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A Chronicle Play of the Last Years of  
Roman Civilization in Six Scenes

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## *PHILOSOPHER AND BARBARIAN*

*A Chronicle Play of the Last Years of Roman Civilization in Six Scenes*

*by Johannes Allgaier*

### *SYNOPSIS*

*The play treats events between A.D. 519 and 523*

#### *I*

Albinus, a prominent Roman senator, conveys to Boethius the Senate's commendation for his ideological contributions to the re-establishment of Christian unity in the old Roman Empire. At the same time, Albinus tries to secure Boethius' support of nationalistic efforts to re-establish the political unity of the Empire under the East Roman Emperor at Constantinople -- efforts which must be seen as dangerous and treasonable by Theoderic, the Germanic invader-king of Italy. Boethius refuses because he believes that the Christian message has made the old Empire obsolete and that its Germanic invaders may bring a much needed invigoration of an essentially decadent society. Albinus' departure is ominously cast against news of an anti-Jewish pogrom in nearby Ravenna perpetrated by Roman mobs enraged over the friendly relations between Jews and Theoderic's Goths.

#### *II*

Roman and Gothic members of the King's council confront each other after the pogrom. The Goths see the mob's lawlessness as an attack upon themselves, the Romans feebly try to justify it on grounds of religious and economic justice. Theoderic angrily rejects the concept of justice taking precedence over the law as dangerous to the common good. In order to underscore his point that the rule of law owes more to force than to the ideal of justice, the King compels his chief Roman councillor to recall the brutal circumstances of his rise to power. His imposition of severe punitive sanctions against the Roman population of Ravenna provides a chilling illustration of the King's political philosophy.

#### *III*

Told by Joseph, a Jewish physician, that he is dying, Eutharic, Theoderic's son-in-law and heir, contemplates the meaning of human existence. Joseph counsels stoic acceptance and attributes the survival of his people to its covenant with reality. Eutharic counters with a passionate testimony to the tragic confrontation of the human will with a reality not its choosing. Historical parallels to Eutharic's attitude are not lost on Joseph. Theoderic is moved to reaffirm his life's work as the fusion of Roman intellect with Germanic will-to-power. He resolves to offset his political difficulties arising from the loss of Eutharic and from Constantinople's pressures by utilizing the best Roman intellect with the appointment of Boethius to chief executive office.

#### IV

In his inaugural speech to the Roman Senate, Boethius, the new "Master of the Offices," outlines the philosophy of his administration and declares his loyalty to the King. He is heckled on the right for his collaboration with Gothic rule in Italy and on the left for his critical assessment of Rome's commitment to Christianity. He reveals his own commitment to the new religion to be based more on a Platonic faith in human destiny than on the certainty of its historical validity. He concludes by reaffirming his faith that Theoderic's rule in Italy will result in a political renewal appropriate to the spiritual renewal under the rule of Christ.

#### V

As Theoderic's difficulties mount, two prominent Roman members of his council convicted of corruption appeal to Constantinople to overrule the King's jurisdiction. Cyprian, the King's lawyer and brother of one of the culprits, argues that Boethius' theology of Christian unity, because of its implication for political unity, poses a far greater threat to Theoderic than any corruption. Driven desperate, the King demands unconditional personal loyalty from Boethius, a loyalty superceding even loyalty to the Truth as Boethius conceives it. When Albinus is arrested on treason charges, Boethius must finally choose between loyalty to Rome and his life's work on the one hand and to the personal will of a conqueror on the other. Trying to defend Albinus, Boethius too is arrested and charged with treason.

#### VI

Boethius suffers a restless night in prison. Troubled dream fantasies invade his sleep. His mind searches for consolation in his misfortune. The spectre of a woman advises stoic detachment, but Boethius soon worries that the old pagan way of dealing with the injustice of Fate does not apply to a world ruled by a just and all-powerful God. The spectre appeals to blind trust in God, but now Boethius becomes troubled by the thought that there can be no human free will if God does indeed rule the world. Foreknowledge does not cause events to happen, teaches the spectre. -- But can human will prove God's foreknowledge wrong? -- counters Boethius. In order to reassert God's rule over the world, the spectre retreats to the inscrutability of divine foreknowledge. The realization that he cannot love the ultimate author of his misfortune awakens Boethius. His slave brings news confirming the hopelessness of Boethius' and Albinus' situation. Before he is tortured and clubbed to death by Theoderic's henchmen, Boethius realizes that true faith is not so much trust in God's providence as participation in the Son's agony.



*Personae*

Boethius, Statesman, Philosopher, and Theologian

Symmachus.....

Albinus.....

Cyprian..... Roman Senators

Opilio.....

Cassiodorus.....

Hecklers (4).....

Lucius..... Boethius' Slaves

James.....

Theoderic, Gothic King of Italy

Amalasuentha, His Daughter

Eutharic, His Son-In-Law

Cunigast..... Gothic Nobles

Triwan.....

Joseph, a Jewish Physician

The Lady Philosophy, a Dream Apparition

Executioner

Sons of Boethius (2)

Gothic Guards

Senatorial Servants

## SCENE I

*Boethius' country home near Ravenna, in the year 519 A.D. Boethius' study. Boethius stands on a ladder in front of a bookshelf which covers the up centre wall of the room. He is consulting various books. When he has found what he has been looking for, he dictates as he composes to his slave, who sits at a writing desk near the right side of the room. Two armchairs are placed in front of the desk. There is a door to the left, opposite the desk.*

BOETHIUS [*dictating*] But since no relation can be related to itself, inasmuch as one which makes a predicate by itself is a predication which lacks relation, the manifoldness of the Trinity is produced in the fact that it is predication of a relation, and the unity is preserved through the fact that there is no difference of substance or operation, or generally of that kind of predication which is made on its own. So then, the substance preserves the unity, the relation makes up the Trinity. Hence only terms belonging to relation may be applied singly and separately. For the Father is not the same as the Son, nor is either of them the same as the Holy Spirit. Yet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same God, the same in justice, in goodness, in greatness, and in everything that can be predicated by itself. [*A second slave enters with a businesslike demeanor, nods casually to the first slave, and waits for an opportunity to interrupt Boethius, who motions him impatiently that he does not wish to be interrupted*] One must not forget that relative predication is not always such that it is always predicated with reference to something different, -- [*staring at second slave*] as slave is with reference to master; for they are different. For equals are equal, likes are like, identicals are identical, each with other; and the relation in the Trinity of Father to Son, and of both to Holy Spirit is like a relation of identicals. [*Second slave becomes increasingly restless, but Boethius motions him again to*

*be quiet.] But if a relation of this kind cannot be found in all other things, this is because of the otherness natural to all perishable, transitory objects. But we ought not to be led astray by any imagination, but raised up by pure understanding and, so far as anything can be understood, thus far also we should approach it with our understanding. -- Now, what is it, James?*

JAMES. Senator Albinus, from Rome, sir.

BOETHIUS. Ugh, did it have to be now? I wasn't expecting him so soon.

*[Descends the ladder with some books which he places on the desk. To the first slave]* Well, I suppose we must call it a day then. I had hoped to finish this today. See you tomorrow morning, Lucius. *[Lucius gathers up some papers, bows slightly, says*

Good afternoon, sir,

*and leaves the room.]*

BOETHIUS *[to James]* Well, show him in.

*James leaves and almost at once returns with Albinus, a gaunt, rather handsome figure of a man in his late thirties. His travelling clothes happen to resemble a Roman officer's uniform, but he is unarmed. His bearing is that of a soldier. James withdraws.*

ALBINUS *[giving the Roman salute]* Hail, Boethius.

BOETHIUS *[does not return Roman salute, but steps forward and holds out his hand to Albinus, who accepts it]* It's good to see you, Albinus. How are things in Rome? *[pointing to books and papers on his desk]* I haven't been much with it lately.



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ALBINUS. Boethius, I have the honour of conveying to you the Senate's commendation and the gratefulness of the Roman people for your efforts on behalf of Christian unity. I may truly say that the joy of the people over the renewal of religious unity in the Empire was unequalled in our recent history. *[taking a less formal stance]* Actually, your popularity in the old city could be dangerous if someone other than you would be its object.

BOETHIUS. Come, come, people seem to be exaggerating my part in the events. But the good will of the Senate touches me. -- I take it then that Constantinople has actually accepted all our terms?

ALBINUS *[delighted]* To save his face the Patriarch insisted on a day's time to examine the Pope's formula of submission. Next day he came up with a preamble in which he asserts that he had always believed in one Holy Mother Church and in the guardianship of the successors of St. Peter. Our delegates could see no reason to deny him his preamble, and so he signed the Pope's articles of faith without further questions -- including the part that stipulates the posthumous excommunication of several of his own predecessors.

BOETHIUS. Why such lack of decorum, or rather, dignity?

