

Antoine de Montchrestien

David, or adultery

(A Free Verse Translation)¹

ACT I

David

A furious Demon who holds my Soul,
 Sometimes freezes me with fear, sometimes ignites me with desire;
 Since Reason cedes to the Appetite,
 My amorous heart is commanded by an eye.
 When the blond Phoebus [*Greek God of the sun*] loosens his new beams
 Upon the new flowers sprinkled upon the earth,
 This eye has its sweetness mixed with severity,
 That opens bitter worries in my heart:
 If the heat of the Sky at noon ignites again,
 So rises the heat of my Soul:
 But alas! Towards evening, the noon heat ends,
 But the soul's heat begins just then.
 20 Oh Sun, then I say you will end your task,
 And your tired horses will rest,
 While my anguish does not cease, and sleep does not desire
 To stretch its dark veil on my eye.
 An inhuman Vulture gnaws my courage,
 When I think about sleep, it awakens my rage;
 In order to make me pass the days without patience,
 With thousands of troubles, and nights without rest.
 Thus completely consumed by unprecedented pains,
 And weakened by so many long vigils,
 The flowers of my face have lost strength:
 My sweet Spring turns into a Winter of languor:
 My eyes, now glowing with ardent sparks,
 Show that my heart burns with cruel flames;
 My complexion, already livid and yellow,
 Shows that I have a burning pain in my blood,
 And that the ebullient spirits who move my arteries
 Are now emptied of their light forces;
 My brain is so dry, and my bones are so smashed

¹ This translation was prepared by Ilaria Stillor-Timor, with my additional editing. It is printed with Timor's permission.

That they are not the same, full of marrow.
 40 Who will recognize me in this extreme martyrdom?
 I cannot even recognize myself.
 Am I that powerful David who, as the common voice says,
 Considers a miracle a Force and an oracle a Law?
 Am I that powerful David who, since his infancy,
 Overcame the power of a Lion and of a Bear?²
 Am I that powerful David who defeated that rebel,
 That one contemptuous of God, that Philistine Giant,³
 Not by force of blows, but with a stone
 Which hit his forehead and threw him to the floor?
 Am I that powerful David who was so virtuous
 And felled Amalek⁴ on the square?
 Am I that powerful David who by his fame,
 Promulgated his laws to the land of Idumée?⁵
 Am I that powerful David who forced the battlements
 Of the cruel Ammonite,⁶ and slaughtered his soldiers?
 In short, who so defeated the Philistine gangs,
 That the weapons fell from their dexterous rebels
 At the simple sound of my name, that flies so gloriously
 On good fortune up to the Skies?
 60 Certainly am I he; but an extreme love,
 That I cannot now defeat, separates me from myself.
 I am really David; but my heart is not the same,
 As when it aspired for immortal honor.
 I shade my head with verdant laurels;
 But Love's lightening devastates me:
 It reduces everything to powder within my body,
 Even if I look whole from outside.
 Alas! It recalls for me so well the day and hour,
 And this reminder is the cause of my death,
 When the shaft of a beautiful eye penetrated my heart,
 Let Love enter and made it triumphant.
 The Sun little by little has removed its light;
 And the brown Vesper has removed the Stars,
 From above our Horizon, which formerly appeared

² See 1 *Samuel* 17: 34-37: "David answered unto Saul: Thy servaunt kept his fathers sheepe, & ther came a lion and likewise a beare, and toke a sheepe out of the flocke: And I went out after him, and smote him, and toke it out of his mouth: And when he arose against me, I caught him by the bearde, and smote him, and slue him. And so thy servaunte slue both the lion, and the beare" (*Bishops' Bible* 2: xlvii[v]).

³ The Philistine Giant is Goliath, defeated by David (1 *Samuel* 17).

⁴ David fought the Amalek people, who were at war with the Israelites, 1 *Samuel* 30.

⁵ Idumée is Edom, a nation situated south of the Israelite kingdom.

⁶ Ammon is a nation, situation east of the Jordan river.

With their unequal course in the Sky.
 At that time I thought to rise from my bed,
 Where I had taken rest from those long days of labor,
 When the hot [*star*] Sirius sparkling ardently,
 Throws weakness and thirst into our bodies.
 80 Just as misfortune led me according to its will,
 I was walking for a long time on my roof,
 Where, as my eyes strayed away from the Sun,
 Another appeared; who was identical
 With the first, its Idea,⁷ when it rises from the wave
 With a radiant forehead and blond hair:
 But it was in the water when, sliding in a flash,
 It dazzled the point of my vision:
 Just as sometimes one can see, while the other is shining,
 A sparkle springing out, which surprises our eyes.
 At times it lay down on this smooth crystal,
 At times it was half immersed under the waves:
 Just as in the East, one can see the beautiful Aurora,
 Scattering thousands of colors, making a beautiful day emerge,
 And distils from the Sky pleasant tears,
 Onto the fields of grass and onto the sweet flowers:
 Or as we say about a beautiful Goddess
 The treasure of her tresses were pushed from the bountiful waves,
 When she arrived at Cythera⁸ on a shell,
 A beautiful sojourn she has since then:
 100 It seems to me I see this pleasant Beauty,
 Pulling her shining head from the shining wave.
 A crystalline liquid ran from her hair,
 And to her heels dripped drop by drop.
 The beautiful tresses of gold amassed on her head,
 Escaping from the knot that held them tight,
 And around her white neck madly wandered;
 A delicate Zephyr⁹ crumpled them slowly:
 I thought they were the waves of Pactolus,¹⁰
 That upon its silver back wandered freely.
 Sometimes they floated upon her forehead,
 Sometimes her smooth fingers moved them aside;
 Then sometimes she combed them and covered [them] with a veil;
 Just as we see a cloud hiding a star.
 My Soul embraced this delicate fluid,
 Wished to stop the gaze of my eyes on it,
 While the Eagles of love, they turn their eyelids,
 Towards two twin Stars full of strong light.

⁷ Dabney explains that: “Idée belongs to the vocabulary of the Neoplatonists” (1963: 104).

⁸ The island birthplace of the Goddess Venus.

⁹ A gentle wind; also the Greek god of the west wind.

¹⁰ A river near the Aegean coast of Turkey.

As when the Sun does not show itself to the eye,
 The eye cannot receive any visible object,
 120 Thus without the benefit of their rays that shone,
 I would not see the features of this divine face,
 Nor this complexion as bright as a radiant Sun,
 When emerging from the waves it appears before our eyes.
 Her face was decorated with more flowers,
 Than the flowers of a thick meadow in April:
 Her forehead was a Sky gently illuminated;
 Love did not have any arch but her double eyebrow,
 On her nipples the immortal graces flew,
 As do birds on new branches.
 When we see them frolicking with the return of Spring,
 Gently singing their romantic martyrdom.
 The snow of her white and wonderfully bright skin
 Was mixed with a vermilion color:
 It seemed to me that I could see floating on the milk
 A pink rose, and a ruby carnation.
 But if from hips to Head her body appeared,
 The other half was covered by water.
 The Sky whose delighted eye noticed the Beauty,
 Poured upon her a harvest of scents.
 140 In short, all the Beauties who contemplated her,
 Considered her the most beautiful, over every other Beauty.
 For her, the winds and the Birds
 Played a gentle concert with the streams:
 It was possible to hear the sighing of all those who breathe,
 Feeling for her love a graceful martyrdom.
 Alas! Without noticing it, she dented my heart!
 Alas! Without seeing me, she ignited my Soul!
 Alas! I became a Lover without her being a Lover!
 And, like under the heat of Mount Erymanthos,¹¹
 And on the cold Riphean,¹² terrible mountain,
 The snow, piled up, melts into running water,
 Or like the soft wax exposed to the flame:
 I felt the vigor of my soul flow away
 Under a fire that was still burning within the wave,
 Erupting out of the water, consuming me.
 Since then, my feelings, numbed with a lethargic humor,
 Seem to languish under a magical charm:
 I was dying to see her, and when I did not see her
 I suffered in one day a thousand and a thousand deaths.
 160 I said to myself that she is not mortal;
 Adam's daughter cannot be so beautiful:
 It must be a Celestial Angel who thus transforms,
 To fill my heart with love and worry:

¹¹ A mountain range in Greece.

