

## *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 trespass, 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 condolment 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.

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## JOHN MILTON

*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 revivifying 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 bloweth 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 unbecoming the sanctity of his person to write a tragedy, which he entitled *Christ Suffering*.<sup>5</sup> 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<sup>6</sup>—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,<sup>7</sup> yet using sometimes, in case of self-defense or explanation, that which Martial calls an epistle;<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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*,<sup>1</sup> or rather *apolelymenon*,<sup>2</sup> 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 *alloeostropha*.<sup>3</sup> Division into act and scene, referring chiefly to the stage (to which this work never was intended), is here omitted.<sup>4</sup> It suffices if the whole drama be found not produced<sup>5</sup> 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.

8. Martial, the Roman epigrammatist of the 1st century C.E., prefixed an epistle to his book of epigrams.

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 Manoa), 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<sup>6</sup>—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.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Argument*

Samson, made captive, blind, and now in the prison at Gaza,<sup>8</sup> 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<sup>9</sup> 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-

6. "Decorum," for a Renaissance writer, is not simply solemn or sedate behavior but the use of appropriate and suitable style, depending on speaker, subject, setting, genre, and so on. "Intricate or explicit": complex or simple.

7. The so-called unity of time, limiting dramatic action to twenty-four hours, was derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* by the Renaissance critic Castelvetro.

8. The Philistines, warlike and commercial, lived in southwest Palestine (the southern coast of modern Israel between, approximately, Tel Aviv and Gaza) in five great cities splendidly named Ashdod, Eshkol, Gaza, Gath, and Ashkalon. They were a wholly urban people as against the largely rural Israelites.

9. People of about the same age.

phe — what Samson had done to the Philistines, and by accident to himself; wherewith the tragedy ends.

## THE PERSONS

SAMSON	PUBLIC OFFICER
MANOA, <i>the father of Samson</i>	MESSENGER
DALILA, <i>his wife</i>	CHORUS OF DANITES <sup>1</sup>
HARAPHA <i>of Gath</i>	

*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, 5  
 Daily in the common prison else enjoined me,<sup>2</sup>  
 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, 10  
 With day-spring<sup>3</sup> born; here leave me to respire.  
 This day a solemn feast the people hold  
 To Dagon<sup>4</sup> their sea-idol, and forbid  
 Laborious works. Unwillingly this rest  
 Their superstition yields me; hence, with leave 15  
 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 20  
 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,<sup>5</sup> who at last, in sight  
 Of both my parents, all in flames ascended 25  
 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 30  
 As of a person separate to God,  
 Designed for great exploits,<sup>6</sup> if I must die  
 Betrayed, captived, and both my eyes put out,  
 Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,  
 To grind in brazen fetters under task 35  
 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 40  
 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? 45  
 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,<sup>7</sup>  
 But weakly to a woman must reveal it, 50  
 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,<sup>8</sup> yet liable to fall 55  
 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 60  
 Of highest dispensation,<sup>9</sup> 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 65  
 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,<sup>1</sup> to me is extinct, 70  
 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 75  
 To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,  
 Within doors or without, still as a fool,  
 In power of others, never in my own—  
 Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.  
 O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon, 80  
 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?<sup>2</sup> 85  
 The sun to me is dark

8. Confident, free from care (Latin *securus*).

9. Providence.

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<sup>3</sup> as the moon,  
 When she deserts the night,  
 Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.<sup>4</sup>  
 Since light so necessary is to life, 90  
 And almost life itself, if it be true  
 That light is in the soul,  
 She all in every part,<sup>5</sup> why was the sight  
 To such a tender ball as th' eye confined,  
 So obvious<sup>6</sup> and so easy to be quenched, 95  
 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, 100  
 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; 105  
 But made hereby obnoxious<sup>7</sup> more  
 To all the miseries of life,  
 Life in captivity  
 Among inhuman foes.  
 But who are these? for with joint pace I hear 110  
 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.  
 CHORUS. This, this is he; softly a while; 115  
 Let us not break in upon him.  
 O change beyond report, thought, or belief!  
 See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused,<sup>8</sup>

3. I.e., unperceived.

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").

