtuous Man. Every one has in him a natural Alloy, tho' one may be fuller of Dross than another: For this reason I cannot think it right to introduce a perfect or a faultless Man upon the Stage." Rather, Addison comments, in its exhibition of the good man who has enough bad in him to merit whatever providentially-ordained suffering he encounters, tragedy puts before us an "example" that "corrects the Insolence of Human Nature" (4:463-64). Even as he or she solicits the audience's sympathy, the tragic hero functions in admonitory rather than exemplary terms. In the almost punitive vision of tragedy unfolded here – tragic pathos inculcates humility in the face of both our own sinfulness and a divine design we can't possibly grasp – one can register exactly the uneasy conjoining of the classical and the Christian that characterizes *Cato*.[24]

And the barely concealed seam between the two is to be found in the transition from acts 4 to 5. The first four acts operate according to the discernibly Senecan paradigm of tragedy advanced in *Spectator* 39, and the play's epigraph announces as much in its quotation of *De Providentia*: "lo! here is a spectacle worthy of the regard of God as he contemplates his works … a brave man matched against ill-fortune" (10-11).

[24] On the complex and contradictory nature of Addison's classicism, see Ayres, *Idea of Rome*, 163-64. My argument here departs from that of Stephen L. Trainor, who argues that "Addison strives to have it both ways" in act 5 by bringing together Seneca's view of suicide with a Christian proscription of it. See "Suicide and Seneca in Two Eighteenth-Century Tragedies," *Comparative Drama* 14.3 (1980): 216-29, 219.

Those acts see Cato unyielding in the face of political annihilation. But, as we've seen, the fifth act instead models not only *Spectator* 548's prohibition of the flawless hero but also its implicitly Christian conception of tragedy. This is a matter not only of Cato's final penitential posture but, more profoundly, of its insistence on culpability, loss, and the contingency of history – of its cautionary structure, which cultivates humility through the salutary spectacle of just suffering and failed aspiration. This is also to say that in its the anomalous shape and tenor – written so long after the earlier acts were drafted – act 5 seems almost to have been conceived as its own play, as a distillate of tragedy that proceeds at pace from dilemma, to hope, to reversal and recognition, and finally to death. Charles Gildon claimed that *Cato* lacked a "discovery producing a Change of Fortune in any of the principal Characters," but the final act gives us both *peripeteia* and, in the expiring protagonist's admission of his own error, *anagnorisis*.[25] The sudden arrival of doubt, Cato's questioning of suicide's moral efficacy, reads as neither belated nor cursory if we take act 5 to be Addison's tragedy in two-hundred lines: a tragedy in which the hero dies an avowed sinner.

**Be What You Behold: Sentimentalizing the Stoic**

Yet, to return to the question I posed at the outset, this quite obviously isn't how most of Addison's contemporaries read *Cato*. For all the great lengths to which act 5 goes to eschew Cato's heroism and forestall the possibility of playgoers taking his suicide to be the ultimate gesture of uncompromising virtue, Addison's protagonist was, as we know, widely regarded in exemplary terms. Nor was Budgell the only one to regard the play as

[25] Charles Gildon, *Cato Examin'd* (London: John Pemberton, 1713), 14.

"approving" suicide. Amid the chorus of praise, some critics were troubled by *Cato* for this very reason. John Dennis opined that it offered the "pernicious instruction" of showing "a Man of accomplish'd Virtue driven to lay violent Hands upon himself, only for supporting Liberty" (*Critical Works*, 2:45), while in 1718 the bi-weekly *Free-Thinker* condemned the tragedy for "setting self-murther in a dazzling light" and considered the "doubtful Surmize" of Cato's final speech "too faint to remove the strong Impressions that remain in Favour of Self-Murther from his Example."[26] These concerns were by no means short-lived: some fifty years later, we find Francis Gentleman lamenting, in his discussion of *Cato* in the *Dramatic Censor*, "that self-destruction is placed in so fair a point of view."[27] Indeed, fears that the play might encourage spectators to imitate its hero's suicide were evidently acute enough that the poet Thomas Beach saw fit to compose an admonitory occasional epilogue for its performance by a group of Wrexham schoolboys at Christmas 1735: Cato was "brave and gen'rous" only "in a *heathen* view," Beach cautioned the students, and as Christians their "*better* light restrains the horrid crime."[28]

Such anxious responses are peculiar to *Cato*. As various historians of suicide have shown, at the start of the eighteenth century there was a near pervasive belief that England was in the grip of a suicide epidemic.[29] Yet, for all that the scene of suicide was a common component of the period's tragedy we find no one expressing alarm that such staple repertory pieces as Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* and William Congreve's

[26] *Free-Thinker*, 11 April 1718.