¹² Part of a mountain range mentioned by Classical authors.

Or, if it is not an Angel, it is a pleasant Grace,
 Who the Beauty herself is only resembles.
 Never will our nephews ever see
 A woman whose head has such beautiful hair,
 Her complexion is like beautiful lilies, like roses is her face;
 Her eyes are lustrous, her mouth is comely.
 Alas! She is gone! But I am still here,
 At this fatal point, where I am devoured by thoughts,
 Tormented by worries, terrified by fears,
 Wounded on all sides by love's blows.
 What have I done, oh good Lord! Or rather, what have I not done,
 To extract from my heart the point of this arrow?
 My Soul is now completely weakened:
 It is inescapable, I must forget myself because of love,
 And I must abandon the care of my being;
 Farewell brave plans, I throw you far off:
 180 I abandon the desire of scepter and crown,
 Then when the Lady will be mine, I will give myself to her:
 Her love is my Soul, and without it I believe,
 That I would cease to be, or I would be myself no more.
 But do I not see someone coming towards me?
 It is without a doubt Nadab;¹³ he has seen my mistress,
 I will go and talk to him. Who sent you here?

Nadab

It is your Bathsheba; she is very worried.

David

Tell me, dear Nadab, who makes her discontented?

Nadab

She is pregnant because of you, this is what torments her.
 At your command, I went to visit her;
 As soon as she sees me, she throws herself
 At my feet all in tears and all disheveled:
 I saw her so sad and disconsolate,
 200 I asked her why she was crying so much,
 She answered me only by sighing;
 Because her heart was filled with such a confused storm,
 That she barely opened the gate
 Help, Nadab, help; if ever friendship
 Could warm up your Soul, have mercy upon me:
 I will be forever miserable,
 If you decide not to help me.
 Go and beg his Majesty on my behalf,

¹³ Nadab does not appear in narrative of David and Batsheba. There are two biblical characters called Nadab: the son of Aaron (*Exodus* 1:23) and the son of Jeroboam, King of Israel (*1 Kings* 15).

That he guard my honor that he took away from me:
 Please entreat him by the royal couch,
 Where, for the first time, he received the kisses of my mouth.
 I have conceived from his deed, ensure that he takes care
 Of his humble servant as long as needed.
 In saying these words, tears ran down her face,
 Onto her breast leaving a slippery trace;
 And these tears that still covered her eyes,
 Made the beams more gentle and full of grace:
 I think a proud Lion would have had pity on her
 Seeing her in mourning so pitiful and beautiful.
 220 It is exactly now that you must be advised
 To take good counsel, and then use it well.

David

Love is strong inside me; but reason is weak.
 I turn myself in all directions, my pain is of no use.
 Every time I make a plan, a hundred other undo it;
 I can find in it no shore, no foundation.

Nadab

Go quickly to the soldiers' commander,
 And order that he send speedily for Uriah
 As soon (this is my belief) as he returns,
 He will feel tickled by the enticements of love,
 He will descend to his home to kiss his wife;
 Thus your larceny will not be vilified.

David

240 Your advice pleases me well; but no one better than the Author,
 Can be, my dear Nadab, the organizer;
 And if you attempt this, nothing shall stop me.

Nadab

Come therefore quickly and send me off.

Chorus

Hercules vanquished the Monsters of the earth;
 No one could avoid the force of his arms:
 But whereas he was indomitable in war,
 In peace an eye can subdue him.

Love is nothing but a Child and its power is great;
 It is a blind Archer who always aims well.
 It is a truly great King, since he commands Kings,
 And from his serfdom no one was released.

In the flowers of beauty it hides its Serpents from us,
 And he who handles them can feel the harshness:
 The Rose of pleasure leaves in he who plucks it,

A prick in the Soul and a thorn in the heart.

260

Love in sweetness steeps its bitterness,
 In the honey of voluptuousness it soaks its gall.
 He who follows it, is deceived.
 And he is given Hell who was promised Heaven.

The more it makes him shed tears, the more it inflames him
 And the more it inflames him, it makes him weep.
 Also its freezing fire cannot burn the Soul,
 And its burning tears cannot drown it.

It moves audacity to the fore and fear to courage;
 It makes people desire everything, in the end there is nothing:
 It promises a benefit, but brings only damage;
 But although we know this, we esteem it well.

Sometimes it gives us confidence in our plans,
 Making us hope with a haughty courage:
 And then it changes the hope into despair,
 Making good doubtful and evil completely certain.

280

Despite all this, nobody can protect himself,
 Against this enemy that troubles his repose:
 As the woodworm is engendered by the wood itself,
 It hatches often from ourselves, for ourselves.

While we are covered with arteries and veins,
 And young blood fomented our body;
 Our heart is subject to human passions,
 And the fury of love within us makes a thousand efforts.

Those who from the vanquishers take the victory,
 In this fight are not victorious:
 Love by its Laurels makes its honor known,
 And acquires for their shame a glorious renown.

David serves for all as a clear example:
 Formerly only honor excited him:
 And now everyone marvelously contemplates,
 A Child prevailing over this triumphant King.

300

Neither the strongest redoubtable Philistine,
 Nor the proud Ammonite ever shook his virtue:
 He continued only by himself to be subdued,
 But how well these beautiful eyes have brought him down.

Love vanquishes all the world and remains invincible;
 Well might one flee it, no one can avoid it:
 Who does not feel it, is not subject to it,

For the one who is subject to it, lets it carry him away.

Just as the rays of the Sun melt the cold ice,
 And just as the Billy-Goat's blood¹⁴ demolishes the Diamond:
 The sweet, attractive traits of a pleasant face,
 Toch the heart of love when he becomes a lover.

