



With Inward Eyes Illuminated: The Different Types of Love in Samson Agonistes

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Abstract

Critics usually regard Milton's *Samson Agonistes* as a study in regeneration; Samson is representative of humanity and he feels lost and defeated when his faith in God, i.e. his true love flickers, but he is regenerated when he eventually manages to turn from himself to the eternal source of Truth & Beauty, i.e. God. On his way to accomplish renovation and regeneration, Samson undergoes a process of spiritual rebirth. What is of utmost significance about his spiritual development besides his having free will in making his right and wrong choices, is the way he treats & is treated by different types of love throughout his quest for attaining union with absolute Beauty and Truth. This study intends to penetrate into different types of love Samson encounters through his spiritual rebirth in the light of the concepts expressed in Plato's "The Symposium".

Keywords: *Different Types of Love; Samson Agonistes; Milton; Plato*

1. Introduction

At the beginning we find Samson in a state of spiritual death, filled with feelings of remorse and despair; his words bespeak of both physical and mental breakdowns. The Chorus in the first act comment on the noticeable contrast between what Samson was and what he is; they also recall the time of heroic feats for which Samson gained fame gloriously and that he was the one who tore up the gates of Gaza and carried them off to a hill. They also comment upon Samson's blindness by which he has become the dungeon of himself. He is in such a state when the Chorus announce his father's arrival; to Samson, Manoa's coming awakens and deepens his inner grief when he like the Chorus emphasizes the "miserable change" between what Samson was and what he is. Manoa inadvertently hurts Samson further by informing him that he has already approached Philistine Lords in order to ransom him. Though his family pride has been shaken and he suffers deeply for that, the safety and the physical comfort of his son are still there on his mind. As a father, he tries to do what he can do for his son's physical comfort and he himself later says, it shall be his "delight to tend his eyes and view him sitting in his house" (Milton 1966, p.1490-91). We notice that Manoa's mind is set on the preservation of Samson's life though the type of life offered by him is ignominious: "Better at home lie bed rid, not only idle,/ Inglorious, unemployed, with age outworn" (579-80).

2. The Objectives of the Study

This study's chief objective is to discuss different types of love in *Samson Agonistes* written by Milton according to principles stated in Plato's "The Symposium". It also analyzes how through encountering these types of love during his quest he attains his spiritual rebirth

3. The Significance of the Study

Even though *Samson Agonistes* has variously been analyzed throughout these years by several critics from different perspectives, it has not been looked upon in the light of Plato's ideas regarding different types of love as stated in his work "The Symposium".

4. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Love, is a key concept in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. Consequently, a study of this concept and the related images and symbols as its components can lead to a deeper interpretation of this work. The analysis of this closet drama according to Plato's ideas concerning love reveals both the poet's attitude and its deployment. Applying eclectic approach to this study is quite helpful, since it makes room for analyzing the work from different angles and scopes.

Discussion

5. The Different Types of Love Displayed

5.1. His Father's Love

At one moment, Samson's father warns Samson against any thought of committing suicide. The father's attempts is bitter medicine for his son, but one cannot go too far in criticizing him since he is a father after all; all he says and does at the moment bespeaks of his paternal love. His presence in the play is so effective because it admits the element of irony, his inability to recognize Samson's true condition, "to see that death is and must be the only salvation for suffering so great and self-reproach so keen intensifies by contrast, the hopelessness of Samson himself who knows that, for good or ill, his race is run" (Verity 1966, p.150).

Philistines hold a great feast, honoring their god Dagon, who has delivered Samson into their hands:

So Dagon shall be magnified, and God,

Besides whom is no god, compared with idols,

Disglorified, blasphemed, and had in scorn

By the idolatrous amidst their wine (Milton 1966, p. 440-443).