5. A famous formula of Plotinus (*Ennead* 4.2.1) describes the soul as "all in all and all in every part."

6. Exposed.

7. Vulnerable, subject.

8. Literally, "poured forth," sprawled.

With languished head unpropped,  
 As one past hope, abandoned, 120  
 And by himself given over,  
 In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds<sup>9</sup>  
 O'er-worn and soiled.  
 Or do my eyes misrepresent? Can this be he,  
 That heroic, that renowned, 125  
 Irresistible Samson? whom, unarmed,  
 No strength of man, or fiercest wild beast, could withstand:<sup>1</sup>  
 Who tore the lion as the lion tears the kid;  
 Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,  
 And, weaponless himself, 130  
 Made arms ridiculous, useless the forgery<sup>2</sup>  
 Of brazen shield and spear, the hammered cuirass,  
 Chalybean-tempered steel, and frock of mail  
 Adamantean proof;<sup>3</sup>  
 But safest he who stood aloof, 135  
 When insupportably<sup>4</sup> 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;<sup>5</sup> old warriors turned  
 Their plated backs under his heel, 140  
 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; 145  
 Then by main force pulled up, and on his shoulders bore,  
 The gates of Azza,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 150  
 Which shall I first bewail,  
 Thy bondage or lost sight,  
 Prison within prison  
 Inseparably dark?  
 Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!) 155  
 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 160  
 To incorporate with gloomy night;  
 For inward light, alas!  
 Puts forth no visual beam.<sup>8</sup>  
 O mirror of our fickle state,  
 Since man on earth unparalleled!<sup>9</sup> 165  
 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 170  
 Whom long descent of birth,  
 Or the sphere of fortune,<sup>1</sup> raises;  
 But thee, whose strength, while virtue was her mate,  
 Might have subdued the Earth,  
 Universally crowned with highest praises. 175

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 interchanged 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, 180  
 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<sup>2</sup>  
 The tumors of a troubled mind, 185  
 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 190  
 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, 195  
 Blindness; for, had I sight, confused with shame,  
 How could I once look up, or heave<sup>3</sup> the head,  
 Who like a foolish pilot have shipwrecked  
 My vessel trusted to me from above,  
 Gloriously rigged, and for a word, a tear, 200  
 Fool! have divulged the secret gift of God  
 To a deceitful woman? Tell me, friends,  
 Am I not sung and proverbéd for a fool  
 In every street? Do they not say, "How well  
 Are come upon him his deserts"? Yet why? 205  
 Immeasurable strength they might behold  
 In me; of wisdom nothing more than mean.<sup>4</sup>  
 This with the other should at least have paired;<sup>5</sup>  
 These two, proportioned ill, drove me transverse.<sup>6</sup>

CHORUS. Tax not divine disposal. Wisest men 210  
 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.<sup>7</sup>  
 Deject not then so overmuch thyself,  
 Who hast of sorrow thy full load besides.

Yet, truth to say, I oft have heard men wonder 215  
 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 220  
 Me, not my parents, that I sought to wed  
 The daughter of an infidel.<sup>8</sup> They knew not  
 That what I motioned<sup>9</sup> was of God; I knew  
 From intimate impulse, and therefore urged  
 The marriage on, that, by occasion hence,<sup>1</sup>  
 I might begin Israel's deliverance, 225  
 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, Dàlila,<sup>2</sup>

That specious monster, my accomplished snare. 230  
 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!), 235  
 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.<sup>3</sup> 240

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

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.

2. Judges 16.4.

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 245  
 Deliverance offered. I, on th' other side,  
 Used no ambition to commend my deeds;<sup>4</sup>  
 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 250  
 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. 255  
 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 uncircumcised<sup>5</sup> a welcome prey, 260  
 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.<sup>6</sup>  
 Had Judah that day joined, or one whole tribe, 265  
 They had by this<sup>7</sup> 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, 270  
 Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty,<sup>8</sup>  
 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 275

4. I.e., sought for no testimonials to my actions.

5. Foreigners, the people outside the covenant of Abraham.

6. Judges 15.8–17 tells the tale of Samson's single-handed victory, using a "trivial weapon," the jawbone of an ass.

7. By this time.

8. Milton appears to have in mind not only early Israel but also contemporary England.

To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds!  
 CHORUS. Thy words to my remembrance bring  
 How Succoth and the fort of Penuel  
 Their great deliverer contemned, 280  
 The matchless Gideon, in pursuit  
 Of Madian and her vanquished kings;<sup>9</sup>  
 And how ingrateful Ephraim  
 Had dealt with Jephtha, who by argument,  
 Not worse than by his shield and spear,  
 Defended Israel from the Ammonite, 285  
 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*.<sup>1</sup>  
 SAMSON. Of such examples add me to the roll. 290  
 Me easily indeed mine<sup>2</sup> 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. 295  
 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.<sup>3</sup>  
 Yet more there be who doubt his ways not just, 300  
 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 ravel<sup>4</sup> more, still less resolved, 305  
 But never find self-satisfying solution.  
 As if they would confine th' Interminable,<sup>5</sup>

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.

2. My people.

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 310  
 Whomso it pleases him by choice  
 From national obstruction,<sup>6</sup> without taint  
 Of sin, or legal debt;  
 For with his own laws he can best dispense.

He would not else, who never wanted means, 315  
 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, 320  
 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.<sup>7</sup> 325

But see! here comes thy reverend sire,  
 With careful step, locks white as down,<sup>8</sup>  
 Old Manoa: advise<sup>9</sup>

Forthwith how thou ought'st to receive him.

SAMSON. Ay me! another inward grief, awaked 330  
 With mention of that name, renews th' assault.

MANOA. Brethren and men of Dan (for such ye seem,  
 Though in this uncouth<sup>1</sup> place), if old respect,  
 As I suppose, towards your once gloried friend,  
 My son, now captive, hither hath informed<sup>2</sup> 335  
 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.

