
ARTAXERXES

An English opera.

Text and music by
Thomas Augustine Arne

First performance: 2 February 1762, London.



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Motivazioni per scrivere note di ringraziamento non mancano. Contributi e suggerimenti sono giunti da ogni dove, vien da dire «*dagli Appennini alle Ande*». Tutto questo aiuto mi ha dato e mi sta dando entusiasmo per continuare a migliorare e ampliare gli orizzonti di quest'impresa. Ringrazio quindi: chi mi ha dato consigli su grafica e impostazione del sito, chi ha svolto le operazioni di aggiornamento sul portale, tutti coloro che mettono a disposizione testi e materiali che riguardano la lirica, chi ha donato tempo, chi mi ha prestato hardware, chi mette a disposizione software di qualità a prezzi più che contenuti.

Infine ringrazio la mia famiglia, per il tempo rubatole e dedicato a questa attività.

I titoli vengono scelti in base a una serie di criteri: disponibilità del materiale, data della prima rappresentazione, autori di testi e musiche, importanza del testo nella storia della lirica, difficoltà di reperimento.

A questo punto viene ampliata la varietà del materiale, e la sua affidabilità, tramite acquisti, ricerche in biblioteca, su internet, donazione di materiali da parte di appassionati. Il materiale raccolto viene analizzato e messo a confronto: viene eseguita una trascrizione in formato elettronico.

Quindi viene eseguita una revisione del testo tramite rilettura, e con un sistema automatico di rilevazione sia delle anomalie strutturali, sia della validità dei lemmi.

Vengono integrati se disponibili i numeri musicali, e individuati i brani più significativi secondo la critica.

Viene quindi eseguita una conversione in formato stampabile, che state leggendo.

Grazie ancora.

Dario Zanotti

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ARTAXERXES, prince and afterwards king of
Persia; friend to Arbaces, and in love with
Semira CONTRALTO

ARTABANES, and favourite of the royal family;
father to Arbaces and Semira TENOR

ARBACES, friend of Artaxerxes, in love with
Mandane SOPRANO

RIMENES, a general of the army, and
confident of Artabanes TENOR

MANDANE, sister to Artaxerxes, in love with
Arbaces SOPRANO

SEMIRA, sister to Arbaces, in love with
Artaxerxes SOPRANO

Nobles, Guards, and Attendants.

*The action is represented in and near the palace of the kings of Persia, in the city of
Susa.*

Preface

The reputation of Metastasio, author of the following drama, is too well established in the learned world, to need any apology for giving the public a translation of Artaxerxes, an opera performed and admired all over Europe. But as the narrative part of this drama may seem too barren of forcible epithets, which, in reading or speaking, dignify the stile, it may be necessary to give Mr. Dryden's and Lord Lansdown's sentiments on the occasion, which exactly correspond with those of our author. Mr. Dryden says, ..."that no critic can justly determine the merit or difficulty of writing a poem for music, till he has been frequently conversant with some skilful musician, and acquired, by experience, a knowledge of what is most proper for musical expression;" and Lord Lansdown, in his preface to the British enchanters, exclaims against that species of dramatic dialogue, which (instead of being free, natural, and easy, as conversation should be) is precise, or formal, arguing pro and con, like disputants in a school; he further asks the question, "Whether in writing, as in dress, it is not possible to be too exact, too starched, and too formal?" and concludes thus, ..."pleasing negligence many have seen; who ever saw pleasing formality?"

Metastasio, in his dialect, seems to affect simplicity; and from his great experience in writing for music, has given the following plan for the poetry of an opera, viz.

' That the fable, or recitative, to which fixed musical sounds are adapted, should be simple dialect; hard and dissonant epithets (though ever so forcible in other respects) being destructive to music, and, when sung, for the chief part, unintelligible. — That the similes be confined to the songs; and that the words, which are to express them, be as smooth and sonorous as possible, lest the composer be cramped in his fancy, and the singers rendered incapable of shewing their skill, which chiefly consists in openly displaying the tones of their voices, on running executive passages.

The translator of this opera has no merit, but from his endeavour to follow the author in all these particulars. He therefore submits this first attempt of the kind to the favour and indulgence of the public, not doubting that (if they consider the difficulty of writing under such restrictions, the necessity of sometimes departing from the author, on account of the different idioms of our language; and of leaving out many beauties in the narrative part of the drama, for the sake of brevity) they will rather peruse it with an eye of favour than severity.

The argument

Xerxes king of Persia, having been often discomfited by the Greeks, his power began greatly to decline; which Artabanes, commander of the royal guards, perceiving, he entertained the hopes of sacrificing to his ambition, not only Xerxes, but all the royal family, and by that method to ascend the throne of Persia; for which purpose, availing himself of the advantage which his familiarity and friendship with the king gave him, he entered, at dead of night, the apartment of Xerxes, and slew him.

He afterwards so irritated the young princes against one another, that Artaxerxes, one of the said princes, caused his brother Darius to be slain, believing him the parricide, by the artful insinuations of Artabanes.

Now nothing was wanting to complete his treasonous designs, but the death of Artaxerxes; which Artabanes having prepared, though by various accidents delayed, (which furnish the episodical ornaments of this drama) he could not accomplish it, the treason being discovered, and Artaxerxes preserved; which discovery and preservation form the principal action of the ensuing drama.

Justin, lib. 3, cap. I.

ACT ONE

[Overture]

Scene one

An inner garden belonging to the palace of the king of Persia. Moonlight.

Mandane and Arbaces.

MANDANE Still silence reigns around, suspicion sleeps,
and unperceiv'd, you may escape these walls.

ARBACES Adieu, my love; o think on thy Arbaces.

MANDANE Yet stay, sweet youth, a few short minutes stay.

ARBACES Ador'd Mandane! see the dawn appears.