ACT II

Uriah. David

Uriah

320 What fear cools down the ardor of my courage?
 What mournful astonishment makes this face grow pale,
 That always maintains itself so constant in the face of hazards,
 Which fall like lightning in the storm of Mars?
 Alas! I do not know why my mind is touched
 By dread and pain, by suspicion and fear:
 Alas! I do not know why I sense in my bones
 A continuous shivering that takes away repose.
 Without a doubt the Sky threatens me with misfortune;
 Its ardent fury pursues my ruin.
 In my troubled mind that never rests,
 A thousand thoughts about death pass
 Thousands of thoughts about death pass incessantly:
 Sometimes I am betrayed by my own Soldiers,
 Sometimes I perish among the alarms.
 Oh Sky, if Destiny has set the time of my death,
 My demise shall be at least glorious and strong;
 The thread of my days shall be cut by iron,
 The shield in my left hand and in my right hand the sword;
 And if I die like this, no, I will not die,
 340 My immortal reputation will arise from my demise:
 I know that through worthiness one can return to life;
 I know that a beautiful death honors an entire life.
 I was called for by the King and I come to find him:
 In some grand adventure he desires to test me;
 But I am not looking for anything but an honorable subject,
 For banishing from my body my miserable Spirit:
 I then will be content in having such happiness,
 Because I wished to stay alive with honor.
 So that henceforth I could have the desire,

¹⁴ In Medieval Bestiary, the billy-goat was “a lascivious beast, known for its lusty nature. The nature makes the he-goat so hot that its blood can dissolve diamond, a stone neither fire nor iron can harm” (*The Medieval Bestiary* 2011).

To extend further the end of my life.
 If my wife, so beautiful,
 Did my wife, so beautiful, in whom resided,
 Virtues and honor as well as love;
 Either voluntarily, or by force,
 Publish among them a letter of divorce:
 Tearing without respect the shame from her brow,
 The fear of her heart being so ready to injure?
 Beauty, a hundred thousand times more wicked than beautiful,
 Is this the reward for being so faithful to you:
 360 Have you acknowledged my raging love,
 With such an offense? With such a cowardly trick?
 No, I cannot believe it (and this consoles me)
 Yet everyone says it; to everyone the rumor flies.
 Love of a grand Lord is perceived by everyone;
 Because he never receives discretion:
 No more than Greek fire,¹⁵ his cannot be extinguished;
 So that most often love is harmful to him:
 If he escapes the world, there is a God on high,
 Who dominates everything and who does not need him;
 His hand extends to all, and worldly grandeur
 Is a feeble rampart to evade his sentence:
 Since he wishes to chastise Sky, earth and water,
 Sergeants, archers and executioners serve him.
 I will not lie down anymore on my bed,
 In order to receive the kisses of your mouth,
 Harvesting the sweet fruit permitted only to me,
 That I will not truly know if the deed was committed:
 And if you have branded me with such shameful slander,
 You no longer have a husband, and I no longer have a wife.
 380 But do I not see the King? I go towards him:
 For you calm my face, and hide my anguish;
 For you disguise my forehead and feign cheerfulness,
 So that he will be blind to my distress.

David

God protect you my Uriah.

Uriah

Oh magnanimous King,
 By your command I came to you.

David

You are welcome; come hither do so that I may embrace you,
 The honor of my Warriors, the support of your race.
 Does all go well in the camp? Joab my Lieutenant,

¹⁵ An incendiary weapon.

And his brave soldiers, what are they doing now?
 By their strong merit, by his good conduct,
 Outrageous Raba¹⁶ should be reduced?

400

Uriah

Joab is well, and his brave soldiers,
 When it comes to battle, they show great gallantry:
 They are delighted with pleasure when the trumpet
 Calls them to combat rather than to retreat:
 Proud Raba encircled from every side,
 Trembles at the waving of our proud standards:
 Courage is needed; and its strong wall,
 Seems to fear that our camp will assail it.

David

My hope promises me a good event:
 But I do not want to keep you any longer;
 Since you left the war under pressure,
 Go to your dwelling and caress your wife
 One must rest when we have fought;
 For virtue cannot always be active.

Uriah

420 I cannot, great King, nor should I;
 I know very well how to distract myself with pleasure:
 To bear up against evil I am not new:
 My body is hardened against heat, against cold, against water:
 Work, sweat, rough exercises
 Are and always will be my sweetest delights.

David

Yet, our bodies are not forged of diamond,
 Continuous labor shall consume them;
 Thus arriving from quite a long journey,
 Wherefore do you not want to make yourself at ease?

Uriah

The Ark of the Covenant dwells in these pavilions;
 Israel and Judah sleep in furrows,
 And my Master Joab, stretched out on the ground
 Allows a short sleep to close his eyelids,
 After he had been going around until late,
 Visiting the quarters and giving orders to the guards:
 440 Some of the soldiers lay awake in the trench,
 And the others on the grass are deep in sleep;
 Having underneath their heads a pillow of turf,

¹⁶ Rabbah or Rabbat Ammon is the chief city and capital of the biblical Ammonites.

And above them a shadowed horizon as a curtain.
 And above for a curtain a shadowy Horizon:
 And I, a soldier of Love, shall I take my ease
 Permitting, dishonor! A woman to kiss me,
 To mislead my heart in its pleasant dalliances?
 I cannot imitate many Courtiers,
 Who can only love through sighs and tears,
 Their youth depending on these sweet alarms.
 That I shall never be reproached for this deed;
 My honor so bright, would become stained:
 Who wants to live with ease and follow delights,
 Wishing always to die is not worthy to live.
 It is true, great David, that in this sweet air
 Your nervous arteries will go without ceasing to move,
 It will never happen that Uriah would be so cowardly
 That in time of war in he will hide in a woman's breast.

460

David

Since your young heart heated by generous blood,
 Since your limbs strengthened by willing labor,
 Since your active soul animated by glory,
 Make you so ardent for renown,
 And only work can make you prepared;
 I do not want to leave you at rest for too long.
 Go and gather Laurels in the field of glory;
 Go, be part of the next victory;
 Open thou the path that conducts a man to the Heavens,
 By the effort of your arm you are always victorious:
 Make thou feared and lauded by all my army,
 For you there are not enough palms of Idumea.¹⁷
 Come find me immediately I want you to feast,
 For to my Joab suddenly you will be sent back
 Has unto him the tidings arrived,
 That my arms have embraced his totally naked wife?
 His obstinate bravery will not be bowed:
 Where strength does not serve one must employ art.
 I have not put him in good cheer,

480

And then the wine will do what I could not.
 It often extinguished the flames of wrath,
 The courage of felons it made sweeter;
 It purges the Spirits of melancholy;
 Of inopportune worries it liberates the Souls;
 It banishes hate and anger far away from us,
 And awakens love asleep in the heart.

¹⁷ The phrase "palms of Idumaea" is cited from Virgil's *Georgics*, Book Three. Line 12. These are "victory prizes in the races" (Fallon 2006: 49, 102).

Chorus

This Century is rightly praised above all,
 When women guard sacred Chastity,
 Which guard them so pure in body and soul:
 Then two loving hearts into one are melted;
 Two bodies became only one living Spirit,
 And two Spirits burned of the same flame.

At that time marriage was greatly prized,
 And always favored by the Celestial graces;
 Everyone under its yoke thought to live in agreement:
 500 Immediately he had the feeling that he was in love,
 He took his half to his satisfaction,
 Without letting himself be burnt by the fire of covetousness.

Without her man too is nothing but a half man:
 Without a girlfriend, he cannot be a boyfriend:
 And if he does not love a woman he does not love his fellowman;
 Who does love his fellowman is without judgment,
 The one who does not love the fellow being is without judgment,
 And if he lives, he lives only in sleeping,
 Or if he is awake, he remains in waking miserable.

