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Charitie

Humilitie



**A GVIDE TO
GODLYNESSE
Or a Treatise of a
Christian Life**

Shewing the duties wherein it
Consisteth, the helps Inabling &
the Reasons perswading vnto it
& Impediments hindering y^e Peac:
tise of it, and the best meanes
to Remoue them

Whereunto are added diuers Prayers
And
a Treatise of Carnall Securitie
By JOHN DOWNAME
Batcheler in Diuinitie
and Minister of Gods Word.

Jeremie 6. 16.
Aske for the old pathes, where is y^e
Good way, and walke therein, and you
shall finde Rest for your Soules. 22.



Printed at London by
Felix Kingstone For Ed:
Weuer & W. Bladen
at the North dore
of Pauls . 1622



John Payne sculpsit. 1622

FRONTISPIECE OF JOHN DOWNAME'S A GUIDE TO GODLYNESSE (1622)

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

MILTON'S RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE IN SAMSON AGONISTES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

By

Milton Gerald Miller

Year

1948



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Introduction

The criticism of Milton's Samson Agonistes has generally centered about interpretation of its autobiographical content and the interpretation of its classical form. The aim of this thesis is to show the relation of the inner, psychological form to the Puritan tradition.

The biblical story from which Samson was derived, Judges 13-16, offers little to the scholar in understanding the psychological impetus of Samson. It is mainly a treatment of a pagan narrative demonstrating the snares inherent in trusting a woman with secrets. Samson finally regains his strength and pulls down the temple at Gaza and the narrative ends.

David Masson claimed that the Samson story, as interpreted by Milton, was largely autobiographical, and the intense psychological struggles of Samson represent Milton's own conflicts. Masson stated:

The marvel...is that this purely artistic drama, this strictly objective poetic creation, should have been all the while so profoundly and

intensely subjective. Nothing put forth by Milton in verse in his whole life is so vehement an exhibition of his own personality, such a proclamation of his own thoughts about himself and about the world about him, as his Samson Agonistes.¹

Masson interprets the struggles of Samson as Milton's attempt to gain insight into his own efforts to maintain Puritanism against a world of foes. The Philistines, according to Masson, are the followers of Charles II; Samson is Milton himself; and Dalila and Harapha are those forces that wished to tempt Milton from the path of righteousness.

Moody, also, advances the opinion that the Samson story is mainly a personal allegory. He states that the tragedy "...offers perhaps the most remarkable instance in all art of an artist's personal story revealed by impersonal symbols, set forth in their traditional integrity, unmanipulated to any private end."²

Hanford once supported the theory that the Job story held many clues to the nature of the conflicts of Samson. He stated that Job, in his many temptations, offers clues to understanding the nature of the temp-

¹ Masson, David, The Life of John Milton. Peter Smith, New York, 1946, Vol. VI, p. 670.

² Milton, John, The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton. Edited by William Vaughn Moody. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1924, p. xxxii.

tations of Samson. Professor Hanford has modified his opinion since his original work on Job. "The official religious attitude of Samson Agonistes is nearer the Psalms than Job."¹ Professor Hanford feels, however, that the original thesis of his discussion of Job is still valid; that Samson is mainly the story of the redemption of a man from sin.

The drama is concerned essentially with the fallen Samson's recovery of God's lost favor. This process involves his punishment and repentance and a sort of probation under new trial, a trial provided by the timidity and lack of faith of Manoah and the Chorus, by the attempted seductions of Dalila, and by the threats of Harapha.²

Increasingly, however, the scholarship has turned to consideration of Samson Agonistes as a tragedy based on Greek forms and inspired in its inner psychological content by Greek models. William Riley Parker, in Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, reviewed the scholarship done on Samson and examined existing Greek drama for clues as to the various influences on Milton's treatment of the Samson story.

Parker states that "...everything in Milton's drama can confidently be traced to Greek tragedy, to The Book of Judges, to the poet's own experience and to

¹ Personal correspondence, July 24, 1948.

² Hanford, James Holly, A Milton Handbook. F. S. Crofts & Co., New York, 1947, p. 286.

a very moderate exercise of dramatic invention. There is no need to look elsewhere." ¹ Parker analyzes Milton's tragedy on the basis of the Greek structure: prologos, parados, epeisodion, etc. In a thorough analysis of the Greek tragedy in relation to Samson, he demonstrates similarities of Samson in plot, structure and characterization with Greek tragedy.

Parker considers the various aspects of Samson in the light of two plays: Sophocles' Oedipus Coloneus and Aeschylus' Prometheus. Although there are keys to the nature of the minor characters in other Greek plays, Parker restricts his analysis of Samson Agonistes' philosophical movement to the Sophocles and Aeschylus plays.

Regarding Oedipus Coloneus, Parker states:

The Greek play which Samson Agonistes most resembles is the Oedipus Coloneus of Sophocles. The parallels between them are indeed so striking that one is tempted to infer a certain amount of conscious imitation on the part of Milton. Certainly, the Sophoclean masterpiece is a worthy model: the English poet must have held it in the greatest veneration. Like Samson Agonistes, it is the work of an ageing man. And the tale it tells of a long-suffering hero, finding at

¹ Parker, William Riley, Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes. The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937, p. 168.

last a not inglorious death, must certainly have recommended it to Milton as a possible model for the similar account of Samson. ¹

Parker bases his analysis of the similarities of Oedipus and Samson on numerous points of likeness. The line parallels are similar, according to Parker, and he demonstrates this by showing the resemblances of the line numbers of the prologos, parados, kommos, etc., of the two plays. The chorus in Sophocles' drama consists of the elders of Colonus; it has men of Samson's tribe in Milton's tragedy. Both men bewail their difficulties in the play and both plays take slow steps towards the eventual doom of the main protagonist. Manoah aids his son; Ismene helps her father. Both men hope for death. Creon and Dalila act as the main irritants in the tragedies. Creon acts in Harapha fashion when he leaves Oedipus, defeated but still threatening. The Public Officer and Polyneices both bade the principals to come with them, and both refuse the summons. Each hero gets intimations that their coming is urged by supernatural powers, and both leave. In both Samson and Oedipus Coloneus the death of the hero is reported by the Chorus. The Chorus' ending of Oedipus has a parallel to the ending of the Chorus of Samson:

¹ Parker, William Riley, Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes. The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937, p. 168.

Come, cease lamentation, lift it up no more;
for verily these things stand fast. ¹

Prometheus is led a captive on the stage as Samson is in the Milton tragedy. He openly mourns his state. Both heroes accept their punishment but feel that the punishment is too harsh for the crime committed. Samson is visited by his father; and Prometheus by his father-in-law. But, says Parker, there the similarity ends. Samson and Oedipus go down in glorious deaths; Prometheus ends the play still defying the gods. Parker clarifies his attitude towards the two plays at the end of the article by stating:

...my own parallels...do not begin to tell the whole story. It is clear that Milton was influenced by these two plays in the writing of Samson Agonistes; it is not clear that they were the whole - or even the greater part - of Milton's 'best example.' ²

With the great amount of scholarship done on Milton's works and the continual interest in Samson Agonistes, it is surprising that scholars have tended to ignore certain phases of study. It is an axiom of criticism that a literary work should be examined from the standpoint of its own era, and yet Samson has been treated mainly as a Puritan heroic tragedy or a

¹ Sophocles, Oedipus Coloneus, ln. 1179.

² Parker, William Riley, Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes. The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937, p. 185.

a play based on Athenian, or Theban, models. Milton, in his Epistle, begins his defense of Samson by heaping scorn on Restoration drama. He states that he has quoted the great figures of drama "...to vindicate Tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common Interludes." Yet Milton was familiar with Restoration drama, and keys to the character of the minor players of Samson can be found in Restoration drama, and in the comedies of Plautus, which Restoration comedy and its sister, French comedy, drew heavily upon. Despite Milton's warning against mixing comic material with tragedy, it is only the intense tragedy of Samson that prevents the humor of the minor characters from becoming too evident.

The contrast between Manoah and Samson at the beginning of the play is striking. Samson lies blinded, dirty, enchained - - - and Manoah walks up to him, bemoaning his fate and berating Samson for bringing dishonour on his house. The contrast has been great enough so that practically every critic has mentioned it, and yet very little attempt has been made to trace the character to the Restoration comedy of the time.

Some clues to Maccan's nature can be found in Plautus' Pot of Gold. Euclio, an aged Athenian miser, loses his gold and bumbles through the play attempting to find it. He is in deadly fear of losing his family's reputation and refuses to permit his daughter to marry a man he considers his social inferior.

Harapha is a miles gloriosus, a soldier that brags of his prowess and is to be discovered afterward as a coward when challenged. In English drama the character of Pyropolynices appeared again and again in the Restoration. His boastfulness and the citizen's normal aversion to the professional soldier gave the character additional depth.

Dalila considered herself to be a femme fatale, a character used to great effect in Restoration comedies. Sophocles and Seneca present Dalila as she wished to be treated: as a woman in the grip of circumstances beyond her own control, a female Hamlet, as it were. Sophocles, in The Trachinae, presents Deianira as a woman that, in attempting to save her love for her husband, Hercules, anoints his robe with the poisonous blood of a centurion Hercules killed. Seneca, adapting the Sophocles tragedy, makes Deianira much less sympathetic a character.

Hercules calls on the gods to recognize his sufferings in Seneca's Hercules on Oeta and denounces Deianira in bitter terms:

...I, whose power the god's three realms have felt,
I die though no sword has pierced my side,
Although Mount Othrys did not bring my death,
Although no giant foe with fierce wide jaws
Has overwhelmed me with all Pindus' ridge.
I fell without a foe and worst of all -
O wretched valor! - Hercules' last day
Shall see no monster prostrate! Woe is me,
I lost my life, but not in noble deeds!
O judge of earth, ye gods who oft have seen
My labours, and thou earth, is it your will
To smite your Hercules with death? O shame
Unmatched! O bitter fate! A woman's hand
To be the author of Alcides' death! ¹

Certain other aspects of classical drama that might have had an influence on the treatment of the characters of Samson have generally been passed over by scholars. The Messenger that brings the tidings of Samson's death is much like the Messenger in Seneca's Thyestes that tells of the slaughter of the sons of Thyestes. The Messenger in Samson is another humorous character, running out of breath and unable to say anything while the Chorus and Manoah urge him to speak. Knowing the part that Roman drama played in the Restoration, if Milton wished to return to the original sources of drama of the day, he could treat with more aptness the Senecan versions of the classical themes, rather than the original Greek

¹ Seneca, Hercules on Oeta. IV, i.

plays themselves.

One other Greek play needs to be discussed: Sophocles' Ajax. Both heroes in the tragedies of Sophocles and Milton desire death and both wish for it constantly. The parallels in action are strikingly similar. What Parker has done with Prometheus and Oedipus Coloneus can be done with Ajax, since both tragedies have analagous line entrances and soliloquies. But, in no other play can the differences between the Greek and the Puritan spirit be seen so markedly. Ajax commits suicide; Milton insists that Samson did not die deliberately by his own hand. Ajax' suicidal melancholy offers no hope of redemption; Samson realizes that purification by temptation will redeem him. Ajax' death comes after he has realized the hopelessness of further living; Samson's death occurs when he realizes that his mission is to bring the temple down on the heads of the Philistines. Samson is transfigured by the glory of the moment, while Ajax' succor is death without hope.

Despite all the parallels in Greek drama, therefore, we find that the basic impetus of the Samson drama remains unexplained. Examination of Greek drama demonstrates little of the spirit of Samson, although it does show many of the similarities of form.

The psychological and religious basis of Samson Agonistes is absent in Greek drama. This can be understood when we realize that the theological steps to the salvation of man were a unique addition from Hebrew and Christian theology.

It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that the mood and ethics of Samson Agonistes are present in both the Psalms and Puritan theological tracts. The writer will be amplifying the remarks of Clark¹, Curry², James Holly Hanford³, Paul Franklin Hanford⁴, Larson⁵, Powell⁶, Tillyard⁷, and others in documenting Puritan theological basis of Samson. The writer has been unable to find any scholarship on the influence of the Psalms on Samson Agonistes.

¹ Clark, E. M., "Milton's Earlier Samson." University of Texas Studies in English, VII (1927), p. 154.

² Curry, Walter C., "Samson Agonistes Yet Again." Sewanee Review, XXXII (1924), pp. 336-352.

³ Hanford, James Holly, "The Temptation Motive in Milton." Studies in Philology, XV (1918), pp. 190-191.

⁴ Hanford, Paul Franklin, "Samson Agonistes Again." Publications of the Modern Language Association, XXXVI (1921), p. 369.

⁵ Larson, Martin A., The Modernity of Milton. The University of Chicago Press, 1927, pp. 174-175.

⁶ Powell, Chilton L., "Milton Agonistes." Sewanee Review, XXXIV (1926), p. 180-181.

⁷ Tillyard, E. M. W., The Miltonic Setting: Past and Present. Cambridge University Press, 1938, pp. 87-88.

I. The Hebraic Influence
In Samson Agonistes
as Reflected in the
Psalms.

One of the main sources of religious literature, and practically the only source of religious music inspiration, for the Puritans was the Psalms. The complete faith in the ultimate salvation of mankind; the various allusions to the nature of the Messiah which biblical scholars later applied to various aspects of the coming of Jesus of Nazareth; the religious asceticism urged by the psalmists; a God that wreaked absolute and unmerciful judgment on the sinner: all these endeared the Psalms to the Puritan philosophy and served as a basis for Puritan liturgy.

Milton, throughout his life, had a great deal of admiration for the Psalms. He felt that, within the Psalms, there could be found elements of poetry lacking in other works of man.

...those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition, may be easily made appear over all the kinds of lyric poesy to be incomparable. These abilities

wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation; and are of power beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public activity, to allay the perturbations of the mind and set the affections in right tune, to celebrate in glorious and loft hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works and he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church, to sing the victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ, to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship....¹

Indeed, the main themes referring to the morality of the Samson story are amply summarized by Milton in this accolade to the Psalms.

