

Samson Agonistes

Adaptation by Nic Helms

Based on *Samson Agonistes* by John Milton as it appears in
Dartmouth's *John Milton Reading Room*.

Cast on 10/13/2017

SAMSON.....Mark Hughes Cobb
MANOA.....Steve Burch
DALILA.....Stephanie Shamblin
HARAPHA.....Mark Hulse
PUBLIC OFFICER.....Joe Welty
CHORUS 1.....Emily D'Amico
CHORUS 2.....Jacob Crawford
CHORUS 3.....Deborah Parker

DRAMATURG.....David Ainsworth

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Samson Agonistes

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

Sams.

A little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps, a little further on;
here I am wont to sit, when any chance
Relieves me from my task of servile toil,
Daily in the common Prison else enjoined me,
Where I a Prisoner chained, scarce freely draw
The air imprisoned also, close and damp,
but here I feel amends,
The breath of Heav'n fresh-blowing, pure and sweet.
This day a solemn Feast the people hold
To Dagon their Sea-Idol, and forbid
Laborious works; hence with leave
Retiring from the popular noise, I seek
Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
Of Hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what am now.
O wherefore was my birth from Heaven foretold,
Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
As of a person separate to God,

Designed for great exploits; if I must dye
Betrayed, Captived, and both my Eyes put out,
Made of my Enemies the scorn and gaze;
To grind in Brazen Fetters under task
With this Heav'n-gifted strength? O glorious strength
Put to the labor of a Beast, debased
Lower then bondslave! Promise was that I
Should *Israel* from *Philistine* yoke deliver;
Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in *Gaza* at the Mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under *Philistine* 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?
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
Blind among enemies, O worse then chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
Light the prime work of God to me is extinct,
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
And silent as the Moon,
When she deserts the night
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.
To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried; but O yet more miserable!
Myself, my Sepulcher, a moving Grave,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes.
But who are these?

Chor 1. O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused,
With languished head unpropped,

As one past hope, abandoned,
And by himself given over.

Chor 2. In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds
O're worn and soiled;
Or do my eyes misrepresent?

Chor 3. 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.

Chor 1. Which shall I first bewail,
Thy Bondage or lost Sight,
Prison within Prison
Inseparably dark?

Chor 2. Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
The Dungeon of thy self; thy Soul
Imprisoned now indeed,
In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward light
To incorporate with gloomy night;
The rarer thy example stands.

Chor 3. By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
Strongest of mortal men,
To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fallen.

Chor 1. For him I reckon not in high estate
Whom long descent of birth
Or the sphere of fortune raises;

But thee whose strength, while virtue was her mate
Might have subdued the Earth,
Universally crowned with highest praises.

Sam. I hear the sound of words, their sense the air
Dissolves unjointed e're it reach my ear.

Chor 2. He speaks, let us draw nigh. Matchless in might,
The glory late of *Israel*, now the grief;
We come thy friends and neighbors not unknown
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.

Sam. Your coming, Friends, revives me, Yee 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 proverb'd 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.

Chor 3. Wisest Men.
Have erred, and by bad Women been deceived;
And shall again, pretend they ne're so wise.

Chor 1. Yet truth to say, I oft have heard men wonder

Why thou shouldst wed *Philistine* women rather
Than of thine own Tribe fairer, or as fair,
At least of thy own Nation, and as noble.

Sam. The first I saw at *Timna*, and she pleased
Me, not my Parents, that I sought to wed,
The daughter of an Infidel: they knew not
That what I motioned was of God; I knew
From intimate impulse, and therefore urged
The Marriage on; that by occasion hence
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*, *Dalila*,
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.

Chor 2. But see here comes thy reverend Sire
With careful step, Locks white as dun,
Old *Manoa*: advise
Forthwith how thou oughtst to receive him.

Sam. Ay me, another inward grief awaked,
With mention of that name renews the assault.

Man.
My Son now Captive! 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 spears 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 Scorpions tail behind?

