



DALILA IN MILTON'S *SAMSON AGONISTES*

DALILA EM *SAMSON AGONISTAS DE MILTON*

DALILA EN LOS *AGONISTAS DE SANSON DE MILTON*

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ABSTRACT

For several reasons, the Dalila scene in John Milton's *Samson Agonistes* is crucial to this tragedy. First and foremost, she portrays the "tempter" in this drama. Second, she might be compared to many characters in other dramas, such as Eve, Satan, and other notable figures. Finally, the length of her episode suggests that she is in the middle of the tragedy; she adds and helps in depicting Samson's growth as a character. Finally, Dalila awakens and assists Samson in understanding his flaws and weaknesses, after which he finds his right way and accepts his fate.

KEYWORDS: Dalila. Milton. Poetry. *Samson Agonistes*. Satan

RESUMO

Por várias razões, a cena de Dalila em *Samson Agonistes*, de John Milton, é crucial para essa tragédia. Em primeiro lugar, ela retrata o "tentador" neste drama. Segundo ela, pode ser comparada a muitos personagens de outros dramas, como Eva, Satanás e outras figuras notáveis. Finalmente, a duração de seu episódio sugere que ela está no meio da tragédia; ela acrescenta e ajuda a retratar o crescimento de Sansão como personagem. Finalmente, Dalila desperta e ajuda Sansão a entender suas falhas e fraquezas, após o que ele encontra seu caminho certo e aceita seu destino.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dalila. Milton. Poesia. *Sansão Agonistes*. Satanás

RESUMEN

Por varias razones, la escena de Dalila en *Samson Agonistes* de John Milton es crucial para esta tragedia. En primer lugar, ella interpreta al "tentador" en este drama. En segundo lugar, podría compararse con muchos personajes de otros dramas, como Eva, Satanás y otras figuras notables. Finalmente, la duración de su episodio sugiere que ella está en medio de la tragedia; ella agrega y ayuda a representar el crecimiento de Samson como personaje. Finalmente, Dalila despierta y ayuda a Samson a comprender sus defectos y debilidades, después de lo cual encuentra el camino correcto y acepta su destino.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Dalila. Milton. Poesia. *Sansón Agonistes*. Satán

1. INTRODUCTION

In John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Dalila plays a major role. Samson marries her, but she manages to know his secret. Finally, through her, he restores his confidence, admits his fault, and accepts the consequences of what he has done. Stasney (2004) argues how Dalila is presented by Milton as a developed and complex character who manages to defend herself. Steadman (1968), on the other hand, claims that Dalila is used as an external factor which aids Samson to explore his inward man. This article uses discourse analysis to present and study Dalila as a major and important

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character on whom Samson becomes able to discover his weakness and prepares himself to accept his fate willingly.

2. DISCUSSION

The encounter between Samson and Dalila is crucial to John Milton's tragedy *Samson Agonistes*. She does assist him in recognizing his flaws. According to Stasney (2004),

Milton gives Dalila a distinctive, imaginative, and theatrical personality, as well as a voice and an opportunity to defend herself and her actions. Like Eve, Dalila is transformed into a far more developed and complex character than the biblical figure on whom she is based. (p. iv)

As a result, her role in *Samson Agonistes* marks the drama's midpoint, despite the fact that this tragedy is said to have no middle. Rajan (1970) claims that "Dalila's encounter with Samson has too much of a middle" (p. 138). In truth, Samson's encounter with Dalila, as an external factor, helps him in confronting his interior reality; this is what Milton achieves by manipulating this figure in this epic. What Steadman (1968) says is even more intriguing? He argues:

. . . the spiritual regeneration of the inward man, was the really significant factor in heroic activity . . . External events could provide an occasion for word action – good or bad – but the primary causes were to be found within the self itself (p. 56).

Samson claims in his first soliloquy that he has shared his secret to a woman in a weak way (L. 50)-L. stands for line number according to *Samson Agonistes*. Then he describes this flaw as "impotence of mind, in body strong!" (L. 52). Because each person in the scenario, particularly Dalila, generates an emotional and mental response on Samson's part, it is apparent that this tragedy is a psychological interior tragedy rather than an exterior one, as evidenced by his soliloquy. Nicolson (1963) emphasizes the internal battle, stating that *Samson Agonistes* is primarily a psychological study of human growth (p. 357). Indeed, Dalila is the focal point of Samson's actions. Accordingly, Samson's "mental state" gets bad (NEELAKANTA, 2011, p. 43).