Nobody has ever seen something more agreeable to the Skies,
 Than a fortunate couple loving more than their eyes,
 Picking in the field of love love the sweet fruits of their age:
 The day more clearly shines in their favor;
 Bitterness for them has a sweet flavor,
 And without thorns grows the rose in their affection.

520 Oh sweet contentment, agreeable pleasure,
 That tickles our hearts with an honest desire,
 You produce like flowers the sweetness in our Soul:
 You can from our labors pull a sweet repose;
 All our greatest happiness you guard in deposit;
 And without consuming us you hold us in the flame.

In times past for these effects God shaped with his hands,
 A female human to the father of humans,
 He ordered them to grow and populate the earth:
 But wanting them to embrace with a tight amity,
 From the man's rib he pulls her half,
 So that to his side gently he holds her close.

Her two loving eyes he arms with sweet arrows;
 On her dainty mouth he scatters charms;
 He fashions her laughter with a modest grace:

He wants to obey while she imposes the law;
 And to make her again the Queen of her King,
 A thousand secret charms he hides on her face.

540

When Adam looks at her he burns with love,
 He wishes to lengthen the day to see her better,
 As he loses himself in her, in her he finds himself again:
 All the arrows from her eyes his heart wants to receive;
 His eye wants to open only to see her,
 And with an amorous wine all his senses he waters.

The marriage between them was then contracted,
 A close link that unites two bodies into one,
 And that binds two hearts with a pleasant embrace:
 God himself there was present, the agreement He signed;
 The woman by His hand to her man He gave,
 The Angels assisted in respect and in fear.

Oh happy Marriage, source of the human race,
 You soften labor and inhuman worry;
 You extinguish the fires of filthy bawdiness;
 You help the man to be victorious over himself,
 And it gives flight to furious desires,
 That his own nature kindles in his veins.

560

If man would have stayed in a good state for ever,
 The sole marriage would have made him happy;
 He would have not known sorrow and pain:
 This tree, flowers of pleasure would have produced,
 True contentment would have been its fruit,
 Honey would have flowed from it like a fountain.

It is said that, pleasures and goods in abundance,
 Our Adam possessed in the prime season,
 And that contented were his eyes and his courage:
 But I do not believe that the goods and pleasure he had,
 Were judged worthy to be the sole desire
 If compared to the fortune of marriage.

By this means to be free from foolish desires;
 To see even in ageing his pleasures rejuvenating,
 And to grow in friendship when age diminishes;
 To have someone to complain with also to rejoice with;
 To have someone on whom to unload a burden,
 To feel cool when in a continuous fever.

580

Can a man find a more precious possession?
 If he did not find it, should he not seek it?
 Should he not keep it, once he owns it?
 Lend here your ear, oh debauched mortals,

Do not wallow any more in your filthy sins,
Run to marriage as to a remedy.

I know that a Beauty who is attractive,
Would be an Argus¹⁸ difficult to keep;
When a woman loves one cannot distract her;
But know to choose her not by beauty,
But by modesty and chastity,
Since lovesickness is a necessary sickness.

A beautiful and chaste woman is a precious gift;
If you want to have her supplicate the Skies,
And choose her discreet, amiable and very wise.
600 In the end, if you see yourself mistaken in judgment,
You must patiently endure this evil.
Everyone depends on his own learning.

Regard especially and look at the Kings.
Their loving desire does not have any laws;
An unbridled appetite, not reason, guides them:
They are ready to give everything to their affection;
They believe only in their passion,
And their desires run at full speed.

Greatness and love in one assembled,
The calmest rest have often troubled;
The one and the other are without eyes, without rules and without measure:
Their offensive effects fill the universe,
Everyday are made diverse ills,
And innocent people often endure them.

620

ACT III David. Nadab

David

I have done what I could and if I do not do something;
Uriah cannot be distracted in any way
From this firm intention in his soul:
Obstinate, he does not want to hear talk of a woman;
When he is solicited he changes the topic,
And says that a good Soldier must hate repose.

¹⁸ Argus is a pheasant, distinguished by a multitude of eye-like patterns on its wings. It was named for the hundred-eyed giant Argus, in Greek mythology.

I wanted with wine to trouble his fantasy;
 I attempted to hold him through gracious courtesy:
 But his mind, constant and fortified with reason,
 Makes him born in disdain to see his home.
 There is no doubt that a tongue, jealous
 Of the pleasure I took with his Spouse,
 Has inspired in him rage and venom,
 Against this paragon of the female Sex.
 640 Whoever is the one whose cursed envy
 Troubled by his gossip, the happiness of my life,
 And exposed to the day my secret love;
 May he lives miserably and die languishing.
 But alas! What shall I do in this great distress,
 In order to save today my mistress's honor?
 From among a thousand designs I cannot choose one,
 Which can now answer my desire.
 I cannot find a way to conceal something,
 Which once opened cannot be closed again.
 For a short pleasure I have long suffered!
 We cannot give a color to this deed;
 And to keep a secret is no less impossible.
 Alas! My own greatness is to me unfortunate and harmful!
 If I were a common man I would have less torment:
 Because I could conceal my sweet blaze,
 And nobody would notice my pleasant flame,
 Except this loving eye that lights my soul:
 But since to a high Theater I have mounted,
 I am an object in everyone's eyes at all hours:
 660 All the world sees me and watches me closely,
 That I could not find a place to hide.
 It is a loss of time to talk about these insubstantial things.
 Nabab, your good Counsel I invoke for my relief;
 Find an expedient, it is necessary,
 Helpful to Bathsheba, salutary to David.

Nadab

When with a sweet voice one cannot win,
 It is necessary, in my opinion, to employ the lance.

David

To kill an innocent man is an extreme transgression.

Nadab

It is better to lose others than to lose yourself.

David

The law does not grant license to Kings to do so.

680

Nadab

Therefore the King absolutely commands the laws.

David

A good Prince must always live according to the laws.

Nadab

Only for his own profit shall he follow them.

David

If he want to dispense with committing evil
Following his example his vassal will dare to do.

Nadab

He shall punish in others what he wants to permit himself,
The evil of his example he will not see committed.

David

What we are not afraid to condemn in others,
Is this not giving the sentence against ourselves?

700

Nadab

To fail once does not make it a custom.

David

When life is extinguished no one can relight it.

Nadab

After so many enemies by you have been put to death,
For one man killed will you make a strong case?

David

For killing his hateful enemies in the ardor of alarms,
No one has ever been blamed; because it is the right of arms:
But to murder his friend, his faithful subject,
This is not the act of a Prince but of an abject Tyrant.

Nadab

I do not counsel that this curved Sword,
Will be soaked today in the blood of Uriah:
But by another way we can achieve the same effect.

720

David

Will I be less at fault then the one who acts?

Nadab

Nay, but do you not know that the hate is diverted,
Towards the one by whom evil arrives?

David

And well he dies although he is innocent

My mind has decided on it and my heart consents.
 Let us extract from the foot this troublesome thorn.
 Some secret means still remain for us,
 To make certain that this blow will be concealed from the world,
 So that my honor will not remain stained.

Nadab

740 Someone must follow him closely,
 And catch him, on the way, without warning.

David

He is very vigorous, and I know that his heart,
 Is not seized by fear when surprised.

Nadab

It is necessary to dispatch one, two, three, even four,
 Since one surprising him would not be able to slaughter him.

