

The Sack of Rome

by Mercy Otis Warren

A tragedy in five acts

PREFACE

To the Public,

Almost every page of the story of Rome, exhibits a tragedy, without the exaggeration of poetic fiction; yet there are few of its interesting scenes, that have not furnished the machinery for some dramatic work. But, amidst the innumerable writers, that almost every age has produced, the author of a piece, now offered the public, does not recollect to have seen the weakness and cruelty of Valentinian ---the character of Petronius Maximus ---the resentment, indiscretion and revenge of Edoxia ---(the more immediate causes of the invasion of the imperial city, by the Vandals)---chosen for the subject of theatrical instruction.

The subversion of the western empire, and the Sack of the city of Rome, by Genseric , form an era in the revolution of human affairs, that strikes the mind with peculiar solemnity: Perhaps, at that period, the character of man was sunk to the lowest stage of depravity. Debilitated by the habits of every species of luxury, a long series of tragical events, and the continual apprehensions of proscription, or death; the powers of the mind were, at the same time, obscured by the superstitions of weak, uninformed Christians, blended with the barbarism and ignorance of the darker ages.

Thus an impenetrable cloud was thrown over the religious and political institutions, both of the Roman and the Gothic world; which hastened on the destruction of the former, without exhibiting any thing more honourable to the genius and virtue of mankind, in the establishment of the latter, nor have more enlightened and polished ages been taught, by their examples, to shun the luxurious vices, or the absurd systems of policy, which have frequently corrupted, distracted, and ruined the best constituted republics; as well as divided and overturned the strong fabric of monarchic government.

In tracing the rise, the character, the revolutions, and the fall of the most politic and brave, the most insolent and selfish people, the world ever exhibited, the hero and the moralist may find the most sublime examples of valour and virtue; and the philosopher the most humiliating lessons to the pride of man, in the turpitude of some of their capital characters: While the extensive dominions of that once celebrated nation, their haughty usurpations and splendid crimes, have for ages furnished the historian and the poet with a field of speculation, adapted to his own peculiar talents. But if the writer of the Sack of Rome has mistaken her's, she will, doubtless, be forgiven, as there have been instances of men of the best abilities who have fallen into the same error.

There is but little mixture of fable in the narration, and, I hope, a just purity of stile has been observed, while the writer has aimed at moral improvement, by an exhibition of the tumult and misery into which mankind are often plunged by an unwarrantable indulgence of the discordant passions of the human mind.

Theatrical amusements may, sometimes, have been prostituted to the purposes of vice; yet, in an age of taste and refinement, lessons of morality, and the consequences of deviation, may perhaps, be as successfully enforced from the stage, as by modes of instruction, less censured by the severe; while, at

the same time, the exhibition of great historical events, opens a field of contemplation to the reflecting and philosophic mind.

My first wish is to throw a mite into the scale of virtue, and my highest ambition to meet the approbation of the judicious and worthy:---In the one, I am gratified from the reflections of my own heart; for the other, I wait with diffidence the determinations of the candid public.

M. W.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Men

Valentinian: *Emperor of Rome*

Heraclius: *Favorite eunuch to Valentinian*

Petronius Maximus: *a noble citizen*

Ætius: *Commander of the Roman Troops*

Gaudentius: *Son to Ætius, betrothed to Eudocia*

Leo: *Bishop of Rome*

Genseric: *King of the vandals, reigning in Carthage*

Huneric: *son to Genseric*

Traulista: *a barbarian prince*

Women

Edoxia: *Empress to Rome*

Eudocia: *Daughter of Valentinian*

Placida: *Daughter of Valentinian*

Senators, Soldiers, Servants. &c. &c.

ACT I

Scene I

A CAMP NEAR ROME

(ÆTIUS AND GAUDENTIUS)

Ætius

A solemn stillness reigns throughout the camp;
The hostile sound of martial musick's hush'd;
A truce agreed, the proud Attila gives,
Perhaps, a short liv'd peace to bleeding Rome:
But nations pouring from their frozen dens,
Rough, naked boors, from every northern wild,
Untutor'd, or by nature, or by art,
With scarce a trait that speaks the species man,
Except the semblance of the human form,
Must be the chosen scourge, by heaven design'd,

To chasten Rome for that tyrannick sway
Usurp'd and stretch'd o'er all her wide domain,
And proudly held by her remorseless sword;
Her insolence, her stubbornness of soul,
That trod down nations, trampled on the necks
Of mighty kings, and taught her weaker foes.
To fear alike her senators and gods.

Gaudentius

Though from each quarter of the peopled globe
Some hostile foe, or new invader rise,
Imperial Rome must ever awe the world.

Ætius

With hideous shouts the northern hords retir'd
O'er the bleak mounts to Sogdiana's wilds;
But fierce Attila look'd indignant back
On weaken'd Rome, by luxury undone;
Flush'd with success, by vulgar kings ador'd,
Who watch his nod and tremble at his frown,
The Scythian savage left the Latian shore,
Like some wild beast just gorg'd with human blood,
Full glutted with his prey, to breathe awhile
In his ferocious den---to whet his taste
For new refreshing hecatombs of blood.

Gaudentius

Extreme distress unites the firm and brave;
True virtue might each obstacle surmount;
Rome, like a phenix, from her smoking towns,
Dissolving columns, cities wrapt in flames,
Might vet emerge and more illustrious shine,
If party rage and luxury should cease,
And peace give time to make a just reform
Through each corrupted channel of the law;
Or if simplicity again returns,
And government more energy assumes,
Her ancient codes restor'd on equal terms,
She yet might reign from Danube to the Po.

Ætius

There's little hope from such a noble source;
So chang'd her manners, so debas'd the mind
By faction, pride, intemperance and lust.
Lost in inglorious ease, all valour melts
Beneath incrusted roofs, emboss'd with gold,
Egyptian pearls and emeralds of the East.
The sword alone is all that Rome can boast

That bears affinity to former fame;
Yet see the sons of Romulus dismay'd,
The trembling youth of Italy alarm'd
Whene'er the trumpet summons to the field.
Before the vernal equinox returns
To cheer the Hetrurian plains, war wakes anew;
I saw the tyger gnash his hungry teeth
When fair Honoria's ample dower was nam'd,
On which the savage stipulated peace;
This brings him back to claim his royal bride.

Gaudentius

But while transported with the youthful charms
Of beauteous Elda---taken to his bed;
Amidst barbarick pomp---he may forget
Both enmity and gold and his Honoria,
Till Rome's prepar'd to meet him in the field.

(EXEUNT)

Scene II

(ÆTIUS, LEO AND GAUDENTIUS)

Leo

I come my lord with tidings on my tongue.

Ætius

Say, what new foe has Rome? I am prepar'd.

Leo

I come to hail the valiant friend of Rome,
Whose arm and prowess are her best support;
With the glad news of fierce Attila's death.

Ætius

How did the monster fall?

Leo

Hot from the riot of a barbarous feast;
Sent swiftly down to Pluto's gloomy shade,
By lewd debauch and great excess of joy
That his rough arm had humbled haughty Rome.

Ætius

Humbled indeed! the world's proud mistress
Trembles at th' approach of Suevick valour;

The harden'd lance dip'd in the Wolga's stream;
Hurl'd in the face of her degenerate sons;
They start appall'd e'en at a distant foe;
The next invader seals Rome's heavy doom.

Leo

Though weaken'd Rome by furious factions torn,
Imbitter'd by decline, sinks deep in vice---
Yet, was the empire held in bolder hands
The fierce barbarick rage might still be check'd:
Within Liguria all would be secure,
And sav'd from pillage all the Latian states;
Then let the world beyond the towering Alps
Be still possess'd by Goth, or Vandal tribes,
Ravag'd by wolves, or yet more savage Huns.

Ætius

Where is the emperor? Does he not awake
From his soft slumbering lethargy of soul?

Leo

Supinely sunk in dreams of wanton bliss,
Ignoble pleasures of a splendid court,
Or peace, or war, or truce, the same to him.

Ætius

Yet, when he heard of the barbarian's death,
Did he not rouse, nor dread the ill omen'd birds
That late have brooded o'er the capitol,
And augur'd evils round the city walls,
That the twelve centuries were near complete,
Since Romulus the founder of the state
Had prophesied the measure of her guilt
Would tempt the destinies in wrath to rise
And shake the empire from its ancient base?

Leo

The fair Ardelia fills the monarch's heart;
He secret sighs for Maximus's wife.

Ætius

Ardelia!---the good---the chaste Ardelia---
The first and fairest matron left in Rome!

Leo

To triumph over her superiour charms,
He cog'd the dye at Maximus's cost:
Long practis'd in the tercerarian art,

Petronius is play'd a double game;
The die was thrown while fortune turn'd the wheel
That makes him wretched as he has been bless'd.

Ætius

'Mongst the long list of celebrated names,
Matrons of ancient or of modern fame,
None boasts a fairer claim to virtue's palm
Than the discreet, the excellent Ardelia;
Nor can she forfeit by a shameful fall
That modesty, and grace, and decent pride,
That dignifies, nor less adorns, the sex.

Leo

Yet heavenly virtue, or angelick worth,
May fall the victim of a wanton wish,
When power lends its iron hand to guilt.

Ætius

Petronius ador'd Ardelia's charms.

Leo

As well he ought---though innocent as fair,
Pity's too weak her anguish to express---
Language too poor to speak one half her griefs:
But Maximus returns---Ah, hapless man!
I would not see him till he knows his fate,
And time has calm'd the tumults of his soul.

(EXEUNT)

Scene III

(ÆTIUS AND MAXIMUS)

Ætius

Hah ! Maximus---
Art thou the last to hail thy friend's success?
Or has long absence blotted friendship out?

Maximus

Forgive me, Ætius---
I esteem thy virtues---nor envy thee
The laurels, thou hast won: Absence, nor time,
Can e'er obliterate that love, that friendship,
Merit makes thy own, and worth commands:
Give me thy hand---thou know'st my heart is thine,
Nor can I more until we meet again.

Ætius

What means this haste? Why that disturbed brow?

Maximus

Return'd this moment from the Aquilean camp
Where I've been sent with such impetuous speed,
So much unlike the slowness of the emperor,
I scarce believe that he could mean me fair.

Ætius

What cause is there for doubt? or why suspect?

Maximus

I think some latent mischief lies conceal'd
Beneath the vizard of a fair pretence;
My heart ill brook'd the errand of the day,
Yet I obey'd---though a strange horror seiz'd
My gloomy mind---and shook my frame
As if the moment murder'd all my joys.

Ætius

But what excites distrust?

Maximus

Not like a child am I about to weave
In piteous accents a sad tale of woe:
But if I'm bubbled by a mean device.
No lingering vengeance shall repair my wrongs.

Ætius

What mean these fears? this agony of doubt?

Maximus

Thou art a gen'rous and a valiant friend:
I'll not conceal the anguish of my soul,
Nor yet the secret worm that gnaws my heart.
Myself forgot in an ignoble vice,
A vice below the dignity of man,
Without temptation but in avarice,
A blacker passion still---fate threw the die,
Or by superiour skill the emperor won
My beauteous grottos---my paternal groves---
My pleasant villas---and, meandering streams---
The sweet cascades that gurgled o'er the dales---
The noble busts that mark'd th' Anician name---
My poplar walks---and my Ardelia's bower---
(Those soft retreats of innocence and love)

And thus for once made Maximus a slave.
But ah! he gave a treacherous release;
He only ask'd the signet from my hand
To seal a promise that I'd reach the camp
Where Accimer commands before the eve:
But 'twas a poor, a frivolous pretence;
Yet did I not suspect a base design,
Till I receiv'd, without a signature,
In characters familiar to my eye,
A sentence like a thunderbolt from Jove.
I kiss'd the hand---in raptures broke the seal---
"Read---tremble---and despair---adieu, Petronius!"
Was all the page---the solemn page, contain'd;
And now I haste to find my lov'd Ardelia;
If she's not wrong'd, Petronius Maximus
May still be bless'd.

Ætius

Though Valentinian doats on beauty's charms,
Ardelia must be safe: True virtue checks
A bold licentious wish, and guards the fair;
He durst not drag an angel to his bed.