8. Swan's down. "Careful": full of care.

9. Reflect, consider inwardly.

1. Unknown, unfamiliar.

2. Directed.

CHORUS. As signal<sup>3</sup> now in low dejected state  
 As erst in highest, behold him where he lies.

MANOA. O miserable change! Is this the man, 340  
 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, 345  
 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?<sup>4</sup> Nay, what thing good 350  
 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? 355  
 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? 360  
 For this did the angel twice descend?<sup>5</sup> 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, 365  
 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 370  
 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,<sup>6</sup> father.  
 Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me  
 But justly; I myself have brought them on; 375  
 Sole author I, sole cause.<sup>7</sup> 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. 380  
 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 385  
 To them who had corrupted her, my spies  
 And rivals?<sup>8</sup> 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 390  
 Her spurious first-born, treason against me?<sup>9</sup>  
 Thrice she essayed, with flattering prayers and sighs,  
 And amorous reproaches, to win from me  
 My capital secret,<sup>1</sup> in what part my strength  
 Lay stored, in what part summed, that she might know; 395  
 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 400  
 She sought to make me traitor to myself.<sup>2</sup>  
 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*).

2. Judges 16.5–20.

With blandished parleys, feminine assaults,  
 Tongue-batteries, she surceased<sup>3</sup> not day nor night  
 To storm me, over-watched and wearied out, 405  
 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<sup>4</sup> held me yoked 410  
 Her bonds slave. 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 415  
 As was my former servitude, ignoble,  
 Unmanly, ignominious, infamous,  
 True slavery; and that blindness worse than this,  
 That saw not how degenerately I served.

MANOA. I cannot praise thy marriage-choices, son, 420  
 Rather approved them not; but thou didst plead  
 Divine impulsion<sup>5</sup> prompting how thou might'st  
 Find some occasion to infest our foes.  
 I state not<sup>6</sup> that; this I am sure, our foes  
 Found soon occasion thereby to make thee 425  
 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 430  
 Enough, and more, the burden of that fault;  
 Bitterly hast thou paid, and still art paying,  
 That rigid score.<sup>7</sup> A worse thing yet remains:  
 This day the Philistines a popular feast

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.

6. Offer no opinion on. "Infest": attack.

7. Debt.

Here celebrate in Gaza, and proclaim 435  
 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,<sup>8</sup> and God, 440  
 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, 445  
 Of all reproach the most with shame that ever  
 Could have befallen thee and thy father's house.

SAMSON. Father, I do acknowledge and confess  
 That I this honor, I this pomp, have brought  
 To Dagon, and advanced his praises high 450  
 Among the heathen round; to God have brought  
 Dishonor, obloquy, and oped the mouths  
 Of idolists and atheists; have brought scandal  
 To Israel, diffidence<sup>9</sup> of God, and doubt  
 In feeble hearts, propense<sup>1</sup> enough before 455  
 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 460  
 With me hath end. All the contèst is now  
 'Twixt God and Dagon. Dagon hath presumed,  
 Me overthrown, to enter lists<sup>2</sup> with God,  
 His deity comparing and preferring  
 Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure, 465  
 Will not connive<sup>3</sup> 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.

9. Mistrust.

1. Inclined.

2. Jousting courts, as in medieval tourneys.

3. Hesitate, palter.

Dagon must stoop, and shall ere long receive  
 Such a discomfit as shall quite despoil him  
 Of all these boasted trophies won on me, 470  
 And with confusion blank<sup>4</sup> 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 475  
 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 480  
 Neglected. I already have made way  
 To some Philistian lords, with whom to treat  
 About thy ransom. Well they may by this<sup>5</sup>  
 Have satisfied their utmost of revenge  
 By pains and slaveries, worse than death, inflicted 485  
 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, 490  
 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, 495  
 The mark of fool set on his front!<sup>6</sup> 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 500

4. Confound, turn pale.

5. By this time.

6. Forehead.

To their abyss and horrid pains confined.<sup>7</sup>  
 MANOA. 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; 505  
 Or th' execution leave to high disposal,  
 And let another hand, not thine, exact  
 Thy penal forfeit from thyself. Perhaps  
 God will relent, and quit<sup>8</sup> thee of all his debt;  
 Who ever more approves and more accepts 510  
 (Best pleased with humble and filial submission)  
 Him who, imploring mercy, sues for life,  
 Than who, self-rigorous, chooses death as due;<sup>9</sup>  
 Which argues over-just, and self-displeased  
 For self-offense more than for God offended. 515  
 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, 525  
 Full of divine instinct, after some proof  
 Of acts indeed heroic, far beyond  
 The sons of Anak, famous now and blazed,<sup>1</sup>  
 Fearless of danger, like a petty god  
 I walked about, admired of all, and dreaded 530  
 On hostile ground, none daring my affront—  
 Then, swoll'n with pride, into the snare I fell  
 Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains,<sup>2</sup>

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.

