Samson Agonistes

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

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Preface to Samson Agonistes

In the spring semester of 1990, I had the pleasure of taking a course on John Milton with Dr. Daryl Adrian. One of the requirements of this course involved a final paper or project. During one of our Wednesday night class meetings, Dr. Adrian, knowing my background in music, jokingly suggested I write an opera based on a piece by Milton. Well, at first I was mildly amused by the suggestion and shrugged it off, but then I began to think seriously about this proposal. Yes, it could be done; in fact, it had already been done by John Dryden who "tagged" Milton's verses of Paradise Lost in 1678 (White 104). So I thought to myself, "This is possible, and why not work with Samson Agonistes, a poem Milton rather conveniently had written in Greek tragic form." Immediately I began sketching plans for my opera: Samson would be a bass, no, a baritone, and Dalila, of course, would be the soprano lead; if I had time, I could even create costume and set designs. The possibilities were as boundless as the sea!

Thus, I embarked upon a year's labor on my illustrious project, and like any good scholar, I began my project with mountains of research: I researched Milton's life and his works, Restoration Theatre, 17th century music, and I even researched the ancient Philistine culture. Through the course of my research, I gathered a multitude of books and started my own library in my tiny apartment.
All this research led me to believe that my first step in converting *Samson Agonistes* into an opera was to prove that this piece is suitable for music and for the stage. I discovered that the 17th century marked a great era of English Renaissance creativity. Out of this era arose such literary greats as Milton, Donne, and Dryden. Towards the closing of the century, English music began to flourish, as well, into a genre almost comparable to the magnificent Italian music. English composers such as Purcell and Locke, contemporaries of the masters of prose, made their contribution to the English Renaissance. The coupling of these two forms, literature and music, yields a unique art form which encompasses all this era had to offer by way of aesthetics—the opera.

Therefore, it is not unlikely that Milton's dramatic poem *Samson Agonistes* would be or could be transformed into the opera style of 17th century England, which was then called "dramma per musica" (Haun 2). Coincidentally, Milton himself possessed great knowledge and talent in music. According to Dr. Sigmund Spaeth in his book on *Milton's Knowledge of Music*, Milton devoted much of his time to intense studies of the classics: Greek philosophy in rhetoric, mathematics, and music (16). However, Milton's interest in music went beyond the mere fancy of a Renaissance scholar. He took his musical pursuits seriously and was not a novice by any means.

Noted biographers of Milton, John Aubrey and Edward Phillips, give us some insight to the musical practices of
Milton. Phillips tells us that Milton's experience in music began early under the tutelage of his father, John Milton, Sr. who was a celebrated composer during his lifetime (Hughes 1026). Aubrey, in turn, speaks more of Milton's musicality: "He had a delicate tunable voice, and had good skill. His father instructed him. He had an organ in his house; he played on that most" (Hughes 1023).

Milton continued his musical pursuits throughout his college days at Cambridge and Trinity, writing a lengthy essay on "the Music of the Spheres" (Spaeth 17). After his training in the universities was complete, Milton carried on his musical education during his Italian journeys between the years 1638 and 1639. The Italian school of music was by far the most advanced in 17th century Europe, and in the cultural centers of Rome and Venice, Milton undoubtedly experienced many of the Italian innovations in the genre.

During one such visit to Rome, Milton became a personal friend to Cardinal Francesco Barbarini, a well-known patron of the arts (Spaeth 21). At the Cardinal's palazzo on February 27, 1639, Milton had the pleasure of witnessing the first known comic opera, "Chi soffre, speri." But the memory of this glorious evening was not all that Milton took back to England, for Milton also purchased several scores and music books for himself, his father, and his friend Henry Lawes: "I occasionally visited the Metropolis either for the sake of purchasing books of learning something new in mathematics, or in music..." (Langdon 201).
For this reason, many musicologists attribute the growth of 17th century English music to men like Milton who brought back their musical experiences and knowledge acquired in Italy to share with their contemporaries (Haun 3).

As mentioned earlier, Milton had a certain musical friend, Henry Lawes, for whom he brought back some music souvenirs from Italy. Before his trip to Italy, Milton and Lawes had combined their talents to create a masque for the Countess of Derby in 1634 (Spaeth 19). In this collaboration, Milton employed some principles of the Greek theory of music to compose the text of Arcades, of which Lawes provided the musical score. The masque was a success, and within that same year, Milton and Lawes once again combined their efforts to produce another masque, Comus. Despite the apparent musicality of the piece in both text and form, it is significant to note that Comus was, in fact, a precursor of early English opera (Demaray 5).

