

SAMSON VS. HARAPHA: THE TEST  
OF THE TRUE NOBILITY  
IN MILTON'S SAMSON  
AGONISTES

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## PREFACE

Studies on Milton have not attempted to explore his views on native nobility (or gentility) and its association with Galenic humoral theories. This study attempts to fill this gap in Milton criticism, albeit very modestly, by demonstrating that Milton used these blood theories in Samson Agonistes and weaved them in a masterful stroke of syncretism with scriptural traditions. It is safe to assume that without knowledge of these blood theories that were prevalent at his time one may not apprehend all the significance that he attached to nobility based upon Christian principles. It is obvious that there is need for further analysis of his other works, using the approach of this study.

Although I had access to a fair amount of first-hand material for my research, I encountered several problems: the mass of original material on Galenic medicine was so great that I had to be very selective; conversely, some of the Biblical commentaries in Hebrew and Latin were unavailable to me because they were not translated into English, reprinted, or microfilmed.

I am deeply grateful to my major adviser, Professor David Shelley Berkeley, under whom this study was first undertaken in his Milton course, for the suggestion of the

subject. Through his unfailing support, patient guidance, and distinguished learning, as well as his scholarly example, I learned much of what I needed to know about scholarship. I am grateful to him (though my eyes are no better for it) for introducing me to all the first-hand information available on microfilm and for teaching me to work primarily with facts. I also wish to thank Dr. Samuel Woods, Jr., Dr. John Milstead, and Dr. Walter Scott for reading my dissertation and offering helpful suggestions in matters of organization, style, and clarity.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"Wherein lies true honor and nobility?"<sup>1</sup> was an exasperating question for the one who seriously attempted to answer it, or so one gathers from the endless entertaining dialogues, eloquent treatises, solemn Biblical commentaries, and fervent sermons on nobility that were penned ever since Aristotle laid down the four bases of nobility in Politics III. vii, 231-241: blood, riches, learning, and virtue.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's classifications were thus divided, subdivided, and rearranged to harmonize with the personal beliefs of every writer (and there were many) who took up the challenge of setting forth what he thought was the most conclusive definition of the subject. Drawing on scriptural and pagan traditions, these prolific works dissected the concept of nobility into diverse and sundry kinds using a bewildering variety of terms.<sup>3</sup> Hebrao-Christian and pagan ethical principles stood in strident contrast to each other, the former concerned with Heavenly fame, the latter with fame in the eyes of mankind. The most commonly used subdivisions of nobility were nobility native, acquired by descent (sometimes also called "natural nobility" and "gentility"), and nobility dative, acquired through the prince by deeds of

virtue and public honor (also referred to as civil nobility); and they were polemically opposed to each other. Even when they were yoked together under civil nobility in an attempt to reconcile them, or made compatible by such statements as "Noble birth without virtue is a vain thing"<sup>4</sup> or "Virtue is more sweet and powerful if found in a man of good fashion than of base condition,"<sup>5</sup> there remained civil nobility glaringly at odds with Christian nobility: the first was grounded on earthly glory, the second on grace. Writers like Cleland, who found it as laborious a task to extoll one kind above the other as "grinding between milestones" (p. 8) left matters in the open. So did Osorio: "This is a doubtfull controversie, which I leave to be decided of other[s]" (fol. 35<sup>r</sup>); the philosopher in Of Gentleness and Nobility, attributed to Thomas Heywood, admits that

These questions they be so high and subtle  
Few dare presume to define them well.<sup>6</sup>

Others presented three main divisions of nobility--natural (perfection by nature), civil (founded on customs and political laws), and Christian (conferred by the grace of God), and, unless they were theologians as well, glibly explained that the last kind is the best of all. As Kelso points out, "On no other subject is it less safe to be dogmatic" (p. 20).<sup>7</sup>

Despite such efforts at reconciliations of terms in long tortuous arguments, Renaissance writers and their readers continued to hold the medieval view that the nobles



of ancient descent (also referred to as "highborn," "wellborn," and of "gentle birth" or "gentle blood") with great admiration. Of all kinds of nobility, the public in general gave importance to gentility more readily. Though virtue and magnanimity were not excluded, the most conventional matrix that separated a gentleman from a plebeian (i.e., a "baseborn" or "lowborn") was gentility of birth. This belief lingered even in the minds of those very writers who attempted to reconcile the different kinds of nobility. For example, the preacher Charron says that "It is rude, that one come from the house of a Butcher or Vinter should be held for a noble, whatsoever service he hath done for the commonweale" (p. 220).<sup>8</sup> The Italian Renaissance writer Giovanni Battista Nenna in Nennio or a Treatise of Nobility, trans. William Jones (London, 1955), tersely observes: "The common voice understands the nobility of bloud, the man of learning the nobility of mind" (p. 73). Therefore, during the sixteenth century when the power of the nobles was weakened by the passing of the feudal system and the development of strong, central authorities and when the ideal of gentility based upon hereditary class distinctions was threatened by discontent and uprisings such as the Peasants' Revolt of 1549, apologists for nobility native were hard pressed to use every evidence they could assemble to prove the origin and necessity of such nobility; they found their evidence in the pagan theories of the divine origin of gentility, in the scriptures where it was

assumed that Moses (and therefore God) was concerned with blood nobility, in verses from classical literature, in natural law, in social laws, in commentaries by church fathers, in contemporary treatises from the continent, or in the medical theories of the humors established long before by Hippocrates and Galen and still perpetuated by the majority of sixteenth-century physicians and moralists. These medico-social notions were so common that they penetrated works of diverse natures in the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> In spite of social change in the seventeenth century, that is, the rise of the mercantile class and the Puritans, and a revolution in physiology as well, old habits die hard, as Marjorie Nicholson would have us believe, and so these well-established physiological concepts did not change in a moment.<sup>10</sup> W. P. D. Wightman shares Nicholson's view. He believes that it took two more centuries to release medicine from the "stranglehold of the humoral system."<sup>11</sup> So when Samson Agonistes was published in 1671, these medical theories with class associations were still widely held in England and available to the public in either medieval encyclopedias or sophisticated contemporary books and pamphlets that were more ethically and psychologically oriented.<sup>12</sup> These works were written by lawyers, civil servants, clergymen, and schoolmasters, as well as physicians. They were so popular that several were reprinted again and again. In his study of vernacular medical literature of the sixteenth century, Paul Slack has

been able to identify 153 medical titles between 1486 and 1604.<sup>13</sup> As Slack concludes, "the textbooks and regimens and collections of remedies helped to mould or to conform the attitudes of the social establishment towards disease and health" (p. 261). With these facts in mind, it will undoubtedly be instructive to examine the medical details in Milton's poem giving particular attention to Samson and Harapha who, it is possible to argue, represented to the seventeenth-century reader two different blood qualities that associated the Hebrew with baseness and the Philistine with gentility.

Milton's medical knowledge and his tendency to employ medical figures has been thoroughly examined by Kester Svendsen in Milton and Science (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956). Some recent Milton criticism has been devoted to elaborate medical interpretations of the tragic catharsis in Samson.<sup>14</sup> J. P. Russo has provided new insights into Milton's use of medical imagery in Samson.<sup>15</sup> Raymond Waddington in "Melancholy Against Melancholy: Samson Agonistes as a Renaissance Tragedy" presents an original study of Samson's religious melancholy and iconographic imagery in the poem associated with it.<sup>16</sup> John Arthos has examined Samson's regeneration as an ordering of the passions in harmony with current ideas on psychology.<sup>17</sup> Finally, in his interpretation of Samson, Anthony Low discusses Samson's physical impairment and touches upon the social degradation linked with it.<sup>18</sup> However, so far as I

know, no attempt has yet been made to link Samson and Harapha with contemporary Galenic theories of blood.

In the encounter between Samson and Harapha, which may be considered both the climax of the dramatic action leading directly to the catastrophe as well as the last and most crucial temptation for Samson, the melancholic Hebrew is pitted against the proud Philistine. From a Renaissance viewpoint that qualities of blood determine character and behavior, the confrontation between the two is expected to end with the heroic Harapha towering over the blind Samson. But what actually happens is the reverse of this. It is Samson who emerges as the hero, expanding in strength and confidence against the humiliated, cringing Harapha. This unexpected turn of events--for it certainly runs counter humoral theories of the time and the laws of nature understood by the majority--can be conceived of as no less than an instance of divine providence asserting itself by working on man and nature. The encounter is thus a miracle. It will be my concern in this study to show that Samson's inferiority to Harapha in blood quality and descent (that is, in gentility) is obliterated by this miracle, which restores Samson's physical as well as spiritual health and projects him as the exemplar of the Christian nobility. It is my belief that without taking account of these blood theories, one cannot recognize all that the poet has achieved in this work.

In the first part of this study (Chapters II, III, and

IV) I will be concerned chiefly with gentility. In Chapter II I will trace the background of this type of nobility and proceed to analyze Samson and Harapha in Chapters III and IV, respectively, in relation to these ideas. It is essential to examine in detail Samson's physical degeneration as a result of melancholy. His lowly state, along with his obscure birth and descent from Manoa and the inferior tribe of Dan, is posed in the poem as a striking contrast to the gentility that Harapha claims from his ancestors (the giants and the Philistines) and his accomplishments as a warrior. In the second part of this study (Chapters V, VI, and VII) I will focus upon Christian nobility as the alternative to gentility in Milton's conception of the true nobility. In Chapter V I will discuss the judicial combat between the two champions, Samson and Harapha, as a miracle administered by God to enable Samson to triumph over Harapha. In Chapter VI I will analyze the combat scene as a test of the true nobility in Milton's thinking, a Christian nobility that places the gentle Harapha and all his giant ancestors among the evil tyrants of the world. As I conclude in Chapter VIII, Milton in this drama rejects gentility in favor of Christian nobility based upon divine election.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The theme of Fulgens and Luces (1490), the first English secular drama; on this point see M. C. Bradbrook, "Virtue Is the True Nobility? A Study of Structure of All's Well that Ends Well," RES N. 5., Vol. 1, No. 4 (1950), p. 293.

<sup>2</sup>trans. H. Rackham (1932; rpt. London: William Heinemann, 1944).

<sup>3</sup>As far as examples will show, the following are terms put forward in some discussions on nobility: nobility of birth, new-sprung nobility, Christian nobility, and counterfeit nobility as in Lawrence Humphrey, The Nobles or of Nobility, trans. from Latin by same (London, 1563); natural, political, and theological in John Guillim's A Display of Heraldrie, 3rd ed. (London, 1638); humane (military, political, literary and palatine) and divine in Peter Charron's Of Wisdome, trans. from French Samson Lennard (London, 1627); civil (including natural and martial) and Christian in Jeronimo Osorio da Franseca, The Five Bookes . . . Contayninge a Discourse of Civill, and Christian Nobility, trans. from Latin William Blandie (London, 1576), and Robert Glover, The Catalogue of Honour, or Treasurie of True Nobility, trans. from Latin Thomas Milles (London, 1610); civil nobility and proper (personal or natural) nobility in James Cleland, ΥΡΛΗΑΙΑΕΤΑ or The Institution of a Young Nobleman, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1612). Other writers on nobility are Francis Markham, The Booke of Honour (London, 1625) and also George Meriton, A Sermon on Nobility (London, 1606 [?]). For more information on the subject of nobility, consult Ruth Kelso's complete studies which include extensive bibliographies: The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, Univ. of Illinois Studies in Lang. and Lit., Nos. 1-2 (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1929) and Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1956). I am indebted for much of my information on nobility to Professor David Shelley Berkeley, my dissertation director. His ideas on this subject which he has graciously shared with us in his classes are published in his book, Blood Will Tell in Shakespeare's Plays (Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech. Univ., 1984).

<sup>4</sup>Glover, p. 17. I have regularized u, v, i, j, and s's in all of my quotations.

<sup>5</sup>Nicholas Faret, The Honest Man (London, 1632), p. 63; cf. Markham: "To be honourably borne is a very happy condition; to be vertually affected, is no lesse worthy: But when they ioyne, and as two most excellent Ingredients in one notable person, then are they more than most excellent, and make their Inioyner so admirable in men's opinions, that hee deserves all respect," p. 53; Also see Cleland, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>The Spider and the Fly: Together with an Attributed Interlude Entitled Gentleness and Nobility, ed. John S. Farmer (1908, rpt. New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1966), p. 470.

<sup>7</sup>c.f. Glover, p. 9; Charron, p. 220.

<sup>8</sup>See also Markham, p. 46, and Osorio, fol. 4<sup>v</sup>. Even in 1635, we have Thomas Powell in The Art of Thriving Well (London, 1635) narrating the story of "the Taylor, who in one of his customers cast suits had thrust himselfe amongst the Nobility at a Court Maske, where pulling out his Handkercher, he let fall his Thimble, and was so discovered, and handled, and dandled from hand to foot, till the guard delivered him at the great Chamber doore, and cryed, farewell good feeble" (p. 59).

<sup>9</sup>J. W. Draper, The Humors and Shakespeare's Characters (Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1945), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" upon Seventeenth Century Poetry, Rev. ed. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 126;

<sup>11</sup>Science and the Renaissance (New York: Hafner, 1962), I, 249.

<sup>12</sup>Some of the popular encyclopedias were Bartholemeus Anglicus, De Proprietatibus Rerum (London, 1495); Stephen Batman, Batman uppon Bartholome (London, 1582); William Caxton, Mirroure of the World, ed. Oliver H. Prior (1913; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966); John Swan, Speculum Mundi (Cambridge, 1635); detailed treatises included among many others, Thomas Wright's The Passions of the Minde in Generall (London, 1620); Juan de dios Huarte, The Examination of Men's Wits, trans. from Italian [Richard] Clarewl (London, 1594); Levinus Lemnius, The Touchstone of Complexions, trans. Thomas Newton (London, 1581); Bishop Nicolas Coeffeteau, A Table of Humane Passions, trans. from French E. Grimston (London, 1621); Peter de La Primaudaye, The French Academie (London, 1614); Thomas Walkington, The Optick Glasse of Humors (London, 1639); and, most important of all, the literary encyclopedia on melancholy of the seventeenth century, Robert Burton's The Anatomy of

Melancholy, trans. and ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Tudor, 1948).

<sup>13</sup>"Mirror of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England," Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century, ed. Charles Webster (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 238-39.

<sup>14</sup>Lee Cox, "Natural Science and Figurative Design in Samson Agonistes," ELH, 35 (1968), 57-75; see also Georgia Christopher, "Homeopathic Physic and Natural Regeneration in Samson Agonistes," ELH, 37 (1970), 361-73; Mary Ann Radzinowicz, "Medicinable Tragedy: The Structure of Samson Agonistes and Seventeenth-Century Psychopathology," in English Drama: Forms and Development, ed. Marie Axton and Raymond Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 94-122.

<sup>15</sup>"'Diffus'd' Spirits: Scientific Metaphor in Samson Agonistes," PLL, 7 (1971), 86-90.

<sup>16</sup>Calm of Mind: Tercentary Essays on Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes in Honor of John S. Diekhoff, ed. Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr. (Cleveland: Case Western Univ. Press, 1971), 259-87. This article includes a useful list of commentaries on the subject of melancholy.

<sup>17</sup>"Milton and the Passions: A Study of Samson Agonistes," MP, 69 (1972), 209-222.

<sup>18</sup>The Blaze of Noon: A Reading of Samson Agonistes (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1974), p. 43-55.



## CHAPTER II

### NATIVE NOBILITY (OR GENTILITY)

Though native nobility (or gentility) was sometimes used interchangeably with nobility in the sixteenth century, gentility was actually differentiated from nobility, Kelso informs us, "as an inner and inherited quality which distinguished all who had it from plebeians" (The Doctrine of the English Gentleman, p. 19). It was founded upon the popular Aristotelian notion that the blood contains the seeds of good and evil behavior (Politics, III, vii, 237). Therefore, gentle blood predisposes the one who possesses it to do virtuous deeds and shun evil. Writing in 1552, Osorio, in The Five Bookes, provides a clear statement of this notion: "Gentle and noble bloude is . . . by nature enclyned to dignitie and commendable actes" (fol. 35<sup>r</sup>). This basic view is repeatedly encountered in works of the Renaissance and is supported by seventeenth-century thinkers. For example, in the 1525 delightful interlude Of Gentleness and Nobility, the knight who represents nobility of descent smugly declares,

That gentle conditions commonly be  
In them that be of noble blood born (p. 468).