Maximus

As truth and virtue dignifi'd my bliss,
The gods alone who judge of spotless worth,
Must clear her fame, and vindicate my own;
Or let their vengeance pour in dreadful peals
Their heated bolts---till chosen curses fall,
In blasts distinguish'd, on the emperor's head.

(EXEUNT)

Scene IV

(ÆTIUS, GAUDENTIUS AND HERACLIUS)

Ætius

Heraclius !---Say, what has brought thee hither?

Heraclius

The emperor's command---he, on the tide
Of pleasure and success, congratulates,
Both on the peace, and on Attila's death,
The brave Gaudentius, and his noble sire;
He greets with thanks, his hardy, veteran friends,
For valour, faith, and every great exploit
Their arms atchiev'd in the rough field of Mars.

When Ætius finds it safe to leave the camp,
It is his will ye both repair to Rome,
To rest awhile from toilsome scenes of war,
And taste the pleasures of the imperial court.

Ætius

We shall obey---and ere tomorrow's dawn,
I reach the city and salute my prince.
But whence that sigh, my son? Art thou afraid

(TO GAUDENTIUS)

To venture on the threshold of a court,
Lest it melt down thy valour or thy fame?
Or does soft hope present th' hymenial torch,
Rekindle in thy breast a lover's flame.
And bring the fair Eudocia to thine eye?
Thy valour claims her from the emperor's hand
Nor will he longer now protract his vow.

Gaudentius

Nor shall he---Eudocia is my wife---
A soldier's honour rests upon his sword,
And mine shall claim its right.

Heraclius

He gives Eudocia to thy longing arms,
And bids thee haste to solemnize thy love,
In festal joys and holy nuptial rites.

Gaudentius

Thou art the harbinger of bliss indeed;
Command my gratitude, it shall be thine:
I'll hasten on, and meet thee in the forum;
If yet thou hast one wish ungratified,
Command my aid---it shall ensure success.
Complete thy fortune, and fill up thy hopes.

Heraclius

The princess waits impatiently to hear
The happy moment of her lord's return.

(EXIT HERACLIUS)

Ætius

There's not a prince in Valentinian's court
Has serv'd with more fidelity and zeal;
Nor does he slight the services of Ætius,

But as a prince he bounteously rewards.
My son! the bravest, most deserving youth
That e'er paternal love clasp'd to his breast,
He crowns thy valour with the choicest gift
A lover ever wish'd, or hero claim'd.
Yet while my heart anticipates thy bliss,
Thou must remember that thou liv'st for Rome:
Let not ambition, avarice, or love,
Contaminate thy patriotick worth:
And as my sword has sav'd the commonwealth,
Drove back her foes, and given peace to Rome,
Let thine example teach her to be free.

Gaudentius

Inspir'd by thee, by glory, and by fame,
No deed of mine shall ever stain thy name.

(EXEUNT)

ACT II

Scene I

*PALACE OF VALENTINIAN
(ENTER VALENTINIAN AND HERACLIUS)*

Valentinian

Hast thou seen Maximus?---Is he return'd?
'Tis whisper'd that he's now about the court:
I order'd Ricemar to urge his stay
To try his valour in the feats of war,
Till I found means to sooth Ardelia's grief,
Or reconcil'd her to my ardent love:
Yet I suspect my will is disobey'd.

Heraclius

I, through the Campus Martius, saw him pass,
Sullen and fierce as is the baited bull,
Whetted for blood and roaring for his prey,
When rushing on the victim of his rage.

Valentinian

He surely meditates some great revenge.
He has a bold, assuming, haughty soul---
A daring pride that spurns the least affront---
I fear him more than Ætius

Heraclius

But Ætius is the idol of the army,
And at his beck---the young barbarian princes.
Haughty and brave, he brooks not thy delay;
Impatient for the promise made Gaudentius,
Sighs for a union with the fair Eudocia.
A son so near---a sceptre in his eye,
May empire give to his aspiring father.

Valentinian

Go lead him hither with his favour'd son,
My hand shall rid me from all fear from them:
Once in the palace, and the work is done:
I'll save my daughter for a nobler union.
But find out Maximus---'tis him I dread;
A man thus injur'd never can forgive.

Heraclius

He lov'd Ardelia with the purest flame;
Indeed she was, for innocence and truth,
For elegance, true dignity, and grace,
The fairest sample of that ancient worth
Th' illustrious matrons boasted to the world
When Rome was fam'd for every glorious deed.
But she's no more!

Valentinian

Hah! slave, forbear---
Mean'st thou to try my love, or wake my fears?
Say thou at once---suspense I ne'er could bear.

Heraclius

Despair, resentment, agonizing grief,
This morn have clos'd the period of a life
Too pure and spotless for the Roman world.

Valentinian

Then I'm undone forever---double the guards.
Go find Petronius out---suffer not him,
Nor Ætius, to see another sun:
To make the work complete, bring Ætius hither;
My sword is ready for a traitor's blood,
Nor dare another arm attempt his death.

(EXIT HERACLIUS)

Down coward conscience, nor disturb a prince.
My recent crime haunts all my sleepless nights;

Yet, shall I fill the measure of my guilt
And turn assassin?---Am I so lost, as thus
To stain my hand with the Patrician blood---
Pollute my court---disgrace the Roman name?
No, that can't be---her infamy's complete.
And no new crime is wanting in the list
To stigmatize, and blast her ancient fame.
In this apartment, now my gloomy cell,
Where I have seen Ardelia drown'd in tears,
And almost dying with indignant grief,
All other crimes are light---let Ætius die.

(ENTER EDOXIA)

But hah!---here comes my torment---
My other conscience---to kill me with a look---
The fair---the excellent---the wrong'd Edoxia;
Her presence freezes all my powers of speech;
I dare not lift my eye to meet her frown---
I'm all confusion---guilt---perdition---death.

(RETIRING HASTILY)

Edoxia

Oh! fly me not, my sovereign---
I only come to warn my much lov'd lord,
A lowering storm may burst upon his head.

Valentinian

I fear no storms but from an injur'd wife;
The sharp invectives of neglected beauty.

Edoxia

My wrongs I here forgive---thy safety now
Is all I have to wish---my soul is all alarm.

Valentinian

What idle terror has assail'd thy brain;
Or what new rupture threatens empire next?

Edoxia

No foreign foe awakes my anxious thought;
The faithful Ætius commands the legions,
And guards the posts from Tyber to the Rhine,
From bold inroads and fierce barbarick foes.

Valentinian

A woman, weaken'd by a sense of wrongs,
With a creative fancy, spreads contagion,
If she names her fears---yet tell the cause,
If any cause thou hast, thus to alarm
And agitate my mind.

Edoxia

Petronius Maximus

Valentinian

What of Petronius?

Edoxia

'Tis him I fear:---As from the Circus,
Late this morn I came, he enter'd---
Rage in his eye---unheeding what he saw;
Lost in deep thought, and wrap'd in dark intrigue,
He onward mov'd, with slow and solemn steps---
A dark, fix'd brow, and gesture of despair---
He walk'd, and stop'd, and trod, and stamp'd the ground,
And gnash'd his teeth, and clench'd his nervous palm,
Then spread it on his breast and press'd it hard,
As if afraid his heart would burst its bounds---
Then sob'd a lowly sigh---alas! Ardelia!
And, as the shadow moves beside the man,
His steps were measur'd by an Alan prince;
But neither heeded all the sports of Rome.
Forgive my lord, my soft officious care
To guard thy peace from each domestick foe.

Valentinian

Thou best of women! how shall I atone
For half the wrongs my faithless heart has done
To beauty blended with superiour worth?

Edoxia

Ill boding dreams and gloomy apparitions---
Fresh bleeding ghosts, and shades of darkest hue,
Haunt all my slumbers---some deep design,
Of terrible import, in Maximus I saw;
Waste not a moment---oh! secure thyself,
And when we meet again, we'll talk of love.

(EXEUNT)

Scene II

(VALENTINIAN AND HERACLIUS)

Heraclius

Ætius attends thy will, as does his son---
With them Beotius, prefect of the city.

Valentinian

Let only Ætius enter---tell him
The business is of such import---
No other ear must witness---thou wilt thy self
Take care of both Beotius and Gaudentius

Heraclius

I will my lord---he and his noble friend
May fight Attila in the shades below,
If that fierce warrior still remembers Rome.

Valentinian

No vulgar souls we'll send the gods this day;
Petronius next, and then defy the world.

(EXIT HERACLIUS)

My arm be strong---away with conscious qualms---
His is a life worthy of Cæsar's sword:
'Tis true I but suspect his cover'd treason:
Yet, Ætius must die---as shall Gaudentius.

(EXIT)

Scene III

(EUDOCIA AND PLACIDIA)

Eudocia

Oh ! my Placidia,
The good, the generous Ætius is dead,
And murder'd by the hand of Valentinian.

Placidia

Impossible!---'tis but the tale of malice, whisper'd round,
By some vile foe to Valentinian's house.

Eudocia

'Tis done,
And hell itself records the dreadful deed.

Placidia

My father ne'er could stain the imperial throne
By such a crime as this!
What! like the madman of old Philip's race,
Plunge his drawn dagger in the faithful breast
Of such a friend as Ætius?

Eudocia

He has,
And my Gaudentius just escap'd the blow
Heraclius design'd, by speedy flight,
And in his stead Beotius was slain.

Placidia

Where is the virtuous youth?---and where his friends?

Eudocia

He pass'd the guards, Traulista by his side,
And, through the western gate, they, swift as lightning,
Hasted to Liguria---though much he lov'd,
He'll ne'er forgive the murd'rer of his sire;
He has a filial heart and valiant arm,
And nature's instinct wakes a tender strife.
The genuine virtues of his youthful heart,
Cherish'd by reason---ripen'd to sublime,
Nurs'd up by honour, gratitude and worth,
Call loud for vengeance o'er his father's tomb.

Placidia

Alas! the gath'ring storm---what chosen blasts,
Heaven's vengeance next pours down, is with the gods.

Eudocia

The death of Ætius augurs ill to Rome;
His soul, too firm to fear, or Goths, or Huns;
Too great to be corrupted, or deceiv'd,
Sooth'd their rough passions, balanc'd their ambition;
They lov'd, they fear'd, and will avenge his death.

Placidia

When jealousy's at war with wild ambition,
And reason quits the helm amid the storm,
The furious hurricane of passion swells
Till ev'ry sail hurls on to sure perdition.

Eudocia

Ah! my Gaudentius---could Eudocia's blood
Wash off the guilt contracted by her sire,

These veins I'd ope, and warm libations pour
Down at thy feet, to make his daughter
Worthy of thy love---love did I say?---no---
He must forever hate---despise---detest---
And curse the name of Cæsar's blasted race,
And fly the sight of his too wretched daughter.

Placidia

Alas! I fear---I know not what I fear---
Imagination's short of what I dread
From complicated guilt, which stalks abroad.
Oh! Heaven avert the destiny of Rome!

Eudocia

I'm sick of life---of pageantry and pomp---
Of thrones and sceptres stain'd by human blood:
Come let us wander down the sacred walks,
The silent grots, where virtue once reclin'd.
The verdant forests bend their lofty tops
To make a covert for the weary head;
There tranquiliz'd beneath pale Cynthia's shade,
We'll breathe and whisper disappointed love;
And weep our country, family and friends,
'Till bright Aurora streaks the eastern skies
And lights us back among the busy throng.

(EXEUNT)

Scene IV

(VALENTINIAN AND HERACLIUS)

Valentinian

The gilded morn in transports hails the day,
And the shrill trumpet sounds to martial sports;
But yet a certain heaviness hangs o'er me,
As though a tempest burst from midnight clouds.
Were I afraid of either gods or men,
I'd swear this day is like the ides of March,
Big with portentous omens:---Calphurnia's dreams,
And my Edoxia's fears, bear such a semblance
That through the night, (even if a cricket moves)
I start---I cry---my evil genius! say,
Dost come with Ætius' or Petronius' sword?

