SAMSON AGONISTES

generously laid out for the Readers

PRELUDE

SCENE I (CONSCIENCE)

SAMSON
A little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps, a little further on;
For yonder bank hath choice of sun or shade.
There I am wont to sit, when any chance
Relieves me from my task of servile toil
Daily in the common prison else enjoined me,
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 heav’n fresh-blowing, pure and sweet,
With day-spring born; here leave me to respire.
This day a solemn feast the people hold
To Dagon their sea-idol, and forbid
Laborious works;

unwillingly this rest
Their superstition yields me; hence with leave
Retiring from the popular noise, I seek
This unfrequented place to find some ease –
Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what am now.
O wherefore was my birth from heaven foretold?
Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
As of a person separate to God,
Designed for great exploits, if I must die
Betrayed, captiv’d, and both my eyes put out,
Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze;
To grind in brazen fetters under task
With this heav’n-gifted strength?

O glorious strength
Put to the labour of a beast, debased
Lower than bondslave! Promise was that I
Should Israel from Philístian yoke deliver.
Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philístian yoke.
Yet stay; let me not rashly call in doubt
Divine prediction! What if all foretold
Had been fulfilled but through mine own default?
Whom have I to complain of but myself,
Who this high gift of strength committed to me,
In what part lodged, how easily bereft me,
Under the seal of silence could not keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,
O’ercome with importunity and tears?
But peace, I must not quarrel with the will
Of highest dispensation, which herein
Happ’ly had ends above my reach to know:
Suffices that to me strength is my bane,
And proves the source of all my miseries –
So many, and so huge, that each apart
Would ask a life to wail.

But chief of all,
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
Light the prime work of God to me is extinct,
And all her various objects of delight
Annulled, which might in part my grief have eased,
Inferior to the vilest now become!
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,
Irrecov’rably dark, total eclipse
Without all hope of day!
O first created beam, and thou great Word,
“Let there be light, and light was over all”,
Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?
The sun to me is dark
And silent as the moon
When she deserts the night,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.
Why have I thus been exiled
As in the land of darkness yet in light,
To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried; but – O yet more miserable! –
Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave,
Buried, yet not exempt
By privilege of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs,
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes.

INTERLUDE
SCENE II (HEBREW FRIENDS)

But who are these? For with joint pace I hear
The tread of many feet steering this way;
Perhaps my enemies who come to stare
At my affliction, and perhaps to insult,
Their daily practice to afflict me more.

CHORUS
This, this is he; softly a while;
Let us not break in upon him.
O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
    Can this be he,
That heroic, that renowned,
Irresistible Samson? whom unarmed
No strength of man, or fiercest wild beast, could withstand;
Who tore the lion, as the lion tears the kid,
Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,
And weaponless himself,
Made arms ridiculous, useless the forgery
Of brazen shield and spear, the hammered cuirass,
Chalybean-tempered steel, and frock of mail
Adamantéan-proof.
    The bold Ascalonite
Fled from his lion ramp; old warriors turned
Their plated backs under his heel;
Or groveling soiled their crested helmets in the dust.
Then with what trivial weapon came to hand,
The jaw of a dead ass, his sword of bone,
A thousand foreskins fell, the flower of Palestine,
In Ramath-lechi famous to this day.
Which shall I first bewail,
Thy bondage or lost sight,
Prison within prison
Inseparably dark?
Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
The dungeon of thy self;
thy soul
(Which men enjoying sight oft without cause complain)
Imprisoned now indeed,
In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward
To incorporate with gloomy night;
For inward light, alas,
Puts forth no visual beam.

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,
The glory late of Israel, now the grief;
We come thy friends and neighbours not unknown
From Eshtaol and Zora’s fruitful vale
To visit or bewail thee, or if, better,
Counsel or consolation we may bring,
Salve to thy sores.

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.

O friends
How many evils have enclosed me round;
Yet that which was the worst now least afflicts me,
Blindness;

for had I sight, confused with shame,
How could I once look up, or heave the head,
Who like a foolish pilot have shipwrecked
My vessel trusted to me from above,
Gloriously rigged; and for a word, a tear,
Fool, have divulged the secret gift of God
To a deceitful woman.
Tell me friends,
Am I not sung and proverb’d for a fool
In every street, do they not say “How well
Are come upon him his deserts?”

Yet why?
Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean:
This with the other should, at least, have paired:
These two, proportioned ill, drove me transverse.