Nicolas Faret, in The Honest Man, also remarks that "The wellborn have most commonly good inclinations which the

others have but rarely. They come naturally, but in others by chance" (p. 12). The blood of nobles, according to Cleland, is thus composed of "some rare and singular substance, which Nature brings not forth, in everie person, not every day" (p. 13). This "rare and singular substance" propels noblemen to compete and so obtain the same degree of achievements as their ancestors. Even clergymen, like George Meriton preaching in the seventeenth century, gave voice to this belief. Noblemen, Meriton says, are "proclive to honourable actions." This disposition, he explains, is the result of a certain "temperature and right constitution of mortal bodies" which inflame people to honourable actions and dangerous enterprises (n. pag.).<sup>1</sup> Possessors of gentle blood were thus considered an exquisite breed. They were thought to be favored by heaven with many gifts, able to excel in anything they undertook. They were, as Baldesar Castiglioni describes them in 1528, "so well endowed that they seemed to have been formed by God with his own hands and blessed with every possible advantage of mind and body."<sup>2</sup> Faret places such wondrous creatures who "are born to please the world" in the highest social rank (p. 52). In his classification of blood into several degrees, Francis Markham, one of the most enthusiastic apologists of gentility, also allots the supreme position to the most naturally endowed monarchs, princes, dukes, earls, and barons because of possessing a higher degree of blood as compared with possessors of civil nobility (p. 8). The idea

that the humor of the blood contains native nobility is one side of the contemporary "psychosomatic" theory that humors are the matrix of morals. Contemporary medical and psychological treatises and books stressed this idea, which was based upon a sympathetic connection between body and mind: the body and mind are either sick or healthy together. Treatises that dealt with the workings of the mind explained the "rare and singular substance" in the nobles' veins as the clear sanguine humor that infused its possessors with pure and quick spirits, indeed the most "refined" spirits, as Walkington states in his literary The Optick Glasse, that "graced [the nobles] with the princeliest and best of all" (p. 113). For the minds, he affirms, must follow the tempers "or rather distemperatures" of the bodies (p. 20). Leminus also believes that the sanguines have inherent virtues: They are courteous people and "without scurrility," "civil and welcome to all" (fol. 100<sup>r</sup>). Coeffeteau endorses the view that noblemen desire honor vehemently (p. 674). So the Spanish physician Huarte points out in an attempt to explain native nobility: "The vegetative, sensitive and reasonable soul have knowledge without that anything be taught them, if so that they possess the convenient temperature" (Ch. 4, p. 34). So, even though a person may attain civil nobility from the King through learning, martial achievements, or distinguished service to the King and commonwealth, he could not acquire gentility except through descent. Hence, such popular

proverbs as "the King cannot make a gentleman," and "good blood cannot lie."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the baseborn plebeians that composed the multitude were thought to possess the lowest degree of blood and so were appropriately placed in the lowest social rank. It may be argued that one reason why the multitude, or "the beast with many heads" as it was commonly referred to by the Renaissance elite, suffered relentless censures by writers of the time was the conventional belief that the low degree of blood possessed by its members drove them to behave in a manner opposite to that of the nobility. Voicing the orthodox thought of the Renaissance, Osorio declares that commoners are not only cowardly but also "dull-wits [of] brutish nature, cannot perceive what is Profitable eyther to themselves or for their countrie" (fol. 20<sup>v</sup>). They were generally considered unfit to hold high positions that demanded mental agility.<sup>4</sup> According to the Galenic humoral theories, it was their melancholic and phlegmatic humors that acted as prime causes for such dispositions. Huarte remarks on Galenic melancholy that it "serves not of any value for the wit, but maketh men blockish, sluggards" (pp. 84-85). Even the Christian apostles, he points out, because of their simple and base nature would not have been filled with knowledge and learning were it not for God's miraculous intervention (p. 19). Walkington offers what seems to be a more imaginative explanation:

The bodily habit being out of temper, the minde hath no lively willingnes to the contemplation of vertue; that being enfeebled and overshadowed, the light of the soule is altogether darkened (p. 19).

With such medical and social attitudes towards the melancholic and phlegmatic plebeians in mind, it is no wonder that the lawyer Bartholeme Felippe, discoursing on the king's counselors in 1584, categorically stated that they be chosen with sanguine or choleric rather than melancholic humors, for the melancholics are "base," "malicious," "enemies to noble thought," delighting in trifles, "dull," "drowsie," and "scarce able to lift themselves from the ground."<sup>5</sup> Galenic medical theories of the humors were thus used not only to delineate temperament but also to suggest social position.

To determine a person's social rank, apologists of gentility looked to his stock, sometimes on both parents' sides, and through nine generations, and to his immediate parentage. These were channels through which blood qualities were transmitted from parents to children or from one generation to another; a noble stock was believed to have the power to beget perfect progeny. As Charron states, "according to the generall and common opinion and custome it [nobility] is a quality of race or stocke" (p. 220). The importance of parentage extends as far back as the Greeks whose nobles claimed ancestry from such heroes as Hercules and Achilles, and both from divine parentage. Aside from drawing on these pagan theories for support, exponents of gentility made use of the dominant Renaissance belief in

heredity. In his Five Bookes, Osorio expresses the conventional belief that the child is "the true and lively image of the parente, not to be seene so much in the feature and makinge of the bodye, as in the qualitye and disposition of the mynde" (fol. 10<sup>v</sup>). This view was still common in the seventeenth century. Henry Peacham observes while discussing nobility in The Compleat Gentleman that

It [nobility] transferreth it selfe unto Posteritie; and as for the most part wee see the children of Noble Personages, to beare the lineaments and resemblance of their Parents: so in like manner, for the most part they possesse their vertues and Noble dispositions, which even in their tenderest yeares, will bud forth and discover it selfe.<sup>6</sup>

Richard Braithwaite writes that "There is a naturall straine in all creatures, which they take from parents that breed them."<sup>7</sup> Marshalling a prodigious amount of evidence from various sources, Burton in An Anatomy asserts that the melancholic humor is inherited from parents. He quotes from Fernelius, Hippocrates, and Roger Bacon to support his view that the child inherits not so much the composition of the body, which is Hippocrates' opinion, but rather the manners and conditions of the mind (pp. 184-188). Thus it was firmly imprinted in the minds of the people of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that, barring astral and climatic influences, the father who excelled in virtue could not but beget a virtuous son; conversely, the cowardly would of necessity produce only cowardly offspring.<sup>8</sup> The mother was also considered responsible for propagating corrupt (or

healthy) qualities. Medical tradition supplied reasons for these beliefs. A common assumption in medical books was that as the fetus draws from its mother "spirits and vital humors," it also draws affections, virtues and vices. Says Burton quoting Fernelius and Lemnius,

If she be over-dull heavy, angry, peevish, discontented, and melancholy, not only at the time of conception, but even all the while she carries the child in her womb . . . her son will be so likewise affected (p. 187).

Qualities and conditions were also transmitted through the mother's milk, which was considered to be, like sweat, a part of the blood. If the infant was to be nursed by a woman other than his mother, then she must be "young and of a hot and dry complexion" in order to transmit pure qualities of blood.<sup>9</sup> As if such evidence was not enough, apologists of native nobility turned to classical poetry to support their arguments. Here are two couplets employed by Glover in The Catalogue, pp. 11, 12, but encountered in several other works. The first is by Mantuan and the second by Horace:

The beauty of the fairest Branch, doth from the  
 roote proceede  
 And so the Fathers manners do, in their offspring  
 abide,

and

In Bullocks and in Horses eke, the Syres worth we  
 prove  
 Nor doth the hardy Eagle hatch, the weak and  
 fearfull Dove.

The vulgar who disapproved of nobility native usually rebutted with the cry of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 echoed

in the ploughman's couplet from Of Gentleness and Nobility,  
p. 449:

For when Adam delved and Eve span  
Who was then a gentleman?



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>See also Osorio, fol. 21<sup>v</sup>.
- <sup>2</sup>The Book of the Courtier, trans. from Italian George Bull (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1967), p. 54.
- <sup>3</sup>For some of these ideas on blood nobility see Elizabeth Hall, "A Study of the Change in Attitude Towards Blood in the Renaissance Drama, 1589-1642," Diss. The Univ. of Kentucky, 1978, pp. 20-22.
- <sup>4</sup>Consult C. A. Patrides' illuminating study of orthodox Renaissance attitudes towards the multitude, "'The Beast with Many Heads': Renaissance Views on the Multitude," SO, 16 (1965), 241-46.
- <sup>5</sup>The Counsellor, trans. from Spanish John Thorius (London, 1589), p. 49.
- <sup>6</sup>(1622; rpt. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1968), p. 4.
- <sup>7</sup>The English Gentleman (London, 1630), p. 266; cf. Meriton in A Sermon, and Jacques Ferrand, ΕΡΩΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ; or A Treatise on Love (Oxford, 1640), p. 84.
- <sup>8</sup>Osorio, fol. 16<sup>r</sup>; Cleland, p. 12.
- <sup>9</sup>On this point see Glover, The Catalogue, p. 14; Burton, p. 187; Antonio de Guevara, The Dial of Princes, p. 18; Cleland, p. 19; also Jacques Guillemeau, The Nursing of Children (London, 1612), p. 4.

## CHAPTER III

### SAMSON THE BASE

Of worldly honor and nobility of descent, Samson possesses but little. Traditions have invested his tribe Dan with inferiority in comparison with the other tribes.<sup>1</sup> This view is also supported by modern scholars. For example, basing his opinions on the Biblical text, J. A. Craig in Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 689, dismisses Dan as a "family" less than tribe (Jud. 18.11). He also notes that Dan, the patriarch of the tribe, is also said to have had only one son, Hushim or Shuham (Gen. 46.23; Nu. 26.42). The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not lack advocates of this view. John Calvin, in The Sermons upon the Fifth Booke of Moses Called Deuteronomie trans. A. Golding (London, 1583), p. 1255, describes Dan as a "tribe of no great reputation, and they [the Danites] seemed not worthie to be made account of." Further in the same passage, he considers them types of the "despyed of the world," "of no force, credit, countenance," and "weake." In his commentary on the book of Judges, Richard Rogers refers to Dan as the "meanest" tribe<sup>2</sup>, where "mean" according to usage current in the seventeenth century meant in regard to a person:

"Inferior in rank or quality," or "Undistinguished in position; of low degree." It was "often opposed to noble or gentle" (OED). A study of Jewish and Christian views on the tribe of Dan based upon scriptural passages and the relation of these views to Renaissance theories of blood nobility would furnish the modern reader of Samson with the necessary information, which his learned seventeenth-century predecessor undoubtedly possessed, to correctly understand Samson's lineage and social status as intimated in the poem.

Much has been written on Gen. 49.3-27 in an attempt to unravel the symbolic structure of Jacob's prophecies regarding his sons. Verses 16-17 predict that

Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.<sup>3</sup>

In his learned and most exhaustive exegesis of these passages, the Cambridge theologian Francis Rolleston endorses the prevalent view of Dan as a "meane" tribe; to the concepts of St. Augustine and Zanchius he adds his own Renaissance notions of nobility. He attributes the low reputation of the tribe to the fact that its patriarch was an illegitimate and therefore "debased" son of Jacob because he (Dan) was born of a "concubine." So, he continues, with what seems an allusion to his own society,

The Nobleman, scornes the Gentleman, and the Gentleman overlookes the Farmer as the Jewes contemned the Galileans, and all this because of a little eminencie in Birth and Blood.<sup>4</sup>

In Biblical commentaries, Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid and

Dan's mother, was referred to as a "concubine," or a "servant," with all the detestable connotations associated with this latter word in the mind of an Englishman.<sup>5</sup> Theologians also assigned a subordinate position to Dan because, on the basis of Gen. 25.6 where Abraham sends away his son of a concubine and gives all his inheritance to Isaac, a concubine's son was not to be put on the same level as the legitimate sons, especially in matters of inheritance.<sup>6</sup> This belief harmonized with the Renaissance laws of inheritance based upon legitimate blood lineage. The gentles were the direct legitimate descendants "from free-borne men, none of whose Ancestors had served as slaves," Glover writes in The Catalogue of Honour, p. 10. The Renaissance belief is epigrammatically stated by Humphrey in The Nobles:

Of a shrimpe sprynges not a rose, or marigold, or  
of a bōd woman a freesonne borne (n. pag.).

Also, a legitimate son was considered better born than a bastard who was neither admitted to high positions by Felipe, nor to the honor of combat by Sir John Ferne except through knightly service in his sovereign's court to blot out the indignity of his vile birth. Even then, he always carried a special mark.<sup>7</sup> Twentieth-century scholars Emil G. Hirsch and R. H. Charles also hold the view that Dan occupied an inferior position compared with other tribes that traced their lineage through Rachel to Jacob.<sup>8</sup> Craig in Dictionary of the Bible also remarks that Dan's descent from the concubine Bilhah indicates that it was a tribe of

"minor significance in the national development" (p. 689). On the other hand, other tribes occupied prestigious positions: Joseph obtained the birthright, Levi was invested with priesthood and his tribe was faithful when others were idolatrous (Ex. 32.29). As for Judah, sovereignty belonged to its descendants: it conducted the host, made peace, and should first offer sacrifice. Peter Martyr Vermigli considers Judah God's elect tribe.<sup>9</sup> As Osorio states, "The stock of Judea did farre excel the Hebrue Nation in vertue, honour and dignity" (13<sup>r</sup>). Out of its stock sprang Caleb "worthy in martiall affyres . . . King David descended from that tribe--myrroure and spectacle of all vertue and godlines"--and, of course, Christ (fol. 15<sup>r</sup>). Voicing the Renaissance belief in blood nobility, Osorio concludes that nobleness of birth and distinction of blood is authorized by the holy scriptures: "Moses had consideration of the noblenes of bloud and nature, in that he assigneth unto one peculiar people the title and prerogative of honoure and dignity" (fol. 15<sup>r</sup>).<sup>10</sup> Milton, however, in The Christian Doctrine<sup>11</sup>, recognizes Dan as one of "the twelve holy tribes chosen by God" in order to prove the legitimacy of children of a polygamous marriage.<sup>12</sup>

Dan was also despised as a tribe because it had small possessions and whatever territory it was allotted was attacked by the Philistines. The Danites had great trouble keeping their land so they had to migrate north and take over, in the most atrocious manner, the peaceful city of

Laish (Jud. 18.11), a crime history never forgave them. Craig believes that the invasion of Laish branded the Danites as marauders and experts in guerilla tactics (p. 199). William Cowper, in Pathmos: or A Commentary upon the Revelation of St. John (London, 1623), p. 899, suggests that one reason why Dan was omitted from Rev. 7 was its inability to provide for itself. In the opinion of John Skinner, "Dan was the weakest tribe and the latest to secure a permanent settlement."<sup>13</sup>

The low reputation of Dan also rests on other commentaries on Gen. 49.16-17. To Calvin, in A Commentarie upon . . . Genesis, the passage means that Dan

shall have no such courage as to fight in the open  
feelde, but shall rather encounter craft and  
subtiltie . . . This subtiltie in Dan is rather  
discommended than prayed (p. 901).

This point is repeatedly made in other Renaissance and seventeenth-century commentaries as well. For example, Gervase Babbington, in Certaine Plaine, Briefe, and Comfortable Notes upon Every Chapter of Genesis (London, 1596), p. 349, remarks that "Dan shall have the honor of a tribe, and that in subtilty and craft abound like serpents; biting heals not head of the horse." Ainsworth also believes that Dan shall overcome his enemies "by subtilty" (n. pag.). This interpretation was often associated in the minds of commentators with the barbaric invasion of Laish.

Further, to most commentators, Christian or Jewish, Dan's name was invariably associated with idolatry. Two

scriptural passages provide evidence of this fact, though they both narrate incidents happening after Samson's death. According to Jud. 18.31, the roving Danites, hunting in the north for territory to settle in, stole graven images from a man named Micah and indulged in idolatry all the time the ark was in Shiloh. Also, the city of Dan, formerly Laish, became the seat of idolatry for the northern tribes when King Jeroboam I set up a golden calf there (I Kings 12.29). In rabbinical literature, however, as Hirsch reports in "Dan," The Jewish Encyclopedia, idolatry in relation to Dan the city is traced back to Abraham's time; it was believed by rabbinic commentators that Abraham was deterred from attacking the Babylonian kings by the idolatry in the city of Dan (Gen. 14.15-16). In his commentaries on Deut. 34.1, Rashi writes that the Midrash declares that God gave Moses a vision of Israel's future history and thus showed him the tribe of Dan practicing idolatry.<sup>14</sup> According to rabbinical tradition, Hirsch explains, Dan continued to be idolatrous and as a result was unprotected by the pillar of cloud during the procession of the host. So, being the "hindmost" and the most "feeble" of the tribes, it was attacked by the Amalekites (Deut. 25.18). By rabbinical interpretation it was also burnt by fire as a punishment for its idolatry (Nu. 11.1).

Most commentators also agree that Dan's idolatry was the chief cause of its omission from Rev. 7.5-8 in the sealing of the tribes.<sup>15</sup> An equally well-accepted

explanation of this fact, first thought to be provided by Irenaeus and endorsed by Roman Catholics especially, was the belief that the Antichrist would spring from the tribe. Irenaeus bases his view on Jer. 8.16, which recalls Dan's slaughtering of the inhabitants of Laish:

The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan; the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have denounced all the land and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein.