Heraclius

No superstitious dread should ere pervade
The royal bosom of a Roman prince;
Encircled deep by faithful veteran bands
Who wait his fiat, and observe his nod,
To feed his pleasures, or to blast his foes;
To light the capitol, or guard the state,
Or make the empire tremble at his frown.

Valentinian

The noble Ætius, of princely birth,
Possess'd a soul by Roman valour warm'd,
That won the plaudits both of friends and foes;
The legions lov'd---the citizens ador'd,
And all will murmur at his sudden fall:
Yet more I fear Petronius's rage,
Than all the city, senators, or troops.

Heraclius

Thou hast done well to cut a traitor down
Ere he usurp'd and rob'd thee of a throne;
And if plebeian, or patrician tongues,
Should utter menace, or a plaintive word,
Teach them the fate of Rome hangs on thy will.

Valentinian

But where is Maximus?
Though he's in friendship, gen'rous and sincere,
Yet injur'd once, implacably he hates:
'Twou'd beggar language to describe his pride,
His strength of passion when arous'd to rage;
Inexorable vengeance tears his soul
Constant and noble, as a god he loves,
But as a furious fiend, rewards his foes;
Nought but their death can cool his passions down.

Heraclius

Petronius Maximus returns no more
To interrupt the pleasures of the court:
Ardelia dead---the funeral pile burnt down---
Her ashes gather'd in a golden urn;
He in despair has left the imperial city.
Beside the margin of the Tuscan shore,
In a small villa of the Anician name,
He's gone to weep his folly and his fate.

Valentinian

Where are his friends?---his num'rous train of clients?
Where the admiring crowds fed by his hand,
And basking in his wealth?

Heraclius

Just as the world in ev'ry age have done,
Paying their court where better fortune smiles;
'Tis not the sun, when muffled up in clouds
And plunging down the western briny main
Mankind adore.

The eastern monarch just from Thetis' bed,
With rosy blushes on his morning beams,
Majestick rising o'er the burnish'd world,
Beholds his homagers on ev'ry side;
As in the field of Mars amid the sports,
The son of Theodotius, is a god.

Valentinian

Yet anguish tears, and love inflames my breast;
Oh! would oblivion wrap a sable veil
O'er my remorse, and o'er Ardelia's grief,
O'er her bright form, and her untimely death,
I might defy the vengeance of her lord:
Methinks I see her lovely tearful eye
With scornful glances fir'd---till grief and fear,
And consternation numb my torpid frame.

Heraclius

Why should an emperor fear?

Valentinian

Say, where's Gaudentius?

Heraclius

He, swift of foot as an Herulian archer,
Escap'd my sword, and shelters in the camp;
But after him---with thy express command---
A trusty messenger I have dispatch'd:
This night his sire may meet him in the shades.

Valentinian

Where is Traulista---prince of the Ostrogoths,
Dauntless and brave---his first---his chosen friend?

Heraclius

Gone to Liguria with the son of Ætius;
He lov'd him much.

Valentinian

Then let him share his fate.

Heraclius

Leave them to me, and chase thy cares away;
The sports are ready---guarded every post,
And while the victims in the Circus bleed,
Smile that thy foes on the same moment fall.

Valentinian

Hafted to the field of Mars---there I'll forget,
A pang e'er touch'd my heart.

Heraclius

There learn all Rome---
That if they brave the mandates of thy lip,
A sov'reign's arm shall punish as it ought.

(EXEUNT)

Scene V

*(GAUDENTIUS SOLUS---IN DISGUISE---JUST RETURNED TO THE CITY,
WHERE HE WAS SHEWN THE MURDERED BODY OF ÆTIUS)*

Gaudentius

Was this the dowry of the fair Eudocia,
The mangled body of my much lov'd sire
Presented by her father's guilty hand?
Just gods avenge---the trait'rous deed avenge!
What is the faith---or what the gratitude,
Or what the sacred promise of an emperor!
As cruelty portrays an abject mind,
Servility precedes the fall of states
In this declension of the Roman world,
While tyrants dip the scymitar in blood,
And sport on human misery at large,
Shall I sit down with folded arms and see
A monster gorging on a parent's blood;
Or unaveng'd behold a father die
By Valentinian's base ungrateful hand!
Yet he, alas! is my Eudocia's sire:
But glory, fame, ambition and revenge
Bid me erase this passion from my heart,
And boldly stem the madness of the times,
Recover Rome and reinstate her power,
And bring her back to glory, wealth and fame.

But hah!---Eudocia, pensive and alone;
(*Seeing Eudocia at a distance*)
Shall I advance, or banish her forever?
(*While he hesitates, Eudocia slowly crosses the stage without observing him*)
One tear dissolves the firmness of my soul,
Unmans the mind, and melts the warrior down;
Dashes his hope, and weakens his resolve;
'Tis ruin to retire---death to speak.
Chaste as Diana in each graceful move,
While Venus lights the features of her face
And gives her son the torch to fire my soul;
Yet honour, conscience, virtue and the world
Forbid a union with his bloody house;
My father's murderer---the gods forbid!
Yet she's all innocence---and virtue's soul
Shines forth conspicuous in her heavenly form:
I haste from her as from the hand of death.

(*EXEUNT DIFFERENT WAYS*)

ACT III

Scene I

(*MAXIMUS SOLUS, IN THE ANICIAN PALACE, THE SUN JUST RISING*)

Maximus

The bird of death that nightly pecks the roof,
Or shrieks beside the caverns of the dead;
Or paler spectres that infest the tombs
Of guilt and darkness, horror or despair,
Are far more welcome to a wretch like me
Than yon bright rays that deck the opening morn;
That softly gliding o'er the dewy field
Give life to nature---cheer the daisied lawn,
Where my Ardelia trod the dappled mead,
And breath'd fresh sweetness through the blooming dale.
What is the sun to Maximus!
Its noon tide ray shews him the sport of fools;
The simple pander of a lecher's guilt.
Ye gods! was reason lost, that, spiritless,
My weak, my dastard hand held back this sword
From striking instant at the tyrant's heart,
When on a frivolous pretence he urg'd,
Before another day, I'd see the camp?
But by the powers that shake the Ætnean vaults,
By all the deities of Rome I swear;

And still more solemnly I bind my soul,
By the great God to whom Ardelia bow'd,
My vengeance shall not sleep.

(ENTER TRAULISTA)

Traulista

What cause is there for Maximus's grief?
Why is thy bosom tortur'd with despair?
Unfold the tale, command Traulista's sword;
Wake up full vengeance, or forbear to grieve.

Maximus

Tortures may seize, and furies tear my heart,
But words can't utter what my soul endures;
Confusion darkens all my powers of speech,
And blushes blast the wretch that sacrific'd
His fame---his peace---his honour---and his wife
To glut a tyrant's lust---My brain grows hot---
It kindles to distraction---yet Valentinian lives.

Traulista

What, did the monster, in thine absence, dare
Profane the sacred threshold of thy peace?

Maximus

She, ever duteous to her lord's command,
Was, by the darkest plot of hell, deceiv'd;
This ring, so often by her husband sent
In times too dangerous for other message,
To her presented, by the base Heraclius,
Reluctantly, she hasten'd to the palace---
Though terror seiz'd and chil'd her frighted soul:
She through each hollow, vacant room was drag'd,
Till in the silent deep abode of guilt,
As a dark fiend, the emperor alone
Waited the victim of his madden'd flame:
He seiz'd his prey---nor cries, nor tears avail'd;
She Heaven implor'd---to pitying Angels pray'd,
And in despair she call'd on her Petronius,
Yet thought his sanction back'd the vile design.

Traulista

And hates thee for suspected perfidy.

Maximus

'Twas a past the midnight watch when I return'd;
With anxious dread and deep suspense I flew

To her abode of misery and grief.
In sables dress'd---a taper just burnt down---
That darkly glimmer'd gloom from side to side---
Indignant scorn glanc'd from her languid eye;
While tears bedew'd her bright angelick face,
As if a cherub wept, the radiant beams
Of stars obscur'd, or of extinguish'd suns:
Dismay'd she held a dagger in her hand
As half resolv'd to plunge it in her breast,
Yet trembled at the purpose of her soul;
I caught her hand, and drew the weapon thence,
Ere she perceiv'd her wretched husband nigh.

Traulista

Sure she's too good to let resentment burn.

Maximus

"Poor Maximus she cry'd---spite of thy guilt,
My soul still pities thee---receive this pledge
To cheat some other soft, believing fool:
Blot from thy thought that e'er Ardelia liv'd
To be the sport of riot and debauch."
Then fix'd the fatal signet on my hand,
This cursed signet that has seal'd my doom,

(SHEWS THE SIGNET)

And branded me with infamy forever.
She breath'd a sob as if a seraph sigh'd,
Drop'd a kind tear, and smil'd a last adieu.

Traulista

Hah! dead!---say'st thou Ardelia's dead?

Maximus

All the big passions of a noble soul
Thrill'd through her heart, and stiffen'd all her frame;
The shining angel left this blasted world,
And now methinks, ineffably serene,
On yon bright azure golden skirted cloud,
Ardelia gently chides this tardy hand
That lingers thus while unaveng'd her death.

Traulista

I bind me by this sword, a soldier's oath,
To vindicate in blood her wounded fame.

Maximus

Her soul unstain'd, immaculate and pure.
Not meagre malice dare impeach her mind;
Nor e'en Megara's tongue, though it were dip'd
In all the poisons of her curling snakes,
Till the gall ganger'd every name but hers,
Durst whisper aught to wound Ardelia's fame:
But yet her wrongs may urge thy dauntless arm,
And give full vigour to a bold design,
To smite a scepter'd brow---yes---that is all---
The man himself's a poltroon---
Yet he's an emperor.

Traulista

This makes him worthy of Traulista's sword.
My arm shall aid till justice holds the scale
To soften grief, or injury repair.

Maximus

Go, find thy friends, and ere the work begins,
I ask a moment to indulge my grief;
'The luxury of tears' is not for me---
My soul's too big for such a soft relief;
Yet I may rave and riot o'er my woes.

(EXEUNT)

Scene II

(MAXIMUS AND GAUDENTIUS)

Maximus

That dignity the gods themselves inspir'd,
When Rome inflam'd with patriotick zeal,
Long taught the world to tremble and admire,
Lies faint and languid in the wane of fame,
And must expire in luxury's lew'd lap
If not supported by some vigorous arm;
Th' Armorici 'tis said have pass'd the Rhine,
And ruder tribes, both Goth and Vandal hosts,
May soon be thundering at the gates of Rome;
While here, a treacherous, bloody minded prince
Stains the imperial court with slaughter'd friends,
And riots in the zenith of his pride.

Gaudentius

And are there none in this distracted state
Whose courage, zeal, and energy of mind
May stem the tide, and break the tyrant's yoke!

Maximus

The Roman people, sicken'd by his sloth,
Detest a weak, a lecherous, dastard prince
Who yet cuts down the bravest men Rome boasts,
And mocks the most heroick of her sons
Abused virgins rave in wild despair;
Affronted matrons weep, and beauty sighs,
While groans reecho from the tomb of grief,
And cry for vengeance on the emperor's head;
For innocence betray'd, and virtue sold.

Gaudentius

Dismay'd by blood, the senators detest
A sovereign, cruel, impotent and base,
And all the army's ripen'd for revolt.

Maximus

'Tis time to dash him from th' imperial throne;
Name his successor, and the work is done.

Gaudentius

The crown, the sceptre, the regalia wait,
Petronius's will to guide the realm,
And bid the mistress of the world revive.

Maximus

Th' imperial crown has not a charm for me;
Hung on a soldier's spear, expos'd to sale,
Stain'd with the blood of a long line of Cæsars,
From Julius down to Valentinian's reign,
'Tis fall'n too low to wake ambition up.
The palace groans with guilt too dark to name;
'Tis but the splendid theatre of woe,
From age to age the shambles of mankind,
On which to sacrifice the richest blood
The Roman annals boast---the crimson stream
Has ras'd the memory that a virtue liv'd,
Or that a noble deed from virtue sprang
In the proud boasts of ancient Roman fame.