**CHORUS**
Tax not divine disposal: wisest men
Have erred, and by bad women been deceived,
And shall again, pretend they ne’er so wise.
Yet truth to say, I oft have heard men wonder
Why thou should’st wed Philístian 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 Timnah, and she pleased
Me – not my parents, that I sought to wed,
The daughter of an infidel.

They knew not
That what I motioned was of God: I knew
From intimate impulse, and therefore urged
The marriage on, that by occasion hence
I might begin Israel’s deliverance,
The work to which I was divinely called.
She proving false, the next I took to wife
(O that I never had! fond wish, too late)
Was in the vale of Sorek, Dálila,
That specious monster, my accomplished snare.

**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.
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
Singly by me against their conquerors,
Acknowledged not, and would not seem
To count them things worth notice, till at length
Their lords the Philistines with gathered powers
Entered Judea seeking me.
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 a welcome prey,
Bound with two cords.

But cords to me were threads
Touched with the flame. On their whole host I flew
Unarmed, and with a trivial weapon felled
Their choicest youth: they only lived who fled.
Had Judah that day joined, or one whole tribe,
They had by this possessed the towers of Gath,
And lorded over them whom now they serve.
But what more oft in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty –
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty –
And to despise, or envy, or suspect
Whom God hath of his special favour raised
As their deliverer. If he aught begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last
To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds?

CHORUS
Just are the ways of God,
And justifiable to men –
Unless there be who think not God at all.
If any be, they walk obscure;
For of such doctrine never was there school
But the heart of the fool,
And no man therein doctor but himself.
God would not else, who never wanted means,
Nor, in respect of the enemy, just cause
To set his people free,
Have prompted this heroic Nazarite,
Against his vow of strictest purity,
To seek in marriage that fallacious bride,
Unclean, unchaste.
Down reason then! – at least, vain reasonings down!

INTERLUDE

SCENE III (MANOA)

But see here comes thy reverend sire
With careful step, locks white as down,
Old Mánoa. Advise
Forthwith how thou ought’st to receive him.

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

MANOA
Brethren and men of Dan, for such ye seem,
Though in this uncouth place,
Say if my son be here.

CHORUS
As signal now in low dejected state,
As erst in highest, behold him where he lies.

MANOA
O miserable change! is this the man,
That invincible Samson, far renowned,
The dread of Israel’s foes, who with a strength
Equivalent to angels walked their streets,
None offering fight; who single combatant
Duelled their armies ranked in proud array,
Himself an army.
O ever-failing trust in mortal strength!
    Ah what thing good
Prayed for, but often proves our woe, our bane?
I prayed for children, and thought barrenness
In wedlock a reproach; I gained a son,
And such a son as all men hailed me happy.
Who would be now a father in my stead?
O wherefore did God grant me my request,
And as a blessing with such pomp adorned
For this did the angel twice descend?
Select and sacred, glorious for a while,
The miracle of men; then, in an hour,
Ensnared, assaulted, overcome, led bound,
Thy foes’ derision, captive, poor, and blind,
Into a dungeon thrust, to work with slaves!

**SAMSON**
Appoint not heavenly disposition, father;
Nothing of all these evils hath befall’n me
But justly; I myself have brought them on,
Sole author I, sole cause.
    If aught seem vile,
As vile hath been my folly, who have profaned
The mystery of God giv’n me under pledge
Of vow, and have betrayed it to a woman,
A Canaanite, my faithless enemy.
This well I knew, nor was at all surprised,
But warned by oft experience. Did not she
Of Timnah first betray me?
This other thrice assayed with flattering prayers and sighs,
And amorous reproaches to win from me
My capital secret;
Thrice I deluded her, and turned to sport
Her importunity.
Yet the fourth time, when mustering all her wiles,
With blandished parlies, feminine assaults,
Tongue-batt’ries, she surceased not day nor night
To storm me, over-watched and wearied out,
At times when men seek most repose and rest,
I yielded, and unlocked her all my heart,
Who with a grain of manhood well resolved
Might easily have shook off all her snares.
But foul effeminacy held me yoked
Her bondslave.

    O indignity, O blot
To honour and religion! Servile mind
Rewarded well with servile punishment!
The base degree to which I now am fall’n,
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base
As was my former servitude, ignoble,
Unmanly, ignominious, infamous,
True slavery! – and that blindness worse than this,
That saw not how degenerately I served!

MANOA
I cannot praise thy marriage choices, son,
Rather approved them not; but thou didst plead
Divine impulsio prompting how thou might’st
Find some occasion to infest our foes.

    The burden of that fault
Bitterly hast thou paid, and still art paying
That rigid score.

