THE origins of the question “Why Cato?” go back to our first gathering, in the Window Room of the Gallery Building at the University of Regina where, amply provided with snacks to tide us over between meals, scholars from various disciplines met to discuss matters of some common interest. Some years later, once again in Canada, this time at the Halifax Citadel, those of us who had first thought to invite people to MPP decided it perhaps behooved us to contribute something to the next meeting—now this meeting, which caused me to offer to explore a question that, I suspect, reveals my ignorance more than anything else: “Why Cato?” A question inspired by the impossibility of getting through much more than a single session without reference to John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s Cato’s Letters. The Letters are not, of course, best thought of as a book, or perhaps even as a coherent attack on contemporary politics, but as a series of letters—columns, really—appearing with regularity over a limited time period, written by two remarkable men bringing a particular sensibility to the ability to select a topic of the day to illustrate their temperament. But contemporaneity in the cause of consistent argument is a difficult proposition, as any number of modern commentators shows us. The letters first appeared gathered as a whole in 1724 in four volumes. Prior to that, however, James Roberts and then John Peele were doing a tidy business publishing almanacs of the letters once enough had appeared to justify a collection.1 Peele was also the publisher of the London Journal, the home for Trenchard and Gordon’s essays until Peel accepted a substantial subvention from Robert Walpole to shift the title’s editorial interests. The British Journal would thereafter publish “Cato’s” letters, and in 1723 three collections of those letters appeared, this time printed by T. Woodward and John Walthoe. Walthoe had earlier published Secretary of the Admiralty Josiah Burchett’s A Complete History of the Most Remarkable Transactions at Sea under royal license and was Master of the Stationers’ Company in 1725 and 26.2 Demand for the letters was sufficient that Woodward, Walthoe, and Peele were able to set aside their differences and collaborate on the 1724 edition of the letters marketed as a book rather than as an anthology.3
This flurry of publication activity suggests a wide audience for the letters and also nicely demonstrates that commercial interests could trump apparent political differences when it came to setting type and selling the resulting product, but this shifting web of publishers and titles also helps remind us that the great attraction of Cato was that the name itself could be fitted to a variety of sentiments, as, indeed, the epigraph for the fourth almanac indicates: “O Liberty! O Virtue! O my country!” It would be a remarkable public figure who would be willing to admit to being against even one of these ideas.

That the cry “O Liberty! O Virtue! O my country!” was selected as the epigraph to the collection is telling, for Cato himself is never recorded as having uttered these words. That they appear in English on the title page, when Latin and, less often, Greek epigraphs were common offers further indication of the abiographical origins of the quote and specifically ties the letters to Joseph Addison’s 1713 play, *Cato: A Tragedy,* drawn as it is from Act IV:

— Alas my Friends!

Why morn you thus? Let not a private Loss
Afflict your Hearts. ‘Tis Rome requires our Tears.
The Mistress of the World, the Seat of Empire,
The Nurse of Heroes, the Delight of Gods,
That humbled the proud Tyrants of the Earth,
And set the Nations free, Rome is no more.
O Liberty! O Virtue! O my Country!

The reply of Juba, prince of Numidia and a Cato ally, is, “While *Cato* lives, *Caesar* will blush to see / Mankind enslaved, and be ashamed of Empire.” But, of course, as theater goers then knew, and as Trenchard and Gordon later knew their readers knew, Cato would not live. This puzzling aspect of the Cato conundrum hints at the possibility that, to be useful, the idea of Cato was best defined less by a specific meaning and more by its potential appeal to anyone feeling uneasy about the contemporary moment. The flexibility of “Cato” as a commodity to be deployed when convenient is suggested by the persona Addison had re-introduced to the British public, even if he had done so by eliding the opinions of Marcus Porcius Cato, Cato the Elder, and his great grandson, Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis, Cato the Younger, the “good suicide … the only man [the dictator Julius Caesar] could never bring himself to forgive.”
For all the attention we pay to Cato now, his presence as a dominant trope in British public discourse was periodic. When you include Cicero, perhaps the most likely political comparison to Cato, in a Google ngrams search you get:

The first major Cato spike coincides with Addison’s play and the next several with various editions of Trenchard and Gordon’s letters, but, with the exception of the Addison play period, Cicero’s appearance in print in English either mirrors or surpasses that of Cato. This rather suggests that, indeed, Cicero might have been the generally preferred exemplar of virtue throughout the period, with Cato making occasional appearances in the sweepstakes. One obvious reason, of course, is that Cato’s suicide made for moral problems when one sought to use him as an exemplar. Cicero had contemplated exile, which would have rendered him, perhaps, an unhelpful model with exile’s post-1688 connotations of Jacobitism, but at Atticus’s urging Cicero abandoned that plan and returned to Rome, delivering the fourteen speeches that would become known as the Philippics, named after the speeches given by Demosthenes against Philip II of Macedonia, arguing against tyranny and for the restoration of the republic. Cicero then died at the hands of an agent of Mark Anthony, but his actions, if not his fate, better lent themselves to exhortatory comments about the value of civic virtue. Yet for Addison and then for Trenchard and Gordon, Cato offered a preferable template to Cicero.

I included Caesar in the search to see if the epitome of a tyrant oppressing a free people was particularly strongly tied to interest in oppositional characters of principle, but the connection would seem to be slight, suggesting that both Cato and Cicero served more as general avatars of honor than they did as stark contrasts to Caesar and tyranny, but then I thought to add Brutus to the search, a more complex character for writers of the period but, ultimately, a man of both virtue and action, noticeably in contrast to the suicide Cato the Younger and the retiring and almost-exile Cicero. This results in a graph that looks like this:
What this suggests, perhaps, is that Cato was at best no more an important character of virtue than either Cicero or Brutus, but that in two periods in the first third of the century he offered commentators attributes useful to that particular time, and this situation makes a certain amount of sense when you consider that one virtue of

Addison’s portrayal [is] the interesting contrasts that emerge between Cato and those among his family and friends who remain loyal to the republican order. The play not only highlights Cato’s nobility in contrast to the ambition, treachery, and capitulation of those who would take Caesar’s part, but it also draws our attention to the great difficulty, and thus rarity, of the kind of republican statesmanship that Cato embodies. A central difficulty that emerges is that virtuous republican leadership not only demands a triumph over personal and political vice; it also requires a level of detachment from real human goods that lie very close to the heart. The level of transcendent virtue and dedication that Cato embodies, while serving as an ideal, thus presents itself as a rare political commodity.11

[During discussion of this paper at the Money, Power, and Print colloquium for which it was written, it was suggested that an equally useful title for this paper might have been “Why Not Seneca?” This question is perhaps answered by James Romm’s recent book, Dying Every Day: Seneca at the Court of Nero, which makes the point, inter alia, that Seneca was a tyrannodidaskalos, a tyrant-teacher.12 Additionally, while Seneca might have shared the fate of suicide with Cato, in the former case it was compelled and in the other voluntary.]

When Addison thrust Cato front and center on stage, the Whig opposition was uncertain and weak (but not that much more so than the Tory ministry that would soon disintegrate as Robert Harley, earl of
Oxford and earl Mortimer, and Henry St John, viscount Bolingbroke, completed their on-going falling out, and there was no obvious leader in either the House of Commons or Lords self-evidently playing the part of Cicero and putting country ahead of self. Addison’s play appeared at a time that lent itself to an exemplar from outside the traditional classical circles, one who could tap into a general emotional uncertainty without necessarily offering specific political solutions. A similar situation would present itself when Cato’s Letters appeared, except that this time the “tyranny” came from within the Whig ranks as Robert Walpole secured power and the new monied interests, as represented by the South Sea Company (whose shares collapsed almost as publication of the letters began) and other financial innovators became increasingly entwined in the political structure of the state.

Addison’s Cato was set in a country where issues of legitimacy, authority, and familial loyalties were being played out against the backdrop of very real constitutional confusion. Audience members and commentators found modern parallels to a time and place when it was necessary for good men to stand up against the erosion of rights, but it was not always clear who best embodied those virtues. Cato had seen like-minded friends of liberty seduced or mistaken:

the Day and Year, are Caesar’s.
For him the self-devoted Decii dy’d,
The Fabii fell, and the great Scipio’s conquer’d:
Ev’n Pompey fought for Caesar.¹³

One person who had not succumbed to the temptation of the modern era was Queen Anne, who had earlier endured an internal exile of sorts, holding a lonely court in Berkeley House, London, while she had been most alienated from her brother-in-law and sister. Her circle then had consisted, in effect, of her, her husband, George, prince of Denmark, and Sarah and James Churchill, with only Anne’s son, the ill-fated William, providing any conduit between the isolated Church of England stalwart and heir apparent and her sister, Mary, and William III. The Churchills had remained loyal to Anne even as others had thrown in their lot with an increasingly unpopular William,¹⁴ and while James Churchill, duke of Marlborough, might have been best taken to represent a Cato-like figure, his evident inclination for self-promotion, even if redeemed by some apparent principles, made his claim to the comparison problematic. Anne herself could hardly be cast as a militarily and politically outmaneuvered suicide.