ALBINUS. Because decorum and dignity have a way of attaching themselves to power, and power in Constantinople these days comes from an Emperor who knows what he wants, who knows what Rome wants.

BOETHIUS. As you know, I have committed myself to the notion that power ultimately comes from the truth.

ALBINUS. It didn't until the Emperor made himself the champion of truth. Justin's sword accomplished what the authority of the Holy Father and

the learned persuasiveness of your celebrated tract on the Holy Trinity failed to bring about these past seven years -- with due respect to your writings, which turned out exactly what Justin needed.

BOETHIUS. Yes, yes, I'm quite aware --

ALBINUS. I've met a lot of men in Rome and Constantinople, not to speak of Athens, who are asking themselves some fundamental questions these days --

BOETHIUS. Ah, tell me of Athens -- *[motions Albinus to an armchair, but he ignores the invitation]*

ALBINUS. -- who are asking themselves where power comes from here in Italy, from some truth the wisdom of a thousand years of Greek and Roman civilization may continue to reveal -- I know you'd like to believe this -- or from the sword of a blond, illiterate barbarian from somewhere beyond the Alps who styles himself King of Italy?

BOETHIUS *[with some hesitation]* In Athens, they'd say from some Principle for which Greek and Roman civilization and Theoderic's sword are imperfect symbols, approximations. *[His eyes glance over his books]* From something that has shown itself capable of staying the cruel hand of the Roman slave master and the Barbarian savage. From some Spirit, even now unrecognized in Athens, Who may well have revealed Himself in Judaea 500 years ago and Who made Rome, after much agony, the moral capital of the world and, yes, the Barbarian the champion of Roman law and order.

ALBINUS. Moral capital of the world! With each gain in morality we become less of a capital.

BOETHIUS. A surprising statement to come from the leader of our patriotic party. I should have thought the decline of the Roman Empire is conspicuously related to the decline of Roman virtue.

ALBINUS. Even the greatest theologian of our time must be troubled by the thought that the rise of Christian morality has something to do with the fall of Roman virtue.

BOETHIUS. Ah, a classical error in logic, my friend. We call it *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. If an old man dies after a deathbed conversion, it's not the conversion that killed him. But the old man's new faith may well be the best he leaves to his children. Perhaps Rome is like the old man -- some say she's an old woman. She dies after having spent her vital energy in slaughter and debauchery. But her life will not have been in vain if she convinces her children that there is a better way of life than hers, a life in -- sweetness and light, of which she's had many visionary glimpses in her nobler moments.

ALBINUS. Maybe she dies, maybe. But there's something about death that confounds the philosopher's art. If Rome dies, so will Roman philosophy -- and Roman philosophers.

*James enters with two cups of wine on a tray. He places the tray on the desk and withdraws.*

BOETHIUS [*offers one cup to Albinus. They drink.*] What's best in Rome will survive. If it wasn't so, history would be turning 'round in circles. What would be the object of man's intellect, if not -- something -- beyond time, history, death? The philosophy of Greece and Rome will live and bear fruit if it is wedded to the religion of the living God.



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ALBINUS. At the Academy of Athens it is still possible to speak of it as the religion of death, as a religion which rewards humility, weakness, poverty, disease, -- a religion which suspects corruption in the very flesh of man and all living things. [*glances at door to assure his privacy, with subdued voice*] Boethius, your living God is sucking our blood --

BOETHIUS [*disturbed*] Faith demands courage, like life.

ALBINUS. What you call faith can be a betrayal of life. When I was a lad of fifteen, my family made sure I was picked as one of the lucky ones to run the ancient course around the Forum at the festival of the Lupercalia. With pride kept alive by shame we were looking forward to the day when our naked bodies were to bring the touch of good fortune and fertility to the girls along the route. That day never arrived. Pope Gelasius condemned the ritual as an impious orgy and forbade all baptized persons to take part in it. Discourses on the value of tradition were not enough to save the thousand-year-old festival.

BOETHIUS. It takes courage to give the future a chance. The mind of man urges beyond the past. Seventy-one years before the birth of the Son of God, after the Spartacus rebellion, the Via Appia, between Capua and Rome, was lined with six thousand crosses. Upon them writhed six thousand slaves who had little to lose in the past and much to gain in the future. Can you think of the naked lads at the Lupercalia and not be reminded of the naked, twisted bodies on those crosses?

ALBINUS. There will always be slaves, and keeping them in their place is never pretty. You'd like to do away with slavery altogether, wouldn't you? A world without slaves -- that's what you're dreaming about, aren't you?



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*Boethius motions Albinus again to sit down. Albinus declines.  
Boethius sits down.*

BOETHIUS. There's no harm in dreaming -- so long as it doesn't cloud one's perception of reality. -- Yes, perhaps there will always be slaves, but if it were up to me, I would not want to deny them the comfort and the dignity which the religion of the spirit may bring to them. Call it the religion of death, if you want. But unless the old Rome dies, the new Rome can't be born.

ALBINUS. You speak of Rome's death as though -- as though it somehow didn't affect you -- as though you were merely a spectator. One would think that the Empire, or what's left of it, is still the vessel of everything that's meaningful to you, including the religion of the spirit. From Rome and Constantinople missionaries go into all the world and preach the gospel to all people. The Barbarian embraces the new faith as eagerly as he does Roman women. Both spell for him the irresistible magic of Empire. Rome may or may not need Christianity. But Christianity needs Rome as a fish needs water.

BOETHIUS. Rather, as the Spirit needs the flesh to manifest himself in this world. Why can't we look at it with some pride that the unique historical task of bearing the gospel of the dignity of every man into the world has fallen to Rome? The fulfilment of that task is the greatest of all our colonizing efforts. It may be our only chance to justify ourselves before history.

ALBINUS. Boethius, I am not a man of the Spirit but of practical politics. And you have conceded that the Spirit avails Himself on occasions of political facilities. There's a chance now to restore those very facilities. In Rome and Constantinople people are tired of the theological disputes

of the past generation. They want order, security. They want to know their houses and shops safe from Germans trying to prove their equality or from rioters demonstrating their theological orthodoxy. There's nostalgia for the Empire, and the Emperor and his nephew, Justinian, seem the men destined to articulate the new realism.

BOETHIUS. New realism, come on! Egypt, Syria, most of the eastern provinces are at the point of secession over Justinian's crude attempt to impose Catholic orthodoxy on them by force. In Italy we've had thirty years of stable government, more stable than any we've known in the last hundred years, under a German chief firmly allied with vigorous and powerful kinsmen in North Africa, Spain, Gaul, and Germany. You call your dream of a restored Empire realistic?

ALBINUS. You sound as though you wished it weren't realistic.

BOETHIUS. Maybe I do. If you could just for a minute forget all this stuff about Romans and Barbarians and just look at people. Rome looked like a garbage dump before Theoderic began his big clean-up. The privileged languished in their country hide-outs, pleasing themselves in exquisite poses of contempt for the world, while the mob dragged public debate down to the level of the games and races in the circus.

ALBINUS. You hate your own civilization. That seems to be a professional hazard of the scholar.

BOETHIUS. No, I love civilization, not mine or yours, but human civilization. That's why I think that the great civilization the human spirit has built around the shores of the Mediterranean these past thousand years needs to be infused with the new, bold, steady blood of people you persist in calling Barbarians.

ALBINUS. I only hope that when the time comes for your spirit to be invigorated you'll survive the operation.

BOETHIUS. Ah, but the spirit is immortal, isn't it?

ALBINUS. I don't know, and frankly, I couldn't care less.

BOETHIUS. That's the trouble with you champions of the past. You want to save civilization by driving the Barbarians from the Empire, but you couldn't really care less about the values that make up civilization.

ALBINUS. Enough. I take it that the Senate can't count on your support in opposing full legitimization of Theoderic's regime by Constantinople and in steering a course of independence subject only to the supremacy of the Emperor?

BOETHIUS. I don't know what legitimization other than thirty years of good government Theoderic needs. So far as I know, he doesn't seek the Imperial title. As for the independence of the Senate -- I don't know what that means after five hundred years of rubber stamping. *[Rises]* But give my regards to the good Senators. May God bless their endeavours and may they leave me alone to pursue mine. James!

*Albinus, by no means defeated, takes leave with a silent Roman salute and is accompanied out by James, who returns shortly.*

BOETHIUS. I can't go on today. I think I'll spend some time with the boys. Where are they?

JAMES. Just finishing their music lessons, sir.

*Boethius nods and leaves. James bows slightly. As Boethius goes out Lucius almost runs into him in the same doorway. Boethius looks at*



*Lucius suspiciously for a moment. Lucius bows, and Boethius goes out, leaving the door open.*

JAMES. What's new?

