Paradise Lost: The Arguments

Paradise Lost appeared originally without any sort of prose aid to the reader, but the printer asked Milton for some “Arguments,” or summary explanations of the action in the various books, and these were prefixed to later issues of the poem. Following are the “Arguments” for all twelve books of Paradise Lost.

Book I: The Argument

This first book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was placed: then touches the prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the Serpent; who revolting from God, and drawing to his side many legions of angels, was by the command of God driven out of heaven with all his crew into the great deep. Which action passed over, the poem hastes into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his angels now fallen into hell, described here, not in the center (for heaven and earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called Chaos: here Satan with his angels lying on the burning lake, thunderstruck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in order and dignity lay by him; they confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; they rise, their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named, according to the idols known afterwards in Canaan and the countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining heaven, but tells them lastly of a new world and new kind of creature to be created, according to an ancient prophecy or report in heaven; for that angels were long before this visible creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers. To find out the truth of this prophecy, and what to determine thereon he refers to a full council. What his associates thence attempt. Pandemonium the palace of Satan rises, suddenly built out of the deep: the infernal peers there sit in council.

Book II: The Argument

The consultation begun, Satan debates whether another battle be to be hazarded for the recovery of heaven: some advise it, others dissuade: a third proposal is preferred, mentioned before by Satan, to search the
truth of that prophecy or tradition in heaven concerning another world, and another kind of creature equal or not much inferior to themselves, about this time to be created: their doubt who shall be sent on this difficult search; Satan their chief undertakes alone the voyage, is honored and applauded. The council thus ended, the rest betake them several ways and to several employments, as their inclinations lead them, to entertain the time till Satan return. He passes on his journey to hell gates, finds them shut, and who sat there to guard them, by whom at length they are opened, and discover to him the great gulf between hell and heaven; with what difficulty he passes through, directed by Chaos, the power of that place, to the sight of this new world which he sought.

Book III: The Argument

God sitting on his throne sees Satan flying towards this world, then newly created; shows him to the Son who sat at his right hand; foretells the success of Satan in perverting mankind; clears his own justice and wisdom from all imputation, having created man free and able enough to have withstood his tempter; yet declares his purpose of grace towards him, in regard he fell not of his own malice, as did Satan, but by him seduced. The Son of God renders praises to his Father for the manifestation of his gracious purpose towards man; but God again declares, that grace cannot be extended towards man without the satisfaction of divine justice; man hath offended the majesty of God by aspiring to Godhead, and therefore with all his progeny devoted to death must die, unless someone can be found sufficient to answer for his offense, and undergo his punishment. The Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man; the Father accepts him, ordains his incarnation, pronounces his exaltation above all names in heaven and earth; commands all the angels to adore him; they obey, and hymning to their harps in full choir, celebrate the Father and the Son. Meanwhile Satan alights upon the bare convex of this world's outermost orb; where wandering he first finds a place since called the Limbo of Vanity; what persons and things fly up thither; thence comes to the gate of heaven, described ascending by stairs, and the waters above the firmament that flow about it: his passage thence to the orb of the sun; he finds there Uriel the regent of that orb, but first changes himself into the shape of a meaner angel; and pretending a zealous desire to behold the new creation and man whom God had placed there, inquires of him the place of his habitation, and is directed; alights first on Mount Niphates.

Book IV: The Argument

Satan now in prospect of Eden, and nigh the place where he must now attempt the bold enterprise which he undertook alone against God
and man, falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despair; but at length confirms himself in evil, journeys on to Paradise, whose outward prospect and situation is described, overleaps the bounds, sits in the shape of a cormorant on the Tree of Life, as highest in the Garden to look about him. The Garden described; Satan's first sight of Adam and Eve; his wonder at their excellent form and happy state, but with resolution to work their fall; overhears their discourse, thence gathers that the Tree of Knowledge was forbidden them to eat of, under penalty of death; and thereon intends to found his temptation, by seducing them to transgress: then leaves them a while, to know further of their state by some other means. Meanwhile Uriel descending on a sunbeam warns Gabriel, who had in charge the gate of Paradise, that some evil Spirit had escaped the deep, and passed at noon by his sphere in the shape of a good angel down to Paradise, discovered after by his furious gestures in the mount. Gabriel promises to find him ere morning. Night coming on, Adam and Eve discourse of going to their rest: their bower described; their evening worship. Gabriel drawing forth his bands of nightwatch to walk the round of Paradise, appoints two strong angels to Adam's bower, lest the evil Spirit should be there doing some harm to Adam or Eve sleeping; there they find him at the ear of Eve, tempting her in a dream, and bring him, though unwilling, to Gabriel; by whom questioned, he scornfully answers, prepares resistance, but hindered by a sign from heaven, flies out of Paradise.

Book V: The Argument

Morning approached, Eve relates to Adam her troublesome dream; he likes it not, yet comforts her: they come forth to their day labors: their morning hymn at the door of their bower. God to render man inexcusable sends Raphael to admonish him of his obedience, of his free estate, of his enemy near at hand; who he is, and why his enemy, and whatever else may avail Adam to know. Raphael comes down to Paradise, his appearance described, his coming discerned by Adam afar off sitting at the door of his bower; he goes out to meet him, brings him to his lodge, entertains him with the choicest fruits of Paradise got together by Eve; their discourse at table: Raphael performs his message, minds Adam of his state and of his enemy; relates at Adam's request who that enemy is, and how he came to be so, beginning from his first revolt in heaven, and the occasion thereof; how he drew his legions after him to the parts of the north, and there incited them to rebel with him, persuading all but only Abdiel a Seraph, who in argument dissuades and opposes him, then forsakes him.
Book VI: The Argument

Raphael continues to relate how Michael and Gabriel were sent forth to battle against Satan and his angels. The first fight described: Satan and his powers retire under night; he calls a council, invents devilish engines, which in the second day’s fight put Michael and his angels to some disorder; but they at length pulling up mountains overwhelmed both the force and machines of Satan: yet the tumult not so ending, God on the third day sends Messiah his Son, for whom he had reserved the glory of that victory: he in the power of his Father coming to the place, and causing all his legions to stand still on either side, with his chariot and thunder driving into the midst of his enemies, pursues them unable to resist towards the wall of heaven; which opening, they leap down with horror and confusion into the place of punishment prepared for them in the deep: Messiah returns with triumph to his Father.

Book VII: The Argument

Raphael at the request of Adam relates how and wherefore this world was first created; that God, after the expelling of Satan and his angels out of heaven, declared his pleasure to create another world and other creatures to dwell therein; sends his Son with glory and attendance of angels to perform the work of creation in six days: the angels celebrate with hymns the performance thereof, and his reascension into heaven.

Book VIII: The Argument

Adam inquires concerning celestial motions, is doubtfully answered, and exhorted to search rather things more worthy of knowledge: Adam assents, and still desirous to detain Raphael, relates to him what he remembered since his own creation, his placing in Paradise, his talk with God concerning solitude and fit society, his first meeting and nuptials with Eve, his discourse with the angel thereupon; who after admonitions repeated departs.

Book IX: The Argument

Satan having compassed the earth, with meditated guile returns as a mist by night into Paradise, enters into the serpent sleeping. Adam and Eve in the morning go forth to their labors, which Eve proposes to divide in several places, each laboring apart: Adam consents not, alleging the danger, lest that enemy, of whom they were forewarned, should attempt her found alone: Eve loath to be thought not circumspect or firm enough, urges her going apart, the rather desirous to make trial of her strength; Adam at last yields: the Serpent finds her alone; his subtle approach,
first gazing, then speaking, with much flattery extolling Eve above all other creatures. Eve wondering to hear the Serpent speak, asks how he attained to human speech and such understanding not till now; the Serpent answers, that by tasting of a certain tree in the garden he attained both to speech and reason, till then void of both: Eve requires him to bring her to that tree, and finds it to be the Tree of Knowledge forbidden: the Serpent now grown bolder, with many wiles and arguments induces her at length to eat; she pleased with the taste deliberates a while whether to impart thereof to Adam or not, at last brings him of the fruit, relates what persuaded her to eat thereof: Adam at first amazed, but perceiving her lost, resolves through vehemence of love to perish with her; and extenuating the trepass, eats also of the fruit: the effects thereof in them both; they seek to cover their nakedness; then fall to variance and accusation of one another.

**Book X: The Argument**

Man’s transgression known, the guardian angels forsake Paradise, and return up to heaven to approve their vigilance, and are approved, God declaring that the entrance of Satan could not be by them prevented. He sends his Son to judge the transgressors, who descends and gives sentence accordingly; then in pity clothes them both, and reascends. Sin and Death, sitting till then at the gates of hell, by wondrous sympathy feeling the success of Satan in this new world, and the sin by man there committed, resolve to sit no longer confined in hell, but to follow Satan their sire up to the place of man: to make the way easier from hell to this world to and fro, they pave a broad highway or bridge over chaos, according to the track that Satan first made; then preparing for earth, they meet him proud of his success returning to hell; their mutual gratulation. Satan arrives at Pandemonium, in full assembly relates with boasting his success against man; instead of applause is entertained with a general hiss by all his audience, transformed with himself also suddenly into serpents, according to his doom given in Paradise; then deluded with a show of the Forbidden Tree springing up before them, they greedily reaching to take of the fruit, chew dust and bitter ashes. The proceedings of Sin and Death; God foretells the final victory of his Son over them, and the renewing of all things; but for the present commands his angels to make several alterations in the heavens and elements. Adam more and more perceiving his fallen condition, heavily bewails, rejects the condolement of Eve; she persists and at length appeases him: then to evade the curse likely to fall on their offspring, proposes to Adam violent ways which he approves not, but conceiving better hope, puts her in mind of the late promise made them, that her seed should be revenged on the Serpent, and exhorts her with him to seek peace of the offended Deity, by repentance and supplication.
Book XI: The Argument

The Son of God presents to his Father the prayers of our first parents now repenting, and intercedes for them: God accepts them, but declares that they must no longer abide in Paradise; sends Michael with a band of Cherubim to dispossess them; but first to reveal to Adam future things: Michael’s coming down. Adam shows to Eve certain ominous signs; he discerns Michael’s approach, goes out to meet him: the angel denounces their departure. Eve’s lamentation. Adam pleads, but submits: the angel leads him up to a high hill, sets before him in vision what shall happen till the Flood.

Book XII: The Argument

The angel Michael continues from the Flood to relate what shall succeed; then, in the mention of Abraham, comes by degrees to explain, who that Seed of the Woman shall be, which was promised Adam and Eve in the Fall; his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension; the state of the church till his second coming. Adam greatly satisfied and recomforted by these relations and promises descends the hill with Michael; wakens Eve, who all this while had slept, but with gentle dreams composed to quietness of mind and submission. Michael in either hand leads them out of Paradise, the fiery sword waving behind them, and the Cherubim taking their stations to guard the place.
Samson Agonistes  The figure of Samson, as one finds him in the Book of Judges, does not seem at first glance particularly adaptable to the elevated mode of tragedy. He is a promiscuous, violent fellow, given to riddles and practical jokes—the last of which puts a gruesome end to himself and his enemies. His long shaggy hair, his name (Samson, in Hebrew Shimshun), which includes the Hebrew word for “sun,” and a persistent association with fire, all suggest a connection with some primitive solar cult, such as can be seen behind the equivalent figure of Hercules. A burly, truculent, and not-very-clever giant, in short; one would not easily see in him the dignified and purifying figure of the tragic sufferer.

But though Samson’s rude vigor and vengeful nature appealed to Milton on one level, the story of his fall through the treachery of a woman on another, and the fact of his blindness on still another, there was a last level on which he could in fact be represented as the type and precursor of the Christian hero. He suffered for his people; in the very pit of despair he was rendered suddenly capable of God’s reviving grace; long exercised in physical warfare, he gave evidence in his last heroic action of having learned the principles of spiritual warfare.

Milton approached the idea of tragedy with hesitations and misgivings; for a Puritan of his day, the very idea of a stage play was instinct with moral danger. But the example of the Greeks and of his much-admired Tasso prevailed; he wrote a “closet drama,” a drama intended not for the actual stage but for reading. When he wrote it is not clear: it was published, with Paradise Regained, in 1671, but may have been begun years earlier. The work is closely modeled on Greek tragedy. Unmoved by this noble ancestry, Samuel Johnson proclaimed it deficient as a play: it had, he said, a beginning and an end but no proper middle. Modern criticism, dissenting as usual from Johnson and stimulated as usual by his judgment, has exercised itself to find in Samson’s spiritual progression during the successive visits of Manoa, Dalila, and Harapha ample psychological movement to sustain both action and interest. This is beyond doubt a useful exercise; but it is also useful to reflect that Samson acts in the end by direction of an inward spirit, a private, intimate inspiration, and that
for the coming of this spirit there is no sufficient preparation. “The wind blow-
eth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell
whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the
Spirit” (John 3.8).