 Undefined, then, except by virtues that were themselves idealistic, “Cato” could be a role model for any faction competing for the right to champion British liberty. [Let us not forget, though, that Cato was also known as “the Censor” by virtue of the position he once held. He was a man whose advocacy of liberty was tempered by a willingness to control the debate so long as he was on the winning side, and,
indeed, Walpole might have mockingly recognized this trait in one of his most eloquent opponents when the second of the two titles to have published Trenchard and Gordon’s letters, the British Journal, came under ministerial sponsorship and added the subtitle “Censor,” to its masthead.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, as Blair Worden notes, “Together with the writings of Lord Bolingbroke, Cato’s Letters would be the principal depository of republican ideas in the earlier [part of the] eighteenth century.”\textsuperscript{16} That Cato’s Letters were commonly assumed at the time to have been the work of Robert Molesworth says something about the ambiguities possible in the common understanding of “Cato” as an identity. Molesworth as the putative author of the Letters makes considerable sense as he had earlier employed John Toland to write election propaganda depicting him as a modern-day Cato; yet in his lengthy warning against absolute monarchy, An Account of Denmark as it was in the Year 1692, Cato is mentioned only in passing. The strongest reference to him is by implication as Molesworth quotes Catullus “To Cato” in the original without translation and without reference. The context is that a well-read citizenry is the best defence against the arrogation of power by either monarch or a parliamentary faction and that in the presence of so literate a society justification for such usurpation of power would be met by mockery and the knowledge that res est ridicula & nimis jocose [the thing is ridiculous and laughable beyond measure].\textsuperscript{17} It was not just Molesworth and Bolingbroke, of course, who could be linked through Cato. Jonathan Swift dedicated his fourth Drapier’s Letter to Molesworth and sought his assistance in the controversy around the 1720 publication of the Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture.\textsuperscript{18} It really does seem as if the word “fungible” could be used to help underscore the many uses and sources of “Cato” to eighteenth-century polemicists.

In Cato Addison’s audience was able to see a man whose loyalty was not to an actual past but, rather, to a past as it should have been. The play represented an early flowering of what Isaac Kramnick would famously identify as the “politics of nostalgia,”\textsuperscript{19} and which Lawrence Klein, lambasting Kramnick’s perhaps nostalgia thesis, would identify as a far more complex “culture of politeness,” as demonstrated by the career of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury.\textsuperscript{20} For Shaftesbury, Klein argues,

Politics was the exemplary arena of inauthenticity, of “Malignity hid under Humanity,” of “fals Pitty expressed for Faults of others; affected Sorrow; Anger on the Publick account & for Mankind; the Quarrels engagd in for the commonwealth.’ Rejecting the world of the politicos, he named names:

the Grave Legislatours, Orators, Authors & Politick Dealers, Aristotelians, Machiavellians, Memoire-Readers or Writers, Gothick or Ancient Modellers, or Collectors; with all that
Dinn of State Dogmatists, Prescribers, Moralizers, Exhorters, Praisers, Censurers, such as the D[avenan]t’s, the F[letche]r’s, M[oleswor]th’s, J. L[ocke]’s, etc.²¹

Shaftesbury’s response had been to decline to stand in the election of 1698, although he took his seat in the House of Lords two years later upon inheriting the earldom.

Shaftesbury’s retreat from electoral politics had not been entirely without precedent, most recently in Swift’s employer and reluctant patron Sir William Temple, who had retired to Moor Park when frustrated by Charles II’s policies and remained there in silence, thereby avoiding the attentions of James II and his ministers, before opting to stay put when William III offered him a government position. William arrived in England with a reputation as a man who liked to get his way, and Temple, who had sought to encourage Charles II to adopt the Privy Council Ministry as a permanent project, would seem to have had little time for the likely structure of William’s monarchy.