8. Free.

9. This is similar to Adam's argument against suicide in *Paradise Lost* 10.1013–19.

1. Emblazoned, glorified. "Sons of Anak": giants, described in Numbers 13.

2. Sensual, sexual lures.

Softened with pleasure and voluptuous life;  
 At length to lay my head and hallowed pledge 535  
 Of all my strength in the lascivious lap  
 Of a deceitful concubine, who shore me,  
 Like a tame wether,<sup>3</sup> all my precious fleece,  
 Then turned me out ridiculous, despoiled,  
 Shaven, and disarmed among my enemies. 540

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, 545  
 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,<sup>4</sup>  
 I drank, from the clear milky juice allaying 550  
 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 555  
 His mighty champion, strong above compare,  
 Whose drink was only from the liquid brook!<sup>5</sup>

SAMSON. But what availed this temperance, not complete  
 Against another object more enticing?  
 What boots it at one gate to make defense, 560  
 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? 565  
 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 burdenous drone; to visitants a gaze,<sup>6</sup>  
 Or pitied object; these redundant locks,  
 Robustious<sup>7</sup> to no purpose, clustering down,  
 Vain monument of strength; till length of years 570  
 And sedentary numbness craze<sup>8</sup> my limbs  
 To a contemptible old age obscure.  
 Here rather let me drudge, and earn my bread,  
 Till vermin, or the draff<sup>9</sup> of servile food,  
 Consume me, and oft-invocated death 575  
 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. 580  
 But God, who caused a fountain at thy prayer  
 From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay  
 After the brunt of battle,<sup>1</sup> can as easy  
 Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,  
 Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast. 585  
 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, 590  
 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<sup>2</sup> droop,  
 My hopes all flat. Nature within me seems 595  
 In all her functions weary of herself;  
 My race of glory run, and race of shame,

6. Spectacle.

7. Strong. "Redundant": in its Latin sense, "flowing"; in the English sense, "unnecessary" or "unemployed."

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.  
 MANOA. Believe not these suggestions, which proceed  
 From anguish of the mind, and humors black 600  
 That mingle with thy fancy.<sup>3</sup> 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. 605

SAMSON. O that torment should not be confined  
 To the body's wounds and sores,  
 With maladies innumerable  
 In heart, head, breast, and reins,<sup>4</sup>  
 But must secret passage find 610  
 To th' inmost mind,  
 There exercise all his fierce accidents,<sup>5</sup>  
 And on her purest spirits prey,  
 As on entrails, joints, and limbs,  
 With answerable pains, but more intense, 615  
 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 620  
 Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,  
 To black mortification.<sup>6</sup>  
 Thoughts, my tormentors, armed with daily stings,  
 Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,  
 Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise 625  
 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; 630  
 Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,

3. Black bile, the melancholy humor, was supposed to have specially ill effects on the imagination.

4. Kidneys.

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.<sup>7</sup>

I was his nursling once and choice delight,  
His destined from the womb,  
Promised by heavenly message<sup>8</sup> twice descending.

635

Under his special eye

Abstemious I grew up and thrived amain;

He led me on to mightiest deeds,

Above the nerve<sup>9</sup> of mortal arm,

Against the uncircumcised, our enemies:

640

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<sup>1</sup>

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,

650

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<sup>2</sup> of grief and anxious thought.

But with th' afflicted in his pangs their sound

660

Little prevails, or rather seems a tune

Harsh, and of dissonant mood<sup>3</sup> 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.

9. Sinew, hence strength.

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 665  
 And fainting spirits uphold.<sup>4</sup>

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: 670  
 Not evenly, as thou rul'st  
 The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,  
 Irrational and brute.<sup>5</sup>

Nor do I name of men the common rout,  
 That, wandering loose about, 675  
 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, 680  
 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 685  
 From thee on them, or them to thee of service.<sup>6</sup>

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, 690  
 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 captived,  
 Or to the unjust tribunals, under change of times, 695  
 And condemnation of the ingrateful multitude.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> old age; 700  
 Though not disordinate, yet causeless suffering  
 The punishment of dissolute days. In fine,<sup>9</sup>  
 Just or unjust alike seem miserable,  
 For oft alike both come to evil end.

So deal not with this once thy glorious champion, 705  
 The image of thy strength, and mighty minister.<sup>1</sup>  
 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— 710  
 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 715  
 Of Javan or Gadire,<sup>2</sup>  
 With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,  
 Sails filled, and streamers waving,  
 Courted by all the winds that hold them play;  
 An amber<sup>3</sup> scent of odorous perfume 720  
 Her harbinger, a damsel train behind?  
 Some rich Philistian matron she may seem;  
 And now, at nearer view, no other certain  
 Than Dàlila thy wife.

SAMSON. My wife! my traitress! let her not come near me. 725

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

8. Literally, "raw," but figuratively, "premature."

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),<sup>4</sup>  
 My penance hath not slackened, though my pardon  
 No way assured. But conjugal affection,  
 Prevailing over fear and timorous doubt, 740

Hath led me on, desirous to behold  
 Once more thy face, and know of thy estate,<sup>5</sup>  
 If aught in my ability may serve  
 To lighten what thou suffer'st, and appease  
 Thy mind with what amends is in my power— 745  
 Though late, yet in some part to recompense  
 My rash but more unfortunate misdeed.