The story of Samson is told in Judges 13–16. Agonistes means “in struggle”
or “under trial”; it is a term derived from the Greek word for a wrestler and
suggests not only that Samson is an athlete of the Lord but that he will wrestle
with the pillars, and with his own fierce temper.

Samson Agonistes
A DRAMATIC POEM

Of That Sort of Dramatic Poem Which Is Called Tragedy

Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest,
moralest, and most profitable of all other poems: therefore said by Aristotle to
be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and
suchlike passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a
kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.¹
Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so, in
physic, things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy,
sour against sour, salt to remove salt humors.² Hence philosophers and other
gravest writers, as Cicero, Plutarch, and others, frequently cite out of tragic
poets, both to adorn and illustrate their discourse. The Apostle Paul himself
thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of Euripides into the text of Holy
Scripture, 1 Cor. 15.33; and Paraeus, commenting on the Revelation, divides
the whole book, as a tragedy, into acts, distinguished each by a chorus of
heavenly harpings and song between.³ Heretofore men in highest dignity have
labored not a little to be thought able to compose a tragedy. Of that honor
Dionysius the elder was no less ambitious, than before of his attaining to the
tyranny.⁴ Augustus Caesar also had begun his Ajax, but unable to please his

¹. Milton is paraphrasing Aristotle’s Poetics 6.
². Italian Renaissance critics like Minturno had applied notions of homeopathic medicine (like cures like) to
tragedy; the idea is not Aristotelean. “Physic”: medicine.
³. David Paraeus (1548–1622) was a German Calvinist who wrote biblical commentaries.
⁴. Dionysius (4th century B.C.E.) won a prize at Athens for tragedy, after becoming tyrant of Syracuse.
own judgment with what he had begun, left it unfinished. Seneca the philosopher is by some thought the author of those tragedies (at least the best of them) that go under that name. Gregory Nazianzen, a Father of the Church, thought it not unbeseeming the sanctity of his person to write a tragedy, which he entitled Christ Suffering. This is mentioned to vindicate tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day, with other common interludes—happening through the poet’s error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity, or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath been counted absurd, and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people. And, though ancient tragedy use no prologue, yet using sometimes, in case of self-defense or explanation, that which Martial calls an epistle; in behalf of this tragedy, coming forth after the ancient manner, much different from what among us passes for best, thus much beforehand may be epistled: that chorus is here introduced after the Greek manner, not ancient only, but modern, and still in use among the Italians. In the modeling therefore of this poem, with good reason, the ancients and Italians are rather followed, as of much more authority and fame. The measure of verse used in the chorus is of all sorts, called by the Greeks monostrophic, or rather apolelymenon, without regard had to strophe, antistrophe, or epode, which were a kind of stanzas framed only for the music, then used with the chorus that sung; not essential to the poem, and therefore not material; or, being divided into stanzas or pauses, they may be called allooeostropha. Division into act and scene, referring chiefly to the stage (to which this work never was intended), is here omitted. It suffices if the whole drama be found not produced beyond the fifth act.

5. Seneca the philosopher was indeed the author of tragedies; but Gregory Nazianzen, a Greek ecclesiastic of the 4th century, did not write the tragedy Christ Suffering, which scholarly opinion of Milton’s day attributed to him.
6. Stage plays.
7. Prologues and epilogues were frequent on the Restoration stage; Milton sets himself apart from contemporary styles.
9. For example, Torquato Tasso’s tragedy Re Torrismondo was modeled closely on classical examples.
1. Not divided into strophe, antistrophe, and epode.
2. Free from stanzaic patterns altogether.
3. With various forms of strophe, irregular.
4. The reader who cares will not find Milton’s drama hard to divide into the customary five acts, each ending with a chorus: act 1 (Samson and chorus), lines 1–325; 2 (Samson and Manoah), 326–709; 3 (Samson and Dalila), 710–1060; 4 (Samson and Harapha), 1061–1296; 5 (Catastrophe), 1297–the end.
5. Drawn out.
Of the style and uniformity, and that commonly called the plot, whether intricate or explicit—which is nothing indeed but such economy, or disposition of the fable, as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum— they only will best judge who are not unacquainted with Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the three tragic poets unequaled yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavor to write tragedy. The circumscription of time wherein the whole drama begins and ends is, according to ancient rule and best example, within the space of twenty-four hours.

The Argument

Samson, made captive, blind, and now in the prison at Gaza, there to labor as in a common workhouse, on a festival day, in the general cessation from labor, comes forth into the open air, to a place nigh, somewhat retired, there to sit a while and bemoan his condition. Where he happens at length to be visited by certain friends and equals of his tribe, which make the chorus, who seek to comfort him what they can; then by his old father, Manoa, who endeavors the like, and withal tells him his purpose to procure his liberty by ransom; lastly, that this feast was proclaimed by the Philistines as a day of thanksgiving for their deliverance from the hands of Samson—which yet more troubles him. Manoa then departs to prosecute his endeavor with the Philistian lords for Samson’s redemption; who in the meanwhile is visited by other persons, and, lastly, by a public officer to require his coming to the feast before the lords and people, to play or show his strength in their presence. He at first refuses, dismissing the public officer with absolute denial to come; at length persuaded inwardly that this was from God, he yields to go along with him, who came now the second time with great threatenings to fetch him. The chorus yet remaining on the place, Manoa returns full of joyful hope to procure ere long his son’s deliverance: in the midst of which discourse an Hebrew comes in haste, confusedly at first, and afterwards more distinctly, relating the catastro-
phe—what Samson had done to the Philistines, and by accident to himself; wherewith the tragedy ends.

THE PERSONS

SAMSON
MANOA, the father of Samson
DALILA, his wife
HARAPHA of Gath

PUBLIC OFFICER
MESSENGER
CHORUS OF DANITES

The Scene, before the Prison in Gaza.

SAMSON. A little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps, a little further on;
For yonder bank hath choice of sun or shade.
There I am wont to sit, when any chance
Relieves me from my task of servile toil,
Daily in the common prison else enjoined me,²
Where I, a prisoner chained, scarce freely draw
The air, imprisoned also, close and damp,
Unwholesome draught. But here I feel amends—
The breath of heaven fresh blowing, pure and sweet,
With day-spring³ born; here leave me to respire.
This day a solemn feast the people hold
To Dagon⁴ their sea-idol, and forbid
Laborious works. Unwillingly this rest
Their superstition yields me; hence, with leave
Retiring from the popular noise, I seek
This unfrequented place, to find some ease—
Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
O hornets armed, no sooner found alone
But rush upon me thronging, and present

1. Hebrews of the tribe of Dan, Samson’s tribe. When the land of Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes, they received the southern portion, adjacent to the Philistines.
2. The metrical pattern of this line, with its many unaccented syllables and careful placement of the strong word “else,” merits careful study. Similar bold effects are found throughout.
3. Break of day.
4. Dagon’s name comes from dag, “fish,” and he seems to have had a fishy shape. His would thus be a marine cult to correspond with that of the many Baals, or land gods, of the Philistines (see Paradise Lost 1.457–466).
Times past, what once I was, and what am now.
O, wherefore was my birth from Heaven foretold
Twice by an angel, who at last, in sight
Of both my parents, all in flames ascended
From off the altar where an offering burned,
As in a fiery column charioting
His godlike presence, and from some great act
Or benefit revealed to Abraham’s race?
Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
As of a person separate to God,
Designed for great exploits, if I must die
Betrayed, captōÁved, and both my eyes put out,
Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,
To grind in brazen fetters under task
With this heaven-gifted strength? O glorious strength,
Put to the labor of a beast, debased
Lower than bondslave! Promise was that I
Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;
Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke.
Yet stay; let me not rashly call in doubt
Divine prediction. What if all foretold
Had been fulfilled but through mine own default?
Whom have I to complain of but myself,
Who this high gift of strength committed to me,
In what part lodged, how easily bereft me,
Under the seal of silence could not keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,
O’ercome with importunity and tears?
O impotence of mind in body strong!
But what is strength without a double share

5. Before Samson was born an angel foretold that he would begin the delivery of Israel from the Philistines (Judges 13.5).
6. Samson was a Nazarite, member of an ascetic group specially dedicated to the service of God (see Numbers 6).
7. I.e., who could not keep silent about the high gift of strength committed to me, or about where it was located, or about how easily it could be taken from me.
Of wisdom? Vast, unwieldy, burdensome,  
Proudly secure, yet liable to fall  
By weakest subtleties; not made to rule,  
But to subserve where wisdom bears command.

God, when he gave me strength, to show withal  
How slight the gift was, hung it in my hair.  
But peace! I must not quarrel with the will  
Of highest dispensation, which herein  
Haply had ends above my reach to know.  
Suffices that to me strength is my bane,  
And proves the source of all my miseries,  
So many, and so huge, that each apart  
Would ask a life to wail. But, chief of all,  
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!

Blind among enemies! O worse than chains,  
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!  
Light, the prime work of God, to me is extinct,  
And all her various objects of delight  
Annulled, which might in part my grief have eased.  
Inferior to the vilest now become  
Of man or worm, the vilest here excel me:  
They creep, yet see; I, dark in light, exposed  
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,  
Within doors or without, still as a fool,  
In power of others, never in my own—  
Scarcely half I seem to live, dead more than half.  
O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon.  
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse  
Without all hope of day!

O first-created beam, and thou great Word,  
“Let there be light, and light was over all,”  
Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?  
The sun to me is dark

8. Confident, free from care (Latin securus).
1. God’s first (“prime”) act in creating the world was to say “Let there be light” (Genesis 1.3), a phrase Milton paraphrases below.
2. I.e., why am I thus deprived of the first-created (and most important) thing?
And silent\textsuperscript{3} as the moon,
When she deserts the night,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.\textsuperscript{4}
Since light so necessary is to life,
And almost life itself, if it be true
That light is in the soul,
She all in every part,\textsuperscript{5} why was the sight
To such a tender ball as th’ eye confined,
So obvious\textsuperscript{6} and so easy to be quenched,
And not, as feeling, through all parts diffused,
That she might look at will through every pore?
Then had I not been thus exiled from light,
As in the land of darkness, yet in light,
To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried; but, O yet more miserable!
Myself my sepulcher, a moving grave;
Buried, yet not exempt
By privilege of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains, and wrongs;
But made hereby obnoxious\textsuperscript{7} more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes.
But who are these? for with joint pace I hear
The tread of many feet steering this way;
Perhaps my enemies, who come to stare
At my affliction, and perhaps to insult,
Their daily practice to afflict me more.

\textbf{chorus.} This, this is he; softly a while;
Let us not break in upon him.
O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused,\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{3} I.e., unperceived.
\textsuperscript{4} Ancient astronomers supposed that during its dark (“interlunar”) phase, the moon hid in a cave. “Vacant”: i.e., where the moon is at ease (Latin vacare, whence modern “vacation”).
\textsuperscript{5} A famous formula of Plotinus (\textit{Ennead} 4.2.1) describes the soul as “all in all and all in every part.”
\textsuperscript{6} Exposed.
\textsuperscript{7} Vulnerable, subject.
\textsuperscript{8} Literally, “poured forth,” sprawled.
With languished head unpropped,  
As one past hope, abandoned,  
And by himself given over,  
In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds  
O’er-worn and soiled.  
Or do my eyes misrepresent? Can this be he,  
That heroic, that renowned,  
Irresistible Samson? whom, unarmed,  
No strength of man, or fiercest wild beast, could withstand:  
Who tore the lion as the lion tears the kid;  
Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,  
And, weaponless himself,  
Made arms ridiculous, useless the forgery  
Of brazen shield and spear, the hammered cuirass,  
Chalybean-tempered steel, and flock of mail  
Adamantean proof;  
But safest he who stood aloof,  
When insupportably his foot advanced,  
In scorn of their proud arms and warlike tools,  
Spurned them to death by troops. The bold Ascalonite  
Fled from his lion ramp; old warriors turned  
Their plated backs under his heel,  
Or groveling soiled their crested helmets in the dust.  
Then with what trivial weapon came to hand,  
The jaw of a dead ass, his sword of bone,  
A thousand foreskins fell, the flower of Palestine,  
In Ramath-lechi, famous to this day;  
Then by main force pulled up, and on his shoulders bore,  
The gates of Azza, post and massy bar,

9. Rags.  
1. Judges 14.5–6 tells the story of Samson ripping apart a lion with his bare hands.  
2. Weapons of forged steel, but also fraudulent, exterior protections.  
3. Hard as adamant, i.e., diamond. The Chalybes lived on the Black Sea and were famous ironworkers.  
4. Irresistibly.  
5. A lion in the act of attacking its prey, rampant. “Ascalonite”: a man from Ascalon, or Ashkalon, one of the five great Philistine cities.  
6. On one occasion Samson killed a thousand Philistines (i.e., “foreskins,” uncircumcised warriors), using the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15.15–17). Judges 16.3 tells how Samson, to escape his enemies, picked up and carried off the gates of Gaza (Azza).
Up to the hill by Hebron, seat of giants old,
No journey of a Sabbath day, and loaded so,
Like whom the Gentiles feign to bear up heaven.  
Which shall I first bewail,
Thy bondage or lost sight,
Prison within prison
Inseparably dark?
Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
The dungeon of thyself; thy soul
(Which men enjoying sight oft without cause complain)
Imprisoned now indeed,
In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward light
To incorporate with gloomy night;
For inward light, alas!
Puts forth no visual beam.  
O mirror of our fickle state,
Since man on earth unparalleled!
The rarer thy example stands,
By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
Strongest of mortal men,
To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fallen!
For him I reckon not in high estate
Whom long descent of birth,
Or the sphere of fortune,  
But thee, whose strength, while virtue was her mate,
Might have subdued the Earth,
Universally crowned with highest praises.