David

But if the secret is known by so many people,
 It would be very soon known also by enemies.
 Only two persons should be admitted into the secret affair;
 Otherwise it will be discovered.

Nadab

One must undertake something only when he is ready,
 Which otherwise will bring disgrace.

760

David

The more I think attentively, the more I find to think about:
 Sometimes I approve one, sometimes I reprove it;
 But my Mind, wandering from report to report
 Finds all these projects unprofitable and short.
 Oh, my Nabad, it is so difficult to hurt!

Nadab

To effect this it is necessary to be a bit audacious;
 Because one who fears danger that may be present,
 Cannot execute anything daring.

David

780 My soul is very soon resolved for a scheme.
 Counsel is taken, chance is thrown.
 And he himself will be the bearer of his death,
 The hostile sword will be the only executor:
 Thus we will gain from his imminent death,
 Because we will blame uncertain fortune,
 Who dropped fate upon those soldiers,
 Who most resolutely are found by hazards.
 So I want therefore to supply him with a sealed letter

Addressed to Joab, that describes something else,
 That Uriah, having returned to his camp,
 Was given the order to launch the attack:
 He who has from nature a generous soul,
 And in perils seeks for adventurous glory,
 Will run with the best in the storm of blows;
 And here I want him to be abandoned by all,
 So that pierced by an honorable wound,
 By his mortal fall he will imprint the sand.

Nadab

Oh courageous scheme! A beautiful invention!
 The result will not fail your purpose:
 You could not find a more fitting ruse,
 I see already the desired end arriving.

David

800 Upon your word, my dear Nadab, return to us quickly.
 Someone could hear us; look, here he is.
 Let us run, let us run very soon to him
 Let's run quickly to give him the dispatch:
 The ruse being undertaken nothing stops me.

Uriah

Woman without God, without faith, that I had so little seen you!
 That I had so little received your greeting!
 That I had so little touched this profane mouth,
 Which let it be kissed in a strange bed!
 No no, I have too much honor, I would love a hundred times more
 To run to my death, and my eyes blindfolded:
 I know it is better to die, than to suffer shame:
 I have a heart large and high, I have a soul ardent and prompt,
 Sensitive to blame more than to pain;
 And I estimate that an affront is the height of misfortune.
 I would be ungrateful and disloyal,
 If I did not respect royal authority:
 Nothing could have prevented me in this just wrath,
 From breaking your hips under my strong knees;
 820 From planting this dagger in your miserable breast,
 Atoning through your blood for your execrable sin.
 Who would blame me for having taken justice
 For one who has filled my house with adultery?
 Who dishonored me by her own dishonor,
 Covering my forehead with shame and extreme infamy? [670]
 Who fades the green of the brave Laurels,
 Which honored my head among all the Warriors?
 As I could higher hold my countenance;
 To have on my forehead an agreeable audacity;
 In my eyes raise an air of liberty;
 In my mouth a speech full of truth;

In my heart an ardent and magnanimous courage,
 Which always the best, not the great, esteemed?
 It is alas necessary to lose this all at once,
 So many beautiful virtues, which I am happy to possess?
 Should you, oh just Skies punish my outrage!
 She having failed must I bear the damage?
 She having defiled her name with her sin,
 Mine cannot but notice disgrace?
 840 Is it this, great David, all the reward
 For having these strong armed hands for your defence?
 For having exposed myself to a thousand dangers for your glory;
 For having done and dared everything for your honor,
 Not fearing the most dreadful peril;
 For at your service to toil indomitably,
 Going through a thousand deaths,
 And because of the armor breaking these large and strong limbs,
 In short; for having overcome alone many a place besieged,
 For having won many a victory in pitched battle,
 For having impetuously left my life in abandonment,
 Did I deserve in this story shame as a reward?
 Go, poor soldiers, and give service
 To these ungrateful princes who change virtue into vice;
 The blood you shed amidst fighting,
 Will be rewarded with a shameful death.
 But he comes here; what point of rage
 Sticks now deep in my courage,
 Seeing myself forced by the laws of duty,
 To honor the one at whom I can barely look.
 860 So, in order to remove this object from my soul.
 Which increases its pain and cuts its wounds;
 It would be better for me to go and find him promptly:
 For I am ready to depart.

David

As soon as you would like, you can depart Uriah,
 To return to Camp to my soldiers:
 You shall give this letter to Joab,
 And on my behalf you shall likewise inform him,
 That he shall order the soldiers into battle,
 To take Raba's wall by storm.
 I will not encourage you to make a good effort;
 I know well the contempt you have for death:
 Here or elsewhere you will be indomitable,
 If you do not cease being yourself;
 And if the hot agitations of your young valor
 Do not of late become tepid.
 Go therefore in good time, and return full of glory,
 First in triumph and in victory.

880

Chorus

O what grand happiness to live
 Under a Prince friend of the faith,
 Who wants always to follow reason,
 Not a King of others but of himself
 But it is an extreme misfortune,
 To obey the will
 Of one who obeys only himself,
 Not the rules of equity.¹⁹

Rightly a good man trembles
 Under a monarch who joins
 Force with malice together;
 For he is not afraid of acting badly.
 The knife is redoubtable
 In an unreasonable hand,
 Power is damaging,
 In the mansion of a wrathful King.

900

Everything to him seems lawful,
 His will has no law:
 The just he measures with the possible,
 He does not take faith into account:
 And thinks that for his service,
 Everyone was born into the world;
 Whereas considering his dignity
 He finds it given by others.

The one who is indeed culpable,
 Wants to do evil and cannot:
 But I find more miserable
 The one who wants and can.
 The one who benefits from license,
 Must also use it the least,
 For he always does penitence,
 After having abused it.

If he knows well his power,
 He will listen to reason:
 As to him obedience is rendered,
 To the King of Kings he will it render.

920

¹⁹ At term from Jurisprudence; “the recourse to general principles of justice (the *naturalis æquitas* of Roman jurists) to correct or supplement the provisions of the law” (*OED*).

Everywhere he is renowned,
 Everywhere he is respected;
 Just as he considers himself a man,
 We consider him to be God.

If he wears a crown on his head,
 And a scepter in his hand,
 The Heavens gives them to him today,
 And can take them from him tomorrow.
 He does not need to believe it,
 He does not need to be too ambitious;
 If he has the good and the glory,
 It comes to him from the Heavens.

Whenever he hazards to act badly,
 Thinking nobody will see him,
 The eye of God always regards him,
 Which does not want to be deceived,
 940 A man must live before a man,
 As he lives before God:
 And he must live before God, as
 If everyone sees him everywhere.

Whereas we ourselves are determined,
 To perform a wicked plan
 God only shakes his head,
 Mocking the vain man:
 For when He pleases he reveals
 What we have secretly done;
 And the man must reveal himself,
 And this man has to reveal himself
 When he is called to judgement.

He can produce in testimony
 His conscience at the very least,
 That accuses him of his outrage
 Doing better than a hundred testimonies:
 It is what makes the complexion pale,
 960 After the evil has been committed:
 For to hide from oneself,
 From the most secret, is not permitted.

Often tardy is the punishment;
 God seems not to take heed:
 But when it after a long time it comes,
 It is more grievous.
 Making them cry out in agony
 By those who find themselves surprised;
 For those who find themselves surprised
 Mortals learn Justice,

And do not place God in contempt.