In light of the entire scope of Milton's experience in music, is it not possible that someone could have adapted Samson Agonistes to opera form? After all, it had been done before; so why not with this particular piece? If one answers negatively to this question, it would have to be on the basis of one small statement made by Milton in the preface to Samson Agonistes, "Division into Act and Scene referring chiefly to the Stage (to which this work never was intended) is here omitted" (Hughes 550). However, Low and Radzinowicz, both accomplished Milton critics, present an
interesting argument on this matter; these critics argue that Milton had intended this drama for a reformed theatre that never came about in his lifetime. According to Radzinowicz, with this concept of a reformed or ideal theatre in mind, a new interpretation of Milton's statement might read like this:

'When the theatres were closed in 1642 I [Milton] planned tragedies for a reformed theatre which the magistrates would shortly reopen, I hoped. After 1660 when the actual theatre was reopened, I could not write for it; hence this play was never planned for the stage' (Radzinowicz 396).

A second reading of this statement is given by Anthony Low who believed that Milton did plan act and scene divisions for *Samson Agonistes* but did not provide them, thus preparing an actable play that Milton knew could not be produced in his lifetime because of the loss of a potential national audience by the downfall of the Commonwealth (Low 226). Interestingly enough, Milton did plan dramas and gave them stage directions in the Trinity Manuscript in the 1640's; so he was hopeful that the condition of the theatre would improve, and based on this assumption, *Samson Agonistes* could have eventually been adapted for the stage, despite the intentions for it not to be as stated in Milton's preface to the dramatic poem.

After I proved the suitability of *Samson Agonistes* for the stage to myself and hopefully to my audience, I began
the difficult part of my project--adapting the poem to opera form as it would have been during the Restoration. My first step was to divide the poem/play into acts and scenes. I found that William Riley Parker had made these divisions in his book Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy according to the classical Greek fashion (17). I initially applied Parker's divisions to my copy of the Samson Agonistes text, but I soon changed these divisions to suit my own purposes as I began editing and adapting the text. My act and scene divisions go as follows:

Act I, scene i: lines 1-275
Act I, scene ii: 295-325
Act II, scene i: 326-651
Act II, scene ii: 652-709
Act III, scene i: 710-996
Act III, scene ii: 997-1060
Act IV, scene i: 1061-1243
Act IV, scene ii: 1244-1296
Act V, scene i: 1297-1439
Act V, scene ii: 1441-1758

My divisions differ slightly from Parker's, and I did not base mine entirely on the classical Greek method of dividing acts and scenes. Rather, I found that it was easy to distinguish where the scenes should be divided and where the stage directions should be just on reading the text, and it does seem as if Milton had intentionally written the play with acts and scenes in mind but left them out, just as Low theorized and as Milton told us in his preface.
During this adaptation of the text into script form, I found myself actually editing Milton's text. I cannot fully express how unworthy I felt to commit such a crime against one of the greatest authors of all time! But, as the saying goes, the show must go on, and I quietly continued with my axing of the text.

Well, with my ax in hand, I was forced to cut down many of the soliloquies, which left in their original lengthy state, I was certain not even Shakespeare's audiences would sit through. The dialogues, as well, were quite lengthy in places, but this problem was solved easily. I simply divided the Danite chorus into four parts and created four new characters: Ephram, Micah, Benjamen, and Levi. These four men would also serve as a male quartet. I also added some "extras" like comrades for Harapha to help the giant taunt the captive Samson, attendants for Dalila, and a guide for Samson who is mentioned twice in the text anyway (1-15, 1630).

In my editing, there was only one place in the original text where I wrote a line of my own (outside of the Prologue). My line occurs in Act III, scene i, within the dialogue between Samson and Dalila. Dalila speaks in lines 56-57 in my script, "Dearest Husband, Love didst urge me to thy presence,/And Love hath oft, well meaning, wrought much woe." My line is the first and Milton's is the second. My goal was for my line to match Milton's style as close as possible, and I attempted to match his style throughout the
entire script in places where I added or changed words and phrases.