[N. 1 - Duettino]

MANDANE, ARBACES

Fair Aurora, pr'ythee stay;
o retard unwelcome day:
think what anguish rends my breast;
thus caressing, thus caress;
from the idol of my heart
forc'd at thy approach to part.

ARBACES Alas! thou know'st that for my love to thee,
the king, great Xerxes, thy too rigid father,
has banish'd me the palace; should he know,
that in defiance of his stern command,
I have presum'd to scale this garden wall,
how little would a lover's plea avail,
when thou, his daughter, could'st not move his pity.

MANDANE Thy noble father, mighty Artabanes,
disposes at his will the heart of Xerxes,
and the young prince my brother, Artaxerxes,
brought up with thee in virtuous emulation,
honours thy worth, and boasts thy valu'd friendship;
their interest joined may soften his resentment.

ARBACES Weak are their efforts, while his kingly pride
disdains to rank a princess with a subject.

MANDANE My spirits sink, my heart forgets to beat,
I have not fortitude to bear thy loss. ~
And must we part? ~ Then all good angels guard thee!

[N. 2 - Air]

Adieu, thou lovely youth,
let hope thy fears remove;
preserve thy faith and truth,
but never doubt my love.

(Exit.)

Scene two

ARBACES O cruel parting! how can I survive?
Divided thus from all that's sweet and fair,
from her, for whom alone I live. ~

(Enter Artabanes.)

ARTABANES Son, Arbaces.

ARBACES My father!

ARTABANES Give me thy sword.

ARBACES Sir, I obey.

ARTABANES Here take thou mine.

ARBACES 'Tis drench'd in blood!

ARTABANES Fly, hide it from all eyes;
Xerxes, the king, this daring arm hath slain.

ARBACES Forbid it, heav'n!

ARTABANES O much lov'd son!
Thy treatment was the spur to my revenge. ~
For thee I'm guilty.

ARBACES Would I had ne'er been born.

ARTABANES Let not weak scruples thwart my great design;
perhaps Arbaces shall be king of Persia.

ARBACES I'm all confusion ~

ARTABANES No more ~ be gone.

ARBACES O fatal day ~ unhappy, lost Arbaces.

Amid a thousand racking woes,
I pant, I tremble, and I feel,
cold blood from ev'ry vein distill,
and clog my lab'ring heart.
I see my fair, one's lost repose,
and o! lament the fatal curse;
that he who gave me life cou'd thus
from virtue's laws depart.

(Exit.)

Scena three

Artabanes solus.

ARTABANES Be firm my heart. ~ In the pursuit of guilt,
the first advance admits not a retreat:
the royal blood, to the last hateful drop,
must then be shed. Conscience thy checks are vain. ~
The prince appears, ~ now art's my only refuge.

(Enter Artaxerxes, Rimenes and Guards.)

Dear Artabanes, glad I meet thee here;
thy prince demands thy counsel,
thy royalty ~ revenge ~

ARTABANES I tremble, sir ~
this dire injunction wants an explanation.

ARTAXERXES Disastrous fate ~ yonder my father lies
savagely murder'd!

ARTABANES Ah! my ill-boding fears!
Unsated thirst of empire:
alas! ~ will nothing but a father's blood
allay thy heat, and quench thy raging fever!

ARTAXERXES Well I conceive ~ my faithless cruel brother
Darius. ~

ARTABANES Who but he at dead of night could penetrate
the palace? Who approach the royal bed?
Nay more, his known ambition ~

ARTAXERXES O, if here lives, a heart that calls me friend,
or feels compassion for a slaughter'd king,
quick let him bring the traitor to our presence.

ARTABANES That welcome task be mine. ~
Guards, follow me.

(Going.)

ARTAXERXES Yet stay ~
Darius is the son of Xerxes.

ARTABANES Who kills the father is no more a son.

[N. 4 - Air]

Behold! on Lethe's dismal strand
thy father's troubled spirit stand!
In his face what grief profound!
See he rolls his haggard eyes;
hark! revenge! revenge! he cries;
and points to his still bleeding wound:
obey the call, revenge his death;
and calm his soul that gave thee breath.

(Exit.)

Scene four

Artaxerxes going; enter Semira.

SEMIRA Stay, Artaxerxes, stay.

ARTAXERXES Adieu, Semira.

SEMIRA And dost thou fly me? Go then cruel prince,
no more shall ill-tim'd fondness importune thee.

[N. 5 - Air]

ARTAXERXES

Fair Semira, lovely maid,
cease in pity to upbraid
my oppressed, but constant heart:
full sufficient are the woes,
which my cruel stars impose;
heav'n alas; has done its part.

(Exit.)

Scene five

SEMIRA I fear some dread disaster ~ say, Rimenes;
what means this strange confusion in the prince?

RIMENES Xerxes is slain ~
and Artaxerxes bears a dreadful conflict,
'twixt filial duty to revenge his father,
and brotherly compassion for Darius.

- SEMIRA** O fatal deed! th'effect of wild ambition;
heav'n knows if Artaxerxes' life be safe.
- RIMENES** Let fate be busy in destructive slaughter,
we blest with love, and seated in the shore,
will view the destin'd shipwreck.
- SEMIRA** Think not that love can find a place to enter,
when the sad heart's surrounded with misfortunes;
leave me, Rimenes, to my troubled thoughts.
- RIMENES** Your web of scorn is not so closely woven,
but I can see between each subtle thread,
yet, born to love, undaunted, I'll pursue thee:
since hope inspires my breast, what you deny,
ungrateful maid! kind fancy shall supply.