SAMSON. I hear the sound of words; their sense the air
   Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear.
CHORUS. He speaks: let us draw nigh. Matchless in might,

7. In Greek (or, as Milton calls it, Gentile) mythology, Atlas supports the heavens. From Gaza to Hebron
would be about forty miles—no journey for the day of rest.
8. Renaissance physiologists supposed the eye saw by sending forth a “visual beam,” which it directed at
various objects.
9. I.e., no such example (has been seen) since man (was) on earth. “Fickle”: changeable.
1. “Sphere”: wheel. Fortune was described as possessing a wheel that, merely by rotating, automatically inter-
changed the highest and lowest social positions. Milton’s definition of “high estate” is interior and spiritual;
he has no interest in the old “Fall of Princes” theme. In fact, the play exactly reverses that theme.
The glory late of Israel, now the grief!
We come, thy friends and neighbors not unknown,
From Eshtaol and Zora’s fruitful vale,
To visit or bewail thee; or, if better,
Counsel or consolation we may bring,
Salve to thy sores: apt words have power to swage
The tumors of a troubled mind,
And are as balm to festered wounds.

SAMSON. Your coming, friends, revives me; for I learn
Now of my own experience, not by talk,
How counterfeit a coin they are who “friends”
Bear in their superscription (of the most
I would be understood). In prosperous days
They swarm, but in adverse withdraw their head,
Not to be found, though sought. Ye see, O friends,
How many evils have enclosed me round;
Yet that which was the worst now least afflicts me,
Blindness; for, had I sight, confused with shame,
How could I once look up, or heave the head,
Who like a foolish pilot have shipwrecked
My vessel trusted to me from above,
Gloriously rigged, and for a word, a tear,
Fool! have divulged the secret gift of God
To a deceitful woman? Tell me, friends,
Am I not sung and proverbed for a fool
In every street? Do they not say, “How well
Are come upon him his deserts”? Yet why?
Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me; of wisdom nothing more than mean.
This with the other should at least have paired;
These two, proportioned ill, drove me transverse.

CHORUS. Tax not divine disposal. Wisest men
Have erred, and by bad women been deceived;

2. Assuage.
3. Lift.
4. Average.
5. Been equal.
6. Off the true course.
And shall again, pretend they ne’er so wise.\(^7\)
Deject not then so overmuch thyself,
Who hast of sorrow thy full load besides.
Yet, truth to say, I oft have heard men wonder
Why thou should’st wed Philistian women rather
Than of thine own tribe fairer, or as fair,
At least of thy own nation, and as noble.

**SAMSON.** The first I saw at Timna, and she pleased
Me, not my parents, that I sought to wed
The daughter of an infidel.\(^8\) They knew not
That what I motioned\(^9\) was of God; I knew
From intimate impulse, and therefore urged
The marriage on, that, by occasion hence,\(^1\)
I might begin Israel’s deliverance,
The work to which I was divinely called.
She proving false, the next I took to wife
(O that I never had! fond wish too late!)
Was in the vale of Sorec, Dâlíla,\(^2\)
That specious monster, my accomplished snare.
I thought it lawful from my former act,
And the same end, still watching to oppress
Israel’s oppressors. Of what now I suffer
She was not the prime cause, but I myself,
Who, vanquished with a peal of words (O weakness!),
Gave up my fort of silence to a woman.

**CHORUS.** In seeking just occasion to provoke
The Philistine, thy country’s enemy,
Thou never wast remiss, I bear thee witness;
Yet Israel still serves with all his sons.\(^3\)

**SAMSON.** That fault I take not on me, but transfer
On Israel’s governors and heads of tribes,
Who, seeing those great acts which God had done

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7. I.e., however much they profess to be wise.
8. Judges 14.1–4 tells the story of Samson’s first decision to marry outside his own tribe and nation.
9. Intended.
1. I.e., so that it might provide an occasion for me to begin Israel’s deliverance.
3. I.e., Israel and the children of Israel are still in servitude.
Singly by me against their conquerors,
Acknowledged not, or not at all considered
Deliverance offered. I, on th’ other side,
Used no ambition to commend my deeds;⁴
The deeds themselves, though mute, spoke loud the doer.
But they persisted deaf, and would not seem
To count them things worth notice, till at length
Their lords, the Philistines, with gathered powers,
Entered Judea seeking me, who then
Safe to the rock of Etham was retired,
Not flying, but forecasting in what place
To set upon them, what advantaged best.
Meanwhile the men of Judah, to prevent
The harass of their land, beset me round;
I willingly on some conditions came
Into their hands, and they as gladly yield me
To the uncircumcised⁵ a welcome prey,
Bound with two cords. But cords to me were threads
Touched with the flame: on their whole host I flew
Unarmed, and with a trivial weapon felled
Their choicest youth; they only lived who fled.⁶
Had Judah that day joined, or one whole tribe,
They had by this⁷ possessed the towers of Gath,
And lorded over them whom now they serve.
But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty,
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty,⁸
And to despise, or envy, or suspect,
Whom God hath of his special favor raised
As their deliverer? If he aught begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last

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⁴. I.e., sought for no testimonials to my actions.
⁵. Foreigners, the people outside the covenant of Abraham.
⁷. By this time.
⁸. Milton appears to have in mind not only early Israel but also contemporary England.
John Milton

To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds!

chorus. Thy words to my remembrance bring
How Succoth and the fort of Penuel
Their great deliverer contemned,
The matchless Gideon, in pursuit
Of Madian and her vanquished kings;9
And how ingrateful Ephraim
Had dealt with Jephtha, who by argument,
Not worse than by his shield and spear,
Defended Israel from the Ammonite,
Had not his prowess quelled their pride
In that sore battle when so many died
Without reprieve, adjudged to death
For want of well pronouncing Shibboleth.1

samson. Of such examples add me to the roll.
   Me easily indeed mine2 may neglect,
   But God’s proposed deliverance not so.

chorus. Just are the ways of God,
   And justifiable to men,
   Unless there be who think not God at all.
   If any be, they walk obscure;
   For of such doctrine never was there school,
   But the heart of the fool,
   And no man therein doctor but himself.3

   Yet more there be who doubt his ways not just,
   As to his own edicts found contradicting;
   Then give the reins to wandering thought,
   Regardless of his glory’s diminution,
   Till, by their own perplexities involved,
   They ravel4 more, still less resolved,
   But never find self-satisfying solution.
   As if they would confine th’ Interminable,5

9. Judges 8: Succoth and Penuel refused aid to Gideon when he was pursuing the common foe, and he punished them.
1. Judges 11 and 12.
3. Psalm 14 deals with the fool who says in his heart there is no God. “Doctor”: teacher.
4. Become entangled.
5. Infinite.
And tie him to his own prescript,
Who made our laws to bind us, not himself,
And hath full right to exempt
Whomso it pleases him by choice
From national obstriction, without taint
Of sin, or legal debt;
For with his own laws he can best dispense.
   He would not else, who never wanted means,
Nor in respect of the enemy just cause
To set his people free,
Have prompted this heroic Nazarite,
Against his vow of strictest purity,
To seek in marriage that fallacious bride,
Unclean, unchaste.
   Down, Reason, then; at least, vain reasonings down;
Though Reason here aver
That moral verdict quits her of unclean:
Unchaste was subsequent; her stain, not his.
   But see! here comes thy reverend sire,
With careful step, locks white as down,
Old Manoa: advise
Forthwith how thou ought'st to receive him.
SAMSON. Ay me! another inward grief, awaked
   With mention of that name, renews th' assault.
MANOAH. Brethren and men of Dan (for such ye seem,
   Though in this uncouth place), if old respect,
As I suppose, towards your once gloried friend,
My son, now captive, hither hath informed
Your younger feet, while mine, cast back with age,
Came lagging after, say if he be here.

6. Obligation, i.e., the law against marrying Gentiles (Deuteronomy 7.3). The chorus here accepts Samson's argument that God had prompted him inexplicably to marry the woman of Timna.
7. The chorus, having accused the woman of Timna of being unclean (i.e., Gentile and taboo) and unchaste, now admits that since Samson married her at God's instigation she was not unclean to him and that she was unchaste only after Samson left her. Reason is therefore puzzled.
9. Reflect, consider inwardly.
1. Unknown, unfamiliar.
2. Directed.
CHORUS. As signal now in low dejected state
As erst in highest, behold him where he lies.

MANOA. O miserable change! Is this the man,
That invincible Samson, far renowned,
The dread of Israel’s foes, who with a strength
Equivalent to angels’ walked their streets,
None offering fight; who, single combatant,
Dueled their armies ranked in proud array,
Himself an army—now unequal match
To save himself against a coward armed
At one spear’s length? O ever-failing trust
In mortal strength! and, oh, what not in man
Deceivable and vain? Nay, what thing good
Prayed for, but often proves our woe, our bane?
I prayed for children, and thought barrenness
In wedlock a reproach; I gained a son,
And such a son as all men hailed me happy:
Who would be now a father in my stead?
O wherefore did God grant me my request,
And as a blessing with such pomp adorned?
Why are his gifts desirable, to tempt
Our earnest prayers, then, given with solemn hand
As graces, draw a scorpion’s tail behind?
For this did the angel twice descend? for this
Ordained thy nurture holy, as of a plant
Select and sacred? glorious for a while,
The miracle of men; then in an hour
Ensnared, assaulted, overcome, led bound,
Thy foes’ derision, captive, poor and blind,
Into a dungeon thrust, to work with slaves!
Alas! methinks whom God hath chosen once
To worthiest deeds, if he through frailty err,
He should not so o’erwhelm, and as a thrall
Subject him to so foul indignities,

3. Notable, eminent.
4. I.e., what is there in man that is not deceivable and vain?
5. The angel who announced Samson’s birth was sent a second time, in answer to Manoa’s request, to give instructions concerning his education and training.
Be it but for honor’s sake of former deeds.

Samson. Appoint not heavenly disposition,6 father. Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me But justly; I myself have brought them on; Sole author I, sole cause.7 If aught seem vile, As vile hath been my folly, who have profaned The mystery of God, given me under pledge Of vow, and have betrayed it to a woman, A Canaanite, my faithless enemy. This well I knew, nor was at all surprised, But warned by oft experience. Did not she Of Timna first betray me, and reveal The secret wrested from me in her height Of nuptial love professed, carrying it straight To them who had corrupted her, my spies And rivals?8 In this other was there found More faith, who, also in her prime of love, Spousal embraces, vitiated with gold, Though offered only, by the scent conceived Her spurious first-born, treason against me?9 Thrice she essayed, with flattering prayers and sighs, And amorous reproaches, to win from me My capital secret,1 in what part my strength Lay stored, in what part summed, that she might know; Thrice I deluded her, and turned to sport Her importunity, each time perceiving How openly and with what impudence She purposed to betray me, and (which was worse Than undissembled hate) with what contempt She sought to make me traitor to myself.2 Yet the fourth time, when, mustering all her wiles,

6. I.e., do not presume to control heaven’s decisions.
7. Like Adam, in Paradise Lost 10, Samson proves his own resurgent virtue by accepting responsibility for his own faults.
8. Samson’s first wife, the woman of Timna, revealed Samson’s riddle to his enemies (Judges 14.8–19).
9. At the mere scent of gold, Dalila conceived a bastard (“spurious”) offspring for Samson—treason.
1. The secret Dalila learned was of capital importance; also, it involved the hair on Samson’s head (Latin caput).
With blandished parleys, feminine assaults,  
Tongue-batteries, she surceased\(^3\) not day nor night  
To storm me, over-watched and wearied out,  
At times when men seek most repose and rest,  
I yielded, and unlocked her all my heart,  
Who, with a grain of manhood well resolved,  
Might easily have shook off all her snares;  
But foul effeminacy\(^4\) held me yoked  
Her bondsleve. O indignity, O blot  
To honor and religion! servile mind  
Rewarded well with servile punishment!  
The base degree to which I now am fallen,  
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base  
As was my former servitude, ignoble,  
Unmanly, ignominious, infamous,  
True slavery; and that blindness worse than this,  
That saw not how degenerately I served.