Samson later blames himself for sharing Dalila his secret when speaking with his old father, Manoa, "Fool, I have divulg'd the secret gift of God / To a deceitful Woman" (L. 201-02). He appears to be trying to make an excuse for himself at this time, referring to himself as stupid. He did not, however, absolve Dalila of the charge of being a deceptive woman. The choir, in response, seeks to console him, saying, "wisest Men / Have err'd and by bad Women been decev'd" (L. 210-11). Samson tells them that he "took [her] to Wife" (L. 227) calling her "that specious Monster" (L. 230). He then declares that it is his cause as part of the internal conflict, he admits, "She was not the prime cause, but I myself" (L. 233) because he "gave up [his] fort of silence to a Woman" (L. 236).

The Chorus also summons her in an attempt "unclean / unchaste" (L. 323-24) to calm him down. It appears to be a means to console Samson, but the chorus encourages him to reconcile with himself by admitting that it is her fault. As a result, he gradually comes to terms with his predicament;



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he realizes that he is the one who has brought "all these evils" (L. 374) to himself. He admits, "I yielded and unlock'd her all my heart" (L. 407). Dalila gives herself up to him when there is a sensuous passion, if not sexual, usually there is some closeness, and Samson appears to succumb. As a result, their connection is reciprocal in nature, in that she provides him what he wants in exchange for him confiding in her and telling her his secret. Samson then informs his father, Manoa, that she "held me yok't / Her Bond-slave . . ." (L. 410-11). He confirms that it is his mistake:

As I deserve, pay on my punishment,
 And expiate if possible, my crime. (L. 489-90)

Later, in a conversation with his father, Samson confirms the influence of Dalila's sensuality; she is "voluptuous," "lascivious," and "deceitful". What a "concubine"- a Biblical reference (L. 534-38). He accepts her authority and influence over him in this scene. Dalila's sexual and seductive effect on Samson is demonstrated by all of these movements in his speech. He also compares his hair to "precious fleece," as previously stated. Fleece is sold, as we all know, and he implies that she has a price; it is gold. The Chorus portrays her coming beautifully later in the tragedy. It appears that a female in finery, "Like a stately ship" (L. 714) is on her way to abduct her would-be captain. In any case, she is perfumed (L. 720) to demonstrate her power and influence. Despite the fact that he has lost his sight, her allure is still felt through other senses, such as hearing her feminine voice and smelling her perfume, not to mention her invitation to "touch thy hand" (L. 951). In such a case, Samson emphasizes, "my Traitress, let her not come near me" (L. 725).

As a result, the Chorus indicates that she is determined, "on the move." She states, "I came [to] acknowledge, yet if tears / May expiate . . ." (L. 739-45). She appears to be a predatory animal in this scene. She is patiently awaiting the opportunity to attack the prey. This is why Samson refers to her as "Hyaena" (L. 748). She begs him in the name of "conjugal affection," and she tries every trick to sway Samson; according to Stasney (2004), "Milton deliberately complicates . . . her identity" (p. 14). Whatever the case may be, Samson dismisses her request, calling her "Hyaena" and stating that marriage is a covenant that deceitful women like Dalila break. They try to deceive people, and they pretend "remorse" (L. 752). He therefore considers himself to be a "penitent." The repentant

Are drawn to wear out miserable days,
 Entangl'd with a pois'nous bosom snake. (L. 762-63)

He compares her to a snake because he believes she has deceived him. She sets an example for future generations by her actions.

On her part, Dalila is determined to make his "hatred less" (L. 772). She claims the flaw is "incident to all [her] sex" (L. 773). She acknowledges, "But I to enemies reveal'd, and should not" (L. 782). At this stage, she becomes artful "to defend herself . . . and to present herself . . . as a victim" (STASNEY, 2004, p. 14). She is condemning him for his own weakness at the same time, and then she says, "Thine forgive mine" (L. 787). She continues to tell him about her "jealousy of love" (L. 791). All she attempts to convey is that she has been enticed and got assurances that there will be no harm done to him (L. 800). She then goes on to explain why she did what she did. First, she has "safe



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custody" guaranteed for him (L. 801-02). Second, she wishes for him to live with her (L. 806-10). She ends up, "These reasons and love's law pass'd for good" (L. 811).