    A worse thing yet remains,
This day the Philistines a popular feast
Here celebrate in Gaza; and proclaim
Great pomp, and sacrifice, and praises loud
To Dagon, as their God who hath delivered
Thee, Samson, bound and blind into their hands.
So Dagon shall be magnified, and God,
Besides whom is no God, compared with idols,
Disglorified, blasphemed.
Which to have come to pass by means of thee, 
Samson, of all thy sufferings think the heaviest, 
Of all reproach the most with shame that ever 
Could have befall’n thee and thy father’s house.

**SAMSON**
Father, I do acknowledge and confess 
That I this honour, I this pomp have brought 
To Dagon, and advanced his praises high 
Among the heathen round; to God have brought 
Dishonour, obloquy, and oped the mouths 
Of idolists, and atheists. 
This only hope relieves me, that the strife 
With me hath end; all the contest is now 
Twixt God and Dagon. Dagon hath presumed, 
Me overthrown, to enter lists with God, 
His deity comparing and preferring 
Before the God of Abraham. 

He, be sure, 
Will not connive, or linger, thus provoked, 
But will arise and his great name assert.

**MANOAH**
With cause this hope relieves thee, and these words 
I as a prophecy receive: for God 
(Nothing more certain) will not long defer 
To vindicate the glory of his name 
Against all competition. 

But for thee what shall be done? 
Thou must not in the meanwhile, here forgot, 
Lie in this miserable loathsome plight 
Neglected. I already have made way 
To some Philistian Lords, with whom to treat 
About thy ransom.
SAMSON
Spare that proposal, father, spare the trouble
Of that solicitation. Let me here,
As I deserve, pay on my punishment,
And expiate, if possible, my crime,
Shameful garrulity.

MANOAH
Be penitent and for thy fault contrite,
But act not in thy own affliction, son.
Repent the sin, but if the punishment
Thou canst avoid, self-preservation bids.
Or th’ execution leave to high disposal,
And let another hand, not thine, exact
Thy penal forfeit from thy self. Perhaps
God will relent, and quit thee all his debt.
Reject not then the offered means
That God hath set before us, to return thee
Home to thy country and his sacred house,
Where thou may’st bring thy off’rings, to avert
His further ire, with prayers and vows renewed.

SAMSON
His pardon I implore; but as for life,
To what end should I seek it? When in strength
All mortals I excelled,
I laid my head and hallowed pledge
Of all that strength in the lascivious lap
Of a deceitful concubine

who shore me
(Like a tame wether) all my precious fleece;
Then turned me out ridiculous, despoiled,
Shav’n, and disarmed among my enemies.
Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonoured, quelled,
To what can I be useful, wherein serve
My nation, and the work from heav’n imposed?
Here let me drudge and earn my bread,
Till vermin or the draff of servile food
Consume me, and oft-invoked death
Hasten the welcome end of all my pains.

MANOA
Wilt thou then serve the Philistines with that gift
Which was expressly giv’n thee to annoy them?
But God can
Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast;
And I persuade me so.

Why else this strength
Miraculous yet remaining in those locks?
His might continues in thee not for naught,
Nor shall his wondrous gifts be frustrate thus.

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

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

SCENE IV (MEDITATION)

SAMSON
O that torment should not be confined
To the body’s wounds and sores
With maladies innumerable
In heart, head, breast, and reins;
But must secret passage find
To th’ inmost mind,
There exercise all his fierce accidents,
And on her purest spirits prey,
As on entrails, joints, and limbs,
With answerable pains, but more intense,
Though void of corporal sense.

Thoughts, my tormenters, armed with deadly stings
Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,
Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
Or medicinal liquor can assuage,
Nor breath of vernal air from snowy Alp.
Sleep hath forsook and giv’n me o’er
To death’s benumbing opium as my only cure.
Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,
And sense of heaven’s desertion.
I was his nursling once and choice delight,
His destined from the womb,
Promised by heavenly message twice descending.
Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless.
This one prayer yet remains (might I be heard –
No long petition), speedy death,
The close of all my miseries, and the balm.
CHORUS
God of our fathers, what is man!
That thou towards him with hand so various,
Or might I say contrarious,
Temper’st thy providence through his short course,
Not evenly, as thou rul’st
The angelic orders and inferior creatures mute,
Irrational and brute.
For such as thou hast solemnly elected,
With gifts and graces eminently adorned
To some great work, thy glory,
And people’s safety, which in part they effect –
Yet toward these thus dignified, thou oft
Amidst their height of noon,
Change thy countenance,
And throw’st them lower than thou didst exalt them high.
In fine,
Just or unjust alike seem miserable:
For oft alike, both come to evil end.
So deal not with this once thy glorious champion,
The image of thy strength, and mighty minister.
What do I beg? How hast thou dealt already?
Behold him in this state calamitous, and turn
His labours, for thou canst, to peaceful end.