**MANOAH.** I cannot praise thy marriage-choices, son,  
Rather approved them not; but thou didst plead  
Divine impulsion\(^5\) prompting how thou might'st  
Find some occasion to infest our foes.  
I state not\(^6\) that; this I am sure, our foes  
Found soon occasion thereby to make thee  
Their captive, and their triumph; thou the sooner  
Temptation found'st, or over-potent charms,  
To violate the sacred trust of silence  
Deposited within thee; which to have kept  
Tacit was in thy power. True; and thou bear'st  
Enough, and more, the burden of that fault;  
Bitterly hast thou paid, and still art paying,  
That rigid score.\(^7\) A worse thing yet remains:  
This day the Philistines a popular feast

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3. Forbore.  
4. Uxoriousness, overfondness, the fault of Adam.  
5. Samson’s repeated reliance on extraordinary divine inspiration aligns him, for Milton, with the godly party of the 17th century—as against worldlings who doubted or disliked the idea of recurring divine intervention.  
7. Debt.
Here celebrate in Gaza, and proclaim
Great pomp and sacrifice and praises loud,
To Dagon, as their god who hath delivered
Thee, Samson, bound and blind, into their hands,
Them out of thine, who slew’st them many a slain.
So Dagon shall be magnified, and God,
Besides whom is no god, compared with idols,
Disdained, blasphemed, and had in scorn
By th’ idolatrous rout amidst their wine;
Which to have come to pass by means of thee,
Samson, of all thy sufferings think the heaviest,
Of all reproach the most with shame that ever
Could have befallen thee and thy father’s house.

SAMYSON. Father, I do acknowledge and confess
That I this honor, I this pomp, have brought
To Dagon, and advanced his praises high
Among the heathen round; to God have brought
Dishonor, obloquy, and opened the mouths
Of idolists and atheists; have brought scandal
To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
In feeble hearts, propense enough before
To waver, or fall off and join with idols:
Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
The anguish of my soul, that suffers not
Mine eye to harbor sleep, or thoughts to rest.
This only hope relieves me, that the strife
With me hath end. All the contest is now
’Twixt God and Dagon. Dagon hath presumed,
Me overthrown, to enter lists with God,
His deity comparing and preferring
Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure,
Will not connive or linger, thus provoked,
But will arise, and his great name assert.

8. Glorified. “Who slew’st them many a slain”: i.e., who slew many a one of them.
1. Inclined.
2. Jousting courts, as in medieval tourneys.
3. Hesitate, palter.
Dagan must stoop, and shall ere long receive
Such a discomfit as shall quite despoil him
Of all these boasted trophies won on me,
And with confusion blank⁴ his worshipers.

MANOA. With cause this hope relieves thee; and these words
I as a prophecy receive; for God
(Nothing more certain) will not long defer
To vindicate the glory of his name
Against all competition, nor will long
Endure it doubtful whether God be Lord,
Or Dagon. But for thee what shall be done?
Thou must not in the meanwhile, here forgot,
Lie in this miserable loathsome plight
Neglected. I already have made way
To some Philistian lords, with whom to treat
About thy ransom. Well they may by this⁵
Have satisfied their utmost of revenge
By pains and slaveries, worse than death, inflicted
On thee, who now no more canst do them harm.

SAMSON. Spare that proposal, father; spare the trouble
Of that solicitation. Let me here,
As I deserve, pay on my punishment,
And expiate, if possible, my crime,
Shameful garrulity. To have revealed
Secrets of men, the secrets of a friend,
How heinous had the fact been, how deserving
Contempt and scorn of all; to be excluded
All friendship, and avoided as a blab,
The mark of fool set on his front⁶ But I
God’s counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuously have published, impiously,
Weakly at least and shamefully: a sin
That Gentiles in their parables condemn

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4. Confound, turn pale.
5. By this time.
6. Forehead.
To their abyss and horrid pains confined.7

MANOAH. Be penitent, and for thy fault contrite,
But act not in thy own affliction, son.
Repent the sin, but if the punishment
Thou canst avoid, self-preservation bids;
Or th’ execution leave to high disposal,
And let another hand, not thine, exact
Thy penal forfeit from thyself. Perhaps
God will relent, and quit8 thee of all his debt;
Who ever more approves and more accepts
(Best pleased with humble and filial submission)
Him who, imploring mercy, sues for life,
Than who, self-rigorous, chooses death as due;9
Which argues over-just, and self-displeased
For self-offense more than for God offended.
Reject not, then, what offered means who knows
But God hath set before us to return thee
Home to thy country and his sacred house,
Where thou may’st bring thy offerings, to avert
His further ire, with prayers and vows renewed.520

SAMSON. His pardon I implore; but, as for life,
To what end should I seek it? When in strength
All mortals I excelled, and great in hopes,
With youthful courage, and magnanimous thoughts
Of birth from Heaven foretold and high exploits,
Full of divine instinct, after some proof
Of acts indeed heroic, far beyond
The sons of Anak, famous now and blazed,1
Fearless of danger, like a petty god
I walked about, admired of all, and dreaded
On hostile ground, none daring my affront—
Then, swoll’n with pride, into the snare I fell
Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains,2

7. In classical legend, Tantalus was confined to hell and torment because he betrayed the secrets of the gods, and Prometheus was savagely punished for giving humanity the secret of fire.
9. This is similar to Adam’s argument against suicide in Paradise Lost 10.1013–19.
2. Sensual, sexual lures.
Softened with pleasure and voluptuous life;  
At length to lay my head and hallowed pledge  
Of all my strength in the lascivious lap  
Of a deceitful concubine, who shore me,  
Like a tame wether, all my precious fleece,  
Then turned me out ridiculous, despoiled,  
Shaven, and disarmed among my enemies.

chorus. Desire of wine and all delicious drinks,  
Which many a famous warrior overturns,  
Thou could’st repress; nor did the dancing ruby,  
Sparkling out-poured, the flavor or the smell,  
Or taste, that cheers the heart of gods and men,  
Allure thee from the cool crystalline stream.

samson. Wherever fountain or fresh current flowed  
Against the eastern ray, translucent pure  
With touch ethereal of Heaven’s fiery rod,  
I drank, from the clear milky juice allaying  
Thirst, and refreshed; nor envied them the grape  
Whose heads that turbulent liquor fills with fumes.

chorus. O madness! to think use of strongest wines  
And strongest drinks our chief support of health,  
When God with these forbidden made choice to rear  
His mighty champion, strong above compare,  
Whose drink was only from the liquid brook!

samson. But what availed this temperance, not complete  
Against another object more enticing?  
What boots it at one gate to make defense,  
And at another to let in the foe,  
Effeminately vanquished? by which means,  
Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonored, quelled,  
To what can I be useful? wherein serve  
My nation, and the work from Heaven imposed?  
But to sit idle on the household hearth,

3. A castrated sheep.  
4. The rays of the sun. Samson is saying that wherever water was purest and cleanest, he drank of it—never of wine. “Rod” intimates a parallel with Moses, who like Samson brought forth a spring in the middle of the desert.  
5. Samson’s calling as a Nazarite forbade him the use of wine.
A burdensome drone; to visitants a gaze, 6
Or pitied object; these redundant locks,
Robustious 7 to no purpose, clustering down,
Vain monument of strength; till length of years
And sedentary numbness craze 8 my limbs
To a contemptible old age obscure.
Here rather let me drudge, and earn my bread,
Till vermin, or the draff 9 of servile food,
Consume me, and oft-invocated death
Hasten the welcome end of all my pains.

manoa. Wilt thou then serve the Philistines with that gift
Which was expressly given thee to annoy them?
Better at home lie bed-rid, not only idle,
Inglorious, unemployed, with age outworn.
But God, who caused a fountain at thy prayer
From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
After the brunt of battle, 1 can as easy
Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
Werewith to serve him better than thou hast.
And I persuade me so. Why else this strength
Miraculous yet remaining in those locks?
His might continues in thee not for naught,
Nor shall his wondrous gifts be frustrate thus.

samson. All otherwise to me my thoughts portend,
That these dark orbs no more shall treat with light,
Nor th’ other light of life continue long,
But yield to double darkness nigh at hand;
So much I feel my genial spirits 2 droop,
My hopes all flat. Nature within me seems
In all her functions weary of herself;
My race of glory run, and race of shame,

8. Weaken, twist.
9. Garbage given to slaves as food.
1. The story of how Samson, with divine aid, created a spring in the desert after the battle with the ass’s jawbone is told in Judges 15.18–19.
2. Life forces, vital energy.
And I shall shortly be with them that rest.

MANOAH. Believe not these suggestions, which proceed
From anguish of the mind, and humors black
That mingle with thy fancy. I, however,
Must not omit a father’s timely care
To prosecute the means of thy deliverance
By ransom or how else: meanwhile be calm,
And healing words from these thy friends admit.

SAMSON. O that torment should not be confined
To the body’s wounds and sores,
With maladies innumerable
In heart, head, breast, and reins,
But must secret passage find
To th’ inmost mind,
There exercise all his fierce accidents,
And on her purest spirits prey,
As on entrails, joints, and limbs,
With answerable pains, but more intense,
Though void of corporal sense!
My griefs not only pain me
As a lingering disease,
But, finding no redress, ferment and rage;
Nor less than wounds immedicable
Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,
To black mortification.
Thoughts, my tormentors, armed with daily stings,
Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,
Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
Or med’cinal liquor can assuage,
Nor breath of vernal air from snowy alp.
Sleep hath forsook and given me o’er
To death’s benumbing opium as my only cure;
Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,

3. Black bile, the melancholy humor, was supposed to have specially ill effects on the imagination.
5. I.e., there put into effect all the fierce qualities (of torment).
6. A medical term for decay.
And sense of Heaven’s desertion. 7

    I was his nursling once and choice delight,
His destined from the womb,
Promised by heavenly message 8 twice descending. 635
Under his special eye
Abstemious I grew up and thrived amain;
He led me on to mightiest deeds,
Above the nerve 9 of mortal arm,
Against the uncircumcised, our enemies:
But now hath cast me off as never known,
And to those cruel enemies,
Whom I by his appointment had provoked,
Left me all helpless with th’ irreparable loss
Of sight, reserved alive to be repeated 1 645
The subject of their cruelty or scorn.
Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
Hopeless are all my evils, all remèdiless.
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
No long petition—speedy death,
The close of all my miseries, and the balm.

CHORUS. Many are the sayings of the wise,
    In ancient and in modern books enrolled,
Extolling patience as the truest fortitude,
And to the bearing well of all calamities, 655
All chances incident to man’s frail life;
Consolatories writ
With studied argument, and much persuasion sought,
Lenient 2 of grief and anxious thought.
But with th’ afflicted in his pangs their sound
Little prevails, or rather seems a tune
Harsh, and of dissonant mood 3 from his complaint,
Unless he feel within

7. Samson comes close here to suggesting that religious despair is the symptom of a physical condition.
8. Messenger.
1. Continually.
2. Soothing (from Latin leniens).
3. The musical mode, or psychological mood, of the comforter jars on that of the sufferer.
Some source of consolation from above,
Secret refreshings that repair his strength
And fainting spirits uphold.⁴
  God of our fathers! what is man,
That thou towards him with hand so various—
Or might I say contrarious?—
Temper’st thy providence through his short course:
Not evenly, as thou rul’st
The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,
Irrational and brute.⁵
Nor do I name of men the common rout,
That, wandering loose about,
Grow up and perish as the summer fly,
Heads without name, no more remembered;
But such as thou hast solemnly elected,
With gifts and graces eminently adorned,
To some great work, thy glory,
And people’s safety, which in part they effect.
Yet toward these, thus dignified, thou oft,
Amidst their height of noon,
Changest thy countenance and thy hand, with no regard
Of highest favors past
From thee on them, or them to thee of service.⁶
  Nor only dost degrade them, or remit
To life obscured, which were a fair dismissal,
But throw’st them lower than thou didst exalt them high,
Unseemly falls in human eye,
Too grievous for the trespass or omission;
Oft leav’st them to the hostile sword
Of heathen and profane, their carcasses
To dogs and fowls a prey, or else captõÁved,
Or to the unjust tribunals, under change of times,
And condemnation of the ingrateful multitude.⁷

⁴ Cf. Job’s answers to his comforters, especially in chap. 14.
⁵ The chorus feels that the beings above and below man on the Great Chain of Being (the nine orders of angels above, the mute beasts below) are ruled by a less capricious code than is man.
⁶ Manoa has already voiced this plaint (lines 368–372).
⁷ After the Restoration, many Puritan leaders were executed, jailed, or exiled, while even the corpses of some were exhumed, beheaded, and publicly exhibited.
If these they 'scape, perhaps in poverty
With sickness and disease thou bow'st them down,
Painful diseases and deformed,
In crude old age;
Though not disordinate, yet causeless suffering
The punishment of dissolute days. In fine,
Just or unjust alike seem miserable,
For oft alike both come to evil end.