[N. 6 - Air]

When real joy we miss,
'tis some degree of bliss,
t' enjoy ideal pleasure,
and dream of hidden treasure.
The soldier dreams of wars,
and conquers without scars;
the sailor in his sleep,
with safety ploughs the deep:
so I, tro' fancies aid,
enjoy my heav'nly maid,
and blest with thee and love,
am greater far than Jove.

(Exit.)

Scene six

Semira sola.

Ye gods, protectors of the Persian empire,
preserve my Artaxerxes ~ Yet he blest ~
Semira's state is wretched; Xerxes dead,
this prince will mount the throne:
belov'd by me, and rais'd above my hopes,
the hand which he intreated, when a subject,
when sov'reign of Persia he'll disdain.

[N. 7 - Air]

How hard is my fate,
how desp'rate my state,
when virtue and honour excite,
to suffer distress,
contented to bless,
the object in whom I delight.
Yet midst all the woes,
my soul undergoes,
thro' virtue's too rigid decree,
I'll scorn to complain,
if the force of my pain
awaken his pity for me.
(Exit.)

Scene seven

The palace.
Enter Mandane.

MANDANE Where do I fly? ~ Ah, hapless maid! ~
Thus, in one fatal instant,
to lose a brother, father, and a lover!

(Enter Artaxerxes.)

ARTAXERXES Alas, Mandane!

MANDANE Does Darius live?
Or are thy guilty hands
imbru'd in brother's blood?

ARTAXERXES Fain wou'd I shun that deed,
which to prevent, I've search'd throughout the palace,
for Artabanes and Darius ~ ~
but all in vain ~ ~

MANDANE See, Artabanes comes.

Scene eight

Enter Artabanes.

ARTAXERXES My friend! ~ ~

ARTABANES I sought you, sir ~ ~ All is accomplish'd.

ARTAXERXES Ha! speak, explain.

ARTABANES Your father's death's revenged,
Darius slain, and Artaxerxes now
is Persia's king.

ARTAXERXES O gods!

MANDANE O dire misfortune!

ARTABANES Why that deep sigh, my liege? 'twas your command.

ARTAXERXES Alas! 'tis true, the guilt is only mine.

ARTABANES What guilt, my sovereign?
'Twas merely justice to your murder'd father.
Take comfort, sir;
and think, that in Darius' death,
a wicked bloody parricide is punish'd.

Scene nine

Enter Semira.

SEMIRA O Artaxerxes!

ARTAXERXES Say, fair Semira, why this seeming joy?

SEMIRA Darius is not guilty of the murder.

MANDANE What do I hear?

ARTAXERXES I'm struck with double horror.

SEMIRA The assassin is secur'd.

ARTAXERXES O quick, proceed.

SEMIRA Your watchful sentinels, when he had leap'd
the garden wall, o'ertook him as he fled.
His deep confusion, palid countenance,
and sword yet reeking with the crimson blood,
strongly proclaim him guilty.

ARTAXERXES But the name?

SEMIRA At my request to know it,
all hung their heads in silence.

ARTABANES Alas! it is my son.
(aside)

ARTAXERXES Must Artaxerxes then ascend the throne,
distain'd with brother's blood?
O, I shall never taste of peace again. ~
Quick, bring this traitor; that unbounded rage
may execute the vengeance he deserves. ~
Hold, Artabanes ~ dear Mandane, stay ~

SEMIRA Leave me not in this distress. ~
Where is my friend Arbaces?

ARTABANES He was forbid the court by royal Xerxes,
for his presumptuous love of fair Mandane.

ARTAXERXES Fly, bring him to my arms ~ I here absolve him.

Scene ten

Enter Rimenes with Arbaces prisoner.

RIMENES Who in his royal presence would believe Arbaces to be guilty?

ARTABANES How!

ARTAXERXES My friend!

ARTABANES My son!

SEMIRA My brother!

MANDANE Oh, ye gods! my lover!

ARTAXERXES Wou'd in the pangs of death I'd met my friend,
rather than thus in fetters like a traitor.

ARBACES I'm innocent.

ARTAXERXES O, make but that appear,
and doubly 'twill endear thee to my love.

ARBACES I am not guilty, that's my only plea.

ARTABANES This prudent caution answers to my wish.
(aside)

MANDANE But your resentment 'gainst the king ~ ~

ARBACES Was just.

ARTAXERXES Didst thou not fly?

ARBACES I did.

MANDANE This thy reserve ~ ~

ARBACES Is requisite.

ARTAXERXES And thy down-cast confusion ~ ~

ARBACES Is suited to th'occasion.

RIMENES This bloody sword ~ ~

(shewing it)

ARBACES Was in the scabbard, when you took me prisoner.

ARTABANES And canst thou yet deny the cruel deed?

ARBACES Great sir, I still assert my innocence.

ARTABANES Audacious boy! thus obstinate in ill,
thy sight's my torment, and this deed my shame.

ARBACES And does my father join in my destruction?

[N. 8 - Air]

ARTABANES

Thy father! away, I renounce the soft claim;
thou spot on my honour, thou blast to my fame,
let justice the traitor to punishment bring;
his father he lost, when he murdered his king.

(Exit Artabanes.)

Scene eleven

ARBACES Ye cruel gods, what crime have I committed,
to draw relentless vengeance on my head? ~
Semira! sister! hear me with compassion.

[N. 9 - Air]

SEMIRA

Acquit thee of this soul offence,
return with spotless innocence;
then shall my hapless brother see,
that never sister lov'd like me.

(Exit.)

Scene twelve

ARBACES Appearance, I must own, is strong against me,
but truth is on my side ~ I'm innocent.

ARTAXERXES Pray heav'n thou may'st; but till the law decide
you must remain a prisoner.

(Exit.)

ARBACES Ah, dear Rimenes, pity my hard fate, ~
my friend!

RIMENES I am no traitor's friend ~ Adieu.

(Exit.)

Scene thirteen

Arbaces, Mandane.