Sam. Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father,
Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me
But justly; I myself have brought them on,
Sole Author I, sole cause: 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.
Thrice she assayed with flattering prayers and sighs,
And amorous reproaches to win from me
My capital secret, 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
Then undissembled hate) with what contempt
She sought to make me Traitor to myself;
Yet the fourth time, when mustering all her wiles,
With blandished parleys, feminine assaults,

Tongue-batteries, she surceased not day nor night
To storm me overwatched, 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 held me yoked
Her Bond-slave; O indignity, O blot
To Honor and Religion! servile mind
Rewarded well with servile punishment!

Man. I cannot praise thy Marriage choices, Son,
Rather approved them not; Bitterly hast thou paid, and still art paying
That rigid score. A worse thing yet remains,
This day the *Philistines* a popular Feast
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,
Disglorified, 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.

Sam. Father, I do acknowledge and confess
This 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.

Man. But for thee what shall be done?
Thou must not in the mean while here forgot
Lie in this miserable loathsome plight
Neglected. I already have made way
To some *Philistine* Lords, with whom to treat
About thy ransom: well they may by this
Have satisfied their utmost of revenge
By pains and slaveries, worse then death inflicted
On thee, who now no more canst do them harm.

Sam. 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. I Gods counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuously have published, impiously,
Weakly at least, and shamefully.

Man. 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;
Perhaps God will relent, and quit thee all his debt.

Sam. 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 Heav'n foretold and high exploits,
Full of divine instinct, after some proof
Of acts indeed heroic, Fearless of danger, like a petty God
I walked about admired of all and dreaded
On hostile ground, none daring my affront.
Then swollen with pride into the snare I fell

Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains,
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 ram, all my precious fleece,
Then turned me out ridiculous, despoiled,
Shaven, and disarmed among my enemies.

Man. 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 out-worn.
But God who caused a fountain at thy prayer
From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
After the brunt of battel, can as easy
Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
Wherewith 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.

Sam. 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:
My race of glory run, and race of shame,
And I shall shortly be with them that rest.

Man. Believe not these suggestions which proceed
From anguish of the mind and humors black.

Sam. O that torment should not be confined
To the bodies wounds and sores
With maladies innumerable
In heart, head, breast, and reins;

But must secret passage find
To th' inmost mind.
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless;
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
No long petition, speedy death,
The close of all my miseries, and the balm.

Chor 3. God of our Fathers, what is man!
That thou towards him with hand so various,
Or might I say contrarious,
Tempers thy providence through his short course,
Not evenly, as thou rul'st
The Angelic orders and inferior creatures mute,
Irrational and brute.
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 peoples safety, which in part they effect:
Yet toward these thus dignified, thou oft
Amidst their heighth 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.

Chor 1. Nor only dost degrade them, 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 captive

Chor 2. Or to the unjust tribunals, under change of times,

And condemnation of the ingrateful multitude.

Chor 3. If these they scape, perhaps in poverty
With sickness and disease thou bow'st them down,
Painful diseases and deformed,
In crude old age.

Chor 1. Just or unjust, alike seem miserable,
For oft alike, both come to evil end.

Chor 2. 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.

Chor 3. But who is this, what thing of Sea or Land?

Chor 1. 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
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails filled, and streamers waving,
Courtied by all the winds that hold them play.

Chor 2. Some rich *Philistine* Matron she may seem,
And now at nearer view, no other certain
Then *Dalila* thy wife.

Sam. My Wife, my Traitoress, let her not come near me.

Chor 3. Yet on she moves, now stands & eyes thee fixed,
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.

Dal. With doubtful feet and wavering resolution
I came, still dreading thy displeasure, *Samson*.
My penance hath not slackened, though my pardon
No way assured.
If aught in my ability may serve
To lighten what thou sufferest, 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.

Sam. Out, out Hyena; these are thy wonted arts,
And arts of every woman false like thee,
To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray,
Then as repentant to submit, beseech,
And reconciliation 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.