So deal not with this once thy glorious champion,
The image of thy strength, and mighty minister.
What do I beg? how hast thou dealt already!
Behold him in this state calamitous, and turn
His labors, for thou canst, to peaceful end.

But who is this? what thing of sea or land—
Female of sex it seems—
That, so bedecked, ornate, and gay,
Comes this way sailing
Like a stately ship
Of Tarsus, bound for th’ isles
Of Javan or Gadire,
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails filled, and streamers waving,
Courted by all the winds that hold them play;
An amber scent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger, a damsel train behind?
Some rich Philistian matron she may seem;
And now, at nearer view, no other certain
Than Dālila thy wife.

SAMSON. My wife! my traitress! let her not come near me.

CHORUS. Yet on she moves; now stands and eyes thee fixed,

9. In short. “Though not disordinate”; i.e., though they have not been dissipated. Milton resented having the gout, supposed to be a disease of the luxurious.
1. Agent, but with a religious connotation as well.
2. Tarsus (the birthplace of St. Paul) is a trading city in modern Turkey. The isles of Javan are the isles of Greece, supposed to be populated by descendants of Javan, son of Noah’s son Japhet. Gadire is modern Cádiz in Spain. “Ships of Tarshish” is a common Old Testament emblem of pride and worldliness (e.g., Isaiah 23, Psalm 48).
3. Ambergris.
About t’ have spoke; but now, with head declined
Like a fair flower surcharged with dew, she weeps,
And words addressed seem into tears dissolved,
Wetting the borders of her silken veil. 730
But now again she makes address to speak.

DALILA. With doubtful feet and wavering resolution
I came, still dreading thy displeasure, Samson;
Which to have merited, without excuse,
I cannot but acknowledge. Yet if tears 735
May expiate (though the fact more evil drew
In the perverse event than I foresaw),
My penance hath not slackened, though my pardon
No way assured. But conjugal affection,
Prevailing over fear and timorous doubt,
Hath led me on, desirous to behold
Once more thy face, and know of thy estate, 740
If aught in my ability may serve
To lighten what thou suffer’st, and appease
Thy mind with what amends is in my power—
Though late, yet in some part to recompense
My rash but more unfortunate misdeed.

SAMSON. Out, out, hyena! 6 These are thy wonted arts,
And arts of every woman false like thee,
To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray; 750
Then, as repentant, to submit, beseech,
And reconcilement move with feigned remorse,
Confess, and promise wonders in her change,
Not truly penitent, but chief to try
Her husband, how far urged his patience bears,
His virtue or weakness which way to assail:
Then, with more cautious and instructed skill,
Again transgresses, and again submits;
That wisest and best men, full oft beguiled,
With goodness principled not to reject 760

4. I.e., my action turned out worse than intended.
5. Condition.
6. Apart from being an animal of odious habits and appearance, the hyena was a traditional beast of hypocrisy, supposed to entice men to destruction by its power of imitating the human voice.
The penitent, but ever to forgive,
Are drawn to wear out miserable days,
Entangled with a poisonous bosom-snake,
If not by quick destruction soon cut off,
As I by thee, to ages an example.

DALILA. Yet hear me, Samson; not that I endeavor
To lessen or extenuate my offense,
But that, on th’ other side, if it be weighed
By itself, with aggravations not surcharged,
Or else with just allowance counterpoised,
I may, if possible, thy pardon find
The easier towards me, or thy hatred less.

First granting, as I do, it was a weakness
In me, but incident to all our sex,
Curiosity, inquisitive, importune
Of secrets, then with like infirmity
To publish them, both common female faults;
Was it not weakness also to make known,
For importunity, that is for naught,
Wherein consisted all thy strength and safety?

To what I did thou show’dst me first the way.
But I to enemies revealed, and should not!
Nor should’st thou have trusted that to woman’s frailty: 7
Ere I to thee, thou to thyself wast cruel.
Let weakness then with weakness come to parle, 8
So near related, or the same of kind;
Thine forgive mine, that men may censure thine
The gentler, if severely thou exact not
More strength from me than in thyself was found.
And what if love, which thou interpret’st hate,
The jealousy of love, powerful of sway
In human hearts, nor less in mine towards thee,
Caused what I did? I saw thee mutable
Of fancy; feared lest one day thou would’st leave me,

7. Like Eve, who wore down Adam with importunity, then blamed him for giving in (Paradise Lost 9.1155–61), Dalila blames Samson for doing what she herself had demanded. Underlying the scene as a whole are the ancient stereotypes and accusations of traditional antifeminism.
8. Parley, agreement.
As her at Timna; sought by all means therefore
How to endear, and hold thee to me firmest:
No better way I saw than by importuning
To learn thy secrets, get into my power
Thy key of strength and safety. Thou wilt say,
“How, then, revealed?” I was assured by those
Who tempted me that nothing was designed
Against thee but safe custody and hold.
That made for me; I knew that liberty
Would draw thee forth to perilous enterprises,
While I at home sat full of cares and fears,
Wailing thy absence in my widowed bed;
Here I should still enjoy thee, day and night,
Mine and love’s prisoner, not the Philistines’,
Whole to myself, unhazarded abroad,
Fearless at home of partners in my love.
These reasons in love’s law have passed for good,
Though fond and reasonless to some perhaps;
And love hath oft, well meaning, wrought much woe,
Yet always pity or pardon hath obtained.
Be not unlike all others, not austere
As thou art strong, inflexible as steel.
If thou in strength all mortals dost exceed,
In uncompassionate anger do not so.

SAMSON. How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, to upbraid me mine!
That malice, not repentance, brought thee hither,
By this appears. I gave, thou say’st, th’ example,
I led the way—bitter reproach, but true;
I to myself was false ere thou to me.
Such pardon, therefore, as I give my folly
Take to thy wicked deed; which when thou seest
Impartial, self-severe, inexorable,
Thou wilt renounce thy seeking, and much rather
Confess it feigned. Weakness is thy excuse,
And I believe it, weakness to resist

Philistian gold. If weakness may excuse,
What murderer, what traitor, parricide,
Incestuous, sacrilegious, but may plead it?
All wickedness is weakness; that plea, therefore,
With God or man will gain thee no remission.
But love constrained thee? Call it furious rage
To satisfy thy lust. Love seeks to have love;
My love how could'st thou hope, who took'st the way
To raise in me inexpiable\(^1\) hate,
Knowing, as needs I must, by thee betrayed?
In vain thou striv'st to cover shame with shame,
Or by evasions thy crime uncover'st more.

**Dalila.** Since thou determin'st weakness for no plea
In man or woman, though to thy own condemning,
Hear what assaults I had, what snares besides,
What sieges girt me round, ere I consented;
Which might have awed the best-resolved of men,
The constantest, to have yielded without blame.
It was not gold, as to my charge thou lay'st,
That wrought with me.\(^2\) Thou know'st the magistrates
And princes of my country came in person,
Solicited, commanded, threatened, urged,
Adjured by all the bonds of civil duty
And of religion—pressed how just it was,
How honorable, how glorious, to entrap
A common enemy, who had destroyed
Such numbers of our nation: and the priest
Was not behind, but ever at my ear,
Preaching how meritorious with the gods
It would be to ensnare an irreligious
Dishonorer of Dagon. What had I
To oppose against such powerful arguments?
Only my love of thee held long debate,
And combated in silence all these reasons

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1. Inextinguishable.
2. Judges 16 is very explicit that Dalila betrayed Samson for money—eleven hundred pieces of silver offered her by each one of the Philistine lords.
With hard contest. At length, that grounded maxim, 865
So rife and celebrated in the mouths
Of wisest men, that to the public good
Private respects must yield, with grave authority
Took full possession of me, and prevailed;
Virtue, as I thought, truth, duty, so enjoining.

SAMSON. I thought where all thy circling wiles would end,
In feigned religion, smooth hypocrisy!
But had thy love, still odiously pretended,
Been, as it ought, sincere, it would have taught thee
Far other reasonings, brought forth other deeds.
I before all the daughters of my tribe
And of my nation chose thee from among
My enemies, loved thee, as too well thou knew’st;
Too well; unbosomed all my secrets to thee,
Not out of levity, but overpowered
By thy request, who could deny thee nothing;
Yet now am judged an enemy. Why then
Didst thou at first receive me for thy husband,
Then, as since then, thy country’s foe professed?
Being once a wife, for me thou wast to leave
Parents and country; nor was I their subject,
Nor under their protection, but my own;
Thou mine, not theirs. If aught against my life
Thy country sought of thee, it sought unjustly,
Against the law of nature, law of nations;
No more thy country, but an impious crew
Of men conspiring to uphold their state
By worse than hostile deeds, violating the ends
For which our country is a name so dear;
Not therefore to be obeyed. But zeal moved thee;
To please thy gods thou didst it! Gods unable
To acquit themselves and prosecute their foes
But by ungodly deeds, the contradiction

3. Reason of state, political “necessity,” was in Milton’s eyes the worst of all possible motives for an action (cf.
Paradise Lost 4.393–394).
4. I.e., you were under my protection, not theirs.
Of their own deity, gods cannot be;  
Less therefore to be pleased, obeyed, or feared.  
These false pretexts and varnished colors failing,  
Bare in thy guilt, how foul must thou appear!

dalila. In argument with men a woman ever  
Goes by the worse,\(^5\) whatever be her cause.  
samson. For want of words, no doubt, or lack of breath!  
Witness when I was worried with thy peals.

dalila. I was a fool, too rash, and quite mistaken  
In what I thought would have succeeded best.  
Let me obtain forgiveness of thee, Samson;  
Afford me place to show what recompense  
Towards thee I intend for what I have misdone,  
Misguided. Only what remains past cure  
Bear not too sensibly,\(^6\) nor still insist  
To afflict thyself in vain. Though sight be lost,  
Life yet hath many solaces, enjoyed  
Where other senses want not their delights  
At home, in leisure and domestic ease,  
Exempt from many a care and chance to which  
Eyesight exposes, daily, men abroad.  
I to the lords will intercede, not doubting  
Their favorable ear, that I may fetch thee  
From forth this loathsome prison-house, to abide  
With me, where my redoubled love and care,  
With nursing diligence, to me glad office,  
May ever tend about thee to old age,  
With all things grateful cheered, and so supplied  
That what by me thou hast lost thou least shalt miss.

samson. No, no; of my condition take no care;  
It fits not; thou and I long since are twain;  
Nor think me so unwary or accursed\(^7\)  
To bring my feet again into the snare  
Where once I have been caught. I know thy trains,

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5. Comes off second best.  
6. With too great sensitivity.  
7. I.e., so neglectful or bewitched.
Though dearly to my cost, thy gins, and toils.  
Thy fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms,  
No more on me have power; their force is nulled;  
So much of adder’s wisdom I have learnt,  
To fence my ear against thy sorceries.  
If in my flower of youth and strength, when all men  
Loved, honored, feared me, thou alone could hate me,  
Thy husband, slight me, sell me, and forgo me,  
How would’st thou use me now, blind, and thereby  
Deceivable, in most things as a child,  
Helpless, thence easily contemned and scorned,  
And last neglected! How would’st thou insult,  
When I must live uxorious to thy will  
In perfect thraldom! how again betray me,  
Bearing my words and doings to the lords  
To gloss upon, and, censuring, frown or smile!  
This jail I count the house of liberty  
To thine, whose doors my feet shall never enter.  
DALILA. Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand.  
SAMSON. Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake  
My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint.  
At distance I forgive thee, go with that;  
Bewail thy falsehood, and the pious works  
It hath brought forth to make thee memorable  
Among illustrious women, faithful wives;  
Cherish thy hastened widowhood with the gold  
Of matrimonial treason: so farewell.  
DALILA. I see thou art implacable, more deaf  
To prayers than winds and seas. Yet winds to seas  
Are reconciled at length, and sea to shore:  
Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,

9. Psalms 58.4–5 describes the “deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.”  
1. Milton’s libertarian hatred of censorship and managed liberty is apparent. “Gloss”: comment.  
2. Compared to thine.  
3. What Samson might remember, at the touch of Dalila, which would lead him to tear her to pieces, is a problem in domestic psychology.
Eternal tempest never to be calmed.  
Why do I humble thus myself, and, suing  
For peace, reap nothing but repulse and hate,  
Bid go with evil omen, and the brand  
Of infamy upon my name denounced?  
To mix with thy concernments I desist  
Henceforth, nor too much disapprove my own.  
Fame, if not double-faced, is double-mouthed,  
And with contrary blast proclaims most deeds;  
On both his wings, one black, th’ other white,  
Bears greatest names in his wild airy flight.  
My name, perhaps, among the circumcised  
In Dan, in Judah, and the bordering tribes,  
To all posterity may stand defamed,  
With malediction mentioned, and the blot  
Of falsehood most unconjugal traduced.  
But in my country, where I most desire,  
In Ekron, Gaza, Asdod, and in Gath,  
I shall be named among the famousest  
Of women, sung at solemn festivals,  
Living and dead recorded, who to save  
Her country from a fierce destroyer chose  
Above the faith of wedlock bands; my tomb  
With odors visited and annual flowers;  
Not less renowned than in Mount Ephraim  
Jael, who, with inhospitable guile,  
Smote Sisera sleeping, through the temples nailed.  
Nor shall I count it heinous to enjoy  
The public marks of honor and reward  
Conferred upon me for the piety  
Which to my country I was judged to have shown.