ARBACES Beauteous Mandane, turn at least and hear me.

MANDANE Away! you fue in vain.
(Going.)

ARBACES O stay, I charge thee ~ ~
think on my former love.

MANDANE 'Tis turn'd to hate.

ARBACES And you believe me guilty?

MANDANE I am convinc'd.

[N. 10 - Air]

ARBACES

O too lovely, too unkind,
if my lips no credit find,
pierce my breast; my heart shall prove
strong in virtue, firm in love;
guiltless, wretched, left forlorn,
and worse than murdered by thy scorn.

(Exit guarded.)

Scene fourteen

Mandane sola.

Recitative accompanied.

Dear and beloved shade of my dead father,
thee I invoke to spirit up my rage,
left fond credulity too strongly plead,
and turn my purpose from a just revenge;
for, oh, I feel the tyrant love within,
he rends my breast, he struggles for Arbaces;
help me kind gods, to tear away his image.

[N. 11 - Air]

Fly, soft ideas, fly;
that neither tear nor sigh,
my virtue may betray:
nature's great call,
that governs all,
a daughter must obey.
Alas my soul denies
to hear revenge's cries;
dare not, fond heart,
to take his part,
but drive his form away.

(Exit.)

ACT TWO

Scene one

The royal apartments.

Enter Artaxerxes, Artabanes.

ARTAXERXES Guards, speed ye to the tower,
and instantly conduct Arbaces to me.

ARTABANES Good my lord,
think not the partial fondness of a father
has urg'd this counsel.

ARTAXERXES No; 'tis justice dictates;
he still persists that he is innocent,
and his fair truth was ne'er till now suspected;
I will withdraw ~
o, reconcile the safety of your son
with your king's peace, and the honor of his throne.

[N. 12 - Air]

In infancy, our hopes and fears
were to each other known;
and friendship, in our riper years,
has twined our hearts in one.
O clear him then from this offence,
thy love, thy duty prove;
restore him with that innocence,
which first inspired my love.

(Exit.)

ARTABANES So far my great resolve succeeds.
Approach, Arbaces.

(Enter Arbaces and guards.)

And you his guards, in the next chamber wait.

(Exeunt guards.)

ARBACES My father!

ARTABANES Ever watchful to preserve thee,
I artfully have gain'd from Artaxerxes
the liberty to question thee:
take thee this fortunate occasion,
and by a secret way, which I will shew thee,
delude the guards, and fly.

ARBACES Sir, my escape
would rise in evidence to prove me guilty.

ARTABANES 'Tis folly all! I give thee liberty;
from the king's wrath I snatch thee; and, perhaps,
the public voice shall call thee to the throne.

ARBACES What said you, sir?

ARTABANES Long have you known
the people's hatred to the royal blood:
away.
The sight of you will fire the mut'nous troops:
whose leaders to your interest are sworn.

ARBACES I turn a rebel! Horror's in the thought. ~
Your pardon, sir; ~ is this a father's counsel?
Guards, enter quick, bring me again my chains ~
conduce me to my prison.

ARTABANES I burn with rage.

ARBACES Yet calm this transport ~ think on my affliction,
sir ~ father ~ turn ~ o grant one kind adieu.

[N. 13 - Air]

Disdainful you fly me,
in anger exclaim;
all comfort deny me,
and murder my fame.
No grief can the heart
to pity incline,
that bears not a part,
in sorrow like mine.
Nature's tender plea is vain;
welcome then my chains again.
O rigour unjust!
o counsel accurst!
ambition ill-plac'd;
my virtue disgrac'd;
the pains I endure,
death only can cure.
Disdainful you fly me,
in anger exclaim;
all comfort deny me,
and murder my fame.
No grief can the heart
to pity incline,
that bears not a part,
in sorrow like mine.
Nature's tender plea is vain;
welcome then my chains again.

(Exit with the guards.)

Scene two

Enter Rimenes.

RIMENES Why, my dear friend, so pensive, so inactive?

ARTABANES My wayward son, that bar to my ambition,
at once rejects both liberty and crown.

RIMENES Let us away, and force him from the tower.

ARTABANES The present time may better be employ'd,
if Artaxerxes perish by our hands, ~
let not my friend betray me.

RIMENES I, my lord!
Forbid it, gratitude! My abject state
caft me below the notice of mankind,
till your great power exalted me to honour.

ARTABANES Small recompence for thy good services:
but should kind fortune fraile on this attempt,
then judge if Artabanes loves his friend.

RIMENES My hand, my heart, are guided by your will.

ARTABANES I have observed thy passion for Semira ~
spare thy confusion; and let this great instance
proove my esteem ~ Semira shall be thine.

RIMENES Thanks, gracious sir ~ my joy is past expression.

ARTABANES *(seeing Semira)*
Come hither, daughter.

Scena three

Enter Semira.

ARTABANES In this valiant chief
behold thy lord and husband.

SEMIRA Cruel sound!
O sir, reflect ~ Is this a time for nuptials,
when my unhappy brother ~

ARTABANES Peace, no more. ~
'Tis my command ~ reply not, but obey.
(Exit.)

Scene four

SEMIRA I tremble ~ hear me, sir, ~ O, if you love me,
prevent this marriage.

RIMENES Sure Semira mocks me?

SEMIRA Tho', by constraint, you seize my helpless hand,
my heart disdains the brutal violence.

RIMENES Give me thy beauty, and reserve thy heart;
thou keep'st the worst, I gain the better part.

[N. 14 - Air]

To sigh and complain,
alike I disdain,
contented my wish to enjoy;
I scorn to reflect,
on a lady's neglect,
or barter my peace for a toy.
In love, as in war,
I laugh at a scar,
and, if my proud enemy yield,
the joy that remains,
is to lead her in chains,
and glean the rich spoils of the field.