Gaudentius

Ambition, in a noble, virtuous mind,
Is the first passion that the gods implant,
And soars to glory till it meets the skies:
If it has place in Maximus's breast,

Fortune, who sports with diadems and crowns
This day may hail him emperor of the west

*(GAUDENTIUS PAUSES A MOMENT, RETIRES THOUGHTFULLY A FEW STEPS,
SMOTHERS AN EXCLAMATION, AND ONLY ARTICULATE)*

---Oh! my Eudocia.

Maximus

'Tis just revenge that animates my arm;
But did ambition urge my purpose on?
Yet, my young pensive friend, if Valentinian
Wraps his mantle o'er his trembling head---
Like Julius Cæsar crys---"Brutus my son,"
Will not Eudocia unnerve thy arm?

Gaudentius

Ah! my Eudocia!---would he were not thy sire;
But from my heart I tear thee for a moment,
'Till Ætius's manes are appeas'd,
And fair Ardelia's wrongs are all aveng'd.

Maximus

But art thou sure thou canst this test sustain?
This test severe, of friendship, honour, love,
Will try thy soul, and probe thee to the heart.
Will not thy purpose shake, when her soft image
Dances in thine eye, and pity pleads?
But yet thou hast a struggle more severe;
Thou may'st as well avenge thy bleeding friends
And draw thy sword in injur'd virtue's cause:
'Tis whisper'd through the court the Suevick chief,
The valiant Ricemar, has purchas'd peace
With Genseric the terror of the west;
And that the heiress of the imperial throne
Is the rich price---that Hunneric his son
Is on his way to wed the fair Eudocia.

Gaudentius

Petronius, thou hast fix'd my wav'ring will;
Let me lead on---my sword alone,
Without another's aid, shall find its way
To Valentinian's heart.

Maximus

The hour draws nigh---the exercise begins---
Arm thy brave heart, and bid adieu to love.

(EXIT MAXIMUS)

Gaudentius

How would my eyeballs from their sockets start
To see Eudocia in that monster's arms?
Can her fair soul mix with the horrid brood,
Begot and nurtur'd in the Quadian lakes!
Beneath the vaulted, black Carpathian mount,
Amidst the darkness of Cimmerian damp,
As nature sported with infernal fiends
She gender'd there this ill form'd squalid birth
And mid'st the jargon of discordant sounds
She call'd the beardless, uncouth monster, Hunneric:
And shall this savage violate her charms?
Save her, ye gods!---oh! save the Roman name
From such a stain, indelible and dark.

(EXIT)

Scene III

(MAXIMUS AND TRAULISTA)

Maximus

Hail , mighty prince of great Hermanric's line!
Is thy sword whetted to avenge thy friends?

Traulista

No eagle darting down the slaughter'd field
Of human carnage strew'd with mangled limbs,
More swiftly bends its talons to the prey,
Than shall my sword deal thunderbolts around,
Whene'er Petronius wishes for its aid.

Maximus

But art thou sure that not one traitor lurks,
Nor coward heart in thy selected band?

Traulista

There's not a man but what would bay the lion,
Or meet the tyger growling from his den,
By hunger urg'd to prowl for human prey.
When Cæsar's dial marks meridian day,
They'll spring to action at the trump of war;
As the train'd steed who snuffs the northern air
Leaps through the crowd, and leaves the winds behind.

Maximus

Have they ne'er trembled at an emperor's frown,
Nor felt the servile homage of a slave?
Will not the valiant arm grow sick and flag,
And the drawn dagger droop e'en in thy hand
As it approaches Valentinian's breast?

Traulista

Have I not sworn by Mars's fiery sword,
The redden'd symbol of the Scythian faith,
To aid thee to avenge thine injur'd love?
Not Casca's arm e'er gave a surer blow
Than shall Traulista's.

Maximus

The great Triumvirs of the world have fall'n
By weaker hands than thine---thou art my Cassius---
But I fear Gaudentius---he's of a softer mould---
Humane and tender---though a valiant prince
He feels the softest passion for Eudocia.

Traulista

He feels no pang but for Eudocia's sake;
Yet jealousy has wak'd a war within;
Resentment, love, and rage, by turns distract,
And make his soul a chaos of despair.

Maximus

Will he o'ercome this painful struggle
In a noble breast?---Can he renounce her charms?
When filial tears are leagu'd with just revenge,
When duty, fame, and glory combat love,
Will the fond lover act the hero's part,
And snatch the princess from a rival's arms,
Mid'st blood and slaughter, and the fresh grown yews
His sword may strew around her father's tomb?

Traulista

Strike, now's the time, before his passions cool.

Maximus

Will Valentinian venture to the sports?

Traulista

The emperor comes with more than usual pomp,
A chosen cohort added to the guards.

Maximus

Though guilt makes cowards, justice finds them out:
Not all the legions of the western world
Shall screen him from my sword, my just revenge.

(EXEUNT)

Scene IV

(EUDOCIA AND PLACIDIA)

Eudocia

Alas ! my fears---my throbbing heart lie still,
Nor startle thus, e'en at a quiv'ring leaf:
The downy pillow gives me no repose,
And slumbers fly from the soft silken couch;
Ill boding terrors shake the gilded roof;
Methinks I hear a distant din of arms---
---alarms---and shouts---

(SHOUTS WITHOUT)

As though from heaven's battlements were burst
Some dreadful ruin, that may empire shake.

Placidia

Another shout---I fear some signal blow:
This early morn, as sleep forsook my lids,
I from my window saw Traulista haste;
Two chiefs beside led on a chosen band,
So like Thuringian blood hounds in their gestures,
I trembled at the sight; yet as they pass'd
I caught a signal meant to be conceal'd,
A hoarse, low, hollow voice growl'd from the midst,
"Haste to the Campus Martius."

Eudocia

Ah! what new shock?---the tumult bends this way---
Oh! Valentinian!

(THE NOISE DRAWS NEAR)

Placidia

The furious multitude rush towards the palace
I hear the legions shout---long live the Emperor
Petronius Maximus

Eudocia

Undone---undone forever!
Where is our father?---Oh! where the good Edoxia?
And midst the group of misery and woe---
Would heav'n permit---ah! where is my Gaudentius?

*(GAUDENTIUS RUSHES SUDDENLY INTO THE PALACE---
SOLDIERS AND GUARDS IN TUMULT WITHOUT)*

Gaudentius

He's here, my princess---he guards the fair Eudocia---
Protects her life from every ruffian hand,
Nor fate again shall snatch her from mine arms.

Eudocia

Oh! leave a wretch abandon'd to her fears.

Gaudentius

What! leave Eudocia midst this furious storm!
Name it no more---death stalks abroad,
And vengeance lifts his arm---but Heaven forbid
That innocence should feel the dread effects
Of cruelty and guilt.

Eudocia

If e'er thou lov'd---if pity touch thy soul---
Fly hence to succour Rome, and save my father.

Gaudentius

Thy father!---he had a friend whose arm---
Yes, Ætius was his friend---Oh! Ætius.

Eudocia

Barbarous man! can'st thou reproach Eudocia,
And chill her with the terror of a name
That rives her inmost soul with guilt and horror?

Gaudentius

Forgive me, princess.

Eudocia

Oh! Gaudentius---
Could my poor life atone---my clay cold corse
I'd lay on Ætius' tomb---sprinkle his urn---
Refresh his memory with the last purple drop
That warms to love, the heart of thy Eudocia.

Gaudentius

Pardon the transports of my filial breast,
That pours its sorrows o'er a father's tomb;
Great Ætius's virtues justly claim
A tributary tear from half the world.

Eudocia

Had'st thou a marble heart, or stoick soul,
Unmov'd at aught the destinies decree,
Though death cut down the hero, father, friend,
I'd spurn a wretch that mock'd these tender names
Back from my soul to ravage the wild woods.
But say, what tale hangs on thy tongue---
Thou durst not name?

Gaudentius

If fate commands, and wraps both in a shroud,
We must forget that e'er our fathers liv'd.

Eudocia

Hah! parricide!
Hast thou the death of Ætius aveng'd?
What! durst thou lift thy sacrilegious hand,
And hurl a blow that severs me forever
From thine arms? then come with this bold front
And subtle tongue, to lay thy sword
Wet with her father's blood, at his Eudocia's feet?

Gaudentius

Not all the wrongs I suffer'd from thy sire,
Nor yet the vengeance that my own demand
Could urge my arm to aim an impious blow
That might a moment interrupt thy peace!
But Maximus---

Eudocia

What of the traitor Maximus?

Gaudentius

Ought never to forgive Ardelia's wrongs.

Eudocia

Tell me the worst---am I the only wretch
Of all my house, that lives to weep?

Gaudentius

Like the thrice heated bolt from heav'ns high arch,
Through the dark gloom of dreary night and horror,

That falls and blasts the cedar's lofty top,
The light'ning fell on Valentinian's head.

Eudocia

From heaven?---no, 'twas hell that belch'd the flame;
By jarring fiends the pointed sword was whet,
And thou wast witness to the horrid deed.
Let us, Placidia, haste with trembling steps,
(Ere earth shall sink beneath his guilty feet,
Like the twin sisters of misfortune lead,
If yet the empress lives, to her apartment.

(THE PRINCESSES IN AN AGONY OF GRIEF RETIRE.---EXIT GAUDENTIUS)

Scene V

(THE PALACE--- EDOXIA, SOLA)

Edoxia

When will these dark and lowering clouds pass o'er,
And brighter aspects tinge the western skies?
This day is big with omens of despair,
And some wild tumult rages loud abroad;
Each face is pale, and every eye's askance,
As wrapt in dark mysterious intrigue:
That Maximus must meditate revenge
There's not a doubt; and when he strikes
'Twill be a deadly blow---his arm disdains
A mean or vulgar stroke---and his bold spirit
Shakes at no resolve---yet 'tis too soon
To execute the deed---his dreaded rage,
Oh! Heaven!--just Heaven restrain!
Hah! who art thou that ent'rest thus abrupt?

(LEO ENTERS HASTILY IN DISGUISE)

Disguis'd, as if beneath a vizard, lurk'd
Mischief and treason---murder---guilt and death!

Leo

There is no time for leave of audience now;
Haste hence my empress---fly the palace gates
Ere all the avenues are seiz'd by Maximus.

Edoxia

Is then the emperor slain!
Am I the slave of Maximus?
Forbid it all ye powers of heaven and earth!

Leo

Thy person may be safe, if not a moment's lost.

Edoxia

What! like a timid fugitive to fly,
And rove a friendless world from court to court?
Though royalty is toss'd from gale to gale
On fortune's fickle wing, the sportive bubble,
The plaything of her most capricious hour;
Yet know, Edoxia dares to hold a throne,
And has a soul to scourge a traitor's guilt.
Name thou the first who struck the impious blow
That shakes the glory of the imperial crown,
He'll feel what vengeance 'tis my arm inflicts.

Leo

Petronius led the band---the cohorts join'd---
Traulista waited at the Campus Martius,
'Till Valentinian enter'd.
The fierce barbarian struck his helmet off,
And, swift as light'ning, fell an hundred blows;
His trembling soul escap'd without a groan;
The army and the Gothic princes cry'd
Long live the emperor, Petronius Maximus.

Edoxia

Forsook---betray'd---and widow'd in an hour!
Alas! my daughters!---where are the lovely maids?
Are my Eudocia and Placidia safe,
Or are the charms or innocence and worth,
Of virgin beauty, piety, and truth,
The sport of Gothic slaves?

(ENTER PRINCESSES)

---Ah! my Placidia!

This tender woe becomes thy filial eye:
Alas, Eudocia!---lovely in thy grief;
I can no more than sighs and tears bestow.
'Tis all I have to lend my hapless children.

Eudocia

Lend not a sigh to me---I am too wretched---
But spare thy tears for those who may be blest.

Edoxia

My tears for thee can never cease to flow;
Yet tears are but unseemly gifts indeed,
And ill become the soft hymenial hour.
This was the day, by solemn promise made
His noble sire---Gaudentius might have claim'd
His lovely bride, and seal'd his nuptials
With the fair Eudocia.

Eudocia

Name him no more---
Let me forget that e'er I was belov'd.