But Milton's interest in the Psalms extended past his panegyrics to them. The only portion of biblical literature that Milton rendered in formal translation was the Psalms. In 1624 Milton paraphrased the 114th and 136th Psalms. These constitute Milton's earliest poems, since they were written at the age of fifteen. Both psalms are odes to the greatness of God and His continuing mercy. Another set of translations was published in the 1673 edition of Milton's works, and comprised Psalms 80-88, written in April, 1648. Psalm 80 complains of the disintegration of the church and the need for deliverance from the

¹ Milton, John, The Reason of Church Government, Book II, Introduction. Prose Selections, Odyssey Press, New York, 1947, p. 107.

world's iniquities; Psalm 81 urges praise of God; Psalm 82 berates the judges of the world for judging unfairly; Psalm 83 compacts with God for the shackling of the oppressors of Israel; Psalm 84 sings of the blessedness of the believers of Jehovah; Psalm 85 asks for a continuance of God's favor; Psalm 86 begs for a sign of God's grace; Psalm 87 sets forth the beauty of the church of God; and Psalm 88 asks for the deliverance of the sons of Korah from enemies and afflictions. Indeed, Psalm 88 comes close to the various complaints of Job regarding his treatment at the hands of God.

The third set of psalms was translated by Milton in 1653 and includes Psalms 1-8. Again, we have a mirror of Samson's woes in the series translated. Psalm 1 contrasts the happiness of the godly with the unhappiness of the ungodly; Psalm 2 states that the rulers of Earth must be overthrown and the kingdom of God and the godly established; Psalm 3 prays for the security of the protection of God; Psalm 4 is David's plea to be heard by God; Psalm 5 asks for the protection of the temple against her enemies; Psalm 6 begs God's aid in afflictions; Psalm 7 entreats God's intervention against enemies and ailments; and Psalm 8 states that God has placed man over the lower creatures. Psalm 114 was also translated into Greek by Milton and appeared in the 1673 edition

of Milton's works.

Even in childhood, the Psalms had a great influence in Milton's upbringing. Milton's father contributed several psalm settings to the Ravencroft's Psalter, published in 1621. In old age, according to Milton's earliest biographer, Milton turned to the Psalms for consolation. Speaking of Milton's activities in old age, his anonymous biographer, generally supposed to be his younger nephew, John Phillips, said that "...David's Psalms were in esteem with him above all poetry." ¹

Returning, therefore, to Samson Agonistes, little of the atmosphere seems to pervade Samson that sets the tone for the other Milton works. Samson does not contain the pagan elements of Lycidas or Comus or the controversial Arianism that marks Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The general theological tone is orthodox Puritanism, and many of the echoes of that Puritanism can be found in the Psalms.

It is natural to presume that the poet, held on an intellectual leash because of his blindness, would turn to a familiar theme for his drama and use source material for inspiration that would require a minimum of outside

¹ Anonymous Life of Milton, in Hanford, James Holly, A Milton Handbook. F. S. Crofts & Co., New York, 1947, p. 61.

assistance. It was simpler for Milton to revive a theme that he had postulated in 1642 and use a minimum of materials that he had not read prior to his blindness.

Samson, in tenor and effect, approach the tone of the Psalms. The psalmist admits his wrong-doing, his sins, his transgressions, and begs for forgiveness. A dichotomy of good and evil is set up. The psalmist has his doubts about patience under difficulties, for he says:

Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord.
Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul; let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt.
Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame that say, Aha, aha.
Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified.
But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God; thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying. ¹

The difficulties of the psalmist are so great that he fears a weakening of his spirit.

For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me. ²

¹ Ps. 70.

² Ps. 40.17-18.

Analyzing his individual danger, the psalmist urges God's mercy. In insistent cries, he says: "Lord, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me: give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee." ¹

Despite the seeming lack of fear of God, these sentiments are Puritan elements also. The Puritan God was an intensely personal God and the intercession of God in man's affairs was to be expected if the entreater prayed hard enough and long enough. The psalmist evidently felt that his entreaties had occupied a sufficient length of time, and he is impatiently waiting for results. In equally expectant terms, the Chorus understands the impatience of Samson with his difficulties, and his request for death or succor, although the request for aid is implied rather than asked for directly.

Many are the sayings of the wise
In antient and in modern books enroll'd;
Extolling Patience as the truest fortitude;
And to the bearing well of all calamities,
All chances incident to mans frail life
Consolatories writ
With studied argument, and much perswasion sought
Lenient of grief and anxious thought,
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...

The Chorus assumes that Samson, because of his patience, will

¹ Ps. 141.1.

² S. A., lns. 652-664.

finally gain the ear of God.

...patience is more oft the exercise
Of Saints, the trial of thir fortitude,
Making them each his own Deliverer,
And Victor over all
That tyrannie or fortune can inflict,
Neither of these is in thy lot,
Samson, with might endu'd
Above the sons of men; but sight bereav'd
May chance to number thee with those
Whom Patience finally must crown. ¹

The psalmist, while he is aroused at the lack of
God's attention to his pleas, is equally annoyed
by the jeering of the ungodly multitude. He com-
plains bitterly to the Lord:

...in mine adversity they rejoiced, and
gathered themselves together: yea, the ab-
jects gathered themselves together against
me, and I knew it not: With hypocritical mockers
in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their
teeth. ²

In a similar manner, Samson answers the call of the
officer to appear before the Philistines as just an
occasion for mockery.

Have they not Sword-players, and ev'ry sort
Of Gymnic Artists, Wrestlers, Riders, Runners,
Juglers and Dancers, Antics, Mummers, Mimics,
But they must pick me out with shackles tir'd,
And over-labour'd at thir publick Mill,
To make them sport with blind activity?
Do they not seek occasion of new quarrels
On my refusal to distress me more,
Or make a game of my calamities?³

¹ S. A., lns. 1287-1297.

² Ps. 36.15-16.

³ S. A., lns. 1323-1331.

Samson's prediction of the revelry of the Philistines in seeing him in thrall is borne out by the statement of the Messenger who tells Manoah and the Chorus that, when Samson appeared, the Philistines rejoiced at the captivity of their former enemy.

At the sight of him the people with a shout
Rifted the Air clamouring thir god with praise,
Who had made thir dreadful enemy thir thrall. ¹

The mocking of the ungodly is even more difficult for the psalmist to bear for he fears that such ridicule is a reflection on the God that he worships.

...I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men,
and despised of the people.
All that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out
the lip, they shake the head, saying,
He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him:
let him deliver him, seeing he delight in him. ²

Similarly, Samson states that he is the object of scorn for the Philistines, since they think that the subjection of Samson is an indication of their god's superiority over Jehovah.

Father, I do acknowledge and confess
That I this honour, I this pomp have brought
To Dagon, and advanc'd his praises high
Among the Heathen round; to God have brought
Dishonour, obloquie, and op't the mouths
Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
In feeble hearts, propense enough before
To wave, or fall off and joyn with Idols:
Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow... ³

¹ S. A., lns. 1620-1622.

² ps. 22.6-8.

³ S. A., lns. 448-457.

The ungodly appear before the psalmist and ask him where is his God.

My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? ¹

Harapha, the giant, taunts Samson:

Presume not on thy God, what e're he be,
Thee he regards not, owns not, hath cut off
Quite from his people, and delivered up
Into thy Enemies hand... ²

In European and Asiatic lands the psalmist is assaulted by doubters in the dispersal of the Hebrews. He is asked, in an echo of Job 7.17:

What is man, that thou are mindful of him? ³

Again, the psalmist reiterates his statement:

Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! ⁴

In the words of the Psalms, the Chorus takes cognizance of the unusually harsh treatment of Samson at the hands of God:

God of our Fathers, what is man!
That thou towards him with hand so various,
Or might I say contrarious... ⁵

The wicked grow stronger as the might of God withholds itself from the godly, and the psalmist cries:

¹ Ps. 42.3

² S. A., lns. 1156-1159.

³ Ps. 8.4.

⁴ Ps. 144.3.

⁵ S. A., lns. 667-669.

They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning
oppression: they speak loftily.
They set their mouth against the heavens, and
their tongue walketh through the earth. ¹

Samson complains in equally condemnatory phrases re-
garding the actions of the people of Israel regarding
their Philistine oppressors. He claims that they re-
fused to follow him to freedom because they love sla-
very more.

Had Judah that day join'd, or one whole Tribe,
They had by this possess'd the Towers of Gath,
And lorded over them whom now they serve;
But what more oft in Nations grown corrupt,
And by thir vices brought to servitude,
Then to love Bondage more then Liberty,
Bondage with ease then strenuous liberty...²

The psalmist protest to God of the flattery and dupli-
city of the wicked.

They speak vanity every one with his neighbour:
with flattering lips and with a double heart do
they speak. ³

The duplicity of Dalila gains echoes from this passage
of the Psalms, when Samson says:

Thrice she assay'd with flattering prayers and sighs,
And amorous reproaches to win from me
My capital secret, in what part my strength
Lay stor'd in what part summ'd... ⁴

Speaking of the wicked, the psalmist likens them to
the deaf adder that stops its ear:

¹ Ps. 73.8-9.

² S. A., lns. 265-271.

³ Ps. 12.2.

⁴ S. A., lns. 392-395.

Their poison is like the poison of a serpent;
they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth
her ear...
Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers,
charming never so wisely... 1

Samson, also, uses the deaf adder to point up his complete imperviousness to Dalila's entreaties:

Thy fair enchanted cup and warblind charms
No more on me have power, their force is null'd,
So much of Adders wisdom I have learn't
To fence my ear against thy sorceries. 2

Beset by difficulties, even the psalmist's friends desert him, and he cries to the Lord:

My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my
sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. 3

Samson tells the Chorus that he, too, has been deserted by his former friends, and welcomes their coming.

Your coming, Friends, revives me, for I learn
Now of my experience, not by talk
How counterfeit a coin they are who friends
Bear in thir Superscription (of the most
I would be understood) in prosperous days
They swarm, but in adverse withdraw thir head
Not to be found, though sought. 4

The man cut from God, according to Puritan doctrines, lives a death-in-life, besieged at all sides by both enemies and former friends. The psalmist, likewise, shows his complete desolation when confronted by this condition:

1 Ps. 58.4-5.

2 S. A., lns. 934-937.

3 Ps. 38.11.

4 S. A., lns. 265-271.

...the enemy hath persecuted my soul: he hath smitten my life down to the ground: he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate. ¹

Samson, too, complains of the living grave he has been made to lie in, both by his captivity and his blindness.

My self, my Sepulcher, a moving Grave,
Buried, yet not exempt
By privilege of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs,
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes. ²

The psalmist is conscious of his alienation from his own people, and the lack of support he has from the multitude. He tells God that he has endured scorn for His sake.

Because for thy sake I have borne reproach;
shame hath covered my face.
I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and
an alien unto my mother's children. ³

Similarly, Samson is conscious of his change in social position. He asks the Chorus:

Am I not sung and proverb'd for a Fool
In every street, do they not say, how well
Are they come upon him his deserts? ⁴

The result of the great persecutions of the godly is that they begin to lose heart and doubt even in their

¹ Ps. 12.2.

² S. A., lns. 392-395.

³ Ps. 69.7-8.

⁴ S. A., lns. 203-205.

own eventual salvation at the hands of God. The psalmist laments:

... innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. ¹

He is unable to bear up under his difficulties, and his heart bows down under the weight of his own guilt.

...mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. ²

Samson denounces his own actions to the Chorus, saying that he is unable to look up because of his immense shame in his past actions.

Yee see, O 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 shiprack't,
My Vessell trusted to me from above,
Gloriously rigg'd; and for a word, a tear,
Fool, have divulg'd the secret gift of God
To a deceitful Woman...³

Yet the psalmist realizes that all his difficulties are a result of his own sins. He admits his sins to God:

¹ Ps. 40.12.

² Ps. 38.4-5.

³ S. A., lns. 193-202.

I acknowledged my sin unto thee and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord... 1

The allseeingness of the Almighty is admitted by the psalmist:

Oh God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee. 2

Man, therefore, has his conscience motivated by God to see the evil of his ways:

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. 3

Yet God, despite all iniquities, will hear the sinner.

In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me. 4

Samson, too, despite his sins, is confident of ultimate entry into the kind and benevolent kingdom of God. He acknowledges his sins but tells Harapha that he will gain final pardon from God.

...these evils I deserve and more,
Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
Whose ear is ever open; and his eye
Gracious to readmit the suppliant... 5

The psalmist not only admits sin and accepts God-given punishment, but asks for punishment for sin not yet punished by God.

1 Ps. 32.5.

2 Ps. 69.5.

3 Ps. 90.8.

4 Ps. 120.1.

5 S. A., lns. 1169-1173.

O Lord my God, if I have done this; if there be
iniquity in my hands...
Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it;
yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth,
and lay mine honour in the dust... 1

Samson refuses his father's aid since he, as the
psalmists, wishes punishment from his enemies to ex-
piate his sin.

...let me here,
As I deserve, pay on my punishment;
And expiate, if possible, my crime,
Shameful garrulity. 2

God, however, does not show himself as only a vengeful
God to the psalmist or the Puritan. The psalmist has
a complete and absolute faith in the superiority of
his God over other gods.

Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now
their God?
But our God is in the heavens: he hath done what-
soever he hath pleased.
Their idols are silver and gold, the work of
men's hands...3

Samson, too, is conscious of the superiority of his
God over all gods.

...God,
Besides whom there is no God...4

The Chorus adds its voice in the denunciation of idola-
try as opposed to the worship of Jehovah. It shows

1 Ps. 7.3,5.

2 S. A., lns. 488-491.

3 Ps. 115.2-4.

4 S. A., lns. 440-441.

that idolatry and drunkenness go hand in hand, while relating the collapse of the temple when Samson pushed against the pillars:

While thir hearts...
Drunk with Idolatry, drunk with Wine,
And fat regorg'd of Bulls and Goats,
Chaunting thir Idol, and preferring
Before our living Dread who dwells
In Silo his bright Sanctuary. ¹

Atheism in primitive days was practically non-existent, as readers of Frazer's Golden Bough will discover. Few references are made to atheism either in biblical or in Puritan literature, for the conflict in religion was between gods, not between God and no god. In one of the few references, the psalmist says:

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God...²

The Chorus in Samson also dislikes the non-believer and denounces atheism in ringing terms:

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.³

The complete and absolute belief of the psalmist in the eventual demonstration of God's power is an excellent index to the feeling that God maintains an

¹ S. A., lns. 1673-1675.

² Ps. 14.1, 53.1.

³ S. A., lns. 293-299 (italics mine)

active and personal interest in man's affairs. Even though man is plunged into the depths of despair, he realizes that God can save him, and he appeals to God to rescue him because the reputation of God is at stake, as well as the life of the man who is doing the entreating.