(Exit.)

Scene five

SEMIRA How many links to dire misfortune's chain
are woven in one day!

(Enter Mandane.)

Stay, dear Mandane. ~
Why this haste?

MANDANE I attend the council.

SEMIRA I'll too attend, if ought within my power
may help my brother.

MANDANE Our views are different; thou desir'st to save him;
I seek his death.

SEMIRA Is this a language for Arbaces' lover?

MANDANE It well becomes the daughter of dead Xerxes.

SEMIRA Away, thou cruel maid!
Enforce his crime, and urge his speedy death.
But first prepare your heart, and quite erase
the soft remembrance of your former passion.
The tender hopes and fears, warm vows of truth,
fond sighs exchanged, and, last, the sweet idea
of that dear form, which first inspired your love.

MANDANE Ah, barbarous Semira! thus to wake
my guilty pity; rebel to my duty.

[N. 15 - Air]

If o'er the cruel tyrant love,
a conquest I believed;
the flatt'ring error cease to prove;
let me be deceiv'd.
Forbear to fan the gentle flame,
which love did first create;
what was my pride is now my shame,
and must be turned to hate.
Then call not to my wav'ring mind,
the weakness of my heart;
which, ah; I feel too much inclined
to take the traitor's part.

(Exit.)

Scene six

Semira sola.

Which fatal evil shall I first oppose?
My princess, brother, this detested lover,
the king, my father, all are enemies;
and each attacks me in some tender part:
while I exert my pow'r against the one,
the others rush on my defenceless breast.

[N. 16 - Air]

If the river's swelling waves
 overflow their usual bed;
 scarce th'affrighted peasant saves,
 from the flood his homely shed.
 Tho' he stop one open shore,
 where the waters swistly glide,
 in an hundred places more,
 rushes in th'impetuous tide.

(Exit.)

Scene seven

A hall of royal council with a throne, seats on the sides for the grandees of kingdom, a small table and chair on the right hand of the throne, Artaxerxes, preceded by guards, afterwards by the nobles, follow'd by Mandane, Semira, Artabanes and Rimenes.

ARTAXERXES Ye solid pillars of the Persian empire,
 behold me fated to sustain the cares
 of my paternal throne, and much I'm grieved
 that my loved father's death so heavy lies
 upon my absent friend; but since Arbaces
 denies this accusation, let the father,
 whose virtues have endear'd him to our favour,
 be the son's judge, to cast him or acquit him;
 in him is vested all our legal power.

MANDANE In him? does friendship so prevail over duty?

ARTAXERXES Not so, Mandane, for his loyal father
 has double reason for severity:
 I ought to vindicate the death of Xerxes;
 but if Arbaces be the criminal,
 his father, with more rigour, will revenge
 his monarch's death, and his own public shame.

ARTABANES Ah, sir, what trial! ~

ARTAXERXES Worthy of thy. Virtue ~
 if any think me partial, let him speak.

RIMENES This silence is a general approbation.

SEMIRA My brother comes.

MANDANE Ah me!

ARTAXERXES Give your attention.

(Ascends the throne, the grandees sit.)

MANDANE Now prudence guide the reins of my affection.
(aside) Cease, busy heart, to flutter in my breast.

Scene eight

Enter Arbaces in chains, guarded.

ARBACES Am I so much the hatred of all Persia,
that it unites to witness my misfortune?
My sovereign!

ARTAXERXES O Arbaces, call me friend!
For till thy crime is prov'd, that title's mine,
but, as a name so tender ill becomes
the impartial judge, thy most unhappy cause
I have assigned to worthy Artabanus.

ARBACES My father judge!

ARTAXERXES Yes, he.

ARBACES I'm chill'd with horror.

ARTABANES Arbaces, in this presence thou appearest
to be the murderer of royal Xerxes:
the circumstances urged are these ~
that thou hast entertained presumptuous love
of this most honoured princess;
for which, by Xerxes banish'd from the court,
you sought revenge, and found it in his death.

ARBACES Naymore, the bloody sword, the time, the place,
and flight, conspire to fix the guilt on me,
and yet my heart is free; ~ I'm innocent.

ARTABANES Demonstrate that, and so appease the wrath
of this offended princess.

ARBACES Ah! forbear; ~
if you would have me with a steady mind,
support my sufferings; make not the assault
in such a tender part. ~ Barbarous father!

ARTABANES Rash young man, be silent.
Consider where thou art, and who attends thee.

MANDANE Be still, my beating heart.
(aside)

ARTAXERXES But this thy crime,
requires defence, or a sincere repentance.

ARBACES My king, I find no crime to be defended,
nor motive for repentance; that's my answer.

ARTABANES O filial love!
(aside)

MANDANE Whether he plead or not,
 he equally is guilty. ~ Where is justice?
 Is this the father that should vindicate
 his murdered king, and his own public shame?

ARBACES Cruel Mandane! does thy voice condemn me?

MANDANE Bear up, my heart.
 (aside)

ARTABANES Your just resentment, princess
 spurs on my lazy virtue. ~
 Let Persia then, in Artabanes' rigour,
 record his justice and his loyalty. ~
 (Takes the pen.)
 My son I here condemn ~
 (Signs.)
 Arbaces dies.

MANDANE Oh, gods!

ARTAXERXES Suspend a while, the rash decree.
 (Artabanes rises, and gives the paper to Artaxerxes.)

ARTABANES 'Tis sign'd, my liege ~ I have fulfill'd my duty.

ARTAXERXES Unnatural sentence!

SEMIRA O inhuman father!

MANDANE Alas, my tears betray me.

ARBACES Weeps Mandane,
 in pity of my cruel destiny?

MANDANE Pleasure may start a tear, as well as grief.