4. I.e., dismissed with predictions of ill fame.  
5. The figure of Fame, in Milton’s youthful poem On the Fifth of November, does indeed have a double tongue, one for truth and one for lies. Fame or Rumor was a favorite grotesque allegorical figure in classical poets like Ovid (Metamorphoses 12.43 ff.) and Virgil (Aeneid 4.173 ff.).  
6. Perfumes.  
7. Jael lured Sisera, who saw in her the wife of his ally and friend, into a tent, and there drove a large nail into his head (Judges 4.17–21).
At this whoever envies or repines,
I leave him to his lot, and like my own.

chorus. She's gone, a manifest serpent by her sting
  Discovered in the end, till now concealed.

samson. So let her go. God sent her to debase me,
  And aggravate my folly, who committed
  To such a viper his most sacred trust
  Of secrecy, my safety, and my life.

chorus. Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange power,
  After offense returning, to regain
  Love once possessed, nor can be easily
  Repulsed, without much inward passion\(^8\) felt,
  And secret sting of amorous remorse.

samson. Love-quarrels oft in pleasing concord end;
  Not wedlock-treachery, endangering life.

chorus. It is not virtue, wisdom, valor, wit,
  Strength, comeliness of shape, or amplest merit
  That woman’s love can win, or long inherit;\(^9\)
  But what it is, hard is to say,
  Harder to hit,
  Which way soever men refer it
  (Much like thy riddle, Samson),\(^1\) in one day
  Or seven though one should musing sit.
    If any of these, or all, the Timnian bride
  Had not so soon preferred
  Thy paranymph, worthless to thee compared,
  Successor in thy bed,\(^2\)
  Nor both so loosely disallied
  Their nuptials,\(^3\) nor this last so treacherously
  Had shorn the fatal harvest of thy head.
  Is it for that\(^4\) such outward ornament

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8. Suffering.
2. I.e., if any of these (virtue, etc., lines 1010–11) sufficed, Samson’s first wife (“the Timnian bride”) would not have preferred to marry his “paranymph” (best man) (see Judges 14).
3. I.e., nor would both your wives have been so careless about their marriage vows.
4. Because.
Was lavished on their sex, that inward gifts
Were left for haste unfinished, judgment scant,
Capacity not raised to apprehend
Or value what is best
In choice, but oftest to affect\(^5\) the wrong?
Or was too much of self-love mixed,
Of constancy no root infixed,
That either they love nothing, or not long?
Whate’er it be, to wisest men and best,
Seeming at first all heavenly under virgin veil,
Soft, modest, meek, demure,
Once joined, the contrary she proves, a thorn
Intestine,\(^6\) far within defensive arms
A cleaving\(^7\) mischief, in his way to virtue
Adverse and turbulent; or by her charms
draws him awry, enslaved
With dotage, and his sense depraved
To folly and shameful deeds, which ruin ends.
What pilot so expert but needs must wreck,
Embarked with such a steers-mate at the helm?
Favored of Heaven who finds
One virtuous, rarely found,
That in domestic good combines:
Happy that house! his way to peace is smooth:
But virtue which breaks through all opposition,
And all temptation can remove,
Most shines and most is acceptable above.
Therefore God’s universal law
gave to the man despotic power
Over his female in due awe,
Nor from that right to part an hour,
Smile she or lour:
So shall he least confusion draw
On his whole life, not swayed

5. Desire.
6. An inward thorn, a viper in the bosom.
7. Clinging: a traditional emblem of marriage was the elm and the vine.
By female usurpation, nor dismayed.
But had we best retire? I see a storm.
samson. Fair days have oft contracted wind and rain.
chorus. But this another kind of tempest brings.
samson. Be less abstruse; my riddling days are past.
chorus. Look now for no enchanting voice, nor fear
The bait of honeyed words; a rougher tongue
Draws hitherward, I know him by his stride,
The giant Harapha of Gath, his look
Haughty, as is his pile high-built and proud.
Comes he in peace? What wind hath blown him hither
I less conjecture than when first I saw
The sumptuous Dalila floating this way:
His habit carries peace, his brow defiance.
samson. Or peace or not, alike to me he comes.
chorus. His fraught we soon shall know: he now arrives.
harapha. I come not, Samson, to condole thy chance,
  As these perhaps, yet wish it had not been,
  Though for no friendly intent. I am of Gath;
  Men call me Harapha, of stock renowned
  As Og, or Anak, and the Emims old
  That Kiriathaim held. Thou know'st me now,
  If thou at all art known. Much I have heard
Of thy prodigious might and feats performed,
Incredible to me, in this displeased,
That I was never present on the place
Of those encounters, where we might have tried

8. Drawn after them.
9. Harapha does not appear at all within the story told in the Book of Judges; Milton invented him with the help of some hints from the image of Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 and some other giants in 2 Samuel 21. Rapha means “giant” in Hebrew.
1. Body; with the suggestion that he is tall as a tower.
2. That the various visitors of Samson are blown hither and yon by the winds of occasion serves to emphasize the deep steadiness of Samson’s final resolution. “Habit” (next line): garb. (He’s not dressed for fighting.)
3. Freight, i.e., business.
4. The chorus of Danites.
5. Og was a giant king of Bashan in Deuteronomy 3.11; Anak and his sons were giants in Numbers 13.33; the Emims were giants in Deuteronomy 2.10–11 and Genesis 14.5.
6. I.e., you know me now if you know anything; but also, “if you are anyone worth knowing.” Cf. Satan’s brag to Zephon and Ithuriel: “Not to know me argues yourselves unknown” (Paradise Lost 4.830).
Each other’s force in camp or listed field;\(^7\)
And now am come to see of whom such noise
Hath walked about, and each limb to survey,
If thy appearance answer loud report.

SAMSON. The way to know were not to see, but taste.\(^8\)

HARAPHA. Dost thou already single me? I thought
Gyves\(^9\) and the mill had tamed thee. O that fortune
Had brought me to the field where thou art famed
To have wrought such wonders with an ass’s jaw!
I should have forced thee soon wish\(^1\) other arms,
Or left thy carcass where the ass lay thrown;
So had the glory of prowess been recovered
To Palestine, won by a Philistine
From the unforeskinned race, of whom thou bear’st
The highest name for valiant acts. That honor,
Certain to have won by mortal duel from thee,
I lose, prevented by thy eyes put out.

SAMSON. Boast not of what thou would’st have done, but do
What then thou would’st; thou seest it in thy hand.

HARAPHA. To combat with a blind man I disdain,
And thou hast need much washing to be touched.

SAMSON. Such usage as your honorable lords
Afford me, assassinated\(^2\) and betrayed;
Who durst not with their whole united powers
In fight withstand me single and unarmed,
Nor in the house with chamber ambushes\(^3\)
Close-banded durst attack me, no, not sleeping,
Till they had hired a woman with their gold,
Breaking her marriage-faith, to circumvent me.
Therefore, without feigned shifts, let be assigned
Some narrow place enclosed, where sight may give thee,

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7. Lists, tourney ground. “Camp”: field of battle (from Latin campus).
8. Make a trial of.
1. In the 18th century, editors changed “wish” to “with,” easing the grammar at the expense of the sense.
2. Treacherously assailed.
3. Samson refers to the four occasions on which Philistines hid in his bedroom while Dalila tried unsuccessfully to betray him to them.
Or rather flight, no great advantage on me;
Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy helmet
And brigandine of brass, thy broad habergeon,
Vant-brace and greaves and gauntlet; add thy spear,
A weaver’s beam, and seven-times-folded shield:
I only with an oaken staff will meet thee,
And raise such outcries on thy clattered iron,
Which long shall not withhold me from thy head,
That in a little time, while breath remains thee,
Thou oft shalt wish thyself at Gath, to boast
Again in safety what thou wouldst have done
To Samson, but shalt never see Gath more.

hARAPHA. Thou durst not thus disparage glorious arms,
Which greatest heroes have in battle worn,
Their ornament and safety, had not spells
And black enchantments, some magician’s art,
Armed thee or charmed thee strong, which thou from Heaven
Feign’dst at thy birth was given thee in thy hair,
Where strength can least abide, though all thy hairs
Were bristles ranged like those that ridge the back
Of chafed wild boars or ruffled porcupines.

sAMSON. I know no spells, use no forbidden arts;
My trust is in the Living God, who gave me
At my nativity this strength, diffused
No less through all my sinews, joints, and bones,
Than thine, while I preserved these locks unshorn,
The pledge of my unviolated vow.
For proof hereof, if Dagon be thy god,
Go to his temple, invoke his aid
With solemnest devotion, spread before him
How highly it concerns his glory now
To frustrate and dissolve these magic spells,
Which I to be the power of Israel’s God
Avow, and challenge Dagon to the test,

4. “Brigandine”: a padded chest-protector, covered with iron scales or rings. “Habergeon”: a coat of mail, a hauberk. “Vant-brace”: a steel cuff for the forearm. Greaves protect the shins and thighs, and gauntlets the hands. A weaver’s beam, emblem of weightiness, is used to keep threads hanging tautly in a loom. All these military details are from the description of Goliath, 1 Samuel 17.4–7.
Offering to combat thee, his champion bold,
With th’ utmost of his godhead seconded:
Then thou shalt see, or rather to thy sorrow
Soon feel, whose God is strongest, thine or mine.

harapha. Presume not on thy God. Whate’er he be,
Thee he regards not, owns not, hath cut off
Quite from his people, and delivered up
Into thy enemies’ hand; permitted them
To put out both thine eyes, and fettered send thee
Into the common prison, there to grind
Among the slaves and asses, thy comrades,
As good for nothing else, no better service
With those thy boisterous locks; no worthy match
For valor to assail, nor by the sword
Of noble warrior, so to stain his honor,
But by the barber’s razor best subdued.

samson. All these indignities, for such they are
From thine, these evils I deserve and more,
Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon,
Whose ear is ever open, and his eye
Gracious to readmit the suppliant;
In confidence whereof I once again
Defy thee to the trial of mortal fight,
By combat to decide whose god is God,
Thine, or whom I with Israel’s sons adore.

harapha. Fair honor that thou dost thy God, in trusting
He will accept thee to defend his cause,
A murderer, a revolter, and a robber!

samson. Tongue-doughty giant, how dost thou prove me these?
harapha. Is not thy nation subject to our lords?
Their magistrates confessed it when they took thee
As a league-breaker, and delivered bound
Into our hands; for hadst thou not committed

5. Thy people.
Notorious murder on those thirty men\(^6\)
At Ascalon, who never did thee harm,
Then, like a robber, stripp’dst them of their robes?
The Philistines, when thou hadst broke the league,
Went up with armèd powers thee only seeking,
To others did no violence nor spoil.

SAMSON. Among the daughters of the Philistines
I chose a wife, which argued me no foe,
And in your city held my nuptial feast;
But your ill-meaning politician lords,
Under pretense of bridal friends and guests,
Appointed to await me thirty spies,
Who, threatening cruel death, constrained the bride
To wring from me, and tell to them, my secret,
That solved the riddle which I had proposed.
When I perceived all set on enmity,
As on my enemies, wherever chanced,
I used hostility, and took their spoil,
To pay my underminers in their coin.
My nation was subjected to your lords!\(^7\)
It was the force of conquest; force with force
Is well ejected when the conquered can.
But I, a private person, whom my country
As a league-breaker gave up bound, presumed
Single rebellion, and did hostile acts!
I was no private,\(^8\) but a person raised,
With strength sufficient, and command from Heaven,
To free my country. If their servile minds
Me, their deliverer sent, would not receive,
But to their masters gave me up for naught,
Th’ unworthier they; whence to this day they serve.