Edoxia

These tears indulge, to bathe his sacred urn,
And while they trickle o'er thy blooming cheek,
Water the willows round thy father's tomb,
Till the brave veteran Ætius shall chace
The bold Petronius from the imperial throne.

Eudocia

Ah! Ætius!---Oh! happy Rome, if Ætius had liv'd.

Edoxia

Had Ætius liv'd!---Just gods! what means Eudocia?
Has the monster slain the noble Ætius,
And rais'd so high the mounds of death around,
That justice cannot reach a traitor's heart?

Eudocia

Great Ætius is dead---spare me the rest,
Nor from my bleeding breast the story wring.

Edoxia

I'm lost and wilder'd in this mazy path;
What furious fiend presides this awful day!
On every side some spectre ghastly grins,
Through floods of reeking gore, and beckons down
To Hades' dark, benighted, dismal shore.

(EXEUNT)

ACT IV

Scene I

(MAXIMUS, SOLUS)

Maximus

Now what am I? ---an emperor---
----- a splendid wretch---
Perch'd on the blood stain'd summit of the world.
Search through each horrid wild of dreary woe,
From Tyber's stream to Danube's frozen banks,
From fair Hetruria to the Hvrcanian wood,
Or blacker forests of Carpathian gloom,
There's not a culprit so completely curs'd---
Tortur'd in pomp---in tenfold misery plung'd,
And torn with guilty greatness, as myself.
Happy Damocles---only envy'd king,
Whose reign began and ended in a day!
My vengeance now's complete; but where's my peace?
Oh! could I leave the world of Roman slaves,
Exil'd to Italy's most distant bounds,
Resume that life of innocence and ease
Which bless'd the noontide of my happier days,
When my Ardelia's smile crown'd all my bliss!
But ah! her name---
Wakes all the baleful passions of my soul.
If Valentinian's grim and ghastly shade
Still wanders here, and can be more accurs'd,
Let mad Alecto's furious sisters join
To make his woes complete---and doubly damn'd,
Let him look through the dank and dismal shades,
Of night and death---in anguish let him see
His rival riot in Edoxia's arms.

(ENTER LEO)

My friend---my faithful Leo.

Leo

I am the friend of Rome, and of Petronius---
Of law---of justice---and the rights of man---
The senators of Rome---and of Edoxia.

Maximus

Is the imperial family secure?
Let not the smallest disrespect be shewn
Or to the empress, or her royal house.

Leo

Edoxia sits like some majestick oak,
Or fairer cedar, that o'ertops the hills,
Strip'd of its leafy robes---shook to the root,
By the rude tempest, or autumnal blasts;
The storm subsides, the naked branches hush'd,
Silent and still, demand a pitying tear
From ev'ry way worn traveller's weeping eye,
Who us'd to rest beneath its friendly shade.

Maximus

The wheel of fortune, rapid in its flight,
Lags not for man, when on its swift routine;
Nor does the goddess ponder unresolv'd:
She wafts at once, and on her lofty car,
Lifts up her puppet---mounts him to the skies,
Or from the pinnacle, hurls headlong down,
The steep abyss of disappointed hope.
Thus the first stroke successful---
A beardless Goth huzza'd, "Petronius reigns!"
The factious legions caught the feeble sound;
And the same moment saw the imperial robes
Torn from one emperor, and another made,
Without a murmur from the servile throng:
Borne through the crowd---till to the palace brought,
I've not yet heard Heraclius's fate.

Leo

The faithful minion caught a thousand wounds,
Aim'd at his master by Traulista's band,
He curs'd alternate, heaven, himself and thee,
And di'd an hero, though he'd liv'd a slave.

Maximus

Then bid a truce to slaughter;
Let not a drop of Roman blood be spilt:
And now, I have another game to play;
Edoxia must be mine---her hand I'll seize---
Her heart I leave till time may do its work.
By a long line of ancestry, a queen,
Her regal title to the imperial crown
Must bind it fast on Maximus's brow.

Leo

She stands superiour to life's roughen'd storms;
Looks calmly down, and bids the waves roll on
Till the last surge ingulphs her weary head.
Yet this new scene may shake her firm resolve,
And raise a tempest in her tranquil breast.

Maximus

Repair to her---if possible persuade---
Yet fix'd as fate is Maximus's will;
Though keen resentment agitates her breast,
Or her indignant soul should burst with rage,
Yet ere tomorrow's sun descends the vale,
And hides behind yon western burnish'd hill,
Our hands are join'd by wedlock's sacred tie;
It must be so, or I'm but half aveng'd.

(EXIT LEO)

'Tis done---the envy'd master of the world conceals
A thousand pangs beneath a purple robe;
Yet furies lurk, and vipers gnaw within.
And give the lie to splendid pomp without.

(EXIT)

Scene II

(EDOXIA, SOLUS)

Edoxia

Where shall I fly?---to what sequester'd shade
Where the world's distant din no more alarms,
Or warring passions burst through nature's tie
And make mankind creation's foulest stain.
Horror and guilt stare wild in every eye;
Freedom extinguish'd in the fumes of lust
Bleeds fresh beside Rome's long expiring fame;
Virtue's become the rude barbarian's jest,
Barter'd for gold, and floating down the tide
Of foreign vice, stain'd with domestick guilt:
Oh! could I hide in some dark hermitage,
Beneath some hollow, dismal, broken cliff,
I'd weep forlorn the miseries of Rome,
Till time's last billow broke, and left me quiet
On the naked strand.---

(ENTER LEO)

---Ah! Leo,
Durst thou be still the friend of sad Edoxia?
Hast thou the courage yet to visit grief.
And sooth a wretch by sympathetick tears;
And reconcile me to the name of man?

Can'st shew me one less cruel than the tyger
Nurs'd in the wilds, and feasting on the flesh
Of all but his own species?
This predilection's left to man alone,
To drink and riot on his brother's blood.

Leo

Fate has ordain'd---'tis thou must give us peace;
Thy lenient hand alone.

Edoxia

Mock not my woe.

Leo

'Tis thou my empress, who must stop the tide
That threatens the deluge of the Roman world;
The jarring factions that tear up the state
Thyself must quell, and reconcile---

Edoxia

Insult not my distress.

Leo

The emperor Maximus---

Edoxia

Whose name strikes daggers through my shivering soul!

Leo

Demands an audience.

Edoxia

Speak not a word my soul disdains to hear.

Leo

The Roman people---

Edoxia

Ah! what is Rome to me?

Leo

All wish a union in the royal pair;
And Maximus adores Edoxia's virtues.

Edoxia

What is the sanction that emboldens thee,
Thus to affront thy queen?

Leo

Oh! pity Rome---the empire---and thy country---
Save thy noble house.

Edoxia

I have no country.
What's life, or empire, or the world to me?

Leo

Yet hear---oh! hear---for Maximus resolves.

Edoxia

And art thou come to sue for Maximus,
Whose blacken'd soul, blown up by fierce ambition,
Assumes the reins, and drives the courser on,
With furious passion and unbridled lust?

Leo

The emperor admits of no delay,
When once resolv'd.

Edoxia

Remember, Leo,
The blood that flow'd from Poplicola's veins,
From breast to breast through the Horatian line,
And thence to me convey'd---a gen'rous stream
That animates and warms Edoxia's heart,
Shall ne'er be tainted by a base submission.

Leo

Impatiently, he waits thy last reply.

Edoxia

Tell him I'm not the coward fool he thinks,
That guilty greatness has no charms for grief;
I scorn his impious passion---detest his name.

Leo

Yet save thyself---thus on my bended knee,

(KNEELS)

Let me beseech from thee a mild reply.

Edoxia

Tell him, a traitor's heart, though swell'd
By adulation's base perfume, has not a hand
To wield the imperial sceptre.

Leo

And therefore needs thy aid,
Both to secure and dignify the throne.

Edoxia

This insolence from thee!---the pious Leo---
My former friend---the guardian of my youth;
I thought thy soul cast in a purer mould---
Above the servile line---not thus to court
And meanly grovel, for a tyrant's smile.
Leave me, base wretch---go fawn on thy new master;
Tell him at once, Edoxia dares to die.

Leo

Forgive this boldness!---Alas! could I but save,
Or serve thy noble house, there's not a task
Edoxia could impose, this aged arm
Unnerv'd by time and grief, would not attempt.
Yet might as well the breath of wisdom strive
To reason down the tempest of the north,
Or lull the maddening hurricane to rest,
As to persuade when Maximus resolves.
Oh! would kind Heaven, which sav'd thee from the sword,
Still find some way to bless and make thee happy.

(WEEPS)

Edoxia

Thy venerable grief, my aged friend,
Softens resentment, which thy zeal inflam'd:
In that kind tear the soul of Leo shines;
Yet say, is Rome so poor and abject grown---
So far debas'd, that when a ruffian dares
To stab his prince, and boldly challenge
To his impious bed, the wife of his
Assassinated lord---none dare oppose?
Has Rome for this so often fought and conquer'd?
Has the best blood the Roman name can boast,
Redden'd the Tyber with its purple streams,
To purchase freedom by the swift perdition
Of every bold invader, from Tarquin's reign,
To the more fatal day, when guilty Maximus
Assum'd the purple?---May thunders roll,
And streams irruptive, blast a wretch like him---
Or sheets of livid flame enwrap Edoxia
From his hated sight.
Go on and bear this answer to thy lord.

(EXIT LEO)

Thou great first cause, who bids the tempest rage,
And rends with mighty peals, the darken'd air,
Light up the skies and blaze from north to south,
Thy vengeance pour on complicated guilt.

(EXIT)

Scene III

(MAXIMUS AND LEO MOVING TO THE APARTMENT OF THE EMPRESS)

Maximus

Hah !---does the empress haughtily reject
My proffer'd vows, and spurn me from her arms?

Leo

Lost in the tender agonies of woe,
She wept, regardless of thy ardent prayer;
'Till grown outrageous by my urgent suit,
She started wild, as if despair awoke,
And rav'd, and sob'd, and imprecated death:
At last, collected in majestick pride,
She drew a poignard from beneath her robe,
And solemn swore, in most indignant strains,
If you presum'd to speak to her of love,
Its point transfix'd should send her to the grave,
More welcome far than thy abhor'd embrace.

(SCENE OPENS AND DISCOVERS EDOXIA)
(ENTER MAXIMUS AND LEO)

Maximus

I ask thy hand, and claim thee as my queen---
Jointly to govern and reform the state.

Edoxia

And must an empress bear this bold outrage---
These stings of insult?---Shall a villain's hand
Drag to the altar---sacrifice my fame,
To each black passion that deforms the soul?
Oh! Heaven look down---his bold ambition curse---
Destruction send on him and all his race.

Maximus

Did lust of empire, or of fame alone.
Thus bid me urge the fair Edoxia's hand---
Ambition, that proud source of human woe,
Thou might'st suspect had push'd my purpose on:
But though the lustre of a crown allures,
And sanction gives to deeds of boldest hue.
Justice alone, and love of virtue warms,
My ardent heart, and animates my arm.

Edoxia

Durst thou profane the sacred name of virtue?
A sacrilegious murd'rer talk of virtue!
Thou know'st not what it means---an heart like thine
Ne'er felt its sacred warmth---not an idea
Of the heavenly flame could e'er exist
In thy corrupted brain---blown up by lust---
Revenge---ambition---death---
Thy dagger reeking with thy sovereign's blood,
Thou still would'st heighten thy detested crime
And make his wife a partner in thy guilt.

Maximus

Thou wrong'st me much---to plead my cause
Would wound so chaste an ear;---false to his vows,
And faithless to thy bed, he wrong'd at once
The empress and myself.

Edoxia

Him, I forgive---
But not the assassin of my injur'd lord;
Oh! let me fly from thee, and from perdition.

Maximus

My destiny impell'd against my will,
My evil genius and my fate combin'd;
Nor will I now recede and yield a throne.
Thy wisdom, grace, and dignity of soul,
Command respect, and bend me to thy charms;
I ask thy aid to extirpate from Rome
Injustice---vice---with anarchy and crimes.
My gracious princess, sovereign, queen and wife,
Reign still in Rome, and grace the imperial throne.