However, Charles in A Critical . . . Commentary, p. 209, believes that this tradition is actually pre-Christian and Jewish and widely accepted by such early church fathers as Eucharis, Augustine, Jacob of Edessa, Theodoret, Arethas, Bede, and others. Giovanni Brocardio in The Revelation of St. John thinks that Judas Iscariot was of the tribe of Dan.<sup>16</sup>

Other evils were also associated with Dan; it became a type of evil doing, as Hirsch reports, the "black sheep" of the house of Jacob. This was not only because of its idolatry and the Antichrist prophecy, but also because of the Danite blasphemer (Lev. 24.11) and the faithlessness of Samson to his vows. Hirsch also reminds us that Dan, the patriarch, plotted against Joseph's life and was in league with the Egyptian crown prince against Joseph. Another tradition identifies the serpent and the lion, the two symbols of Dan (Gen. 49.17 and Deut. 33.22), with Belial. Costas, a modern scholar, makes the point that the emblem of the serpent on its standard could not but have been regarded



in connection with Satan (p. 176). Other details in the scriptural text support this most unfavourable view of Dan. Dan's standard was placed on the north side of the armies (Nu. 2.25), the north region having sinister associations (Jer. 1.14);<sup>17</sup> and when the tribes set forward, Dan was "the rearward of all camps" (Nu. 10.25). Guillim, the early seventeenth-century apologist of gentility, observes in A Display of Heraldrie, p. 9, that the ordering and conducting of the Israelites to the land of promise shows God's approbation of arms and insignia as marks of social distinctions and nobility. According to such a belief, Dan was considered the most ignoble and inferior in social rank. Other commentators, like Rogers in Milton's day, censured Dan for its "slavish" fear that caused it to run to the ships rather than fight the enemy, one interpretation of Jud. 5.17 (p. 261). Thus Peter Martyr: "Dan so feared the enemy that it ran to the ships" (fol. 107<sup>v</sup>). Rogers continues his vituperation against Dan: "Men of Dan were vile and lawless" (p. 857). Perhaps John Napeir in A Plaine Discovery, of the Whole Revelation of St. John (London, 1611, p. 153), summarized for the seventeenth-century reader the status of Dan:

Why Dan is so left out [from Rev. 7.5-8] the reason appeareth to be, that, that tribe hath bene more accursed than the rest; for by the Spirit of God, it is called Gen. 49.17, a serpent, or an adder, and is called a Lyons whelpe, Deut. 33.22 and for their golden calves and great idolatry, appeareth by the Prophet Amos 8.14 that they fell, and never rose again, and so could not be participant of this Christian marke.

Milton does not depict the Danites more favourably in Samson. He shows them to be suspiciously familiar with fertility cults and ready to indict Jehovah.<sup>18</sup> Samson and they are excluded from "long descent of blood."<sup>19</sup> In accordance with the prevalent Renaissance belief that "wickedness corrupts the blood,"<sup>20</sup> the Danites must then be considered as having inferior blood compared to other tribes.

More facts about Samson's lineage could possibly shed light upon his social status and lack of nobility of blood. Samson's parents are shadowy figures in the book of Judges; according to Rogers, p. 613, they are not even endowed with the grace and godliness of St. John the Baptist's parents (Luke 1.6), though they appear to be a "worthie couple." There are notably few references to Samson's parents in Biblical commentaries. Two commentaries on the book of Judges that Milton was familiar with, Josephus' The Antiquities of the Jews and Peter Martyr's A Commentary, both show Manoa to have been jealous of the angel who appeared to his wife in the form of a man.<sup>21</sup> Hayne, in The General View, p. 636, regards Manoa as simple and fearful though he does not censure him for these qualities of character. Modern Miltonists have been harsher on Manoa, presenting him as "senile,"<sup>22</sup> "utterly broken and pathetic,"<sup>23</sup> and indulging in "self-pity."<sup>24</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard speaks of Manos's "gloating" upon hearing of Samson's destruction of his enemies (1.1564).<sup>25</sup> W. R.

Parker considers him "stubborn," "patristic," "single-minded," and "fond of giving advice."<sup>26</sup> He also observes that Manoa cannot understand his son's true feelings nor his death. Jeanne Welcher gives the Hebrew meaning of "Manoah" as "resting place," so that Manoa represents a supreme temptation for Samson: a life good in itself.<sup>27</sup> Ann Gossman, p. 537, judiciously points out that Manoa's basic concern is with self-preservation. Low discerns Manoa's instability:

He hopes and despairs, chides and confronts,  
sympathizes but misunderstands irritates but  
loves. He is vengeful towards his enemies but  
willing to swallow his pride, to get what he wants  
from them (p. 126).

While several of these critics' remarks are undoubtedly valid, the last two seem to hit at the center of Manoa's character as suggested by the evidence in the poem. A close study of the second epeisodion in Samson (ll. 332-606) and the exodus (ll. 1552-1758), passages where Manoa appears, will show that Manoa's chief purpose in life is practical: physical survival and comfort. He is not concerned with Samson's gnawing religious agony (sin, despair, and expiation); his hope is to drag him to the comfort of his home:

It shall be my delight to tend his eyes,  
And view him sitting in the house, ennobl'd  
And on his shoulders waving down those locks.  
(ll. 1490-94)

Another quality of Manoa's character that surfaces upon close examination of the text is his willingness to beg the Philistine lords in the most humiliating manner for his

son's ransom. No doubt such behavior stems from his fatherly concern; but his role as a bargaining, negotiating solicitor, waylaying the Philistine nobles in the streets to tearfully plead for his son's ransom while lying prostrate in complete submission, does lack dignity. As Manoa admits, he was sometimes treated contemptuously:

I have attempted one by one the Lords  
 Either at home, or through the high streets passing,  
 With supplication prone and Father's tears  
 To accept of ransom for my Son this pris'ner.  
 Some much averse I found and wondrous harsh,  
 Contemptuous, proud.

(ll. 1457-62)

This scene arouses a patronizing feeling in the reader towards Manoa, a feeling which has little to do with his old age and none with his character. He lacks self-assertiveness in his interaction with the Philistines. Manoa's bewilderment upon hearing the noise at the temple: "What shall we do, stay here or run and see?" (l.1520) intensifies the patronizing feeling in the reader. As the chorus watches old Manoa returning with glad news, it affectionately marks, somewhat humorously, "his youthful steps" (l.1442). Such details scattered in the poem indicate that Manoa fails to inspire respect and awe. Manoa is certainly not a noble figure. He possesses none of the classical heroic virtues, like fortitude, wisdom, leadership, or magnanimity. He also lacks ideas of chivalry and martial glory. In the light of Renaissance views that stressed degrees of blood and the transmission of qualities of blood through heredity, it would be inconceivable,

barring divine intervention, to expect a heroic son descended from Manoa, or, for that matter, from the degenerated stock of Dan. In its speech on heroism, the chorus clearly places Samson, as far as ancestral blood, inheritance, and social distinctions are concerned, among the lowborn:

For him I reckon not in high estate  
 Whom long descent of birth  
 Or the sphere of fortune raises;  
 But thee, whose strength, while virtue was her mate,  
 Might have subdu'd the Earth,  
 Universally crown'd with highest praises.  
 (ll. 170-75)

Samson's debasement on account of his low birth is further increased by his melancholy which, according to Galenic humoral theories, corrupts the blood and creates all types of villeins and churls. Because of the complexity, combinations, and instability of the humors, it is not easy to categorize humoral types definitively. This attempt becomes increasingly difficult when considering melancholics because of the confusing and what seems to be divergent ideas about melancholy found in the medical and psychological books and treatises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. "The Tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues, as this Chaos of Melancholy doth variety of symptoms," writes Burton in *An Anatomy* (pp. 337-38). Bridget Lyons, along with other modern students of melancholy, thinks that the term "melancholy" became an "all embracing word for all diseases caused by burnt humours."<sup>28</sup> Further, melancholy was based upon several traditions, which

tended to aggravate the confusion.<sup>29</sup> How much Milton knew about melancholy is a subject that deserves close attention. Svendsen's conclusions issuing from a survey of medical lore in Milton are the following:

The number of allusions [to medicine] is large; the range of information and the depth is narrow and small. Whatever he might have known out of books or experience, he used only conventional, comparatively shallow medieval and Renaissance commonplaces in physiology, psychology, and medicine.<sup>30</sup>

Milton's thorough knowledge of Burton's work and Paracelsian medicine has already been pointed out by scholars.<sup>31</sup> A close examination of medical details in Samson Agonistes reveals that Milton's knowledge of medical matters, as it was used in the poem, was more sophisticated than shallow. Indeed, my study leads me to agree with Parker that Milton's knowledge of medical terms is "exceptional" (p. 884). Though it is impossible to determine the exact sources of his medical information, it is correct to suggest that Samson intimates its author's familiarity with more than crude or commonplace physiology.

Waddington in "Melancholy Against Melancholy," has classified Samson's melancholy as a religious despair, a melancholy of the mind and soul that Burton fully expounds in Anatomy. Often marshalling scriptural evidence, particularly the apt Prov. 17.22 and Deut. 28.15-68, Renaissance exponents of this type of melancholy considered it a punishment from God for disobedience. Burton views despair as God's punishment for idolatrous and superstitious

men (pp. 946-49). Lyons suggests in Voices, p. 6, that Christian writers generally associated despair with sinfulness, especially acedia, a spiritual illness that afflicted monks, hermits, and others who chose a religious life. According to Lemnius, in The Touchstone, remorse of conscience is "denounced by God to lyghte uppon so many as forsake his lawes, and rebelliously contemn his commandments" (fol. 144<sup>r</sup>). De la Primaudaye, in The French Academie, conceives of this sort of melancholy as God's "spirituall physicke for the soul against all the diseases there of" (p. 546). It was also considered the most dangerous to spiritual and physical health:

Of all kinds of miseries that befall unto man, none is so miserable as that revenging hand against the guiltie soule of a sinner. . . the cause, the guilt, the punishment, the revenge, the ministers of the wrath, all concurring together in more forcible sort . . . then in any other kind of calamitie whatsoever,

writes the physician and theologian Timothy Bright.<sup>32</sup> Burton summarizes this idea to the seventeenth-century man: "Every perturbation is a misery, but grief a cruel torment" (p. 225).

Samson's melancholy, while not merely a symptom of acedia, does exhibit a relationship to religious doubt and remorse. Samson reveals this agonizing remorse all throughout the prologue and the first two epeisodia in lamentations like the following:

Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd  
As of a person separate to God,  
Designed for great exploits; if I must die

Betray's captiv'd, and both my eyes put out  
 Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze:  
 (ll. 30-34)

and:

O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!  
 Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,  
 Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!  
 (ll. 68-70)

The immediate cause of his despair is of course his betrayal of God, a memory which persistently hovers in his mind, and like the hornets about his head stings his conscience and forbids rest (ll. 19-22, 623), a traditional detail in descriptions of the melancholy man who, in the words of Andreas Laurentius,

if he think to make truce with his passions by taking some rest, behold so soone as he would shut his eyelids, hee is assayled with a thousand vaine visions, and hideous buggards.<sup>33</sup>

Also, using Christian imagery, Samson compares himself to a foolish pilot who has shipwrecked his vessel "gloriously rigg'd" and

Vanquished with a peal of words (O weakness!)  
 Gave up my fort of silence to a Woman.  
 (ll. 220, 235-36)

Later, again remembering Dalila, he moans his uxuriousness:

But some effeminacy held me yoked  
 Her Bond-Slave; O indignity, O blot,  
 To Honour and Religion! Servile mind  
 Rewarded with servile punishment!  
 (ll.410-13)

Samson's grief is also caused by a sense of loss continuously brought to mind by a juxtaposition of what he was (God's champion, Israel's deliverer, and a Nazarite from the womb devoted to God eternally) and what has become of



him now: "Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves" (l. 41). His intensifying sorrow bursts out into the following lyrical lines which perhaps summarize his agony:

O dark, dark, dark amid the blaze of noon  
 Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse  
 Without all hope of day!

(ll. 80-82)

The actual darkness (his physical blindness) is intensified by a spiritual darkness (his sin) which isolates him from all light (God), even when God ("the blaze of noon") is all around.<sup>34</sup> It is this impossibility of having any relationship at all with God, especially after having received "motions" from Him before, having experienced an intimate spiritual relationship with Him as His champion and magistrate, that is the major cause of Samson's despair. His sorrow may be interpreted as melancholy that accompanies sin, described by Chrysostom as "a chastisement from heaven to punish past sins and to avert new ones." It is an eternal punishment, Chrysostom continues, unless man is restored to unity with God.<sup>35</sup>

Because of prevalent contemporary "psychosomatic" ideas about the close relationship of body and mind, Samson's melancholy is to be understood not just as the disease of a troubled mind, but also as a physical disease caused by an abundance of black bile in the body. This type of melancholy (known as "natural melancholy") was briefly sketched or more copiously expounded in books, treatises, regimens, or pamphlets, the fullest treatment being Burton's Anatomy, which draws upon physicians, philosophers, and

church fathers (pp. 217-82). Though some advanced psychological explanations of melancholy appeared in countless sixteenth-century treatises like Elyot's extremely popular The Castell, it was the seventeenth-century thinkers par excellence who undertook to set them forth in somewhat lengthy expositions. In The Preservation of Health, trans. Sir John Harrington (London, 1624), p. 30, Henricus Ronsovius gives a succinct psychosomatic explanation of melancholy: "Perturbations of the mind doe follow the passions of the bodie, as we may see, so on the other side, the bodie is affected from the passions of the mind." More elaborately, Thomas Wright explains that

There is no Passion very vehement but that it alters extreemly some of the foure humours of the bodie; and all Physitians commonly agree, that among divers other extrincecall causes of disease, one, and not the least, is, the excesse, of some inordinate Passion . . . they consent that it may proceed from a certain sympathie of nature, a subordination of one part to another, and that the spirits and humours wait upon the Passions, as their Lords and Masters (p. 4).

He defines passions as the "motions" of the soul (p. 8). Coeffeteau, in A Table, offers a poetic and broad view of psychosomatic theories drawing on traditional correspondences between the humours and the cosmos:

For as the intellectual power which mooves a heaven, applying her vertue to moove it, makes it to change place, and drawes it from East to West, or from West to East, even so the soule which hath a moving power commanding over the body, changeth his naturall disposition, and by her agitation puts him from his rest, wherein hee was before shee troubled him in this manner (p. 12).

More specifically, passions, being "motio sensualis

appetitiva virtutis" as Wright has defined them (p. 8), violently move "spirits" in the blood and so impair the natural faculties. Elyot refers to sorrow as an "enemie to life" (p. 95), possessing the most destructive qualities. It corrupts the blood by weakening or extinguishing the vital spirits (also called the "genial" or "generative" spirits) that carry food and heat in the body. As the physician John Makluire explains, in The Buckler of Bodilie Health (Edinburgh, 1630, p. 61),

Sadnesse, griefe, or melancholy . . . shoote up or draw together the heart, that it fadeth and faileth. This hindereth the generation of spirits, as also the distribution of these few, that are ingendered.

Lemnius makes the same point: "Vital spirite fainteth because of strong emotions" (fol. 60<sup>r</sup>). Psychological interpretations were given by Wright (p. 45), Laurentius (p. 100) and Burton (pp. 220-24), who explained that it is actually the false images or conceits produced by sorrow in the brain that spur the melancholic humor down to the heart. As a result of these abnormal turbulences in the humors, physicians believed, the cold black melancholic humor was formed. As Burton remarks, sorrow is "the mother and daughter of melancholy, her epitome, symptom, and chief cause" (p. 225). In a melancholic, he explains, the blood becomes coagulated and forms cold "dreggs" which the heart cannot digest. So it contracts and imprisons the spirits within, causing a drying up of the whole body (p. 226) and, according to Wright, makes it "wither and languish away" (p.

61). This state is in turn a cause of fainting, for all the spirits, even the "animal" spirits which impart power to the muscles and sinews to move and feel, are extinguished. Consequently, the sinews of the body are weakened, and, as Lemnius points out, the head droops forward (p. 146). Walkington also writes that "this melancholy causeth one look to be on earth creeping" (p. 132). Indeed, he says, it makes the whole nature "droup" (p. 127).

A close inspection of Samson Agonistes reveals that these medical theories and terms, even the very words used by the writers in these expositions of melancholy, are employed by Milton. Two lines need to be examined first because of their richness in medical terms. When the chorus first sees Samson, it observantly describes his appearance:

See how he lies at random, carelessly diffus'd  
With languish'd head unpropt.

(ll. 118-19)<sup>36</sup>

The careless position of Samson, almost supine, indicates an impairment of his natural faculties, especially of the animal spirits without the aid of which, it was believed, no feeling, motion, or agility can be produced in the body. This physical exhaustion in Samson is also suggested by the word "languish'd" which, as has already been pointed out, was used by Wright to explain the wasting of the spirits. Next we have the "head unpropt," another sign of physical impairment and a traditional gesture of melancholics who were depicted with "drooping head and down cast look."<sup>37</sup> A survey of Milton's poetry shows that he utilizes this detail

considerably.<sup>38</sup> References to Samson's "fainting" spirits also abound in the poem and are based upon medical doctrines. In an attempt to console him, the ever-sympathetic chorus prays for

Secret refreshing, that repair his strength  
And fainting spirits uphold.

(ll. 665-66)

The verb "uphold" is, of course, the direct opposite of "droop" which in its physiological sense refers to the spirits descending to the heart and being held captive there. Lines 590-632 of the poem must also be scrutinized with care, for they are saturated with conventional and sophisticated ideas in medicine and psychology, woven into metaphorical language. Despite the powerful poetic language in the passage and the intense lamentations of Samson, Milton's sophisticated knowledge of contemporary medical theories regarding the cyclical interrelationship between mind and body appears in the above mentioned lines: griefs are compared to physical diseases which in turn cause more psychological torments. Samson regrets that "torments" are not just physical but must need prey on the "purest spirits" of the mind (l. 612). The "purest spirits" may be understood to mean the animal spirits, which, seated in the brain, are diffused through the nerves of sense to other parts of the body. In the same passage, Samson explains that he is afflicted with "faintings, swoonings of despair" (l. 631). Clearly, there is in this line the traditional association of sorrow with fainting. Further in l. 595, he

describes his intense despair thus: "So much I feel my genial spirits droop." Here, "genial spirits" may be taken to mean the natural or generative spirits believed to be seated in the liver and responsible for digestion and providing the body with nutrition and heat. The word "droop" in its physiological sense has already been explained above.<sup>39</sup> All these details are indications of corrupt blood and not simply metaphors for the weariness of life. Finally, in ll. 607-09 and 620-21, Milton alludes to Samson's immedicable wounds and sores; and in ll. 623-28, he directly refers to his physical diseases caused by his grief:

Thoughts my Tormentors arm's with deadly stings  
Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,  
Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise  
Dire inflammation which no cooling herb  
Or med'cinal liquor can assuage,  
Nor breath of Vernal Air from snowy Alp.