Indeed, Temple had argued that

a monarchy where the prince governs by the affections, and according to the opinions and interests, of his people, or the bulk of them (that is, by many degrees the greatest or strongest part of them) makes of all others the safest and firmest government: and on the contrary, a popular state which is not founded in the general humours and interest of the people, but only of the persons who share in the government, or depend upon it, is of all others the most uncertain, unstable, and subject to the most frequent and easy changes.²²

Temple would seem to have distinguished politics from government, despising one while recognizing the need for the other, and in explaining himself he did identify a role model: Cato ultimately made the same decision and, deprived of the opportunity to retire, he chose, says Temple, “to die rather than outlive the Liberties of his Country or Submit to a Conqueror.”²³ Yet this example is provided in the course of Temple’s observation that “Men come to despise one another, by reckoning they have all the same Ends … when indeed their Ends are different,”²⁴ so that:

_Pompey_ fled among the _Ægyptian_ Slaves to save his Life, after the Battle of _Pharsalia_, and loss of Empire, and _Liberty of Rome_. _Cæsar_ chose to die once, rather than live in fear of dying. _Cato_, to die rather than outlive the Liberties of his Country or Submit to a Conqueror. _Atticus_ preferred the Quiet of Life, before all Riches and Power …

Yet these all Contemporaries, and the four greatest of _Rome_.²⁵
Temple quotes Cato the Elder elsewhere on the pleasures of a garden, and notes he was one who “seemed to dote upon cabbage,” Temple chose Atticus as his role model, retiring to Moor Park and living on a relatively modest income, dying a baronet, seemingly content to have declined opportunities that would have earned him wealth and a more senior title. Even so, that Temple could identify Pompey, Caesar, Cato, and Atticus as the “four greatest of Rome” offers further evidence that, as he finished the play, Addison, who was still just about on speaking terms with Swift—who had edited Temple’s Miscellanea—and who was familiar with Temple’s reflections on a life well spent, was able to make of Cato largely what he wished.

By the time of the play’s first performance in 1713 domestic politics had become significantly tenser as it became increasingly obvious the last Stuart monarch was going to die without a living son or daughter. It was true that some considerable finessing of the concept of “the established order of things” had been necessary in the interpretation of events around William’s November 5, 1688, landing at Brixham and the subsequent departure of James II from England, but, nonetheless, by 1713 British parliamentary validity rested on the premise that following James’s “abandonment” of the throne William had been the rightful king, by virtue of his marriage to the older daughter of James II, and that when Mary and then he died without issue the right of succession fell, given the continuing absence of James and his son, to Anne, younger sister of Mary. The status of James II and then of his son could be avoided in polite circles so long as the possibility existed that Anne would give birth to a healthy child and the fiction maintained that James II had abandoned the throne. Once George, prince of Demark, died in 1708 the prospect of Anne giving birth to an heir vanished (in truth it had vanished years earlier), but so long as Anne remained queen confrontation of the succession issue could, in best political fashion, be delayed. As Anne’s health steadily worsened, there were essentially three options: reversion to James II’s son, as James III; recognition of James III not as king regnant but with a regent unless and until he renounced his catholic faith and became a protestant, as well as agreeing that his children be raised in the Church of England; or Sophia, the Dowager Electress of Hanover, the nearest living non-catholic relative of Anne. In the end, Sophia would pre-decease Anne by a matter of days and her son, George, would be crowned as George I.

This uncertainty should have been settled by the 1701 Act of Succession, but there were suggestions of opposition to the Hanoverian claim, largely as a result of concerns that the new monarch might seek to circumvent the provisions of the act stipulating “That in case the crown and imperial dignity of this realm shall hereafter come to any person, not being a native of this kingdom of England, this nation be not obliged to engage in any war for the defence of any dominions or territories which do not belong to the crown of England, without the consent of parliament.” The mechanisms by which such a provision might be secured had become apparent during the various overseas campaigns of William and then of
Anne: by establishing a long-term debt and funding the army and navy on a year-to-year basis. Yet this strategy had been met by a chorus of complaints that such a device was nothing less than a means of stripping power from established hierarchies and undermining traditional English liberties, that the creation of permanent national debt and a standing army necessarily expunged civil liberties. The Act of Settlement in this interpretation was ultimately proving to be at least as unsettling as the prospect of reversion to those whose “principles … [are] such that they will stick at nothing, be it never so wicked, if it will promote their interest,” as the-future Queen Anne had once indicated. 28