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?
How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having
sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine
enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; lighten mine
eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;
Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him;
and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved,
But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall
rejoice in thy salvation. 1

Similarly, Samson, though he feels that he is no longer the vessel of the Lord's trust, states that God must enter the lists against the Philistines.

The anguish of my Soul, that suffers not
Mine eie to harbour sleep, or thoughts to rest.
This only hope relieves me, that the strife
With me hath end; all the contest is now
'Twixt God and Dagon; Dagon hath presum'd,
Me overthrown, to enter lists with God,
His Deity comparing and preferring
Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure,
Will not connive, or linger, thus provok'd,
But will arise and his great name assert:
Dagon must stoop, and shall e're long receive
Such a discomfit, as shall quite despoil him
Of all these boasted Trophies won on me,
And with confusion blank his Worshippers. 2

1 Ps. 13.1-5.

2 S. A., lns. 458-471.

The psalmist believes implicitly that God will show him His works and that man should recognize the workings of God.

He hath shewed his people the power of his works,
that he may give them the heritage of the heathen....
He sent redemption unto his people...¹

Samson's major complaint regarding the Hebrews is that they failed to recognize redemption when sent by God, and refused to follow Samson when he was vanquishing the Philistines.

...Israel's Governours, and Heads of Tribes,
Who seeing those great acts which God had done
Singly by me against their Conquerours
Acknowledg'd not, or not at call consider'd
Deliverance offerd...²

Though the hand of God be heavy on His people, he is even more vengeful on the heathen. We are reminded of the fate of Astyanax when he is cast on the rocks by Ulysses when the psalmist commends this end to the daughter of Babylon's children.

O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed;
happy shall he be, who rewardeth thee as thou
hast served us.
Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy
little ones against the stones. ³

Manoah, also, has no qualms about the death of the Philistines. He rejoices at their death and their people's mourning.

¹ Ps. 11.6,9.

² S. A., lns. 242-246.

³ Ps. 137.8-9.

...no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause, Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finish'd
A life Heroic, on his Enemies
Fully reveng'd, hath left them years of mourning,
And lamentation to the Sons of Caphtor
Through all Philistian bounds. ¹

The psalmist ends his pleas to God, and his admission of guilt, with an expression of absolute belief in God's mercy and benefaction. He states that God is to be preferred over man.

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. ²

God is all, and man is nothing, states the psalmist. He will, like Samson facing Harapha, trust only in God, rather than the strength of man-made armaments.

The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. ³

Samson, too, stands in absolute belief in the workings of God. He scorns all armaments and tells Harapha:

My trust is in the living God...⁴

In the final speech of the Chorus the wisdom of God is vindicated and all the evils of the past are forgotten.

All is best, though we oft doubt,
What th' unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns

¹ S. A., lns. 1708-1714.

² Ps. 118.8.

³ Ps. 18.2.

⁴ S. A., ln. 1140.

And to his faithful Champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously...¹

Both the psalmist and the Puritan can agree with the
final lines of Samson Agonistes, which contain the
philosophy of both the psalmist and Milton: that God,
after working his judgment, always has decided for the
best.

His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind all passion spent. ²

¹ S. A., lns 1744-1752.

² S. A., lns. 1755-1758.

II. The Puritan Influence in
Samson Agonistes as Reflected
in the Puritan Theological
Writers.

A. The Puritan Theological Progression
in Samson Agonistes.

1. A Study in Dejection:

The Samson and Choral Monologues

...where true and lively faith hath residence, the soule is tempered to symbolize with divine goodnesse, and standeth affected to the severall branches of the Word, as a good appetite doth to wholesome food of diverse qualities. This is the nature of justifying faith: but it admits many interruptions in acts or operations. The mind is sometimes darkened with mists arising from our naturall corruptions; sometimes our passions stir villently, that wee cannot doe as we wovld, not continue our adherence vnto the word of life, as better for the time being than the prosecution of some sensvall good, that for the present doth move our affections, and is stolen into them. Naturall taste is distempered with sick humovrs that abovnd in the body: so is the spiritvall with temptations from without, and spiritvall diseases from within. Thus it is with best oftentimes in this life, whilest the mind is clouded with earthly thoughts, and the heart assailed with carnall lusts, which through weaknesse, or neglect of watchfullnesse, creep upon and disturb them for a time: but in their right tempter and good plight they are much better; they taste and feed upon the word of truth, and the favovr of God is sweeter to them than all the delights of the sons of men. We concludve then that justifying faith is a firm, absolvte, unlimited assent, and well-rooted, all-seasoning, soveraigne affaiance, whereby, wee rest upon Christ for salvation, embrace the mercies of God as better than life, and feed vpon the Word with sweet refreshing and delight.

Ball, John, A Treatise on Faith. Edward Brewster, London, 1637, pp. 37-38.

Salvation and redemption was a desperate everyday reality to the Puritan. Milton, in writing Samson Agonistes, followed the theological progression of salvation that is reflected again and again in the little-known

Puritan theological tracts.

As the play opens, Samson is being led by guards into the sun, and stumbles to find his seat. The scene does not begin with defiance, but commences with words appropriate to a crushed spirit.

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 toyl...¹

Samson despairs completely of any aid. Blind, imprisoned, he broods at the desperate plight he is in because of his own sins. His mental attitude is one of complete dejection, as he utters the great soaring words that are so largely a result of Milton's own experience in his blindness.

Then had I not been thus exil'd from light;
As in the land of darkness yet in light,
To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried; but O yet more miserable!
My self, my Sepulcher, a moving Grave,
Buried, yet not exempt
By privilege of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs,
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes. ²

Samson, in the words of one commentator, "...feels himself to be a broken and useless instrument cast aside by the Hand that fashioned it; he is the forsaken

¹ S. A., lns. 1-5.

² S. A., lns. 98-109.

of God..."¹ Samson's exposed position is due to his opposition to God's will, so that God acted with Samson as he does with totally atheistic peoples and "...had withdrawn his protection, and taken away his hedge of defense and so left them naked and exposed unto the rage and cruelty of their brutish Enemies."² Samson's captivity, as he states himself, is a punishment for sin and is accompanied by two penalties: the penalty of blindness and the penalty of captivity among inhuman foes. Speaking of the Babylonian captivity, Sebastian Benefield expounds this punishment in terms of imprisonment for sin.

Captivity to be an effect, or punishment of sin, king Salomon in his praier made to the LORD at his consecration, or dedication of the Temple, acknowledged. It's expreslie delivered...of the Israelites; that for their transgressions they were carried away captiue unto Babel. The Captivity...is...a corporal captivity, which vsually is accompanied with two great miseries... The first, they dwell in darknes, and in the shadow of death, that is, they are put into deepe dungeons, void of light, whereby they are as it were at deaths doore. Secondly, they are bound in anguish, and yron, that is, day and night they are loaden with fetters, gyues, or shackles or yron; so loaden, that they finde no rest vnto their bones. Thus must it be with them, who by sinnedfull living provoke the LORD to high displeasure.³

The Chorus then moralizes on the state of a man that

¹ Curry, Walter C., "Samson Agonistes Yet Again." Sewanee Review, XXXII (1924, pp. 340-341.

² Brown, John, The Swan Song. (No printer of noted origin), London, 1630, p. 70.

³ Benefield, Sebastian, A Commentarie or Exposition Upon the First Chapter of the Prophecy of Amos. Printed by Joseph Barnes to be sold by John Barnes, London, 1613, pp. 128-129.

formerly occupied the highest place in the esteem of God, but now has been lowered to the position of a slave at the mill. The Chorus introduces itself as a thoughtful group of friends, concerned about Samson. But, more important, they form a second soliloquizing agent of the play, since their remarks at the beginning of the tragedy are not addressed to Samson directly but to the reader. The Chorus has the general moral make-up of the Puritan church-goer, not rising above conventional religion in the manner that Samson does, but holding to what is right and wrong by Puritan standards. The Chorus recites many of Samson's heroic feats, all drawn from the Book of Judges account. This has a dual purpose: first, to summarize the past actions of Samson and, secondly, to strengthen the moral of the wretchedness of those forsaken by God. Milton utilizes the Chorus to circumvent Aristotle in some measure, so that the past action can be brought into the tragedy and still not violate the unities. The Chorus recites the complaints of Samson and summarizes the action of the first portion of the tragedy.

Which shall I first bewail,
Thy Bondage or lost Sight,
Prison within Prison
Inseparably dark?
Though art become (O worst imprisonment!)
Thy dungeon of thy self; thy Soul
(Which Men enjoying sight oft without cause complain)
Imprison'd now, indeed,

In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward light
To incorporate with gloomy night;
For inward light alas
Puts forth no visual beam. ¹

Thus the monologue phase of the tragedy ends.

Samson has stated the problems of a man undergoing psychological and spiritual torment; the Chorus gives the reader the perspective of the friendly observer that values social stature and physical well-being more than the psychological calm of a sinner who has been forgiven for his trespasses. The Chorus does not touch the crux of the problem to Samson: his doubts as to his future mission in life. It deals only with the surface aspects of the case.

¹ S. A., lns. 151-163.

2. The Vindication of the Will
of God: Samson as Defender
of the Faith.

At the end of the monologues of Samson and the Chorus, the scene is set for the advancement of the action of the tragedy. Until Samson comes in actual contact with the people, he must remain in absolute dejection, since there is no reason for him to change his attitude. He must project his feelings of guilt from a half-sense that God might be in error to the immediate cause of his downfall, Dalila, and, at the same, pertinent time lay his doubts about God's wisdom. This is accomplished in the first dialogues between Samson and the Chorus.

Samson lies dejectedly on the ground as the Chorus completes its statements about Samson. He bestirs himself slightly, however, at the conclusion of the choral ode. The Chorus speaks of Samson as "...the grief..."¹ of Israel; presenting, thereby, the views of the people rather than the outlook of the man himself, who is more interested in his own difficulties than those of his nation. The Chorus names its home areas, again highlighting its function as a represen-

¹ S. A., ln. 179.

tative of the Hebrew national body. It tells Samson that it has come to give Samson "...Counsel or Consolation..."¹ by using "...apt words to swage/ The tumors of a troubl'd mind..."²

The Chorus thereby introduces itself as a primitive kind of psychotherapist to whom, it hopes, Samson will divulge his fears and receive consolation.

Samson, after learning about the coming of his friends, begins to take an interest in externals. He says that he has regained some faith in mankind by their coming, since he mistrusted the world when former friends deserted him during his troublesome days. He reveals again that he feels that he has lost the guidance of God because of his own foolishness.

Yee see, O 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 shipwrack't
My Vessel trusted to me from above,
Gloriously rigg'd...³

It is this mental confusion, this inability to know whether his failure was due to God's plans, whether God himself failed, or whether Samson, as a limited free agent, strayed from the path the Lord established for

¹ S. A., ln. 183.

² S. A., lns. 184-185.

³ S. A., lns. 193-200.

his servants. Here, however, he discards the theory that God erred and places the blame on himself.

John Frewen expresses the Puritan belief that this step is a prerequisite to regaining grace in God's sight.

...as the firste steppe to recouer health is to acknowledge our infirmitye, euen so the firste steppe to the grace of God is, to know our own ungodlines and ignorance....¹

Samson then expresses his shame when he realizes that he is now discredited in the eyes of the people. Yet he still believes that his lack of wisdom was the cause of his downfall and not deliberate disregard of God's wishes. He still has some doubts about God's choice of him as Israel's champion. He feels that his own stupidity caused his shearing at the hands of Dalila. He justifies his actions by citing Heaven's neglect in not providing him with the intellect to match his strength.

The Chorus, acting as comforters, immediately stops Samson from exploring the subject, since it feels that his statements are approaching sacrilege. It states, "Tax not divine disposal..."², and then enquires about Dalila, wondering why Samson chose a foreigner

¹ Frewen, John, Certaine Fruitfull Instructions and necessary doctrines to edify in the feare of God. Printed for Thomas Chard, London, 1587, p. 166.

² S. A., ln. 210.

for a wife, rather than one of his own people. Samson justifies the selection of his first wife, saying that she was selected on action "...motion'd...of God..." 1

Samson then discusses his second wife, the false Dalila, and denounces her to the Chorus. Samson blames himself for giving up "...my fort of silence to a Woman." 2 The Chorus arouses Samson when it says that, despite all his efforts, "...Israel still serves with all his Sons." 3 Samson transfers the blame to the Hebrew leaders who gave him to the Philistines when he was their appointed deliverer.

Samson again asserts that he is the agent of God, ignored by his own people. The God that chose him to deliver Israel was ignored, says Samson, since man preferred to trust in his own methods, rather than abide with the judgment of God.

Samson now rises to his full height to proclaim his doctrine of liberty. Samson is certain that his prior deeds were motivated by God; he no longer has doubts about his mission as the servant of Jehovah. He in-

1 S. A., ln. 222.

2 S. A., ln. 236.

3 S. A., ln. 240.

sists that Israel's leaders were given the choice of following God or bowing to the Philistines, and they chose to ignore God's deliverance. "Free will to Milton was not relative, depending upon a person's chance to know the truth, but absolute and unqualified. The ways of God to man are just, not the ways of man to God." ¹

The Chorus moralizes on the foolhardiness of disbelief in God, to strengthen the newly-found faith of Samson.

Just are the ways of God,
And justifiable to Men;
...Yet more there be who doubt his ways not just,
...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 dispence. ²

The Puritan, Francis Taylor, expressed the same theory of God's freedom of action in 1654.

Men may be potent: God is omnipotent. Their power is but weaknesse compared unto his. God doth what he will: Men do what they can. When they have done what they can, God goes on with the work. He begins where they end, and turnes all to a new end which they never dreamed of.... Gods wayes differ from ours, because they are secret, and unknown to us. He gives his Com-mandements to men, but reveals not his ends and purposes to them. His revealed purpose concerning

¹ Wolfe, Don M., Milton in the Puritan Revolution. Thomas Nelson Sons, New York, 1941, p. 65.