LUCIUS. Something going on in town. People are out in the streets smashing up Jewish shops. The synagogues of Ravenna are said to be in flames. Governor Eutharic and a band of armed Goths tried to break up the crowd, but they had to take refuge in the Palace.

JAMES. What did I tell you? Now we know who their friends are. How did it start?

LUCIUS. Some Jewish young fellows down by the river are said to have poked fun at baptism and communion. Anyway, the crowd is pretty nasty. Angry not just at the Jews but at the Goths as well.

*Boethius re-enters unobserved.*

JAMES. Maybe people are beginning to wake up. Senator Albinus said there's a new spirit everywhere.

BOETHIUS. Where by Jove are those boys? -- *[anxious]* What's this about Senator Albinus' new spirit?

JAMES. Everyone who's Roman in Ravenna is out in the streets. They've driven Eutharic and his Barbarians into the Palace and they're burning down the synagogues. Rome is awakening, sir.

BOETHIUS *[uncomfortable]* Awakening to what?



JAMES *[equally uncomfortable]* To the greatness, the destiny of Rome.  
*[Failing to impress Boethius]* To civilization, sir.

*Curtain*

## SCENE II

*Theoderic's residence in Verona. A large room of Roman architecture but with formidable Gothic weapons suspended from walls and pillars. Up centre, slightly raised, a throne-like, heavy, sparsely decorated oak chair. Romans and Goths in groups. Stage left a door guarded by armed Goths. Stage right, the doors fly open suddenly and Theoderic enters, preceded by two gigantic Gothic guards. Even at sixty-five, Theoderic is a powerfully built man. He wears something like Roman military dress over Germanic trousers. He seats himself on his throne in a relaxed but erect posture. The Goths group themselves to the King's right and the Romans to his left.*

THEODERIC. Cunigast, do you have enough men in Ravenna?

CUNIGAST. I think so. The mobs dispersed as soon as our reinforcements arrived at the outskirts of the city. It's been very quiet since, almost as though people are trying to pretend that nothing has happened. Except the victims, of course.

TRIWAN. All three synagogues of Ravenna have been burned to the ground. Jewish shops are a pile of rubble. These people have lost everything. If we don't teach the Romans a lesson in civilization, we may be their next victims.

CYPRIAN. We'll all be victims if this kind of talk prevails. It would be ironic indeed if the peace and prosperity our peoples have enjoyed these past twenty years came to be disrupted at the -- instigation of a race that has refused to commit itself to -- the very idea on the basis of which Goths and Romans have maintained a civilized consensus. Who will profit if we teach each other civilization the way Triwan seems to suggest?

TRIWAN. I wonder what the King's legal counsel means by instigation. It was Romans, not Jews, who burned and looted. Or are you telling us here that your piety was offended by some Jewish fellows throwing each other into the river and calling it baptism? There's something here I don't understand. But the ugly mood of that mob made me feel that the object of their hate were the Goths, that the Jews served as some kind of substitute, or scapegoat, as they call it.

OPILIO. I'm not here to defend mob action, but before we sow any more suspicion between us let us realize that the anger of a people may have causes far deeper than the immediate occasion suggests.

THEODERIC [*catching interest*] And what may this deep cause be?

CYPRIAN. The fact no one here can be unaware of, namely that the portion of the people's wealth controlled by Jews is in no way proportionate to their numbers. Call it envy or call it the demand for justice, it's something a government cannot ignore.

THEODERIC. To call upon the government to consider the feelings of the envious is a strange sentiment for someone whose cultural tradition has given the world the concept of the state. When my people lived in the northern plains, unbridled envy gave rise to beautiful epic poetry -- and to a lifestyle that was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. As for justice, I can't see what it has to do with the distribution of wealth. Justice is the rule of law, which ought to protect the diligent, the clever, and the enterprising against the envy of the lazy, the stupid, and the unimaginative.

OPILIO. This definition, with due respect, has been out of date in the civilized world for at least two hundred years. Since the coming of the Good



Shepherd we've come to see justice as that which demands that no one suffer without deserving it.

THEODERIC. So that you can conveniently shrug off death, disease, pain, heartbreak as the just punishments of those who deserve it -- of the wicked. The Jews in Rome and Ravenna got themselves beaten up and had their property and houses of worship destroyed because they deserved it, because they dared to arouse the envy of the Romans and because they reject Christ and Christianity! With a definition of justice such as yours you can justify the most enormous lawlessness. Since God is just, and since justice demands that no one suffer unjustly, the victims of the mob must be wicked. Let me tell you that I don't know how to bring civilized government to Rome under principles such as this.

OPILIO. Perhaps you ought to leave some of the governing to God, sir.

THEODERIC. As I led my people from the northern plains to Greece and then to Italy more than a quarter of a century ago I littered the wayside with most of my certainties. By the time I arrived here I had found one unshakable conviction: that it is up to man, preferably myself, to do the governing, that the people's misery tends to rise with their willingness to leave the governing to God.

OPILIO. It makes me very sad to realize that we have less in common than I thought. I do not need to be told that God's rule over this fallen world occurs through human intermediaries, but the meaning of our intellectual history during the past centuries has been the gradual revelation that the source of all power is God, not man, or, if you like, justice rather than the sword. Roman history has demonstrated that without God's justice might becomes right. I don't think we want to go back to that.



THEODERIC [*with rising anger*] What you are really telling us is that the burning, the looting, and the beating in Ravenna are the manifestations of God's justice. I call that blasphemy. I hate to think what your righteousness holds in store for me and my people if we were ever to lay aside our swords.

CASSIODORUS. These -- theoretical -- discussions, gentlemen, detract us from the practical task of governing Italy. I'm sure everyone here agrees with me when I say that His Majesty's rule over our country has been a most beneficial one, whatever our religious or philosophical differences may be. For close to thirty years now our streets and highways have been safe from crime and our country from foreign invasion. Poverty has been all but eliminated and our crumbling cities have risen again from piles of rubble. For the first time since anyone can remember we have a coinage that merchant and manufacturer can rely on -- the King's solidus is as hard as its name. After centuries of precarious dependence on grain imports, Italy has become a grain-exporting country again. And let us not forget that despite the King's own religious persuasion, the Church of Rome has enjoyed his gracious protection. Need we bicker here --

THEODERIC [*unplacated, rises, descends from the throne and approaches Cassiodorus*] Cassiodorus, it might be good for the continuance of the peace and prosperity you describe so well if you used your oratorical talent to help us recall how it all began.

CASSIODORUS [*unsure and somewhat terrified*] Why, my lord, I'd rather leave the precise determination of what makes good government to those who may some day be called political scientists. What we are concerned with here --

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THEODERIC [*fixing Cassiodorus in a brutal stare*] What was it that put me in a position to implement good government, as you call it?

CASSIODORUS. I'd say the liberation of Italy, of course.

THEODERIC. Liberation from what?

CASSIODORUS. From tyranny.

THEODERIC. Are you now more free than you were under my predecessor, Odovacar?

CASSIODORUS. Rome and Italy enjoy the freedom of lawful government. I am not one to confuse freedom with the licence to do as one likes --

THEODERIC. Would you care to point out how the legitimacy which the Emperor at Constantinople bestowed on my government differs from that bestowed on my predecessor?

CASSIODORUS [*with hesitation*] The exact distinction may be a matter for debate by historians, but it is a matter of public record that you received an Imperial commission to liberate Italy and that recognition of your royal title was clearly implied in the return from Constantinople of the insignia of the Western Empire by his late Imperial Majesty.

THEODERIC. I commend the circumstances under which I received a licence to conquer Italy to your curiosity as a scholar. As to the significance you attach to the whereabouts of the Imperial insignia, it says more about the efficacy of symbols than about your concept of liberty. -- As you know, Odovacar was less impressed by my legitimacy than you. After I beat him in Verona he holed himself up in Ravenna. How would you describe his eventual fall?

CASSIODORUS. Your highness gained entry into the city under a pretense, and you executed him.

THEODERIC. Yes, with my own sword, at a banquet. *[brutally]* "Where is God?" he cried before I split him with this sword. *[Draws his sword from the wall above him and moves about, brandishing it. Romans and Goths clear his path in terror.]* It felt as though the wretch had never a bone in his body. *[After a silence, sheathes his sword again, to the obvious relief of those present, and returns to his throne.]* Perhaps what I did there was justified by thirty years of good government, but not by God's justice. -- God's justice is not of this world, but good government is. And good government demands justice for the Jews of Ravenna. *[Rises as in judgment]* I therefore want a levy raised against every adult Roman in Ravenna -- sufficient to provide for the restoration of the synagogues. Those who have no money to pay are to be flogged through the streets while the crier proclaims their offence. The details of this measure are to be worked out between our son-in-law, Governor Eutharic, and the Roman bishop of the city.