Another facet of my editing involved deciding what portions of Milton's text would become the lyrics of the songs needed to transform this piece into an opera. The chorus and the quartet songs were easy to locate, for Milton employed the classical Greek "parodos", "epeisodion", "stasimon", and even a final dirge or "kommos" (Parker 16). In ancient Greek tragedy, these sections of the drama were actually sung; hence the chorus once again takes on its original intended use--the delivery of the narrative passages and a reflection of the deep emotions felt by the tragic hero through the power of music and singing (148). In fact the invention of early opera came about by the Renaissance revival of the ancient Greek practices in drama, which in turn brought the use of sung arias and recitatives to the theatre. In England, particularly, the first performance of a musical drama marked the official relaxation of the Puritanical suppression of the theatres and the establishment of the Restoration Theatre (Haun xv).

So how does one go about applying this Greek method of chorus to *Samson Agonistes*? All it takes is a bit of common sense. When I applied the choral songs, I took the sections toward the end of the acts, the sections that seemed most like commentary and were written more poetically than the preceding lines, converted them into to songs and divided
the lines into four recitatives sung by the quartet and sometimes finishing with a tutti choral movement. For the principal arias, I had to use my own personal discretion; Samson has three arias, Dalila has one, and Manoa two. In total there are twelve songs, and I admit there could have been more, but one must remember that this is early opera and more of the lines were spoken than sung, unlike modern opera.

Since the focus of my preface has shifted to the songs of the opera, I will now discuss the music and the hypothetical composer. I chose Purcell's music because his operatic style is closest to what I had in mind for Samson Agonistes. First of all, Purcell was composing during the time period appropriate for the production of this hypothetical opera, from 1680 to 1695. Secondly, Purcell's operas are considered to be a genre of their own, "part spoken play and part sung," exactly how I intend my opera to be (Moore xiii). Also, the sources for many of Purcell's operas came from great authors like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Dryden (White 110). Surely Purcell could have composed something on Milton as well, but he did not, and we cannot go back in time to ask him why. Nonetheless, Purcell's talents certainly would have been suitable for composing an opera based on Samson Agonistes, if he had been so inclined to, and it is his music that I used to complete the music portion of my project: for the overture, I used the overture to Purcell's Dido and Aeneas, and for the arias I used various songs I found in a collection of his vocal pieces (Kagen).
The last phase of my project called upon my creative abilities, for my opera still needed a Prologue and some costume designs (I opted not to design a set or scenery since my time was running out). Since I had taken a course on Restoration Theatre earlier in my college career, I knew that most, if not all, Restoration dramas contained a Prologue. The Prologue was usually presented by one of the company actors, and its purpose was to establish a relationship between the audience and the play and emphasizes the importance of the audience, for without the audience there could be no play. Often the poet of the Prologue would warm up the audience with wit, abuse them, comment on their fashion, their behavior and values (Powell 16). Sometimes the Prologue would provide salient facts for the audience to aid in understanding the play, or even give a brief synopsis of the impending drama.

With these criteria in mind, I set about writing my own Prologue for Samson Agonistes. A Prologue is actually a 20 to 40 line poem written in iambic pentameter with a typical rhyme scheme of AA BB CC, and so on. Thusly, I followed this restrictive format in my Prologue. To imitate the purpose of the original Restoration Prologues, the first four lines addresses the audience and comments upon the occasion:

All ye that are gathered here today,
Witness a spectacle of woe and dismay,
For as our humble discourse will unfold
A tale of such tragedy ne'er betold.
The poem continues with a brief summary of Samson's demise, stressing the weakness of a man to give in to such a wicked woman as Dalila. The poem ends with yet another connection to the audience, warning men against their wicked, controlling, and possessive wives. True, this last message may be a bit chauvenistic, but I cannot ignore the fact that a large part of the Restoration audience (for which this opera is intended) was male, and I must keep within the parameters of their culture and value system which, unfortunately, was oppressive and chauventistic toward women. I by no means am chauvenistic, and I do not condone such misogynistic views, (especially since I am a woman), and I do hope that I have not offended anyone by my Prologue.

The second part of my creative phase for my project involved designing my own costume. Through my humble artistic talents I sketched costumes for all the principal actors and some for the attendants for Dalila and for male and female chorus members (without getting into another dissertation on Restoration Theatre, it might be of interest to note that by this time females were allowed to act on the stage). I based my designs on costumes depicted in several costume books: Laver's *Costume Through the Ages*, Lister's *Costume: An Illustrated Survey from Ancient Times to the Twentieth Century*, and Van Witsen's *Costuming for Opera*.