Two other points need to be noted in this passage: Milton's knowledge of the cures of melancholy and his use of the word "apprehensive" which, in the faculty psychology of the age, meant "sensitive" soul, the seat of passions.

To all the physical symptoms of Samson's excess black humor may be added the noxious odour which is presumptively associated with him in the poem and which provides Harapha with an excuse to refuse his challenge to combat: "And thou hast need much washing to be touched" (l. 1107). Bad smell was considered a symptom of melancholics whose blood is corrupted. Batman's encyclopedia describes them as having a

"stinking savour and smell" (fol. 32<sup>r</sup>). It was customary in the literature of the Renaissance to depict a melancholic baseborn as emitting a bad odour. For example, in R. Jones' comedy A Knacke to Know a Knave (London, 1594), the ploughman is absolutely certain that the way to tell a knave is to smell his hat (n. pag.). Low, in The Blaze of Noon, p. 55, attributes Samson's smell to his immedicable wounds and compares him to Philoctetes, who bears the wound mark of an outcast. The goat (known for its bad smell) was a zodiac sign for Saturn, the planet-god of melancholics and a common symbol in iconographical representations of him.<sup>40</sup> It seems legitimate, then, to hold the view that Milton uses Samson's presumed odour as one more detail to place him among the debased and physically impaired melancholics.

To complete the cyclical psychosomatic pattern, the excessive black bile engendered by despair in turn affects the passions. The medical theory that humors determine temperament has already been discussed in Chapter II as a basis for gentility. The most detrimental effect of melancholy is that by corrupting the blood it infects the "cell of fancy". George Foxle in The Groaning of the Spirit (London, 1639), p. 32, makes the point that black bile corrupts the imagination by sending "blacke fumes" to the brain. Thus, according to encyclopedias and medical treatises of the time, fearful dark dreams were the lot of melancholics.<sup>41</sup> It was believed that a darkening of the mind occurs in the melancholic because of the black humor,

producing a parallel between inner and outer darkness. In Voices Lyons states that "There was no clear line of distinction between fact or image, or between the state of the melancholic's mind and the landscape that he inhabited or projected" (p. 15). In Samson Agonistes, Manoa diagnoses his son's grief as

Suggestions which proceed  
From anguish of the mind and humors black  
That mingle with thy fancy.  
(ll. 599-601)

More effectively, Samson expresses the same idea:

My griefs not only pain me  
As a ling'ring disease,  
But finding no redress, ferment and rage,  
.....  
To black mortification.  
(ll. 617-19, 622)

The fearful dark dreams and fantasies of this life-negating disease may lead to suicide. All melancholics desire death, Batman's encyclopedia asserts (fol. 32<sup>r</sup>). Samson's perturbations of the mind and soul also lead him to think of death as a "rest" (l. 598), to hope that

. . . oft-invocated death,  
Hast'n the welcome end of all my pains,  
(ll. 575-76)

to think of death as "benumbing Opium . . . my only cure" (l. 630), and to pray for a

. . . speedy death,  
The close of all my miseries, and the balm.  
(ll. 650-51)

The melancholy humor is also engendered and increased not only by the passions of the mind, but also by physiological causes, namely, diet, surroundings, and



exercise. All are found in Samson Agonistes. Diet was considered so important by Galenic physicians that it was often thought to be the sole cause (and cure) of diseases. Diets were used to increase or lessen humors to preserve a healthy temperament. Walkington states a prevalent Renaissance belief: "Good diet prolongs the days of man" (p. 44). Conversely, the wrong type of diet was fatal.<sup>42</sup> Lemnius, fol. 17<sup>v</sup>, stresses the function of diet as a factor (along with education) that alters the disposition of a person. Noblemen who could afford choice meat and drink (that is, partridges, hares, raisins, and wine) were, because of a generated good temperature and disposition, more prone to "frame themselves and theirs to a very commendable and civill behavior" than their "pezantly countreyne." The traditional diet of the latter was leeks (in fact, all vegetables), black bread, oats, barley, and dairy products, their common drink, sour whey or "water of the puddles."<sup>43</sup> Good "meat" (food) was supposed to engender good blood, while "grosse and viscuous meate causeth obstruction in the liver . . . and stopeth the pores of the whole body by a grosse blood," states Mackluire, p. 81. Samson's food at the mill is described by him as "the draff of servile food" (l. 574), where "draff" meant in the seventeenth century "Refuse, dregs, lees; wash or swill given to swine," (OED).

Renaissance physicians, like Bright, p. 26, prohibit the eating of any food "too olde" or "too long kept" on

grounds that it is detrimental to health. It is no wonder that Samson suspects that he will one day be "consumed" by his unwholesome food. The adjective "servile" that Samson uses to describe his food had a strong pejorative sense to Milton and the Englishmen of his day; it is therefore a means of underscoring the poor quality of his food. The word "vermin" in

Till vermin or the draff of servile food  
Consume me

(ll. 574-575)

suggests, following Batman, fol. 385<sup>r</sup>, the corruption of the food; "vermin" could refer to maggots (that were believed to be generated spontaneously from rotten flesh), his diseased body (as worms were thought to be produced in the body by the corruption of the humors), or his filthy surroundings (that is, his comrades in the prison, the slaves and asses).

All humors are also affected by "air" or what was understood then to mean climate and surroundings. According to Walkington, the healthiest air that protects the "spirits" is "illuminated" and "pure" (p. 100). Neither "too hote or cold, moist or dry," but "cleare and light," it, as Makluire believes,

revives the spirits, purifies the blood, procureth appetite, helpeth the digestion . . . rejoiceth the heart, quickeneth the senses, sharpeneth the wits, fortifieth the members, so that all actions of the body animals, vitals, and naturals are made better by it (p. 65).

On the other hand, unwholesome air is "stinking or corrupted with ill vapours, near to draughts, sinks, dunghils,

gutters"<sup>44</sup> and "close which neither wind nor sunne doth penetrate, nor purge."<sup>45</sup> Bright also mentions the current belief that air which is "thick and grossehumie, marrish, mistie, and lowe habitations, are hurtful to persons disposed to melancholie" (p. 31). Other physicians and writers were more explicit on this point. Cogan in The Haven states that "unwholesome air corrupts the body to scabs and other infirmities" (p. 9). Batman explains that thin air, the nearest to Heaven, cleans the liver by mixing with it and so strengthens life. But the nearer to the earth the air is, the colder it is and more "vaprous," and so the more destructive to the body (fol. 157<sup>r</sup>).<sup>46</sup> The clearest explanation to my mind is provided by William Folkingham in Pamela Medica: The Fruitfull Nourse of Sound Health (London, 1627, p. 49): "Air being very moist in wet weather passing into the body through the dilated pores occasions defluxions." The OED lists the seventeenth century meaning of the word "defluxions" as "a flowing or running down" and "a supposed flow of 'humors' to a particular part of the body in certain diseases." As Fink and Stroup have pointed out, Milton was familiar with the climatic theory.<sup>47</sup>

Confined to a prison, a dungeon, Samson describes his unwholesome surroundings in much the same terms. It is a place

Where I a prisoner chain'd, scarce freely draw  
The air imprison'd also, close and damp,  
Unwholesome draught.

(ll. 7-9)

So out in the open air, a rare occasion for him, he feels the "amends" of the clean breeze of dawn, "The breath of Heav'n fresh-blowing, pure and sweet" (l. 10). This line, aside from its religious and metaphorical implications recalling the thin "vernal" air in Paradise and Heaven,<sup>48</sup> is based on the current physiological concept that the thin, clear air is a cure for melancholy. Milton uses this information in line 628 also, where Samson laments that no herb or medicine can assuage his diseases, "Nor breath of Vernal from snowy Alp." His "sores" (ll. 184-86) and "immedicable wounds" (l. 620) may be seen as effects of corruption by, among other causes, unwholesome air. One point certainly deserves notice here. The "common Prison" is not only an unwholesome place and therefore a cause of melancholy, but it also is an apt image in the poem. It reflects the "cave of melancholy" which, according to Lyons, was a basic feature in iconographical representations of melancholics. This detail is based upon physiological explanations that the melancholy man haunted dark places and was shut up in caves and dens. Also, because he was literally imprisoned by the gross humor, the melancholic tended to see the world as a prison.<sup>49</sup>

Samson's spirits are also weakened by hard labour. Although his physical strength is supernatural (in fact, contingent upon God's grace), he is, on the human level with which the poem is also concerned, like us, susceptible to attrition caused by physical and mental exertions. His

excessive grinding at the mill,

Put to the labour of a Beast, debas'd  
Lower than bondslave

(11.37-38)

is unmitigated by periods of rest and sleep. Were it not for the feast of Dagon, the Philistines would have been unwilling to grant him rest (11. 12-15). He refers to his work as "toil" (l. 5) and drudgery (l. 573). In the opinions of Renaissance writers such immoderate labour undoubtedly corrupts the blood by increasing black bile and thus reducing the heat of the body. Walkington writes that "Vehement motion corrupts the spirits" (pp. 100-101).<sup>50</sup> Rest and sleep are necessary; otherwise the spirits "languish and pine away."<sup>51</sup> To "cherish" his spirits and preserve a well-ordered sanguine disposition, Cogan advises his nobleman to take only a measure of pleasant exercise, like tennis or hawking, and that at a special time in the day, usually "before meate" (p. 8). In his treatise on nobility, Nenna explains that "Corporall and base exercise doth bring contempt unto the nobility of bloud, and convert it into his contrary" (p. 77). Consequently, Bright forbids heavy exercise or work for melancholics on grounds that it engendered black bile (pp. 249-50). But, ironically, such hard labour was the inescapable fate of melancholics. Generally poor and considered baseborn, they could procure only the meanest work. As Burton explains, the "Gentry scorn the commonalty, and will not suffer them to match with them; they depress, and make them as so many asses to carry

burdens" (p. 500). Melancholics were usually depicted as tanners, farmers, blacksmiths, grave-diggers and the like. Samson's work at the mill places him as one more figure among those oppressed melancholics, plodding at their hard work in iconographic representations of the "children of Saturn."<sup>52</sup>

Other traditional features of melancholy in Samson that were also used as iconographic images have already been noted by Raymond Waddington in "Melancholy" (pp. 262-63): the stinging hornets (ll. 20-21, 623) to be taken also as symbols of God's wrath, Samson's sleeplessness (ll. 629, 459), and his slavish rags (ll. 122, 415).<sup>53</sup> Low, in The Blaze of Noon, pp. 38-43, has discussed Samson's physical isolation (ll. 15-17). The ass, which according to Lyons is the most common figure in iconographic representations of melancholy (p. 89), is also present in the poem as a "comrade" of Samson (l. 1162).

One important point about Samson's physical stature needs to be mentioned here. As David Shelley Berkeley has observed, neither the book of Judges nor the poem depicts Samson as a giant, although some Miltonists and Biblical commentators have treated him as such.<sup>54</sup> The poet's view of Samson is that of the Talmud, Luther, and St. Augustine. Berkely further describes how a giant Samson, equivalent to Charles Atlas or Arnold Schwarzenegger, would be absurd given the Biblical belief that all giants are evil and the thematic implication of the Samson story which stresses the

distinction between fiducia in Deo and fiducia carnalis. Thus, Milton's Samson, of an average physique to begin with, is further debilitated by melancholy.

One further point needs yet to be discussed. When Harapha appears, Samson is a fettered captive with gyves around his ankles. His servitude and task at the mill are degrading according to both Hebraic and Renaissance social standards. As he says, he is doing the labour of a beast among slaves. According to the scriptures, grinding at the mill in the household was done by a woman or a female slave (Exod. 11.5; Matt. 24.41; Job 31.10; Jer. 42.2), so it was the utmost dishonor for Samson to be condemned to this work. His debasement and servitude, obviously of great concern to him, are repeatedly referred to and in one sense reflect his physical degeneration. He speaks of his "bonds under Philistine yoke" (l. 41) and the infuriating habit of his enemies to stare at him and insult him (l. 112-14). Burton in The Anatomy, pp. 289-93, includes an interesting discussion on how "Scoffs, Calumnies, bitter Jests" cause melancholy. Samson laments the

base degree to which I am now fall'n  
These rags, this grinding.

(ll. 414-415)

He uses the pejorative word "servile" to describe his work (ll. 5, 413). The Renaissance gentleman would even look with more scorn on Samson's servitude than a Hebrew. In her study of the occupation suitable for the gentleman, Kelso in Doctrine of the English Gentleman, p. 42, writes that his

choice of a profession must rest upon a "liberal, not servile, character, that is, upon its demand for mental rather than manual ability and dexterity." Peacham remarks in The Compleat Gentleman, p. 13, that a nobleman will lose his civil nobility if he exercises any manual occupation. Mention has already been made of the corrupting effects of hard labour on the blood (see pp. 46-48 above). Servitude was also considered destructive to the wits. "Servitude is a great evil," writes Charron in Of Wisdome, p. 220. Burton is most imaginative in his exposition of the relationship between servitude and melancholy. Quoting Lucian, he expresses pity for the miserable prisoners who "must abide that filthy stink and rattling of chains, howlings, pitiful out-cries, that prisoners usually make: these things are not only troublesome but intolerable" and could lead to death (p. 295). Thus also Felipe in The Counsellor, p. 42: "Servitude causeth a man to lose his understanding." Samson echoes this standard Renaissance belief almost word for word as he wonders at the Philistines for commanding him to perform feats of strength in the temple:

Can they think me so broken, so debas'd  
 With corporall servitude, that my mind ever  
 Will condescend to such absurd commands?  
 (ll. 1375-37)

Low sees Samson's appearance, his shameful task at the mill, his vermin, and his rags as reflections of "his apparent loss of a free man's integrity" (p. 44).

However, in spite of the prevalence of these causes and



symptoms of melancholy in Samson and his surroundings, he is certainly no dim-witted melancholic. His mental vigor is untouched by melancholia. He is able to argue rationally with the chorus and his visitors, and to remember keenly his past actions.<sup>55</sup> Thus in his description of Samson, Milton lays the ground for Samson's later growing confidence and assertion of free will in trusting his God. In the encounter with Harapha, as will be discussed in Chapter V, Samson is ready to engage in judicial combat.

Thus by the use of physiological ideas and terms and traditional iconographic features, Milton successfully establishes Samson as a sickly melancholic so utterly debilitated and wasted by disease that when the chorus takes a look at him lying ignobly on the ground, it cannot help uttering: "O change beyond report, thought, or belief!" (l. 117), and in amazement it asks,

. . . Can this be hee,  
That Heroic, that Renown'd,  
Irresistible Samson?

(ll. 124-26).

Manoa also remarks the noticeable change in Samson:

O miserable change! Is this the man,  
That invincible Samson, far renown'd  
The dread of Israel's foes . . .?

(ll. 340-42)

The remedies for excess black humor in the body are easy to administer if available: balms to the sores, nourishing food, cooling herbs, the open air, music, restful sleep, and the healing words of friends.<sup>56</sup> But for Samson's intense grief, the rectifying hand of God is needed. As Burton

states in Anatomy, pp. 950-51, the remedy for such intolerable pain is not mere "Physick." Samson must wait for a "spirituall physicke"<sup>57</sup> which comes in the form of the giant Harapha.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Much of the information in Chs. III and IV of this dissertation is published in the following article that my dissertation director, Profesor David Shelley Berkeley, and I co-authored: "Samson the Base Versus Harapha the Gentle," MiltonQ, 17 (1983), 1-7.

<sup>2</sup>A Commentary upon the Whole Booke of Judges (London, 1615), p. 614.

<sup>3</sup>All Biblical citations and quotations in this study are from the KJV.

<sup>4</sup>Twelve Prophetical Legacies or Twelve Sermons upon Jacob's Last Will and Testament (Cambridge, 1612), pp. 136, 142.

<sup>5</sup>On this point see Henry Ainsworth, Annotations upon the First Book of Moses (London, 1616), n. pag; Thomas Hayne, The General View of the Holy Scriptures (London, 1640), p. 90; also Calvin, in A Commentarie upon the Firste Booke of Moses, Called Genesis trans. T. Timme (London, 1578), p. 624, undervalues Bilhah's relationship with Jacob as "adulterous" although God in the course of time gave the relationship "the honour of wedlock."

<sup>6</sup>See Hayne, p. 90; Andrew Willet, An Harmonie upon the Second Booke of Samuel (Cambridge, 1614), p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>The Counseller, p. 54; The Blazon of Gentry (London, 1636), p. 313; see also Markham, p. 46; Osorio, fol. 8<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>8</sup>"Dan," The Jewish Encyclopedia; A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John (1920; rpt. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), I, p. 207.

<sup>9</sup>Commentarie upon the Booke of Judges (London, 1584), fol. 8.