*Theoderic turns towards the door to the right, followed by bodyguards, leaving the Romans in visible fear and consternation, the Goths in uneasy satisfaction.*

*Curtain*



## SCENE III

*The palace in Ravenna. The sick chamber of Eutharic, Theoderic's son-in-law. He is in bed gravely ill. His prominently displayed Germanic arms show him to be a Gothic chieftain. Joseph, a Jewish physician, is concluding an examination.*

EUTHARIC *[after a silence]* Is there no hope?

JOSEPH *[gravely]* To rule out hope would be to deny the meaning of life.

EUTHARIC *[with difficulty]* Meaning? What meaning? They need me here. The King's over seventy, my son is seven. Our allies, Franks, Burgundians, Vandals, are discovering great interest in the Roman faith -- and Constantinople's power -- not to speak of the Romans. He can't deal with the Romans. He'd rather be a Roman himself. And when the Barbarian is hurled in his teeth I don't trust his judgment. -- Where's your meaning?

JOSEPH *[silent]*

EUTHARIC. Is there meaning in your world?

JOSEPH. So long as there's order, there must be meaning. But it's not man's meaning. I wouldn't presume --

EUTHARIC. Tell me, do you *love* that meaning?



JOSEPH. I believe some of our mystics did. I neither love nor hate it. I suppose the wisdom of the people of Israel has been to respect it.

EUTHARIC. Respect a meaning that grinds to dust Goth, Roman, and Jew alike?

JOSEPH. The answer to this question can be found in the history of my people. Our covenant with reality, necessity, reason gives us life. We've survived Egypt and Babylon. When this Roman world is gone, we'll be much the same. You Goths, Franks, Angels, and Saxons will rule the world, but we'll be there as a thorn in your flesh reminding you of reality.

EUTHARIC. You call this life? Life in homage to a reality that mocks your will?

JOSEPH. That is the riddle of human life. As we watch pharao, king, and emperor rage from the blares of triumph to the cries of agony on the stage of history, the blares and cries sound like one discordant groan of life. Still, the boast by the stomping hero that the triumph is worth the agony is -- disturbing. -- So indeed we may some day watch the last act of the drama of your people. -- Those who hate us see us as the very cause of their agony. But we only remind them of reality. It's the truth that kills them, not us. And by killing us they hope to kill the truth, and for each drop of our blood spilled, the truth will bear down on their tormented souls with the leaden weight of guilt.

EUTHARIC [*after a pause*] Are life and freedom -- illusions?

JOSEPH. Not to the living and the free. There's life in the interval between triumph and agony. -- If you want life, you must embrace death. -- If you want freedom, you must choose madness. The Roman once chose

those, and he had freedom and life. But when he began to see what he was doing, he lost his courage and blames us for it. The German has plenty of courage, until he too discovers what he's doing. But before that happens he'll worship the death of God rather than God Himself in temples that pierce His flesh like swords and spears. And whenever he comes to face his madness, he will hate us for the loss of his freedom and his life.

*Eutharic rises with difficulty and clangs his sword powerfully against his shield. Theoderic enters, followed by Amalasuentha. He catches the staggering Eutharic in his arms.*

EUTHARIC. If you want life, you must embrace death.

*Theoderic guides Eutharic back to his bed. Joseph, who has watched the scene dispassionately but not coldly, withdraws without ceremony. Amalasuentha, twenty-four, beautiful, intelligent, educated, embraces her husband passionately. Her dress is Roman, except for some Gothic ornament.*

EUTHARIC. You'll have to hold Rome, the Church, the Emperor -- and reality at bay without me.

AMALASUENTHA. I could do even that with you. Without you -- I see only madness.

EUTHARIC. Without me, you'd stay away from love, so you won't suffer loss. You wouldn't hate your enemies, because you can't bear hate yourself. You'd avoid all danger, so you'll never suffer pain. You'd live in order to go on living. And you'd pray to God to be delivered of your very self. Is that what you'd do without me?

AMALASUENTHA *[weeps and is comforted by her father]*

EUTHARIC. Is that what you'd want for our people -- for our son?

AMALASUENTHA. I want peace. If I can have peace by coming to terms with reality --

EUTHARIC [*passionately*] Then make your peace with Rome. Make your peace with an Emperor who treats his enemies as the enemies of truth, with politicians who justify their backstabbing by the logic of Greek theology. Make your peace with a people who are scared of life, who see weakness and cowardice as promises of everlasting life, who have so despaired of themselves that they'd rather be all equal before God. Make your peace, if you really can, with a people for whom life has become a burden because there's nothing left to do for them that really matters except howl with the mob in the circus. -- Peace with a world that treats your beauty as a temptation of the flesh? Is that what you want for our son?

AMALASUENTHA. We won't change the world from behind swords and spears.

THEODERIC. And we won't change it by surrendering to it. Italy cannot be governed without Gothic arms. Civilization emasculates its children. It's the victory of beauty, of the intellect over power. -- But without power, my child, beauty and intellect are nothing but ornaments. Art becomes decoration, as those gaudy Byzantine mosaics.

AMALASUENTHA. And without beauty and intellect, power becomes brutality, life a hopeless struggle for survival.

EUTHARIC [*gently*] Like life without you, Suentha. [*She embraces him.*]



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THEODERIC. Like life without women. -- Like the life of our people without Rome. But without the strength of our people, Rome can't live. For our strength, we may live under this Italian sky [*looks out through the window*] that concentrates the mind with its clear light -- that concentrates life as it concentrates those tall pines on the road to Rome.

AMALASUENTHA. Father, if you love this land, give it freedom. If you want the love of its people --

THEODERIC. It is not I who denies them freedom. Rome has lost her freedom when she chose Truth over will, God over Fate, -- and salvation over life.

AMALASUENTHA. Then why do the Romans hate you? The Senate treats you with contempt. In their dealings with the Church and Constantinople they treat you like an irrelevant nuisance at best. The leading senators are busy travelling to Constantinople while you're surrounded by second-rate schemers, buffoons, and busy-bodies.

THEODERIC [*hurt*] I'm doing something about it. I'll make Boethius Master of the Offices. He's married to the daughter of the Head of the Senate. He is the author of famous books I couldn't bear to read. He's played an important part in bringing about church union -- if I get Boethius, I get Rome.

EUTHARIC. He won't do it.

THEODERIC. I'll flatter him. I'll make his sons consuls for the year.

EUTHARIC. He won't be flattered. And the Emperor won't appoint the boys as consuls. Why should he?

THEODERIC. It's been done before. -- It's a gamble. Justin knows it as well as I. I need legitimacy in Rome. Justin wants more power for the Senate. I'll trade him power for legitimacy. As for the efficacy of flattery -- there's no greater vanity than that of the philosopher.

*Curtain*

## SCENE IV

*The Senate chamber in Rome. Up centre a wall with a conspicuously empty niche for an altar and a statue. Eight curule chairs in two curved rows facing the audience. The upper row, on a dais, consists of a chair for Symmachus, the Head of the Senate, flanked by chairs for the sons of Boethius. The lower row contains, from right to left, chairs for Albinus, Cassiodorus, Boethius, Cyprian and Opilio, all except Boethius seated as the curtain rises. Outside closed doors to the right, guarded by unarmed servants, the noise of a large crowd mingled with fanfares of state.*

CYPRIAN *[with cynical detachment]* The noise is getting close.

ALBINUS *[with hostile sarcasm]* It'll get closer yet, and this time it won't go away again.

CYPRIAN. Oh, it will go, avoiding pain and seeking pleasure, and it would know neither pain nor pleasure unless somebody had first defined them for it.

OPILIO. Be that as it may, I should think that it has generally come to be accepted in our time that the voice of the people is not the voice of God. When I hear a noise like this I am reminded of a crowd in Jerusalem that shouted "crucify Him."

ALBINUS. They weren't Romans. To me that noise sounds like the unfettered voice of Rome. Refreshing contrast to the nasal twang of lawyers and theologians.



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CYPRIAN *[as to himself]* I have many swift arrows in my quiver which speak to the wise, but for the crowd they need interpreters.

ALBINUS. Poor devils!

CASSIODORUS. Pindar, Olympian Odes. *[To Albinus]* I would have thought that you hear the voice of Rome in her poets. There the crowd doesn't fare as well as with you. *[turning straight ahead to the audience. While he lectures, as the crowd noise reaches its climax, his companions turn their heads to the door behind them, paying no attention to Cassiodorus.]* The people are a many-headed beast, says Horace, who probably got it from Plato. Caligula wished that the Roman people had a single neck, but his view may have been prejudiced. *[Laughs]* For a more benign view of the people we have to turn to Scripture. Nehemiah: And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. Or Job: No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. Jesus, as you know, was moved with pity for the multitude. Perhaps Juvenal can be said to reconcile the two views: The people that once bestowed commands, consulships, legions, and all else, says he, now concerns itself no more, and longs eagerly for just two things *[as Cassiodorus says these words, the doors are swung open by servants. Enter in formal procession the two sons of Boethius, thirteen and fourteen, in splendid consular robes, followed by Boethius, carrying a manuscript, and Symmachus. In order to be heard, Cassiodorus has to shout his last two words at the audience]* -- bread and circuses.