These uncertainties, and the obvious attraction of an exemplar of how to conduct oneself ethically in such times, might help us draw closer to the answer to that question “Why Cato?” Cicero, in the end, had been captured while fleeing; Brutus had slain Caesar but had sustained the civil war that led to the destruction of the Roman Republic, though it was by then but a republic in name only. Both offered a possible model for those wishing to oppose tyranny, but neither offered a model that promised sustained social peace, and both had patently violated the concept of Passive Obedience so important to the Church of England. One should, of course, be careful about seeking to hold Roman dignitaries to the precepts of Passive Obedience, but other ancient-modern comparisons were equally problematic and, in any case, as Swift had pointed out in a poem unpublished in his lifetime—for obvious reasons—“Truth is eternal” and God’s “essence [is] fix’d [and does not] depend on giddy circumstance of time or place.”29 Noble though certain actions of both Cicero and Brutus might have been, their overall political careers were nonetheless marked by a certain flexibility that allowed them to adjust to “circumstance of time or place.” Swift’s poem, apparently written at the request of the non-Juror bishop of Ely, Francis Turner, praised “a gentleman I admire at a degree more than I can express,”30 observing

But foolish man still judges what is best
In his own balance, false and light,
Following opinion, dark and blind,
That vagrant leader of the mind,
Till honesty and conscience are clear out of sight.31

Swift’s plea for “submission and humility” combined with non-situational ethics had an obvious appeal, and Addison’s Cato, conflating the twin historical sources, offered an exemplar who had been active in politics, struggling to preserve an ideal state as long as it was possible. When that effort failed and a new constitutional settlement began to emerge he chose suicide over continued, if futile, resistance, exile not being an option without compromising his principles. “Cato” thus combined the active promotion or defense of ideal secular ethical values and the virtue of the church as epitomized in the doctrine of passive
obedience. Additionally, his status as a pre-Christian ethical model allowed Addison and others to ignore the fraught moral question of suicide.

As he put the finishing touches to the play, Addison used the remaining goodwill he enjoyed with former friends to secure a prologue by Alexander Pope and perhaps definitively establish Cato as the one figure around whom a discomforted nation could coalesce. Without addressing contemporary matters at all, Addison could rally people to

Remember, O my friends, the laws, the Rights,
The Gen’rous Plan of Power deliver’d down,
From Age to Age, by your renown’d Forefathers,
(So dearly bought, the Price of so much Blood)
O let it never perish in your Hands!32

Yet the “gen’rous plan of power deliver’d down” was liable to disruption and

When the Ballance is broke, whether by the Negligence, Folly, or Weakness of the Hand that held it, or by mighty Weights fallen into either Scale; the Power will never continue long in equal Division between the two remaining Parties, but (until the Ballance is fixed anew) will run entirely into one. This gives the truest Account of what is understood in the most ancient and approved Greek Authors, by the Word Tyranny; which is not meant for the seizing of the uncontroled or absolute Power into the Hands of a single Person (as many superficial Men have grosly mistaken) but for the breaking of the Balance by whatever Hand, and leaving the Power wholly in one scale.33

One obvious response when “Power [is] wholly in one scale” might well be to withdraw, but, as William Temple at Moor Park showed, such withdrawal did not help prevent the “gen’rous plan of power” from perishing. Indeed, quiet withdrawal rather than specific opposition might even be held to enable decay, for when good men withdraw the field is left to others of less exultant character. Swift had first-hand knowledge of such tensions, gained in his time spent as secretary to Temple.34 Alexander Pope might have been excluded from political society by virtue of his religion, but he, too, associated virtue with a love of home. Perhaps the answer, then, lay in combining domestic virtue with social engagement, in being, in effect, both Catos at once:
Addison’s Cato seems perfectly poised between love of home and patriotic duty … He is a man “fill’d with domestic tenderness, the best, the kindest Father” and always gentle with his friends (92). Yet at Marcus’ death, Juba remarks, “Behold that upright man! Rome fills his eyes with tears that flowed not o’er his own dead son” (85). At the same time, it is the fate of his friends that alone is able to incite in him any fear of Caesar. But perhaps the greatest indication of Cato’s love of home and hearth is his advice to Portius to retreat to the family estate: “There live retired, pray for the peace of Rome: Content thyself to be obscurely good. When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway, The post of honour is a private station.”