<sup>10</sup>For sixteenth and seventeenth-century views on the tribes, see Peter Martyr, fols. 8-19, and Hayne, pp. 8-20.

<sup>11</sup>The Works of John Milton, ed. Frank Patterson, et al. (Columbia Univ. Press, 1931-40), 15. 205, hereafter cited as Works. All quotations from Milton's prose will be from this edition and referred to in the text.

<sup>12</sup>On this point see Berkeley and Khoddam, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup>A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1930), p. 52; also Andrew Willet, Hexapla Genesin, 2nd ed. (London, 1632), p. 459.

<sup>14</sup>Solomon ben Isaac, called Rashi, Commentaries on the Pentateuch, trans. Chaim Pearl (New York, Norton, 1970), p. 242.

<sup>15</sup>See Francis Junius, Apocalypsis: A Briefe and Learned Commentarie upon the Revelation of St. John, trans. from Latin (London, 1592), fol. 22<sup>r</sup>; John Bale, The Image of Both Churches (London, 1570 [?], fol. 97<sup>r</sup>; Cowper, p. 900; Thomas Brightman, A Revelation of the Revelation that is the Revelation of St. John (Amsterdam, 1615), p. 248; Joseph Hall, Contemplations upon the Principall Passages of the Holy Storie (London, 1628), p. 942; William Fulke, Praelections upon the Sacred and Holy Revelation of S. John, trans. from Latin George Gyffard (London, 1573), p. 46.

<sup>16</sup>trans. from Latin James Sanford (London, 1582), fol. 93<sup>v</sup>; see also Constantine Costas, The Revelation of Jesus Christ (New York: Carlton, 1963), p. 176. For a detailed discussion of the Dan Antichrist legend, see Bousset, The Antichrist Legend (1895), pp. 112-15.

<sup>17</sup>On Milton's use of this detail, see H. F. Robins, "Satan's Journey: Direction in Paradise Lost," Milton Studies in Honor of H. F. Fletcher (Urbana, 1961), p. 101.

<sup>18</sup>Berkeley and Khoddam, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Samson Agonistes, John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey, 1957), l. 171. Hereafter references to lines from Samson as well as from other poems will be from this edition and cited in text.

<sup>20</sup>Markham, p. 22; see also Osorio, The Five Bookes, fol. 33<sup>r</sup>, where Osorio mentions Dionsiodrus of Trezene in Greece who bragged so much of his line but had a "foolish" and "untowarde" progeny; Peacham, The Compleat Gentleman, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup>See Josephus: Complete Works, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1960), pp. 118-19; also Peter Martyr, fol. 205<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>22</sup>Arthur E. Barker, "Structural and Doctrinal Pattern in Milton's Later Poems," Essays in English Literature. . . Presented to A. S. P. Woodhouse, ed. Millar MacLure and F. W. Watt (Toronto, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 177-78.

<sup>23</sup>Louis Martz, "Chorus and Character in Samson Agonistes," MiltonS, I (1969), 122.

<sup>24</sup>Ann Gossman, "Milton's Samson as the Tragic Hero Purified by Trial," JEGP, 61 (1962), 536.

<sup>25</sup>Milton (London: Chatton and Windus, 1956, p. 283.

<sup>26</sup>Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1937), p. 120. See a detailed review of recent criticism on Manoa in Low, pp. 123-32.

<sup>27</sup>"The Meaning of Manoa," MiltonQ 8 (1974), 48-49.

<sup>28</sup>Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), pp. 2, 6.

<sup>29</sup>For a comprehensive study of intertwined ideas on melancholy see Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malady: A Study in Melancholia in English Literature from 1580-1642 (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), especially pp. 65-67; see also his article "The Background of 'Il Penseroso'," SP, 37 (1940), 257-73; and Francis R. Johnson, "Elizabethan Drama and The Elizabethan Science of Psychology," English Studies Today, ed. C. L. Wrenn and G. Bullough (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 111-19.

<sup>30</sup>Milton and Science, p. 209; Arthos in "Milton and the Passions," pp. 211-12, also thinks that Milton is exploiting a rather "crude psychology," especially in ll. 599-601, 606-32 of Samson.

<sup>31</sup>Z. S. Fink has suggested in "Il Penseroso, line 16," PQ, 19 (1940), 309-13, that Milton knew Burton well; George W. Whiting in Milton's Literary Milieu (New York: Russel & Russel, 1964), pp. 129-76, notes parallels between Milton and Burton; William J. Grace, "Notes on Robert Burton and John Milton," SP, 52 (1955), 578-591, suggests also that Milton knew the "psychiatry" of his time and points out more parallels between Burton and Milton; Waddington and other critics have discussed Milton's knowledge of Paracelsian medicine (see n. 14, Ch. I). Milton's knowledge and use in his works of the climatic influence on personality and its relationship to melancholy have been explored by Z. S. Fink in "Milton and the Theory of Climatic Influence," MLQ, 2 (1941), 67-80 and Thomas B. Stroup in "Implications of the Theory of Climatic Influence in Milton," MLQ, 4 (1943), 185-189.

<sup>32</sup>A Treatise of Melancholy (1586; rpt. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1940), pp. 184-85; see also Sir Thomas Elyot, The Castell of Health (London, 1595), p. 95.

<sup>33</sup>Andreas Laurentius, A Discourse of the Preservation of Sight, trans. Richard Surphlet (1599; rpt. London: Shakespeare Association Facsimile Text Society, 1940), p. 82. This point has been discussed by Lyons, p. 13, and Waddington, p. 263.

<sup>34</sup>The element of darkness in the poem, both physical and spiritual, is wonderfully appropriate because on the physical level it can function as an image of the black melancholic humor which darkens the mind and so reinforces the black religious despair of the protagonist. See pp. 41-42; Waddington, p. 268, suggests the same point.

<sup>35</sup>As quoted by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 78.

<sup>36</sup>The italics in these and the following lines from Samson in this section are mine.

<sup>37</sup>On this interesting point see Babb, pp. 119-20; Lyons, p. 22; Waddington, p. 262, erroneously believes that this gesture is contrary to traditional representations of melancholics resting the cheek on one hand; Mary Ann Radzinowicz in "The Distinctive Tragedy of Samson Agonistes," MS, 17 (1983), p. 256, briefly mentions these iconographic features of melancholy.

<sup>38</sup>For example, the downcast eyes in "Il. Pens.," ll. 40-44; the image of the cowslips hanging the "pensive head," "Lyc.," l. 147; the melancholic fallen angels with "looks / Downcast and damp," PL I. 523, and their "drooping cheer," PL IV. 495.

<sup>39</sup>cf. the description of old age as "A melancholy damp of cold and dry / To weigh thy spirits down" PL XI. 544-45, and Comus, ll. 809-13, where melancholy is associated with "drooping spirits."

<sup>40</sup>Klibansky, Saturn, plates 31, 32-33, 38-40. About plebeian odor see Brents Stirling, The Populace in Shakespeare (Columbia Univ. Press, 1949), pp. 70-73.

<sup>41</sup>See Svendsen, p. 183; Lemnius, fol. 10<sup>r</sup>; Elyot, p. 5; and Batman, fol. 32<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>42</sup>For a general view on the significance of diet, see, for example, Batman, fol. 79<sup>r</sup>; Bright, p. 26; Jacques Guillemeau, Childbirth (London, 1612), pp. 13, 189; Makluire, p. 81; James Hart, KALNIKA, or The Diet of the Diseased (London, 1633), p. 9; Huarte, Ch. 4, p. 34; also Burton, pp. 188-203.

<sup>43</sup>Desiderius Erasmus, An Epystell unto Christofer Byshop of Basyle (London, 1530), p. 47.

<sup>44</sup>Thomas Cogan, The Haven of Health (London, 1636), p. 8.

<sup>45</sup>Ronsovius, The Preservation, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup>On the effects of "air" see also Guillemeau, Childbirth, p. 11; Ferne, p. 48; Burton, pp. 206-10.

<sup>47</sup>See n. 31 above.

<sup>48</sup>cf. PL IV. 264, which refers to the "vernal" air in Paradise; PL XI. 284-85, where the air in Paradise is "pure;" and PL XII. 76-78, where the air in Heaven is "thin."

<sup>49</sup>I follow here Lyons' interesting discussion in Voices, pp. 14, 44, and 151. Milton also used the cave image in relation to melancholy in "Il Pens.," l. 171, and "L'Allegro," l. 3. See Walkington, fols. 67<sup>v</sup>-68<sup>r</sup>; also Laurentius, pp. 82, 89.

<sup>50</sup>See also Cogan, p. 10; Lemnius, fol. 9<sup>v</sup>; and Burton, p. 210.

<sup>51</sup>Cogan, p. 12, Cleland, The Institution, p. 213.

<sup>52</sup>Klibansky, plates 31-33, 38-40.

<sup>53</sup>See also Klibansky, p. 195, where unclean garments are said to be associated with melancholics.

<sup>54</sup>"On a Common Error Respecting Samson's Size and Musculature," ELN, 19 (1982), pp. 260-62. Also, see Berkeley and Khoddam, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup>Berkeley and Khoddam, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup>These cures are summed up by Coeffeteau, pp. 347-48; Walkington, pp. 100-01; Wright, pp. 65, 160; Lemnius, p. 530. Some are scattered throughout Samson.

<sup>57</sup>de La Primaudaye, The French Academie, p. 586; Richard Rogers, A Commentary, p. 766.

## CHAPTER IV

### HARAPHA THE GENTLE

As the Philistine giant looms into view, his character is deftly established by the apprehensive chorus. It perceptively observes that

. . . a rougher tongue  
Draws hitherward . . . his look  
Haughty as is his pile high-built and proud.  
(ll. 1066, 1969-70)

True to this description, and, as one may imagine, with a disdainful glance at the intimidated Danites, Harapha begins to extol his noble stock. The lines suddenly overflow with blustering first person pronouns:

. . . I am of Gath;  
Men call me Harapha, of stock renown'd  
As Og or Anak and the Emims old  
That Kiriathaim held: Thou knowst me now  
If thou at all art known.  
(ll. 1078-1082)

Harapha is Milton's own creation to the extent that he is not a character in the Biblical narrative of Samson in Judg. 13-16. But the very same word is in the Hebrew scriptural text, some translations of the Bible like the Geneva, the Chaldee text, and the Septuagint.<sup>1</sup> In some Biblical translations and church fathers' commentaries the word "Harapha" or "Rapha" is used as a proper name for the nameless giant in II Sam. 21.16-28 and I Chron. 20.4-8. It



is translated "the giants" in the Geneva gloss on these passages. Willet in An Harmonie Upon the Second Booke writes that the word "Harapha" actually means "a giant" (p. 124). However, M. Seligsohn in "Giants," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1912, translates the word as "the giant," Ha being the definite article and rafa, the Hebrew word for giant.<sup>2</sup> This nameless giant in the scriptures was the father of four giants, the most famous of whom being Goliath (who was six cubits tall and a hand breadth), and the most mysterious and awesome being another nameless one described as having six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Carrying thus a common name, Milton's Harapha is established as a representative of all giants, containing in himself the essential qualities of his race.

As the French scholar Jean Céard tells us in his impressive work on giants, gigantism was a familiar theme in the sixteenth century in disputations about the creation and history of the world.<sup>3</sup> Gen. 6.4 provides a point of departure for any discussion on the giants:

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the Sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

Biblical exegetes who believed in the actual existence of giants (and there were many that interpreted the giants only allegorically) were divided into two main groups regarding the meaning of "Sons of God." An earlier group composed of Josephus and several church fathers like Irenaeus,

Lactantius, and Eusebius explained "Sons of God" as the fallen angels. Another group led by St. Augustine believed that the Biblical phrase referred to the godly sons of Seth.<sup>4</sup> In any case, as St. Augustine explains, they were giants and their offspring were giants, though there were some that were not (City of God, XV.23). He also describes them as experts in military skills.<sup>5</sup> Some other Biblical exegetes also explained the phrase "men of renown" describing the giants in Gen. 6.4 as a reference to their heroic virtue and might, qualities that brought them fame and glory. Eusebius considers the Biblical passage the origin of the Greek Titan and giant myths.<sup>6</sup> Josephus also holds the view that the giants' acts resembled the heroic acts of "those whom the Grecians called giants" (p. 28). Steadman notes that in Castellian's Latin translation of the scriptures, the giants are termed "heroes" (p. 179). Peter Martyr also relates them to Turnus in the seventh book of the Aeneid and the heroes of war in the sixth book of the Illiad (fol. 16<sup>v</sup>).

Two other similarities link the Biblical antediluvian giants with the Greek Titans, and also with such ancient heroes as Aeneas, Hector, Achilles, Sarpedon, and Hercules. The first is alluded to by Ainsworth in Annotations Upon Moses where he calls the Biblical giants "sons of the earth" (n. pag.). The Renaissance also held that the Titans were "Terrae filii" as most contemporary dictionaries defined them.<sup>7</sup> In a stroke of pagan-Christian syncretism, Milton

himself also links Satan with "Titanian, or Earth-born, that warr'd on Jove" (PL I. 198). The other more noteworthy affinity between the antediluvian giants and the Titans is their divine parentage. According to the Renaissance belief that blood qualities are transmitted through heredity, it can be argued that the antediluvian giants, though evil from the Biblical point of view, possessed the clearest noble blood of the first degree running through their veins because of, according to one tradition, their direct descent from the fallen angels. Milton successfully employs this detail in Paradise Lost. Satan, the archetype of all fallen angels, possesses the best degree of blood. Wounded by Michael's sharp-edged sword during the war in Heaven,

A stream of Nectarous humor issuing blow'd  
Sanguine, such as Celestial Spirits may bleed  
(VI. 332-33)

Peter Matyr remarks in language that recalls Renaissance blood theories: "They [the Biblical giants] are of huge stature because of strong naturall heate, and also a moysture which abundantly and largely ministreth matter" (fol. 17<sup>v</sup>). In A Commentarie upon . . . Genesis, p. 175, Calvin admits that "there is no doubt that they [the giants] were somewhat more excellent than the common sort of people by which they got them favour and renowne." He calls them in the same passage the "first nobility of the world."

A belief in the giants and their heroic qualities (though they were considered evil for their tyranny as will be demonstrated in Chapter VI) led thinkers who were

concerned with creation and history of the world towards accepting the notion of the senility of the universe. It was difficult to look back on those mighty "men of renown" and not feel with Augustine that the more nature advances in age, the smaller bodies it reproduces (City of God XV. 8). An explicit account of this miserable biological degradation taking place from one generation to another is provided in II Esdras 5.45ff. where God explains to the prophet that in the same way that those born of a young woman are stronger than those born "when the womb faileth," so

Consider thou therefore also, how that ye are less of stature than those before you and so are they that come after you less than ye, as the creatures which now begin to be old, and have passed over the strength of youth.<sup>8</sup>

Peter Martyr holds the same view: "Bodies are lesser now because nature is made more weake." In Homer's time, he says, the giants diminished to only a "meane seven feet" (fol. 17<sup>r</sup>). This popular Renaissance belief in the senility of nature may have been shared by Milton. Fink in "Milton" agrees with this view. He believes that although Milton stated in the 1640's "Natura non pati senium," the idea troubled him in later years (p. 72). It is implied in "Prolusions: An Oration Delivered in the Chapel in Defense of Knowledge," where Milton refers to ancient people as having "excellence of form" (Works 12. 273). It is implied in Paradise Lost, IV, where Adam and Eve are described as

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
Godlike erect, with native Honor clad  
In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all.  
(11. 288-290)

It is implied in the conception of sin as stated by Milton in The Christian Doctrine, that Adam's fall initiated not only moral but also physical deterioration in men:

It [sin] is attended likewise with the sensible forfeiture of the divine protection and favor; whence results a diminution of the majesty of the human countenance, and a conscious degradation of mind (Works 15.205).

In the proem to PL, IX, Milton effectively summarizes the effects of man's disobedience that angered Heaven and

That brought into this World a world of woe,  
Sin and her shadow Death, and Misery  
Death's harbinger.

(ll. 11-13)

The notions of the degeneration of nature and the devolution of the human race operate effectively in Samson. They help in establishing Harapha's superior blood as compared with ordinary man because of his descent from the Biblical giants.