² S. A., lns. 293-314.

the event of all things he locks up in heaven, and keeps the key himself. Men that use the counsaile of others, are often disappointed of their ends, because their plots are revealed by them whose heads they were forced to make use of. But no man knows Gods ends, that he may reveal them. He knows ours, and can disappoint them. ¹

The first stage of Samson's redemption has been accomplished. Samson now has his faith in God's wisdom restored. He has gained perspective from God's workings in his past acts, and the mental torture he has been inflicting on himself has been, in a slight degree, alleviated. The Chorus shows Samson the way to redemption as the chosen instrument of God. Samson has his attention deflected from his own miseries. He is again interested in the deliverance of Israel from Philistine bondage, although he does not quite know how he is going to accomplish this deliverance. From his own guilt feelings, Samson's attention is now occupied with the problem of a corrupt Hebrew leadership at the beck-and-call of an overbearing Philistine ruling class.

As Samson emerges as a man who has found his faith in God once again, he must prove that faith before a doubter. The doubter is Manoah, the father of Samson. In the humiliating conditions of the defeat of his son, Manoah

¹ Taylor, Francis, Gods Glory in Mans Happiness. Printed by E. C. for G. & H. Eversden, London, 1654, pp. 44-46.

loses faith in God's wisdom, and decides himself to pay a huge ransom to the Philistines to effect freedom for Samson.

The Chorus announces the approach of Manoah with trepidation, shared by Samson, who does not wish to have "...another inward grief awak't..."¹ Manoah, old and cranky, comes on the scene and asks the Chorus where Samson is. Manoah bewails his own lot as a father. He exclaims, in desperation:

...what thing good
Pray'd for, but often proves our woe, our bane?²

Here is the first clear-cut statement in the tragedy that doubts some of the actions of God. The comments of the Chorus regarding doubts as to God's wisdom make Samson appear spiritually strong in contrast to Manoah's readiness to question God's judgment. Samson has suffered the supreme indignity of blindness, captivity, and fall from God's grace; Manoah only has had his pride as a father hurt. The greater man is Samson and Manoah helps highlight the contrast between the small man who complains bitterly of minor difficulties, and the stout-hearted man, who bears his difficulties with forbearance. Yet Manoah's doubts, even though they indicate

¹ S. A., ln. 330.

² S. A., lns. 350-351.

a weak faith, does not indicate that Manoah is lost for "...God refuteth and reiecteth none for weaknes of faith." 1

Manoah continues to ask why God has done this horrible act to his son, with God presented by Manoah as the giver of Trojan horses in return for prayers, where the results of prayers drag "...a Scorpions tail behind..."² Manoah cast doubts upon the actions of God in sending angels and other divine portends to announce the coming of the emancipator of Israel.

Manoah, thereby, sets the stage for Samson. Samson can follow one of two possible courses. He can agree with Manoah's intemperate statements regarding God, and relapse back to his psychological state at the beginning of the tragedy, or he can stand up to Manoah and renew his trust in God. The first temptation, a typically Puritan temptation, is thus put before Samson. Samson is "...a great man who, in the midst of failure and personal affliction, is definitely tempted to surrender his trust in Providence because of his inability to understand its dealings with himself..."³

1 Attersoll, William, The New Covenant. Printed by W. Jaggard and sold by Nicholas Bourne, London, 1614, p. 94.

2 S. A., ln. 360.

3 Hanford, James Holly, "The Temptation Motive in Milton." Studies in Philology, XV (1918), pp. 190-191.

Samson does not fail. He responds that heavenly judgment must not be brought into question because of his failure.

Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father.
Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
But justly; I my self have brought them on,
Sole Author, I, Sole Cause: if aught seem vile,
As vile hath been my folly, who have profan'd
The mystery of God giv'n me under pledge
Of vow, and have betray'd it to a woman,
A Canaanite, my faithless enemy. ¹

Samson tells Manoah that his own lust separated him from God, and not the action of God against him. God's acts are the results of man's sinfulness, and lust is the most carnal of the sins that deprives man of God's guidance, said John Downname, one of the earlier Puritan theologians.

...carnall lusting after earthly things, breedes a neglect and loathing of things spirituall and euen of God himselfe: for their appetite being filled and glutted with the sweet poison of fleshly delights, they haue no tast nor relish of those heauenly excellencies, and they who haue their senses filled with the seeing of worldly pleasures, haue their spiritual sense so dulled and deaded, that they cannot smell Gods odiferous sweetnesse in his word and holy ordinances. But as the Beetle chuseth rather to be in the dung then among the sweetest flowers, and the filthy hogge is more delighted with rooting in the dunghill, then to walke about in the most pleasant garden: so those who are carnally minded are best pleased, when as by any means they may satisfie their sensuall and fleshly appetite, and take no pleasure in spirituall or heauenly things; yea so contrarie and opposite

¹ S. A., lns. 373-380.

are they vnto God in all goodnesse, and such emnitie there is betweene them, that nothing giueth vnto them greates distates and discontentment. And as these fleshly lusts enrage men against God; so also do they prouoke Gods wrath against them; and therefore the Apostle saith, that whilest they had their conuersation in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires thereof, they were also the children of wrath, and in that respect in danger daily to bee consumed with the fire of his displeasure....¹

Samson feels that he was amply warned about Dalila and only his stupidity and uxoriousness caused him to fall into her trap. His first wife betrayed him, but Samson did not learn his lesson and again was the victim of a woman's wiles.

...foul effeminacy held me yok't
Her Bond-slave; O indignity, O blot
To Honour and Religion! seruil mind
Rewarded well with seruil punishment!
The base degree to which I now am fall'n,
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base
As was my former seruitude, ignoble,
Unmanly, ignomious, infamous,
True slavery, and that blindness worse then this,
That saw not how degenerately I serv'd. ²

Again, the conscience of Samson causes the deepest hurt. He served his lusts, not the wishes of God, and he realizes his sin.

Samson's father, however, is more worried about the disgrace on his own house than the great mental suffering that Samson has undergone. Manoah claims that Samson's

¹ Downname, John, The Conflict between the Flesh and the Spirit. Printed by William Jones, London, 1618, pp. 74-75.

² S. A., lns. 410-419.

use of Dalila as an instrument of God's will resulted in his own defeat and that, instead of Samson; using Dalila as an entering wedge to overcome the Philistines, he was overcome by his own lust. Here, perhaps, is the major difference between the more highly philosophical attitude of the Chorus, which supports Samson's contention that all was divinely ordained, and Manoah, who, in extremely practical language, does not feel that Samson was really motivated by God in taking Dalila as his wife but was moved more by his own lust.

Manoah continues to discuss the various failures of Samson and tells him of the Philistine's feast and celebration in honor of Dagon. Manoah, social-minded and rich, worries about the disgrace to his name and, at times, seems more worried about his family reputation than his son's fate. He is a father and worried about his son, but his preoccupation over appearances and over Samson's marital errors seems to be motivated more by self-interest than by paternal love.

Samson is humble, but this new humility is a well-reasoned humbleness. His disgrace is intense, Samson confesses, but even this is not as bad as the honor he has brought to Dagon.

Father, I do acknowledge and confess
That I this honour, I this pomp have brought
To Dagon, and advanc't his praises high

Among the Heathen round; to God have brought
Dishonour, obloquie, and op't the mouths
Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
In feeble hearts, propense enough before
To waver, or fall off and joyn with Idols;
Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
The anguish of my Soul, that suffers not
Mine eie to harbour sleep, or thoughts to rest. 1

Samson then says that God will enter the lists against Dagon, the gods of the Philistines. Samson is willing to resign himself to a secondary role in the future actions of Jehovah for, as a true Puritan hero, Samson is willing to take a second place and allow God "...to doe that which in his wisdome he seeth to be fittest for vs...." 2

Manoah is not too interested in Samson's theological moralizing. He passes over Samson's statements lightly, and then divulges the news that he is attempting to make arrangements to gain the release of his son.

Samson will have none of this. He wishes to pay for his crime against God and His people. His punishment, he feels, is in expiating his sin by staying in prison. Samson, indeed, "...seeks the sources of suffering and retribution within the soul of a potentially noble man who fails in his conflict with the principle of evil..." 3

1 S. A., lns. 448-459.

2 Downname, John, Consolation for the Afflicted. Printed by John Beale for W. Welby, London, 1613, p. 710.

3 Curry, Walter C., "Samson Agonistes Yet Again." Sewanee Review, XXXII (1924), pp. 351-352.

Samson is willing to put his future fate on the decisions of God. He has no desire to be free, if such freedom means foregoing possible forgiveness by God. He is willing to put his faith in God, rather than man, for he feels certain that God will treat him justly. "The will of God (although the reason thereof be unknowne unto us) is to be counted iust. For the Lord hath his right taken from him if he be not at liberty to doe with his creatures as he seemeth best...." 1 Samson upholds the actions of God in leaving man to himself after giving him His advice on future actions.

But I Gods counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuously have published, impiously,
Weakly at least, and shamefully: A sin
That Gentiles in thir Parables condemn
To thir abyss and horrid pains confin'd. 2

He is, therefore, a creature of his own will, much like the Puritan's analysis of the Adam and Eve story:

Being left by God to the mutabilitie of their owne will, they voluntarily enclined vnto that euill, whervnto they were tempted; therby not onely loosing for themselues the image and fauour of God, but withall depriuing their posteritie of that blessed estate, and plunging them into the contrarie. 3

Manoah does not agree with Samson's concept of the need

1 Frewen, John, Certaine Fruitfull Instructions and necessary doctrines meete to edify in the feare of God. Printed for Thomas Chard, London, 1587, p. 214.

2 S. A., lns. 497-501.

3 Crooke, Samuel, The Guide Unto True Blessednesse. Printed by Edw. Griffin for Nathaniel Butter, London, 1614, p. 23.

for self-punishment, a kind of neo-masochism, to bring about redemption from sin. Quite logically, Manoah assumes that a man that has been blinded, subjected to public condemnation and ridicule, imprisoned and used as an exhibit of his enemy's power, has had enough punishment. Manoah realizes, however, that merely answering Samson with a negative approach will not suffice to convince him that he has expiated his sin. Samson, says Manoah, must not inflict punishment on himself. Samson's refusal to leave prison will not only not help him with God; it will hurt his chances of redemption, Manoah states. God wishes to have men ask for mercy so that he can bestow it, says Manoah, and Samson's attempt to increase his own sufferings and wish for death is not looked upon favorably by God. Manoah then advises Samson not to reject ransom, which may be in accordance with God's plans. He urges Samson to do his penitence, if he feels he must, at home, where he can bring offerings and other means of showing his desire for heavenly forgiveness.

Samson, however, is still suffering from the enormous shame of a man who has violently betrayed the confidence of God. He retells the story of his past glory and asks, rhetorically, if he can ever hope to regain that glory. Samson

looks at his past strutting with scorn, saying that he strode "...like a petty God..."¹ when he was the champion of Israel. Now he has come to evil days, when his glory has been dimmed. His conscience causes the most intense pain but he feels that death will be the solution to his difficulties. Samson reviews the great shame of revealing the secret of his strength to Dalila. This betrayal was caused, Samson says, by his overbearing pride in his own strength and his standing with the Hebrews.

The Chorus intercedes in the dialogue, now that Manoah has stopped protesting, and attempts to remove Samson's thoughts from his own troubles. It enters into a discussion with Samson on the evils of drink, but Samson realizes finally that the Chorus is praising his temperance to revive his spirits. Samson finds himself falling into his old habit of boasting, and catches himself up sharply.

But what avail'd this temperance, not compleat
Against another object more enticing?
What boots it at one gate to make defence,
And at another to let in the foe
Effeminatly vanquish't?²

¹ S. A., ln. 529.

² S. A., lns. 558-562.

Manoah returns to his old thesis: that Samson is using his strength for the glorification of a pagan people if he refuses to be removed from captivity. But Manoah's ire cools slightly and he holds out the hope that Samson may have his eyesight restored.

But God who caus'd a fountain at thy prayer
From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
After the brunt at battel, can as easie
Cause light again within thy eies to spring,
Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast;
And I perswade me so; why else this strength
Miraculous yet remaining in those locks?
His might continues in thee not for naught,
Nor shall his wondrous gifts be frustrate thus. ¹

Manoah's God is a generous god, a Greek god, a god that will remove disabilities much like a magician pulling rabbits out of a hat. Manoah's God is the god of Christianity that forgives the prostitute without asking for an equal act of works. Manoah asks for a deus ex machina and continues to request it throughout the play.

Samson hold no such hopes for himself. He prefers to remain in the hands of the Philistines, answering to God for his sins. He desires death still but death only after he has had an opportunity to make amends for his past misdeeds. Samson's God is the god of Moses that demands works as well as faith.

¹ S. A., lns. 581-589.

Manoah realizes the uselessness of arguing with Samson, so he leaves, urging him to listen to the Chorus and "...healing words from these thy friends admit." ¹

In the exchange between Manoah and his son two results have been accomplished. Samson has been cast in the role of defender of the faith, opposing Manoah's views on God, and claiming that his miseries resulted from his own neglect of God. Samson also realizes that his salvation lies in his own hands, and that he must expiate his sins under his present conditions, rather than accept ransom and live in comfort with his father.

Samson, therefore, has begun to defend God and, while not believing that he can recover his sight, he does believe that he can regain God's favor by expiating his sin. Refusing to search for the inner meanings of life, since he realizes that these secrets lie buried, and recognizing that his greatest misery lies in his spiritual torment, Samson is now capable of interesting himself in the steps towards redemption at the hands of God.

¹ S. A., ln. 605.

3. The Riddle of Life:

The Odes of Samson and the Chorus

With the departure of old Manoah Samson is plunged in-
to deep meditation. Wounded deeply by his conscience,
he asks why the pangs of conscience should afflict a
man who is also tortured with physical disabilities.

O that torment should not be confin'd
To the bodies wounds and sores
With maladies innumerable
In heart, head, brest, and reins;
But must secret passage find
To th' inmost mind,
There exercise all his fierce accidents,
And on her purest spirits prey,
As on entrails, joints, and limbs,
With answerable pains, but more intense,
Though void of corporal sense.
My griefs not only pain me
As a lingring disease,
But finding no redress, ferment and rage,
Nor less then wounds immedicable
Ranckle, and fester, and gangrene,
To black mortification.
Thoughts my Tormenters arm'd with deadly stings
Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,
Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
Or medicinal liquor can assuage,
Nor breath of Vernal Air from snowy Alp.
Sleep hath forsook and giv'n me o're
To deaths benumbing Opium as my only cure.
Thence faintings, swounings of despair,
And sense of Heav'ns desertion. ¹

The enormous tortures of the conscience as a result of
actions that are not approved by God are, of course,
a basic portion of any evangelical Christian movement.

¹ S. A., lns. 606-632.