*Cassiodorus, Cyprian, Albinus, and Opilio rise and bow stiffly towards the official party. All seat themselves in the assigned chairs, the two youthful consuls first.*

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SYMMACHUS *[rises]* It is difficult for me to address myself to the present turn in the life of our city with the sobriety becoming the Head of this House. Never before has a Roman been so honoured to see his grandsons raised to symbols of what we love and cherish in Eternal Rome, and their father, my beloved son-in-law, to the honour of tending her affairs. That is why the wisdom of our people over these past centuries has set apart what we love from what we care for, so that our love may be kept pure from the cares of our political existence, and our political judgment unclouded by the longing of our soul. We behold what we love in smiling youth, what we try to understand -- not fear -- in the philosopher's brow. I call upon the Master of the Offices, the Illustrious Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, to address this honourable House. *[Sits down. Senators among the audience may incite applause.]*

BOETHIUS *[rises and addresses the audience]* Senators of the Eternal City! It is fitting for one in whose hands Providence has placed the business of Rome to turn back for a look at our history before searching the horizon for a glance of our destiny. Whence have we come, where are we going? Two hundred and ten years ago Constantin the Great raised to the bosom of Rome those who had suffered persecution for their faith in Him Who gives meaning to history. Seventy years later, one hundred and forty years ago, Rome turned away in grief from those who had more faith in the past than in the future. From the Atlantic to the Euphrates, Roman law closed pagan temples and proscribed pagan sacrifices. Faith in the meaning of Roman history, not its denial, led to the removal of the Altar of Victory from this hallowed chamber. That faith was put to the test twenty-eight years later, a hundred and twelve years ago, when this our City was ravished by a Gothic army. The once mighty Roman Empire withdrew its legions from Britain, after



they had already been driven from Germany and Gaul. For almost a hundred years now, Imperial Rome's granary, North Africa, has been a Vandal kingdom. Some members present here today were old enough to reflect upon the meaning of history when the last Emperor of the West was deposed by Odovacar.

This we have to remember, my fellow Romans, before we give the King of the Goths his due for almost a generation of freedom from invasion, lawlessness, and hunger in Italy.

A HECKLER ON THE RIGHT OF THE AUDIENCE *[as seen from stage]*  
Freedom?

BOETHIUS. Yes, the freedom that is life. What is freedom, what is life? Indeed, what is the meaning of our history? Were we led all that way for Birth or Death?

FIRST AND SECOND HECKLERS ON THE LEFT. Paganism, blasphemy!

BOETHIUS *[abandoning his manuscript]* Yes, by all means, let us honestly ask these questions. We cannot find clarity in our existence if we don't ask these questions. Have we fooled ourselves, or have we set out on a hazardous journey of discovery? Have we betrayed our obligation to the people of Britain, Germany, Gaul, North Africa -- and to ourselves -- or have we given Truth a chance to reign?

THIRD HECKLER ON THE LEFT. I thought we had settled those questions long ago.

BOETHIUS. If indeed we have given Truth a chance, the benefits of her rule to Roman history are not evident to mortal senses. *[discontented murmuring among the Hecklers on the left]* When Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, urged the removal of the Altar of Victory from this House,



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*[points to the empty pedestal]* he could still reject the old with confidence in Rome's future under the aegis of Christ. Little more than two decades later, after the sack of our city, Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, now in Vandal hands, warned that confidence in our earthly future would incite the ridicule of the pagans and the despair of the weak.

THIRD HECKLER ON THE LEFT. You can't turn back the wheel of history. Let us live today, not in the past.

BOETHIUS. The wheel of history, my friend! You cannot ignore the possibility that the wheel of history is nearing the end of the revolution that Providence has granted Rome. Yes, to our earthly senses, as to our pagan critics, it does indeed seem as though our history was nearing its end. Plato speaks of the withering of a people's life force, and many of our poets and thinkers have echoed that infinitely sad and serene theme. Indeed, to earthly eyes there seems nothing beyond death -- there seems no escape from the inexorable course of history. But the soul of man seeks life and liberty. So long as there is hope, we shall choose life and liberty over death and the bondage of Fate. So long as there is a promise, we shall choose hope and meaning over despair and absurdity. And Almighty Providence has revealed to Rome that hope which mortal eyes cannot discover for themselves. *[Takes up his manuscript again.]*

So long as we can choose, we shall choose life and liberty. And if the life and liberty of the body, the life and liberty of Rome, shall fail us, we shall raise our eyes to the promise of the Spirit.

There lives in our hearts an Eternal City beyond the ravishes of Time, Fortune, and the failings that mar all human efforts on this earth -- an Eternal City offering its gift of civilization, at last ripened by the

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Incarnate Word, to all men of good will. Unhindered by the earthly pull of matter, this Eternal Rome offers to mankind the gift of Roman justice, tempered by divine mercy, together with the gift of its ancient learning by which men may gain freedom from all that is base in order to fulfil their human destiny. Stripped of the glory of Empire, the idea which is Rome reveals the essence of humanity to Roman and barbarian, to master and slave, to Christian and pagan. *[Applause from all factions]*

Senators of Eternal Rome, Providence has placed the burden of responsibility for the earthly aspect of our City on the broad, strong shoulders of the King of the Goths. Need I mention here the labours the King has undertaken during these past twenty-nine years to make Rome once again a worthy image of the Roman idea? We honour Caesar as the symbol of the spiritual unity of the civilized world, but we thank the King for the security, peace, and prosperity that we enjoy again in Italy. If it's not Caesar's legions but Theoderic's Goths who guard our borders more securely than they have been guarded for a hundred years against those all too impatient to partake of Roman civilization, if it's not Caesar's administration in Constantinople but the King's in Ravenna that has renewed our agriculture, secured our streets and highways, rebuilt our cities, and hardened our coinage, we need only remind ourselves of the irreconcilability of the idea and the reality which is the curse of our life on this earth.

Meanwhile, the genius of the Roman people guides my vision through a thousand years of Roman civilization to the ancient founder of our race, Aeneas, carrying his father Anchises away from burning Troy towards a new horizon and a new life. Even so, in the fullness of time, I behold the King of the Goths carrying on his shoulders all that we venerate in the past towards what we hope for in the future -- a new

Rome worthier than the old of that Eternal City which is the home of Romans and Goths and of all men of good will.

*Polite applause on both sides of the chamber. Symmachus and the sons of Boethius rise.*

*Curtain*



## SCENE V

*Verona, as in Scene II. Theoderic seated on his throne, Triwan, standing, in consultation. Armed Goths guarding doors to the left and right.*

THEODERIC. It must be done by law.

TRIWAN. We are not in Italy by law.

THEODERIC. If you expel two Roman Senators from the sanctuary of a Catholic church at the point of a Gothic sword we won't be here much longer.

TRIWAN. We are not here by the grace of the Roman mob. Opilio and Gaudentius have embezzled the public treasury. The mob clamouring for their impunity couldn't care less about the law.

THEODERIC. What do they care about?

TRIWAN. What do they care about! About confirming their Catholic orthodoxy, I suppose. The more indecent their demands, the greater the confirmation. The mob wants Opilio and Gaudentius to be judged by a tribunal of their Senatorial peers -- or by the Emperor!

THEODERIC [*aroused*] Not for offences relating to my power.

TRIWAN. Let me take care of it.

THEODERIC. Go tell them if they do not proceed to their places of exile by tonight I'll have them -- branded. It may help Cyprian decide whose

side he's on. *[to a guard at door stage left]* Bring in Cyprian. *[Guard opens door and motions Cyprian without ceremony.]* I hope your journey was a pleasant one. Is Constantinople willing to acknowledge my presence in Italy?

CYPRIAN. Justinian thinks it of mutual benefit to preserve the legal status quo. He says it has served us well in the past --

THEODERIC. When the people of Italy remembered what it was like before I came and when the Emperor was tied up in the East. What does he want? Does he want to undo a hundred years of history?

TRIWAN. He wants war. He's forgotten how Goths fight.

THEODERIC. We cannot beat a united Empire.

CYPRIAN. He wants Romans of Senatorial rank to be subject to his exclusive jurisdiction.

THEODERIC. But I'm holding the Senate, Italy hostage.

TRIWAN. He needs a reminder of that.

CYPRIAN *[to Theoderic]* I should think it in your interest to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty.

THEODERIC *[threatening]* Who are the guilty?

CYPRIAN. Not those against whom your anger is vented, because they happen to have run afoul of -- a rather novel political morality --

THEODERIC. One of whom happens to be your brother --

CYPRIAN *[unperturbed]* Know who your friends and who your enemies are, sir.