Harapha has every valid reason to boast about his descent from the Biblical giant Og, for through him he can claim a direct lineage from the mighty antediluvian giants. According to rabbinical tradition, Og was the only giant to survive the flood. He was thus a link between the two races of the giants, the antediluvian and the postdiluvian. Seligsohn writes that rabbinical commentaries state that "Noah made a place for him near the lattice door of the ark, through which, because Og had sworn to save Noah and his descendants of all time, he handed his food everyday."<sup>9</sup> Seligsohn also notes that the Talmud identifies "ha-palit," the Hebrew word for the "escaped" fugitive of Gen. 14.13,

with Og. There is a direct reference in the scriptures to Og as the only "remnant of the giants" (Deut. 3.11). Concerning Og's descent from the antediluvian giants Pirke R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanes writes the following commentary:

Atque exterminata est omnis substantia vivens in terra . . . . Praeter Noachum et omnes, qui erant cum ipso in arca . . . . Etiam Praeter Og, regem Basan, qui insedit cuidam ligno ex scalis arcae, et juravit Noacho ejusque filiis, quod illis futurus esset aeternus servus. Quid fecit Noach? Terebravit foramen quoddam in arca et quolibet die porrigebat illi cibum, atque ipse etiam superstes mansit.<sup>10</sup>

In the seventeenth century, Willet, in An Harmonie Upon the Second Booke, p. 124, agrees that during the period of I and II Samuel there was still a remnant of these mighty antediluvian giants. From his study of this subject, Ceard concludes first, that "le déluge n'avait pas été universel, mais avait laissé subsister un 'semen giganteum' dont devaient sortir les géants postdiluviens" (p. 49) and second, that

cette légende fut assez tôt répandue en Occident; elle du même être assez populaire, s'il est vrai qu'on peut la reconnaître sur la peinture murale de Saint-Savin qui représente l'arche de Noé (p. 50).<sup>11</sup>

The "Emims" and the Sons of Anak (or "Anakim"), of whose stock Harapha also boasts descent, are postdiluvian Biblical giants (Nu. 13.22, 33 and Deut. 2.20-22). However, they are linked with the giants of Genesis through the translation of "Emim" and "Anakim" ("giants" in Chaldee and Greek) as "nephilim" in Hebrew, the same word used for the giants of Gen. 6.4.<sup>12</sup> They were also renowned for their

might. Seligsohn observes that in rabbinical tradition, they were also called "gibborim" (the mighty) because their brains measured eighteen ells, and "zamzummim," because they inspired fear.<sup>13</sup> Peter Martyr remarks that the "Emims" were so called because of "the terror which they drove into others by their loke" (fol. 16<sup>v</sup>). The "Anakims," he continues, were "noble and excellently adorned," presumably with golden chains around their necks (fol. 16<sup>v</sup>). These were the giants in comparison to whom the Israelites saw themselves as grasshoppers, "low, weak, base," writes Ainsworth in Annotations Upon . . . Numbers (n. pag.).

Aside from their heroic might, stature, and a presumed nobility of blood through Renaissance Galenic theories the antediluvian giants were well known as experts in war (Baruch 3.26-28). The Midrash describes them also as the greatest masters in the arts of war.<sup>14</sup> Peter Martyr reads the word "nephilim" as "assailants"; Willet in Hexapla explains it as "falling away" because their opponents "fell to the ground for feare" (p. 62). The postdiluvian giants were chronic enemies of the Israelites. As early as Gen. 14.5 they had occupied the coast and were terrorizing the Israelites, the "Emims" holding Kiriathaim, the town that Harapha refers to in his introductory speech. Later, they settled near Carmel (Josh. 17.15), and were so powerful that the valley they inhabited was named after them, the "valley of the giants" (Josh. 15.8; 18.16).

Harapha is not only a giant but a Philistine giant,

that is, of the Caphtarim, who migrated from Egypt or Crete and, having conquered the inhabitants of the Palestinian coast, settled in the large fertile plain. As early as Exodus 13.17 and 23.31 they were in power and were to increase in might during the period of the Judges to the extent that in Samson's time they dominated their mountain neighbors, the Israelites. They were politically well-organized; each of their five capitals was ruled by a king, Gath being the seat of the government and Gaza, the wealthiest and most famous. Their armies were also well-equipped and brave. They were divided into infantry, cavalry, and chariotry. The Philistines were also famous for their civilization, arms, and exotic culture of the Mycenaean type--as well as for their wealth.<sup>15</sup> Their elaborate weaponry perhaps becomes clear when one remembers that Goliath's brigadine (breast plate) weighed 5,000 shekels by itself (that is, 156 lbs. and 4 oz.).

Samson also furnishes us with information about the Philistines' accomplishment in the military arts. The Hebrew messenger in ll. 1616-19 of Samson describes the gorgeous procession in which Samson was led to the temple. The lines also show the Philistines' sophisticated knowledge and skills in the martial arts. Samson was brought in

. . . before him Pipes  
 And Timbrels, on each side went armed guards,  
 Both horse and foot before him and behind,  
 Archers, and Slingers, Cataphracts and Spears.

Harapha himself is completely equipped with the finest



weapons of war. He appears to be a champion of judicial combat (l. 1152) and, naturally, extols the use of glorious arms in his challenge to Samson:

Thou durst not disparage glorious arms  
Which greatest Heroes have in battle worn,  
Their ornament and safety.

(ll. 1130-32)

Considered against the sixteenth and seventeenth-century ideas of the gentleman, these lines acquire great significance. As will be discussed in Chapter V, the code of the duello and its apologists demanded of the gentleman a knowledge and expertise in the art and managing of weapons, namely the rapier and dagger. As Girolamo Munzio asserts in his popular treatise on the duello translated by Vincentio Saviolo and dedicated to Lord Essex, "noble spirits desire to study the profession or practice military arts."<sup>16</sup> He encourages the nobles to study the arts of weaponry because weapons belong to a gentleman (n. pag.). He also writes that it is neither courageous nor wise to fight without sufficient weapons. Fighting with a staff (the "weapon" that Samson challenges Harapha with) is ridiculous and degrading. It makes men like "wilde beastes that wilfullye run upon their own death" (n. pag.). George Silver in his treatise defending the bow, relates military skills to humoral theories. He writes that "the exercising of weapons pulleth away aches, griefs, and diseases, it increaseth strength, and sharpneth the wits, it giveth a perfect judgement, it expelleth melancholy, cholericke and evil conceits, it keepth a man in breath, perfect health, and

long life."<sup>17</sup> Interestingly enough, Milton himself had been an expert in the use of a sword and does not fail to mention this fact when attempting in Second Defense to prove that his blindness is no indication of a loss of valor:

I possess that spirit and strength, that when my age and manner of life so inclined me, I was neither unskilled in handling my sword, nor unpractised in its daily use. Armed with this weapon, as I commonly was, I thought myself a match for any man. (Works, 8. 61).

Harapha, then, presents himself as a descendant from a heroic race which, according to one tradition, is linked to the fallen angels. Disregarding their evil nature for the moment, one has to admit that by worldly standards the giants were renowned for their superb physical stature, their heroic might, and their expertise in war. George Waggoner sees Harapha as a model of the medieval knight of chivalry.<sup>18</sup> Steadman associates him with Achilles and Aeneas on account of his intense desire for military glory and honor.<sup>19</sup> Also, he regards Harapha's boasts and professed concern for honor as characteristics of Hector and Achilles (Milton, p. 157). Steadman also sees him as a Renaissance "gentleman" like "many of the English gentry and nobility of Milton's generation" because of his noble and renowned stock.<sup>20</sup> He also regards him as a type of the "Cavalier," "a Philistine prototype of the royalists and episcopals who supported the Stuarts" ("Harapha," p. 150). Merritt Hughes also considers him as an embodiment of "Cavalier" ethos (p. 535). Renaissance blood theories,

however, invest Harapha with the highest of gentility because of his presumably excellent qualities of blood. According to these theories, it appears that Samson is utterly disqualified for any physical combat with this noble warrior. The odds are strongly against Samson as Harapha approaches him "each limb to survey" (l. 1089).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For full treatment on this subject and a list of other sources, see John M. Steadman, "'Men of Renown': Heroic Virtue and the Biblical Giants," Milton's Epic Characters (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 185-93.

<sup>2</sup>See Eid A. Dahiyat, "Harapha and Baal-Zebub/Ashtaroth in Milton's Samson Agonistes," MiltonQ, 16 (1982), 60.

<sup>3</sup>"La querelle des geants et la jeunesse du monde," JMRS, 8 (1978), 45.

<sup>4</sup>See Don Cameron Allen, "Milton and the Sons of God," MLN, 61 (1946), pp. 73-79.

<sup>5</sup>I follow here Ceard's and Allen's discussions of Augustine, pp. 39 and 75, respectively.

<sup>6</sup>See Steadman, p. 185.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Estienne, Dictionarium Historicum, Geographicum, Poeticum (1671), n. pag.

<sup>8</sup>The Apocrypha, King James Version, ed. Manuel Komroff (New York: Tudor, 1936). All quotations and citations from the Apocryphal Books will be from this translation.

<sup>9</sup>M. Selligsohn, "Giants," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1912.

<sup>10</sup>Capitula R. Eliezer, trans. Guilelmus H. Vorstius (Leiden, 1644), p. 52, as quoted by Ceard, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup>Thus, it seems to me that Steadman, p. 185, erroneously states that all antediluvian giants perished in combats or died in the flood.

<sup>12</sup>Henry Ainsworth, Annotations upon the Fourth Book of Moses Called Numbers (London, 1619), n. pag.

<sup>13</sup>"Giants."

<sup>14</sup>Steadman, p. 180.

<sup>15</sup>See Ira M. Price, "Philistines," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1972.

<sup>16</sup>Saviolo, Vincentio, Vincentio Saviolo his practise. (An unacknowledged trans. of Il Duello of Girolamo Munzio). (London, 1595), n. pag.

<sup>17</sup>Paradoxes of defense wherein is proved the true grounds of fight to be in the short ancient weapons (London, 1599), n. pag.

<sup>18</sup>"The Challenge to Single Combat in Samson Agonistes," PQ, 39 (1960), 82-92.

<sup>19</sup>Milton and the Renaissance Hero (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 28.

<sup>20</sup>"Harapha," A Milton Encyclopedia, ed. William B. Hunter et al. (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1978), p. 152.

## CHAPTER V

### THE COMBAT SCENE AS A MIRACLE

While the Harpaha-Samson encounter is not actually a physical "combat" but more of a verbal judicial combat between two champions who represent two different truths, there are woven into it some elements of the Renaissance duello which pertain to ideas on nobility. There is Harapha, the prototype of the Renaissance gentleman who is appropriately trained in the arts of war and the duello, an exemplar of gentility who, so far as his expertise in martial arts and heredity are concerned, would have gladdened the heart of a Castiglione or a Saviolo, or any other apologist for the martial skills.

Yet what happens in the epeisodion with Samson runs counter to all expectations. First, Harapha defies the code of the duello by attempting to challenge Samson who, to all outward appearances, is baseborn: he is dirty, debased as a slave, and suffering from melancholia. According to rules of the duello, the two combatants must be equal in status and honor.<sup>1</sup> Samson, being lowborn and further debased by captivity and melancholy, is supposed to be incapable of honor, or any virtue for that matter. His blindness is also a cause for infamy and thus disqualifies him from combat, as

Harapha well knows (ll. 1106). Harapha thus may be motivated to challenge Samson by personal reasons, to take revenge on a fallen Hebrew champion.

Second, it is Harapha who rejects the challenge to combat and literally runs away--a shameful action according to the code of the duello. Munzio warns that "hee that should flye were to bee condemned for a wilde man and a coward, and the other should be honoured" (n. pag.). On the other hand, Samson's first words to Harapha, who has just expressed his regret at having missed the chance to fight him in "mortal duel" and so has come to inspect him instead, are harsh, challenging, and even insulting: "The way to know were not to see but taste" (l. 1091), an answer which the giant could not have expected from a physically degenerated blind captive. This answer is not a surprise to the reader who has already witnessed the beginning stages of Samson's regeneration in his preceding encounters with Manoa and Dalila. As has been mentioned in Chapter III, Samson's intellectual vigor has not been affected by melancholy. Thus so far he had been able to resist Manoa's and Dalila's temptations to live in comfort or luxuriousness, respectively. Harapha, however, is a little daunted, but being the true Philistine and the Renaissance gentleman, he praises his refined weapons of war, in order to cast dishonor on Samson's barbaric weapon, the trivial jawbone of an ass, and his fierce brutal methods of fighting. When Samson challenges him with his brute force, his bare hands

(an unwise and crude act according to the code of the duello), the giant cringes, turning into a cowardly figure and begins to spout excuses to wriggle out of the combat. Without his protective weapons, which have become extensions of himself, he cannot fight. The climax of this basically abstract duel occurs when two types of weaponry are pitted against each other: the Hebrew's primitive oaken staff against Harapha's traditional and refined weapons of iron and brass. One feels Samson's fury as he enumerates in detail the weapons of the "common rout" which are extolled by gentles like Harapha but are so contemptible to him:

Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy Helmet  
 And Brigandine of brass, thy broad Habergeon,  
 Vant-brace and Greaves, and Gauntlet, add thy Spear  
 A Weaver's beam, and seven-times-folded shield,  
 I only with an Oak'n staff will meet thee,  
 And raise such outcries on thy clatter'd Iron.  
 (11. 1119-24)

One can imagine the extent of Samson's trust in his "oak'n staff," symbolizing his trust in the "living God." In the heat of the challenge, Samson becomes aware to what extent his strength is God-given and asserts his faith in the mercy and grace of God: "Yet I despair not of his final pardon" (1. 1171). Finally, through challenging Harapha on the physical and spiritual levels, and defending himself against the giant's subtle temptations to despair and discredit God, Samson comes to realize fully that he still is God's champion, a person rais'd

"With strength sufficient and command from Heav'n  
 To free my Country."

(11. 1211-13)



Humiliated, "crestfallen" as the chorus remarks, the giant of Gath leaves the combat scene in defeat, and the rules of the duello and its code of honor are thus turned upside down.

Sixteenth and seventeenth-century Christian writers saw Samson's victory over the Philistines as one more miracle manifesting the Pauline text: "and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (I. Cor. 1.27). In his commentary on the book of Judges, Peter Martyr, referring to Samson, remarks:

The Providence of God conveneth things most base and most light into the glory of the name of God. . . For, for a man with apt and meete instruments, to bring any thing to passe, it is no great matter; but with things unapt and deformed, to fabricate any excellent thyng, this seemeth to pertaine to a cunning woorke-man (fol. 222<sup>r</sup>).

In The Sermons upon . . . Deuteronomie, Calvin also states that Samson's strength and subsequent victory is an indication of divine intervention:

The moral to be learnt is that the Lord may preserve a people if it pleases him although without defence and utterly unfurnished of these inferior helps (p. 1225).

In his discussion on cures for melancholy, Wright in The Passions, p. 162, uses Samson as an example of a miracle and concludes:

It is customary with God, to work miraculous effects by creatures which have either no vertue at all to worke such an effect, or onely a weake resemblance.

David's combat with Goliath, which may be considered as the prototype of Samson's combat with Harapha, is, needless to

say, an established Biblical miracle also. The Geneva Bible gloss on the word "staff" in I. Sam. 17.40 is the following: "ȳ intent that by these weake meanes God might only be knowe to be ȳ author of this victorie." Andrew Willet in An Harmonie upon the First Booke of Samuel (Cambridge, 1607) places David among all those heroes "destitute of outward weapons, that the glorie of the victories should onely redound unto God" (p. 99). In Contemplations, Hall explains the moral of the David-Goliath miracle:

We have no strength but what is given us, and if the author of all good gifts remit his hand for our humiliation, either we fight not or are foyled (p. 1105).

Willet in An Harmonie upon the Second . . . Samuel also uses this miracle to preach that we "ought not to be too confident upon our strength or any other gift, either inward or outward" (p. 13).

In the brief encounter of Samson and Harapha, one also witnesses divine providence working through Samson to produce a reversal of events otherwise not made possible by any human power or natural agency.<sup>2</sup> In The Christian Doctrine Milton defines a miracle in the following lines:

The extraordinary providence of God is that whereby God produces some effect out of the usual order of nature, or gives the power of producing the same effect to whomsoever he may appoint. This is what we call a miracle. (Works, 15.95).

According to the usual order of nature, Samson, a blind captive, wasted by melancholy and malnourishment, and of inferior blood quality to Harapha, could not have mustered enough courage to challenge the mighty Harapha. The fact

that he achieves such a feat is the will of God working to destroy his enemies. This specific miracle may be seen as a regeneration in the Christian sense in harmony with Milton's views of regeneration, a belief several critics have adopted about the whole work.<sup>3</sup> In The Christian Doctrine Milton describes God as creating afresh the "inward man." He infuses "from above new supernatural faculties into the minds of the renovated" (Works, 15.367). Critics have pointed out the divine intervention manifested in the whole work through the homeopathic cures provided by Samson's three visitors.<sup>4</sup> Arthos, in "Milton and the Passions," p. 217, sees Harapha's visit as part of a supernatural direction on the psychological level to bring Samson out of his state of inertia. I should like to argue that the imagery in the poem invites speculation that the encounter with Harapha has been not just a "spirituall physicke" but also a physiological one. As Samson's soul and mind were being purged, his body was also regaining its former health as a result of the miracle. For, according to de La Primaudaye in The French Academie,

Nature is the order and continuance of the works of God, obeying the deitie, and his words and commandments, and borrowing his force and strength from thence, as from his fountaine and originall (p. 172).

Thus when Samson tells the chorus after Harapha has left

Be of good courage, I begin to feel  
Some rousing motions in me which dispose  
To something extraordinary my thoughts  
(11. 1381-83).