[27] Francis Gentleman, *The Dramatic Censor; or, Critical Companion*, 2 vols. (London: J. Bell, 1770), 1:454.

[28] *The Gentleman's Magazine* 23 (1753): 240. For all Beach's words, he was to cut his own throat in 1737, just thirteen days after Budgell's suicide.

[29] See George Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1999), 181-86.

*The Mourning Bride* might incite spectators to imitate the suicides of their protagonists. Gentleman, for instance, writes about both these tragedies as well as Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, but only with respect to *Cato* does he feel the need to insist that the hero is "a very dangerous and censurable subject of imitation for any man, in any station" (2:453). What's special – what's different – about Addison's play?

To answer this question we must look to *Cato*'s paratexts, for it is here rather than in the play itself that an instrumentalist reading of the tragedy, and of its protagonist most especially, is properly adumbrated. Pope's prologue, the first and in many ways the most significant of these paratexts, explicitly endorses a theater of emulation:

> *To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,*
> *Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold:*
> *For this the Tragic-Muse first trod the stage*
> *Commanding tears to stream thro' every age*. (Prologue, ll. 3-5)

Such lines reflect the formal transformation of English drama between the 1660s and 1730s, the movement – tracked in detail by Laura Brown and Rose A. Zimbardo – from a theater of embodied but remote ideals to one of verisimilitude, affective identification, and, most especially, practical exemplarity.[30] Taken as a theoretical statement about tragedy, Pope's prologue sits at odds with the critical orthodoxy of the day, for the likes of John Dryden, John Dennis, and Charles Gildon all insisted that we admire the hero of

[30] Brown, *English Dramatic Form* and Rose A. Zimbardo, *A Mirror to Nature: Transformations in Drama and Aesthetics, 1660-1732* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1986). See also Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 61, and John O'Brien, "Drama: Genre, Gender, Theater," in *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cynthia Wall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 183-201, esp. 186-88.

epic but pity that of tragedy. Rather, as its parting shot at the repertorial prominence of "French *translation, and* Italian *song*" (l. 42) makes clear, Pope's prologue needs to be understood within the specific terms of contemporary discourse regarding the English stage's condition and public utility. Above all, it allies itself with exactly the model of theater as a cultural engine for virtuous imitation advanced by Richard Steele, that self-appointed reformer of the stage.

Speaking in the voice of "Eugenio" in the *Tatler* in 1709, Steele advocates the performance of plays "from whence it is impossible to return without strong Impressions of Honour and Humanity," and compares the representational efficacy – and so the ethical potential – of the painting and the play:

> Who can see *Le Brun*'s Picture of the Battle of *Porus*, without entring into the Character of that fierce gallant Man, and being accordingly spur'd to an Emulation of his Constancy and Courage? … If a Thing painted or related can irresistibly enter our Hearts, what may not be brought to pass by seeing generous Things perform'd before our Eyes?[31] *Eugenio* ended his Discourse, by recommending the apt Use of a Theatre, as the most agreeable and easie Method of making a Polite and Moral Gentry, which would end in rendring the rest of the People regular in their Behaviour, and ambitious of laudable Undertakings.

For Steele, the liveness, physicality, and proximity of theatrical performance render it a medium pre-eminently suited to the generation of empathy and so in turn encourages its audience – in Pope's words – to "be what they behold." This is, fundamentally, a manifesto in brief for sentimental drama: "a drama," as Zimbardo defines it, "that draws

[31] *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 1:73-74.

its audience to *emulation*" by presenting them with characters who are equally relatable, sympathetic, and virtuous (11). And Pope's prologue offers Cato as just such a character: Addison's play, it announces, challenges spectators to identify with "*Virtue confest in human shape*" and so "*show you have the virtue to be mov'd*" (ll. 17, 38).