ARTABANES Now I hare finish'd the stern judges part,
 permit, o king, the feelings of a father.
 Pardon, my son; the effect of tyrant duty;
 suffer with patience, and remember this,
 the worst of every evil is the fear.

ARBACES My patience, sir, begins at last to leave me:
 in view o' th' world, to find myself exposed
 a seeming guilty object; all my hopes
 cut off i'th' bloom, the morn of life my end;
 hated by Persia, by my king,
 and her whom I adore: to know that you,
 barbarous father, ~ (ah, I lose myself!)
 Adieu.

(Going.)

ARTABANES I freeze.
 (aside)

MANDANE I die.

ARBACES

(returning)

Stay, rash Arbaces!
 Where wouldst thou go? Ah, sir, forgive your son;
 behold me at your feet. ~
 Excuse the transports of my frantic grief;
 shed all my blood, 'tis yours, ~ I'll not complain;
 but kifs the honour'd hand that sign'd my death.

ARTABANES

Enough, o rise ~
 thou hasat but too much reason to lament:
 but know ~ (o gods!) ~ take one embrace and part.

[N. 17 - Air]

ARBACES

By that beloved embrace,
 by this my fond adieu,
 deplore my halpless case,
 condemn'd, alas! for you.
 Appease my love, my truth commend,
 yourself preserve, my king defend.
 My sentence I obey,
 to filial duty true;
 and scarce have power to say
 a long and last adieu!

(Exit, guarded.)

Scene nine

MANDANE Ah me! at poor Arbaces' parting
 I feel the stroke of death.

ARTABANES I hope, Mandane's wrath will now subside;
 for I have sacrificed my only son,
 to satisfy her vengeance.

MANDANE Savage, no more. ~
 Avoid my presence: dare not to view the light
 of sun or stars; but hide thy cruel head
 within the deepest bowels of the earth.

ARTABANES Is then my virtue ~

MANDANE Silence, inhuman!

ARTABANES Did not Mandane's rage excite my justice?

MANDANE The daughter ought to vindicate the father;
 but thou, a father, shouldst have saved thy son.

Monster, away!
from chearful day;
to the gloomy desert fly:
paths explore,
where lions roar,
and devouring tigers lie.
Tho' for food,
they wade in blood,
all to save their young agree;
every creature,
fierce by nature,
harmless is compar'd to thee.
(Exit.)

Scene ten

ARTAXERXES See, loved Semira!
how heaven conspires the ruin of Arbaces.

SEMIRA Inhuman tyrant!
You first destroy your friend,
and then bewail him.

ARTAXERXES I, to thy father's will, his life committed;
how was I then a tyrant?
All Persia knows my friendship for Arhaces,
and faithful love to thee.

SEMIRA I thought you once
a tender lover, and a generous friend;
but in one instant you have proved yourself
in friendship false, and treacherous in love.

This bosom, a stranger to rest,
resentment and pity assail,
as both for dominion contest,
so both, to my sorrow, prevail:
my heart, in this desperate state,
to give each assailant its due,
now bleeds for my brother's hard fate,
and burns with resentment to you.
(Exit.)

Scene eleven

ARTAXERXES O, Artabanes?

ARTABANES Lament not, sir, but leave complaints to me;
I am the most unhappy of mankind.

ARTAXERXES Thy woe must needs be great,
when mine is insupportable.

(Exit.)

Scene twelve

Artabanes solus.

Recitative accompanied

At length my soul has room t'indulge its grief, ~
what racking thoughts surround the guilty breast. ~
O my dear son, forgive the piercing woes,
which my soul deeds inflict upon thy youth;
I come to save thee from the jaws of death,
and pay thy virtues with a kingly throne.

[N. 19 - Air]

Thou, like the glorious sun,
thy splendid course shalt run:
what tho' the night
obscure his light,
when prison'd in the west;
the day returns,
again he burns,
the god of day consent.

(Exit.)

ACT THREE

Scene one

A prison.

Arbaces, in a melancholy posture.

[N. 20 - Arietta]

ARBACES

Why is death for ever late,
so conclude a wretch's woe;
those who live in happy state,
feel too soon th' untimely blow.

(Enter Artaxerxes.)

ARTAXERXES Arbaces!

ARBACES Gracious heaven, what's this I see!
Does royal Artaxerxes deign to visit
the wretch Arbaces, in this horrid gloom!

ARTAXERXES Pity and friendship brought me here to save thee.

ARBACES To save me!

ARTAXERXES Yes. That secret passage leads
to life and liberty; then quickly fly. ~
Remember Artaxerxes, and be happy.

ARBACES Your pardon, sir, the world esteems me guilty ~
then let me die; your honour, sir, requires it.
Happy my exit, having once preferred
my sovereign's life, and now his spotless honour.

ARTAXERXES Such noble sentiments can ne'er proceed
from guilty minds ~ beloved Arbaces, fly ~
as friend, I beg thee to preserve thyself;
but if that fails ~ as sovereign, I command thee.

ARBACES In gratitude to thy exalted friendship,
I'll quit this scene of horror and despair.
But oh! Thus exiled, I shall only fly,
restless to tread the paths of misery.

[N. 21 - Air]

Water parted from the sea,
may increase the river's tide;
to the bubbling fount may flee,
or thro' fertile valley's glide:
yet in search of lost repose,
doom'd like me, forlorn to roam,
still it murmurs as it flows,
till it reach its native home.

(Exit.)

Scene two

ARTAXERXES That front, secure in conscious innocence,
defies the charge of guilt: affliction's veil
can never quite eclipse the inward light,
that from a noble soul darts forth its rays.
When in the countenance the heart is seen.

[N. 22 - Air]

Tho' oft a cloud, with envious shade,
conceals the face of day,
the sun is fill in flames array'd,
his beams immortal, not decay'd:
soon the gloomy veil retires;
he darts each powerful ray,
and light and heat expires.