INTERLUDE

SCENE V (DALILA)

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

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

CHORUS
Yet on she moves, now stands and eyes thee fixt,
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:
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.

But conjugal affection,
Prevailing over fear and timorous doubt,
Hath led me on desirous to behold
Once more thy face, and know of thy estate –
If aught in my ability may serve
To lighten what thou suffer’st; and,
Though late, yet in some part to recompense
My rash – but more unfortunate – misdeed.
SAMSON
Out, out Hyæna; these are thy wonted arts,
And arts of every woman false like thee –
To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray,
Then as repentant to submit, beseech,
And reconcilement move with feigned remorse;
Confess, and promise wonders in her change,
Not truly penitent, but chief to try
Her husband – how far urged his patience bears,
His virtue or weakness which way to assail;
Then, with more cautious and instructed skill,
Again transgresses, and again submits.

DALILA
Yet hear me, Samson: not that I endeavour
To lessen or extenuate my offense;
But that, with just allowance counterpoised,
I may, if possible, thy pardon find
The easier towards me, or thy hatred less.
First granting, as I do, it was a weakness
In me (but incident to all our sex),
Was it not weakness also to make known
For importunity (that is, for naught)
Wherein consisted all thy strength and safety?
To what I did, thou shewd’st me first the way.
But I “to enemies revealed, and should not”.
Nor should’st thou have trusted that to woman’s frailty:
Ere I to thee, thou to thyself wast cruel.
Let weakness then with weakness come to parley
(So near related, or the same of kind),
Thine forgive mine; that men may censure thine
The gentler, if severely thou exact not
More strength from me, than in thyself was found.
And what if love (which thou interpret’st hate)
The jealousy of love (powerful of sway
In human hearts, nor less in mine towards thee)
Caused what I did?
I saw thee mutable
Of fancy; feared lest one day thou wouldst leave me,
As her at Timnah; sought by all means therefore
How to endear, and hold thee to me firmest:
No better way I saw than by importuning
To learn thy secrets, get into my power
Thy key of strength and safety.

Thou wilt say,
“Why then revealed?” I was assured by those
Who tempted me, that nothing was designed
Against thee but safe custody, and hold.
That made for me.

I knew that liberty
Would draw thee forth to perilous enterprises,
While I at home sate full of cares and fears
Wailing thy absence in my widowed bed.
Here I should still enjoy thee day and night
Mine and love’s prisoner, not the Philistines’,
Whole to myself, unhazarded abroad,
Fearless at home of partners in my love.
These reasons in love’s law have passed for good,
Though fond and reasonless to some perhaps;
And love hath oft, well meaning, wrought much woe,
Yet always pity or pardon hath obtained.

SAMSON
How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, to upbraid me mine!
That malice not repentance brought thee hither,
By this appears: “I gave”, thou say’st, “th’ example,
I led the way”.

Bitter reproach, but true;
I to myself was false ere thou to me.
Such pardon, therefore, as I give my folly
Take to thy wicked deed: which when thou seest
Impartial, self-severe, inexorable,
Thou wilt renounce thy seeking, and much rather
Confess it feigned.

“Weakness” is thy excuse,
And I believe it: weakness to resist
Philistian gold!

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

DALILA
Since thou determin’st weakness for no plea
In man or woman, though to thy own condemning,
Hear what assaults I had, what snares besides,
What sieges girt me round.
It was not gold, as to my charge thou lay’st,
That wrought with me.

Thou know’st the magistrates
And princes of my country came in person,
Solicited, commanded, threatened, urged,
Adjured by all the bonds of civil duty
And of religion, pressed how just it was,
How honourable, how glorious to entrap
A common enemy, who had destroyed
Such numbers of our nation:
and the priest
Was not behind, but ever at my ear,
Preaching how meritorious with the gods
It would be to ensnare an irreligious
Dishonourer of Dagon.

What had I
To oppose against such powerful arguments?
Only my love of thee held long debate;
And combated in silence all these reasons
With hard contest.

At length, that grounded maxim,
So rife and celebrated in the mouths
Of wisest men, “that to the public good
Private respects must yield”, with grave authority
Took full possession of me and prevailed:
Virtue, as I thought, truth, duty, so enjoining.