Addison’s Cato did not, of course, rise fully formed from his pen, and as well as the conflation of the two Catos Addison’s portrayal relies on both the transmigration of Cicero’s “idea of citizenship as senatorial” to Cato, an ideal wherein Cicero’s model was “not the republic in his own era … but the republic as [he] idealized it in its classic moment before the Gracchi … a mixed and balanced constitution,” and on taking to heart Swift’s observation that

When the two Parties that divide the whole Commonwealth, come once to a Rupture, without any Hopes left of forming a Third with better Principles, to balance the others: it seems every Man’s Duty to chuse one of the two Sides, although he cannot entirely approve of either … This was the Opinion and Practice of the latter Cato, whom I esteem to have been the wisest and best of all the Romans.

In his list “Of mean and great figures,” Swift identified Cato as one “of those who have made great figures in some particular action or circumstances of their lives” by virtue of his “providing for the Safety of his Friends and had determined to dy.”

It wasn’t, then, that Cato was a suicidal republican that made him so attractive an example to commentators; it was the life he had been reported to live before suicide became his defining gesture. Charles Davenant, for example, discoursing in 1704 Upon Grants and Resumption took the opportunity to Shew … How Our Ancestors Have Proceeded noted that

Cato Uticensis brought from Cyprus seven Thousand Talents (about thirteen Hundred Thousand Pounds of our Money) which he made by the Sale of the Jewels, Plate, Housholdstuff, and other Riches of the Ptolomy who poison’d himself in that land, and the exactness with which Cato proceeded in that Commission, is a noble pattern for such to follow, as will handle matters of Government with Integrity and Virtue.
Later in the same tract, Davenant considered what should be done with income from estates forfeited in Ireland after the conclusion of the Williamite campaign. That the lands were won, in effect, by the combined resources of the English state meant the revenues from them were, by right—Davenant brings Grotius into the argument in just about every paragraph of this disquisition—the property of the state and should be used to pay down the public debt, rather than to enrich individuals. “Cato,” Davenant noted, citing Aulus Gellius, “complain’d in vehement Words, That poor Thieves were manacled in Fetters, but that the Publick Robbers shin’d in Gold and rich Attire.”

Indeed, “Cato” could find himself dropped into the conversation with no apparent account of context. Issuing a plea for the restoration of religious observation by the state, a “Grave Divine of the Church of England” had reflected in 1701 that

Should we trust too much to the Wisdom of our Parliament, tho every Member of it were another Cato; should we rely barely upon the strengths and numbers of our Ships, tho every Seaman were another Drake; in short, should we trust too much to the Fidelity and Courage of our Armies, tho every soldier were another Julius Caesar … yet such a Creature-confidence were a sin like enough to provoke our God to prevent our Safety, and blast all our Hopes.

When Cato and Caesar show up in such close company, and both are the object of praise, even if being compared for differing attributes, you know you are dealing with short-hand references designed to evoke a reaction without having to cope with the risky proposition of actually staking out some sort of position.

Indeed, Cato had been many things in history up to this point: for Cicero and Plutarch, Cato the Younger’s self-inflicted death stood as an exemplary act of model citizenship; for Seneca it was the ultimate act of self-control. In Dante’s Divine Comedy Cato is not in hell with other suicides but is guardian of Mount Purgatory. Indeed, in the Convivio Dante had called Cato the “human being best suited to represent God.”

This was the cultural DNA upon which Addison drew when he chose Cato to speak from the stage for a carefully undefined sense of contemporary unease. So, when Decius asks Cato what it will take for him to set aside his opposition and be known as “Caesar’s friend,” the response evokes the theory, if not the practice, of the ideal British parliamentary system:

Bid him disband his Legions,

Restore the Common-wealth to Liberty,
Submit his Actions to the Publick Censure,
And stand the Judgment of a Roman Senate.
Bid him do this, and Cato is his Friend.44

At least in part, then, Cato’s objection to Caesar boiled down to the question of what to do with public finances. It was just such an accounting to which the duke of Marlborough had appeared to have been held to when the 1711-12 “Commission for the taking, examining and stating the public accounts of the Kingdom” concluded by a substantial majority that “the taking of several sums of money annually by the Duke of Marlborough from the contractor for foraging the bread and wagons ... was unwarrantable and illegal,” and that the 2.5 percent deducted from the pay of foreign troops “is public money and ought to be accounted for,”45 although, as Gilbert Burnet archly noted, Marlborough’s successor, the duke of Ormonde, was granted “the same allowances that had been lately voted criminal in the Duke of Marlborough.”46