Edoxia

Thy perfidy thou think'st is made secure
By plunging Ætius in the general wreck;
His valorous hand would from thine impious grasp

Have pluck'd the sceptre, stained by thy touch:
Yes, if through Rome there was a Roman left.
As brave as Ætius, the diadem
Would of itself drop off,
From thine imperious brow.

Maximus

Does not the empress know who murder'd Ætius?---

(TO LEO)

And that Petronius would avenge his death?

Leo

The bloody deed had not yet reach'd her ear,
When Valentinian fell.

Edoxia

It is enough, she knows the miscreant---
The proud usurper of the vacant throne,
Who dares aspire to Valentinian's bed;
But witness, all ye powers of earth and heaven,
Ere my soul bends to sanctify the deed,
Or yields a victim to this bold offence,
The horrid void beneath the Tarpeian rock
Shall first be fed by all the Anician race.

Maximus

Prepare the rites---Edoxia must be mine---

(TO LEO)

Before the wood lark hails the morning dawn,
Or early matins call the virgins forth
To chant their lays---the empress is my bride---
Then time and love shall soften by degrees,
'Till Lethè lends forgetfulness to grief.

(EXIT MAXIMUS AND LEO)

Edoxia

Ye gods!---where am I?---
Shall I be aw'd by Maximus's frown
To stain the glory of the Horatian name?
Alas!---ye patriots of ancient fame---
Where are the youth, whose glorious fathers di'd
To save the commonwealth?
Arise! ye ancient, venerable shades,

Who bravely fought for liberty and Rome:
Assist my powers---my single arm shall dare
Some dreadful deed of horrid desperation.
I swear by all the deities of Rome,
By him who thunders in the vaulted skies,
And downward points the artillery of Heaven,
'Till worlds dissolve beneath his dreaded frown,
The most distinguish'd vengeance shall befall
The Roman world, for Maximus's sake.

(EXIT)

Scene IV

(GAUDENTIUS AND EUDOCIA)

Gaudentius

Though nature frowns, and monsters howl around
And threat the bands of each domestick joy,
Yet innocence and truth should cease to weep;
'Tis guilt alone should tremble in the storm.

Eudocia

My native land distain'd with Roman blood
Warm from the veins of patriots and kings---
A father slain---a mother's tender woe---
Her virgin daughters weeping by her side,
Add stings to pain, and poignancy to grief.

Gaudentius

Let Angels guard and calm thy ruffled breast,
Let love and virtue cheer thy drooping soul;
And let thy peace reanimate again
A prince that lives but in Eudocia's smile.

Eudocia

Talk not of peace to the imperial house;
The hand, the dark assassinating hand,
That pierc'd th' unguarded heart of Valentinian,
Has murder'd all his race---hah! Gaudentius!
(Gaudentius trembles, and turns pale)
Why trembles thus Gaudentius, at Valentinian's name?
A name he once rever'd, and call'd his friend---
Is it a probe that touch'd a secret wound?

Gaudentius

My love---my grief---my fears---
A sudden illness that will soon subside.

Eudocia

Thy fears---why should Gaudentius fear?

Gaudentius

For all my soul holds dear beneath the stars---
Thy peace---thy health---thy happiness and love.

Eudocia

Is there a latent cause, this moment wak'd,
To doubt Eudocia's love?

Gaudentius

Thy deep dejection---thy too curious eye---
A brow o'ercast with something like a frown,
Ne'er seen before, where sweetness sits enthron'd,
And soft complacency has been us'd to smile,
Amidst the grief that wrung the aching heart.

Eudocia

Does thine own conscience smile, and whisper peace;
And art thou sure that all's secure within?
I much suspect, thy friend, Traulista,
Is a secret foe---and that his hostile hand,
Oft steep'd in blood---fierce as the vulture's fang,
Was not inactive on that fatal day,
When the remorseless sword mow'd down as grass
The faithful friends to Valentinian's house.
But Heaven forbid, that e'er the brave Gaudentius,
A good, a generous, noble minded prince,
Should join a murderous band---impossible!
I will not wrong thee thus---yet some strange horror
Seizes all my frame---as if my father's ghost
Stood bleeding by, and chid this parley
With a parricide.

(EUDOCIA TURNS ABRUPTLY TO WITHDRAW)

Gaudentius

Oh! leave me not, my princess, thus suspected.

Eudocia

If thou art guilty, own thy crime at once;
A poor defence will make thee doubly so.
If the least guilt contaminates thy soul,

My own would share by hearing thy excuse;
I see thee not till time restore thy fame;
And yet I fear---Oh! death to name---I fear,
Thy infamy is fix'd---forever fix'd,
Beyond redemption's call.

(EUDOCIA EXITS HASTILY)

Scene V

(TRAULISTA AND GAUDENTIUS)

Traulista

Why does my friend wear that soft April eye?
What is it poisons thy heroick soul,
And damps the vigour of thy martial arm?
Brace up thy nerves, and fence about thy breast,
And scorn the boon of pity from a girl---
A haughty---stubborn---solemn Roman maid.

Gaudentius

A heart like thine---insensible to love---
Dead to the soft sensations of the soul---
Only to fierce Bellona's voice awake---
Though all the sex were offer'd to thy choice,
Knows not the joy, nor feels the tender pang,
Fear may excite, or expectation raise.

Traulista

What hast thou got by all thy love sick dreams?
Go shew the mighty Goths thy baby face,
And see if one would know it was Gaudentius,
Who fought and conquer'd on the Danube's banks;
Tell them you've whin'd for more than twenty moons---
Crest fallen, sigh'd before a puling chit,
The daughter of thy most inveterate foe---
The murderer of thy sire.

Gaudentius

But he's aveng'd---
And, like the frightened hare, she fled my sight---
Suspects me an accomplice, charg'd me home,
With treason, murder, perfidy and blood

Traulista

Come, be thyself again; nor longer bask
Upon the silken, downy lap of hope;

Leave her to sigh, and whisper to the winds---
Else snatch by force, and bear her o'er the wilds,
Through growling forests---hideous, broken cliffs,
And frozen seas---to Scythia's icy banks,
Where rugged winds pour from the brindled north
Adown the mountain's brow---a blast may cool
The transports of thy love.

Gaudentius

Heaven blast a wretch, whose fierce barbarick heart
Would violate in thought so chaste a fame---
A purity allied to heaven itself.
Alas! the charms that have subdu'd my heart
Have something more than human in their birth.

Traulista

Then why profanely sigh for charms divine?
Think thee of Bleda's hospitable dames,
Won without wooing---thine without a sigh;
But if ye choose to wanton in the west,
And hang upon the dimpled smile of love,
A day, perhaps, or less, brings on the scenes
That level all the bars round birth and beauty,
Or innocence and elevated worth.
Thou may'st be safe e'en in the imperial court,
'Till surfeited with those Italian smiles:
The blue ey'd mountain maids of Caucasus,
(Who, once allur'd by native, artless charms,)
Call back thy sighs to nature's utmost bounds,
The bolder beauties of the northern world.

Gaudentius

Forbear, Traulista---nor sport thus with my pain.

Traulista

Come then, erect the scymitar of Mars,
And twang the bow string at the trumpet's sound.

Gaudentius

Go, clear my wounded fame---assure the princess
That I did not strike---that her fair image,
Hovering round his head, held back my hand---
Repell'd the pointed sword---for aught I did,
Her father might have liv'd.

Traulista

I know ye acted as a coward would---
But half resolv'd, and trembling at thyself:

Yes, I will see Eudocia is inform'd,
She's made a poltroon of a noble prince.

Gaudentius

Hah!---this from thee?---yet know he has a sword,
That will not fail to reach a villain's heart,
And let the venom out that rankles there.

(LAYS HIS HAND ON HIS SWORD)

Traulista

For this I love thee---come on and try its mettle---
I fear'd thou had'st forgot who was thy sire,
And that the lustre of his burnish'd blade,
Wielded by him in many a hardy field,
Had hurt the opticks of the gentler son
Of noble Ætius

Gaudentius

Draw and defend thyself---

(DRAWS)

Traulista

What shall I tell Eudocia, when she chides,
If I should scratch, or let out Roman blood?

(INSULTINGLY)

Gaudentius

The empress comes---forbear---I, on the morrow,
Meet thee in the Circus.

Traulista

Come on, my boy---
The morrow may have other work to do;
This day shall tilt thee swiftly out of time,
If thou art weary of thy silken chain.

(EXIT TRAULISTA)

(ENTER EDOXIA)

Edoxia

My son---my friend---my injur'd friend Gaudentius,
Canst thou forgive the noble Ætius' death?
Thou lov'st Eudocia with the purest flame:
Remember Valentinian was her sire,
Then vindicate the honour of her house.

Gaudentius

While life glows warm in this my faithful breast,
Eudocia holds my fortune and my fate.

Edoxia

I know thou'rt noble, generous and just,
And not less brave than Ætius thy sire;
He wore a sword, he dar'd to draw
In injur'd virtue's cause---nor fear'd the frowns
Of tyrants or of kings---it is thy birthright,
Durst thou grasp it hard, and boldly venture,
For Eudocia's sake, to extricate
Her mother from the arms---the hated bed
Of an usurper of her father's throne?

Gaudentius

There's nought, true courage prompts the brave to do,
Or virtue justifies, or honour calls,
But what I dare attempt.
But if it mars the peace of Rome---

Edoxia

The peace of Rome is an ideal thing;
Lost in the tide of every shameful vice,
Rapine and blood; and violence and lust
But mock the story of her ancient fame.
Canst thou a moment balance in the scale
The tranquil scenes of harmony and peace,
With all the lustre that adorns a crown?
Eudocia gives an empire with her hand.

Gaudentius

My sword---my services---my life are thine---
Ambition burns, and love and glory join---
Yet name no task that more distracts my country.

Edoxia

Then thou canst see the empress bath'd in tears,
Drag'd by Petronius to the sacred altar---
Compell'd to be his bride---the fair Eudocia,
But a moment lent, to dry the filial tear,
Ere she's compell'd to wed his worthless heir?

Gaudentius

Not all the powers of earth, or hell combin'd,
Shall rob me of my wife, my lov'd Eudocia.

Edoxia

Wilt thou apply to Genseric---my friend?

Gaudentius

A dangerous expedient indeed---

A faithless friend---a treacherous ally.

Edoxia

The time forbids evasion, or excuse---

Admits of no delay---my purpose is

Irrevocably fix'd---Say, wilt thou,

At the port of Ostia, meet Genseric---

Bear him my signet---bring him on to Rome?

Gaudentius

Not for the golden treasures of the east,

Or all the wealth the tempting world bestows;

No, though Eudocia were the bright reward,

Could I betray the capitol of Rome,

And sell my country to the Vandal king?

Edoxia

Wilt thou betray the mother of Eudocia,

And blast my hopes of most severe revenge?

Gaudentius

Though great thy wrongs, much greater must thou fear,

If Genseric's rapacious brutal hosts

Should enter Italy---my sovereign forbear,

And like the gods, benignantly forgive;

Nor let resentment kindle up anew

The flames of war; nor introduce in Rome,

Those savage, hostile guests to riot there,

To subjugate the state---subvert thy house,

To extirpate thy name, and rudely reign

And triumph o'er the West.

Edoxia

'Tis done---I fear'd thy tardy spirit---

The last remains of patriotick virtue,

So like a glow worm in a stormy night,

It twinkles but to shew the sable hue

By nature worn through all the midnight gloom.

A trusty messenger, I therefore sent---

The winds have sped, and brought him back to Rome;

And ere Petronius dreams of danger nigh,

Genseric's thunder shakes the capitol,

Gaudentius

Thou hast struck deep---a sure and deadly blow.

Edoxia

The tangled lion can't escape the toils.

Gaudentius

Nor thou---nor Rome---nor all thy house, perdition.

Edoxia

Secure thyself, and leave the rest to me.

(TRUMPETS WITHOUT)

Gaudentius

Hark! the shrill trump!---Genseric's herald
Cannot yet be nigh.---

Edoxia

Like a brave friend, he instantly prepar'd
To plant his banners round the towers of Rome.