Robert Bolton, one of the theological leaders, in the new Puritan movement, stated:

Of all the afflictions incident to the Soule of man, there is none more greivous, and transcendent; then to have the Conscience enraged with the guilt of sinne. If there be no wound there, if all were safe and sound within, if that bird of the bosome sing sweetely in a mans breast; it is no matter what miseries be abroad in the world; what stormes, or stirres be raised against Him... But on the other side, if by reason of the raigne of sin, there be no rest there; if God be not there because of the abounding of iniquitie, what shall a man doe then? Whither shall he flie, when the hand of God hath found Him out, and the swift Arrow of the Almighty sticks fast in his side? He will flie, saith that Ancient Father, out of the House into His Chamber: horrour still dogging him at his Heeles. And from His Chamber whither will he goe, but into the inmost Cabinet in his bosome, where his Conscience dwelleth? And if hee finde there nothing but tumult and terrour, but guiltinesse, confusion and cryes of despaire, which way will he then turne himselfe: Or whither will he flie then? He must then, either flie from Himselfe, which is utterly impossible, or else abide that torment, which is beyond all compasse of conceit or expression of of tongue. For all the rackes, saith another, wheeles, wilde horses, hot pincers, scalding lead poured into the most tender, and sensible parts of the body; yea, all the mercilesse, barbarous, and inhumane cruelties of the holy house, are but flea-bitings, meere toyes, and May-games, compared with the torment, that an evill conscience will put a man to, when it is awakened. ¹

The Chorus supports the statements of Samson, and re-echoes his complaint, adding depth to the grief of Samson and, yet, at the same time, giving Samson some consolation by stating that these are the troubles throughout the world. Patience is excellent in books,

¹ Bolton, Robert, Instructions for a Right comforting Afflicted Consciences. Printed by Tho. Badger for Tho Weaver, London, 1640, pp. 56-57.

but it serves little with those who suffer.

Many are the sayings of the wise
In antient and in modern books enroll'd;
Extolling Patience as the truest fortitude;
And the bearing well of all calamities,
All chances incident to mans frail life
Consolatories writ
With studied argument, and much perswasion sought
Lenient of grief and anxious thought,
But with th' afflicted in his pangs thir sound
Little prevails, or rather seems a tune,
Harsh and dissonant mood from his complaint,
Unless he feel within
Some sourse of consolation from above;
Secret refreshings, that repair his strength ,
And fainting spirits uphold. ¹

Here, indeed, is a direct reference to the Puritan tracts of the day in which many rules of patience are embodied. Milton is critical of the advice to the tried soul, since he believes that inner relief can only be found within the individual, and not from without.

The Chorus continues to openly question the nature of the frailty of existence, asking "God of our Fathers, what is man!" ² It wonders why man's existence is not conducted as evenly as that of angels or lower animals. Man, says the Chorus, is elevated to the highest levels and then demoted to the depths of deprivation. This descent from the heights is not accompanied by mere obscurity, but is a process where

¹ S. A., lns. 652-666.

² S. A., ln. 667.

height of fame is contrasted with depth of despair. The Chorus, acting as suppliants, beg God not to deal with Samson in this manner.

So deal not with this once thy glorious Champion,
The Image of thy strength, and mighty minister.¹

The Chorus adds that its pleas are actually useless, since Samson has already wreaked the vengeance of the Lord. It amends its plea by asking that Samson's labors be turned to peaceful ends, instead of continuing his present miserable and worried existence.

The purpose of these two speeches, as far as advancing the religious psychology of Samson is concerned, is doubtful. They do not add any new light to the psychological problem confronting Samson, although the Chorus' speech on the nature of man is one of the greatest passages in Samson. Samson, however, sheds more light on the intense psychological hurt he has suffered when he was spurned by both God and man, and shows in what low mental state he is. The Chorus echoes this complaint, applying it to all mankind, and concludes with a prayer that Samson should not be dealt with as previous champions have been. The stage is now set for the entrance of Dalila and the testing of Samson.

¹ S. A., lns. 705-706.

4. The Test of Uxoriousness:

Samson and Dalila

Before Samson can be certain that he has overcome the temptations of the flesh, Milton feels that he must again be confronted with the woman that caused his downfall: Dalila. In overcoming his physical desire and uxoriousness, Samson will then demonstrate that he can again be trusted by God.

The Chorus sees Dalila and describes her as an overdressed, over-perfumed woman, given to wearing filmy veils and other archly feminine devices. Samson does not want to meet Dalila. He tells the Chorus:

My Wife, my Traytress, let her not come near me. ¹
Reawakened memories of past love vie with hatred for Dalila in Samson's mind.

Dalila weeps as she approaches Samson and ignores the Chorus completely. She speaks to Samson with trepidation, saying that she feared the consequences of her own acts.

Samson will have none of this. He denounces her as a sadist, coming to see him just to intensify his

¹ S. A., ln. 725.

suffering. He says that continual forgiveness breeds only continued betrayal.

Facing defeat, Dalila changes her approach and insists that Samson's betrayal occurred as a result of feminine faults and that Samson himself betrayed his secret to a weak woman.

Samson lashes back at Dalila. He is aroused and angry. He insists that he has not pardoned himself and she is welcome to his own pardon to himself for his sins, "...Impartial, self-severe, inexorable..."¹ This self-severity forms a central portion of the Puritan theological methodology. But, in addition, Samson is applying a Puritan doctrine that insists on forgiveness for one's enemies derived from the example of Jesus of Nazareth. His statements, however, are only lip service to the theologians that believe in turning the other cheek. Samson refuses to accept the excuse of weakness since all wickedness is weakness and all arch-criminals can plead weakness in self-defense. Samson concludes his reply to Dalila by stating that her desire to have his love was a false excuse since, knowing her actions would bring hate, not love, if she had been prompted by love, she would not have betrayed him. Samson calls the love that Dalila claims

¹ S. A., ln. 827.

to have for him "...furious rage/ To satisfy thy
lust..."¹ Samson has taken the opportunity to
reply to Dalila and, at the same time, he has begun
to fight. His quiet protestations of misery have
given way to rage, and now he has a fitting object
of his rage before him: the woman that betrayed him
to the Philistines.

Dalila, however, has not yet finished her attempt to
regain Samson. She changes her defense again and says
that the forces that were brought to bear on her were
so strong that she could not deny them. She insists
that she took the steps she did because of patriotism
and the appeals of the Philistine religious leaders.

Samson will have none of Dalila's excuses. Filled
with disgust, he denounces Dalila's actions as hypocrisy.
He says, with magnificent irony, that, after he has
married outside his tribe and religion, loved Dalila,
and gave her all his secrets, he is now judged as an
enemy.

Dalila has been bested in argument and she justifies
her defeat by saying that she is unable to meet men
on equal intellectual grounds. Samson will not heed

¹ S. A., lns. 836-837.

Dalila and she adopts the approach of asking him to permit himself to be rescued from the Philistines by her intercession.

Samson does not attempt to answer Dalila as he did his father. He does not use the force of theological arguments to refuse freedom. Instead, he states bluntly that he does not trust Dalila and does not wish to be caught again in the trap that once held him. Samson is acutely conscious of Dalila's past efforts to ensnare him and he fears that he will be trapped again if he permits her to gain the controlling power over him. Despite Samson's protestations of invulnerability to Dalila's charms, the effect is one of conscious rejection of temptation. Samson no longer deals with Dalila as she would like to be dealt with; as a woman. Instead, he treats her as any enemy and rejects her offered assistance as another weapon used by the Philistines in reachieving his fall from God's grace.

Dalila attempts her last trick. She tries to touch Samson, in an attempt to reawaken his physical desires. Samson refuses to be tempted and summarily refuses to have any personal contact with her. He forgives her, a token forgiveness, to be sure, and summarily dismisses her.

Dalila realizes she has been defeated and reveals her true thoughts. She says that, despite the opinion held of her by Samson and the Israelites, she will be respected and honored by her own people and her grave will become a shrine. Dalila leaves the stage in a burst of defiance, leaving Samson and the Chorus to themselves.

The Samson-Dalila scene, though it has no biblical authority, has a great deal of theological value in the progression of the tragedy. Samson is a better man now than he was prior to his blindness when he was a prey of uxoriousness. Samson, in the exchange with Dalila, did not mention his blindness, except where it pertained to the discussion; signifying that the self-pity has been drained off into the more theologically productive fields of justifying faith. "By confronting his own guilt without evasion, and by resisting the temptation to doubt that God's ways are just or to fear for the ultimate triumph of his cause, Samson has won the right to be put to proof a second time...." ¹ He has met the weakness that caused his original difficulty, and conquered it.

When Dalila leaves, the Chorus says that Dalila has proven

¹ Hanford, James Holly, A Milton Handbook. F. S. Crofts & Co., New York, 1939, p. 287.

Samson's statements about her. Samson, however, does not wish to renew the discussion. He states, simply:

...let her go, God sent her to debase me,
And aggravate my folly who committed
To such a viper his most sacred trust
Of secrecie, my safety, and my life. ¹

Samson recognizes that his trials have past their major stage of temptation. He has proven himself by rejecting what previously tempted him. The Puritan writer, Thomas Goodwin, urged his readers to reject what previously tempted them.

...when the recalling of former acts committed by a man, prove still to be a snare to him; and being suggested by Satain as a meanes to quicken his lust, the thought thereof doth rather stir up his lust afresh, it is a signe of an unmortified frame.... It is a signe a man is deeply in love, when as he falls in love with the picture; when the remembrance of whence he is fallen, should make him repent, that it should on the contrary cause him to commit the same sinne againe, it is a signe flesh hath the much better. To have the mind stirred with new objects and new temptations, may stand with far lesse corruption, and more grace, than to have it stirred afresh with the remembrance of such an act, this argues much corruption. The speech... where we are commanded to mortifie the deeds of the flesh, may admit among others this interpretation also, that not onely the lusts, but even former deeds and acts committed, which may prove an occasion of sin to us, and have a fresh verdure in our eye, are to be mortified. ²

The Chorus, however, has been affected by the beauty of Dalila, even though it recognizes her treachery.

¹ S. A., lns. 999-1002.

² Goodwin, Thomas, The Tryall of a Christians Growth. Printed for R. Dawlman, London, 1643, pp. 116-117.

It claims that past love leaves a residue of affection that is difficult to dispel. Samson does not respond in antagonistic terms but tells the Chorus quietly that treachery in marriage that endangered life could not be forgiven.

The Chorus discusses the problem of man's relationship to woman. It claims that woman has a beautiful exterior but this is often camouflage for a mind lacking any sense of responsibility. The Chorus asks how a man burdened with such a woman can continue to maintain his intellectual equilibrium and comes to the conclusion that man should have absolute power over woman.

As the scene ends, the tragedy is prepared for the final scene prior to Samson's death: the challenge of the giant Harapha. Milton has brought his character to a religious and psychological peak where he is now prepared to embark in his God-ordained mission.

5. Samson as the Servant of God
and the Redeemer of Israel

Samson, therefore, has followed a well-laid psychological road to Puritan redemption. He has scored numerous triumphs over temptations. His first problem, and a still existing problem, is his depression and desire to die. He has partially overcome this depression by speaking to the Chorus and by opposing Dalila's plans. He has completely conquered his own doubts regarding God in conversations with the Chorus. He has overcome the temptation of a freedom bought by his father or liberty gained by the entreaties of a betraying wife. He has overcome his previous sin that led to his downfall: uxoriousness.

There are two steps to be accomplished by Samson before the Puritan moral drama can be completed. He must overcome his fear of physical contact with the Philistines and he must redeem his name with the people of Israel. Samson has been humbled, but his humbling is part of an established Puritan road to salvation. "Let a man not be soundly humbled with the sight of his sins, his faith is weaker, and his Sanctification and comfort the sleighter...." ¹

¹ Sibbes, Richard, The Returning Backslider. Printed by G. M. for George Edwards, London, 1939, pp. 166-167.

The entry of the Philistine champion, Harapha, is heralded by the Chorus but Samson is not cowed by Harapha's appearance. Harapha blusters up to Samson and announces his noble ancestry, saying that he did not come to condone Samson's feeble state but he does wish that Samson had not suffered his present fate so that he could meet him in battle.

Harapha's defiance and overbearing pride arouses Samson and he challenges Harapha to battle.

The way to know were not to see but taste. ¹

Harapha is amazed at the turn of events. He expected to find a completely cowed Samson and, instead, finds a man challenging him to mortal battle. Harapha changes the conversation from the past to the probing of what might have happened if Samson and Harapha had fought. Harapha gloats at what he might have done to Samson if he ever met him on the field of battle prior to his blinding.

Samson, however, will take no equivocating talk from Harapha. He is prepared to fight and is not worried any more about abstract philosophical arguments about the nature of God and his relation to man. Samson, the theologian, gives way to Samson, the strong man,

¹ S. A., ln. 1091.

and in tests of strength Samson is in his element. He challenges Harapha to battle, stating that he will go into battle with a staff and Harapha is welcome to use his ornate armour. When Harapha offers the lame excuse that he refuses the challenge because he feels that Samson will use black magic, Samson answers:

I know no Spells, use no forbidden Arts;
My trust is in the living God who gave me
At my Nativity this strength, diffus'd
No less through all my sinews, joints and bones,
Then thine, while I preserv'd these locks unshorn,
The pledge of my unviolated vow. ¹

Samson, as a servant of God, stands ready to battle with faith in God's sponsorship. He has, as William Ames expressed it, "...set before his eyes the majesty and power of God..." ² He needs no elaborate armour and does not fear death for, as Robert Bolton says:

...Gods Favorite is...furnished with an other spirituall weapon of impregnable temper, and incredible might. I mean Faith, the very Power, and Arme of God for all true joy, found comfort and lightsomnesse at the heart-root of this life. The crowned Emperesse of all those Heavenly graces, that dwelt in the Soule of a sanctified man; and which in a right sense may be said virtually to comprehend all the beautie, strength, excellency and power of Christ himselfe; is truly victorious, and triumphant over all the World; over the very gates of Hell, and all the powers of darknesse; over the Divils fiercest darts; over the devouring flames of the raging fire, over the roaring fury of the most hungrie Lions; over the variety and

¹ S. A., lns. 1139-1144.