(Exit.)

Scene three

Enter Artabanes, with a train of conspirators.

ARTABANES My son, Arbaces ~ Where art thou retired? ~
Sure he should hear my voice ~ what ho ~ Arbaces!
O heaven! ~ guards, watch the entrance of the prison,
till I can find my son.

(Exit.)

(Enter Rimenes.)

RIMENES Not yet arrived! ~
Sir, Artabanes!

(Exit.)

(Re-enter Artabanes.)

ARTABANES O unhappy father!
My son I seek in vain ~ my blood grows chill;
I fear ~ I doubt ~ perhaps in ~

(Re-enter Rimenes.)

RIMENES Artabanes!

ARTABANES Where is Arbaces?

RIMENES Is he not with you?

ARTABANES O cruel gods! th'unfortunate has perish'd.

RIMENES Suspicion always borders on extream;
and might not Artaxerxes or Mandane,
the friend or lover, have procured his flight?
What strange delay is this! ~ Let's to our task;
behold the way that leads us to the palace.

ARTABANES And what great enterprise shall I accomplish,
my son being lost?

RIMENES What, have you then, for nought,
secured the royal guards, and I, the troops?
Determine, sir; this instant, Artaxerxes
prepares to take the coronation oath;
the sacred cup is by your order poison'd:
and shall we then so basely ~

ARTABANES O my friend!
Arbaces lost, for whom should I engage?

RIMENES Thy son Arbaces from thy hand expects
the throne, if living; and if dead, revenge.

ARTABANES That, that alone recalls my fleeting spirit;
lead on, kind friend; my fate depends on thee.

RIMENES I'll lead thee on to joyful victory.

[N. 23 - Air]

O let the danger of a son
excite vindictive ire;
the prospect of a kingdom won,
should light ambition's fire.
To wounded minds, revenge is balm;
with vigour they engage,
and sacrifice a pleasing calm,
to a more pleasing rage.

(Exit.)

Scene four

Artabanes solus.

Recitative accompanied

Ye adverse gods! y'ave found the only way
to quell my vast ambition; perplexing doubt,
whether my son yet lives, awakens fear;
and the dire image of despair starts up,
unnerves my arm, and checks my daring soul.

[N. 24 - Air]

O much loved son, if death
has stolen thy vital breath,
I'll share thy hapless fate;
but ere the dagger drinks my blood,
a murder'd king, at Lethe's flood,
the tidings shall relate.
Bid Charon cease from toil,
and rest upon his oar,
'till I attain the happy soil,
where we shall part no more.
(Exit.)

Scene five

Mandane's apartment. Enter Mandane and Semira.

- MANDANE** Perhaps the king released Arbaces.
SEMIRA No ~ rather destroyed him,
MANDANE How!
SEMIRA 'Tis known to all;
in secret he resigned his wretched life.
MANDANE O hapless youth! O tidings worse than death!
SEMIRA I hope your vengeance now is satisfied ~
or would you other victims? ~ speak.
MANDANE I cannot;
light cares are ever sosten'd by complaint;
but such as mine, arrest the power of speech.

- SEMIRA** Ne'er lived a heart more lost to sense of pity.
All eyes in Persia wail his hapless fate;
but yours are dry.
- MANDANE** The deeper my affliction:
small is the grief that vents itself in tears.
- SEMIRA** Go, if not satisfy'd, and feast your eyes
upon the slaughter'd spoils of my dear brother;
with secret joy, number his bloody wounds.
- MANDANE** Be silent ~ leave me.
- SEMIRA** Never; while thou liv'st,
I'll haunt thee like a spirit, and my wrongs
shall dash thy hopes with bitterness and woe.
- MANDANE** You think me cruel, and denounce revenge. ~
Ah! how have I deserved thy enmity?

[N. 25 - Air]

Let not rage, thy bosom firing,
pity's softer claim remove;
spare a heart that's just expiring,
forced by duty, rack'd by love.
Each ungentle thought suspending,
judge of mine, by thy soft breast;
nor with rancour never ending,
heap fresh sorrows on th' oppress'd.
Let not rage thy bosom firing,
pity's softer claim remove;
spare a heart that's just expiring,
forced by duty, rack'd by love.
Heaven, that every joy has crost,
ne'er my wretched state can mend;
I, alas! at once have lost,
father, brother, lover, friend.

(Exit.)

Scene six

Semira sola.

What have I done! alas, I vainly thought,
div'iding grief, to lessen my affliction;
these cruel insults, vented on Mandane,
have pierced her breast, and not relieved my own.

'Tis not true, that in our grief,
others, weeping in distress,
to our troubles bring relief,
making each misfortune less.
No, when sore oppress'd by fate,
better 'tis to sigh alone,
than support a double weight,
other's sorrows, and ouwn.
(Exit.)

Scene seven

Enter Arbaces.

ARBACES Nor here my searching eyes can find Mandane.
Fain would my heart, before external exile,
indulge its fondness with a last adieu.
Perhaps, this way ~ but whither do I wander?
Rash man ~ or heavenly pow'rs behold her there!
My spirits fail me ~ yet I'll speak ~ Mandane!
(Enter Mandane.)

MANDANE Ye powers! Arbaces! and at liberty!

ARBACES A friendly hand unlock'd my cruel fetters.

MANDANE Ah! fly, begone.

ARBACES How can I part, for ever, from such beauty?

MANDANE Perfidious traitor! what wouldst thou with me?

ARBACES Am I no longer dear to my Mandane?

MANDANE Thou art become the object of my hate.

ARBACES Barbarous maid! my death shall end thy scorn.
I fly to meet my fate ~ adieu ~ for ever.
(Going.)

MANDANE Hear me, Arbaces.