"rousing motions" can be read, as Russo perceptively suggests in "'Diffused' Spirits," p. 90, not simply divine "inspiration," which is what it is commonly understood to mean, but also quite literally motion and emotion, sense and feeling resulting from the diffusion (or pouring out) of the animal spirits in the blood through the nerves and the sinews. It is as if Samson's congealed melancholic blood, imprisoned in the heart with the weakened animal spirits, has been heated up and freed to flow through the body and arouse it to a state of health. Low's remarks about the whole work that it

raises doubts, questions, hesitations, alternatives, and mysteries of various kinds, and that it then solves them by one simplifying stroke of divine providence working through Samson (p. 91)

particularly applies to the epeisodion of Samson and Harapha. As Parker suggests, to the reader who certainly knows the catastrophe, Samson's unheroic state when Harapha appears on the scene is a dramatic device to capture the reader's attention and have him focus his thoughts on the mechanism that would have to be used to bring about a total reversal of events (p. 26). This mechanism is, in my opinion, the miracle which anticipates the pulling down of the temple. Steadman in "Harapha" describes the combat scene between Samson and Harapha as a "dress rehearsal for his [Samson's] performance on the Philistine stage" (p. 154). Its pattern, as I have attempted to show, is Biblical. It is God's "spirituall physicke" which transforms all evil into good.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For my discussion of the duello in this chapter, I am indebted to Waggoner, pp. 82-92 and Edith Buchanan, "The Italian Neo-Senecan Background of Samson Agonistes," Diss. Duke Univ., 1952; see also Saviolo and Silver.

<sup>2</sup>Divine providence radiates from the center of Samson Agonistes: the pulling down of the temple is seen by Low to be an indication of divine providence fulfilling with Samson's cooperation "predictions that seemed impossible of fulfillment" (87); Steadman, Milton, views the whole work as a dramatic tension between man's limited foresight and the unlimited wisdom of divine providence "which accomplishes its design against expectation and against obstacles that appear insuperable" (p. 73); Arthos considers all the events in the whole work as proceeding gradually by supernatural direction to restore Samson's character.

<sup>3</sup>For example, Gossman, pp. 535-36; Parker, Milton's Debt, p. 238; Low, pp. 171-72.

<sup>4</sup>See n. 14 to Ch. I above; Low, pp. 53, 61-62; Arnold Stein Heroic Knowledge (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 201.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE COMBAT SCENE AS A TEST OF THE TRUE NOBILITY

In addition to serving as a parallel to the major action of the poem--the victory of God (through Samson) over Dagon (i.e., the pagans) by the spectacular miracle at the temple, the Samson-Harapha episode has thematic implications about nobility. The downfall of Harapha as a result of Samson's expanding faith and energy arouses doubts in the reader as to the validity or the applicability in this instance of the Renaissance standards of blood nobility. Locked in their moral struggle, the blind captive hero and the crestfallen giant are telling arguments about nobility--but other standards and assumptions than blood theories are now at work. The reader is jostled by the miracle at the prison into viewing the growing confidence of Samson at the expense of the cringing Harapha as the triumph of the true nobility. Contingent upon the miraculous reversal of events is a reversal of the standards which the reader was provided with earlier to evaluate the two characters. The new standards that emerge deserve a closer look in order for one to understand Milton's principal views on the true nobility.

Two Miltonic prose passages in particular reveal the author's interest in the traditional debates on whether ancestry or virtue is more essential as a requirement for nobility. They also aptly summarize his view on the subject. While praising the Commonwealth and its leaders at the time in Apology, Milton observes that

knowne and well reputed ancestry, is a great advantage towards vertue one way, but in respect of welth, ease, and flattery, which accompanies a nice and tender education is as much a hindrance another way (Works, 3.335).

The other passage is in his Commonplace Book and is a direct paraphrase from Guillim's A Display of Heraldrie, p. 410:

And our English herald Guillim, though his office consist chiefly about titular dignity, and gentry by birth, yet confesses, speaking of those whom first ancestors were raised for thire worth, that if they want of thire linage or titular dignity, and want thire vertues, they are but like base serving men who carry on thire sleeve the badge of some noble family, yet are themselves but ignoble persons (Works, 18.195).

A swift glance at the lines immediately following this passage in Guillim discloses that the word "vertue" was taken by Guillim to mean a gift bestowed by God and nature and therefore to be placed (with learning) above riches and blood for "Boores may be rich, and Rake-hels may be of ancient blood." So, Guillim concludes with Bartholus' dictum: "Good men and wise men were nobles in God's sight, as rich men and great men were nobles in men's eyes" (p. 410). This conception of virtue is, as we shall see later, not too far removed from Milton's.

Readers of Milton are undoubtedly aware of the poet's

numerous treatments of virtue in both his prose and poetry. Of course, virtue had always been an important element in the moral code of the ideal Renaissance gentleman.<sup>1</sup> Even Castiglione in The Book of the Courtier, which is mostly concerned with civil nobility, includes a lengthy exposition in Book IV on the virtuous behavior of the prince, the contemplative life, and Platonic and divine love. But such moral excellence was generally oriented to what the temporal world honors: service to the king and country or the "public weale."<sup>2</sup> Milton's total absorption with virtue, especially in his three major works, is more in alignment with thinkers of his own century when humanitarian tendencies began to modify the concept of the heroic.<sup>3</sup> Kelso summarizes the changing gentlemanly ideals in the seventeenth century thus:

During the seventeenth century the balance was completely shifted; a distinctly religious point of view colored the handbook for the gentleman, and finally usurped the whole field, turning the complete gentleman in to a Christian gentleman, and hardly a gentleman at all from the point of view of the sixteenth century (p. 107).

W. Lee Ustick similarly affirms: "The tendency was to view the gentleman as the good Christian rather than the Magnanimous man of the ancients, or the complete personality of the Renaissance."<sup>4</sup> To the Puritans in the seventeenth century there was a struggle between the spirit and the flesh, virtue and vice. Writing in retrospect about the seventeenth century, Richard Baxter remarks in 1696 that this century witnessed a war between the spiritual and the



carnal, the Puritans and Cavaliers, the religious who "used to talk of God and Heaven, and Scripture, and Holiness . . . and spend the Lord's day in Religious Exercises" and the gentry who did not trouble too much about God and who were for "dancing and recreation on the Lord's Day . . . and were glad to hear a sermon . . . which lasht the Puritans."<sup>5</sup> In 1630 Richard Braithwaite in his popular The English Gentleman, p. 56, defines the nobles as those who

admire not so much the dignitie of the place to which they are advanced, as they consider the burden which is on them imposed; labouring rather how to behave themselves in their place.

According to Hughes, the Christianized version of the magnanimous man became Job, regarded as a type of Christ, and, to the seventeenth-century reader, an analogue to Samson (p. 264).<sup>6</sup> That is not to say, however, that the change in the ideals of aristocracy was abrupt or conclusive. Kelso observes that in spite of the change, the ideal of the Renaissance "continued to hold men's imagination through the next two hundred years" (p. 163). Evidence has already been given in Chapter II from the works of seventeenth-century writers, like Cleland, Guillim, Charron, Markham, Glover, Powell, Makluire, Wright, and Walkington, for example, who upheld theories of blood nobility, some with more enthusiasm than others. Even the theologian Meriton who in his sermon On Nobility insisted on a levelling of all distinctions, including those of blood, says in the very same sermon that, all the same, Christ was not from an ignoble stock but from the lineage of David.

Markham somewhat paradoxically remarks that a Christian is better born than a pagan (p. 46). Milton's aristocratic ideas, which appear even in his last works, are also evidence that a complete obliteration of distinctions was hardly the most wished for ideal for him, even in the Puritan and humanitarian seventeenth century. The changing ideal, as Hughes remarks, rested more on a fusion or interpenetration of aristocratic and religious concepts of magnanimity (p. 263).

Christian nobility has been fully expounded by the bishops Humphrey and Osorio in the sixteenth century, with other writers contributing essentially the same views. It certainly was not contingent upon eating and drinking well in order to temper excess humors; nor upon the right measure of exercise at a special time in the day. It did not depend upon what Charron terms the "common marks of honor" (Dalila's very words in l. 992): crowns, laurels, prerogative of surname, orders of knighthood (p. 266); nor did it demand as a requisite the elegant attire of Castiglione's courtier riding on his beautifully caparisoned horse on his way to the tournament (p. 116). Drawing on St. Augustine, Peter Martyr in Commentarie rejects blood nobility that associated size with virtue:

Neither the beauty of the body, neither the bignesse of stature, nor strength of the flesh are to be accompted among the chief good things (fol. 17<sup>r</sup>).

Christian nobility also denied distinctions of stock and any

other conventional class distinction: "With God there is no respect either of stocke, honors or person, either of descent or dignity except through Christ," states Humphrey (n. pag.).<sup>7</sup> Meriton also preaches, "Stand not upon the blood you have; as upon the good you do" (n. pag.). In similar words quoted from Prudentius, Milton in his Commonplace Book states that nobility comes not from ancestors or human laws:

As the high-minded Martyr in Prudentius is noble:  
'Let not the blood of my parents make me noble or  
the law of Curia . . . Our existence began with  
the words of God, our Father;' whoso serves Him is  
truly Noble (Works, 18.195).

Denying any importance to vain transitory pleasures and honors which the foolish multitude holds and looking up to Christ as a pattern, Humphrey defines a Christian noble as he who "believeth soundlye and lyveth uprightly" (n. pag.). A Christian noble believes rightly when he fears God and embraces the true faith. He lives uprightly if he loves God and his neighbors, what Osorio terms the right "ordering and disposing of one's life" (fol. 80<sup>r</sup>). More specifically, Osorio defines Christian nobility or the "true nobility" as the

knowledge of felicity, [to] clime higher, and  
advance . . . [the] minde and excellent nature to  
clime higher, to the beholdinge of things in  
heaven, and not regarde the wayne sheene of  
transitory pleasures (fol. 39<sup>v</sup>).

This concept of "felicity," it is to be observed, is similar to the major aspect of Milton's concept of the purpose of education: the "knowledge of God and things invisible"

(Education, Works 4.227). The most conclusive and persuasive statement on Christian nobility comes from Humphrey and deserves quoting in full:

Be thou auncienter then Adam, stronger then Sampson, wyser, and more learned, then Solomon--more upryghte then Abraham. Have thou most Noble and vertuous ancestours, possesse thou all goods, perchase thou all vertues, be skylful in all thynges, be thou Noblest, beste, hyghest, and learnedst yet not but in Chryste onely, mayest thou bee termed Noble; yet shalt thou remaine an unprofitable servant for, with God is no accompte or respecte, eyther of stocke, honour or person, eyther of deserte or dignitie; but through Christe Jesus (n. pag.)

But Christian nobility is not freely available to everybody. At its highest level it is no less than a consequence of God's election. Dante had conceived of this sort of nobility as descending by the grace of God.<sup>8</sup> Osorio believes that true nobility is conferred only when the "minde of some righte Noble personage, have been stirred and moved thereunto, by the especiall instigation, and furtherance of the holye spyrite" (fol. 80<sup>r</sup>). Glover in The Catalogue of Honour, p. 16, makes the same point:

Some, immediatly from God were elected and called unto Nobility . . . and such as God hath ennobled, are of us above all others to be accounted most noble.

Milton refers to this process of election in his Commonplace Book as an "inspiration of God" (Works, 18.195), and "rousing motions" in Samson (l. 1382). Milton's mature understanding of the doctrine of election is that there are degrees of election depending upon individual disposition and inclination. This power to do and will to do good is

bestowed by God upon the select few (the true believers who are to be distinguished from the ordinary believers); or put another way, the specially elected are "the less reluctant, less backward, less resisting" (Christian Doctrine, Works 14.133).<sup>9</sup> Milton's doctrine of Christian election, I believe, is his own way of reconciling his Renaissance aristocratic views, which persistently appear in his works, with Christianity at its highest level. His aristocratic views are revealed in his predominant attitude towards the multitude, which is clearly within the mainstream of standard Renaissance thought. To him the multitude is a "dull rabble" ("Ad Patrem"), a "vulgar mob" ("Sonnet XI"), a "common rout" (SA, l. 674).<sup>10</sup> The Christianization of conventional ideas of nobility, by giving them, so to say, a Christian signification, does explain, as no other argument does, Milton's peculiarly fervent antagonism towards the commoners which springs up even when least expected, that is, in the words of Christ:

And what the people but a herd confus'd  
A miscellaneous rabble, who extol  
Things vulgar, and well weighted, scarce worth the  
praise?

(PR. III, 49-51)

Milton's mature ideas of the true nobility and its corollary, divine election, may be clearly discerned in Samson Agonistes.

Although a Hebrew, the primitive tribesman of Dan mocked by Harapha of Gath was, for the seventeenth-century reader, a Christian saint, and more significantly, a well-

established if unbiblical type of Christ. According to F. Michael Krouse, it is "impossible to suppose that any of Milton's literate contemporaries could have thought of Samson without thinking of Christ."<sup>11</sup> Of course, the locus classicus of this typological conception of Samson is the Pauline text (Heb. 11.32), where Samson is listed among the heroes of faith who are considered forerunners of Christianity (though not called types), especially in terms of their strong faith and suffering. According to Krouse's thorough study, the early church fathers and contemporary commentators on the scriptures saw many specific homologues between Samson's and Christ's stories, some of which Milton used. Samson's lowly state, his conception, his election as a Nazarite, his degradation, and suffering--all strongly marked at the beginning of the poem--are some of his affinities with Christ, a connection that intensifies his anguish to the reader. One affinity between Milton's Samson and his Christ in Paradise Regained that has escaped the attention of critics and scholars, so far as I know, is peculiarly Miltonic: both are described as lowborn. Mention has already been made of the chorus' speech in regard to Samson's low birth. Harapha's sneering attitude towards Samson's birth may be detected in l. 1081:

Thous knowest me now  
If thou at all art known.

More blatantly, Satan scoffs at Christ's birth in Paradise Regained III.413-15:

Thou art unknown, unfriended, low of birth,  
 A Carpenter thy Father known, thyself  
 Bred up in poverty and straits at home.

This homologue has some scriptural authority: Jesus, although from the royal tribe of Judah, was also a Galilean from humble parents, not Jerusalem-born, and Samson from the obscure, mountainous tribe of Dan--so both debarred from earthly nobility. Satan significantly omits Christ's membership in Judah and makes his (Christ's) status depend on Joseph's occupation. Milton posits low birth in both works and then discards it by presenting Samson and Christ as the true heroes regardless of their common birth. This technique represents Milton's characteristic attitude towards the nobility of blood: a natural aristocratic tendency encouraged by humanistic concepts but subsumed by, and sometimes fused with, a fervent Christianity.

As a Christian saint, a hero of faith and a Christ figure, Samson then is clearly in Milton's understanding one of God's elect. Contemporary readers were saturated with commentaries that had established him as God's champion or magistrate. IN words somewhat similar to Milton's, Peter Martyr describes Samson as "not a private man but a magistrate, whom God himself had appointed" (fol. 236<sup>v</sup>). George Whiting remarks that the Geneva Bible underscores the Protestant and Puritan belief that Samson had an intimate spiritual relationship with God.<sup>12</sup> Possibly drawing on such information, Milton stresses Samson's status as a Nazarite (ll. 318-321), God's champion and Israel's deliverer (ll.

115, 1176, 1211-13). He is the true single combatant representing fiducia in Deo (l. 1140-44). The chorus, previously referring to Samson's low birth in ll. 170-72, also marks him not of

. . . the common rout,  
That wand'ring loose about  
Grow up and perish, as the summer fly,  
Heads without name no more remember'd,  
(ll. 674-77)

but as one who is

. . . solemnly elected,  
With gifts and graces eminently adorn's  
To some great work.  
(ll. 678-80)

Treatises on nobility had already listed Samson among the Christian nobles. Osorio, continuing his discourse on the elect Christian nobles who are moved by the Holy Spirit, gives the example of Samson: "Powered upon Jephtha was the spyrite of the Lord; Upon Sampson fell the spyrite of the Lord" (fol. 80<sup>r</sup>). Geoffrey Gates, in The Defence of Militarie Profession (London, 1579), also conceives of the Judges, along with Moses, Joshua and David, as exemplars of divine nobility (p. 39). Finally, to Glover, writing in 1610, Gideon, Jephthah, and the rest of the Judges of Israel were elected and called to nobility (p. 16). Scriptural, patristic, Renaissance, and contemporary treatments of Samson that Milton may have drawn upon, as well as evidence from the poem, support the argument that Milton's Samson is the exemplar of the true nobility, that is, the Christian nobility. The details that had initially suggested his degradation and debasement at the beginning of the poem are



seen to be overweighted at the end with Christian conceptions that elevate him to the rank of a noble. Other details also reinforce this heroic view of him which Milton would have wished to leave his readers with.<sup>13</sup> If Samson was a primitive warrior wielding the jawbone of an ass, his weapon is no meaner than Hercules' club; if he was a sinner, he was a repentant one, a point which is not scriptural but found in the annotations of the Geneva Bible and Biblical commentaries.<sup>14</sup> His inclusion among the heroes of faith in Heb. 11 would suggest his repentance. He is also a famous historical figure; and finally, he proved himself to be still a hero of faith. The story of Samson as Milton weaved it can be seen as the story of an obscure baseborn translated into a champion of Christ.

To the apologists of Christian nobility, all worldly nobility is the image of God's divinity. Resorting to analogical thinking, these apologists saw that conventional nobility grounded upon vulgar opinion (that is, pride, riches, and ambition) was short-lived and counterfeit, a "shadow" of the true nobility. Even civil nobility which spurs noblemen to high achievements in the eyes of the world was also counterfeit. To Osorio, the only true virtue is the one that joins us to God; whereas "all other vertues [are] in no wise to be esteemed as vertues, but the shadowes and false counterfaytes of vertue" (fol. 57<sup>v</sup>). Therefore, all the unfortunates who believe in the standards of counterfeit nobility, he continues, are overwhelmed by "a

miste of darknes" (fol. 55<sup>r</sup>). All who trust in things which are transitory and subject to change are under

a cloude of ignorance . . . hidden in darknes,  
that neyther they could behold any heavenly light,  
neyther sufficiently consider the worthines of  
true Nobility (fol. 59<sup>v</sup>).