SAMSON. Out, out, hyena!<sup>6</sup> 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 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, 755

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. 765

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, 770  
 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 775  
 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? 780  
 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:<sup>7</sup>  
 Ere I to thee, thou to thyself wast cruel.  
 Let weakness then with weakness come to parle,<sup>8</sup> 785  
 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, 790  
 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 795  
 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,  
 “Why, then, revealed?” I was assured by those 800  
 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, 805  
 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. 810  
 These reasons in love’s law have passed for good,  
 Though fond<sup>9</sup> 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 815  
 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! 820  
 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 825  
 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 830

9. Foolish.

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. 835

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<sup>1</sup> hate,  
 Knowing, as needs I must, by thee betrayed? 840  
 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, 845  
 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.<sup>2</sup> Thou know'st the magistrates 850  
 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 855

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 860  
 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

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 contèst. 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,<sup>3</sup> with grave authority  
 Took full possession of me, and prevailed;  
 Virtue, as I thought, truth, duty, so enjoining. 870

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. 875  
 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 880  
 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 885  
 Parents and country; nor was I their subject,  
 Nor under their protection, but my own;  
 Thou mine, not theirs.<sup>4</sup> If aught against my life  
 Thy country sought of thee, it sought unjustly,  
 Against the law of nature, law of nations; 890  
 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; 895  
 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. 900  
 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,<sup>5</sup> whatever be her cause.  
 SAMSON. For want of words, no doubt, or lack of breath! 905  
 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 910  
 Towards thee I intend for what I have misdone,  
 Misguided. Only what remains past cure  
 Bear not too sensibly,<sup>6</sup> nor still insist  
 To afflict thyself in vain. Though sight be lost,  
 Life yet hath many solaces, enjoyed 915  
 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 920  
 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, 925  
 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<sup>7</sup> 930  
 To bring my feet again into the snare  
 Where once I have been caught. I know thy trains,

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.<sup>8</sup>  
 Thy fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms,  
 No more on me have power; their force is nulled; 935  
 So much of adder's wisdom I have learnt,  
 To fence my ear against thy sorceries.<sup>9</sup>  
 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, 940  
 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 945  
 In perfect thralldom! how again betray me,  
 Bearing my words and doings to the lords  
 To gloss upon, and, censuring, frown or smile!<sup>1</sup>  
 This jail I count the house of liberty  
 To thine,<sup>2</sup> whose doors my feet shall never enter. 950

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.<sup>3</sup>  
 At distance I forgive thee, go with that;  
 Bewail thy falsehood, and the pious works 955  
 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 960  
 To prayers than winds and seas. Yet winds to seas  
 Are reconciled at length, and sea to shore:  
 Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,

8. Nets. "Trains": tricks. "Gins": snares. The traditional images for female wiles are heightened by reference to an enchanting cup and warbled charms reminiscent of Homer's Circe (*Odyssey* 10).

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 965  
 For peace, reap nothing but repulse and hate,  
 Bid go with evil omen,<sup>4</sup> and the brand  
 Of infamy upon my name denounced?  
 To mix with thy concernments I desist  
 Henceforth, nor too much disapprove my own. 970  
 Fame, if not double-faced, is double-mouthed,  
 And with contràry blast proclaims most deeds;<sup>5</sup>  
 On both his wings, one black, th' other white,  
 Bears greatest names in his wild airy flight.  
 My name, perhaps, among the circumcised 975  
 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, 980  
 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 985  
 Above the faith of wedlock bands; my tomb  
 With odors<sup>6</sup> visited and annual flowers;  
 Not less renowned than in Mount Ephraim  
 Jael, who, with inhospitable guile,  
 Smote Sisera sleeping, through the temples nailed.<sup>7</sup> 990  
 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, 995  
 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 1000  
 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 1005  
 Love once possessed, nor can be easily  
 Repulsed, without much inward passion<sup>8</sup> 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, 1010  
 Strength, comeliness of shape, or amplest merit  
 That woman's love can win, or long inherit;<sup>9</sup>  
 But what it is, hard is to say,  
 Harder to hit,  
 Which way soever men refer it 1015  
 (Much like thy riddle, Samson),<sup>1</sup> 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 paranymp, worthless to thee compared, 1020  
 Successor in thy bed,<sup>2</sup>  
 Nor both so loosely disallied  
 Their nuptials,<sup>3</sup> nor this last so treacherously  
 Had shorn the fatal harvest of thy head.  
 Is it for that<sup>4</sup> such outward ornament 1025