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6. Judges 14.8–20 and 15.9–15 describe the episode. When he came to Timna to be married, Samson proposed a riddle and a bet to the marriage guests; they got his intended bride to reveal the riddle, and in revenge, he killed thirty of their people and left the lady to the “paranymph,” or best man. Old Testament Samson is indeed a rude and savage figure; Milton, with characteristic confidence, undertakes his legal defense in everything.

7. I.e., you argue that my nation was subjected to your lords.

8. I.e., lawless individual.
I was to do my part from Heaven assigned,  
And had performed it if my known offense  
Had not disabled me, not all your force.  
These shifts refuted, answer thy appellant,\(^9\)  
Though by his blindness maimed for high attempts,  
Who now defies thee thrice to single fight,  
As a petty enterprise of small enforce.\(^1\)

**Harapha.** With thee, a man condemned, a slave enrolled,  
Due by the law to capital punishment?  
To fight with thee no man of arms will deign.

**Samson.** Cam’st thou for this, vain boaster, to survey me,  
To descant on my strength, and give thy verdict?  
Come nearer; part not hence so slight informed;  
But take good heed my hand survey not thee.

**Harapha.** O Baal-zebub!\(^2\) can my ears unused  
Hear these dishonors, and not render death?

**Samson.** No man withholds thee; nothing from thy hand  
Fear I incurable; bring up thy van;\(^3\)  
My heels are fettered, but my fist is free.

**Harapha.** This insolence other kind of answer fits.

**Samson.** Go, baffled coward, lest I run upon thee,  
Though in these chains, bulk without spirit vast,  
And with one buffet lay thy structure low,  
Or swing thee in the air, then dash thee down,  
To the hazard of thy brains and shattered sides.

**Harapha.** By Astaroth,\(^4\) ere long thou shalt lament  
These braveries,\(^5\) in irons loaden on thee.

**Chorus.** His giantship is gone somewhat crestfallen,  
Stalking with less unconscionable\(^6\) strides,  
And lower looks, but in a sultry chafe.

**Samson.** I dread him not, nor all his giant brood,

---

9. I.e., now that we’ve disposed of these dodges, answer your challenger. “Apellant”: literally, caller, one who calls you out.
1. Difficulty.
2. Baal-zebub is Beëlzebub, god of the flies.
3. The vanguard of an army was, naturally, the first group engaged. Samson invites Harapha to start the fight.
4. Moon goddess of the Philistines, consort of Dagon (see Paradise Lost 1.437–446).
5. Boasts.
Though fame divulge him father of five sons,
All of gigantic size, Goliath chief.  

chorus. He will directly to the lords, I fear,
And with malicious counsel stir them up
Some way or other yet further to afflict thee.

samson. He must allege some cause, and offered fight
Will not dare mention, lest a question rise
Whether he durst accept the offer or not;
And that he durst not plain enough appeared.
Much more affliction than already felt
They cannot well impose, nor I sustain,
If they intend advantage of my labors,
The work of many hands, which earns my keeping,
With no small profit daily to my owners.
But come what will; my deadliest foe will prove
My speediest friend, by death to rid me hence;
The worst that he can give, to me the best.
Yet so it may fall out, because their end
Is hate, not help to me, it may with mine
Draw their own ruin who attempt the deed.

chorus. O how comely it is, and how reviving
To the spirits of just men long oppressed,
When God into the hands of their deliverer
Puts invincible might
To quell the mighty of the earth, th’ oppressor,
The brute and boisterous force of violent men,
Hardy and industrious to support
Tyrannic power, but raging to pursue
The righteous, and all such as honor truth!
He all their ammunition
And feats of war defeats,  
With plain heroic magnitude of mind
And celestial vigor armed;
Their armories and magazines contemns,

7. 2 Samuel 21 describes four giants “born to the giant in Gath” and brothers of Goliath, slain by David's men; Milton makes the identification with Harapha on his own.
8. A touch of the pervasive Miltonic punning.
9. Storerooms, hence the contents, military stores.
Renders them useless, while
With wingèd expedition\(^1\)
Swift as the lightning glance he executes
His errand on the wicked, who, surprised,
Lose their defense, distracted and amazed.

But patience is more oft the exercise
Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
Making them each his own deliverer,
And victor over all
That tyranny or fortune can inflict.
Either of these is in thy lot,\(^2\)
Samson, with might endued
Above the sons of men; but sight bereaved
May chance to number thee with those
Whom patience finally must crown.\(^3\)

This idol's day hath been to thee no day of rest,
Laboring thy mind
More than the working day thy hands.
And yet, perhaps, more trouble is behind;
For I descry this way
Some other tending; in his hand
A scepter or quaint\(^4\) staff he bears,
Comes on amain, speed in his look.
By his habit I discern him now
A public officer, and now at hand.
His message will be short and voluble.\(^5\)

**OFFICER.** Hebrews, the prisoner Samson here I seek.

**CHORUS.** His manacles remark\(^6\) him; there he sits.

**OFFICER.** Samson, to thee our lords thus bid me say:
This day to Dagon is a solemn feast,
With sacrifices, triumph, pomp, and games;

---

1. Haste.
2. Fate.
3. The Christian tragedy, like the Christian epic, must center ultimately on an act of passive, not active, fortitude. It is the special achievement of Samson to combine in a single dramatic action both qualities.
4. Ornamented.
5. To the point.
6. Distinguish.
Thy strength they know surpassing human rate,  
And now some public proof thereof require  
To honor this great feast, and great assembly.  
Rise, therefore, with all speed, and come along,  
Where I will see thee heartened and fresh clad,  
To appear as fits before th’ illustrious lords.

**samson.** Thou know’st I am an Hebrew; therefore tell them  
Our Law forbids at their religious rites  
My presence; for that cause I cannot come.

**officer.** This answer, be assured, will not content them.

**samson.** Have they not sword-players, and every sort  
Of gymnic artists, wrestlers, riders, runners,  
Jugglers and dancers, antics, mummers,\(^7\) mimics,  
But they must pick me out, with shackles tired,  
And over-labored at their public mill,  
To make them sport with blind activity?  
Do they not seek occasion of new quarrels,  
On my refusal, to distress me more,  
Or make a game of my calamities?  
Return the way thou cam’st; I will not come.

**officer.** Regard thyself; this will offend them highly.

**samson.** Myself? my conscience, and internal peace.  
Can they think me so broken, so debased  
With corporal servitude, that my mind ever  
Will condescend to such absurd commands?  
Although their drudge, to be their fool or jester,  
And in my midst of sorrow and heart-grief  
To show them feats, and play before their god,  
The worst of all indignities, yet on me  
Joined\(^8\) with supreme contempt! I will not come.

**officer.** My message was imposed on me with speed,  
Brooks no delay: is this thy resolution?

**samson.** So take it with what speed thy message needs.

**officer.** I am sorry what this stoutness\(^9\) will produce.

---

8. Enjoined, ordered.  
Samson. Perhaps thou shalt have cause to sorrow indeed.

Chorus. Consider, Samson; matters now are strained

Up to the height, whether to hold or break.

He’s gone, and who knows how he may report

Thy words by adding fuel to the flame?

Expect another message, more imperious,

More lordly thundering than thou well wilt bear.

Samson. Shall I abuse this consecrated gift

Of strength, again returning with my hair

After my great transgression, so requite

Favor renewed, and add a greater sin

By prostituting holy things to idols,

A Nazarite in place abominable

Vaunting my strength in honor to their Dagon?

Besides how vile, contemptible, ridiculous,

What act more execrably unclean, profane?

Chorus. Yet with this strength thou serv’st the Philistines,

Idolatrous, uncircumcised, unclean.

Samson. Not in their idol-worship, but by labor

Honest and lawful to deserve my food

Of those who have me in their civil power.

Chorus. Where the heart joins not, outward acts defile not.

Samson. Where outward force constrains, the sentence holds:

But who constrains me to the temple of Dagon,

Not dragging? The Philistian lords command:

Commands are no constraints. If I obey them,

I do it freely, venturing to displease

God for the fear of man, and man prefer,

Set God behind; which, in his jealousy,

Shall never, unrepented, find forgiveness.

Yet that he may dispense with me, or thee,

Present in temples at idolatrous rites

For some important cause, thou need’st not doubt.

Chorus. How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach.

1. Taboo.
2. I.e., where outward force constrains, your maxim is right.
3. God will make a special dispensation for Samson to attend idolatrous ceremonies “for some important cause,” which Samson cannot yet define but which he intuits.
samon. Be of good courage; I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.
I with this messenger will go along—
Nothing to do, be sure, that may dishonor
Our Law or stain my vow of Nazarite.
If there be aught of presage in the mind,
This day will be remarkable in my life
By some great act, or of my days the last.¹
chorus. In time thou hast resolved: the man returns.
officer. Samson, this second message from our lords
To thee I am bid say: Art thou our slave,
Our captive, at the public mill our drudge,
And dar’st thou, at our sending and command,
Dispute thy coming? Come without delay;
Or we shall find such engines to assail
And hamper thee, as thou shalt come of force,
Though thou wert firmlier fastened than a rock.
samon. I could be well content to try their art,
Which to no few of them would prove pernicious;
Yet, knowing their advantages too many,
Because⁵ they shall not trail me through their streets
Like a wild beast, I am content to go.
Masters’ commands come with a power resistless
To such as owe them absolute subjection;
And for a life who will not change his purpose?
(So mutable are all the ways of men!)
Yet this be sure, in nothing to comply
Scandalous or forbidden in our Law.
officer. I praise thy resolution. Doff these links:⁶
By this compliance thou wilt win the lords
To favor, and perhaps to set thee free.
samon. Brethren, farewell. Your company along
I will not wish, lest it perhaps offend them

¹. By a classic device of dramatic irony, Samson proposes as alternatives two events that will both simultaneously come true. “Presage”: premonition, presight.
⁵. So that.
⁶. Take off these chains. “Resolution”: decision.
To see me girt with friends; and how the sight
Of me, as of a common enemy,
So dreaded once, may now exasperate them
I know not. Lords are lordliest in their wine;
And the well-feasted priest then soonest fired
With zeal, if aught religion seem concerned;7
No less the people, on their holy-days,
Impetuous, insolent, unquenchable.
Happen what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonorable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our Law, my nation, or myself;
The last of me or no I cannot warrant.

chorus. Go, and the Holy One
Of Israel be thy guide
To what may serve his glory best, and spread his name
Great among the heathen round;
Send thee the angel of thy birth, to stand
Fast by thy side, who from thy father’s field
Rode up in flames after his message told
Of thy conception, and be now a shield
Of fire; that Spirit that first rushed on thee
In the camp of Dan,
Be efficacious in thee now at need!8
For never was from Heaven imparted
Measure of strength so great to mortal seed
As in thy wondrous actions hath been seen.
But wherefore comes old Manoa in such haste
With youthful steps? Much livelier than erewhile
He seems: supposing here to find his son,
Or of him bringing to us some glad news?

MANOA. Peace with you, brethren! My inducement hither
Was not at present here to find my son,
By order of the lords new parted hence
To come and play before them at their feast.

7. Milton’s animus against paid priests, whom he considered particularly likely to contaminate the Word of God with their own private interests and worldly desires, comes out plainly here.
8. As a Nazarite (specially consecrated person), Samson had been frequently inspired by the “Spirit of the Lord.”
I heard all as I came; the city rings,
And numbers thither flock: I had no will,
Lest I should see him forced to things unseemly.
But that which moved my coming now was chiefly
To give ye part with me⁹ what hope I have
With good success to work his liberty.

chorus. That hope would much rejoice us to partake
With thee. Say, reverend sire; we thirst to hear.

MANOA. I have attempted, one by one, the lords,
Either at home, or through the high street passing,
With supplication prone and father's tears,
To accept of ransom for my son, their prisoner.
Some much averse I found, and wondrous harsh,
Contemptuous, proud, set on revenge and spite;
That part most reverenced Dagon and his priests:
Others more moderate seeming, but their aim
Private reward, for which both God and State
They easily would set to sale: a third
More generous far and civil, who confessed
They had enough revenged, having reduced
Their foe to misery beneath their fears;
The rest was magnanimity to remit,
If some convenient ransom were proposed.¹

What noise or shout was that? It tore the sky.

chorus. Doubtless the people shouting to behold
Their once great dread, captive and blind before them,
Or at some proof of strength before them shown.

MANOA. His ransom, if my whole inheritance
May compass it, shall willingly be paid
And numbered down. Much rather I shall choose
To live the poorest in my tribe, than richest
And he in that calamitous prison left.
No, I am fixed not to part hence without him.
For his redemption all my patrimony,

⁹. I.e., to impart to you.
¹. The three parties are in effect bigots, swindlers, and gentlemen—types common enough in Restoration England, with whom Milton and the defeated Puritans had frequently to deal.
If need be, I am ready to forgo
And quit. Not wanting him, I shall want nothing.