There is, of course, notable friction between this prologue and the play to which it serves as an introduction and hermeneutic frame: it cues *Cato*'s audience to respond in a manner that the play itself, as much recent criticism has argued, would seem to resist. But Pope's prologue was part of a much broader campaign, orchestrated by Richard Steele, to conscript the tragedy to his own – that is, Steele's – ideal of a theater of sentimental exemplarity. *Cato* would seem to be an unlikely vehicle for Steele to seize upon given the explicit and lengthy disavowal of Catonic heroism in his 1701 treatise *The Christian Hero*, where he judges Cato's death to be "an action below the precepts of his Philosophy."[32] Evidently, however, the post-*Spectator* Steele saw things rather differently and must have considered a tragedy concerned with the cause of liberty and written by his friend, a leading Whig luminary, too appealing a project to ignore. By his own later admission, he engineered *Cato*'s remarkable success by taking "measures" to ensure it gained "popular Applause," including packing Drury Lane with supporters for its early performances ("To Mr. Congreve," xv-xvi), and he also worked to shape the play's wider reception in the pages of his new periodical, the *Guardian*. It was in that venue, tellingly, that Pope's prologue was first published on 18 April 1713, nine days before Jacob Tonson's quarto of the play was released.[33] In the same number (33), Steele averred that

[32] Richard Steele, *The Christian Hero: An Argument proving that no Principles but those of Religion are Sufficient to make a Great Man* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1701), 12.

[33] *The Guardian*, 2 vols. (London: J. Tonson, 1714), 1:132-33.

there was "nothing uttered by *Cato* but what is worthy of the best of Men," adding – in a comment which signally ignores the character's dying words – that his "Sentiments … are not only the most warm for the Conduct of this Life, but such as … consists with the Happiness of the Human Soul in the next" (1:130-31).

Twice more in the weeks that followed, the *Guardian* returned to *Cato* to elaborate and secure this take on the tragedy. *Guardian* 59 once again effaces the final act's critical framing of suicide, with a correspondent (possibly Edward Young) writing of Cato's famous soliloquy that "such virtuous and moral Sentiments were never before put into the Mouth of a *British* Actor" (1:248). But it is in *Guardian* 43 that Steele most completely appropriates the play to his agenda. There, as Squire Ironside conjures the domestic idyll of a family reading the play together, he posits *Cato* as the emphatic realization of a reformed stage's cultural power and function: "The Love of Virtue, which has been so warmly rouzed by this admirable Piece in all Parts of the Theatre," Steele declares, "is an unanswerable Instance of how great [a] Force the Stage might be towards the Improvement of the World, were it regarded and encouraged as much as it ought." In Addison's play, Steele goes on, the public are "insensibly won" to virtue "by personated Characters, which they neither look upon as their Rivals or Superiors" (1:177). On this account, *Cato* is a sentimental drama *par excellence*: a drama that improves us by moving us; a drama of exemplary but also familiar personae – its stoic protagonist included – with whom an audience identify affectively.

This emulative interpretation of *Cato* is ultimately enshrined in its duodecimo edition, published by Tonson in late June 1713, which prefaces the play with a series of commendatory verses written by members (or would-be members) of the Whig literary

circle. Taken together, these panegyrics project the image of a powerful critical consensus, one which credits Addison with the revival of the nation's theater precisely by taking as read both Cato's exemplarity and the depth of the spectator's emotional and imitative response to that exemplarity.[34] John Hughes, for instance, writes of the tragedy's protagonist as "*asserting virtue's Cause*" and presenting "*the finish'd figure*" before "*our ravish'd eyes*," and in the same gesture declares that since "*nobler morals*" now "*grace the* British *Stage*," "*Great* Shakespear*'s ghost*" will "*hover o'er the Scene*" (ll. 7-9, 22-25). Likewise, Laurence Eusden puffs that "*'Tis nobly done thus to enrich the stage, | And raise thoughts of a degenerate age*," before announcing that to watch the tragedy's audience is to see "*unborn* Cato*'s heave in ev'ry breast*" (ll. 1-2, 24); Thomas Tickell opines that though "*Love*" has "*engross'd* Britannia's *stage | And sunk to softness all our tragic rage*" Addison's play now shows a "*firm Hero*" of "*conscious virtue*" whose "*sufferings venerably great*" cause "*our eyes* [to] *o'erflow*" (ll. 1-2, 12-16); while Digby Cotes insists that the tragic hero "*rushes out of Life, to snatch the glorious prize*" and is "*A perfect image of what man should be*" (ll. 17, 27). At the head of these eulogies is a short poem by Steele, which reports that Addison's play "*the fierce divided* Britons awe" (l. 1). As Bridget Orr observes, Steele sought in the sentimental a theatrical mode "which could unify audiences divided by ethnicity and nation, as well as status or party affiliation, through shared sympathy."[35] This, the duodecimo edition avows, is exactly the achievement of *Cato.*

[34] "Verses to the Author of the Tragedy of *Cato*," in *Miscellaneous Works*, 1:337-46. Hereafter cited by line number from this edition.