Not quite 20 years earlier, Cato’s virtue had been invoked by William Pittis to those gathered around Robert Harley then Speaker of the House of Commons and at odds with the cabinet. Surveying the situation in 1702, Pittis took some solace in the fact that

There are some …

That still survive, whose Conduct shews them true,
Whose Souls in their first Bent unmov’d have stood,
Tenacious, Bold, impenetrably Good,
Deaf to the Syrens Voice, and Tempters Cries,

Uncharm’d like Adders, and like Serpents wise,

Whose strenght of Knowledge and whose steady Lives,
Shew the dead Patriot’s Worth in their’s survives.

... 

Like Roman Cato with Attention hear’d,
Like Cato, for his Constancy, rever’d,
Unchang’d, like Good it self, he’l’ll Good approve,
Speak daring Truths, and Point at Pow’rful Faults,
Disdainful of a Check to Curb his Thoughts.47

“Cato,” said Pope, in a letter to one of his friends, written as the play was enjoying its accolades, “was not so much the wonder of Rome in his days, as he is of Britain in ours.”48 The Romans, perhaps, knew Cato for whom he was. The British knew him as they wished to be known.
Notes


3. [Trenchard, John and Thomas Gordon]. *Cato’s Letters*. 4 vols (London, 1724). [Volume 2 in some holdings has a 1723 date on the title page; I have not been able to find any such title date for volumes 1, 3 or 4].

4. [Trenchard, John and Thomas Gordon]. *A Collection of Cato’s Political Letters in The London Journal, to December 17, inclusive, 1720. The Second Edition; with a New Preface* (London, 1723). The edition that forms the basis for most modern editions is that of 1755, and it is that edition that includes for the first-time the subtitle *Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, which is not insignificant in that any mention of money, finance, or public debt is missing from that sub-title. Indeed, of the 144 letters Trenchard and Gordon published only four mention either debt or credit in their titles.

5. The evocation of “Cato” was usually intended to call to mind the younger of two notable Romans who bore that name, but, on occasion, the words of the older one were borrowed without particular attention to biographical accuracy.

6. Addison, Joseph. *Cato: A Tragedy* (London, 1713). (Performed and published in 1713, the play was finished in 1712 after Addison re-visited a draft he had written when younger).


12. Romm, James. *Dying Every Day: Seneca at the Court of Nero* (New York: Knopf, 2014). It was Alan Downie who posed this most reasonable of questions.


18. For more on Swift and Molesworth and the *Proposal* see, Fauske, Christopher J. *Jonathan Swift and the Church of Ireland, 1710-1724* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), pp. 76ff.


27. An Act for the Further Limitation of the Crown and Better Securing the Rights and Liberties of the Subject [12 and 13 Will 3 c. 2].


35. Wright, “Thoughts on Joseph Addison’s *Cato.*”


> In November 1839 Forbes Winslow delivered a lecture, “Suicide, Medically Considered,” to the Westminster Medical Society. After the talk the debate amongst the members focused, for the most part, on the relationship between insanity and suicide, and the death of Cato was often mentioned. At the end of a second evening of discussion, *The Lancet* reported, Mr Winslow rose at a late hour to reply:

He contended that the object of his paper had been misunderstood and that the main points of it had not been discussed . . . With reference to the proof of insanity in some suicides,
the case of Cato had been frequently appealed to, but the speakers had taken the view of his character and conduct rather from poetry than history from Addison instead of Plutarch. He contended that the description which the latter gave of the last hours of Cato fully warranted the opinion that he was a lunatic (744-5).


44. Addison, Cato, II.i, p. 21.


46. Burnet, Thomas, ed. Bishop Burnet’s History of His Own Time: From the Restoration of King Charles II, to the Conclusion of the Treaty of Peace at Utrecht, in the Reign of Queen Anne. To which is Prefixed, A Summary Recapitulation of Affairs in Church and State, from King James I. to the Restoration in the Year 1660. Together with the Author’s Life, by the Editor, and Some Explanatory Notes. The Whole Revised and Corrected by Him (London, 1753), iii:367.


48. Letters of Mr. Pope, and Several Eminent Persons, From the Year 1705 to 171 (London, 1735), ii:46.