After completing my manuscript for the opera, I needed to decide where, when, and by whom my opera should be performed. My research on the theatre and on Purcell
indicated that the optimum theatre for my opera would be the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane. During Purcell's theatre days, there was much competition between the two central theatres, the new and ornate Dorset Garden and the old and established Drury Lane (Powell 8). Since Dorset Garden was primarily used for the more elaborate opera and theatre productions, Drury Lane would have probably been the sight of the hypothetical *Samson Agonistes* opera.

The prominent acting company of the late 17th century was the United Company, which was actually a combination of the King's Company and the Duke's Company merged in 1681 (Powell 151). So, the probable players for my opera would be the United Company, and the probable date for the production would be between the years 1694 and 1695, the last years of Purcell's life. All of this information can be read on the title page of my opera, and one might notice the line, "Adapted by Sir Gerald Lee." Yes, this is my alias for my production; since a woman would not have been involved with the adaptation of an opera libretto in 17th century England, I was forced to keep with the times and adopt the male nomenclature Sir Gerald Lee, which I thought sounded noble yet remained similar to my own name.

My opera is completed, and all that remains is for you, the audience, to read and enjoy. However, keep in mind that this is a purely hypothetical situation, and please forgive me for shortcomings, for I am not a 17th century English composer or librettist. And who knows, maybe some day with a little luck and a little money, my opera will be produced.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


Samson Agonistes

A Dramatic Opera
Perform'd at
The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane
By the United Company
The Words Made by Mr. John Milton
Adapted by Sir Gerald Lee
Musick Composed by Mr. Henry Purcell
Prologue

All ye that are gathered here today,
Witness a spectacle of woe and dismay,
For as our humble discourse will unfold
A tale of such tragedy ne'er betold.
It is that of poor Samson, captive and blind,
A prisoner of Gaza, his own sin designed.
To be wiled by a wench is fate most unkind.
Betrayer of ages, Dalila, Jezebel,
Whose carnal desire didst cast such a spell
Upon God's chosen, whose strength and might
Drove foul, pagan enemies afeared into flight.
Tis pity a wife as beautiful as she
Prove wicked and traitorous inward to be.
This treacherous maid in her wifely disguise
Crept where He lay, unaware of demise.
The she-devil, she, with shears in her hand
Unveiled Samson's secret with force and demand.
Alas, our hero, now raped of his lock
Must stand before Dagon, scorned and mock't;
The warrior of Dan weak and defrock't.
Is there no hope for a faithless man as he?
Be patient and watch, for soon you shall see.
But hark my words and heed my warning
You men with wives who spy to go shorning
Through the tenuous threads of your manhood
To snip away all that is dear and is good
To a man: your money, your mistress, your wine
Hide from your Dalila, and all will be fine.
Lest you end as Samson, in bondage, a slave
To the will of a woman, tis shameful and grave.
The Persons

Samson
Manoa, the father of Samson
Dalila, his wife
Harapha, of Gath
Public Officer
Messenger
Guide, to Samson
Ephram
Micah
Benjamen
Levi

Chorus, of Danites
Attendants, to Dalila
Comrades, of Harapha

Scene—Gaza, home of the Philistines
ACT I

Scene i
The Prison of Gaza
Enter Samson with Guide

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, where I a Prisoner
chaine'd;
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.

Exit Guide

Sam. Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
Of Hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what am now.

SONG

Sam. O wherefore was my birth from Heaven foretold
Twice by an Angel?
Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
As of a person separate from God,
Disguised for great exploit;
If I must die Betray'd, 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 Heaven-gifted strength?
O glorious strength put to the labor of a Beast,
Debas't lower than a Bondslave!

Sam. Promise was that I should Israel from Philistian
yoke deliver;
Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke;

Samson Agonistes
A Dramatic Opera
By John Milton and Henry Purcell
Life in captivity, among inhuman foes.

Enter Ephram, Micah, Benjamen, Levi, and Chorus

**Sam.** But who are these? for which 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.

**Ephram.** This, this is he; softly awhile,
Let us not break in upon him.

**Micah.** O change beyond report, thought or belief!
See how he lies at random, carelessly diffus'd,
With languished head unpropt,
As one past hope, abandon'd,
And by himself given over.