On the other hand, Samson believes that Dalila has come out of "malice, not repentance" (L. 821). Then he maintains recognizing his mistake: "I was unfaithful to myself before thou to me" (L. 824). He admits his mistake, and as a result, his rehabilitation begins. "Weakness is thy excuse / And I believe it, weakness resists philistian gold," Samson muses, and continues to ponder if everything will be attributed to weakness, then "all wickedness is weakness" (L. 829-34). As a result, he reminds her of her carnal desire (she calls it love). Dalila, however, persists on justifying herself, saying, "It was not gold" (L. 849), but rather "the Magistrates / And Princess of my country [who] came in person..." (L. 850-51.) Later, she affirms the priests' pressure. She is "press'd" by the priests who are "urg'd, / Adjur'd by all the bonds of civil Duty / And of Religion" while she defends her frailty (L. 852-54). She wants to claim that she has been duped into believing that he is an enemy and that she is a weak woman. Milton presents Dalila as a woman situated between two patriarchies: her husband and the men of her society.

To persuade Samson, she employs rationality. After that, she returns to her former loving tone and argues, "Only my love of thee held long debate" (L. 863). She perceives herself as being "against all these reasons," if only in quiet (L. 864). "Dalila is essentially permitted, by Milton, the opportunity to explain to Samson the reasons for her crime against him—something the Bible did not allow her to do" (STASNEY, 2004, p. 2). "All thy circling vile would end," Samson assaults at this point. He then begins to regret his marriage:

I before all the daughters of my tribe
 And of my Nation chose thee from among
 My enemies . . . (L. 876-78)

He has revealed her all his "secrets", "not out of levity, but overpow'r'd / By [her] request" (L. 880-81). As a result, her country has pursued him "unjustly / Against the law of nature, law of nations" (L. 889-90). Instead of being a mistress, Milton has Dalila marry Samson in this epic; he wants to give the story a sense of legality. Then, Samson criticizes her religion: "But zeal mov'd thee, / To please thy gods . . ." (L. 895-97). Her gods are powerless to save her. As a result, she is exploited to deceive him in order to benefit her people. When Samson compares his God to hers, he sees his God's mercy and power to save him. It is a watershed moment on the path to self-realization.

Dalila, in a last-ditch effort, points out that a woman always loses when defending whatever issue she is attempting to defend:

In argument with men a women ever
 Goes by the worse, whatever be her cause. (L. 903-04)

Despite the fact that she looks to be persuasive and articulate about her actions, Samson refutes her claim and tells her that her setback is simply "for want of words, no doubt, or lack of breath" (L. 905).



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Later, Dalila argues, "I was a fool, too rash, and quite mistaken" (L. 907). She asks Samson to forgive her and pay her for what she's done because she has "misdone / Misguided" (L. 907-12) him. She tries to persuade the lords to release him, just like Manoa did. If he agrees to live with her, she promises to increase her love and care. Indeed, "though Dalila's apology and love may be genuine, they may in fact still be rhetorical, and as such her argumentation may be read as more than simply a defense against Samson's accusations" (MAZZACANE, 2003, p. 42).

In response, Samson says, "No, no, of my condition take no care." (L. 928) He believes she is attempting to "To bring [his] feet again into the snare" (L. 931). Then he explains his feelings for her despite "warbling charms" (L. 934) how her "force is null'd" (L. 935). He has "learn't / To fence my ear against thy sorceries" (L. 936-37). After declining her treatment, he goes above and beyond and discusses something she hasn't mentioned: her efficacious charm. She wants to test another sense right now, so she'll touch his hand later (L. 951).

In the meantime, Samson considers his previous and future options in the event that he agrees to live with her; in the past, she could "slight," "sell," and "forego" him, but now that he is blind, she treats him no more than a "child." He will "live uxorious" to her volition "in perfect Thralldom" (L. 940-46). In any case, he believes in his God and restoration, if he has recovered "how again betray me / Bearing my words and doing to the Lords" (L. 946-47). He concludes, "To thine whose doors my feet shall never enter" (L. 950). She pleads him to allow her approach and touch his hand in a line that embodies the most sensual portion of the tragedy; "Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand" (L. 951)," she says after falling all "wiles."