[35] Bridget Orr, "Empire, Sentiment, and Theatre," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2014), 621-37, 626.

Needless to say, the exegesis of the play elevated to the status of authorized reading by its duodecimo edition takes us a long way from Addison's insistence in the *Spectator* that tragedy has little to do with "a perfect or a faultless Man" – and a long way, too, from act 5's anxious application of that lesson. Addison must have consented to the inclusion of the commendatory verses, of course, but his demeanor in 1713 is consistently that of the reluctant playwright.[36] Persuaded to complete *Cato* and offer it for performance only by the entreaties of his supporters, Addison's voice is then entirely absent from the mass of commentary the play generated. Intentionally or otherwise, this withdrawal placed Steele in a position almost of proxy authorship (a move repeated in 1715, when Addison left wholly at his friend's discretion the anonymous arrival on stage and in print of his comedy, *The Drummer*).[37] Budgell's suicide, we might conclude, responds to Steele's *Cato*, rather than Addison's: his unfinished final couplet is a measure of the cultural embeddedness of Steele's take on the play, even as it is a *reductio ad absurdum* of that take's overriding emphasis on the imperative of sympathetic imitation.

Except that, at the very least, Addison's play lends itself to such a reading – and does so principally through its very attempt to render Cato a fallible character. Critics have long been alert to the tragedy's singular compound of stoicism and sentimentalism. Brown understands the play to be the most coherent example of an emergent "moral form" of drama that "defines merit in terms of inner moral worth and assumes a direct identification between audience and protagonist," but she sees this new form to surface in

[36] Addison declined to include John Hughes's commendatory poem in play's first edition, claiming: "it will draw upon me an Imputation of Vanity." See his letter to Hughes of 24 April 1713 in Joseph Addison, *Letters*, ed. Walter Graham (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941), 276.

[37] For accounts of Addison's reluctance to bring *Cato* to the stage see Cibber, *Apology*, 267, and William Warburton in *The Works of Alexander Pope Esq.*, 9 vols. (London: J. and P. Knapton et al., 1751), 4:176-77n. Steele's describes his involvement in *The Drummer* in "To Mr. Congreve," iii-iv, ix.

the sons, daughters, and lovers of the play's subplot, who thereby become the action of "the static protagonist" (xvi, 154-55). Ellison and Freeman follow suit in their respective attention to the spectacle of weeping elicited by Cato's stoic disinterestedness and to the structural importance of the tragedy's much disparaged (and later excised) love scenes. For such critics, *Cato* incubates a sentimental mode in the pockets of dramatic space that surround the title character, who, in Ellison's words, is "not a figure but a plot, not a position but a relation" (580). But these accounts cannot adequately explain the specific affective response to Cato as a *character* that we find articulated and authorized in the instrumentalizing rhetoric of Steele and others. Rather, as Ian Donaldson has recognized, Addison remakes the classical Cato as "an eighteenth-century man of feeling," a "Cato domesticated … the kindly father of his family."[38] But what Donaldson misses – he, too, puzzles over the "curious disjunction … at the heart of the play" between "the passionate and the austere" (159) – is that this sentimental Cato only appears in the tragedy's final act.

For the majority of the play – that is, the four acts Addison had drafted by 1703 – Addison's hero is a near facsimile of the Cato of Lucan's *De Bello Civili*. This Cato is an unrelenting embodiment of the stoic ideal, unimpeachable but remote. He pointedly refuses to mourn for his son, Marcus; he defeats mutiny with words alone (in an episode closely modelled on Book 8 of Lucan's poem); and, in the face of total defeat, he rejects Caesarian diplomacy out of hand. 'A stile, like this, becomes a Conqueror', notes Decius, as Cato insists that it is for Caesar to surrender (1.2.38). As a protagonist, this Cato properly belongs to the world of the heroic drama that briefly held the English stage from

