The Struggle against Arbitrariness of Providence: Miltonic Fate in Samson Agonistes

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The Struggle against Arbitrariness of Providence: Miltonic Fate in *Samson Agonistes*

Kotomi Egawa

I

Although Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671) rests on the basis of Judges 13-16, Milton does not merely paraphrase the Bible.[1] Instead, he imbues the biblical tale with the ideas of Greek tragedy, and reinforces certain tragic themes. One such theme is Samson's emotional turmoil between providence and the free will of human beings. The biblical narrative contains no allusion to the matter of Samson's inconsolable lamentation for his own unmerited suffering among the Philistines. Milton, on the other hand, explores his imprisoned hero's heightened sense of wrath and frustration for God's incomprehensible purposes.

Because the Miltonic Samson, toyed with by the inscrutable actings of providence, is characterized by the acute agony rather than by assurance of salvation, scholars have offered various readings that aim to explore the tumultuous and conflicted dimensions of the drama from the standpoint that Milton's dramatic poem incorporates and values the classical literary tradition. Richard Jebb, who is in this critical vanguard, has formulated a simple and lucid definition of the disparity between Hebraism and Hellenism, asserting that "Milton's mind was, in the literal and proper sense, Hebraic."[2] Jebb clearly

states that the "first characteristic of Hellenic tragedy" is a contrast "between man and fate," in the sense that the established rules of Greek tragedy underline the conflict between free will and an inexorable external destiny, and this is not a feature of Hebraic drama.[3] In addition to this significant analysis, he continues "Hellenism contrasts man with fate. Hebraism contrasts God and His servants with idols and their servants."[4] In this respect, it seems reasonable to assume that Milton likewise in *Samson Agonistes* contrasts the Christian hero Samson with pagan champion Harapha, and further the Lord of the Israelites with Dagon of the Philistines.

However, against Jebb's reading, William R. Parker discusses in detail some divine mysterious force, which is to produce the catastrophe at the climax of *Samson Agonistes*, and points out the analogy of the attribution of Hellenic gods at the top of Zeus and Milton's God:

> [...] The Greeks believed that Zeus or some eternal Being, acting in obedience to a universal law of justice which was Fate, interfered in the destiny of men for the mysterious good of the universe. Milton evidently made synonymous the universal law of justice and God. To him, God is not merely the Administrator of a law; God is supreme, and the law is His decree. Apart from this distinction, there seems to be agreement. Fate is a mysterious divine decree, to both Milton and the Greeks. It was divinely decreed that Samson should overthrow the Philistines. The decree was made known before Samson's birth, not by an oracle, but, appropriately, by an angel. Samson realized that this was his 'fate', though at times he doubted.[5]

In his consideration of the conception of fate, Parker insists that the

general conception of fate in Hellenic tragedy is a close counterpart of fate in Milton's drama. That is to say, fate in Hellenism corresponds to the divine decree in Hebraism, and both can be identified as the symbols of the awe-inspiring and unfathomable cosmic order. Further, Parker's reading of the drama observes that "the dominant idea" of *Samson Agonistes* is Christian, and at the same time, "its spirit is nevertheless Greek."[6]

In a sense, Milton's handling of the matter of property of God is consistent with the spirit of Renaissance humanism. Arthur O. Lovejoy emphasizes that Milton is "in many respects a typical mind of the humanistic Renaissance, delighting in the splendor and diversity of the sensible world."[7] When we inquire into Milton's literary commitment to the Renaissance culture, it must be recalled that in *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), his second antiprelatical tract, Milton exhibits his own "ambition to rival Homer, Vergil, and Tasso in epic writing, or Sphocles or Euripides in writing tragedy, or Pindar and Callimachus in writing odes and hymns."[8] Whatever his view on fate and divine justice, clearly, for the fledgling poet, the spirit of archaic art is the artistic culmination which the following literary art should adopt. If Milton's drama is with the spirit of the Greek tragedy, Milton's treatment of Samson's fate manifests the intention of the entire poem, particularly the nature of his most advanced theological perspective. As a means to grasp the definition of Miltonic fate, we shall examine in some detail Samson's regeneration towards disciplined submission in providence's perplexing designs.

II

For Milton, Vergil "remained a real presence, an author whose language could stir the imaginagion."[9] Vergil's *Aeneid*, the myth about the founding of Rome, presents Aeneas as the hero who is played fast and loose with uncooperative divine intention. Aeneas suffers acutely from a sense of his failure as a commander, and yet rouses himself once more to engage in the establishment of a sovereign state in Latium. *Samson Agonistes*, likewise, registers the despairing anguish of the hero and emphasizes the enigmatic and variable providential design. When we comprehend Milton's conception of fate, *Aeneid* offers a promising clue to the signification of Samson's struggle against fate.

Vergil's epic represents the founder of Rome as the wanderer who is trifled with the malicious intent of the goddess Juno. In the second book, Aeneas gives a vivid description of the events at the terror-filled night when the Greeks made a surprise attack on Troy. While he aroused many compatriots to retreat in the face of the enemy, Aeneas became separated from his beloved wife Creüsa. In the presence of Dido of Carthage, as he gives a detailed explanation of the debacle at Troy and his following roaming about the world, he mourns over his own adverse destiny:

> [...] For while I plunge down byways and leave the course of the streets I now, alas! my wife Creüsa was snatched from me by an unhappy fate. Did she halt? Did she stray from the path or sit down in exhaustion? I do not know. Never again was she restored to my eyes, nor did I look back for my lost one, or cast a thought behind, until we came to the mound and ancient Ceres' hallowed home. Here at last, when all were gathered, she alone

was missing and had vanished from the company, her child, and her husband. What man or god did I not reproach in my frenzy?[10]

The crucial matter is Vergil's handling of fate. It is wicked fate that abducts Creüsa, and Aeneas bitterly reproaches fate and his gods for it. Although fate does not intimate to him its intention, he has to submit to the obscure working of the deity. Such power of fate is beyond human rationality, and enervates people who are confronted with it. Vergil depicts fate as some impenetrable mystery that can operate in unsettling ways. It is evident that in this Hellenic epic the arbitrariness of the workings of deity provokes such friction between human beings and fate.

As Vergil displays fate as the awful and enigmatic design, Milton does present providence as unpredictable intention. In the context of *Samson Agonistes*, Milton stresses Samson's graphic lament and growing despair. On his liberal construction of the biblical narrative, Milton chooses to provide a more detailed explanation of the imprisoned hero's psychological condition.[11] The drama opens with tragic woe of Samson:

Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
As of a person separate to God,
Designed for great exploits; if I must die
Betrayed, captived, and both my eyes put out,
Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze [...]. [12]

Samson evinces feelings of wretchedness and despondency at his present state, referring to his previous glorious career: "what once I was, and what am now" (22). Because of lack of willpower, he

succumbed to the temptation of his own wife Delila, and fell into the hand of the idolaters the Philistines, "Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves" (41). Wheresoever he is, he is haunted by "restless thoughts" like "a deadly swarm" (19), and begins to inquire "Why" God selected and inspired him to be his chosen servant. Consequently, that profound humiliation drives him to desperation, and he almost abjures his religion:

> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
> Without all hope of day!
> O first-created beam, and thou great word,
> Let there be light, and light was over all;
> Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree? (80-85)

Here, Samson is "thus exiled from light; As in the land of darkness" (98-99), and bewails his "loss of sight" (67) above all in this abasement. In this context, "light" signifies "the prime work of God"(70), and at the same time, stands for God himself who says, "Let there be light" at the Creation. Thus his expression of darkness is a striking metaphor for his own true feelings and discouragement concerning faith. It naturally follows that the main purpose of Milton's depiction of Samson's blindness is to accentuate Samson's hopelessness of salvation.[13]

Conversely, Milton's detailed consideration of Samson's desperate thoughts illuminates the absoluteness of God's dispensation:

> God of our fathers, what is man!

That thou towards him with hand so various,
Or might I say contrarious,
Temper'st thy providence through his short course,
Not evenly, [...]
[.....]
[...] thou [God] oft
Amidst their height of noon,
Changed thy countenance, and thy hand with no regard
Of highest favours past
From thee on them, or them to thee of service. (667-86)

Milton makes apparent that the hero feels accumulated resentment at divine "providence," of which the words "countenance" and "hand" become an emblem here. Entirely intimidated and cast down by such overpowering authority, all Samson can do is murmur against the bewildering workings of providence. This acute mental torment is caused to Samson as a result of God's "contrarious" and unfathomable ordinance. As such, the principal point of the analogy between Samson and Aeneas is an unrivaled champion, at first who is "heroic, that renowned, / Irresistible" (125-26), then unfortunately suffers misery from the cruel destiny. In their supreme agony, their mutual foremost thought is that theirs are lives of constant struggle against the unworthy working of fate.

It may be worth pointing out that the doctrinal notion in Miltonic providence inflames the imagination of William Blake. In the Blakean view, the arbitrary power of God and Son in Milton's works is intellectually unacceptable and unjust. In Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the great severity of the Hebraic deity leads to the view that the god of Hellenism is more charitable and benevolent than the Lord of Hebraism. Suggesting that "The ancient Poets animated

all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive," and aspiring after such Hellenic religion, Blake greatly deprecates a "system" of "Priesthood" on the ground that in the doctrine of a secular church "Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast" (*MHH*, 11, 1-16).[14] The view of Blake reflects his own theology, where he loudly extols his notion of God as the embodiment of Energy or Desire. To comprehend Blake's critical spirit against Milton's God, it is useful to quote from Blake's pronouncement in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which is the most famous of all Romantic critiques of *Paradise Lost*: "Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it" (*MHH*, 6, 10-13). Likewise many romantic critics, Blake regards the most liberal and powerful character in *Paradise Lost* not as God or Son but as Satan.[15] Furthermore, Blake categorically states that "[in *Paradise Lost*] the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah"(*MHH*, 5, 7). What this passage makes clear is that Blake embraces the dogmatic opinion that Milton's Messiah is an administrator and punisher, as Satan in the Book of Job. According to Lucy Newlyn's psychological analysis of Blake's view of Milton, for Blake "angels and God [in *Paradise Lost*] are dramatizations of the repressive super-ego," and *Paradise Lost* is the place in which there is "a struggle for power between the tyrannical conscious and the oppressed unconscious."[16] Blake demonstrates, very conclusively, that the dimension of Miltonic God is distinguished by the repressive and tyrannical force.

From this perspective, this divine nature in *Paradise Lost*, which Blake interprets as a punisher, corresponds with the image of the deity

in *Samson Agonistes.* In this Miltonic drama God also imposes sanctions on Samson in the same way that God inflicts a heavy punishment for Adam's guilt in *Paradise Lost.* Adam is captured by his wife's beauty, and considers Eve as a kind of perfect being. When Adam decides to eat the forbidden fruit, he cannot restrain his blind love. In the postlapsarian state, however, he concedes that the excessive conjugal love is the prime cause of his own fall. Samson also attributes his error to his own uxoriousness:

> *Sam.* So let her [Delila] go, God sent her to debase me,
> And aggravate my folly who committed
> To such a viper his most sacred trust
> Of secrecy, my safety, and my life. (999-1002)

Using the skillful seduction of Delila, God tends to try Samson's repentance tenaciously, because Samson degenerated into infatuation for his own wife and exposed divine secret to the idolators. In the context of *Samson Agonistes,* those who fail to worship God with proper fear cannot escape God's dreadful and inevitable punishment. God is described not only as infallible judge but also as potential powerful enemy. Milton seems to concur with Blake in the point that Samson can be regarded as a prime example of those who bring down perdition upon themselves as the result of their disregard of the sternness of the Hebraic Lord as the merciless accuser.

III

It is true that the term "fate" does not occur in Milton's *Samson*

Agonistes, but he uses "fortune" (169, 1291) or "necessity" (1666) as close synonyms for the word fate.[17] However, we can assume that Milton suggests the idea fate as a fundamental manifestation of divine force. In his *De Doctrina Christiana,* Milton remarks that the term fate means "a divine decree emanating from some almighty power,"[18] rejecting a pagan concept of fate that it "denotes a principle or force that predetermines all events."[19] And in terms that emphasize its omnipotence, Milton further goes on to discuss the notion of "a divine decree" in this theological work:

> "THE DECREES OF GOD are GENERAL or SPECIAL. GOD'S GENERAL DECREE is that WHEREBY HE HAS DECREED FROM ALL ETERNITY OF HIS OWN MOST FREE AND WISE AND HOLY PURPOSE, WHATEVER HE HIMSELF WILLED, OR WAS ABOUT TO DO."[20]

The decree of God is promulgated by his omniscience whatever it tends to attain. And the divine will proves perfectly right, even if it seems not to pay any attention to probable torment of man which might be aroused through its workings. In this way, Milton takes the definitive stand on a doctrinal controversy concerning the omnipotence and providence of God, warranting the divine ordinance. We can safely presume that within the context of *Samson Agonistes,* Milton generates his own theology of fate, which is markedly different from that of Hellenism, and that for Milton, any conception of fate can belong to the category of providence in Christianity.

While Milton places great emphasis on the authority of providence from this perspective of divine fate, he presents Samson as a powerless human being in the face of the demanding fate in this drama. Having just heard the baffled Samson's heartrending groan

of despair, like the lamentation of characters bewildered by fate in *Aeneid*, the Choruses exhibit their dissatisfaction about the divine providence's handling of the domestic hero:

> O mirror of our fickle state,
> Since man on earth unparalleled!
> The rarer thy example stands,
> By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
> Strongest of mortal men,
> To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fallen. (164-69)

Despite "the timidity and lack of faith,"[21] the Chorus' comment adequately conveys Samson's anxiety that arises from an inner religious conflict. Such a despair in faith is the obstacle for Samson to uphold the justice of providence. To sum up, Samson's deepest adversity shows Milton's concerns of two conflicting notions between human free will and the providence.

The scene where Samson is gradually getting his confidence back in God reflects Milton's theological attitude towards the arbitrariness of mysterious destiny. When Harapha of Gath encounters the imprisoned Samson, Harapha's narration evokes Samson's psychology of the subconscious: "I come not Samson, to condole thy chance, / As these perhaps, yet wish it had not been, / Though for no friendly intent" (1076-78). In Harapha's interpretation, Samson's adverse circumstances are construed as the outcome of some "chance," that is, an unforeseen calamity. Harapha, in addition, describes the divine power, which bestows great physical strength on Samson, as "spells / And black enchantments, some magician's art" (1132-33). For Harapha, such attributions of the Lord of the Israelites are of a decidedly irrational and repulsive sort, because the

numinous providence appears to human mind as an object of horror and dread. Through the argument with Harapha, Samson's perception of theophany changes, and he recalls that he is charged with a high mission of vengeance on the heathen god:

> [...] if Dagon be thy god,
> Go to his temple, invocate his aid
> With solemnest devotion, spread before him
> How highly it concerns his glory now
> To frustrate and dissolve these magic spells,
> Which I to be the power of Israel's God
> Avow, and challenge Dagon to the test,
> Offering to combat thee his champion bold,
> With the utmost of his godhead seconded:
> Then thou shalt see, or rather to thy sorrow
> Soon feel, whose God is strongest, thine or mine. (1145-55)

Indeed Samson ironically depicts the inscrutable operation of divine orders as "these magic spells." But Milton here makes clear that Samson gets rid of despair of salvation, developing the firm conviction that his God is "strongest" and perfectly right. During his heated controversy with Harapha, Samson no longer despairs of God's forgiveness, and "In confidence" (1174) spontaneously decides to anticipate divine "final pardon" (1171). So far Milton focuses the conditions which lead to Samson's diseased and dying soul, yet, even in the midst of apparent defeat, Milton makes Samson realize that there are opportunities for triumph.

Unlike *Samson Agonistes*, in the *Aeneid* the conflict between human beings and fate may erupt at any time. Most importantly, Vergil's poem is replete with the heightened sense of the frustration of

man caused by the ineluctable divine order. The Hellenistic personification of providence can torment man out of arbitrary malevolence. In other words, such manifestation of the cosmic order is characterized by arbitrary nature. In Book XI, Turnus, the enemy of Aeneas, mentioning Fortune's fickle wheel, says "many a man Fortune, fitful visitant, has mocked, then once more set up upon firm ground."[22] Here we can regard "Fortune" in the same light as fate. Fate "mocks" and mercilessly ridicules man's weakness. And the counsel of a prophet Nautes reminds us that the relations between man and fate are downright hostile: "Let us go, goddess-born, where the Fates, in their ebb and flow, draw us; come what may, endurance must master every fortune."[23] Within the scope of Vergil's intention, man lives in a permanent state of subjection to whatever fate decrees. Furthermore, let us examine the last half passage of this English translation in the original: "superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est."[24] Grammatically, *ferendo* can be recognized as ablative of Gerundium of *ferō* [bear]. As a whole, this sentence connotes that all destiny (*omnis fortuna*) has to be overcome (*superanda*) "through endurance" (*ferendo*). In this way, the Vergilian poetic technique highlights particularly the significance of man's endurance as the best possible measure against the fickleness of fate. This sort of interpretation of fate leaves no room for human response to the work of providence, and suggests that the deity is superior to all human action and that man can only quietly wait for the Lord's next command.

While Vergilian patience is the means to avoid the assaults of cruel misfortune, and we can find such great endurance again and again throughout *Aeneid*, in *Samson Agonistes* the virtue of patience seems to contain special significance, and is affiliated with the religious tone of the drama. Miltonic patience does not only bear the meaning of the punishment of guilt but also "the trial of their

fortitude" (1288):

> But patience is more oft the exercise
> Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
> Making them each his own deliverer,
> And victor over all
> That tyranny or fortune can inflict,
> Either of these is in thy lot [...]. (1287-92)

No doubt God bestows highest praise on those who can show unshakable fortitude in dealing with any difficult situation, and makes such people victors "over all / That tyranny or fortune can inflict" (1290-91). Additionally, in *De Doctrina Christiana,* Milton investigates the virtue of patience, defining the "temptation" as one of the means which tests a Christian's patience and devotion.[25] As a perfect incarnation of the virtue of patience, Christ in *Paradise Regained* demonstrates the fortitude to withstand every possible temptation by Satan, waiting patiently and obediently upon God's will, and the Miltonic Christ vindicates dramatically the appropriateness of providence.

Hope for Salvation and the ways of God is the key element in Samson's victory over Harapha, while in *Aeneid* the process of history seems to be discontinuous one. Though Samson is a victim of unfair punishment as surely as Aeneas is at fate, the spirit of *Samson Agonistes* is filled with a law of divine justice. Throughout the context, the Chorus says that God's treatment of Samson is just: "Just are the ways of God, / And justifiable to men [...]" (293-94). Through his drama, Milton proposes his own theology of the rightness of providence, and exhorts devotion to God's ultimately just way, endorsing the need for fortitude in any state of crisis. Milton's

dramatization of the Chorus' confident response to divine dispensation confirms the view that the providential workings surpass human "Reason" and "vain reasonings" (322) in all respects:

> *Chor.* All is best, though we oft doubt,
> What the unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close. (1745-48)

On the one hand, the final chorus evidently registers the possibility of man's doubt about "the unsearchable dispose," and at the same time, it foreshadows the righteousness of all divine dispensation which is revealed at last. From this viewpoint, we may interpret Milton's last word as the condensation of the entire meaning of his drama. As a result, Hellenic fate no longer resonates behind Milton's. Representing Samson's noble resolution to cease the previous passive and pessimistic view of life, Milton evolves the pattern of spiritual regeneration from the deepest despair for his readers, which is quite distinct from the Hellenic pattern.

Meanwhile, at this stage we cannot be convinced that to what extent Samson sees his sacrifice of his own life as an agreeable end through slaughtering the idolatrous and pulling down the temple of Dagon. It is true that it is his own "rousing motions" (1382) that urges Samson to follow the Philistine messenger meekly, who comes to take him out from the prison for his performance in the pagan theatre. The ambiguous connotation of his own speech, however, enables us to construe that he might just obey the Lord's spirit and the operation of some awesome providence without probing into God's recondite intention: "If there be aught of presage in the mind, / This day will be remarkable in my life / By some great act, or of my days the last"

(1387-89). His prophetic utterance indicates conclusively that he does not perceive what the nature of his "great act" (1389) is. It seems that he has no idea of what he will attain at God's command or whether he will live or die. Although Milton avoids the urge to comment on Samson's tragical future predestined by God, he thinks it necessary to grapple with the question of the fallen Samson's religious regeneration towards the just way of God.