Dal. Yet hear me *Samson*; 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 shewdst me first the way.
But I to enemies revealed, and should not.
Nor shouldst thou have trusted that to woman's frailty
E're I to thee, thou to thy self wast cruel.
Let weakness then with weakness come to parl
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, then in thy self was found.
And what if Love, which thou interpretest 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 wouldst leave me
As her at *Timna*, sought by all means therefore
How to endear, and hold thee to me firmest:
No better way I saw then by importuning
To learn thy secrets, get into my power
Thy key of strength and safety: thou wilt say,
Why 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 sate full of cares and fears
Wailing thy absence in my widowed bed;
Here I should still enjoy thee day and night
Mine and Loves prisoner, not the *Philistines*,
Whole to myself, unhazarded abroad,
Fearless at home of partners in my love.
These reasons in Loves law have past for good,
Though fond and reasonless to some perhaps;
And Love hath oft, well meaning, wrought much wo,
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.

Sam. How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, to upbraid me mine?
weakness is thy excuse,
And I believe it, weakness to resist

Philistine 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 couldst thou hope, who took the way
To raise in me inexpiable hate,
Knowing, as needs I must, by thee betrayed?
In vain thou striv'st to cover shame with shame,
Or by evasions thy crime uncoverst more.

Dal. Hear what assaults I had, what snares besides,
What sieges girt me round, e're I consented;
It was not gold, as to my charge thou lay'st,
That wrought with me: 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
With hard contest: at length that grounded maxim
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.

Sam. I thought where all thy circling wiles would end;
In feigned Religion, smooth hypocrisy.
But had thy love, still odiously pretended,
Bin, 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 over-powered
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 then 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
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?

Dal. In argument with men a woman ever
Goes by the worse, whatever be her cause.

Sam. For want of words no doubt, or lack of breath,
Witness when I was worried with thy peals.

Dal. 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 shew what recompense
Towards thee I intend for what I have misdome,
Misguided: only what remains past cure
Bear not too sensibly, nor still insist
To afflict thy self 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
Eye-sight 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.

Sam. No, no, of my condition take no care;
It fits not; thou and I long since are twain;
Nor think me so unwary or accurst
To bring my feet again into the snare
Where once I have been caught; I know thy trains
Though dearly to my cost, thy traps, and toils;
Thy fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms
No more on me have power, their force is nulled,
So much of Adders 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 wouldst thou use me now, blind, and thereby
Deceivable, in most things as a child
Helpless, thence easily contemned, and scorned,
And last neglected? How wouldst thou insult
When I must live uxorious to thy will
In perfect thralldom, 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.

Dal. Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand.

Sam. 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.

Dal. I see thou art implacable, more deaf
To prayers, then winds and seas, yet winds to seas
Are reconciled at length, and Sea to Shore:
Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,
Eternal tempest never to be calmed.
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 *Ecron*, *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.

Chor 1. She's gone, a manifest Serpent by her sting
Discovered in the end, till now concealed.

Sam. 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.

Chor 2. Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange power,
After offence returning, to regain
Love once possessed, nor can be easily
Repulsed, without much inward passion felt
And secret sting of amorous remorse.

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

Chor 3. Favored of Heav'n who finds
One virtuous rarely found,
That in domestic good combines:
Happy that house! his way to peace is smooth.

Chor 1. But virtue which breaks through all opposition,
And all temptation can remove,
Most shines and most is acceptable above.

Chor 2. Therefore Gods 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 lower.

Chor 3. So shall he least confusion draw
On his whole life, not swayed
By female usurpation, nor dismayed.

Chor 1. But had we best retire, I see a storm?

Sam. Fair days have oft contracted wind and rain.

Chor 2. But this another kind of tempest brings.

Sam. Be less abstruse, my riddling days are past.

Chor 3. 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.

Chor 1. 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.

Sam. Or peace or not, alike to me he comes.