ACT III
David. Messenger

980

David

My desire is perfect; I do not doubt anything.
 You will now be mine and I will be yours:
 Nobody will keep me from coming to your bed
 To enjoy without constraint the delights of your mouth.
 Your husband, who could have troubled our sweet dalliance
 Has returned to camp not to come back:
 I have plotted against him such a tempest,
 That lightening very soon will fall on his head.
 Even if he had a hundred arms, and even if these fortified arms
 Would raise a hundred shields against the scattered blows,
 He would not yet be able to avoid the blows:
 With blood in a thousand places his weapons will be colored;
 A wealth of arrows on his head will fall;
 His body, like a fur tree, under them will stumble:
 Although he is vigorous and magnanimous of soul,
 He will be of the God Mars the bloody victim:
 The ropes I have stretched have enough strength,
 To hold his arms and his feet enlaced.

1000 I will feel in my heart more ease and more glory,
 If I win, my friend, this victory;
 As in a fight, fortunate adventurer,
 Against ten thousand enemies I will gain the laurel.
 I do not prize anymore the honorable corpse
 Of the superb Giant covered with bruises;
 I do not make the case for trophies planted
 In the Philistine fields by my arms conquered;
 All this is too vile for me: in this war I acquire
 More honor than vanquishing the two ends of the earth.
 Beautiful soul of my heart, if you lose your Spouse,
 You triumph over a King who triumphs over all:
 You place under your yoke a Monarch in servitude,
 Grand in authority, but grander in courage;
 And by prudence admired everywhere,
 Has limited the power of the sea and the Heavens.
 You thou henceforth will be happy and glorious,
 Having by thy charms been victorious
 Of one who knew to give not receive the law;
 But who henceforth wishes to take it from you.

1020 I see a man coming in great speed:
It is some messenger, I must advance:
My friend, where are you from? And who hastens you thus?

Messenger

Sire, I come from the camp and towards you also?

David

Well, what goes on there? Good news?

Messenger

Fortune has appeared unfaithful to our people.

David

Has some new misfortune occurred?

Messenger

Yes Sire, by fate, not for lack of valor.

David

1040 Take a little breath, and let me know;
For I do not want any of the facts hidden from me.

Messenger

I will tell you without omitting or changing:
The Sun regilded the high summits of the mountains,
And the Heavens were obscured by colored rays;
Next in the East the clear Dawn of the day,
Its ordinary course was advancing on return;
Then in our camp we heard the thunder
Of fifes and drums that announce war.
The gallant Joab, among the first to awaken
Assembles the soldiers coming from their quarters;
He arranges them for combat, and with a steadfast countenance
Inspires in their breast ardor and courage.
And towards evening we see the Shepherds,
Separate the ewes, the Rams and the Kids,
Crook in hand: So this Captain,
Pike in fist, was going through the plain,
And arrayed his soldiers according to his best judgment,

1060 To launch a furious attack on the city.
When he had amassed the dispersed troops,
And had disentangled the amassed bands;
He harangues thus: O gallant Warriors,
Who each day gain new Laurels,
This speech should not cause you alarm,
If the brandishing of weapons is enough to inspire you:
After having a hundred times tempted a thousand hazards,
You are not apprentices to the profession of Mars:
In order to demonstrate today your extreme valor,

Follow only your own example.
 Each of you maintain his strength and rank:
 Press foot against foot; hold flank by flank,
 For a common effort to climb the wall,
 Which serves as a strong rampart for feeble rabble.
 Although the path seems rough and hostile,
 Because it is strewn with thorny bushes,
 It is all the same: Virtue is not afraid of these approaches:
 Rather it opens the way through the highest rocks.
 So you, Abisai,²⁰ conduct this battalion;
 1080 Gain the foot of the wall from the inside of this vale,
 And when I send you the battle sign,
 Set forth to climb this corner of the wall.
 I, however, will turn around here and there,
 So that in this tower I can lodge:
 Because in my judgment I take it as a beginning,
 Provided that in many places the city will be disrupted.
 Uriah advance here, march in the front;
 This gallant troop will follow your steps.
 Boys, break in, take this gate;
 If your heart is strong, it will be less strong.
 Having by such language inspired his soldiers,
 Joab deployed the broad standards.
 The drums, the trumpets sounded out;
 The encircling fields resounded with the noise.
 Following orders, everyone has an eye on duty,
 All wish to demonstrate their valor against weariness.
 The courageous Uriah, shaded by his shield,
 Marches with a free pace at the beginning of the charge;
 A massive cuirass shined on his back;
 1100 On his golden helmet the plume waved.
 But the enemy troops were inspired to combat,
 Shamefully remaining enclosed within the walls.
 Thus it receives him, and arrests his course.
 With strength and courage he continues fighting.
 The battle is cruel: in one and in the other band,
 A blind fury not reason commands.
 One falls down dead, and another is knocked down,
 Cruelly wounded by sword and collision.
 Horror wanders everywhere and the green field,
 With a precious enamel of blood it is covered here and there.
 In brief, so many different sounds spread out into the air,
 That the cries of the dying are no longer heard.
 All your men behave very well: But, above all Uriah
 Blazing with fury, perpetrates a great massacre
 As with every blow he gives he fells them low;
 There is not one of the enemies who is not cowardly,

²⁰ Avishai was the eldest son of Zeruah, sister of David, and the brother of Joab.

When he sees that at his body is directed the sword,
 That is soaked with the blood of his neighbors until the guards.
 Just as a serpent flicks out so promptly
 1120 Its whistling tongue, which it properly resembles,
 In having not one but three together,
 Thus having it seems an arm striking three,
 As his redoubled blows, following one upon the other,
 Hammer at those who are found at the front!
 Finally the enemies give way to his valor;
 In their boiling breast flows cold ice:
 The heart drops to their feet, and regaining their Fort,
 Many in fleeing meet their death.
 The courageous Uriah, ardent in pursuit,
 Steps on the dead and stops them in their flight;
 Arriving quickly at this miserable place,
 Which he must take with a valiant effort.
 He attacks in an instant; his audacity is flattened:
 He does not change color or place;
 Similar to a Rock rising from the sea,
 Which cannot be shaken by the waves and wind:
 Many flaming discuses, more and more grenades
 Fly on all sides of his helmet;
 The arrows shadow him, and javelins by the thousands
 1140 Choose him for a target among all the Soldiers.
 The blows of the enemies from all sides bring down
 The brave assailants who fight near him,
 So that the camp sighs at the calamity
 In which are lost so many men of valor.

David

It cheapens the gallant Souls,
 Too ready to attempt hazardous things:
 The Mind for Job, as needed, was lacking;
 Did he have to ignore that from an assaulted wall,
 Against the assailants, at every hour we thrust forward,
 Wood and rocks were thrown with violence?
 The brave Abimelech²¹ advanced his death
 A piece of millstone was thrown down,
 By the feeble hand of an afflicted woman,
 When the tower of Thebes he besieged.

Messenger

1160 Uriah also died: this gallant soldier,
 Of the circumcised people the invincible rampart.
 Those who followed him lost their courage,
 Seeing themselves repulsed, they turned their face.
 He who on all sides saw himself abandoned,
 The greater the peril, the less he is astonished,

²¹ Abimelech, the son of Jeru-Besheth, was killed in the battle (2 *Samuel* 11).