8. Suffering.

9. Possess.

1. Samson's riddle is propounded and answered in Judges 14.14, 18.

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 "paranymp" (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 ofttest to affect<sup>5</sup> the wrong? 1030  
 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, 1035  
 Soft, modest, meek, demure,  
 Once joined, the contrary she proves, a thorn  
 Intestine,<sup>6</sup> far within defensive arms  
 A cleaving<sup>7</sup> mischief, in his way to virtue  
 Adverse and turbulent; or by her charms 1040  
 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? 1045  
     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, 1050  
 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, 1055  
 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. 1060  
 But had we best retire? I see a storm.  
 SAMSON. Fair days have oft contracted<sup>8</sup> 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 1065  
 The bait of honeyed words; a rougher tongue  
 Draws hitherward, I know him by his stride,  
 The giant Harapha<sup>9</sup> of Gath, his look  
 Haughty, as is his pile<sup>1</sup> high-built and proud.  
 Comes he in peace? What wind hath blown him hither 1070  
 I less conjecture than when first I saw  
 The sumptuous Dalila floating this way:<sup>2</sup>  
 His habit carries peace, his brow defiance.  
 SAMSON. Or peace or not, alike to me he comes.  
 CHORUS. His fraught<sup>3</sup> we soon shall know: he now arrives. 1075  
 HARAPHA. I come not, Samson, to condole thy chance,  
 As these<sup>4</sup> 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 1080  
 That Kiriathaim held.<sup>5</sup> Thou know'st me now,  
 If thou at all art known.<sup>6</sup> 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 1085  
 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;<sup>7</sup>  
 And now am come to see of whom such noise  
 Hath walked about, and each limb to survey,  
 If thy appearance answer loud report. 1090

SAMSON. The way to know were not to see, but taste.<sup>8</sup>

HARAPHA. Dost thou already single me? I thought  
 Gyves<sup>9</sup> 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! 1095  
 I should have forced thee soon wish<sup>1</sup> 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 1100  
 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. 1105

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<sup>2</sup> and betrayed;  
 Who durst not with their whole united powers 1110  
 In fight withstand me single and unarmed,  
 Nor in the house with chamber ambushes<sup>3</sup>  
 Close-banded durst attack me, no, not sleeping,  
 Till they had hired a woman with their gold,  
 Breaking her marriage-faith, to circumvent me. 1115  
 Therefore, without feigned shifts, let be assigned  
 Some narrow place enclosed, where sight may give thee,

7. Lists, tourney ground. "Camp": field of battle (from Latin *campus*).

8. Make a trial of.

9. Chains. "Single": challenge.

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, 1120  
 Vant-brace and greaves and gauntlet; add thy spear,  
 A weaver's beam,<sup>4</sup> 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, 1125  
 That in a little time, while breath remains thee,  
 Thou oft shalt wish thyself at Gath, to boast  
 Again in safety what thou would'st have done  
 To Samson, but shalt never see Gath more.

HARAPHA. Thou durst not thus disparage glorious arms, 1130  
 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, 1135  
 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 1140  
 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, 1145  
 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 1150  
 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. 1155

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 1160  
 Into the common prison, there to grind  
 Among the slaves and asses, thy comràdes,  
 As good for nothing else, no better service  
 With those thy boisterous locks; no worthy match  
 For valor to assail, nor by the sword 1165  
 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,<sup>5</sup> these evils I deserve and more,  
 Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me 1170  
 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, 1175  
 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! 1180

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 1185

5. Thy people.

Notorious murder on those thirty men<sup>6</sup>  
 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, 1190  
 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, 1195  
 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. 1200  
 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!<sup>7</sup> 1205  
 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! 1210  
 I was no private,<sup>8</sup> 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, 1215  
 Th' unworthier they; whence to this day they serve.

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,<sup>9</sup> 1220  
 Though by his blindness maimed for high attempts,  
 Who now defies thee thrice to single fight,  
 As a petty enterprise of small enforce.<sup>1</sup>
- HARAPHA. With thee, a man condemned, a slave enrolled,  
 Due by the law to capital punishment? 1225  
 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. 1230
- HARAPHA. O Baal-zebub!<sup>2</sup> 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;<sup>3</sup>  
 My heels are fettered, but my fist is free. 1235
- 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, 1240  
 To the hazard of thy brains and shattered sides.
- HARAPHA. By Astaroth,<sup>4</sup> ere long thou shalt lament  
 These braveries,<sup>5</sup> in irons loaden on thee.
- CHORUS. His giantship is gone somewhat crestfallen,  
 Stalking with less unconscionable<sup>6</sup> strides, 1245  
 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.

6. Excessive.

Though fame divulge him father of five sons,  
 All of gigantic size, Goliath chief.<sup>7</sup>

CHORUS. He will directly to the lords, I fear, 1250  
 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; 1255  
 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, 1260  
 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 1265  
 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 1270  
 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 1275  
 The righteous, and all such as honor truth!  
 He all their ammunition  
 And feats of war defeats,<sup>8</sup>  
 With plain heroic magnitude of mind  
 And celestial vigor armed; 1280  
 Their armories and magazines<sup>9</sup> 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<sup>1</sup>  
 Swift as the lightning glance he executes  
 His errand on the wicked, who, surprised, 1285  
 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 1290

That tyranny or fortune can inflict.  
 Either of these is in thy lot,<sup>2</sup>  
 Samson, with might endued  
 Above the sons of men; but sight bereaved  
 May chance to number thee with those 1295  
 Whom patience finally must crown.<sup>3</sup>

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; 1300

For I descry this way  
 Some other tending; in his hand  
 A scepter or quaint<sup>4</sup> staff he bears,  
 Comes on amain, speed in his look.  
 By his habit I discern him now 1305  
 A public officer, and now at hand.