[38] Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 158.

the mid-1660s to the mid-1670s, a form through which Dryden sought to bring epic into the playhouse and in which, as Brown writes (145), the hero's incarnation of an epic ideal puts him at a real distance from the social realities of the spectatorship.[39]

The Cato of act 5, however, is not only an imperfect man but also, intensely, a private one who shares his thoughts and fears with the audience. Or rather, the imperfect man has to be private, and the private man imperfect; the two are entwinned. The soliloquy that opens the final act announces and instigates this shift. Before this speech, we have seen Cato only in public – never at any moment alone – and thus always in the guise of the statesman or *vir civilis*. Equally, the first four acts deploy the soliloquy solely as a mechanism through which the play's conspirators – the traitorous senator Sempronius and his Numidian accomplice Syphax – disclose their malign intentions. Now, though, the soliloquy becomes instead a mode of both reflective readerly response and self-interrogation:

> It must be so—*Plato*, thou reason'st well!—
> Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
> This longing after immortality?
> Or whence this secret dread, and inward horror,
> Of falling into nought? (V.i.1-5)

Often compared in the period to Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, this speech signals not only the tragedy's abrupt shift towards introspection but also its new drama of doubt, uncertainty, and error.[40] Juba, the drama's pivot until this point, its means of

[39] On the rejection of the heroic in drama of the period see Elaine McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660-1745* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware, 2009).

[40] See, for instance, William Guthrie, *An Essay upon English Tragedy* (London, [1747]), 25-6; Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, 1:452.

channeling the emotional and imitative impulses it stimulates, suddenly disappears: he speaks just eight lines in act 5, fewer than any other character who appears on stage in the final portion of the play.

With Juba gone and the subplot intrigues of the lovers essentially resolved in act 4, Cato becomes (and has to become) the play's locus of intimacy and emotion. His long monologue offers an internalized replay of the earlier debate in the Utican senate over whether or not to surrender to Caesar (2.1); it transforms the struggle between resistance and resignation at the heart of that debate into a conflict of and within the self, commuting the public and political into the private and personal. Cato the remote becomes Cato the familiar.

And, in turn, even as act 5 recoils from showing the suicide it also speaks against, it presents Cato in sentimental terms as the exemplary dying man. In *Spectator* 289, Addison argues that "there is nothing in History which is so improving to the Reader as those Accounts which we meet with of the Deaths of eminent Persons." The reason for this, Addison suggests, is that theirs is a part we must all at some point play: "The General, the Statesman, or the Philosopher, are perhaps Characters which we may never act in; but the dying Man is one whom, sooner or later, we shall certainly resemble" (3:28-29). In the expiring Cato's urgent paternalism, his care for his family and friends ("Can any thing be thought of for their service?" [5.4.81]); in his undiminished allegiance to the idea of Rome ("Whoe'er is Brave and Virtuous, is a *Roman*" [5.4.91]); and in his proto-Christian resignation in the face of his own transgressions, Addison offers us a hero whom the audience might one day look to emulate not in his death but in his dying.

The paradox of *Cato* is that the protagonist only truly becomes an object of emulation when he ceases to be a paragon of virtue and enters – becomes the very axis of – a sentimental economy that until act 5 is quietly sustained by the sighing lovers of the tragedy's romance subplot. Addison's Cato is not "static"; he is rather two different characters in two different plays. Departing radically from the heroic drama that constitutes the main plot of the first four acts, the fifth act is a domestic tragedy in miniature. Louis Duguernier's frontispiece to the 1713 duodecimo edition of *Cato* (fig. 1) – that monument to Steele's sentimental reading of the play – makes this abundantly clear: the interior is classical but the tenderness and intimacy of the scene, with the seated, visibly moved Cato surrounded (and touched) by the tight cluster of concerned family and friends, mark it as unmistakably private and domestic. The Senecan spectacle of the virtuous man striving against the intolerable slides into the sentimental spectacle of a community of sympathy.