Samson immediately refuses, stating, "Lest fierce remembrance wake / My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint" (L. 952-53). If he touches her, he will most likely succumb to her charms, which he has already mentioned. Samson's reaction indicates "the powerful attraction which she still holds" (MARTZ, 1969, p. 128). He tries to excuse his punishment by rationalizing "his carnal passion for" (NEELAKANTA, 2011, p. 41) her. When he states, "At a distance I forgive thee, go with that," he reveals his weakness against her sexuality (L. 954). For him, her "treason" will make her "memorable." Low (1974) clarifies:

One can argue that Dalila may have acted partly out of malice, partly because she is pressured by the Philistine leaders and priests, partly of gold, partly out of desire for fame (p. 151).

At the end, Dalila delivers her closing remarks, indicating that his anger is "unappeasable" (L. 993). She came as "a stately ship" earlier, and now she compares his rage to the sea, asking whether she does "reap nothing but repulse and hate" (L. 966) from the angry sea. This serves as a reminder of his contemplation over his creation. Then she moves on to fame, saying, "Fame if not double-fac't [as she has done] is doubled-mouth'd" [she will be remembered in both countries, but with different stands]. She compares her fame in both countries; in his, she is vilified, while in hers, she will "be nam'd among the famousset / Of Women . . . who to save / Her Country from a fierce destroyer . . ." (L. 982-85). She is persistent and truthful in these lines. "With odors visited and annual flowers" (L.



987), her burial will be a shrine. Finally, she decides to "leave him to his lot" (L. 996). Her pride and narcissism are evident in her final remarks. Indeed, Dalila's character is dominated by vanity and self-love.

The chorus recognizes her deception and compares her to Satan from "Paradise Lost" in "She is gone, a manifest Serpent . . ." (L. 997). Thus, Mustazza (1988) claims:

Both [Dalila and Satan] may actually feel the strings of remorse, but, on the other hand, both also have selfish motives for action, both want to maintain the affections of those whom they have led into disaster, both want to maintain control (p. 248).

What is written here is correct. Samson remarks, "God sent her to debase me, / And aggravate my folly" (L. 999-1000). By the way, "Snake," "Adder," "Serpent," and "viper" are all names that reflect deception in this tragedy.

Indeed, Samson's encounter with Dalila enhances his self-knowledge, which is necessary for him to recognize his mistake and gets ready for the consequences. Parker (1963) claims that Samson "has gained confidence through the encounter. It was a trial, he realizes, sent by God" (p. 43). Similarly, Sarkar (2015) points out that "Dalila acted only as a tool to bring out the inner wrath of Samson" (p. 227).

Furthermore, while speaking with Harapha, the giant who mocks Samson in prison, Samson does not forget Dalila, whom "they had hir'd a woman with their gold, / Breaking her Marriage Faith to circumvent"(L. 1114-15) him. He expresses his regret and blame for choosing this woman again and over again: "Among the Daughters of the Philistines / I chose a Wife, which argu'd me no foe" (L. 1192-93). He is convinced that he has been duped. He becomes more cognizant and aware of his fault and responsibility for what he has done as a result of the recurrence. Even the usage of the relative word "which" in L. 1193 indicates that these actions are not human. In any marriage relationship, passion, love, and honesty should reign supreme. Samson, on the other hand, looks at her as if she isn't human, despite "Dalila's apology and love may be genuine" (MAZZACANE, 2003, p. 42). It may be difficult to determine who is misled by whom in such a situation. Whatever her intentions, Samson has undergone a dramatic transformation through Dalila; she enhances his reactions and awakens his internal powers. Hence comes the significance of Dalila's episode in the tragedy; she plays an important role in the tragedy. She manages to bring Samson to reconcile with himself and finally accepts his fate.

3. CONCLUSION

Dalila has an influential and major role in *Samson Agonistes*; she inspires in Samson what he needs. Dalila aids Samson in comprehending his entire failure and returning to his core beliefs. Through Dalila, he demonstrates mastery over his former weakness, which has brought him loss and misery. Dalila is the one who eventually prepares Samson to accept his fate and act in accordance



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with his powers. As a result, Dalila's story sits in the heart of this Miltonic tragedy, giving it the feel of a literary work despite its religious origins.

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