His message will be short and voluble.<sup>5</sup>

OFFICER. Hebrews, the prisoner Samson here I seek.

CHORUS. His manacles remark<sup>6</sup> him; there he sits.

OFFICER. Samson, to thee our lords thus bid me say: 1310

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. 1315  
 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 1320  
 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 gymnastic artists, wrestlers, riders, runners,  
 Jugglers and dancers, antics, mummers,<sup>7</sup> mimics, 1325  
 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, 1330  
 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 1335  
 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, 1340  
 The worst of all indignities, yet on me  
 Joined<sup>8</sup> 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. 1345
- OFFICER. I am sorry what this stoutness<sup>9</sup> will produce.

7. Actors. "Gymnastic artists": gymnasts. "Antics": clowns.

8. Enjoined, ordered.

9. Defiance.

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

1350

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

1355

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?

1360

Besides how vile, contemptible, ridiculous,

What act more execrably unclean,<sup>1</sup> profane?

CHORUS. Yet with this strength thou serv'st the Philistines,

Idolatrous, uncircumcised, unclean.

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

1365

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:<sup>2</sup>

But who constrains me to the temple of Dagon,

1370

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,

1375

Shall never, unrepented, find forgiveness.

Yet that he may dispense with me, or thee,

Present in temples at idolatrous rites

For some important cause,<sup>3</sup> thou need'st not doubt.

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

1380

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.

SAMSON. 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 1385  
 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.<sup>4</sup>

CHORUS. In time thou hast resolved: the man returns. 1390

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; 1395  
 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.

SAMSON. I could be well content to try their art,  
 Which to no few of them would prove pernicious; 1400  
 Yet, knowing their advantages too many,  
 Because<sup>5</sup> 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; 1405  
 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:<sup>6</sup> 1410  
 By this compliance thou wilt win the lords  
 To favor, and perhaps to set thee free.

SAMSON. Brethren, farewell. Your company along  
 I will not wish, lest it perhaps offend them

4. 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 1415  
 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;<sup>7</sup> 1420  
 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; 1425  
 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; 1430  
 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 1435  
 In the camp of Dan,  
 Be efficacious in thee now at need!<sup>8</sup>  
 For never was from Heaven imparted  
 Measure of strength so great to mortal seed  
 As in thy wondrous actions hath been seen. 1440  
 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 1445  
 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, 1450  
 Lest I should see him forced to things unseemly.  
 But that which moved my coming now was chiefly  
 To give ye part with me<sup>9</sup> what hope I have  
 With good success to work his liberty.

CHORUS. That hope would much rejoice us to partake 1455  
 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. 1460  
 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 1465  
 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, 1470  
 If some convenient ransom were proposed.<sup>1</sup>  
 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. 1475

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. 1480  
 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: 1485  
 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, 1490  
 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 1495  
 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 1500  
 Useless, and thence ridiculous, about him.<sup>2</sup>  
 And since his strength with eyesight was not lost,  
 God will restore him eyesight to<sup>3</sup> his strength.
- CHORUS. Thy hopes are not ill-founded, nor seem vain,  
 Of his delivery, and thy joy thereon 1505  
 Conceived, agreeable to a father's love;  
 In both which we, as next,<sup>4</sup> 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. 1510
- CHORUS. Noise call you it, or universal groan,  
 As if the whole inhabitation perished?  
 Blood, death, and deathful deeds are in that noise,  
 Ruin,<sup>5</sup> destruction at the utmost point.
- MANOA. Of ruin indeed methought I heard the noise. 1515

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.  
 MANOA. Some dismal accident it needs must be.  
 What shall we do, stay here, or run and see? 1520  
 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; 1525  
 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 dole<sup>6</sup> among his foes,  
 And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way? 1530  
 MANOA. That were a joy presumptuous to be thought.  
 CHORUS. Yet God hath wrought things as incredible  
 For his people of old; what hinders now?  
 MANOA. He can, I know, but doubt to think he will;  
 Yet hope would fain subscribe, and tempts belief. 1535  
 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.<sup>7</sup>  
 And to our wish I see one hither speeding—  
 An Hebrew, as I guess, and of our tribe. 1540  
 MESSENGER.<sup>8</sup> O whither shall I run, or which way fly  
 The sight of this so horrid spectacle,  
 Which erst<sup>9</sup> my eyes beheld, and yet behold?  
 For dire imagination still pursues me.  
 But providence or instinct of nature seems, 1545  
 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, 1550  
 So<sup>1</sup> 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, 1555  
 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, 1560  
 The desolation of a hostile city.

MESSENGER. Feed on that first; there may in grief be surfeit.<sup>2</sup>

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 1565  
 To utter what will come at last too soon,  
 Lest evil tidings, with too rude irruption  
 Hitting thy agèd ear, should pierce too deep.

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

MESSENGER. Then take the worst in brief: Samson is dead. 1570

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<sup>3</sup> joy this day had I conceived,  
 Hopeful of his delivery, which now proves 1575  
 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.