² Ames, William, Conscience. Printed by E. G. for I. Rothwell, T. Slater & L. Blacklock, London, 1643, Book III, p. 54.

extremity of exquisitest tortures, of temptations, persecutions, all outward miseries; even over cruell mockings. It unresistably beates downe, or blowes up the strongest Bulwarkes, and thickest walls; puts to flight the mightiest Armies, and conquers the most invincible Kingdomes. And when all is done, Oh blessed Faith! at the very last, and deadliest lift, shee triumphantly sets her foot upon the neck of the Prince of terrors, I mean death, the last and worst; the end and summe of all feared evils: And even in the midst of those dying and dreadfull pangs, beares a glorious part with Iesus Christ, the Conqueror in that sweetest Song of victory, O death, where is thy sting?....¹

Samson is asked why he is suffering his present trials if his god is so powerful. Samson answers that he has suffered because he has sinned, but that he is hopeful of being readmitted to the grace of God.

All these indignities, for such they are
From thine, these evils I deserve and more,
Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
Whose ear is ever open; and his eye
Gracious to re-admit the suppliant...²

Samson does not challenge Harapha's statements and does not fall to petty bickering, which is what Harapha wishes. But Samson does not look upon his afflictions with the great sorrow that he had previously. His sins are greater than his afflictions and he hopes to be admitted again to the inner circle of God's believers now that he has done penance for his sins.

¹ Bolton, Robert, Instructions for a Right comforting Afflicted Consciences. Printed by Tho. Badger for Tho. Weaver, London, 1640, pp. 8-9.

² S. A., lns. 1168-1173.

Harapha then accuses Samson of being the enemy of both his own people and of the ruling Philistines because of his actions in breaking the Israelite-Philistine treaties. Samson defends himself and states that he followed God, not man. He then rechallenges Harapha, but Harapha declines the challenge and Samson dismisses him curtly. As Walter C. Curry points out, "...Samson, the man who has failed once in a divinely appointed mission, has in some way gained a spiritual victory over his own enemies as an external witness of it..."¹

Samson, in this exchange, has proven two points to himself: that he can still fight the Philistines and that his physical prowess is still feared. More important than any of this, however, is the value of the psychological defeat of Harapha to Samson's ego. He has triumphed in the first exchange with an enemy since his blinding. He cannot help looking upon this blindness as a punishment for past sins, but in his revelation of the true nature of Dalila and Harapha helps to strengthen his newly found spiritual resolve. These two consecutive victories, one against feminine wiles and one against the threat of force, prepare him for his final act, the destruc-

¹ Curry, Walter C., "Samson Agonistes Yet Again." Sewanee Review, XXXII (1924), p. 339.

tion of the temple at Gaza.

Thus Samson has scored his major psychological victories, and the poet must moralize on the general lessons learned. First, however, the Chorus points out the crestfallen retreat of Harapha and fears that Samson's actions may lead to complications with the Philistines. Samson wishes for death, but only when ordained by God, and announces that this is the worst that the Philistines can do to him.

But come what will, my deadliest foe will prove
My speediest friend, by death to rid me hence,
The worst that he can give to me the best. ¹

The Puritan theologian, John Ball, points out that the righteous need not fear death.

Death is to vs as a sleepe; and the graue as a
bed of rest. A crowne of righteousnes is laid
vp for vs, which the righteous Iudge shall giue
vnto vs: so that an euill death can neuer follow,
where a good life hath gone before forasmuch as
hee cannot dye ill, who hath liued well. Death
indeed is a Scorpion or serpent but his sting is
pulled out, hee may well hisse, but he cannot
hurt: he may well threaten, but he cannot des-
troy, for Christ hath quelled and conquered him. ²

The Chorus, carrying in its words the spirit of the poet, brings out the moral of the past action, men-

¹ S. A., lns. 1262-1264.

² Ball, John, A Treatise of Faith. Printed by George Miller for Edward Brewster, London, 1632, p. 9.

tioning that the resurgence of Samson is of great encouragement to them, since it means the might of God is in the hands of the righteous. The Chorus advises Samson to have patience with his present woes, since patience may reward him with freedom and the good will of God.

...patience is more oft the exercise
Of Saints, the trial of thir fortitude,
Making them each his own Deliverer,
And Victor over all
That tyrannie or fortune can inflict,
Either of these is in thy lot,
Samson, with might endu'd
Above the Sons of men; but sight bereav'd
May chance to number thee with those
Whom Patience finally must crown. ¹

Patience, says the Puritan writer William Ames, is of primary importance for deliverance at the hands of God. The signs of patience, according to Ames are:

...If we neither contemn the chastisement of the Lord nor murmur against God however he deale with us, but blesse him in all... If we doe constantly continue in the doing of our duty, what ever the sucresse be... If we doe expect from God himselfe the end which we hope for... If we make not too much haste, either flying to unlawfull meanes, or being out of heart... If... we seeke counsell and direction from God in all our streights...²

The Chorus concludes its Ode and sets the scene for the entrance of the officer, who will take Samson to

¹ S. A., lns. 1286-1296.

² Ames, William, Conscience. Printed by E. G. for I. Rothwell, T. Slater and L. Blacklock, London, 1643, Book 4, p. 17.

to the temple at Gaza. In this exchange Samson redefines his goals as absolute fearlessness in the face of Philistine opposition, while the Chorus advises Samson to have patience until he can again fulfill the will of God. Thus we have Samson with new found-strength and new-found faith in himself. The Chorus, with the approach of an officer of the Philistines, feels that something of great moment is about to happen.

Samson is curtly accosted by the Officer after it discovers his whereabouts from the Chorus. The Officer speaks to Samson with a modicum of respect and yet with a full knowledge of his own authority. He lacks the pompousness and verbosity of Harapha. He advises Samson that the heads of the Philistines state wish to see his strength for themselves. Samson, however, refuses to go, since he feels that such pomp for a heathen god will be in opposition to the will of Jehovah. The Officer leaves, warning that such affirmed opposition to the Philistine will willingly result in difficulties for Samson.

The Chorus remonstrates with Samson, but he will not listen, claiming that his strength is given to him by God and he cannot permit himself to defile a gift of Jehovah. The Chorus, however, proposes a method by

Which Samson can serve the Philistines and yet perform no deeds that would seem evil in the eyes of God.

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

Samson still holds firm, feeling that he would disobey God's orders by yielding to the demands of the Philistines. However, the argument is solved by Samson when he capitulates, admitting that he feels that his presence is required by God.

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts,
I with this Messenger will go along,
Nothing to do, be sure, that may dishonour
Our Law, or stain my vow of Nazarite.
If there be aught of presage in the mind,
This day will be remarkable in my life
By some great act, or of my days the last. ²

The slow unwinding of God's will has been revealed to Samson and this is in accordance with the basic Puritan doctrine pronounced by John Howe, in 1678, after the heyday of Puritanism. The successive stages of the revelation of God's will are as follows, according to Howe: "...the Glory of God seen, that assimilates and impresses its likeness upon the beholding Soul; and so its causality is that of an objective cause... that operates only as it is apprehended: so introducing its own form and similitude into the subject it works

¹ S. A., ln. 1368.

² S. A., lns. 1381-1389.

upon..."¹ Richard Sibbs (or Sibbes), so righteous a figure that he was known as "Holy Sibbs" by the Puritans, explains how God's will is slowly revealed:

...God doth alwaies begin to us, and is before-hand with us in all dealings with our selves. He giveth us many motions, and never withdraweth himself from us; but when he is despised, and slighted first: therefore let us take heed that we labour to answer Christs call, when he doth call. If we slight it, then in a judicious course, he ceaseth to speake further to us, if we slight his beginnings of revelations. There be many degrees and passages of faith and assurance; if we do not observe the beginning, how God begins to reveal himself to us by little and little, speaking to us by his Spirit in our hearts when he begins; then in a spirituall judgement sometimes he leaves us to our selves. And therefore let us regard all the motions of the Spirit, and all the speeches of the Spirit of Christ; for he begins by little and little, else our consciences will say afterward, we are not saved, because we would not be saved...²

Milton, in the Argument, assures his reader that Samson accompanies the Officer because he was "...perswaded inwardly that this was from God..."

Samson, thus, has had the will of God made evident to him. He still operates on the basis of the freedom of his will. Samson can either go with the Officer of the Philistines, or not, according to his own judgment

¹ Howe, John, The Blessedness of the Righteous. Printed by A. Maxwell and R. Roberts for Ed. Gellibrand, London, 1678, p. 89.

² Sibb(e)s, Richard, A Heavenly Conference between Christ and Mary. Printed by S. G. for John Rothwell, London, 1656, p. 10.

rectitude. While the Presbyterians among the Puritans argued for predestination, many other Puritans argued with such a view. Among them was William Ames, who said:

The Spirit worketh faith not by morall perswasion, onely inciting to belieue, and leauing it to our free choice whether wee will assent or no; but by his powerful operation, and omnipotent hand put forth for such a purpose, hee produceth this gracious effect. ¹

Charles Sumner, editor of the first edition of Milton's Christian Doctrine, says that, according to Milton, "...everything is foreknown by God, though not decreed absolutely..." ²

Samson has two presentments: either he will carry out some great act or he will perish this day. The gradual unfolding of God's will, then, is not completed until he is at Gaza's Philistine temple, when he realizes that he will do both. When the Philistine officer comes again, Samson leaves with him, zealous in his belief in God.

The Chorus sees Samson go and wishes that the revelation of God will be in keeping with Samson's wishes. It urges him to carry out the will of God and rescue

¹ Ames, William, Conscience. Printed by E. G. for I. Rothwell, T. Slater, and L. Blacklock, London, 1643, Book 4, p. 17.

² Milton, John, A Treatise on Christian Doctrine, Edited by Charles R. Sumner. Cummings, Hilliard and Co., Boston, 1825, p. xlviiii.

Israel from Philistine slavery.

Go, and the Holy One
Of Israel be thy guide
To what may serve his glory best, and spread his name
Great among the Heathen round:
Send thee the Angel of thy Birth, to stand
Fast by thy side, who from thy Fathers field
Rode up in flames after his message told
Of thy conception, and be now a shield
Of fire; that Spirit that first rusht on thee
In the Camp of Dan
Be efficacious in thee now at need.
For never was from Heaven imparted
Measure of strength so great to mortal seed,
As in thy wond'rous actions hath been seen.¹

As the Chorus quotes from Judges Samson leaves to carry out his mission. The benediction ends the primary theological and psychological portion of the play but Milton, in accordance with his promise, intends to complete the action, and does so with the device used by the Greeks and Romans, the Messenger.

The Chorus notes Manoah's return and Manoah tells how he has been laboring to obtain Samson's release. After the enormous impact of Samson's psychological struggles, the statements of Manoah are anti-climatic in their pedestrian nature. Again, Manoah argues that God will retain Samson as his leader on Earth and will restore his eyesight. To the allegations of the reversal of the actions of God, The Chorus seems slightly dubious but, being friends of Samson, they agree with Manoah. The collapse of the temple at Gaza interrupts a friendly

¹ S. A., lns. 1489-1502.

speech by Manoah to the Chorus. After some discussion about the nature of the crash, a Messenger arrives and reveals that Samson has pulled down the temple and killed himself. Manoah takes the shock well, when he learns that his son has not committed suicide but carried out the Lord's commands. He mourns the death of his son in which, typically, he regrets that his plans have not borne fruit.

The worst indeed, O all my hope's defeated
To free him hence! but death who sets all free
Hath paid his ransom now and full discharge.
What windy joy this day had I conceiv'd
Hopeful of his Delivery, which now proves
Abortive as the first-born bloom of spring
Nipt with the lagging rear of winters frost. ¹

With Samson's death, the path is completed from complete debasement because of sin to glorious death as the champion of Jehovah. The play now returns to the action at Gaza when Samson pulled the pillars of the temple down. The Messenger describes Samson, praying for inner strength while reclining on the pillars:

...when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while enclin'd,
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd. ²

Samson discovers what his mission is, and he announces to the assembled lords that he will show them even greater

¹ S. A., lns. 1571-1577.

² S. A., lns. 1635-1638.

feats of strength.

The Chorus comments on the past events, giving the moral of the tragedy. Samson, they say, has conquered over tremendous odds because of the inner light of God's guidance. Samson, says the Chorus, was forgiven for his sins because he lapsed into sin, while the Philistines:

...only set on sport and play
Unweetingly importun'd
Their own destruction to come speedy upon them.¹

The difference between continual sin, such as that of the Philistines, and occasional sin is explained by a Puritan theologian, Thomas Goodwin:

...the doctrine of the Covenant teaches men to distinguish between a lapse in sin, and a Law of sin, between sinnes of infirmity sorrowed for, resolv'd and striven against, and sins of pre-
sumption gone on in, and given up unto the reigne
and dominion of them, which cannot stand with this
Covenant of grace...²

The Semi-Chorus concludes that virtue lies dormant until it is aroused, using the phoenix as the exemplum.

So vertue giv'n for lost,
Deprest, and overthrown, as seem'd,
Like that self-begott'n bird
In the Arabian woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay e're while a Holocaust,
From out her ashie womb now teem'd,

¹ S. A., lns. 1679-1681.

² Goodwin, Thomas, The Returne of Prayers. Printed by M. F., for R. Dawlman, London, 1643, p. 53.

Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deem'd,
And though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird ages of lives. ¹

Thomas Goodwin explained this delay of the revelation of God's grace as being saved until the most opportune time. Prayers will be granted, he says,

...when it is the most acceptable and every way the fittest time to have the thing granted. At that time, when thou hadst the most neede, and when thy heart was most fit for it. ²

Manoah, now reassured that Samson died with honor, says that Samson should not be mourned, since he died in the service of his nation. His grave, he states, will be a shrine for Israel's young men.

The Chorus concludes the play by conforming with the Aristotelean theory of the cathartic action of drama. The final transcendentalism of the Samson tragedy demonstrates itself in these last lines.

All is best, though we oft doubt,
What th' unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns
And to his faithful Champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns

¹ S. A., lns. 1697-1707.

² Goodwin, Thomas, The Returne of Prayers. Printed by M. F. for R. Dawlman, London, 1643, p. 53.

And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable intent,
His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind all passion spent. ¹

The peace of God's grace breaks on the last speech of
the tragedy and all is calm with "...all passion spent."

The complete peace when God permits man to enjoy his
grace is emphasized by a Puritan writer, Robert Bolton.