ARBACES Ha! what torture more?

MANDANE I cannot speak.

ARBACES O heaven!

MANDANE Fly, save thyself.

ARBACES What means my princess? ~ this returning pity ~

MANDANE Does not arise from love ~ but fly ~ and live.

[N. 27 - Duetto]

ARBACES For thee I live, my dearest;
but if I meet disdain,
for thee, my dear, I'll die.

MANDANE How lovely thou appearest,
my blushes will explain.
I can no more reply.

ARBACES Then hear me,

MANDANE No.

ARBACES Thou art ~

MANDANE Divide not thus my heart:
leave me ~ in pity go.

ARBACES, MANDANE

Ye gods that torture so,
some timely respite send;
when will your rigour end?
(Exeunt, different ways.)

Scene eight

*A Temple, and throne, with a crown and scepter; the image of the sun,
with a lighted altar.*

Artaxerxes, Artabanes, Nobles, etc.

ARTAXERXES To you, my people, much beloved, I offer
myself, not less a father, than a king:
your native rights, your customs, and your laws,
with jealous care I ever will maintain,
and raise up treasure in my people's hearts.

ARTABANES Here is the sacred cup ~
your solemn oath must bind the lasting tye;
fulfil th'accustom'd rites ~ (aside) and drink thy death.

Recitative accompanied

ARTAXERXES Resplendent god, by whom sweet April blooms,
thou genial beam, that warms us and enlightens,
look awful down; and if my treacherous lips
have utter'd falshood, may this wholesome draught
change, as it passes, into deadly poison.

Scene nine

Enter Semira hastily.

SEMIRA Fly quick, my liege; thousands of rebel troops
surround the palace, by Rimenes led;
your death is plotted, and your guards corrupted.

ARTAXERXES O gods!

ARTABANES What fear you, sir? my single presence
shall quell this tumult, and protect my king.

ARTAXERXES Away, my friend, to victory or death.
(*Going.*)

Scene ten

Enter Mandane.

MANDANE Hold, brother, the rebellious crew are fled.

ARTAXERXES Say how, Mandane?

MANDANE Led by false Rimenes,
they forced the gates, and enter'd, when Arbaces
departing to eternal banishment,
his single breast opposed, and swore to die
in his great master's cause: all dropp'd their arms,
except that daring rebel at their head
on him Arbaces, like a lion, flew,
clove thro' his helmet, flew him, and revenged thee.

ARTAXERXES Where's my preserver ~ bring him to my arms!
(*Exeunt officers, with Guards.*)

ARTAXERXES He murder Xerxes! Impious supposition!

MANDANE My heart respire!

SEMIRA O loyal brother!

MANDANE Valour suppress'd, now springs again to glory.

[N. 28 - Air]

The soldier, tired of war's alarms,
forswears the clang of hostile arms,
and scorns the spear and shield:
but if the brazen trumpet sound,
he burns with conquest to be crown'd,
and dares again the field.

Scene, the last

Enter Artabanes and Arbaces.

ARBACES Behold, my king, Arbaces at thy feet.

ARTAXERXES O still my friend! come to my grateful breast.

MANDANE Yet that my brother may with better grace
reward this deed, and satisfy the people,
some reason give us for the bloody sword,
thy tim'rous flight, and all that waked suspicion.

ARBACES If deeds, not words, proclaim a loyal heart,
permit me to be silent ~ I am innocent.

ARTAXERXES Confirm it with a solemn imprecation,
and of a truth, as Persia's law prescribes,
that vessel drain'd shall be the sacred pledge.

ARBACES I am prepar'd.

ARTABANES O cruel gods! If my son drinks he dies!

Recitative accompanied

ARBACES Resplendent god, by whom sweet April blooms,
thou genial beam that warms us and enlightens!

ARTABANES O wretched father!
(aside)

ARBACES If my treach'rous lips
have utter'd falshood, may this wholesome draught
change, as it passes, into ~

ARTABANES Hold, 'tis poison.

ARTAXERXES What fury urged thee to so vile a deed?

ARTABANES Away, disguise, the draught was meant for thee;
but my paternal fondness has betrayed me.
I murder'd Xerxes; and, to gain the throne,
would have destroy'd thee too.

ARTAXERXES Wretch, thou shalt die.

ARBACES Then I disdain to live.

ARTAXERXES Mandane shall reward thy spotless virtue;
and thy fair sister shall partake our throne:
but for that traitor ~

ARBACES I will die for him:
my blood is his, and shall atone his crimes.

ARTAXERXES Thy loyalty and virtue, injured youth,
shall change his sentence into banishment:
make no reply ~ his exile is for life.

MANDANE Sure heaven inspired the merciful decree;
Arbaces and Semira must approve it;
tho' for his crimes the father justly suffers,
his life is spared, that you, his guiltless children
may not be ever wretched in his death.

[N. 29 - Finale]

CHORUS

Live to us, to empire live,
great augustus, long may'st thou
from the subject world receive,
laurel wreaths t'adorn thy brow.

MANDANE, ARBACES

Of his country, ever free,
there the royal father see!

CHORUS

To the patron of our laws,
pierce the air with loud applause.

SEMIRA, ARTABANES

Virtue in his soul resides;
in his truth the world confides.

CHORUS

To the patron of our laws,
pierce the air with loud applause.

MANDANE, ARBACES

Pity from the throne descending,
how the monarch it endears;
when with justice, mercy blending,
in the king a god appears!

SEMIRA, ARTABANES

Tyrants claim, with iron sceptre,
duty which our fears impart;
but our gentle kind protector,
monarch reigns o'er every heart.

CHORUS

Live to us, to empire live!
Great augustus, long may'st thou,
from the subject world receive
laurel wreaths t' adorn thy brow!

Finis.

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