Samson's betrayal of God's trust has to be punished, that is what he himself believes in; but of all punishments this is the most shameful, not only to Samson, but to his father's house as well. His fall has resulted in his personal shame and that of his family, but it has brought even more, i.e. the fall of the true God and this very thing adds to the shame of their family and tribe and leaves a serious blemish on their highly valued fame and glory. Leaving Samson in Philistines' prison like a captivated injured animal is a scene of disgrace that Manoa logically enough cannot allow to exist; that is why he resorts to ransoming his son and advises his son to take peace in retirement from service and expiate error in prayers and

"vows renewed". Considering Manoa's words on the human level, his advising his son who has suffered so much seems reasonable enough, but then again though his words are embellished with paternal love, they serve basically as a kind of temptation; the main point of Manoa's temptation is its hinging on the sin of presumption that Samson himself is troubled with when he first tastes both physical and mental despair to the utmost degree. Manoa like Samson at the earlier stage, presumes that his son's mission is over and that God has no further need of him; he asks Samson to act on this assumption, he rejects it and his reason for doing so is nothing but his pride that does not allow him to become a "pitied object" after the glories of his past life. Though he rejects the temptation, he does not overcome it, since he does the right thing for the wrong reason.

Manoa's temptation only reminds Samson of his petty situation and his fatherly and well-intentioned but purely empirical assessment of the situation serves only to plunge Samson further into the slough of despond:

So much I feel my genial spirits deep,

My hopes all flat, nature within me seems

In all her functions weary of herself;

My race of glory run, and race of shame...

And I shall shortly be with them that rest (Milton 1966, p.394-8).

Not wishing to omit a father's timely care, Manoa rushes off to deliver his son from prison by ransom or any other thing, but in the meantime he leaves Samson without uplifting his soul. It appears as if in moments like this even a father's love is not enough and that Samson needs to be put in the hands of that Father whose love is high enough to deliver him from prison and the grave.

For Samson's spiritual struggle, Manoa's slight impiety, his readiness to agree with the Lord, is more helpful than the attempted worldly wisdom of the Chorus, who view Samson's case as a "mirror of our fickle state", just one of those things, and who view God's will for human beings on such an occasion as being "justifiable", but only inscrutably and dreadfully so. When he hears his own thoughts reflected in the words of his friends and father, Samson is able to gain some perspective on what they imply. Their way of believing in God's inscrutability in effect denies God's justice. This is a very important insight for Samson. A just God does not reward evil or punish virtue; the spiritual fall of a moral creature is always the result of sin. If a person feels an affliction to be from God, that is if one experiences during tribulations a sense of heaven's desertion, then one must accept one's suffering as merited and its justice as comprehensible; one must seek out its cause and its curve. It is to say, however, that humans can stay in a true, non-arbitrary relationship with a God whose ways towards created beings are reliably consistent and sufficiently revealed.

At the time of Manoa's visit, both the Chorus and Samson are near despair, but for different reasons. The Chorus suffers fear or dread, because it worships a God whom it believes to be unjust:

God of our fathers, what is man!

That thou towards with hand so various,

Or might I say Contrarious,

Temper'st thy providence through his short course (Milton 1966, p.667-70)

Samson on the other hand, has clearly seen the depth of his own sin, his betrayal of God's trust; and this guilt is the truth that binds him to God's justice. He is at least ready, in his ensuing encounters with the Philistines, to learn that God operates by a law even more perfect than that by which Samson now, truthfully and accurately, judges himself.

When with the degree of grace and revelation, Manoa recognizes that living or dying, Samson has fulfilled what he ought to & that his death after pulling down the temple on Philistines is by no means ignoble or unheroic; it has been done by him as the God's servant is guided by his "uncontrollable intent". Manoa's happiness and exultation, however is not just because of Israel's victory over Philistines that is Samson's overwhelming Dagon through his heroic acts; he sees and feels other inspiring and rewarding elements in Samson's bravery. According to Diotima in Plato's Symposium, men "are stirred by the love an immortality of fame. They are ready to run all risks far greater than they would have for their children and to spend money and undergo any sort of toil, and even to die, for the sake of leaving behind them a name which shall be eternal" (Plato 32). She proceeds with "I am persuaded that all men do all things, and the better they are, the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue; for they desire the immortal" (32). The fame and victory that Samson brings upon his tribe is an immortal and everlasting fame that will not be affected by the ravishes of time; Manoa as the hero's father enjoys glory his offspring succeeds in bringing unto him.