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? 1580  
 What glorious hand gave Samson his death's wound?  
 MESSENGER. Unwounded of his enemies he fell.  
 MANOA. Wearied with slaughter, then, or how? Explain.  
 MESSENGER. By his own hands.  
 MANOA. Self-violence! What cause  
 Brought him so soon at variance with himself 1585  
 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.  
 MANOA. O lastly over-strong against thyself! 1590  
 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. 1595  
 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 1600  
 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, 1605  
 Half round on two main pillars vaulted high,  
 With seats where all the lords, and each degree  
 Of sort,<sup>4</sup> might sit in order to behold;  
 The other side was open, where the throng  
 On banks and scaffolds under sky might stand:<sup>5</sup> 1610  
 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, 1615  
 In their state livery clad: before him pipes  
 And timbrels;<sup>6</sup> on each side went armèd guards;  
 Both horse and foot before him and behind,  
 Archers and slingers, cataphracts<sup>7</sup> and spears.  
 At sight of him the people with a shout 1620  
 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, 1625  
 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 1630  
 (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 unsuspecting led him; which when Samson 1635  
 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 1640  
 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.” 1645  
 This uttered, straining all his nerves,<sup>8</sup> he bowed;

6. Tambourines.

7. Armored horsemen on armored horses.

8. Muscles.

As with the force of winds and waters pent  
 When mountains tremble,<sup>9</sup> those two massy pillars  
 With horrible convulsion to and fro  
 He tugged, he shook, till down they came, and drew 1650  
 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, 1655  
 Met from all parts to solemnize this feast.  
 Samson, with these immixed, inevitably  
 Pulled down the same destruction on himself;  
 The vulgar<sup>1</sup> only 'scaped, who stood without.  
 CHORUS. O dearly bought revenge, yet glorious! 1660  
 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 1665  
 Of dire Necessity,<sup>2</sup> whose law in death conjoined  
 Thee with thy slaughtered foes, in number more  
 Than all thy life had slain before.  
 SEMICHORUS.<sup>3</sup> While their hearts were jocund and sublime,  
 Drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine 1670  
 And fat regorged<sup>4</sup> of bulls and goats,  
 Chaunting their idol, and preferring  
 Before our living Dread, who dwells  
 In Silo, his bright sanctuary,<sup>5</sup>  
 Among them he a spirit of frenzy sent, 1675  
 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.

4. Greedily devoured. "Jocund and sublime": joyous and exalted.

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<sup>6</sup> importuned 1680  
 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, 1685  
 And with blindness internal<sup>7</sup> struck.

SEMICHORUS. But he, though blind of sight,  
 Despised, and thought extinguished quite,  
 With inward eyes illuminated,  
 His fiery virtue roused 1690  
 From under ashes into sudden flame,  
 And as an evening dragon<sup>8</sup> came,  
 Assailant on the perchèd roosts  
 And nests in order ranged  
 Of tame villatic<sup>9</sup> fowl, but as an eagle 1695  
 His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.  
 So Virtue, given for lost,<sup>1</sup>  
 Depressed and overthrown, as seemed,  
 Like that self-begotten bird,<sup>2</sup>  
 In the Arabian woods embossed,<sup>3</sup> 1700  
 That no second knows nor third,  
 And lay erewhile a holocaust,<sup>4</sup>  
 From out her ashy womb now teemed,  
 Revives, reflowerishes, then vigorous most  
 When most unactive deemed; 1705  
 And, though her body die, her fame survives,

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 secular<sup>5</sup> bird, ages of lives.  
 MANOA. Come, come; no time for lamentation now,  
 Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit<sup>6</sup> himself  
 Like Samson, and heroically hath finished 1710  
 A life heroic, on his enemies  
 Fully revenged; hath left them years of mourning  
 And lamentation to the sons of Caphtor<sup>7</sup>  
 Through all Philistian bounds; to Israel  
 Honor hath left and freedom, let but them 1715  
 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. 1720  
 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 1725  
 Soaked in his enemies' blood, and from the stream  
 With lavers<sup>8</sup> pure and cleansing herbs wash off  
 The clotted gore. I, with what speed the while<sup>9</sup>  
 (Gaza is not in plight to say us nay),  
 Will send for all my kindred, all my friends, 1730  
 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,<sup>1</sup> 1735  
 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.

Thither shall all the valiant youth resort,  
 And from his memory inflame their breasts  
 To matchless valor and adventures high; 1740  
 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.<sup>2</sup> All is best, though we oft doubt 1745  
 What th' unsearchable dispose<sup>3</sup>  
 Of Highest Wisdom brings about,  
 And ever best found in the close.  
 Oft he seems to hide his face,  
 But unexpectedly returns, 1750  
 And to his faithful champion hath in place<sup>4</sup>  
 Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns,  
 And all that band them to resist  
 His uncontrollable intent.  
 His servants he, with new acquist<sup>5</sup> 1755  
 Of true experience from this great event,  
 With peace and consolation hath dismissed,  
 And calm of mind, all passion spent. 1671

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.