Chor 2. His fraught we soon shall know, he now arrives.

Har. 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 knowst 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
Each other's force in camp or listed field:
And now am come to see of whom such noise
Hath walked about, and each limb to survey,
If thy appearance answer loud report.

Sam. The way to know were not to see but taste.

Har. Dost thou already single me; I thought
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 Asses Jaw;
I should have forced thee soon with 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 unforeskinn'd race, of whom thou bearest
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.

Sam. Boast not of what thou wouldst have done, but do
What then thou would'st, thou seest it in thy hand.

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

Sam. Such usage as your honorable Lords
Afford me assassinated and betrayed,
Who durst not with thir whole united powers
In fight withstand me single and unarm'd,
Nor in the house with chamber Ambushes
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,

Or rather flight, no great advantage on me;
Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy Helmet
And Brigandine of brass, thy broad Habergeon,
Vambrace and Greaves, and Gauntlet, add thy Spear
A Weavers beam, and seven-times-folded shield,
I only with an Oaken staff will meet thee,
And raise such out-cries on thy clattered Iron,
Which long shall not with-hold me from thy head,
That in a little time while breath remains thee,
Thou oft shalt wish thy self at *Gath* to boast
Again in safety what thou wouldst have done
To *Samson*, but shalt never see *Gath* more.

Har. Thou durst not thus disparage glorious arms
Which greatest Heroes have in battel worn,
Their ornament and safety, had not spells
And black enchantments, some Magicians Art
Armed thee or charmed thee strong, which thou from Heaven
Feigndst 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.

Sam. 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,
Then 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,
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.

Har. Presume not on thy God, what e're 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 Barbers razor best subdued.

Sam. 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 re-admit 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.

Har. 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.

Sam. 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.

Har. O *Baal-zebub!* can my ears unused
Hear these dishonors, and not render death?

Sam. No man with-holds thee, nothing from thy hand
Fear I incurable; bring up thy van,
My heels are fettered, but my fist is free.

Har. This insolence other kind of answer fits.

Sams. 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.

Har. By *Astaroth* e're long thou shalt lament
These braveries in Irons loaden on thee.

Chor 3. His Giantship is gone somewhat crest-fallen,
Stalking with less unconscionable strides,
And lower looks, but in a sultry chafe.

Sam. I dread him not, nor all his Giant-brood,
Though Fame divulge him Father of five Sons
All of Gigantic size, *Goliath* chief.

Chor 1. He will directly to the Lords, I fear,
And with malicious counsel stir them up
Some way or other yet further to afflict thee.

Sam. 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.

Chor 2. Oh how comely it is and how reviving
To the Spirits of just men long oppressed!

Chor 3. 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,
Renders them useless, while
With winged expedition
Swift as the lightning glance he executes
His errand on the wicked, who surprised
Lose their defense distracted and amazed.

Chor 1. 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,
Samson, with might endued
Above the Sons of men; but sight bereaved
May chance to number thee with those
Whom Patience finally must crown.

Chor 2. This Idols day hath bin to thee no day of rest,
Laboring thy mind
More than the working day thy hands.

Chor 3. And yet perhaps more trouble is behind.

For I descry this way
Some other tending, in his hand
A Scepter or quaint staff he bears,
Comes on amain, speed in his look.

Chor 1. By his habit I discern him now
A Public Officer, and now at hand.
His message will be short and voluble.

Off. *Hebrews*, the Prisoner *Samson* here I seek.

Chor 2. His manacles remark him, there he sits.

Off. *Samson*, to thee our Lords thus bid me say;
This day to *Dagon* is a solemn Feast,
With Sacrifices, Triumph, Pomp, and Games;
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.

Sam. Thou knowst I am a *Hebrew*, therefore tell them,
Our Law forbids at their Religious Rites
My presence; for that cause I cannot come.

Off. This answer, be assured, will not content them.

Sam. Return the way thou cam'st, I will not come.