5.2. His Beloved's, i.e. Dalila's Love

The Dalila scene is also significant; she like Manoa enters the scene with her own temptations, but her temptation differs from that of Manoa for its being temptation by fraud or persuasion. Manoa's temptation is embellished with fatherly love; moreover, it has Samson's deliverance as its prime, whereas that of Dalila is malicious and venomous and seeks Samson's total destruction. She appears on the scene "like a stately ship of Tarsus" that is a symbol of pride:

With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,

Sails filled and streamers waving,

Courted by all the winds that them play,

An amber scent of odorous perfume.

Her harbinger a damsel train behind (Milton 1966, p.719-21).

The character of Dalila is described by Samson, in his opening dialog with the chorus, as "that specious Monster, my accomplished snare". He also later describes her as "fallacious, unclean and unchaste". Thus, when she finally appears in person, one is surprised to hear the Chorus use the simile of a special ship to describe Dalila, "so bedecked, ornate and gay". It is the first mention of her physical beauty and the description and admiration goes on: "tackle trim... and streamers waving". She even smells sweet, being followed by a damsel train and "amber scent of odorous perfume". It seems as if anyone falls under Dalila's spell as Samson once did.

Samson however has learnt his lesson well & is under no such illusions. Perhaps his blindness prevents him from capitulating to her beauty; he is no longer able to perceive her beauty and appreciate it. One should not forget that her beauty was the chief reason for Samson's falling desperately in love and marrying her though he was well-aware that marrying an infidel would not be welcomed by his tribe. Apparently, this love cannot be considered a true love, since it is more about physical love and passions and the love that drew Samson to Dalila, in comparison with sacred love is nothing; moreover, it brought Samson devastating effects, that is just filled him with feelings of remorse and despair and made him doubt God's affections. As Erixymachus states in Plato's Symposium, when "the wanton love" gets the

upper and affects "the seasons of the year, is very destructive and injurious, being the source of pestilence, and bringing many other kinds of disease on animals and plants" (Plato 17). True and sacred love is ennobling, but from the treacherous treatment Samson receives from Dalila we notice she is not at all related to the source of eternal Beauty and Truth Samson seeks and from the moment they first met, Samson gained nothing but loss.

At one point, we find Dalila weeping, "Wetting the borders of her silken veil." She fixes her eyes on Samson and pretends to have compassion for Samson's miserable present state. She fears Samson's "displeasure", so she claims that she has come with "doubtful feet and wavering resolution". She knows how to give the impression of a meek Dalila; she acknowledges that she can offer no excuse; she thus tries to make believe she is sincere. She humbly takes the blame and adds different color to her pretense by further claiming that "conjugal affection" is her sole motive for visiting Samson Dalila even talks about her love and that it is the greatness of her love that prepares her to risk his wrath. She is lying; Samson unlike the Chorus is not under the spell of her beauty and tells her to leave in a manner that one wouldn't a human, "out, out", and even calls her a hyena. This is a reference to Ecclesiasticus, where the hyena is described as a beast which "counterfeith the voice of men, and so entiseth them...and devourth them"(Tillyard 1961, p.87).It is not that difficult for Samson to dismiss Dalila's claim of loving him as mere mendacity, since with a look back on all the mistreatment he received from her, her betrayal, her selling him to his enemies and watching them torturing him in the most brutal manner, he can hardly find any trace of love if there is any. He is no longer blinded by Dalila's beauty; in this respect, his actual blindness appears to have opened his eyes. Dalila realizes the great change in Samson's mentality and changes her way to win him back.