THEODERIC. Very well, your brother Opilio, as well as Gaudentius, shall have my pardon -- I'll even restore them to my Council -- if you will help me distinguish between my friends and enemies.

CYPRIAN. Your friends are those who work for *you*, your enemies, those who work for the Emperor, for the Pope, for justice -- or for the Truth.

THEODERIC. Does Justinian have a monopoly on the Truth?

CYPRIAN. It appears that way in Constantinople.

THEODERIC. I sent you there to set the record straight.

CYPRIAN. I'm afraid my modest talent in eloquence did not prevail against -- the Truth.

TRIWAN. You don't talk like one committed to the King's cause.

CYPRIAN. But I've done my best to uphold the King's cause, even against the Truth.

TRIWAN. Then, damn it, what is the Truth? [*Cyprian and Theoderic look at him long enough for him to recognize the gaffe.*]

THEODERIC [*to Cyprian*] What is this Truth that's destroying what I have built?

CYPRIAN. In our time the Truth manifests itself in theology, and Rome's greatest theologian happens to be your Master of the Offices.

THEODERIC. Boethius? Are you suggesting --

CYPRIAN. I'm suggesting that there is nothing as dangerous to your position in Italy as the theology of the Master of the Offices. In fact, Boethius



promoted the very formula under which the Eastern and Western Churches found it possible to unite years before Justinian recognized its possibilities -- in his Book Against Eutyches and Nestor. His recent tractates on the Trinity are an ardent defense of the so-called Theopaschite formula which holds that --

THEODERIC. Skip the theology.

CYPRIAN. This formula was the tool that Justin and Justinian had been looking for in order to bring about Christian unity -- and to make themselves acceptable to the West. Boethius' contacts in Constantinople --

THEODERIC. If I'd get rid of him, I'd cut myself off from what you call the Truth. No one can rule people's bodies without their minds. Boethius is my last chance to rule people's minds.

CYPRIAN. If he's willing to let himself be used. But why should he if he can make history himself?

THEODERIC *[for a moment at a loss]* Because -- history is our Destiny. We can be led by it -- or we can be dragged by it. That is the extent to which we can make history. The Empire is finished. If Justinian succeeds in grabbing Italy, Byzantine rule will replace Gothic rule, and the Romans won't like it any better, because Constantinople is not Rome. Do you think Boethius understands this?

CYPRIAN. His vanity won't let him.

THEODERIC. We'll see. *[motions a guard at door to the left to let in Albinus, Boethius, and Cassiodorus. Albinus gives a Roman salute, while the others bow perfunctorily.]* Gentlemen, I can no longer maintain any illusions as to Constantinople's intentions. What lies at stake is not the

precise legal status of my presence in Italy. The Emperor and his nephew want to turn back the wheel of history. Gentlemen, I need commitment. The Emperor or the King of the Goths?

CASSIODORUS. Your majesty --

ALBINUS. I don't see --

BOETHIUS. The Emperor's demands for jurisdiction -- *[The three Romans look at each other and settle on Boethius as their first spokesman.]* The Emperor's demands for Imperial jurisdiction over members of the Senate -- why, do not reflect present day realities --

THEODERIC. Those realities are changing, Master of the Offices. In Carthage my sister rots in prison for her Arian faith -- for *my* faith. In Burgundy my grandson lies slain by his Catholic father. The Franks are poised to abandon me as soon as their Catholic brethren in Constantinople manage to offer them more loot than I can. You elect a Pope courting the Emperor with Trinitarian pleasantries. -- How do you propose to alter those realities?

BOETHIUS. If we look at them logically --

THEODERIC. Logic works against me. The most important events in my life were the ones I made happen in spite of logic. The things I wanted most were always illogical, things everyone said couldn't be done. Here's the difference between Goths and Romans. You Romans know how to build bridges and roads, but without us you wouldn't be building any. With your logic you've built one great big machine, and now the machine has taken you over -- you need us to escape from it.

BOETHIUS. I am frightened by what's outside logic -- the madness of the Caesars, for instance.

THEODERIC. If I were Roman, I'd find that more exciting than your logic.

BOETHIUS. I don't have much else to offer you.

THEODERIC. Yes, you do. You are Rome's foremost theologian. With your help I can rule a people ridden by theology.

BOETHIUS. The purpose of theology is not to rule people. What would you do with me if I had written my tractates on the Trinity for a political purpose?

THEODERIC [*suspiciously*] What was your purpose? Your writings are encouraging my enemies.

BOETHIUS [*vehemently*] That's because people can't take theology for what it is -- a search for something beyond politics, for Truth, if you will. The concept can't be meaningless to you.

THEODERIC. In Constantinople people stab each other in the back in the name of God and theology. -- But, no, it's not meaningless to me.

BOETHIUS [*boldly*] What does it mean to you?

THEODERIC [*forgetting the argument for a moment*] I found God not in theology -- in a First cause -- or in Providence. I found Him in -- that part of myself -- that has no cause -- that little part of myself [*recovering*] that dares to defy your logic. For you -- logic seems to be God.

BOETHIUS [*pouts*] God is the Power consoling me that even chaos and unreason form part of His plan.



THEODERIC. His plan -- God makes me govern Italy in spite of His plan.  
When I have to chop off a head, I'd rather do it in my own name.

BOETHIUS. I'm glad that you leave God out of it.

THEODERIC. Lying and killing in His name are bad for His reputation. [*in a more serious vein*] But yes, the fortunes of man on this earth, whether Roman or Goth, Catholic or Arian, may be part of His plan. Trouble is, God's plan does not seem to square with man's plan. That's why we prefer to worship God's son. The Cross reminds us of that discrepancy -- Poor theology, I know.

ALBINUS [*seizing a chance to extricate himself*] Why, it's the Theopaschite formula -- *unus ex trinitate passus carne* -- One of the Trinity suffered in the flesh. There's no need for people of good will, for Romans and Goths, Catholics and Arians, to deny themselves fellowship under the one God. The present crisis --

CYPRIAN [*unwilling to let his plans go up in smoke, to Albinus*] -- is not a theological one but a political one. Sir, I have documentary evidence that you yourself have treated the matter as a political one right from the assumption of power by the present Emperor. [*to Theoderic*] I have obtained documents in Constantinople, my lord, that prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Senator Albinus has conspired with Romanus, the Imperial Master of Soldiery and other highly ranked persons at the court of Constantinople with the goal of assuming the independence of the Roman Senate from the King of the Goths and of bringing about the political re-unification of the Empire -- without the slightest prejudice as to the means, including military means, by which this is to be effected. I will prove to you, my lord, that --

THEODERIC [*rising, to Albinus*] If this is true, I'll kill you.

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*Triwan and two guards position themselves beside Albinus.*

ALBINUS. My lord, I have desired no more than the entire Senate. If a desire for the independence of the Senate and for the unity of the Empire be treason -- then every Roman is guilty.

CASSIODORUS [*with the instinct of the survivor*] The Senate perhaps -- but not every Roman. These phantasies of glory only confirm what has been apparent for centuries of Roman history, that the Senate is an idle debating club of the wealthy and the privileged. Ordinary Romans owe their security and prosperity to the King of the Goths, not to the Senate. It's not the Senate that brings them the political fulfilment of the spiritual promise held out by the Gospel. Ordinary Romans stand united behind you, my lord, not as the King of the Goths but as the king of all men bound by the brotherhood of man. As far as I am concerned --

THEODERIC. I can use your commitment, Cassiodorus. As to the brotherhood of man -- I'm not sure what it means. If it means there's no difference between Roman and Goth, rich and poor, master and servant -- or, rather, that their differences in fortune are the result of some failing by the fortunate, it's politically mischievous -- it leads to strife, not peace. If brotherhood means we all owe something to one another -- well, yes, then the few owe their higher consciousness, some heightened sense of being, to the many -- on whose backs they've reached it.

BOETHIUS. No, no. There's got to be something better -- than climbing on the backs of others. If I didn't hope for it, I would not be your Master of the Offices. There's justice, truth, and before those, my lord, you and I, why, are brothers.

THEODERIC. Like Cain and Abel -- before God.



BOETHIUS [*frightened*] I only hope that this accusation against Albinus, if that's what it is, shall proceed under the rule of law --

THEODERIC [*angry*] Rule of law? I rule Italy, not the law. The law doesn't rebuild your cities, secure our frontiers, or keep the grain moving north. Your choice isn't between the King and the law, it's between the King and the lawyers, who can blame it on the law if things go wrong.

BOETHIUS. Is the government of men then to proceed from -- tooth and claw? Is the weaker inexorably subject to the stronger? Is civilization then no more than -- an elaborate rationalization by which the stronger justify their rule? [*looks at Theoderic as though to await a reply. Theoderic appears troubled by these questions but remains silent*] If I have to choose between the King of the Goths and -- civilization, you know what my choice must be. I'll be glad to return to my library.