Off. Regard thy self, this will offend them highly.

Sam. 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 shew them feats and play before their god,
The worst of all indignities, yet on me
Joined with extreme contempt? I will not come.

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

Sam. So take it with what speed thy message needs.

Off. I am sorry what this stoutness will produce.

Sa. Perhaps thou shalt have cause to sorrow indeed.

Chor 3. Consider, *Samson*; matters now are strained
Up to the heighth, whether to hold or break.

Chor 1. He's gone, and who knows how he may report
Thy words by adding fuel to the flame?

Chor 2. Expect another message more imperious,
More Lordly thundering then thou well wilt bear.

Sam. 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?

Chor 3. Yet with this strength thou serv'st the *Philistines*,
Idolatrous, uncircumcised, unclean.

Sam. Not in their Idol-worship, but by labor
Honest and lawful to deserve my food
Of those who have me in their civil power.

Chor 1. Where the heart joins not, outward acts defile not.

Sam. Where outward force constrains, the sentence holds.

Chor 2. How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach.

Sam. 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.

Chor 3. In time thou hast resolved, the man returns.

Off. 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 darest 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 then a rock.

Sam. I could be well content to try their Art,
Which to no few of them would prove pernicious.
Yet knowing their advantages too many,
Because 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.

Off. I praise thy resolution, doff these links:
By this compliance thou wilt win the Lords
To favor, and perhaps to set thee free.

Sam. Brethren farewell, your company along
I will not wish, lest it perhaps offend them
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:
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.

Chor 1. Go, and the Holy One
Of *Israel* be thy guide
To what may serve his glory best, & spread his name
Great among the Heathen round:

Chor 3. exits, following Samson at a distance.

Chor 2. But wherefore comes old *Manoa* in such hast
With youthful steps? much livelier then e're while
He seems.

Chor 1. Supposing here to find his Son,
Or of him bringing to us some glad news?

Man. I have attempted one by one the Lords
Either at home, or through the high street passing,
With supplication prone and Fathers 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 revered *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.
What noise or shout was that? it tore the Sky.

Chor 2. Doubtless the people shouting to behold
Their once great dread, captive, & blind before them,
Or at some proof of strength before them shown.

Man. 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, then richest,
And he in that calamitous prison left.
No, I am fixt not to part hence without him.
For his redemption all my Patrimony,
If need be, I am ready to forgo
And quit: not wanting him, I shall want nothing.
— O what noise!
Mercy of Heav'n what hideous noise was that!
Horribly loud unlike the former shout.

Chor 1. Noise call you it or universal groan
As if the whole inhabitation perished.

Chor 2. Blood, death, and deathful deeds are in that noise,
Ruin, destruction at the utmost point.

Man. Of ruin indeed methought I heard the noise,
Oh it continues, they have slain my Son.

Chor 1. Thy Son is rather slaying them, that outcry
From slaughter of one foe could not ascend.

Man. Some dismal accident it needs must be;
What shall we do, stay here or run and see?

Chor 2. Best keep together here, lest running thither
We unawares run into dangers mouth.

Chor 1. This evil on the *Philistines* is fallen,
From whom could else a general cry be heard?

Chor 2. The sufferers then will scarce molest us here,
From other hands we need not much to fear.

Chor 1. What if his eye-sight (for to *Israel's* God
Nothing is hard) by miracle restored,
He now be dealing dole among his foes,
And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way?

Man. That were a joy presumptuous to be thought.

Chor 2. Yet God hath wrought things as incredible
For his people of old; what hinders now?

Man. 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.

Chor 3 re-enters.

Chor 1. Of good or bad so great, of bad the sooner;
For evil news rides post, while good news baits.
And to our wish I see one hither speeding.

Chor 3. O whither shall I run, or which way fly
The sight of this so horrid spectacle
Which erst my eyes beheld and yet behold;
For dire imagination still pursues me.