**Ben.** A man in slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds
O'erworn and soiled;
Or do my eyes misrepresent? Can this be he,
That Heroic, that Renown'd, irresistible Samson?
Whom unarm'd, no strength of man, or fiercest
Wild beast could withstand; Who tore the Lion,
Who made Arms ridiculous, useless the forgery
Of brazen shield and spear.
Which shall I first bewail, Thy Bondage or lost
Sight,
Prison within Prison, inseparably dark?
Thou art become the Dungeon of thyself.

**Levi.** O mirror of our fickle state,
Since man on earth unparallel'd!
The rarer thy example stands,
By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
Strongest of mortal men,
To lowest pitch of abject fortune art thou fall'n.

**Sam.** I hear the sound of words, their sense the air
Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear.

**Ephram.** He speaks, Let us draw nigh. Matchless in might,
The glory of Israel, now the grief;
We come thy friends and neighbors not unknown
From Eshtaol and Zora's fruitful Vale
To visit or bewail thee, or if better,
Counsel or Consolation we may bring,
Salve to thy sores; apt words have the power to swage
The tumors of a troubl'd mind,
And are as Balm to fester'd wounds.

**Sam.** 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; in prosperous days
They swarm, but in adverse withdraw their head
Not to be found, though sought. Ye see, 0 friends;
How many evils have enclos'd me round;
Yet that which was the worst now least afflicts me,
Blindness, for had I sight confus'd with shame,
How could I once look up, or heave the head,
Who like a foolish Pilot have shipwreck't
My Vessel trusted to me from above;
And for a word, a tear, fool, have divulg'd
The secret gift of God to a deceitful Woman.
Tell me, friends, am I not sung 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 pair'd,
These two proportion'd ill drove me transverse.

Micah. Tax not divine disposal: wisest Men
Have err'd, and by bad women been deceiv'd;
And shall again, pretend they ne'er so wise.
Deject not them so overmuch thyself,
Who hast of sorrow thy full load besides;
Yet truth to say, I oft have heard men wonder
Why thou shouldst wed Philistian women rather
Than of thine own Tribe fairer, or as fair.
At least of thy own Nation, and as noble.

Sam. The first I saw at Timna, and she pleas'd
Me, not my parents, that I sought to wed,
The daughter of an Infidel: they knew not
That what I motion'd was of God; I knew
From intimate impulse, and therefore urg'd
The Marriage on; that by occasion hence
I might begin Israel's Deliverence;
Yet she proving false, the next I took to Wife
Was in that Vale of Sorec, Dalila,
That specious Monster, my accomplish snare.
Of what I now suffer she was not the prime cause,
But I myself, who vanquished with a peal of words
Gave up my fort of silence to a Woman.

Ben. In seeking just occasion to provoke
The Philistine, thy Country's Enemy,
Thou never wast remiss, I bear thee witness:
Yet Israel serves with all his Sons.

Sam. 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
Acknowleg'd not, or not all consider'd
Deliverance offer'd: I on th' other side
Us'd no ambition to commend my deeds,
The deeds themselves, though mute, spoke loud
the doer;
Till at length their Lords, the Philistines,
With gather'd powers enter'd Judea seeking me.
Meanwhile the men of Judah to prevent
The harass of their land, beset me round, bound
Me with cords, and set me before the Philistines;
But the cords to me were threads toucht with flames
On their whole Host I flew, unarm'd, and fell'd
Their choicest youth; they only liv'd who fled.
Yet ungrateful men of Judah despise, or envy, or
Suspect whom God hath of his special favor rais'd
As their Deliverer; if he aught begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last
To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds?

Scene ii

SONG

Ephram. 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.

Micah. Yet more there be who doubt his way not just
As to his own edicts, found contraticting,
Then give the reigns to wand'ring thought,
Regardless of his glory's diminution;
Till by their own perplexities involv'd
They ravel more, still less resolved,
But never find self-satisfying solution.

Ben. As if they would confine th' interminable,
And tie him to his own prescript,
Who made our Laws to bind us, not himself,
And hath full right to exempt
Whom so it pleases him by choice
From National obstruction, without taint
Of sin or legal debt;
For with his own Laws he can best dispense.

Levi. He would not else who never wanted means,
Nor in respect of th'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.
Chorus. 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.

Act II

Scene i
Enter Manoa

Levi. But see here comes thy reverend Sire
With careful step, Locks white as down,
Old Manoa: advise
Forthwith how thou ought'st to receive him.

Sam. Ay me, another inward grief awak't,
With mention of that name renews th' assault.

Manoa. Brethren and men of Dan, for such ye seem,
Though in this uncouth place; if old respect,
As I suppose, towards your once glorified friend,
My Son now captive, hither hath inform'd
Your younger feet, while mine cast back with age
Came lagging after; say if he be here.

Ephram. 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 renown'd,
The dread of Israel's foes, himself an Army,
Now unequal match to save himself against
A coward arm'd at one spear's length.

SONG

Manoa. O ever failing trust in mortal strenth!
And oh, what not in man deceivable and vain!
Nay, what good thing pray'd for, but oft
proves our woe, our bane?
I pray'd for children, and thought barrenness
In wedlock a reproach; I gain'd a Son,
And such a Son as all Men hail'd me happy;
Who would be now a Father in my stead?

Manoa. O wherefore did God grant me my request,
And as a blessing with such pomp adorn'd;
Ordain'd in thy nature Holy, Select, and Sacred,
Glorious for a while, the miracle of men:
Then in an hour ensnar'd, assaulted, overcome,
Led bound, thy Foe's 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 as a thrall subject him to so
foul indignities
Be it but for honor's sake of former deeds.

Sam. 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, who have profan'd
The mystery of God giv'n me under pledge
Of vow, and have betray'd it to a woman.

SONG

Sam. A woman, a Canaanite, my faithless enemy
In her prime of love, with
Spousal embraces, vitiated with Gold,
She purpos'd to betray me.
Thrice she assay'd with flattering prayers
and sighs
And amorous reproaches to win from me
My capital secret. Thrice I deluded her,
Yet she sought to make me traitor to myself.
The fourth time, when must'ring all her wiles,
Feminine assaults, Tongue batteries,
She surceas'd not day nor night
To storm me over-watch't and wearied out.
At the time when men seek most repose and rest,
I yielded, and unlocked her all my heart,
And foul effeminacy held me yok't her bondslave.

Sam. O indignity, O blot to Honor 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 serv'd.

Manoa. I cannot praise thy marriage choices, Son,
Rather aprrov'd them not; but thou didst plead
Divine impulsion prompting how thou might'st
Find soon occasion to infest our Foes.
Our Foes found soon occasion to make thee
Their captive, and their triumph; thou the sooner
Temptation over-power'd the sacred trust of silence
Deposited within thee; but thou hear'st enough,
And more the burden of that fault: yet a worse thing
remains.
This day the Philistines popular Feast
Here celebrate in Gaza; and proclaim
Great Pomp, and Sacrifice, and Praises loud
To Dagon, as their God who hath deliver'd
Thee, Samson, bound and blind into their hands,
Them out of thine, who slew them many.
So Dagon shall be magnified, and God,
Besides whom is no God, compar'd with Idols,
Disglorified and Blasphem'd amidst their wine.
Which to have come to pass by means of thee,
Samson, of all thy sufferings think the heaviest,
Of all reproach the most with shame that ever
Could have befall'n thee and thy Father's house.

Sam. Father, I do acknowledge and confess
That I this honor, I this pomp have brought
To Dagon, and advanc'd his praises high;
To God hath brought dishonor, and have brought
Scandal to Israel, diffidence to God, and doubt
to feeble hearts;
Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
The anguish of my soul. This only hope relieves me,
That the strife with me hath end; all the contest
Is now twixt God and Dagon. Dagon hath presum'd
Me overthrown, and with me, my God. Yet He, be sure,
Will not connive, or linger, thus provok'd,
But will arise and his great name assert:
Dagon must stoop, and shall ere long receive
Such a discomfit, as shall quite despoil him
Of all these boasted Trophies won on me,
And with confusion blank his Worshippers.

Manoa. With cause this hope relieves thee,
and these words I as a Prophecy receive:
For God will not long defer to vindicate the
glory of his name.
But for thee what shall be done?
Thou must not in the meanwhile here forget
Lie in this miserable loathsome plight.
I have already made way to some Philistian Lords,
With whom to treat about thy ransom.

Sam. Spare that proposal, Father, spare the trouble
Of that solicitation; let me here, as I deserve,
Pay on my punishment; and expiate, if possible,
My crime, shameful garrulity.

Manoa. Be penitent, my Son, and for thy fault
contrite,
But act not in thy own affliction; Repent the sin,
But if the punishment thou canst avoid,
self-preservation bids;
Or th' execution leave high disposal,
And let another hand, not thine, exact
Thy penal forfeit from thyself; perhaps
God will relent and quit thee all his debt.
Return thee home to thy country and His sacred house,
Where thou mayest bring thy off' rings, to avert His further ire, with prayers and vows renew'd.

Sam. His pardon I implore; but as for life,
To what end should I seek it?

SONG

Sam. When in strength all mortals I excell'd,
And full of divine instinct, of acts indeed heroic,
Famous now and blaz'd, fearless of danger,
Like a petty God I walk'd about admir'd of all And dreaded on hostile ground.
Then swoll'n with pride into the snare I fell
Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains,
Soft'n'd with pleasure and voluptuous life;
At length to lay my head and hallow'd pledge
Of all my strength in the lascivious lap
Of a deceitful Concubine who shore me
Like a tame ram, all my precious fleece,
Then turn'd me out ridiculous, despooil'd,
Shav'n, and disarm'd among my enemies.

Sam. Now blind, disheart'n'd, sham'd, dishonor'd, quell'd
To what can I be useful, wherein serve my Nation
And the work from Heaven impos'd, but to sit
Idle on the household hearth, a burdensome drone,
To visitants a pitied object, these redundant locks
Robustious to no purpose clust'ring down,
Vain monument of strength; till length of years
To a contemptible old age obscure?
Here rather let me drudge and earn my bread,
Till vermin or the draff of servile food
Consume me, and oft-invocated death
Hast'n the welcome end of all my pains.

Manoa. Whilt thou then serve the Philistines?
Better at home lie bedrid, not only idle,
Inglorious, unemploy'd, with age outworn.
But God who caus'd a fountain at thy prayer
From the dry ground to spring, thy first to allay
After the brunt of battle, can as easy
Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
Wherewith to serve him better then thou hast.
Why else this strength miraculous yet remaining in those locks?
His might continues in thee not for naught,
Nor shall his wondrous gifts be frustrate thus.

Sam. These dark orbs no more shall treat with light,
Nor th' other light of life continue long.
I feel 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 humors black.
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 the friends admit.

Exit Manoa

**Sam.** O that torment should not be confin'd
To the body's wounds and sores
With maladies innumerable in heart, head, breast,
and reins;
But must secret passage find to the inmost mind,
There exercise all his fierce accidents,
And on her purest spirits prey.
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
No long petition, speedy death,
The close of all my miseries, and the balm.

Scene ii

**SONG**

**Ephram.** Many are the sayings of the wise
In ancient and in modern books enroll'd
Extolling Patience as the truest fortitude
And to the bearing well of all calamities
All chances incident to man's frail life
Consolatories writ with studied argument
And much persuasion sought
Lenient of grief and anxious thought.

**Micah.** But with th' afflicted in his pangs thir sound
Little prevails, or rather seems a tune
Harsh, and of dissonant mood from his
complaint
Unless he feel within some source of
Consolation from above
Secret refreshings that repair his strength
And fainting spirits uphold.

**Ben.** God of our Fathers, what is man!
That thou towards him with hand so various
Or might I say contrarious
Temper'est thy providence through his short
course
Not evenly, as thou ru1'st
Th'Angelic orders and inferior creature mute
Irrational and brute.
Levi. Nor do I name of men the common rout
That wand'ring loose about
Grow up and perish, as the summer fly
Heads without name no more remember'd
But such as thou hast solemnly elected
With gifts and graces eminently adorn'd
To some great work, thy glory, and the
People's safety, which in part they effect.

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

Act III

Scene i
Enter Dalila with Attendants

Ephram. But who is this, what thing of Sea or Land?
Female of sex it seems, that so bedeck't, ornate,
And gay, comes this way sailing like a stately Ship
Of Tarsus, with all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails filled and streamers waving, courted by all
the winds that hold them play, an amber scent of
Odorous perfume her harbinger, a damsel train behind.
Some rich Philistian Matron she may seem
And now at nearer view, no other certain
Than Dalila thy wife.

