



Samson Agonistes

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Places Discussed

*Gaza. Philistine city. The prison is at once a literal punishment by the Philistines for the Nazarite Samson's Hebraic faith and fight against the Philistines and a metaphorical punishment for Samson's betrayal of himself and his God. Once metaphorically blind to Dalila's treachery, