"Of my own accord": Milton's Dialogue with the Rabbis in Samson Agonistes

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Abstract
This thesis examines rabbinic commentaries on the Samson story and the ways in which Milton appropriates or differs from these interpretations. It considers the critical debate over whether Samson's character and violent life are justified and seeks to reconcile critics who justify Samson with those who vilify him. It argues that seeing Samson as a type of Christ, but an incomplete type, at least partially obviates this dissension by making Samson sinful while also allowing his final action to serve the will of God.

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The character of Dalila is first described by Samson, in his opening dialogue with the Chorus, as "that specious Monster, my accomplish'd snare." He also later describes her as "fallacious, unclean, unchaste". Her first words in Milton's poem take the form of a transferred epithet, claiming that she has come with "doubtful feet and wavering resolution", the reason behind this being her fear of Samson's "displeasure". 3785 words - 15 pages underscores the misogyny inherent in his portrayal of the Fall: So rose the Danite strong Herculean Samson from the Harlot-lap Of Philistean Dalilah, and wak'd Shorn of his strength, (IX.1059-62) As we know from reading Milton's Samson Agonistes, Dalila(h) seduces Samson into revealing the secret of his strength (his hair) and then shaves. Milton. Samson agonistes. Edited with introduction and notes. By. In Samson's challenge to the giant Harapha, Professor Masson discerns the expression of Milton's own ' unabated pugnacity, his longing for another Salmasius to grapple with, his chafing under the public silence to which he was enforced in the midst of repeated attacks and insults.' Farther than this it would perhaps be
hazardous to stretch the allegory.