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

Micah. Yet on she moves, now stands and eyes thee fixt,
About t'have spoke, but now, with head declin'd
Like a fair flower surcharg'd with dew, she weeps
Wetting the borders of her silk'n veil;
But now again she makes address to speak.

Dalila. With doubtful feet and wavering resolution
I came, still dreading thy displeasure, Samson;
Yet of tears may expiate, my penance hath not slack'n'd
Though my pardon no way assur'd. But conjugal affection, Prevailing over fear and timorous doubt, hath lead me on
Desirous to behold once more thy face, and know of thy estate.
If aught in my ability may serve to light'n what Thou suffer'st, and appease thy mind with what
Amends is in my power, may in some part recompense
My rash but more unfortunate misdeed.

Sam. Out, out Hyaena; 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 feign'd remorse,
Confess, and promise wonders in her change,
Not truly penitent.

**Dalila.** Yet hear me Samson; not that I endeavor
To lesson or extenuate my offense, but that
I may, if possible, thy pardon find the easier
Towards me, or thy hatred less.

**SONG**

**Dalila.** It was a weakness in me, but incident
to all our sex,
Curiosity, inquisitive, importune
Of secrets, then with like infirmity
To publish them: common female faults.
Let weakness then with weakness come
to parle
So near related, or the same of kind,
Then forgive mine.
Now I wail thy absence in my widow'd bed;
Here I should still enjoy thee day and
night
Mine and Love's prisoner, whole to myself.

**Dalila.** Samson, was it not weakness to make known to me,
A Woman, wherein consisted all thy strength and safety?
To what I did thou show'dst me first the way.
But I to enemies reveal'd what thou shouldst not have
Trusted to a woman's frailty: Ere I to thee, thou to
Thyself wast cruel. Canst thou see, I was assur'd by
Those who tempted me, that nothing was design'd
Against thee but safe custody and hold.
Dearest Husband, Love didst urge me to thy presence,
And Love hath oft, well meaning, wrought much woe,
Yet always pity and pardon hath obtain'd.
Be not unlike all others, not austere
As thou art strong, inflexible as steel.
If thou in strength all mortals dost exceed,
In uncompassionate anger do not so.

**Sam.** How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, to upbraid me mine!
Malice not repentance brought thee hither,
I gave, thou say'st, th' example, I led the way;
Bitter reproach, but true, I to myself was false
Ere thou to me; Weakness is thy excuse, and I
Believe it, weakness to resist Philistian gold.
If weakness may excuse, what Murderer, what Traitor,
Parricide, Incestuous, Sacrilegious, thou art?
All wickedness is weakness: that plea therefore
With God or Man will gain thee no remission.
But love constrain'd 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 betray'd? 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, hear what assaults I had,
What snares besides, ere I consented: It was not gold,
As to my charge thou lay'st, that wrought with me:
Thou know'st the Magistrates and Princes of my country
Came in person, solicited, commanded, threat'n'd, urg'd
By all the bonds of civil Duty and of Religion,
Press'd how just it was, how honorable, how glorious
To entrap a common enemy who had destroy'd such numbers
of our Nation.
And the Priest was ever at my ear, preaching how
Meritorious with the gods it would be to ensnare
An irreligious dishonorer of Dagon.
What had I to oppose such powerful arguments?
Only my love of thee held long debate, and combated
In silence all these reasons with hard contest;
At length, to the public good, which private respects
must yield,
Took full possession of me and prevail'd.

_Sam._ I thought where all thy circling wiles would end;
In feigned Religion, smooth hypocrisy.
But had thy love been, as it ought, sincere, it would
Taught thee far other reasoning, brought forth other
deeds.
I before all the daughters of my Tribe and of my
Nation chose thee from among my enemies, lov'd thee,
Unbosom'd all my secrets to thee, overpower'd
By thy request, I could deny thee nothing.
Why then didst thou at first receive me as thy
Husband, then, as thy country's foe profest?
Being once a wife, for me thou wast to leave
Parents and country; nor was I their subject;
If aught against my life thy country sought of
Thee, it sought unjustly. Tis no more thy
Country, but an impious crew of men conspiring
To uphold their state by worse than hostile deeds.
Zeal mov'd thee, not they; 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.
These false pretexts and varnish'd colors failing,
Bare in thy guilt how foul must thou appear?

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