Gaudentius

The senate---people---all the royal house,
For slaughter ripe, in its most dreadful form---
Proud Rome the seat of arms, and arts, and fame,
Stands tottering on the verge of mighty ruin.
A soldier's duty calls; I haste away;
Fate may do much before we meet again;
She has a busy hand, and swiftly rides
On revolution's wheel---Rome may be sack'd,
And crowns and sceptres toss'd from shore to shore,
Transplanted, or despoil'd.

(EXEUNT)

ACT V**Scene I**

(THE SENATE ASSEMBLED IN THE PALACE.---ENTER AN HERALD)

Herald

The Vandal king, now at the gates of Rome,
Sends on an Herald to the magistrates,
The consuls, and the prefect of the city,
The army, senate, and the Roman people,

Demand an audience in Edoxia's name,
And offers terms, on which fam'd Rome may yield
To Genseric, and his all conquering sword.
He comes to rescue from the usurper's arm,
The remnant of the Theodosian line;
Chase from the throne the traitor Maximus,
And save the daughter of his great ally;
Give Italy a king of more reknown,
Or change the seat of empire from old Rome.

Senator

Tell mighty Genseric, Petronius yields,
Appall'd and frighten'd at his potent name.
He left the city, sick of life and empire;
No more ambitious of the world's applause,
He wish'd to hide beyond the rapid Rhine;
But fate forbad---a bold Burgundian chief,
Arrested his career, and cleft him down---
Amidst the cries of citizens and friends,
Of foes to Rome, and of Edoxia's slaves.
His body, mangled by a thousand wounds,
Was thrown contemptuously from Tyber's bank.

(EXEUNT)

Scene II

*(OPENS AND DISCOVERS THE CITIZENS IN GREAT CONFUSION---
LEO AT THE HEAD OF A PROCESSION OF PRIESTS, SENATORS AND NOBLES,
MEET GENSERIC IN SUPPLIANT POSTURES, WITHOUT THE PALACE)*

Leo

Edoxia sends all health to Genseric,
Her friend---her royal brother, and demands
Protection for the imperial house:
That no rough foot approach the palace gate,
Or hostile arm to plunder, or invade,
The royal daughters, or the wife of Cæsar.

Genseric

Tell her that Genseric himself will haste,
To guard the princesses and Cæsar's wife.

Leo

She begs repose after the furious storm;
And thy permission to be left retir'd,
To weep awhile the destiny of Rome;

To pour the balm of pity on the breast
Of virgin sorrow---to lift the drooping head
Of undissembled grief---hung like the lily
O'er the wasted vale---when the rough surge's
Roaring deluge sweeps down all around,
Except the naked bloom---propless and weak,
And quivering on the marge of the next tide---
Whose wat'ry wave may wash the broken fragment
From its natal soil.

Genseric

Hymenial songs must cheer these drooping maids---
They each shall choose a Goth or Vandal lord,
And rase the lineage of the Roman name
In the warm grotts of Asdrubal and Hanno,
For which their ancestors in Carthage bled,
And armies perish'd in the Lybian sands.

Leo

Now thou art master of the Roman world,
Let clemency bespeak thee more a king,
Than all thy triumphs o'er subjected Rome.

Genseric

The multitude disarm'd---I leave their lives;
Plebeian slaves may tremble and retire;
But all of noble or patrician blood,
Of ev'ry age and sex, my prisoners are.
Go thou, and tell the empress to prepare,
First, to receive her sovereign in the palace---
Then with her daughters, follow him to Carthage.

(EXEUNT)

Scene III

(EDOXIA AND LEO IN THE IMPERIAL PALACE)

Leo

Fortune ingulphs thy family and throne,
Beneath her shifting tide they're floating down,
And for thine house my soul in anguish bleeds;
The capitol---thy crown---and freedom lost---
Thy daughters seiz'd, Placidia borne away,
And made the mistress of a Gothic lord,
And Genseric himself is near the palace,
With hosts of Vandals crowding in the rear.

Edoxia

No more---death to my eyes---the tyrant comes---
The chains prepar'd---I hear the shackles clank.
Arise ye furies, from Tartarus' gulf,
And drag him peace meal, to the infernal shades.

(ENTER GENSERIC)

Hah! traitor, is it thus thou meet'st Edoxia?
Rob'd of her crown---a homager to thee---
Strip'd of her robes---her diadem and wealth,
And rudely bid to quit my native clime,
Still mere to swell thy fierce and savage pomp:
The princesses insulted---and enslav'd---
By vulgar hands drag'd to the Vandal tent.
Oh! burst my heart---and let my eye strings break,
Let furious billows swallow up his fleet,
And darkness cover nature in the wreck,
Ere I obey, and see my household train,
Lag at the feet of his triumphal car.

Genseric

A milder tone becomes a captive queen,
At whose request invaded and subdu'd,
Rome prostrate lies beneath her conquering lord.

Edoxia

Ah! what a contrast to the splendid tale
Of Roman greatness---her illustrious fame---

Genseric

Empire decays when virtue's not the base,
And doom'd to perish when the parts corrupt.

Edoxia

My soul's as hot with rage, remorse, revenge,
As are the Lybian sands when Sirius reigns,
Or the thrice heated summer solstice burns.

Genseric

Then, to console and mitigate thy rage,
I'll haste to Tunis with the illustrious throng,
Where Hunneric, my son, shall wed Eudocia.

Edoxia

Oh! dreadful threat---severer far than death.
Where are the sacred, celebrated shades,
Who wash'd the stains from chaste Lucretia's fame

In red libations from a tyrant's heart---
Oh! shield Eudocia---snatch her from despair.
Rescue a hapless, chaste, and friendless maid
From base, abandon'd, prostituted slaves!---

Genseric

Fix'd as the fates that roll th' etherial orbs,
I now forbid a murmur, or a sigh.

Edoxia

Thou may'st forbid the morning sun to rise;
Bid ocean cease to lave the pebbled shore,
Or Roman souls to mix with Vandal slaves,
And be obey'd---ere sighs are hush'd,
Or execrations cease.---

Genseric

Each chief has seiz'd a princely Roman dame,
The booty's safe, and prosperous gales invite;
And now my guards escort the empress on.

Edoxia

What! thus commanded in imperious strains,
To haste from Rome to Africk's scorching realms,
Where Tophet gapes and slaughter'd infants cry,
By thousands offer'd their infernal gods:---
Jehovah! why do all thy thunders sleep---
While each black crime the demons perpetrate,
Is acted o'er by this infernal race.

Genseric

Slaves, hasten on, and seize your royal charge,
And guard her safe to Carthagen's coast.

Edoxia

Down on my head th' avenging gods have pour'd
Each curse the house of Hannibal could frame,
Or vanquish'd Carthage utter in despair,
For all the wrongs, oppression, and disgrace,
By haughty Rome, inflicted on her sons.
Now ye stern souls, ye venerated shades,
Heroes who fell on Zama's routed plains---
Look down and triumph, vengeance is compleat.
Behold the last of the Horatian line,
Sent to the margin of the burning plains,
The tawny front of Afric's blacken'd tribes,
To stand an exil'd slave---to rave and weep
The loss of empire and the fall of Rome,
Amidst Numidia's sands and sooty sons

But thanks to Heav'n, the empress of the west
Has yet the means, and will an empress die.

(DRAWS A CONCEAL'D POIGNARD, AND ATTEMPTS TO STAB HERSELF)

Genseric

Slaves, seize her hand---she must not die---
'Twill half defeat the triumph of the day.

Edoxia

Enough of life and all life's idle pomp---
Nor by a tyrant's fiat will I live---
I leave the busy, vain, ambitious world
To cheat itself anew, and o'er and o'er
Tread the same ground their ancestors have trod,
In chace of thrones, of sceptres, or of crowns,
'Till all these bubbles break in empty air,
Nor leave a trace of happiness behind.

(EDOXIA IS LED OFF IN GOLDEN CHAINS)

(GENSERIC, FROM THE PALACE GATES, GIVES ORDERS TO THE VANDAL TROOPS)

Genseric

Down with the Roman eagles, statues, temples,
Monuments of fame---their trophies tear:---
Strip all the vestments from their ancient gods---
Their pageant heroes level with the dust,
And rase their names from memory and time.
The golden shrines and saintly relicks seize;
Both gilded busts and roofs of bronze destroy;
The branches, tables, candlesticks of gold,
In ostentation shewn by Jewish priests,
And in triumphal pomp transfer'd to Rome,
With all the treasures of Zenobia's house,
Palmyra's wealth, and Asia's spoils, secure---
And teach the naked capital to weep,
Her long arrearages to all mankind,
For plunder'd nations, cities, kingdoms, climes.
What has this mighty Roman name to boast?
'Tis time to rase her from the list of nations,
And blast the world no more by Roman crimes---
Then plead prescription, as 'twas done by Rome.
Break up their fountains, poison all their baths,
Ere they contaminate the Vandal troops
With soft, effeminate, luxurious sloth?
Ransack each church, and pillage all the city,
Nor leave a drachma round the seven hills.

(EXEUNT)

Scene IV

(HUNNERIC AND TRAULISTA)

Hunneric

If or ambition, wealth, or airy fame,
Could sooth to rest, my soul would be at ease;
But yet some secret heaviness I feel,
Ne'er felt before, that rankles at the heart,
And blasts the joys of victory and conquest.

Traulista

The world, and all its treasures at command;
And beauty, emulous to win thy love---
What can disturb thy peace?

Hunneric

Eudocia---the lovely, weeping, tender, fair Eudocia---
She is my prize---my prisoner---my wife---
Yet every motion of her eye appals;
And when she speaks, I like a statue stare,
Unable to reply, or to withdraw.

Traulista

These Roman maids have some enchanting arts,
That bend the boldest warrior to their smiles;
Yet they are not so cold as they may seem.

Hunneric

She holds me by some fascinating tie,
Spite of my prowess, or superiour strength:
Did the celestial deities combine
To form her thus?---Her image makes me hate
The wanton beauties of our amorous clime.
In her majestick presence, I'm as tame,
As the young lambkin in the shepherd's cot;
I fearcely move me, lest I should offend;
It may be love---I fear it is---
Yet spurn it from my thought---yes, I adore,
My worship is profound---my veneration such
I'm tenfold more a slave than is the princess.

Traulista

Perhaps, some darling favourite indulg'd,
May find Eudocia soft as yielding air,
Though frozen to the blandishments of love---
Cold as the Scythian snows to thine embrace;
Yet I could let a fatal secret out,
Would give a clue to wake her passions up.

Hunneric

Ah! say Traulista;
Half my booty shall be thy reward;
And fifty captives of the fairest dames
Shall swell thy haram to the eastern stile.

Traulista

Know, all the sex I equally despise;
And did some busy demon wake a wish
To toy and trifle with some matchless fair,
I'd puff it off;---if I could blush, the thought
Would burn my cheek.---Give me a Roman province,
Or give an army to patrol the empire,
To rid the world of their patrician pride,
Or yet more turbulent plebeian blood,
That has, for more than thirteen hundred years,
Plagu'd all mankind with their ambitious fires.

Hunneric

Not less than thee, I hate the Roman name:
Command thy terms---though they're to govern Rome,
To wear a crown---to reign in Gaul or Spain;
Both by the cross, and by the ancient gods,
Here is my signet---claim thine own reward.

Traulista

What if within this garden lies conceal'd
The rival of thy love?

Hunneric

The game more easy---more secure the prey:
By all the blood Genseric's arm has spilt,
The traitor dies before the morning dawns.

Traulista

Belov'd and favour'd by the fair Eudocia,
The brave Gaudentius waits to bear her off.

Hunneric

Hah! the son of Ætius?---thy valiant friend?---

Traulista

He once presum'd to call his friend a traitor,
And thinks that mine is such a milky soul
As to forgive---'tis not a soldier's trade:
My sword, my arm, aveng'd his bleeding sire,
Nor shall the son ungratefully defy
That sword---that prowess---that decided strength

Rome's legions fear, and trembling armies fly.
But yet I bid resentment sleep awhile,
'Till all was ripe an empire to subvert---
I scorn to play at a less noble game.
I rais'd Petronius to the imperial throne;
But he, ungrateful, indolent and weak,
At once forgot Hermannic's noble son;
With vulgar princes rank'd him as a slave:
The empress saw, and wanted such an arm,
To back the rage that rankled in her breast,
And rid her of Gaudentius, who'd refus'd
To be her friend and confident to thee.
He, raging mad with patriotick pride,
Resign'd his love at freedom's sacred foot,
Disgust'd---urg'd against her fix'd design,
And arm'd at once against the Vandal king.
She bade me hope, as my reward, her daughter---
But I've no wish the princess to possess;
Yet my ambition burns to reign in Rome.