This is to say that act 5 transforms the inimitable (a man of impossible virtue) into the imitable (a flawed but penitent and pathetic figure). The very strategies through which, as we saw earlier, Addison seeks to moderate the sensational Plutarchan account of Cato's death and disclaim the heroism of classical suicide function to recast his protagonist as a character who invites not only identification but imitation, too. What the two distinct Catos of Addison's tragedy enable us to recognize is how far the nascent form of sentimentalism involved the recoding of cultural conceptions of heroism and exemplarity at this time. Cato becomes "exemplary" in the final act precisely because he is no longer so wholly ideal as to be almost allegorical. The meaning of exemplarity changes over the course of the play: the *exemplar* in its original and fully philosophical

sense as the abstract archetype or pattern that can never be perfectly replicated in the particular, gives way to the *exemplar* as that which the witness can and should become in practical and actual terms, being "what they behold" through the dynamics of sympathy.

Of course, playgoers don't watch act 5 alone. To experience *Cato* on stage or in print is necessarily to be find these different and competing paradigms of exemplarity – and genre – overlaid. We can hear this peculiar conjunction of conflicting codes in the tensions of the commendatory verses, where the rhetoric of the Platonic ideal ("*the perfect image*") meets that of sensibility ("*ravish'd eyes*," "*eyes o'erflow*"); and we hear it, too, in Pope's prologue, which speaks of "*God-like* Cato" (l. 18) and yet asks that we be moved to take him as our model. And we can readily discern the confusions to which this same awkward conjunction might lead in Budgell's final couplet: Addison did not by any means "approve" of suicide, but his play does drive together the distant hero who is beyond all reproach with the familiar, fallible man of virtue in whom we might see ourselves. In act 5, the playwright suddenly plunges the superlative into what Ernest Bernbaum long ago described as sentimental drama's "environment of ordinary life."[41] It is not hard to imagine how some readers and spectators might struggle to register the drama's turn against classical suicide amid such a dizzying shift.

Perhaps Addison belatedly recognized exactly this exegetical trap, for his play makes a last-ditch attempt to withdraw from the sentimental. In the tragedy's closing speech, Lucius first repurposes Cato's body as a makeshift diplomatic shield – "let us bear this awful corps to *Caesar*, | And lay it in his sight, that it may stand | A fence betwixt us and the victor's wrath" (5.4.103-105) – and so reduces Cato from tragic

[41] Ernest Bernbaum, *The Drama of Sensibility: A Sketch of the History of English Sentimental Comedy and Domestic Tragedy, 1696-1780* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ., 1925), 5.

protagonist to stage prop: an object to be physically and strategically repositioned. Then, as if this move were not enough, he effaces Cato almost entirely, warning the audience: "From hence, let fierce contending nations know | What dire effects from civil discord flow" (5.4.107-108). These words speak directly to the partisan tensions of 1713 and to the fear of Jacobite unrest, but nothing in the play has prepared us for them. Rather, they see Addison retreat to the world of Lucan, his epic source, with its recurrent emphasis on the horrors of civil war, and indeed doing so by means of a flagrant borrowing: as Samuel Johnson later observed, the second line of the couplet is lifted verbatim from Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Eclogues*.[42]

In an astute comment on these lines, the *Examiner* (27 April - 1 May 1713) noted that Addison felt obliged to "desert *Cato* after his Fall; and therefore he forms his Moral upon quite another Turn than the Imitation of his *Hero*, and only warns us to avoid *civil discord*, a Topick not touched upon in the Body of the *Play*."[43] The end of the tragedy stages an uneasy vanishing act: both the body of Cato (still on stage but now posited as moveable scenery and totemic object) and the "body" of the play – the two are really one and the same – are made to disappear. Seemingly anxious about the power of a theater of sentimentalism, about the affective potential of "Things perform'd before our Eyes," *Cato* strives in its final lines to shut down the possibility of emulation by reconstituting itself as a blunt political parable for an age of party. In their strained attempt to persuade

[42] John Dryden, *Pastorals*, I.99, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker et al., 20 vols. (Berkley: Univ. of California, 1956-2002), 5:77; Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of English Poets*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 3:21. In fact, Dryden himself took the line in question from John Caryll's translation of the first eclogue, published in *Miscellany Poems* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1684), 8.

[43] Dennis similarly observed that "the Moral which is foisted in at the latter end of this Play, is wholly Foreign to it" (*Critical Works*, 2:45).

the audience that the drama they've just sat through isn't really about Cato at all, the tragedy's closing words seem anxiously to anticipate the figure of Budgell, his pockets crammed with stones, throwing himself into the Thames.

CAPTION FOR FIGURE 1:

Louis Duguernier's frontispiece to seventh edition of Joseph Addison's *Cato* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1713)