SAMSON
I thought where all thy circling wiles would end –
In feigned religion, smooth hypocrisy.
But had thy love, still odiously pretended,
Been, as it ought, sincere, it would have taught thee
Far other reasonings, brought forth other deeds.
I before all the daughters of my tribe
And of my nation chose thee from among
My enemies, loved thee, as too well thou knew’st,
Too well, unbosomed all my secrets to thee,
Not out of levity, but over-powered
By thy request, who could deny thee nothing;
Yet now am judged an enemy.

Why then
Didst thou at first receive me for thy husband?
Then, as since then, thy country’s foe professed.
But “zeal moved thee;  
To please thy gods thou didst it” – gods unable  
To acquit themselves and prosecute their foes  
But by ungodly deeds (the contradiction  
Of their own deity), gods cannot be:  
Less therefore to be pleased, obeyed, or feared.  

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

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

**DALILA**  
I was a fool, too rash, and quite mistaken  
In what I thought would have succeeded best.  
Let me obtain forgiveness of thee, Samson,  
Afford me place to show what recompense  
T’wards thee I intend for what I have misdone,  
Misguided. Only, what remains past cure  
Bear not too sensibly, nor still insist  
To afflict thyself in vain.  

Though sight be lost,  
Life yet hath many solaces, enjoyed  
Where other senses want not their delights  
At home in leisure and domestic ease,  
Exempt from many a care and chance to which  
Eyesight exposes daily men abroad.  
I to the lords will intercede, not doubting  
Their favourable ear, that I may fetch thee  
From forth this loathsome prison-house, to abide  
With me,  

where my redoubled love and care  
With nursing diligence (to me, glad office)  
May ever tend about thee to old age  
With all things grateful cheered; and so supplied,  
That what by me thou hast lost, thou least shalt miss.
SAMSON
No, no, of my condition take no care;
It fits not; thou and I long since are twain.
Nor think me so unwary or accurs’d
To bring my feet again into the snare
Where once I have been caught.

I know thy trains,
Though dearly, to my cost; thy gins, and toils;
Thy fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms
No more on me have power, their force is nulled:
So much of adder’s wisdom I have learnt
To fence my ear against thy sorceries.

If in my flower of youth and strength, when all men
Loved, honoured, feared me, thou alone could hate me –
Thy husband – slight me, sell me, and forgo me;
How wouldst thou use me now, blind, and thereby
Deceivable, in most things as a child
Helpless, thence easily condemned, and scorned,
And last neglected?

How wouldst thou insult
When I must live uxorious to thy will
In perfect thralldom, how again betray me,
Bearing my words and doings to the lords
To gloss upon, and censuring, frown or smile?
This gaol I count the house of liberty
To thine, whose doors my feet shall never enter.

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

SAMSON
Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake
My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint.
At distance I forgive thee; go with that.
Bewail thy falsehood and the pious works
It hath brought forth to make thee memorable
Among illustrious women, faithful wives!
Cherish thy hastened widowhood with the gold
Of matrimonial treason! So, farewell.

**DALILA**

I see thou art implacable, more deaf
To prayers than winds and seas. Yet winds to seas
Are reconciled at length, and sea to shore:
Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,
Eternal tempest never to be calmed.
Why do I humble thus myself, and suing
For peace, reap nothing but repulse and hate,
Bid “Go”, with evil omen and the brand
Of infamy upon my name denounced?
But in my country, where I most desire,
In Ecron, Gaza, Asdod and in Gath,
I shall be named among the famousest
Of women, sung at solemn festivals,
Living and dead recorded, who to save
Her country from a fierce destroyer chose,
Above the faith of wedlock-bands;
   my tomb
With odours visited and annual flowers:
Not less renowned than in Mount Ephraim,
Jaël, who with inhospitable guile
Smote Sisera sleeping through the temples nail’d.
Nor shall I count it heinous to enjoy
The public marks of honour and reward
Conferred upon me, for the piety
Which to my country I was judged to have shown.
At this who ever envies or repines
I leave him to his lot, and like my own.

**CHORUS**

She’s gone – a manifest serpent, by her sting
Discovered in the end, till now concealed.
SAMSON
So let her go. God sent her to debase me,
And aggravate my folly, who committed
To such a viper his most sacred trust
Of secrecy, my safety, and my life.

CHORUS
It was for this God’s universal law
Gave to the man despotic power
Over his female in due awe,
Nor from that right to part an hour,
Smile she or lour:
So shall he least confusion draw.

INTERLUDE
SCENE VI (HARAPHA)

CHORUS
But this another kind of tempest brings.

SAMSON
Be less abstruse, my riddling days are past.

CHORUS
Look now for no enchanting voice, nor fear
The bait of honeyed words; a rougher tongue
Draws hitherward,

I know him by his stride,
The giant Harapha of Gath, his look
Haughty as is his pile high-built and proud.
Comes he in peace?

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

CHORUS
His fraught we soon shall know, he now arrives.

HARAPHA
I come not Samson, to condole thy chance,
As these perhaps, yet wish it had not been,
Though for no friendly intent.
I am of Gath,
Men call me Harapha, of stock renowned
As Og or Anak and the Emims old
That Kiriatháím held. Thou knowst me now,
If thou at all art known.

Much I have heard
Of thy prodigious might and feats performed
Incredible to me – in this displeased,
That I was never present on the place
Of those encounters, where we might have tried
Each other’s force in camp or listed field:
And now am come to see of whom such noise
Hath walked about, and each limb to survey,
If thy appearance answer loud report.

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

HARAPHA
Dost thou already single me; I thought
Gyves and the mill had tamed thee.

O that fortune
Had brought me to the field where thou art famed
To have wrought such wonders with an ass's jaw!
I should have forced thee soon with other arms,
Or left thy carcass where the ass lay thrown:
So had the glory of prowess been recovered
To Palestine, won by a Philistine
From the unforeskinned race, of whom thou bear’st
The highest name for valiant acts.

That honour,
Certain to have won by mortal duel from thee,
I lose, prevented by thy eyes put out.

SAMSON
Boast not of what thou wouldst have done, but do
What then thou would’st: thou see’st it in thy hand.
HARAPHA
To combat with a blind man I disdain,
And thou hast need much washing to be touched.

SAMSON
Such usage as your honourable lords
Afford me, assassinated and betrayed,
Who durst not with their whole united powers
In fight withstand me, single and unarmed,
Nor in the house with chamber ambuses
Close-banded durst attack me – no, not sleeping,
Till they had hired a woman with their gold
Breaking her marriage faith to circumvent me.
Therefore without feigned shifts, let be assigned
Some narrow place enclosed, where sight may give thee,
Or rather flight, no great advantage on me.
Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy helmet
And brigandine of brass, thy broad habergeon,
Vambrace and greaves, and gauntlet; add thy spear,
A weaver’s beam, and seven-times-folded shield:
I only with an oak’n staff will meet thee,
And raise such outcries on thy clattered iron,
Which long shall not withhold me from thy head,
That in a little time, while breath remains thee,
Thou oft shalt wish thy self at Gath, to boast
Again in safety what thou wouldst have done
To Samson; but shalt never see Gath more.

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

SAMSON
I know no spells, use no forbidden arts:
My trust is in the living God who gave me
At my nativity this strength, diffused
No less through all my sinews, joints and bones,
Than thine, while I preserved these locks unshorn,
The pledge of my unviolated vow.
For proof hereof, if Dagon be thy god,
Go to his temple, invocate his aid
With solemnest devotion, spread before him
How highly it concerns his glory now
To frustrate and dissolve these magic spells,
Which I to be the power of Israel’s God
Avow, and challenge Dagon to the test,
Off’ring 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.
I once again
Defy thee to the trial of mortal fight,
By combat to decide whose god is god,
Thine, or whom I with Israel’s sons adore.

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

SAMSON
Tongue-doughty giant, how dost thou prove me these?

HARAPHA
Is not thy nation subject to our lords?
SAMSON
My nation was subjected to your lords.
It was the force of conquest. Force with force
Is well ejected when the conquered can.
These shifts refuted, answer thy appellant
Though by his blindness maimed for high attempts,
Who now defies thee thrice to single fight,
As a petty enterprise of small enforce.

HARAPHA
With thee, a man condemned, a slave enrolled,
Due by the law to capital punishmen
To fight with thee, no man of arms will deign.

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

HARAPHA
O Baäl-zebub! can my ears unused
Hear these dishonours, and not render death?

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

HARAPHA
This insolence other kind of answer fits.

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

HARAPHA
By Astaroth, ere long thou shalt lament
These braveries, in irons laden on thee.
SCENE VII (PHILISTINE OFFICER)

CHORUS
His giantship is gone, somewhat crest-fall’n,
Stalking with less unconscionable strides,
And lower looks, but in a sultry chafe.

SAMSON
I dread him not, nor all his giant-brood,
Though fame divulge him father of five sons
All of gigantic size, Goliath chief.

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

SAMSON
Come what will, my deadliest foe will prove
My speediest friend, by death to rid me hence –
The worst that he can give, to me the best.
Yet so it may fall out, because their end
Is hate, not help, to me, it may with mine
Draw their own ruin who attempt the deed.

CHORUS
O how comely it is and how reviving
To the spirits of just men long oppressed,
When God into the hands of their deliverer
Puts invincible might
To quell the mighty of the earth!
He all their ammunition
And feats of war defeats
With plain heroic magnitude of mind
And celestial vigour armed;
Their armories and magazines contemns;
Renders them useless, while
With wingèd expedition
Swift as the lightning glance he executes
His errand on the wicked, who, surprised,
Lose their defence, distracted and amazed.
And yet perhaps more trouble is behind.
For I descry this way
Some other tending; in his hand
A scepter or quaint staff he bears;
Comes on amain, speed in his look.
By his habit I discern him now
A public officer, and now at hand.
His message will be short and voluble.

OFFICER
Hebrews, the pris’ner Samson here I seek.

CHORUS
His manacles remark him, there he sits.

OFFICER
Samson, to thee our lords thus bid me say:
This day to Dagon is a solemn feast,
With sacrifices, triumph, pomp, and games;
Thy strength they know surpassing human rate,
And now some public proof thereof require
To honour this great feast and great assembly.
Rise therefore with all speed and come along,
Where I will see thee heartened and fresh clad
T’ appear as fits before th’ illustrious lords.

SAMSON
Thou knowst I am an Hebrew; therefore tell them,
Our law forbids at their religious rites
My presence: for that cause I cannot come.

OFFICER
This answer, be assured, will not content them.
SAMSON
Have they not sword-players, and every sort
Of gymnic artists, wrestlers, riders, runners,
Jugglers and dancers, antics, mummers, mimics,
But they must pick me out with shackles tired,
And over-laboured at their public mill,
To make them sport with blind activity?
Return the way thou cam’st, I will not come.
OFFICER
My message was imposed on me with speed,
Brooks no delay: is this thy resolution?
SAMSON
So take it with what speed thy message needs.
OFFICER
I am sorry what this stoutness will produce.
SAMSON
Perhaps thou shalt have cause to sorrow indeed.
CHORUS
Consider, Samson; matters now are strained
Up to the height, whether to hold or break.
He’s gone, and who knows how he may report
Thy words by adding fuel to the flame?
Expect another message more imperious,
More lordly thund’ring than thou well wilt bear.
SAMSON
Shall I abuse this consecrated gift
Of strength, again returning with my hair
After my great transgression? So requite
Favour renewed, and add a greater sin
By prostituting holy things to idols? –
A Nazarite in place abominable,
Vaunting my strength in honour to their Dagon!
Yet, that God may dispense with me or thee
Present in temples at idolatrous rites
For some important cause, thou needst not doubt.
CHORUS
How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach.
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 dishonour
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.
CHORUS
In time thou hast resolved, the man returns.
OFFICER
Samson, this second message from our lords
To thee I am bid say: “Art thou our slave,
Our captive, at the public mill our drudge,
And dar’st thou at our sending and command
Dispute thy coming?
Come without delay;
Or we shall find such engines to assail
And hamper thee, as thou shalt come of force,
Though thou wert firmlier fastened than a rock.”
SAMSON
I could be well content to try their art,
Which to no few of them would prove pernicious.
Yet knowing their advantages too many,
Because they shall not trail me through their streets
Like a wild beast, I am content to go.
OFFICER
I praise thy resolution. Doff these links:
By this compliance thou wilt win the lords
To favour, and perhaps to set thee free.
SAMSON
Brethren, farewell. Your company along
I will not wish, lest it perhaps offend them
To see me girt with friends; and how the sight
Of me as of a common enemy,
So dreaded once, may now exasperate them,
I know not.
Happen what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonourable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our law, my nation, or myself –
The last of me, or no, I cannot warrant.

CHORUS
Go, and the Holy One
Of Israel be thy guide
To what may serve his glory best.
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?

SINFONIA = SCENE VIII (THE TEMPLE OF DAGON)

The sinfonia represents the climax of the drama which takes place off-stage, in the temple of Dagon.
The events are supposed to be happening in the real time of the play.
The successive reactions of the Philistines are perceived by the Chorus and by Manoa as ‘shouts’, ‘outcries’ and a ‘hideous noise’.
The causes will be revealed by the Messenger in scene IX.

SCENE IX (THE MESSENGER)

CHORUS
Ah to our wish I see one hither speeding,
A Hebrew, as I guess, and of our tribe.
MESSENGER
O whither shall I run, or which way fly
The sight of this so horrid spectacle
Which erst my eyes beheld and yet behold.

MANOA
Tell us the sum, the circumstance defer.

MESSENGER
Gaza yet stands, but all her sons are fall’n,
All in a moment overwhelmed and fall’n.

MANOA
Sad, but thou knowst to Israelites not saddest
The desolation of a hostile city.

MESSENGER
Now take the worst in brief, Samson is dead.

MANOA
The worst indeed! O, all my hopes defeated
To free him hence! But death who sets all free
Hath paid his ransom now and full discharge.
How died he? Death to life is crown or shame.
All by him fell, thou say’st; by whom fell he,
What glorious hand gave Samson his 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
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 thy self,
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,
Eye-witness of what first or last was done,
Relation more particular and distinct.

MESSENGER
Occasions drew me early to this city,
And as the gates I entered with sunrise,
The morning-trumpets festival proclaimed
Through each high street.

    Little I had dispatched,
When all abroad was rumoured that this day
Samson should be brought forth to show the people
Proof of his mighty strength in feats and games;
I sorrowed at his captive state, but minded
Not to be absent at that spectacle.
The building was a spacious theatre
Half round on two main pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the lords, and each degree
Of sort, might sit in order to behold.
The other side was open, where the throng
On banks and scaffolds under sky might stand:
I among these aloof obscurely stood.
The feast and noon grew high, and sacrifice
Had filled their hearts with mirth, high cheer, and wine,
When to their sports they turned.
Immediately
Was Samson as a public servant brought,
In their state-livery clad; before him pipes
And timbrels, on each side went armed guards,
Both horse and foot before him, and behind
Archers, and slingers, cataphracts and spears.
At sight of him the people with a shout
Rifted the air, clam’ring their god with praise,
Who had made their dreadful enemy their thrall.

He patient but undaunted where they led him,
Came to the place; and what was set before him,
Which without help of eye might be assayed,
To heave, pull, draw, or break, he still performed
All with incredible, stupendous force,
None daring to appear antagonist.

At length for intermission sake they led him
Between the pillars. He his guide requested
(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 massive pillars
That to the archèd roof gave main support.
He unsuspicious led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
And eyes fast fixed he stood, as one who prayed,
Or some great matter in his mind revolved.

At last with head erect thus cried aloud,
“Hitherto, lords, what your commands imposed
I have performed – as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld.
Now of my own accord such other trial
I mean to shew you of my strength, yet greater;
As with amaze shall strike all who behold.”
This uttered, straining all his nerves he bowed;  
As with the force of winds and waters pent  
When mountains tremble, those two massive pillars  
With horrible convulsion to and fro  
He tugged, he shook, till down they came and drew  
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder  
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,  
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,  
Their choice nobility and flower, not only  
Of this but each Philistian city round  
Met from all parts to solemnize this feast.

Samson with these immixed, inevitably  
Pulled down the same destruction on himself:  
The vulgar only scaped who stood without.

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

**INTERLUDE (brief and elegiac)**

**X (EPILOGUE)**
MANOA
Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroic’ly hath finished
A life heroic, on his enemies
Fully revenged, hath left them years of mourning,
And lamentation to the sons of Caphtor
Through all Philistian bounds.

To Israel
Honour hath left, and freedom – let but them
Find courage to lay hold on this occasion;
To himself and father’s house, eternal fame;
And which is best and happiest yet, all this
With God not parted from him, as was feared,
But favouring and assisting to the end.
Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.
Let us go find the body where it lies
Soaked in his enemy’s blood, and from the stream
With lavers pure and cleansing herbs wash off
The clotted gore.

I with what speed the while
Will send for all my kindred, all my friends,
To fetch him hence and solemnly attend
With silent obsequy and funeral train
Home to his father’s house.

There will I build him
A monument, and plant it round with shade
Of laurel ever green, and branching palm,
With all his trophies hung, and acts enrolled
In copious legend, or sweet lyric song.
Thither shall all the valiant youth resort,
And from his memory inflame their breasts
To matchless valour, and adventures high.
CHORUS
All is best, though we oft doubt,
What th’ unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about.
God now, with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event,
His servants hath dismissed –
Dismissed with peace and consolation,
And calm of mind, all passion spent.

FINIS