THEODERIC. Your library -- is part of *this* world. The choices we must make in this world -- must be made in the library as on the field of battle. If it wasn't so, your thoughts, your writings would be mere idle chit-chat. As it is, your books have strengthened Justinian's hand.

BOETHIUS. My lord, the Emperor's claim to jurisdiction over the Senate issues logically from his title -- from his right, for instance, to appoint consuls -- albeit upon your nomination, with which you have graciously honoured my sons beyond the hope of any father. But the whole Senate -- the whole Roman Senate -- can't but see itself under the ultimate jurisdiction of the Roman Empire -- however modified that jurisdiction may be by political realities. Albinus cannot be guilty of treason by having been faithful to Rome. Cyprian's accusation is false. But if Albinus is guilty, both I and all the Senate have acted with a single counsel.



CYPRIAN. As far as that goes, I don't know about all the Senate. But I do know that the Master of the Offices has kept Albinus' negotiations from the King's knowledge, and that he has in fact been a party to those negotiations --

THEODERIC *[barely paying attention to Cyprian's charges, to Boethius]* You have made your choice. *[Triwan conducts Boethius to Albinus' side]*

BOETHIUS. Anger is a poor counsel in the affairs of state.

THEODERIC. Where there's no anger -- no hate -- there's only -- logic.

*Boethius and Albinus are led away by the guards towards door to the right.*

CYPRIAN *[as Theoderic keeps his glance fixed pensively on the door through which Boethius and Albinus have disappeared]* What about my brother and Gaudentius?

THEODERIC *[without looking at Cyprian]* We'll let the Senate do it.

CYPRIAN *[alarmed]* But -- my lord --

THEODERIC *[to Cyprian]* We'll let the Senate throw the book at Albinus and Boethius. Get me the Prefect of the City of Rome.

CYPRIAN *[much relieved]* What charges?

THEODERIC. Treason, of course -- it's up to you -- and paganism, sacrilege.

CASSIODORUS. Boethius -- sacrilege?

THEODERIC *[to Cassiodorus]* We must give the mob a chance to confirm their orthodoxy. You look after it. You've done this sort of thing

before. -- I need a new Master of the Offices. *[As Theoderic and Triwan leave towards door to the right, the King passes Cyprian]*

CYPRIAN. What about my brother and Gaudentius?

THEODERIC *[to Triwan]* Let them go. We may have some use for them.

*Curtain*

## SCENE VI

*Boethius' prison in Pavia, at first dimly, later more intensely lit by the pale light of the moon entering through a barred window in the wall stage right. To the right of a door up centre, between door and window, Boethius lies asleep on his couch; to the left, in a corner, Albinus.*

BOETHIUS *[asleep]* Why, why? Why, oh God, should the deeds of men be unrestrained by your law? Why should uncertain Fortune rule our lives?

*To a melancholy chord of a synthetizer, Lady Philosophy appears at the foot of Boethius' couch, close to the door. In moonlit semi-darkness, she appears tall and slim, wearing a long, light-coloured gown seductive by its simplicity, and long, open hair silvered by the moon. Boethius raises himself to a sitting position.*

PHILOSOPHY. Your condition clouds your judgment. God's law rules the world. Your happiness is not important. Be thankful for the happiness you have known. Remember --

BOETHIUS. The greatest misfortune of all is to remember lost happiness.

PHILOSOPHY. Would you prefer to have nothing to remember? If you look with the eye of the philosopher, you'll find that the gifts of fortune are not what they seem. Good fortune deceives, sorrow teaches the true good, from which we may know true happiness.



BOETHIUS. What is true happiness?

PHILOSOPHY. Freedom from desire. Do you imagine that riches, honours, power, fame, or pleasure can bring about such a state?

BOETHIUS. No. But how can I find freedom from desire?

PHILOSOPHY. Through prayer.

BOETHIUS [*prays*] Oh God, creator of heaven and earth, who doest govern the world with eternal reason, grant that my mind rise to thy sacred throne. Let me see the source of good; let me see the light, so that my soul may fix itself in Thee. Scatter the fogs and clouds of earth and shine through in Thy glory.

PHILOSOPHY. You can now perceive that the happiness that seeks nothing beyond itself is the very perfection of those lesser fulfilments that we crave. And the perfect good whence it flows is what men call God. Therefore true happiness has its dwelling in God.

*The moonlight is now at its brightest.*

BOETHIUS. The radiant light which rules and animates the heavens shuns the dark ruins of the soul. Whoever can see this light will find the very brightness of the sun wanting.

PHILOSOPHY. With His help you have looked into the nature of things.

BOETHIUS. Happy is he who can free himself from the heavy chains of earth.  
-- [*The moonlight begins to dim again*] But how can there be evil in a world presided over by an all-knowing and all-powerful God who desires only good?

PHILOSOPHY. Evil is nothing but the failure of weak and impotent men to achieve the good. The good is its own reward, because it makes a man godly.

BOETHIUS. Still, I wish that sinners were not permitted to confound the just. When punishments designed for the wicked are imposed on good men, I find it easier to believe that we are ruled by chance -- than by God.

PHILOSOPHY. No man can penetrate the wisdom of Divine Providence. Sorrows may be good and just and beneficial to those who suffer them. Trust that Providence leaves nothing to chance, although man cannot comprehend its workings. If you trust God, evil does not exist.

BOETHIUS *[quickly]* Is there no such thing as chance then? Are accidents the will of God?

PHILOSOPHY. Chance, which seems to rush onward without rein, is bridled and governed by law.

BOETHIUS *[with growing unrest]* Is there any freedom for my will within God's law? Or am I nothing but a link in the inexorable chain of cause and effect? Is what I want determined by God or by myself? Do I ever want something -- because *I* want it?

PHILOSOPHY. You are free when you do God's will. --

BOETHIUS. But can I ever want anything that God's foreknowledge does not foresee?

*The moonlight has now waned to almost total darkness.*

PHILOSOPHY. Foreknowledge of an event does not cause it to happen. You know that day follows night, that spring follows winter, but you are not the bringer of light and life.

BOETHIUS. But if light and life failed to return -- I would have been wrong. Does my will have the power -- to prove God wrong? -- You tell me that God is never wrong -- and that he is in command. I don't see how any human decisions and actions can be free -- since God's foreknowledge can't be wrong. Good and evil in human actions lose all meaning, since God must be responsible for man's darkest deeds. And what is man in such a scheme of things?

*Gradually rising sunlight reveals Philosophy's gown somewhat tattered and discoloured, her hair stringy and greyish, and her features sunken and emaciated.*

PHILOSOPHY. Human reason cannot comprehend the nature of divine foreknowledge.

BOETHIUS. Then what's the use of theology?

PHILOSOPHY. The charioteer in the race, the artist at his work, do they not experience this freedom? But they cannot comprehend it, for the lower cannot comprehend the higher. God's eternity is the whole, simultaneous, and perfect possession of endless life. For God, there's no before and after. His is not so much a foreknowledge of future events, but knowledge of a never changing present.

BOETHIUS *[insistent]* Nevertheless, what God foresees as happening will happen.



PHILOSOPHY. A future event is necessary if seen from God's point of view, but free and undetermined from man's point of view. *[In the light of dawn, Philosophy assumes a somewhat ominous and threatening manner]* Thus as often as you may change your mind, you cannot frustrate the divine knowledge any more than you can escape the eye of someone who is present and watching you.

*During her last words, Boethius awakens. He raises himself into a more upright position and points his finger at Philosophy as in a silent accusation. Philosophy vanishes.*

BOETHIUS. But can I love him?

ALBINUS. Eh?

BOETHIUS. Can I love the author of my fate?

ALBINUS. If you can love your enemy -- but what's the point?

BOETHIUS. Nothing, I was dreaming.

ALBINUS. Good or bad dream?

BOETHIUS. It was good while it lasted, but it ended bad.

ALBINUS. Like life, I suppose.

BOETHIUS. I thought it good -- while it lasted. But I often had bad dreams -- the happier I was, the worse. Maybe they were trying to tell me something. Maybe there's more honesty in a bad dream than in a thousand days of happiness.

ALBINUS. Seems to me that you have always preferred dreams to life.

BOETHIUS. Life rises from a dream -- and to a dream it returns.

ALBINUS. What sort of dream will it return to?

BOETHIUS. A dream with its own ambiguities -- perhaps a worse dream -- but a more honest dream. We have dreamed about a world in which nothing is left to chance -- a world reflecting the goodness of its Maker -- a world held together by logic, by causality, in which no sparrow shall fall on the ground without the Father's will -- and now we are reminded by a barbarous people that we've lost our soul in the bargain even as we gained a Heaven.