Man. The accident was loud, & here before thee
With rueful cry, yet what it was we hear not,
No Preface needs, thou seest we long to know.

Chor 3. It would burst forth, but I recover breath
And sense distract, to know well what I utter.

Man. Tell us the sum, the circumstance defer.

Chor 3. *Gaza* yet stands, but all her Sons are fallen,
All in a moment overwhelmed and fallen.

Man. Sad, but thou knowst to *Israelites* not saddest
The desolation of a Hostile City.

Chor 3. Feed on that first, there may in grief be surfeit.

Man. Relate by whom.

Chor 3. By *Samson*.

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

Chor 3. 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.

Man. Suspense in news is torture, speak them out.

Chor 3. Then take the worst in brief, *Samson* is dead.

Man. 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 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 winters frost.
Yet e're I give the reins to grief, say first,
How died he? death to life is crown or shame.
All by him fell thou say'st, by whom fell he,
What glorious hand gave *Samson* his deaths wound?

Chor 3. Unwounded of his enemies he fell.

Man. Wearied with slaughter then or how? explain.

Chor 3. By his own hands.

Man. Self-violence? what cause
Brought him so soon at variance with himself
Among his foes?

Chor 3. 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.

Man. O lastly over-strong against thy self!
A dreadful way thou took'st to thy revenge.

Chor 3. The building was a spacious Theatre
Half round on two main Pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the Lords and each degree
Of sort, might sit in order to behold,
The other side was open, where the throng
On banks and scaffolds under Sky might stand;
I among these aloof obscurely stood.
The Feast and noon grew high, and Sacrifice
Had filled their hearts with mirth, high cheer, & wine,
When to their sports they turned. Immediately
Was *Samson* as a public servant brought,
In their state Livery clad; 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 assayed,
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
As over-tired to let him lean a while
With both his arms on those two massy Pillars
That to the arched roof gave main support.
He unsuspecting led him; which when *Samson*
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who prayed,
Or some great matter in his mind revolved.
At last with head erect thus cried aloud...

Sam. 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 shew you of my strength, yet greater;
As with amaze shall strike all who behold.

Chor 3. This uttered, straining all his nerves he bowed,
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 thy came and drew
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder
Upon the heads of all who sate beneath,
Lords, Ladies, Captains, Counselors, or Priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this but each *Philistine* City round
Met from all parts to solemnize this Feast.
Samson with these immixt, inevitably
Pulled down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only scaped who stood without.

Chor 1. O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfilled
The work for which thou wast foretold
To *Israel*, and now liest 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
Then all thy life had slain before.

Chor 2. While their hearts were jocund and sublime,
Drunk with Idolatry, drunk with Wine,
And fat regorged of Bulls and Goats,
Chanting their Idol, and preferring
Before our living Dread who dwells
In *Silo* his bright Sanctuary.

Chor 1. Among them he a spirit of frenzy sent,
Who hurt their minds,
And urged them on with mad desire

To call in hast for their destroyer.

Chor 2. They only set on sport and play
Unweetingly importuned
Their own destruction to come speedy upon them.

Chor 1. 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 struck.

Chor 2. 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 came,
Assailant on the perched roosts,
And nests in order ranged
Of tame villatic Fowl; but as an Eagle
His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.

Chor 1. So virtue given for lost,
Depressed, and overthrown, as seemed,
Like that self-begotten bird
In the *Arabian* woods embossed,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay e're while a Holocaust,
From out her ashy womb now teemed
Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deemed,
And though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird ages of lives.

Man. Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause, *Samson* hath quit 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 *Caphtor*
Through all *Philistine* bounds. To *Israel*
Honor hath left, and freedom, let but them
Find courage to lay hold on this occasion,
To himself and Fathers 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, I will build him
A Monument, and plant it round with shade
Of Laurel ever green, and branching Palm,
With all his Trophies hung, and Acts enrolled
In copious Legend, or sweet Lyric Song.

Chor 3. 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.

THE END