Dalila departs a bit from her previous words and tries to make her actions seem logical or at least understandable. She resorts to making excuses and that she acted through moral feebleness; she adds that "importune of secrets" and then the publishing of them is "incident to all our sex"; thus it is because of her being a woman that she has such weaknesses and it is not her fault. Dalila also goes further as to claim that Samson is also to blame; had he not been weak in revealing his secret, then she wouldn't have been able to betray him and thus he should forgive her. She clears herself at the expense of Samson and tries her best to make him appear responsible for her wrongdoings and faults. Interestingly enough, she does not stick at misrepresenting his side of the case; she argues that he" had revealed the secret out of mere levity and wantonness, to gratify a woman's passing whim and leaving out of count the ceaseless importunity of sighs and reproaches wherewith she had wearied him and through his very love of her had overmastered his resistance" (Verity 1966, p.248).

She claims that love has been her chief motivation in doing such things to Samson and that she wanted to have Samson by her side for good and since she knew liberty would draw [him] forth to perilous enterprises; that she decided to keep Samson close to her as "love's pris'ner, not the Philistines". She did it all because Samson was all that she ever wanted and she would do anything to make him hers. But what occurs to Samson's mind along with that of the reader is that what kind of love is this that can tolerate watching the beloved brutally captivated by enemies, constantly mocked, chained and treated like a slave and blinded? Aye, what Dalila labels as love, is not love at all; the nature of love does not allow such cruelties hurled at the beloved for no good reason, nor does a lover leave the beloved alone to suffer when he needs love and affection the most. Phaedrus says it best when he says," who would desert his beloved or fail him in the hour of danger? (the veriest coward would become an inspired hero, equal to the bravest, at such a time; love would inspire him...Love will make him dare to die for their beloved...love alone; and woman as well as man" (Plato 7). The example that Phaedrus gives of what a woman would do for her beloved, puts light on what a beloved could and should do through the power of love: "Alcestis, the daughter of Pelias, is a monument to all; for she was willing to lay down her life on behalf of her husband, when no one else would, although he had a father and mother; but the tenderness of her love so far exceeds theirs..."(7).

What does Dalila's so-called love do for Samson? The devastating effect of her mere existence on Samson's life is apparent from the beginning; she preferred her tribe and money to the true love of Samson. She is more like Orpheus," the son of Oeagrus, the harper, whom gods sent empty away, and presented to him an apparition only of her whom he sought, but herself they would not give because he showed no spirit" (7). He was only a harp player who had only entering the Hades alive on mind, not love. Dalila's breathtaking and fascinating beauty has the magic of the sound of the harp that Orpheus used to play, and she like Orpheus abuses her charms as a means for evil ends. Pausanias' concept of two types of love is applicable here, that is there are two types of love; one is the love of the heavenly goddess which is noble in every aspect and the other type is the love of the common goddess which is like that of the unreal and "vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul , in as much as he is not even stable, because he loves a thing which is in itself unstable, and therefore when the bloom of youth which he was desiring is over, he takes wing and flies away, in spite of all his words and promises" (11). On the other hand, the love of the heavenly goddess is of noble disposition and lasts forever.

The afore-mentioned love of the common goddess is not much unlike the feelings Dalila pretends to have for Samson, for she considers Samson as a means through which she can attain what she desires most, i.e. wealth and fame. Had Samson accepted to yield to her wishes and offerings, she would no doubt have taken wings and flown away in spite of all her words and promises; she is overcome by the love of money and fame and as Pausanias concludes, "there is dishonor in being overcome by the love of money, or wealth, or of political power, whether a man is frightened into surrender by the loss of them, or having experienced the benefits of money and political corruption is unable to rise above the seduction of them"(11).

Dalila contributes to this drama of divine justice "the feminine symbol of injustice; she acts from personal will, for which "the public good" is a

reciprocating justification"(Stein 1965, p.176). Her character is dominated by vanity and self-love, cut off from the natural and rational order, needing to subvert and to continue to subvert, for she suffers from the spiritual death and thus has lost the freedom to do good. Her love must be the love of power, including the minor loves of money, fame and honor; she associates herself with false civil and religious justice, extracting an unnatural obedience from the individual. She acts out a subversion of domestic justice by the power she gains over her husband with her weapons of words and sexual sorcery.