His heart does not diminish, his forehead does pale:
 I think he would have feared the fall of Heaven itself.
 His shield all covered by a forest of arrows;
 His body was pierced by blows in a thousand places,
 He still remained indomitable in combat.
 And showed a force resembling a palm,
 That the more we press it and load burdens,
 The more it raises high its gallant branches.
 As among the defenders rage was growing,
 This brave assailant augmented his courage:
 But they with a fierce anger are ardently inflamed
 But those (the defenders) were very disappointed
 To see one who resists so many armed men,
 At last they forced him to measure the ground,
 They entombed his body with the tools of war,
 1180 Shields, lances, spears, gauntlets and bracers,
 Cuirasses, javelins, scimitars and darts.
 Death worthy of such a man! O indomitable Warrior,
 You could not have a tombstone more honorable
 Than that, made by your own enemies,
 When at the foot of their wall they killed you.

David

This damage is very great; but what? The fortunes of war
 Ordinarily fall on the best Gendarmes:²²
 Their valor ruins them; one would say that death
 Sparing the coward, desires only the strong man.

Chorus

Each one has a pleasure that strongly attracts him:
 One is pleased at Court, another loves the [*Lawyer's*] Bar,
 One for the laurels aspires;
 Another toils, and another goes to sea,
 Trusting the wood of a fragile Ship.

1200 Through a thousand diverse needs life is exercised,
 And always desires are reborn from their perfection:
 This vessel is pushed
 By the storm of the world and waves of destiny,
 Whereby into shipwreck it was often forced
 Well pleased is he who can pass his age,
 In body and spirit residing at rest,
 In some humble village;
 And who at his will establishes unto himself a law,
 Without to the greatest Lords engaging his freedom.

But three or four times is wretched the man,²³

²² Heavily-armored cavalryman of noble birth.

Who wants their favor to rejoice to his will,
 So that he will be renowned:
 For when it embraces him it will suffocate him,
 Imitating the thieves called Philistines.

1220 The love of Kings resembles a nimble and inconstant fire,
 That we perceive at night in the Heavens blazing,
 Next to the sea shore;
 If a passer-by follows it, it will lead him to drown,
 Dazzling him with rays thrown at his face.

With a disguised goodness they mask their face;
 With a feigned sweetness they bait their eyes:
 They shine their grace;
 But alas! It is a light that leads to the coffin
 For the person who pursues the honor behind them.

If the slightest rancor changes their courage,
 They will no longer regard past services:
 Having put all your age
 In their service, a single failure,
 Will be like a storm on all your harvests.

1240 Do not endanger for them either your riches or your soul;
 Having in a thousand places fought bravely,
 And passed through the flames:
 They remember only sometimes,
 Forgetting everything when ire inflames them.

And then what a beautiful reward to save an army?
 To conquer a city, to seize a Castle?
 A vain smoke,
 Which reaches the Heavens to dissolve into water:
 A burning glory swiftly extinguished.

The Palms of victory acquired in war
 Have pain for flowers, and perils for fruit:
 Have instead of flowers sorrow and instead of fruits dangers,
 Fear grips them,
 Danger and horror, tumult and noise,
 And never grow on infertile ground.

²³ Dabney explains that this echoes Virgil's *Aeneid* I. Line 94: "O terque quaterque beati..." (1963: 103).

Cultivate the Olive Tree,²⁴ with blood it is not watered;
 But only with peace, with love an:
 Gather the Rose of honor,
 Provided that it is not in a piercing shrub,
 With flaring thorns enclosed on all sides.

1260 Otherwise it is better to die without any glory,
 Than wanting to grow it by shortening days:
 Also the memory
 Of the greatest Emperors does not last forever;
 For their life too is temporary.

ACT V

Bathsheba. David. Nathan

Bathsheba

About whom must I complain in this extreme misfortune?
 About Uriah, about David, about the Heavens or about myself?
 Is it not I who received in my arms
 Another man than mine without running to death?
 Is it Heaven that envying me,
 Abducted my Spouse in the prime of his life?
 Is it David who, violating the law,
 1280 And appearing less than a man, has shown that he is King?
 Or Uriah, whose soul been seized with
 Violent anger and fierce jealousy,
 Sank so much into the press of blows,
 That his vigorous body was overwhelmed from below?
 You are well, Soldiers, without glory and without courage,
 When fear of death made you turn your face:
 You are bound to lose yourself to this great Warrior,
 Gaining with your death an immortal laurel?
 You have cut the wing of your renown;
 Your flight shall be blamed by our men,
 And the sons of your sons, and those who will be born to them,
 Of your disgrace yet remain ashamed.
 As for me, dear Spouse, until the final hour,
 My heart will conserve our first love:

²⁴ Dabney explains that the “olive tree became even in Roman times a symbol of peace and national wealth and plenty. It was also used to crown victors in the Olympian games” (1963: 103).

I will not have anything more precious, whatever may happen,
 Than to speak of you, than to recall to me.
 The deep affection I carry for your virtue
 For such a long time, did not die with you.
 What justified anger animated you against me,
 1300 Thinking I had bankrupted my faith:

And you did not desire in my profaned bed,
 To taste as before the kisses of my mouth;
 I swear on the power of this grand living God,
 That I always loved you as before.
 And I understood that a generous soul,
 Suffering such scorn becomes despised:
 But I thought that one day you would become softer,
 Time would ameliorate your hardened wrath,
 After having known the force and ruse
 Of a King grand and subtle, could forgive me.
 O foolish hope! A reckless Fate
 Yet gave you a difficult death;
 And myself in this misfortune what made me so miserable,
 That I could not gather your generous soul,
 When with a sigh your mouth exhaled it,
 Neither wipe this beautiful blood that flowed from you,
 Nor pronounce over you the last words,
 Nor close dying eyelids on your eyes.
 1320 Nevertheless do not leave, if you still feel,
 Listening now to these painful accents,
 And see surging this great river of tears,
 That night and day I pour out on your weapons.

David

Your mourning, dear Mistress, too long has endured:
 I would wish to be dead to be thus lamented.
 Leave all these regrets, divine Bathsheba,
 Did you not by his death fall into good hands?
 From you Uriah was abducted, and to you David was returned;
 Do you not gain more than you have lost?
 Heaven takes from you a Soldier; but a Prince gives to you,
 Who puts in your hands his life and his crown.
 Take this royal scepter; you can bear it well,
 For to obey you I will content myself.

Chorus

When a man thinks he has attained
 The fullness of all his desires;
 1340 At that hour he fears less,
 That they will for him turn into displeasures.

Those that vice renders contented
 Lose very quickly their gaiety:

Nobody can rejoice for a long time
With the fruit of wickedness.

God, who better to convince him,
Left him to accomplish his design,
In the watchtower of the Heavens,
Does not always have his hands to his breast.

As no one can deceive Him,
When His eye wants to sound out the heart:
So no one can escape
The just rigor of His arm.

1360 Confront the man who wants
To be blinded by his sin;
The remembrance shall return
To his sorrowful and angry heart.

But happy is the Criminal
Who confesses in the end;
And who the voice of the Eternal
Wants to redirect onto the right path.