ALBINUS. If you insist on dreams, don't complain of illusions -- what's the difference?

BOETHIUS. Illusions are abandoned dreams. A dream becomes an illusion the moment you give up responsibility for it -- a dream that takes you over. It comes to haunt you, until you turn into something like its very shadow. But if you're faithful to your dream -- even if it's a nightmare -- you may become your own dream -- if you're faithful to it to the bitter end. -- Rome has become an illusion. I wanted to turn it back into a dream -- a dream owned up to with barbarian strength and courage, but I forgot --

ALBINUS. -- that you're not God. Something you philosophers tend to forget.

BOETHIUS. That's one way of looking at it. But yes, it's like playing God -- only I forgot that the price of one's -- divinity -- is the cross. The cross, you see, makes it legitimate.

ALBINUS. There had to be a catch in your disillusionment.

BOETHIUS. But instead of asking 'Do I believe' -- we must ask 'Do I dare choose the cross.' Here's how we can keep the dream alive. Maybe some day a wretched, agonized body on a cross will rally the seekers of a Kingdom within themselves, the seekers of an uncaused self, unfettered even by logic, obsessed nonetheless with causes and their effects, for what they really want to know is their freedom from the chain of causality. -- And when they feel the last link of that deadly chain touch their soul they will set fire to the world.

ALBINUS. Sht!

*Sounds of a scuffle off stage. The door is pushed open abruptly, and Lucius, bleeding, is shoved on stage by jeering Gothic guards.*

BOETHIUS. Lucius, you're hurt. *[Cleans Lucius' face with his robe]*

ALBINUS *[before Boethius has finished]* What's Constantinople doing?

LUCIUS *[to Boethius]* It's nothing, sir.

BOETHIUS. How's my wife -- the boys?

LUCIUS. With her father -- your property has been confiscated. They would have liked to come, but --

BOETHIUS. Is Symmachus safe?

LUCIUS. Not -- as safe as can be, ever since he's told people what he thought of the Senate, sir.

ALBINUS. Is he the only one who spoke out against the Senate?

LUCIUS. The only one, sir. They are all very much afraid. They act as though --



BOETHIUS. Symmachus must condemn me. Tell him that. -- Let me take care of myself.

LUCIUS. That he will never do -- even if the Lady Rusticiana would let him. He's a proud man, sir.

ALBINUS. What is Constantinople doing?

LUCIUS. They've outlawed the King's religion and turned all the Barbarian churches over to the Catholics. The King's furious --

ALBINUS. My God, why does Justinian drop us just like that?

BOETHIUS. He needs martyrs. Rome -- or the truth -- is more important to him than you and I.

ALBINUS. What about the Pope?

LUCIUS *[to Boethius]* He's very sad about you, sir. He cares a great deal about you. But since your case is a political one, he can't do much about it. The King wants him to go to Constantinople to try and talk the Emperor into repealing the new laws against the Arians. The Lord Symmachus thinks that if Pope John can make the Emperor repeal --

BOETHIUS. The King's angry -- I know him. I even know his anger. Tell my father-in-law to lay off me -- for the sake of his daughter and the boys. Tell them that I love them all very much. -- Now, how do we get you out of here again?

ALBINUS. Has he told us all?

LUCIUS *[to Albinus]* Sorry, I wish I had better news for you, sir.

ALBINUS. What about the people? What can Theoderic do if a whole people stands up to him?

LUCIUS. The people! They seem to hide behind their sense of -- justice and truth --

BOETHIUS. Justice and truth?

LUCIUS. Yes, sir. Most people seem to feel that if your cause is just, if the King's charges and the Senate's sentence are false, justice and truth will somehow -- take over. Maybe the Emperor will do something, maybe God. And then there is the charge that you are secretly a pagan --

ALBINUS. Are they actually that stupid?

BOETHIUS. I see. Now get the hell out of here. *[bangs at the door, which is opened by a single guard, who motions Lucius out without further incident]* They seem to have cooled down.

ALBINUS *[chuckles]*

BOETHIUS *[after a pause]* If this were a play on a stage, it might as well end here. There's no more to be said. But for the hero the gist of the matter lies between the time his departure is announced and the time it happens. That's when he needs the audience most -- the time when he is even more lonely than at the zenith of his pride or glory. That's when he must accept the fact that the audience is about to go home to dinner, a cup of wine, or bed, and he must face the horror and the nothingness. That's when he would like to cry through the walls of his prison that your departure is announced at the time of your arrival, that the purpose of your life is to prepare for its end -- not because he's a joyless fellow

who begrudges your dinner, wine, or bed, but because he feels somehow entitled to your fellowship.

ALBNUS. Fellowship? With you one always had the feeling that you preferred the fellowship of God or of the Truth to that of me or anybody else, Roman or Goth, if you like. Let God, let the Truth comfort you now.

BOETHIUS. I chose the kingdom that is not of this world. Like Him -- was He fooling Himself? -- My God, why hast thou forsaken me?

*Albinus sits listless on his prison couch. A noise to the left off stage. Boethius rushes to the window.*

BOETHIUS [voiceless] Here are some Gothic horsemen. [Returns to his couch]

*Silence. The door suddenly bursts open. Several guards enter and grab Albinus, who furiously shakes himself free and walks between them to centre stage. Boethius sits terrified on his couch. The guards form a circle around Albinus. One of them, sword in hand, steps up to him. Albinus can indistinctly be seen to kneel down and present himself for the fatal blow. His body, forming a heap on the ground, and his severed head are left where they fell. The guards open an alley towards Boethius, who rises slowly and walks towards centre stage.*

BOETHIUS. Oh God, why have you created a world in which we can't be free without being murderous?

*He kneels down next to Albinus' body, but is grabbed on both arms by guards. The executioner steps up to him with a rope.*



EXECUTIONER. The King of the Goths sends you his hate. *[Twists the cord around Boethius' forehead, whose agonized moans are at last ended by the executioner's club.]*

*After a few silent moments, the guards file out through the door, leaving the bodies behind. Enter Cyprian and Triwan. They slowly walk up to the bodies, careful not to step in the blood. With his foot, Triwan turns over Boethius' body, which has slumped to the ground face down.*

CYPRIAN *[sickened, averts his glance]*

TRIWAN. He double-crossed us.

CYPRIAN. That doesn't make it any less ghastly, does it?

TRIWAN. If you hate him it doesn't bother you.

CYPRIAN. I don't hate anybody.

TRIWAN. That makes it harder to kill -- and to look at it.

CYPRIAN. I didn't kill him.

TRIWAN. You played your part in it. That's the trouble with you. You don't like to get your hands dirty. You like to do it at a distance -- by remote control, you might call it. But kill you do -- like the rest of us. -- Looking at it keeps it small -- small enough so we can handle it, I suppose.

*Curtain*

## *Philosopher and Barbarian*

### *Some Questions and Answers*

Q. Does a civilization decay as a result of some moral failure or as a result of a natural process analogous to aging?

A. The evidence of history suggests the latter. One can always pin some moral fault on others, but there was no moral the Romans of the late Empire hadn't tried. Rome had been Christian for almost two centuries before the extinction of the Western Empire.

Q. Can an individual remain loyal to the values of his civilization if he perceives it to be decaying?

A. It's difficult but necessary for mental hygiene, and conducive to humility. Like most intellectuals, Boethius lacked humility.

Q. Can people actually create a new civilization, discarding the values of the old?

A. Such is the pride that comes before a fall.

Q. Can Western civilization survive without the values of Christianity?

A. No. Rome did not survive without the values of classical antiquity.

Q. Are there any universal truths beyond the values of one's civilization?

A. To have faith in some universal truth - Tennyson's larger hope - appears to be a characteristic of full humanity. Without it, there can be no religion, and without religion, no civilization.

Q. Does the belief in universal truths threaten the life of a civilization?

A. Yes, because people have the nasty disposition to wield the truth like a weapon. Dogma destroys what the larger hope inspires. Both tyranny and revolution justify their evil deeds by appointing themselves the executors of the Absolute. As I have conceived Boethius, the Absolute upon the cross suggests to him the distinction between faith and dogma, between the imitation of Christ and Christianity.

*"... it is a very thoughtful, readable, and rewarding piece. I like the way you keep the main characters in balance, accounting for Theoderic's barbarism as well as his ability and Boethius's rather quixotic sense of rationality as well as genuine insight. You seem to have moved a situation from the Dark Ages into the middle of Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents. This is a remarkable achievement, and I find the conclusion, with the clarifying of the mind of Boethius, especially remarkable."*

*Northrop Frye, letter to the author*

#### **About the Author**

Johannes Allgaier was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1935. He came to Vancouver, B.C. in 1956 and took a master's degree in English from the University of British Columbia in 1966. Mr. Allgaier has been teaching English at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, B.C. since 1974. Philosopher and Barbarian is his first play.