Dalila is stuck in the material world; Samson's feelings of love for Dalila, though they were real and genuine, were not returned, since his supposed beloved was not at all related to the eternal and immortal source of Beauty and Truth. Dalila's beauty is mere physical beauty, rather shallow and with no promises of ever uplifting her or any other person's soul to the immortal state of perfection that Samson was striving to get to through her love. Though it is a flaw on the Samson's side to yield thoughtlessly to the love of Dalila, it can be looked upon as a noble error arising from his human side, because though he is invincible, he is still a human being with all human passions and feelings. Since he is a good man and in the hope that he will be improved by her company keeps being virtuous; though he is deceived, "he has committed a noble error. For he has proved that for his part he will do anything for anybody with a view to virtue and improvement, then which there can be nothing nobler"(12).

Before his fall, Samson too like Dalila, sought both public glory and private pleasure; he believed that because of the considerable giftedness bestowed on him, he could and should have it all. It is true that he had been fighting against Philistines for God, but he had neither understood the justice of his cause nor that of his Lord. But Samson's actions in comparison with Dalila's morally-contradictory actions were simply unexamined. Now that he examines Dalila's actions, he "finds within national deity, he glimpses the law in its wholeness" (Danielson 1989, p. 228). From the reasoning by which Samson judges the crime of Dalila and her governors, we can see how his love for her and his campaign against the Philistines need never have entailed moral contradiction. While using his position as Dalila's husband to

oppose the Philistines' tyranny, he would not have acted against hers, would have sought nothing "against [her] life, in violation of his marriage"(229).

5.3. God's Love

At Dalila's departure, Samson finds himself obliquely aware that God has been at work with him during Dalila's visit: "God sent her" (Milton 1966, p.999). His second Philistine visitor is like Dalila spiritually adrift; he is "a storm", a "wind" has blown him hither. Samson's emotional energy is eventually returning, and his wish is to fight this enemy soldier, a desire which he formulates as a proposal to test "whose God is strongest". The form of Harapha's refusal serves to draw Samson quickly beyond this unthinking stance. Harapha sneers, "Presume not on thy God"; Samson's service to God before his fall had been loyal, but it had also been presumptuous. But then again, the opposite of presumption is not as "tongue doughty" Harapha imagines a retreat into despair; "Presumption and despair are two sides of the same coin of willed ignorance of God" (Danielson 1989, p.229). The opposite of such blindness is faith, which seeks genuine understanding, trusting that the experience of the Truth is attainable. Harapha goes further as to boldly claim, "Your cause is illegal and your God, whatever he be, has drowned you" (Milton 1966, p. 1156-63). But, Harapha like Dalila, is a tool of providence for Samson; in divorcing Dalila, Samson has come to realize how fully his own private life has fought against his public cause. He is left at her departure feeling that not only Dalila, but also he is hopelessly guilty. Now, however, in political confrontation with Harapha, Samson envisages a contrary possibility; for as he defends his past public acts he finds a basis for the hope that God may yet again use him in a public role, simply because of the justice of his cause, which exists regardless of Samson's or the Hebrew's unworthiness. This hope is identical with a hope for Grace: God's "ear is ever open; and his eye/ Gracious to readmit the suppliant"(Milton 1966, p.1172-3). Samson's chief affliction has been "shame and sorrow" and his own sin, had brought his people to "diffidence of God" (454) and to the brink of spiritual chaos.

With the arrival of the Officer, God at last speaks to Samson directly, though not to the Chorus or to us; a Philistine Officer requires Samson's athlete performance at the feast of Dagon Officer like a good angel, proposes a "temptation" that is completely physical, the threat of violence, the machines that will drag Samson to the feast; it echoes and varies Manoa on self-preservation and the physical trials offered by Dalila and Harapha. In loyalty to the Hebrew law and his own conscience, Samson refuses to yield to religious compulsion. But as soon as he has thought through his options for dealing with the thought of a new mission, his moral reason leads him to a statement of the hierarchy of values inhering in God's law: "God may dispense with me or thee/ Present in temples at idolatrous rites, for some important cause..." (1377 - 79).