Nathan

1380 So many fragilities accompany men!
We sin all at all hours, and all that we are
We cannot cease, miserable, bringing upon us
The Monarch of the Heavens' too just wrath;
O all powerful Lord, without your divine grace,
Man always hurts when beaten;
If you do not hold the hand of this pile of flesh
He would not be able to alas! walk without stumbling.
Look at this King who the Eternal calls,
By His mouth, His faithful servant;
And through misfortunes, as by degree,
He deigned to raise to the sacred throne;
To these holy commandments he turned a deaf ear,
And without remorse in his vice he slumbers.
O miserable Prince, rouse yourself;
Come here, listen to me, I am not speaking for myself,
But for the Eternal who governs the world,
And who created the Heaven, the fire, the earth and the wave.
But I call you in vain; I must go find you:
I could not otherwise accomplish this duty.
It is necessary to have your response about a point,
The judgment given by God against you I must pronounce.
I will approach him, conveniently I see him.

David

God save you, Nathan; what brings you to me?

Nathan

I come to inform you of an execrable crime,
 In order to give it a fitting punishment.
 Two men, your subjects, lived in the same city;
 1400 Both were neighbors, and both were familiar with each other:
 Now one of them enjoyed a very ample inheritance
 A thousand sheep in pasture;
 The other one was very poor and possessed nothing
 But a sole ewe that he valued as his property.
 He had bought and gently nourished it,
 He did not hold his daughter more affectionately;
 It came to eat bread from his hand,
 To drink from his glass, and to sleep in his breast.
 But behold a Passer-by arrived in their village;
 The Rich man received him, and brought him to his house,
 And to make a feast for this new guest,
 He does not choose the fattest Sheep of the flock;
 But the only Ewe from his neighbor he carries away,
 To feed his hunger and that of his guest.
 It was not enough having thus robbed.

David

You have to me, O Nathan, already revealed too much;
 He dies, the wicked one, he will be led to torture,
 1420 No punishment will equal his vice.

Nathan

It is you false Hypocrite, the Hypocrite is you,
 Who despising your God, who violating His law,
 Under the deceptive mask of this honest face,
 Conceals the heart of a goat and the soul of a beast.
 Your unjust mouth therefore has given this just judgment!
 And under the name of another you have condemned yourself well!
 O cruel Adulterer! O small earthworm!
 Do you not fear this hand, which hurls the thunder
 The Eternal says thus: I have your head crowned;
 By holy unction I have destined you King;
 I have saved you from the hands of your fierce adversary;
 I have dispersed those who wished to do you harm;
 I have made you triumph over all your enemies;
 The wives of your master I have placed in your arms;
 I made you inhabit this superb dwelling;
 I lavish new favors upon you at all hours;
 And if you furthermore look for a wish,
 1440 Just ask and it shall be done.
 Why therefore, ungrateful man, execrable Adulterer,
 Have you so despised my redoubtable ire,
 That you have perpetrated two furious crimes?
 Did you think, I beg you, you could blindfold my eyes

So as not at all to see your cruel offence?
 Wicked man, lend your ear, listen to your sentence:
 As you struck Uriah in treason
 By the Ammonite sword, so that in your house,
 You could receive his well beloved wife,
 By the public voice rightly defamed:
 Your sons, your own sons, your death shall pursue,
 And the murders will never cease in your house.
 The Lord says thus: as your filthy flame,
 Debauched the wife of the innocent Uriah,
 I shall fill your royal bed with incest,
 Your debased sons, reason dispelling,
 Will lie down before you with your Concubines,
 And they will not hide their lustful ravishments.
 You committed adultery in the shadow of the night;
 1460 But this beautiful Sun, which in the Heavens shines,
 Circling around us every day,
 Will expose your shame to the eyes of the entire world;
 All Juda will see it, all Israel also:
 It is the Eternal who speaks, it will thus be done.

David

I have sinned against God; my fault
 Deserves nothing less than eternal death:
 By these holy judgments my heart is astonished,
 By comfort and hope left abandoned.

Have mercy upon me by your gentle clemency,
 Remember, Oh God, your great compassion,
 And do not remember my transgressions,
 In order to remove the punishment for my ungrateful offense.

Of my dirty sins cleanse and re-cleanse me;
 Of my criminal offense render my soul innocent:
 To my streaming eyes the image is presented.
 1480 And I can hear well his voice accusing me before you.

I confess having failed before your high goodness:
 Against you alone, O my God, I have sinned,
 I sinned only against you, o my Lord.
 Alas! What can I do after having angered you?
 Your justice is extreme, and very great is my fault.

You can therefore, if it pleases you, remain angry,
 Condemn me to death without deserving blame:
 But you know that in sin a woman conceived me,
 To bring me into the world with iniquity.

You wish that our heart can be read on our face;
 And speak of one not thinking otherwise:

That is why you have opened my eye of understanding,
To see more clearly the secrets of your grace.

1500 Sprinkle me with hyssop to purge me,²⁵
So that my purity will be ultimate;
Darkened to my whiteness the snow itself will be,
If in the water of your grace it will be please you to plunge me.

Let me hear quickly the agreeable tidings,
That will assure me of your sweet favor:
You have been Creator, yet be my Savior,
And my bones will take back their natural strength.

Turn your eyes from the sins that I have committed;
Disperse my offenses from the rays of your face,
And within your Spirit their memory erase,
So that in the future you will never think thereof.

Create a pure heart in me by your holy light;
Forming therein a constant desire to do good:
That your grace o my God does not cast me away,
Give to me from your Spirit the customary favor.

1520 From your fortunate peace yield me jubilation:
A free and liberal soul yet consoles me;
Then to all your sinners I will teach your word,
All converted sinners will return to you.

Lord, I recognize you as the God of my salvation:
Come quickly, cleanse me of the crime of homicide;
And even to the Heavens where your grandeur resides,
I will cry out my voice and the sound of my Lute.

As well as the heart you open my mouth;
And my tongue follows the flight of my imagination,
Will your praise to the people proclaim,
From where the sun rises until the wave where it sets.

You do not desire, O immortal Lord,
A large victim offered in sacrifice:
If by such means one would render you gracious,
I would have a thousand times watered your altar.

1540 Whoever wants to offer you a pleasurable sacrifice,
He brings you his contrite and desolate heart,
From the sleep of sin by your grace awakened;

²⁵ This stanza is a paraphrase of *Psalms* 51:7: “Purge thou me with hyssop and I shall be clean: Wash thou me, and I shall be whiter than snowe” (*Bishops’ Bible* 3.xvi[v]).

Joyful only within you, within himself only miserable.

O God, come your favors spread over Sion;
 Its sacred foundations forever fortify:
 For your sacred City build the sacred walls,
 As it makes itself a promises of your affection.

Then the just sacrifice will please you well,
 And the entire burned offering that we will give you:
 Then on your altar the calves we will offer,
 To purge the bodies and the hearts for every vice.

Nathan

The courteous Lord is now appeased,
 Your tears have extinguished his blazing rage:
 Your sins are great; but his mercy

Infinitely greater grants you grace.
 Now hear what he says; Insofar that because of you
 1560 The mouth of the wicked blasphemes against me,
 Disparages my power and strains my justice,
 As if I would tolerate your vice;
 The Child who will be born to you from this pregnancy,
 Will tomorrow be brought from the womb to the grave.

THE END