Hunneric

Nail this Gaudentius to some grassy plot
And thou shall triumph in the capitol.

Traulista

This night is friendly to revenge and death:
Between the gloom of midnight and the dawn,
Just light enough beneath the cypress shade
To track the heedless lover on his way:
Yet could'st thou in Eudocia's presence draw,
And lay her lover bleeding at her feet?
When she to heaven erects her lily hand,
In all the beauteous agony of grief,
Heaves up her snowy breast, and sighs--- Gaudentius !

Hunneric

'Twould sweeten my revenge, and steal my heart,
To drag her instant to my slighted bed.

Traulista

Then on and feast thee with the luscious sight;
A triumph worthy of a Vandal prince.

(EXEUNT)

Scene V

*(A GROTTO IN THE GARDEN OF THE PALACE---
EUDOCIA SOLUS--- GAUDENTIUS APPROACHING)*

Gaudentius

These are the grotts, the sacred silent walks,
Where my Eudocia wanders from the world.
Methinks I hear, within yon roseate bower,
Some plaintive angel's soft harmonious voice:
Perhaps, her guardian goddess down descends,
From yonder silvern cloud capt mountain's brow,
To watch her beauteous charge.---

*(LISTENS)
(EUDOCIA WITHIN, IN A SOFT, PLAINTIVE, AGONIZING VOICE)*

Eudocia

Oh! some kind seraph snatch my soul away,
And shroud my griefs beneath the peaceful tomb;
Or must a dagger ope a passage hence,
To set me free from Hunneric's embrace?

Gaudentius

'Tis she herself---'tis her symphonious voice:
The murmuring maid in broken accents sighs;
Tis my Eudocia whispering to her God.

(ENTERS THE GROTTO)

Let not those sighs fear up an angel's breast;
Nor let the wreck of empire strike too deep.

Eudocia

Hah!---who art thou that boldly dares intrude
On the last hour of this my still retreat?
Some spy of Hunneric's, to watch my steps,
Lest one short moment of repose I find,
This last sad night, ere I'm completely curs'd.

Gaudentius

May all the powers who guard the good and just
Protect my princess!---

Eudocia

Hah! my belov'd Gaudentius!---
Dost thou yet live, through all the perils
Of a barbarous siege, to see Eudocia

Snatch'd from thy lov'd arms?---Alas! my fate,
To what a hated rival am I doom'd!

Gaudentius

I had not liv'd but for Eudocia's sake.

Eudocia

Yet save a life much dearer than my own;
Nor linger here, 'tis on the verge of death:
Leave me to perish in my country's fall.

Gaudentius

Not all the clangor, or the din of arms,
Or roughen'd tempests, whose impetuous blasts,
In fiery bolts, may rive the mountains up,
Again shall tear me from my lov'd Eudocia.

Eudocia

My lips can't utter, nor my tongue express,
The anguish that my tortur'd soul endures:
'Twas early duty nurs'd my infant love,
And strictest virtue sanctifi'd the flame,
'Till Valentinian fell---alas! no more;
Nature---religion---reason---filial love,
Forbid a union with the son of Ætius.

Gaudentius

My brain grows hot---it kindles to distraction---
This night secures my bliss---or---certain death.

Eudocia

Oh! live Gaudentius---live for Rome's defence;
Nor rob thy country of so brave an arm.
Not crowns, or sceptres, or the world besides,
Has aught to balance with my love for thee;
Yet urge no more---fly hence and save thyself---
One parting sigh---one solemn, last adieu---
Then, for thy country's sake, forget Eudocia

Gaudentius

Not till the pulse of life forgets to play,
And death's cold dews pervade my quivering lip.
Within this garden will I find a grave,
Unless my princess dares an enterprise,
Which lost this night, may never more return;
I must attempt thy rescue ere the morn.

Eudocia

In what new horror would this scene involve?

Gaudentius

Arouse thy noble fortitude of mind---
'Tis the decisive hour---the next subjects
To Hunneric's embrace.---

Eudocia

Not all that nature shudders at in death,
Has half the terrors that his name conveys;
Oh! save, if possible---prevent my fate.

Gaudentius

Then fly with me from misery supreme.

Eudocia

The port of Ostia's shut---and all the seas
Fill'd with Genseric's fierce piratic slaves:---
Where can the wretched fly?

Gaudentius

Fly any where from Hunneric and death.

Eudocia

Alas! my heart---my weak, my wavering heart!

Gaudentius

Come, let us move to yonder small alcove;
The brave Traulista, whom Genseric trusts,
Most fortunately heads the nightly watch,
Patroles the posts until the morning dawns;
The moment that the midnight bell resounds,
He brings a Vandal garb for my Eudocia,
And aids our flight to the Tarentiae sea.

Eudocia

Traulista!---I like not this Traulista---
Traulista has a rough, a savage soul,
Wrought up to treasons of the darkest hue.

Gaudentius

His life he owes to Ætius and myself.

Eudocia

But gratitude can never bind the base:
An infidel to God---there is no tie---
No principle to bind a worthless heart.

Gaudentius

He is my friend; come, dissipate distrust.

Eudocia

A thousand spectres stare on every side.

Gaudentius

Let's lose no time, nor let thy fears retard;

(HE OFFERS TO LEAD HER OUT OF THE BOWER)

The hazy moon enwraps her tranquil face,
And hides behind a thin transparent cloud,
Lest she betray, by her resplendent beam
Thy trembling step---the terror in thy eye.

(MOVING SLOWLY ON)

Eudocia

Methinks I hear some speedy foot advance.

(SHE STARTS BACK)

Gaudentius

My generous friend anticipates the hour.

Eudocia

Lie still, my heart---
Nor burst the brittle casement of my breast.

(ENTER SERVANT)

Servant

Away, my lord---fly to the thickest shade,
Or, ere thou can'st escape, thou art undone.

Gaudentius

Hah! betray'd!--

Servant

Two ruffians arm'd, crawl round the citron walk---
They nam'd Gaudentius---I stay'd to hear no more---
But rush'd---and shot across the darken'd grove,
To serve the princess and to save my lord.

Gaudentius

Alas! my faithful Cassio---thou'rt too late,
Yet as a soldier will I sell my life.

(ENTER HUNNERIC AND TRAULISTA)

(GAUDENTIUS MAKES A FURIOUS PASS AND MORTALLY WOUNDS TRAULISTA)

Traulista

Death to my hopes---damnation to his hand!---

Gaudentius

Oh! heavens! Traulista---art thou the villain---

Traitor---dastard---slave---lurking in secret,

To betray thy friends?

Traulista

Coward, come on---

To brave in words thou may'st a dying man;

Yet know I've life enough to dash to hell,

And send thy puny soul to Pluto's shades,

For daring once to threat Traulista's life.

Gaudentius

High heaven has levell'd at thy treacherous heart

The fatal stroke that justice' hand demands.

Traulista

Now are there deities or devils---ghosts or gods,

I'd thank them all had he have dy'd before me.

My eye balls sink---my stiffen'd fibres fail!---

Haste, Charon---with thy boat---and set me o'er

The Stygian pool---blot out this being---

'Tis a curse to man---yet if these Romans live

In other worlds, I would exist again,

To chase them from Elysium, as from Rome.

(DIES)

Hunneric

Seize this young furious prince, and on the rack

(TO HIS GUARDS)

Extend each limb---with heated pincers tare,

'Till I have time to find new tortures out.

Gaudentius

Not thee, nor death, nor tortures do I fear,

Would angel guards and ministers of fate

First snatch Eudocia from thy loath'd embrace---

Yet know, Gaudentius dies not as a slave.

*(HE RUSHES FORWARD AND ENGAGES HUNNERIC , WHO MORTALLY WOUNDS HIM.---
EUDOCIA RUNS BETWEEN THEIR SWORDS, AND OFFERS HER BREAST TO HUNNERIC)*

Eudocia

Strike here, most noble Hunneric---end my pain---
Now if thy soul can do one generous deed
Emancipate thy prisoner---enhance the gift---
Nor like a niggard do thy work by halves;
But let me die with him, my life, my lord,
My husband, my Gaudentius.

Hunneric

No, my Eudocia, live---thou art my queen.

Eudocia

If hell's dark empire had a charm for me,
Then I might wish to be the Vandal queen.

Gaudentius

Adieu, my fair---adieu, my lov'd Eudocia---
Adieu to glory, empire and renown!---

(FALLS)

Eudocia

Oh! stay Gaudentius---let me assuage thy wounds,
Support thy drooping head one moment more---
Then I accompany my much lov'd lord.

(SHE FAINTS)

Hunneric

Slaves, bear her off---these are the sex's tricks---
While her fond eyes hang on her paramour
She'll play them o'er, and weep, and sigh, and rave,
And faint again---yet cannot die with grief---
But in mine arms she'll sink an easy bride.

Eudocia

Heaven blot from time that curs'd, that blasted hour!

(THE GUARDS ATTEMPT TO FORCE HER FROM THE CORPSE OF GAUDENTIUS)

Off murderers---nor tear me from his corpse---
Let me come near---if still he breathes,
And sip the last soft breath.---Ah; he is dead!
In his last sob---the last of Romans died---

Just Heaven is kind---I yet shall die with him.
My throbbing heart almost forgets to beat---
The slow pulsation lags---I sink---I fall---
Time shakes the glass to sift out my last sands---
Virtue, sublim'd by piety and truth,
Now beckons to the skies---the curtain falls,
And opes eternity---I've nought to ask
Of this distracted world---but just to shrowd
In the same peaceful tomb, with my Gaudentius.

(DIES)

Epilogue

Poets and heroes travelling from home,
For perfect models, oft repair to Rome;
Yet real prowess, or true sterling wit,
Or genius there, they do not always hit.
They had their bullies, sycophants and fools,
And learned dunces in Apollo's schools;
Their poetasters---pretty playful things,
Who, patroniz'd by ladies, or by kings,
By rules logistick, reason'd truth away,
And form'd new systems fit for each new day;
Zealots, or bigots to their fathers' creed,
As infidels, or fashion gave the the lead;
A proud republick, or a servile throng,
Aw'd by a frown, or by a Nero's song;
A celebrated, brave, heroick race,
They'd save, or sell their country, for a place.
For liberty---a poor unmeaning name,
They shook the globe, and set the world in flame;
But, factious, fickle, impious and bold,
Enervated by luxury and gold,
Ye've seen extinguish'd---great Apollo's fire,
Untun'd his harp, and broke his sacred lyre.
But in this age of literary claim,
When taste and genius vie with Roman fame,
Like them ye'll read, and candidly excuse
A piece design'd for pleasure or for use;
Though both the unities of place and time
May'nt always tally with the true sublime,
Nor buskin merit meet the mid day sky,
A female bard still asks your candid eye.
Sure the politeness of an infant nation
Wont damn the play, and hiss it out of fashion;
At the first reading on a winter's eve

Pray cry encore ---a second may retrieve,
And save her fame from ev'ry critick's rage
To tread securely on Columbia's stage.
No censuring bards, or little wits she fears,
If ye are pleas'd, and Peter Pindar spares.
The author asks but this small boon of you,
Pray let it pass at least a night or two;
And if the moral in this pious age
Should let it live a week upon the stage;
Some gambling fools by Maximus's fate
Might learn their follies ere it was too late.
Might stay at home and save their pretty spouses,
And borns prevent by lodging at their houses.
Others, by thinking, might be taught the odds,
'Twixt him who fears and him who blasts the gods;
Might choose to live and die a man of merit,
Ere he'd be damn'd---an infidel of spirit;
But, like Traulista's , let their follies end,
Who basely have betray'd or told a friend.