In accordance with these basic Christian standards of true and counterfeit nobility, the giant Harapha cannot but emerge as the blustering embodiment of counterfeit nobility. A close examination of orthodox religious thought concerning the giants reveals the extent to which Milton and his contemporary religious thinkers and readers were actually censorious of these monsters' sort of nobility.

While the giants were considered from a worldly viewpoint heroes of renown, as I have attempted to show in Chapter IV, they were nevertheless unanimously condemned by patristic and contemporary theologians for their evil nature. In the Bible all giants are evil. The Hebrew word "nephilim" of Gen. 6.4 was glossed not only as "assailants" but also as "falling away from vertue," and from God.<sup>15</sup> In his Annotations upon all the Bookes of the Old and New Testament (London, 1645) the Puritan John Downname explains "nephilim" as "fallen from true Religion, and falling upon such as were weaker than themselves with Tyrannicall violence and oppression" (n. pag.). Writing in 1569, the physician Joannes Goropius Becanus glosses the Hebrew word "nephilim" "tyrants" as "qui per manum, non per rationem gubernat."<sup>16</sup> These definitions establish the violent and

monstrous nature of the giants. In his commentary on Genesis, Calvin associates them with "violent water, tempests" (p. 75), traditional Christian symbols of evil. As Steadman remarks in "Men of Renown," these explanations of 'Nephilim' in terms of violence and attack, hurling and falling, made the epithet 'Giant' particularly suitable for the rebel angels in Paradise Lost (p. 184). The giants were also consistently condemned by theologians for their fiducia carnalis, or trust in their own strength, exemplified by Goliath's challenge to single combat, an action "much displeasing to God . . . and tending into mischief," writes Willet in his commentary on I Sam. (p. 147).<sup>17</sup> This notion of the giants takes its origin from Ecclus. 16.7: "the old giauntes obtained no grace for their sinnes, which were destroyed trusting in their own strength."

Other passages in the Apocrypha present the giants as prototypes of brute strength devoid of wisdom (Baruch 23.26-28; Sir. 16.17). Later, theologians and exegetes built on these passages a tradition that established the giants as agents of destruction and oppression. For Nu. 13.33, where the giants are also called "sons of Anak," the Geneva Bible has the following elaborate note: "Gyants were so cruel that they spoiled and killed one another, and those that came to them." In Caxton's Mirroure of the World they are associated with "wulves" (p. 69). The giants' brute strength bereft of reason, led them to another sin in the eyes of theologians--the sin of pride. It is true that,

according to Calvin in *A Commentarie on . . . Genesis*, p. 175, they were, as far as their heroic race is concerned, "the world's first nobilitie," but as he continues, it is a "nobilitie that exalted itself by the disdain of others." He then refers to them in the same passage as "violent theeves [whol] by their iruptions have brought detriment and decay to the world." Their pride "breeds the contempt of God" (p. 175). Because of his ruthlessness and his insistence that might is right, Lucifer was consigned to hell in the scriptures (Isa. 14.9-15).<sup>18</sup> The Geneva Bible annotations on Deut. 2.20 explain God's destruction of the "Zamzummims" (another name for the postdiluvian giants) as signifying that "those gyãts were drivẽ out for their sinnes: so ỹ wicked whẽ their sinnes are ripe cannot avoide Gods plague." Commenting on the same passage, Ainsworth calls them "presumptuous, wicked-ones"; and Calvin associates them with Satan (p. 71). Milton places these self-styled conquerors and agents of destruction among the perverse sinners in Adam's vision of human history (PL XI.638-96). Although he considers the belief of angels mixing with women a "heresy" (*Of Reformation, Works* 3.21), he employs the tradition that conceived of the giants as offspring of fallen angels in PL III, 448-49, where they are placed in the Paradise of Fools among other sinners

. . . who in vain things  
Built thir fond hopes of Glory or lasting fame.<sup>19</sup>

Neither did Harapha's people, the Philistines, fare better than the giants at the hands of seventeenth-century

theologians. Though a people of an advanced civilization compared with their barbaric mountainous Israelites, famous for their skill in making weapons and artifacts (see Chapter IV), they were, after all, pagans. To preachers like Meriton who believed that the

Honour of the gentiles, with all their wealth, wisdom, policies, pedigrees and whatsoever is of high account, and glorious in the eyes of the world . . . must stoope and lie down, at the feete of a new creature,

the Philistines and all their elaborate culture were suspect from God's viewpoint. Also, their chronic enmity with the Israelites was never forgotten. For that they were considered "inhumane, rejecting the laws of the people of God," and therefore "enemies to God," and like Pharoah and the Cananites a type of the devil.<sup>20</sup> So the word "Philistines" became an ill-reputable, all-embracing term used by the English to cast obloquy on the "enemies of England," be they the papists or others.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, there was a current belief, expressly stated in Thomas Cooper's popular Thesaurus Linguae Romanae & Britannicae (London, 1584), for example, that the Philistines were "certayne robbers among the Aegyptians which embrace a man to the end to strangle him" (n. pag.). This unflattering view of their origin has historical authenticity and has received the support of modern scholars also:

The prevailing opinion among scholars is that the Philistines were roving pirates from some northern coast on the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>22</sup>

Some modern scholars have attempted to relate Samson to

Milton's contemporary England. In her study of the poem's relation to the Puritans, Miriam Muskin observes that Samson represented the ordinary citizenry of England and the Philistines, the wicked Kings.<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Jose regards the Philistine empire in Samson as an analogue to the Restoration state: imperial, showy, martial, false, and transient.<sup>24</sup>

It is easy then for the seventeenth-century reader who is exposed to those orthodox views on the giants to come to see Harapha for what he really is beneath his heroic costume--a negative exemplum of the true nobility (Christian nobility). In his insatiable desire to challenge Samson to a mortal duel in "camp or listed field" (l. 1087) and thus regain glory and honor for the Philistines, Harapha is the evil champion who trusts in his own strength, devoid of wisdom, and so is damned by the scriptures. He is an embodiment of mens caeca, Samson's own sin before repentance, the "impotence of mind in body strong" (l. 52), "bulk without spirit vast" (l. 1238), strength without virtue (l. 173). Like Goliath, he is not only guilty of shedding blood, according to commentators like Willet, but he is also full of wrath and malice; he spends his days challenging God, which is a "most fearefull thing."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, by giving him five sons, Milton may be using numerical symbolism to suggest Harapha's evil nature: the number five was believed to be ominous.<sup>26</sup> Harapha, whose name stands generically for all the giant breed, represents

his ancestors. Also, the fact that Harapha's sons are giants and the fact that he is descended from the giant Og (see Chapter IV) show that his bloodline is true. He was not a freak. Like begets like.

But, Harapha's boasts of an ancient stock are all in vain; the giants have been exposed by the scriptural tradition in their true evil nature, in the same manner that Harapha has been by Samson. If he was ever thought to be a type of a chivalric knight, or a Renaissance gentleman, he is reduced to a blustering coward by a true champion who weaponless

Made Arms ridiculous, useless the forgery  
Of brazen shield and spear, the hammer'd Cuirass  
Chalybean temper'd steel, and frock of mail  
Adamantean Proof.

(ll. 131-34)

Samson, on the other hand, is

raised by his gifts, not by his birth, indicated  
by his contempt for well-armed warriors and the  
insistence on virtue as definitive of greatness.<sup>27</sup>

Like the giants of old, Harapha of "stock renown'd," boasting his blood nobility, is to the followers of Calvin no more than a symbol of worldly vanity and of those "who in vain things Built their fond hopes of Glorie or lasting fame."<sup>28</sup> Looking back at Harapha, one may be reminded of Humphrey's vivid depiction of the counterfeit nobles,

Importunately boasting their bravery . . . Craking  
their chevalrous facts (in nede none) their fraies  
and scarres [with] open mouth and false and forged  
lyes . . . walowing in excesse, masked in sutes  
and coloures, with impudēt face and hard favour,  
not walking, but roving: belche forth no meane  
matters, but warres, Princes, emperours, Cities,  
castels, realmes" (n. pag.).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman, Ch. V, fully treats the moral code of the gentleman; see also Chapter I above.

<sup>2</sup>Peacham, p. 2; also Cleland, p. 6; Osorio, fol. 24<sup>v</sup>, 73<sup>v</sup>; cf. Charron: "For he is truly and entirely noble, who maketh a singular possession of publicke vertue, serving his Prince and Countrey" (p. 221).

<sup>3</sup>See M. Y. Hughes, "The Christ of Paradise Regained and the Renaissance Heroic Tradition," SP, 35 (1938), 270.

<sup>4</sup>"Changing Ideals of Aristocratic Character and Conduct in Seventeenth Century England," MP, 30 (1932), 155.

<sup>5</sup>Reliquiae Baxterianae (London, 1696), pp. 31-32.

<sup>6</sup>On Job and Samson, see James Hanford, "Samson Agonistes and Milton in Old Age," Studies in Shakespeare, Univ. of Michigan Publications in Lang. and Lit., No. 1, Milton, and Donne (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 173-74; Low, pp. 60-61, 87-88, 141-42, passim; the most thorough study on this subject is Ann Gossmann, "Samson, Job, and the 'Exercise of Saints,'" ES, 45 (1964), 212-24.

<sup>7</sup>This point is also made by Osorio, fol. 14<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>8</sup>Convivio, IV, XV; see Bradbrook, p. 289.

<sup>9</sup>A useful discussion of this doctrine is found in C. A. Patrides, Milton and the Christian Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), pp. 187-219.

<sup>10</sup>Milton's prose also is laced with similar attitudes towards the crowd: for example, Def 2 (Works, 8.151), and Eikon (Works, 5.309), where the crowd is described as the "ignorant multitude" in the first work and the "image-doting rabble," "hopeless herd," "begott'n to servility."

<sup>11</sup>Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), p. 120. This work is indispensable for any study on seventeenth century views of Samson as a Christ figure, especially pp. 35-43, 50-53, 79, passim.



<sup>12</sup>George Whiting, "Samson Agonistes and the Geneva Bible," The Rice Institute Pamphlets, 18 (1951), 18-35.

<sup>13</sup>Parker has noted correspondences between Samson and several classical heroes, especially Hercules, Prometheus, and Oedipus; Krouse also discusses Samson's affinity with Hercules, pp. 44-45.

<sup>14</sup>See Peter Martyr, fol. 236<sup>v</sup>; Rogers, p. 769.

<sup>15</sup>The Geneva Bible; Ainsworth, Annotations upon . . . Genesis, n. pag.

<sup>16</sup>Origines Antwerpianne, Bk. II (Anvers, 1569), quoted by Ceard, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup>See also Peter Martyr, fol. 18<sup>v</sup>; Josephus, p. 28; Rogers, p. 32; Ainsworth, Annotations on Deuteronomie, n. pag.

<sup>18</sup>Hobbes also condemns the giants to hell in Leviathan; on this point see Steadman, "Men of Renown," p. 175.

<sup>19</sup>See PL V.447, and XI.621-22, where he uses the tradition that considers the "Sons of God" as the godly sons of Seth.

<sup>20</sup>This point is treated by Willet, An Harmonie upon the First . . . Samuel, pp. 349, 25; Sebastian Benefield, A Commentary or Exposition upon the first Chapter of the Prophecie of Amos (London, 1629), n. pag.; see also Krouse, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup>James I. King, A Meditation upon 25-29 Verses of the Fifteenth Chapter of the Firste Booke of the Chronicles (Edinburgh, 1603), n. pag.

<sup>22</sup>Ira Price, "Philistines," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1912.

<sup>23</sup>"Wisdom by Adversity:" Davidic Traits in Milton's Samson, MiltonS, 14 (1980), p. 237.

<sup>24</sup>"Samson Agonistes: The Play Turned Upside Down," EIC, 30 (1980), 138.

<sup>25</sup>An Harmonie upon the First . . . Samuel, p. 147; on the evil nature of single combats, see also Willet, op. cit., p. 148; Willet, An Harmonie upon the Second . . . Samuel, pp. 11-12; Cleland, p. 233; Waggoner, p. 91.

<sup>26</sup>On this point see Gunnar Qvarnstrom, Poetry and Numbers: On the Structural Use of Symbolic Numbers. Scripta Minora. Regiae Societatis Humanorum Litterarum Lundensis (Lund, 1966), p. 27.

<sup>27</sup>Radzinowicz, "Medicinable Tragedy," p. 257.

<sup>28</sup>A Commentarie upon . . . Genesis, p. 175.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

This study has, I hope, supplied the evidence that Milton, forever drawing on his vast learning when it suits his purpose, utilized two main traditions to delineate the two combatants, Samson and Harapha: the Renaissance theories of blood nobility supported by orthodox medico-philosophical notions, and the Hebrao-Christian tradition based upon Biblical texts and early and contemporary commentaries. He used the theories of blood nobility which are consonant with his natural aristocratic tendencies mainly for dramatic and thematic purposes, to arouse the reader's suspense and then to deliberately reverse the whole order of events by a miracle patterned upon a Biblical prototype. The miracle establishes the true nobility as a Christian nobility independent of blood and circumstances are divinely granted. It is as if he used these Renaissance notions of gentility in order to expose their shortcomings and assert the necessity for them to be subsumed by, or fused with, a more refined elective nobility, for fear that they may breed in the imagination of the vulgar monsters like Harapha. In Samson Agonistes he accomplishes this purpose in a steady and calculated progression: first by

introducing Samson, the true exemplar of nobility, in unheroic, slavish garb, degenerated by melancholy, while the false exemplar, Harapha, who actually embodies what the vulgar world most honors--power, ancestry, and military skills--struts about with heroic lustre. As the drama proceeds, the giant is disrobed and revealed to be only a monstrous figure stuffed with rags and straws. Steadman's comments on Milton's epics in Milton and the Renaissance Hero also apply to Samson: "The old heroic patterns serve as foils for the new. The new as a yardstick to measure and investigate the old" (p. 16). Pagan nobility that is divested from God (the source of all wisdom and strength) must, like Dagon, stoop to Christ as the pattern of nobility. Yet, ironically, Christ, God's "Only begotten Son," who can thus claim the most divine parentage on the spiritual level, is by human standards of low birth considering his parentage. His genealogy, like Samson's, is nothing to brag about as Milton reminds us in PR III, 413-15. Humphrey energetically preaches in The Nobles that Christ in the form of God humbled himself, "that taking on hym a servile forme, hee became lyke men, and in shape a man Christ is not of

aunciente Monarches of Assiria, Persia, Greece: but of scorned Jewes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob Shepherdes. Not of Queenes or Coye Ladys, but of Thammar, Ruth, Rachel, either strangers, or harlots . . . Joseph the carpenter his father, Mary a humble Mayde his Mother. Not in Hierusalem, but in Bethlem was hee borne.

Christ lay in a manger not a palace, he had fishermen and

Christ lay in a manger not a palace, he had fishermen and publicans as followers not servants, he rode a mule not an ass, and he bore nails not arms. Humphrey then concludes rhetorically: "His genealogy who maye blase?" (n. pag.).

The juxtaposition of the true and counterfeit ideals of nobility adds another dimension to Samson Agonistes. In one sense then, the poem takes its place in the long cavalcade of works that attempted to solve the exasperating riddle "Wherein lies true honor and nobility?" Before Samson a long dramatic tradition reflecting English life depicted the division of society into two classes: the gentles and the baseborns. Medwall, Lyly, Gascoigne, Dekker, Shakespeare, Chapman, Middleton, Brome, Webster, and Ford, among others, comment on gentility and plebeianism. By providing an unambiguous viewpoint unflinching and in a great work of art, it shines above all other kindred works. Concerned with nobility that is contingent upon

. . . the better fortitude  
Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom  
Unsung

(PL IX.31-33)

rather than upon the heroism of

. . . gorgeous Knights  
At Joust and Tournament,

(PL IX.36-37),

Samson Agonistes, like Paradise Lost, rises above what has been attempted before. The Italian Renaissance writer Nenna, like most other exponents of nobility who cleverly bypassed conclusive answers or blatantly contradicted themselves from one page to another, attempts a feeble

reconciliation of terms in his treatise on nobility. After listening for days to a delightful debate between Possidonio, an aristocrat defending nobility of blood, and Fabricio, an apologist of the virtues of the mind, he awards the prize (a ring given by a mysterious lady to both men which each one claims to be his) to Fabricio; the latter, to keep everyone happy, passes it on to Possidonio. For Milton, there is no such shilly-shallying. Nobility descends from Heaven. It falls upon God's elect, the true Sons of God, chosen, as Glover insists in The Catalogue, sometimes "from the plough, out of the field [like] David from feeding of his flock" (p. 16), and, one may add, like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and other Old and New Testament prophets--and, of course, like Samson. The theme of the episode that has been under our consideration, that God is the author of all gifts (Christian Doctrine, Works, 14.363), thus reflects the major Biblical theme of the work. As Richard Rogers preached in the seventeenth century, echoing a Pauline pronouncement that was still alive and reverberating in the minds of the period, "God will serve himselfe by the meaner sort as well as by the mightier and greater when it pleaseth him" (p. 614). It is to demonstrate such a belief that Samson Agonistes was written.

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VITA 2

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