IV

The Samson paradigm, as we have seen, exemplifies a situation in which man can strive against the mysterious and inevitable workings of fate with the virtue of patience and the renewal of religious piety. When we turn to Samson's suffering in this dramatic poem once more, we can observe in Samson's psychology his frustration between obeying God's eternal providence and achieving self-fulfilment in this world.

Samson's anguish and emotional turmoil can be discussed from the point of view of the Restoration and its aftermath in seventeenth-century England. At the time, Providentialism flourished in revolutionary Puritan culture. David Loewenstein provides a useful interpretation of Providentialism in Milton's age: "Providentialism itself could encourage a distrust of human agency and a dependence upon the divine; one revolutionary Puritan, for example, suggested that Providence was responsible for all human actions and that men were nothing but 'secondary causes' in the process and instruments of its work."[26] Thus some Puritans blindly believed that human agency was totally controlled by providence's mysterious designs and that man could not do anything of his own accord. Form this standpoint, God can be illustrated as a figure for

whom we feel unavoidably a kind of fear or dread. The notion of God in the context of *Samson Agonistes* can be identified as the just manifestation of divine overwhelmingness as delineated in the Old Testament. Michael Lieb declares that the Miltonic Samson in effect subsumes within himself divine dread and role at the scene where he overcomes Dagon and his worshipers, and that in the very time Samson assumes himself as God incarnate. Here, it seems that Samson is the mere means by which God manifests his inscrutable providence. [27] The emphasis on God's arbitrariness which seriously threatens man's free will can be observed in this sort of Protestant discourse in those days. Further, we should add that in the era of Milton, predestination decreased and man's decision based on "the demands of the individual conscience" acquired greater importance than God's arbitrariness. Corresponding with the astounding developments of "politics, economics and science," conventional ideas about predestination declined, and as a sequel liberal explication of the Scriptures was consequent upon "Enlightenment," "deism," and "rationalism." [28] From the perspective that we are exploring, *Samson Agonistes* unmistakably reflects this religious agitation in Christianity in the seventeenth-century England.

Moreover, assessed from the angle of the mid-seventeenth century English Protestant, *Samson Agonistes* offers an exploration of the political events of those days. Samson's ultimate triumph over the Philistines might encourage failed revolutionaries of those times. They could not abandon the idea of attaining the millennium, and aimed "the final destruction of Antichrist's forces" in their own time.[29] It is certainly possible that the Philistines in this drama betokens "Antichrists" in Puritan's phrase.

We can be fairly certain that through the seminal account of the Old Testament hero Samson, Milton avers adamantly that human will

and action are not subordinate to Heaven's dispensation, rejecting the conception of the arbitrary fate in Hellenism. Indeed, obviously, this dramatic poem's Samson also exemplifies a model of the radical saint who is stimulated by the "Some rousing motions" (1382), that is, the inner work of the divine providence, and engaged in the cathartic destruction of the pagan temple. However, it is more noteworthy that Milton's religious drama does indeed underscore Samson's voluntary resolution to respond to providential promptings and the leading of Spirit through resolving intense conflict between despair at his own unfavorable situation and eager hope for salvation. The Miltonic Samson's free obedience to the providence of God in effect transpires through his own utterance, "of my own accord" (1643), which appears at the climactic scene of his vengeance on the Philistines. While he emphasizes the superhuman nature of Samson's great act at this revenge, Milton underlines the significance of free will in human agency. This is a drama that encourages the readers to behave as conscious and active beings. Within *Samson Agonistes*, responsibility for one's actions always lies with the individual, and the Miltonic fate is to be defined as the cooperation between God's unfathomable providence and man's spontaneity.

Notes

1. Parenthetical biblical references are to the King James Version of 1611.
2. The most significant discussion of Hellenism and Hebraism in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* appears in Richard C. Jebb, "*Samson Agonistes* and the Hellenic Drama," *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, ed. J. Martin Evans, vol.5 (New York: Routledge, 2003) 163.