CHORUS. Fathers are wont to lay up for their sons:
Thou for thy son art bent to lay out all;
Sons wont to nurse their parents in old age:
Thou in old age car’st how to nurse thy son,
Made older than thy age through eyesight lost.

MANOA. It shall be my delight to tend his eyes,
And view him sitting in the house, ennobled
With all those high exploits by him achieved,
And on his shoulders waving down those locks
That of a nation armed the strength contained.
And I persuade me God hath not permitted
His strength again to grow up with his hair
Garrisoned round about him like a camp
Of faithful soldiery, were not his purpose
To use him further yet in some great service—
Not to sit idle with so great a gift
Useless, and thence ridiculous, about him.²
And since his strength with eyesight was not lost,
God will restore him eyesight to³ his strength.

CHORUS. Thy hopes are not ill-founded, nor seem vain,
Of his delivery, and thy joy thereon
Conceived, agreeable to a father’s love;
In both which we, as next,⁴ participate.

MANOA. I know your friendly minds, and—O what noise!
Mercy of Heaven! what hideous noise was that?
Horribly loud, unlike the former shout.

CHORUS. Noise call you it, or universal groan,
As if the whole inhabitation perished?
Blood, death, and deathful deeds are in that noise,
Ruin,⁵ destruction at the utmost point.

MANOA. Of ruin indeed methought I heard the noise.

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2. Much of the play deals with the concept of relevance and irrelevance; outward weapons and outward strength are often beside the point (“ridiculous”) in the face of inward and spiritual powers.
3. In proportion to.
4. As kinsmen.
5. From Latin ruina, downfall.
Oh! it continues; they have slain my son.
chorus. Thy son is rather slaying them; that outcry
From slaughter of one foe could not ascend.
MANOAH. Some dismal accident it needs must be.
    What shall we do, stay here, or run and see?
chorus. Best keep together here, lest running thither
    We unawares run into danger’s mouth.
This evil on the Philistines is fallen:
From whom could else a general cry be heard?
The sufferers then will scarce molest us here;
From other hands we need not much to fear.
What if, his eyesight (for to Israel’s God
Nothing is hard) by miracle restored,
He now be dealing dole⁶ among his foes,
And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way?
MANOAH. That were a joy presumptuous to be thought.
chorus. Yet God hath wrought things as incredible
    For his people of old; what hinders now?
MANOAH. He can, I know, but doubt to think he will;
    Yet hope would fain subscribe, and tempts belief.
A little stay will bring some notice hither.
chorus. Of good or bad so great, of bad the sooner;
    For evil news rides post, while good news baits.⁷
And to our wish I see one hither speeding—
An Hebrew, as I guess, and of our tribe.
MESSANGER.⁸ O whither shall I run, or which way fly
    The sight of this so horrid spectacle,
    Which erst⁹ my eyes beheld, and yet behold?
For dire imagination still pursues me.
But providence or instinct of nature seems,
Or reason, though disturbed, and scarce consulted,
    To have guided me aright, I know not how,

⁶. Grief, pain, with perhaps a pun on “dole,” that which is handed out.
⁷. Pauses to renew (“bait”) the horses.
⁸. Greek tragedy forbade the representation on stage of actual bloodshed; a messenger is, therefore, a frequent figure at the end of these plays, arriving posthaste from the scene of the final catastrophe, to deliver in a long set speech a descriptive report.
⁹. A moment ago.
To thee first, reverend Manoa, and to these
My countrymen, whom here I knew remaining,
As at some distance from the place of horror,
So\(^1\) in the sad event too much concerned.

Manoa. The accident was loud, and here before thee
With rueful cry; yet what it was we hear not.
No preface needs; thou seest we long to know.

Messenger. It would burst forth; but I recover breath,
And sense distract, to know well what I utter.

Manoa. Tell us the sum; the circumstance defer.

Messenger. Gaza yet stands; but all her sons are fallen,
All in a moment overwhelmed and fallen.

Manoa. Sad, but thou know’st to Israelites not saddest,
The desolation of a hostile city.

Messenger. Feed on that first; there may in grief be surfeit.\(^2\)

Manoa. Relate by whom.

Messenger. By Samson.

Manoa. That still lessens
The sorrow, and converts it nigh to joy.

Messenger. Ah! Manoa, I refrain too suddenly
To utter what will come at last too soon,
Lest evil tidings, with too rude irruption
Hitting thy aged ear, should pierce too deep.

Manoa. Suspense in news is torture; speak them out.

Messenger. Then take the worst in brief: Samson is dead.

Manoa. The worst indeed! O all my hope’s defeated
To free him hence! but Death who sets all free
Hath paid his ransom now and full discharge.
What windy\(^3\) joy this day had I conceived,
Hopeful of his delivery, which now proves
Abortive as the first-born bloom of spring
Nipped with the lagging rear of winter’s frost!
Yet ere I give the reins to grief, say first
How died he; death to life is crown or shame.

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1. The construction “as . . . so . . .” is equivalent to “though . . . yet . . .”
2. I.e., there may be all too much grief to follow.
3. Empty and talky.
All by him fell, thou say’st; by whom fell he?
What glorious hand gave Samson his death’s wound?

MESSENGER. Unwounded of his enemies he fell.

MANOAH. Wearied with slaughter, then, or how? Explain.

MESSENGER. By his own hands.

MANOAH. Self-violence! What cause
Brought him so soon at variance with himself
Among his foes?

MESSENGER. Inevitable cause
At once both to destroy and be destroyed.
The edifice, where all were met to see him,
Upon their heads and on his own he pulled.

MANOAH. O lastly over-strong against thyself!
A dreadful way thou took’st to thy revenge.
More than enough we know; but while things yet
Are in confusion, give us, if thou canst,
Eyewitness of what first or last was done,
Relation more particular and distinct.

MESSENGER. Occasions drew me early to this city;
And as the gates I entered with sunrise,
The morning trumpets festival proclaimed
Through each high street. Little I had dispatched,
When all abroad was rumored that this day
Samson should be brought forth, to show the people
Proof of his mighty strength in feats and games.
I sorrowed at his captive state, but minded
Not to be absent at that spectacle.
The building was a spacious theater,
Half round on two main pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the lords, and each degree
Of sort,⁴ might sit in order to behold;
The other side was open, where the throng
On banks and scaffolds under sky might stand:⁵
I among these aloof obscurely stood.

⁴. Of rank.
⁵. The temple at Gaza comprised a covered pavilion or shell for the gentry, semicircular in shape and supported at the center of the semicircle by two pillars; on the open side, under the hot sun, and behind the stage, as it were, stood the common people.
The feast and noon grew high, and sacrifice  
Had filled their hearts with mirth, high cheer, and wine,  
When to their sports they turned. Immediately  
Was Samson as a public servant brought,  
In their state livery clad: before him pipes  
And timbrels; on each side went armed guards;  
Both horse and foot before him and behind,  
Archers and slingers, cataphracts and spears.  
At sight of him the people with a shout  
Rifted the air, clamoring their god with praise,  
Who had made their dreadful enemy their thrall.  
He, patient but undaunted, where they led him,  
Came to the place; and what was set before him,  
Which without help of eye might be essayed,  
To heave, pull, draw, or break, he still performed  
All with incredible, stupendous force,  
None daring to appear antagonist.  
At length for intermission sake they led him  
Between the pillars; he his guide requested  
(For so from such as nearer stood we heard),  
As over-tired, to let him lean a while  
With both his arms on those two massy pillars,  
That to the archèd roof gave main support.  
He unsuspicious led him; which when Samson  
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,  
And eyes fast fixed he stood, as one who prayed,  
Or some great matter in his mind revolved:  
At last, with head erect, thus cried aloud:  
“Hitherto, Lords, what your commands imposed  
I have performed, as reason was, obeying,  
Not without wonder or delight beheld;  
Now of my own accord such other trial  
I mean to show you of my strength yet greater  
As with amaze shall strike all who behold.”  
This uttered, straining all his nerves, he bowed;

6. Tambourines.  
7. Armored horsemen on armored horses.  
8. Muscles.
As with the force of winds and waters pent
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro
He tugged, he shook, till down they came, and drew
The whole roof after them with burst of thunder
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,
Lords, ladies, captains, counselors, or priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this, but each Philistian city round,
Met from all parts to solemnize this feast.
Samson, with these immixed, inevitably
Pulled down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only 'scape, who stood without.

chorus. O dearly bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfilled
The work for which thou wast foretold
To Israel, and now li’st victorious
Among thy slain self-killed;
Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
Of dire Necessity, whose law in death conjoined
Thee with thy slaughtered foes, in number more
Than all thy life had slain before.

semichorus. While their hearts were jocund and sublime,
Drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine
And fat regorged of bulls and goats,
Chaunting their idol, and preferring
Before our living Dread, who dwells
In Silo, his bright sanctuary;
Among them he a spirit of frenzy sent,
Who hurt their minds,
And urged them on with mad desire

9. Earthquakes in Milton’s day were supposed to be the effect of escaping winds and waters imprisoned (“pent”) beneath the earth.
1. The common people.
2. Samson must not be supposed guilty of suicide (see lines 1586–87).
3. In classical theater a chorus was commonly split in two parts, their speeches to be recited alternately.
5. Shiloh, where the Israelites established their tabernacle (Joshua 18.1).
To call in haste for their destroyer.
They, only set on sport and play,
Unweetingly\(^6\) importuned
Their own destruction to come speedy upon them.
So fond are mortal men,
Fallen into wrath divine,
As their own ruin on themselves to invite,
Insensate left, or to sense reprobate,
And with blindness internal\(^7\) struck.

SEMICHORUS. But he, though blind of sight,
Despised, and thought extinguished quite,
With inward eyes illuminated,
His fiery virtue roused
From under ashes into sudden flame,
And as an evening dragon\(^8\) came,
Assailant on the perchèd roosts
And nests in order ranged
Of tame villatic\(^9\) fowl, but as an eagle
His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.
So Virtue, given for lost,\(^1\)
Depressed and overthrown, as seemed,
Like that self-begotten bird,\(^2\)
In the Arabian woods embossed,\(^3\)
That no second knows nor third,
And lay erewhile a holocaust,\(^4\)
From out her ashy womb now teemed,
Revives, reflowerishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deemed;
And, though her body die, her fame survives,

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6. Unwittingly.
7. The play accomplishes itself by showing the internal blindness of the Philistines at the very moment of Samson’s spiritual illumination.
8. Serpent (from Latin *draco*).
9. Farmyard (from Latin *villaticus*).
1. Given up for lost. “Bolted”: cast as a thunderbolt.
2. The mythical phoenix begets itself out of its own ashes; it is unique, in that there is only one phoenix alive at any one time, and it lives in the scrubland of Arabia.
3. Enclosed, hidden.
4. A sacrifice burned whole on the altar.
A secular⁵ bird, ages of lives.

manoa. Come, come; no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit⁶ himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished
A life heroic, on his enemies
Fully revenged; hath left them years of mourning
And lamentation to the sons of Caphtor⁷
Through all Philistian bounds; to Israel
Honor hath left and freedom, let but them
Find courage to lay hold on this occasion;
To himself and father’s house eternal fame;
And, which is best and happiest yet, all this
With God not parted from him, as was feared,
But favoring and assisting to the end.
Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.
Let us go find the body where it lies
Soaked in his enemies’ blood, and from the stream
With lavers⁸ pure and cleansing herbs wash off
The clotted gore. I, with what speed the while⁹
(Gaza is not in plight to say us nay),
Will send for all my kindred, all my friends,
To fetch him hence and solemnly attend,
With silent obsequy and funeral train,
Home to his father’s house. There will I build him
A monument, and plant it round with shade
Of laurel ever green and branching palm,¹
With all his trophies hung, and acts enrolled
In copious legend, or sweet lyric song.

⁵. Living through the centuries (Latin saecula).
⁶. Acquitted.
⁷. In Amos 9.7 the Philistines are described as immigrants from Caphtor (perhaps Crete).
⁸. Basins.
⁹. I.e., with what speed (I may) in the meanwhile.
¹. Leaves of laurel were worn by civic conquerors on triumphal occasions; wreaths of palm were given to victors in the Olympic games. Samson, as both an athletic victor in his agon and the savior of his people, gets both.
Samson Agonistes

Thither shall all the valiant youth resort,
And from his memory inflame their breasts
To matchless valor and adventures high;
The virgins also shall, on feastful days,
Visit his tomb with flowers, only bewailing
His lot unfortunate in nuptial choice,
From whence captivity and loss of eyes.

chorus. All is best, though we oft doubt
What th’ unsearchable dispose
Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns,
And to his faithful champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns,
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable intent.
His servants he, with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event,
With peace and consolation hath dismissed,
And calm of mind, all passion spent.

2. The final chorus of the play is cast in the rhyme pattern of a sonnet.
3. Appointment, disposition.
4. On this very spot, at this very instant.
5. Increase, acquisition.