When the heavenly beames of GODS pleased countenance
begin to breake out upon a man, thorow the dark
and Hellish mist of his manifold and hainous sinnes,
the unquenchable heat of His everlasting love
thorow Christ dissolving them into nothing; and
fairely shine with a comfortable aspect upon His
humbled Soule; ipso facto, as they say, Heaven and
Earth, and all the Hosts of both are everlasting-
ly reconciled unto him, and become his friends; the
stormes and tempests raised by all the powers of
Hell are presently calmed for ever doing him any
deadly hurt. All the creatures then, pull in their
hornes, retyre their stings, bite in their poyson,
snib'd, and awed by those divine impressions of
their Creators blessed image stamped upon them
by the Spirit of grace; and dare no more offer any
violence or vexation to him (except upon particular
dispensation for his spirituall good and quickening)
then to the Apple of Gods owne eye....²

¹ S. A., lns. 1745-1758.

² Bolton, Robert, Instructions for a Right comforting
Afflicted Consciences. Printed for Tho. Badger for
Tho. Weaver, London, 1640, p. 86.

B. Social Puritanism

In Samson Agonistes

The general theme in Samson Agonistes is the redemption of a lost soul, but, in the weaving of the story, many aspects of the social outlook of Puritanism enter the discussion. Reflected in the lines of Samson are the ethics of a system that Milton earnestly and energetically subscribed to.

The Puritan Family

The primary keystone of the Puritan life is the family, run by an Old Testament style patriarch. The father of the Puritan home is an absolute monarch and, indeed, Samson's primary error was permitting Dalila to prevail over him. Samson's attitude towards his father is that of absolute deference. He does not feel that his father is correct in trying to gain his release by paying a ransom; he disagrees with his father's opinion of the perfidy of God; he insists that he was following the wishes of God in marrying an infidel. Yet he begins all of his statements to his father with an admission of his own humility and the first line of his first remarks to his parent contain the respectful "father." It is repeated again and again.

Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father... ¹

Father, I do acknowledge and confess... ²

Spare that proposal, Father, spare the trouble...³

John Downname, one of the many Puritan writers commenting on family relations, outlined in detail the duties of children to their parents:

The duties of children towards their parents are first, to be answerable to them in loue. Secondly, to reuerence them highly, though their state be neuer so meane, in and for the Lord. Thirdly, to stand in awe of them, and to haue respect to their very words and countenance. Fourthly, to obey them in all things lawfull and in the Lord. Fifthly, to shew themselues thankefull to their parents, by helping them, if neede require, with their goods or seruice. Sixthly, to hearken to their parents instructions, counsailes, admonitions, and rebukes, and to beare with meaknesse and loue and respect those who are neere and deare to their parents, for their sakes... ⁴

Samson's main difficulty, says the Chorus, is that he, like Adam in Paradise Lost, permitted a woman to gain sway over the home, instead of keeping her in her place as the inferior of the man. The Chorus praises the virtues of a "good" wife:

Favour'd of Heav'n who finds
One vertuous rarely found,
That in domestic good combines:
Happy that house! his way to peace is smooth:

¹ S. A., ln. 373.

² S. A., ln. 448.

³ S. A., ln. 486.

⁴ Downname, John, A Guide to Godlynesse. Printed by Felix Kingstone for Ed. Weuer & W. Bladen, London, 1622, p. 149.

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

Hannibal Gamon outlined the duties of the wife that
is "favour'd in Heaven."

What singular duty is there requisite in a Woman,
either in respect of God, or of her husband, chil-
dren, kindred, seruants, place and of Gods people,
which the life of Grace, the Grace of Feare of the
Lord doth not animate, aduance, and accomplish.
This godly Feare ennobleth Nobilitie, beautifieth
Beautie, enricheth wealth, teacheth wit, wisdome.
She that hath this Feare, dare not for her heart,
but be loathe to offend her husband, and deny her
inferiority; but be an example of godlinesse to
her children, prouide things necessary for her ser-
uants both in health and in sicknesse; loue her
naturall and legall kindred, esteeme her equalls
aboue her selfe, countenance and relieue her in-
feriours, maintaine the dignitie of her place by
all such vertues as may discharge the same; winne
the affections of Gods people to her more and more,
by the offices of courtesies, gifts, visitations,
inuitations and of helpfulnesse; yea she that feares
God, dare not for her heart but Honour them that
feare God... but keepe her set taskes of hearing,
reading, fasting, praying meditating, moderating
passionate distempers, and of all other gracious
exercises, of Selfe-deniall; so that there is not
any knowne sinne which she nourisheth, alloweth,
or goeth on in, but quaketh and trembleth at the
very first thoughts, yea motions and inclinations
thereunto, as being in the sight of an inuisable
God, vnder the perpetuall presence of his All-seeing
glorious pure eye, which shee will not prouoke to
anger by any sinne, for all the gold that euer the
Sunne made, or shall make while it stands in Hea-
uen... 2

The Chorus explains that the error is made in giving

1 S. A., lns. 1046-1052.

2 Gamon, Hannibal, The Praise of a Godly Woman. Prin-
ted by I. H. for John Grismond, London, 1627, pp. 7-8.

women excessive authority. They urge that men maintain their "God-given" power over women.

...Gods universal Law
Gave to the man despotic power
Over his female in due awe,
Nor from that right to part anhour,
Smile she or lowre:
So shall he least confusion draw
On his whole life, not sway'd
By female usurpation, nor dismay'd.¹

Richard Barnard, another Puritan commentator on family relations, urges absolute power in the hands of the husband. This power, states Barnard, is ordained by God.

...God hath appointed him to be Head and Master and though shee bee more wise and Charitable than her husband, yet shee hath no warrant out of Gods Word to justle him out of that ranke and station wherein Gods providence and All-Seeing wisdome hath placed him in... Her desire is to be subject unto him... Her conscience will reape the more comfort from the good actions she doth while she submits to Gods Ordinance, and observes all the circumstances which are requisite to every good worke...²

Dalila admits that she is the inferior of the male in judging the rectitude of actions. Speaking of divulging Samson's secret, she justifies herself by saying that:

...it was a weakness
In me, but incident to all our sex,
Curiosity, inquisitive, importune,
Of secrets, then with like infirmity
To publish them, both common female faults...³

¹ S. A., lns. 1053-1060.

² Barnard, Richard, The Ready Way to Good Works. Printed by Felyx Kyngston to be sold by Edward Blackmore, London, 1935, pp. 74-75.

³ S. A., lns. 773-777.

Richard Bernard explained that some wives "are such brainlesse, heartlesse, carelesse creatures, that they have neither a will to give, nor a hand to work, nor a will to discerne betweene the unworthie conditions and true wants of the distressed." 1

Divorce was countenanced by the Puritan theologians under certain conditions, and Samson justifies his reasons for divorcing his first wife. She gave his secrets away to the Philistine enemy:

.....she
Of Timna first betray me, and reveal
The secret wrested from me in her high
Of Nuptial Love profest, carrying it strait
To them who had corrupted her, my Spies,
And Rivals... 2

She committed adultery, as the Chorus points out:

....The Timnian bride
Had not so soon preferr'd
Thy Paranymp, worthless to thee compar'd
Successour in thy bed,
Nor both so loosly disally'd
Thir nuptials... 3

As William Ames demonstrated, therefore, marriage is a holy union only when it is evident that the participants are joined in one flesh.

...Matrimony is not onely a Civill, but a Divine conjunction, whose institutour and Ordainer is

1 Bernard, Richard, The Ready Way to Good Works.
Printed by Felyx Kyngston to be sold by Edward
Blackmore, London, 1635, p. 65.

2 S. A., lns. 382-387.

3 S. A., lns. 1018-1023.

God himselfe... And is of that nature, that it cannot possibly bee dissolved without the great inconvenience of both parties... Neverthelesse, it is not so indissoluble, but that upon such cause, as God approveth to bee just it may bee dissolved. For that indissolubility was not instituted for the punishment, but for the comfort of the innocent and doth admit some exception, in which God ceaseth to joyne them... There is not any just cause of making a divorce approved in Scriptures, beside adultery and the like horrid impurities, whereby it comes to passe, that two remaine no longer one flesh but divides; and so the faith of Wedlock, is directly violated... 1

Marriage with the infidels, the non-believers, is to be avoided. Here, perhaps, is the major difference between Manoah's opinion of Samson's sin and Samson's own opinion of his own sin. Manoah claims that Samson's major error was that of marrying outside his own people; Samson, on the other hand, claims that marriage outside of his faith was permitted if divinely motivated.

Manoah says:

I cannot praise thy Marriage choises, Son,
Rather approv'd them not; but thou didst plead
Divine impulsion prompting how thou might'st
Find some occasion to infest our Foes. 2

The Puritan writers denounced the marriage of infidels also, implying, of course, marriage with Catholics and non-believers. One of the earliest Puritan theologians, Sebastian Benefield, urges that such marriage is wicked.

1 Ames, William, Conscience. Printed by E. G. for I. Rothwell, T. Slater, and L. Blacklock, London, 1643, Book 5, p. 208.

2 S. A., lns. 420-423.

Moses...charge is concerning the Hittites, the Ger-gasites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hiuites, and the Iebusites, that they should not at all make any covenant with them nor giue...their children in marriage. And why so? Because by such covenants, & marriages, they might be withdrawn from the true service of God, to the prophane worship of Idols.... They that fall into familiarity with the wicked, do couple themselues with them, & so are led out of the way, and made to worke wickednesse before the Lord. ¹

Besides the relationship of husbands to wives, wives to husbands, and children to parents, the Puritans carefully delineated the duty of parents to children. Manoah is willing to submit his whole fortune to the Philistines in exchange for Samson's release. He tells Samson that:

I however
Must not omit a Fathers timely care
To prosecute the means of thy deliverance
By ransom or how else.²

Another of the early Puritan theologians, William Gouge, warned that parents must seek their children's good.

It is not sufficient for parents to preuent such mischiefes as children may fall into, but they must also seeke their good. All the precepts in Scripture charging parents to seeke their childrens good, proue the point. Herein lieth a main difference between the affection which parents and stranger ought to beare towards children, and the dutie which one and the other owe to them. Meere strangers ought not to prouoke them: but parents ought moreouer euery way to seeke their goode....³

¹ Benefield, Sebastian, A Commentarie or Exposition Upon the First Chapter of the Prophecy of Amos. Printed by Joseph Barnes to be sold by John Barnes, London, 1613, pp. 137-138.

² S. A., lns. 932-935.

³ Gouge, William, Of Domesticall Duties. Printed by John Haviland for William Bladen, London, 1622, p. 156.

Formal Religion

The danger of idolatry in primitive times among the newly established worshippers of Jehovah is expressed in the various prohibitions in Leviticus and elsewhere in the Pentateuch. In Samson Agonistes reference is made again and again to the idols worshipped by the Philistines. Samson, for example, tells Dalila that her prime failing was the worship of gods that were false deities.

But zeal mov'd thee;
To please thy gods thou didst it; gods unable
To acquit themselves and prosecute their foes
But by ungodly deeds, the contradiction
Of their deity, Gods cannot be... ¹

The Puritan writer, John Ball, stated that the prime error of Gilgal was "that horrible idolatrie, wherewith it was poluted, and by their inventions, wee must understand their idolatrous Worship, set up directly against the Commandement of God...." ² The evil of all things connected with idolatry is emphasized as a mortal sin by all the major Puritan writers. The Puritan felt that Catholicism had, by adopting symbols for the godhead, substituted Baal for Jehovah and that Puritanism therefore had the same problem as that confronting Moses and Samson: to restore the church. A very early Puritan, John Frewen, warned of the per-

¹ S. A., lns. 895-899. See, also, references in lns. 426-429, 406-408, 529-534, 560-562, and 755-756.

² Ball, John, An Answer to Two Treatises of Mr. John Can. Printed by R. B. and sold by John Burroughes, London, 1642, p. 53.

sistence of idolatry among all peoples.

...we must abhorre idolatry, the which the wise man calleth vanity and lies, and so likewise do all the prophets in divers places. In all ages and amongst all nations, it is, and hath bene usuall that the idolaters (euen those which are the deuoutest) do give themselves unto dishonestie, filthinesse and uncleannesse, unto oppression and crueltye, even to an unbrideled lust and desire. And the prophets also doe make greate complaints thereof, & do reproach the idolaters, that they haue forsaken God, and that they haue their handes full of bloud...¹

Religion, says Samson, must not be used as an excuse for sinning. After hearing Dalila's reasons for turning him over then to the Philistines, he says:

I thought where all thy circling wiles would end;
In feign'd Religion, smooth hypocrisie. ²

The Puritans believed that a true conversion to Christ involved a spiritual change and evils done under the cover of religion therefore consist of a mockery of God. Thomas Goodwin says:

...when they abuse morall knowledge, which yet, as Aristotle sayes, is least apt to be (I am sure should least be) abused, so as to make a shew of good pretences to cover their sinnes, and dissemble them; not onely by finding out some cunning artificiall colour...but when men are so impudently hypocriticall, as to make use of religious pretexts.... In sins against knowledge, usually the mind indeavours to find out a colour, and that provokes God more than the sinne, because we goe

¹ Frewen Joh, Certaine Fruitfull Instructions and necessary doctrines meete to edify in the feare of God. Printed for Thomas Chard, London, 1587, pp. 36-37.

² S. A., lns. 871-872.

about to mock him. Wee see men cannot endure a shift, much lesse the all-knowing God, not to be mocked: and we see it hard to convince such an one.... 1

Milton abhorred the atheist, although he did not believe that the atheist was very common. Thus, the Chorus says, in answer to doubts raised by Samson:

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. 2

The complete repugnance of the atheist to the Puritan is amply expressed in a passage by Thomas Hill:

The prophane Atheist hee wallowes in his sinne, prostituting his precious soul to this ignoble service, to make provision for his lusts, that is his Element; and all this while (poore creature) without God in the World...at a great distance from him and his own Salvation.... 3

Puritan Propriety

The Puritan is best known for his intense dislike of all "ungodly" revelry. Samson implies this when he refuses to come with the Officer to perform for the Philistines.

1 Goodwin, Thomas, Aggravation of Sinne and Sinning. Printed by T. P. and M. S. for John Rothwell, London, 1643, pp. 47-48.

2 S. A., lns. 293-299.

3 Hill, Thomas, The Good Old Way, Gods Way, to Soule-Refreshing Rest. Printed by Ric. Cotes for John Bellamie and Philemon Stephens, London, 1644, p. 20.