3. Jebb, 164.
4. Jebb, 165.
5. William R. Parker, "The Greek Spirit in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*," *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, vol.5, 179.
6. Parker, 192.
7. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1936) 161.
8. Roy Flannagan, *John Milton: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 62.
9. Thomas Kaminski, "Striving with Vergil: The Genesis of Milton's 'Blind Mouths'," *Modern Philology* 92.4 (1995): 487.
10. Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, *The Loeb Classical Library*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, 2 vols. (1916; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001) 1: 365-67.
11. See George F. Butler, "New Light on Samson's Darkness: *Samson Agonistes* and Suicide in the Seventeenth Century," *CLA Journal-College Language Association* 37.4 (1994): 444. Butler points out that the biblical text "does not even hint at self-pity, despair, or any of the other emotions associated with suicide. The Old Testament treats Samson's suicide as a means to an end and as the most effective method of attaining vengeance against his enemies."
12. John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, in *Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1997) 30-34. Parenthetical references are to this edition.
13. Butler 450-51. He persuasively maintains that in seventeenth-century England, the interpretation of Samson's suicide in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* was conditioned by the religious culture and the concerns of his day: "The loss of faith in salvation was the most significant meaning of 'despair' throughout the seventeenth century. The writings of Martin Luther, Hugh Latimer, and Thomas Bacon argued that Satan convinces the

especially devout to despair of salvation, and this argument became a commonplace of Protestant thought. Bunyan had even suggested that despair is the 'unpardonable sin' mentioned in Mark 3:29, for one who despairs of salvation was linked with suicide throughout the Renaissance, and it was considered a leading cause of suicide during the seventeenth century."

14. Parenthetical references to William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* are to *William Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin Books, 1977). Hereafter referred to as *MHH*. Parenthetical references for this poem are in the form of a plate number, followed by line numbers.
15. Flannagan, 26.
16. Lucy Newlyn, Paradise Lost *and the Romantic Reader* (1993; New York: Oxford UP, 2001) 39.
17. Parker, 178.
18. John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana, The Works of John Milton*, eds. Frank Allen Patterson, et al., 4 vols. (New York: Columbia UP, 1931-38) 14: 27.
19. William B. Hunter Jr., et al., eds., *A Milton Encyclopedia*, vol.3 (London: Associated UP, 1978) 97.
20. *De Doctrina Christiana*, 14: 63.
21. James Holly Hanford, *A Milton Handbook* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1946) 286.
22. *Aeneid*, 2: 267.
23. *Aeneid*, 1: 521.
24. Aeneid, 1: 520.
25. *De Doctrina Christiana*, 15: 87.
26. David Loewenstein, "The Revenge of the Saint: Radical Religion and Politics in *Samson Agonistes*," *Milton Studies* 33 (1997): 175-76. Loewenstein acutely analyzes that throughout Milton's time, even after the Restoration, Samson was identified with a vindictive Puritan saint in those

days.

27. Michael Lieb, "'Our Living Dread': The God of *Samson Agonistes*," *Milton Studies* 33 (1997): 3-25. On the Samson's equation of himself with the God of dread in *Samson Agonistes*, Lieb especially comments as follows: "The point is that Samson is able to talk like God because he is able to act like God. That is, he is empowered to be triumphantly destructive in God's cause. In this cataclysmic act, all sense of Samson's 'beingness' is obliterated. With this obliteration, it is now his 'livingness' that matters. He has become a force, a terror, and a dread: he exists totally within the context of this new role. That is his raison d'être. He is 'our living Dread' incarnate" (Lieb 16).
28. Christopher Hill, *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill, Vol.2, Religion and Politics in 17th Century England* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986) 117. About the dramatic turnabout of the spirit of the times in seventeenth-century England, Christopher Hill argues cogently that: "In seventeenth-century England there were revolutionary changes in politics, economics and science. Almost as important a turning-point was the emergence of new ideas of sin and hell, of man's fate in the after life and consequently of the way in which he should behave in this life. At the beginning of the century the conviction prevailed among the articulate that a minority was predestined to eternal life, the vast majority to an eternity of torture. By the end of the century we are on the verge of the Enlightenment, of deism, of rationalism. Human effort and morality, based on the demands of the individual conscience, now appear more important than the arbitrary decisions of an omnipotent God."
29. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Milton and the Millennium," *Milton and the Ends of Time*, ed. Juliet Cummins (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 26. For a discussion of Milton's characteristic conception of Millenarianism, see Kotomi Egawa, "Patience in the Restoration Wilderness: Millenarianism in *Paradise Regained*," *Kyusyu Studies in English Literature*, 21 (2004): 1-15.