Now, he is purged of his folly, for he has accepted it and the consequences entirely, followed it through to the end. He has been the Athlete of God and failed, now he is the fool of God and succeeds; he has accepted his folly, possessed it, but not been possessed by it. He withdraws in a gesture of wisdom learnt through suffering. He withdraws in thought and spirit before the final redemptive act which is to end the long process of redemption. Samson repeats, with a difference, the passive withdrawal from his true self which asserted the feminine pride of independence as a "petty god"; the passive withdrawal which mysteriously fulfilled itself by the act of passivity, the surrender to Dalila. The gesture recalls and acknowledges the sense of his human weakness and helplessness which assisted him against the temptations to withdraw in self-concern. But now he renews the admitted source of strength in God and marks the separation from self:

At last with head erect thus cryd aloud,

Hitherto, Lords, what your commands impos'd,

I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,

Not without wonder or delight beheld.

Now of my own accord such other trial,

I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater;

As with amaze shall strike all who behold (Milton 1966, p.1939-45).

The weakness of Samson, which has been defined by moral and intellectual strength, has at last granted the expression of strength. The hero's victory over himself through patience becomes through the inspired "command from heaven", the champion's triumphant recovery of his end. The expression of human hope celebrated in the return of the hero is carried toward its conclusion as the tragic experience closes the gap between the hero and his people, through the "best and happiest" realization that God was "not parted from him, as was feared":

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail

Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,

Dispose or blame, nothing but well and fair

And what may quiet us in a death so noble...

His servants he with new acquist

Of true experience from this great event,

With peace and consolation hath dismissed,

And calm of mind, all passion spent (1721-1758).

To many it may seem quite perverse to see in the final moral of Samson Agonistes anything but a simple acquiescence in the will of an extrinsic and controlling God, who can be trusted after all, in spite of every appearance to the contrary, to look after the men of his election so that they may be fit for the paradise he has prepared for them. Some see other elements in Samson's final victorious act; that is they think Samson's passion is spent "not in the martial reconciliation or in procreation but in iconoclasm" (McLoone 1995, p.153). Those who hold such views regarding Samson's glorious final act, usually tend to overlook the significance of the moving power of love divine that runs through his veins when he successfully pulls down the pillars on infidels and on himself and thus attains annihilation in His ever-flowing stream of immortal Beauty and Truth.

Samson's magnificent success in eventually uniting himself with his true love, is reminiscent of the description given by Diotima in Plato's Symposium of the real lover who has learnt to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end he suddenly perceives a nature of wonderful beauty that is also everlasting; it grows without ever decaying, waxing or waning. Samson's moving from Manoa's offer of resignation which would only let him give way to despair and second guessing God's trust and also his determination to refuse to yield to Dalila's devastating love, all serve as a stimulus for moving upward on the spiritual ladder to attaining union with God. This can again be compared with what Diotima says about moving from the beauties of earth and mountains upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as "steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is" (Plato 34).

It is no wonder to find Samson filled with so incredibly powerful sources when one contemplates on what magical effects true love can bestow on the real and devoted lover of absolute Beauty and Truth:

But he though blind of sight,
 Despised and thought extinguished quite,
 With inward eyes illuminated
 His fiery virtue roused
 From under ashes into sudden flame.

.....
 Depressed, and overthrown, as seemed,
 Like that self-begotten bird
 In the Arabian woods embossed,
 That no second knows nor third,
 And lay ere while a holocaust,
 From out her ashy womb now teemed,
 Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
 When most unactive deemed,
 And though her body dies, her fame survives,
 A secular bird ages of lives (Milton 1966, p.1689-1706)

It is the power of love divine that can ascend the blind Samson from the dungeons of misery, sorrow and shame to the immortal source of divine light with "the eye of the mind, enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities"(Plato 34).He thus breaks through the darkness of doubt and brings forth light and virtue; he becomes the lover of God and embraces immortality, "if mortal man may"(34).

6. Conclusion

This paper has endeavored to study different types of love in Milton's closet drama Samson Agonistes in the light of the ideas concerning the concept of love expressed in Plato's "The Symposium". It has also analyzed how during his quest for eternal Beauty and Truth, Samson attains his spiritual rebirth after encountering different types of love.

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