Have they not Sword-players, and ev'ry sort
Of Gymnic Artists, Wrestlers, Riders, Runners,
Juglers and Dancers, Antics, Mummers, Mimics,
But they must pick me out with shackles tir'd,
And over-labour'd at thir publick Mill,
To make them sport with blind activity?
Do they not seek occasion of new quarrels
On my refusal to distress me more,
Or make a game of my calamities. 1

The Puritan theologians warned against revelry as a means to draw men from God. The Puritan theologian and preacher, Robert Bolton, stated:

It is incredible to consider what a deale of advantage in worldly dealing, the covetous divell in a cruell and crafty worldling, doth sucke out of the single heartednesse, plaine dealing, and unsuspectiousnesse, of conscionable men, for their rising and enriching, if GOD crosse it not... He drawes them by all the baites He can devise to all the incentives, and preservatives of carnall contentment: as to Tavernes, Ale-houses, Play-houses, Whore-houses, Gaming-houses; to May-games, Morrice-dances, Church Ales; to Cardes, to Dice, to Dancing; To Feasts; to Walkes, Misrules, Drinking-matches, revellings, and a world of such sinfull haunts, Bedlam-fooleries, and Good-fellow-meetings... 2

Samson and the Chorus oppose extremes of dress. Both the enemies of Samson, Dalila and Harapha, the two enemies of Samson, are twitted for their love of fancy dress. The Chorus, in perhaps the only humorous passage in Samson, describes Dalila's coming as that of a ship in full sail:

1 S. A., lns. 1323-1331.

2 Bolton, Robert, Instructions for a Right comforting Afflicted Consciences. Printed by Tho. Badger for Tho. Weaver, London, 1640, pp. 97-98.

But who is this, what thing of Sea or Land?
Female of sex it seems,
That so bedeckt, ornate, and gay,
Comes this way sailing
Like a stately Ship
Of Tarsus, bound for th' Isles
Of Javan or Gadier
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails fill'd, and streamers waving,
Court'd by all the winds that hold them play,
An amber sent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger... 1

Samson, in daring Harapha to indulge himself in the luxury of fighting a man that is strong in God, tells him to put on his shiny ornaments while he, Samson, will only rely on a belief in God and an oaken beam.

...put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy Helmet
And Brigandine of brass, thy broad Habergeon,
Vant-brass and Greves, and Gauntlet, add thy Spear
A Weavers beam, and seven-times-folded shield,
I only with an Oak'n staff will meet thee... 2

John Downname expresses the Puritan disapproval of fancy dress and extreme attire. He says:

Our Apparell to be sober and comely such as becom-meth Saints. The contrarier whereof is, too curious trimming and decking of our selues, forbidden euen vnto women: who yet (it may bee thought) for the pleasing of their Husbands, might of all other best vse it. Therefore the Apostle saith, Whose trimming let it not be that outward trimming or frizzling of haire, putting of golden things about them, or putting on of apparell, but the hidden man, &c. Likewise also women, let them adorne themselues in modest garments with shamefastnesse and sobrietie,

1 S. A., lns. 710-721.

2 S. A., lns. 1119-1123.

not with frizzling, siluer things, or gold, or pearles, or costly apparell....¹

The distaste of the Puritan for drunkenness is reflected in the only dramatic digression in Samson. The Chorus mentions the complete abhorrence of Samson for alcoholic beverages in an exchange between Samson and the Chorus.

CHORUS: Desire of wine and all delicious drinks,
Which many a famous Warriour overturns,
Thou couldst repress, nor did the dancing Rubie
Sparkling, out-pow'rd, the flavor, or the smell,
Allure thee from the cool Crystalline stream.

SAMSON: Where ever fountain or fresh current flow'd
Against the Eastern ray, translucent, pure,
With touch ætherial of Heav'ns fiery rod
I drank, from the cleare milkie juice allaying
Thirst, and refresht; nor envy'd them the grape
Whose heads that turbulent liquor fills with fumes.

CHORUS: O madness, to think use of strongest wines
And strongest drinks our chief support of health,
When God with these forbid'n made choice to rear
His mighty Champion, strong above compare,
Whose drink was only from the liquid brook.²

Samson then asks what avails it if her barred the door of intoxication only to let the way open to uxoriousness. The early Puritan writer, Samuel Ward, warned of the dangers of drink.

Goe...now ye Drunkards, listen not what I, or any ordinary hedge-priest (as you stile vs, but that most Wise and experienced royall Preacher) hath to say vnto you. And because you are a dull and thick-eared generation, hee first deales with you by way of questions. You vse to say, Woe be to hypocrites. It's

¹ Downname, John, The Summe of Sacred Divinitie. Printed by W. Stansby, London, 1630, p. 204.

² S. A., lns. 541-557.

true, woe be to such and all other witting & willing sinners, but there are no kind of offenders on which woe doth so palpably ineuitably attend as to you drunkards. You promise your selues mirth, pleasure, and iollity, in your Cups, but for one drop of your mad mirth bee sure of gallons and tunnes of woe, gall, wormewood and bitternesse here and hereafter. Other sinners shall tast of the Cup, but you shall drinke of the dregs of Gods wrath and displeasure.... You talke of good fellowship & friendship, but wine is a rager and tumultuous makebate, and setts you a quarrelling & medling.... 1

Hypocrisy was one of the cardinal sins of the Puritan.

Samson denounces Dalila again and again for hypocrisy.

As a Puritan writer, Cuthbert Sidenham, Samson complains that Dalila "...can put on any face according to any persons or times in the world..."²

My love how couldst thou hope, who tookst 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 uncoverst more. 3

Dalila apologizes and states that she was beseiged so that she was forced to reveal Samson's secret.

Hear what assault I had, what snares besides,
What sieges girt me round, e're I consented;
What might have aw'd the best resolv'd of men,
The constantest to have yielded without blame. 4

Yet Sidenham gives such excuses as this another symptom of hypocrisy.

1 Ward, Samuel, Woe to Drunkards. Printed by A. Math for John Marriott and John Grismand, London, 1622, p. 5-6.

2 Sidenham, Cuthbert, Hypocrisie Discovered in its Nature and Workings. Printed by J. Streater for Richard Tomlins, London, 1657, pp. 123-124.

3 S. A., lns. 838-842.

4 S. A., lns. 845-848.

...there are some that are but more generally touched with the sense of some sin that God meets them with, and laies upon them, and at every turn checks them for, and lets in glimpses of his wrath now and then upon his conscience, and they get into a strange kind of temper, of complaining and whining and whimpering and yet it doth not work so much upon them as to cry out with hideous noyses of damnation, yet are kept under fear, and bondage of spirit, and cannot get out of it, and all their design is to whine at it, and complaine of it to others abroad: that as we say in grieffe, (to open a mans mind is a mighty ease) so shall you find them open their hearts, and say, they are under these and these sins; talking of their corruptions, telling you how they are under such trials, under such feares of their passions, and tell you of hypocrisie, and thus they go from door to door, and from Professor to Professor, and all to no purpose... 1

Samson's big sin was the inability to keep God's secret, the secret of his strength. Samson sinned against God; Dalila sinned against man by revealing the secret of Samson. Dalila, being a heathen, could not be expected to adhere to God's rules, but she should have kept to the rules of common decency. Samson denounces her:

...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... 2

William Ames says that divulging such a secret is a sin against man and against God.

¹Sidenham, Cuthbert, Hypocrisie Discovered in its Nature and Workings. Printed by J. Streater for Richard Tomlins, London, 1657, p. 57.

²S. A., lns. 748-753.

Another mans Secret which wee engaged our selves to keepe close, if there were a promise which doth remaine lawfull, cannot bee disclosed without sinne... The promise of concealing is not thought to bee made onely expressly, when wee doe promise silence in plaine words; but also tacitly, when by the manner of speaking and receaving it, and out of words signifying and perswading confidence, such a promise is left to bee gathered... Although there had no promise passed, yet if the detection of a secret shall bee hurtfull to anothers soule, body, credit, or estate, hee which doth reveale it without a cause, sinneth as well against justice as charity... If a desire or intention of hurting doth accompany such a revealing, the sinne is the greater, being that it is repugnant to charity... If there bee no meaning of hurting another, and yet hee is damage, the sinne is as much as that of negligence or inconsideratenesse: in which wee find the fault sometimes lighter, sometimes larger.... 1

Samson may commit suicide, fears Manoah, and he is continually urging his son to recover from his downcast attitude. The exchange between Manoah and the Messenger when Samson's death is revealed shows the fear that Manoah harbored regarding the possibility of Samson committing suicide:

MANOAH: ...death to life is crown or shame.
 All by him fell thou say'st, by whom fell he,
 What glorious hand gave Samson his deaths wound?
 MESS. : Unwounded of his enemies he fell.
 MANOAH: Wearied with slaughter then or how? explain.
 MESS. : By his own hands.
 MANOAH: Self-violence? what cause
 Brought him so soon at variance with himself
 Among his foes? 2

1 Ames, William, Conscience. Printed by E. G. for I. Rothwell, T. Slater and L. Blacklock, London, 1643, Book 5, p. 290.

2 S. A., lns. 1579-1585.

When Manoah hears that Samson killed the Philistines and died only incidently, he rejoices. Milton, in clarifying this, said in the Argument that Samson died "by accident." Richard Sibbes warns about suicide, saying that even non-Christians oppose this step.

It is rebellion against God for a man to make away with himself. The very heathens could say, that we must not go out of our station till we be called. It is the voice of Satan, "Cast thyself down." We should so carry ourselves, that we may be content to stay here till God hath done the work he hath in us to do and by us; and then he will call us hence in the best time... Whatsoever good is in a natural man, is depraved by a self-end. Self-love rules all his actions. He keeps within himself: God is but his idol. This is true of all natural men in the world. They make themselves their last end; and where the end is depraved, the whole course is corrupted.... 1

Finally, the Puritan disliked self-praise, insisting that it was self-worship. Richard Sibbes warns that the true worshipper should "...consider what kinde of thing boasting is, it is Idolatry, for it sets the creature in the place and roome of God..." 2 Samson denounces Harapha when he challenges him and yet fears to match his words with deeds.

Cam'st thou for this, vain boaster, to survey me,
To descant my strength, and give thy verdict?
Come nearer, part not hence so slight inform'd;
But take good heed my hand survey not thee. 3

1 Sibbes, Richard, Complete Works, Vol. VII, Divine Meditations and Holy Contemplations. James Nichol, Edinburgh, 1864, pp. 211-212.

2 Sibbes, Richard, The Returning Backslider. Printed by G. M. for George Edwards, London, 1639, p. 82.

3 S. A., lns. 1227-1230.

Thus, in Samson, we see a sort of footnoted commentary and lesson in general Puritan morals, touching major phases of social and religious activity in the Puritan world. Some of these are, in many respects, the reflections of the completely austere Puritan social system but the continual references to idolatry can be interpreted as a combined attack on the Church of England, which maintained the pomp of the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church itself. Politics and morals were mixed, sometimes indistinguishably, in the Puritan social mores and social criticisms, and these find their reflections in the heroic tragedy, Samson Agonistes.

Conclusion

Examination of Samson Agonistes and the scholarship surrounding the tragedy demonstrates that certain elements of the play need reinterpretation and clarification in the light of the primary influences that surrounded Milton at the time of the writing of Samson.

Milton owed much to his Puritan background in the conception of his various poetic works. His continuous reading of the Psalms, as attested to by his biographers and his own statements, add another facet to the understanding of the genesis of the Samson drama.

Yet both interpretations of Samson Agonistes blend into a uniform consideration. The Psalms, it appears, gave Milton much of the language of Samson. The Psalms amply explain the mental anguish of losing God. The psalmist attempts to find his way back to God by examining his own soul. But he does not attempt to regain grace by a carefully executed series of steps to purification. He does not try to conform to a social code that sets forth the means of living and worship. It is this side of Samson that the many Puritan tracts illustrate and illuminate.

By the use of the Greek form Milton brings the Puritan tradition in line with the classical concepts. Much has been said about the similarities of Greek tragedy and Samson but the dominant idea advanced by Milton seems to be the adaptation of the form of Greek tragedy to a new use of drama: drama combining religious psychology and the psychosomatics of depression. It therefore becomes a link between the morality play and the modern psychological drama of Strindberg, Ibsen and O'Neill.

The crux of the Samson tragedy swings on the treatment of Samson and the Chorus. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that the utterances of the Chorus and Samson are heavily indebted to the Psalms and the Puritan theological thought.

In the Psalms the basic psychology of repentance is to be found. The psalmist humbles himself before God. He admits his sins. He asks for punishment. He urges God's deliverance. He sings the praises of God. All these find lasting echoes in Samson.

This does not mean that Milton drew only on the Psalms or on the Puritan theological writings for his heroic tragedy. Many other sources were available that Milton

was familiar with and contained the road to salvation. Among these could be named the various rabbinical writings, the writings of the church fathers and the works of the pre-Puritan "heretics." The Puritan theological thought, however, was the end-product of these influences in Milton's day, and was the influence closest to Milton. Examination of the tracts of Puritan theologians demonstrates that this road of repentance, contrition and forgiveness was carefully expounded by the Puritans and that the description of these acts of contrition comes remarkably close to the acts of Samson in cleansing himself of his sin against God. The morals of Samson are essentially Puritan morals, as has been demonstrated by the interest of the Puritan theologians in advising on the minutiae of behavior.

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VITA

The writer was born in New York City in April, 1923. He attended the New York elementary schools and Military Academy of Guatemala in Guatemala City, Central America. He was graduated from Boys High School, New York, in 1941.

After one and one-half years of college at Arizona State Teachers College in Tempe and Los Angeles City College, the writer was inducted into the Army on December, 1942. After being trained for a laboratory technician at O'Reilly General Hospital, Springfield, Missouri, he was put in charge of an Army laboratory at Romulus Army Air Base, Michigan. Put in the Army Specialized Training Program, he attended various courses at the University of Illinois, Ripon College and the University of Minnesota. He was discharged from the Army in July, 1945.

For the next two years the writer attempted several fields, but finally returned to English in January, 1947, at the University of Louisville. He completed his degree in September of that year, but did not obtain the diploma until June, 1948.

The work on the sources of the Puritan theology in this thesis was done in the MacAlpin Collection of British Theology and History in Union Theological Seminary, New York, where the writer spent a month of study in April, 1948.

Following the degree of Master of Arts, the writer intends to begin preparing for the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.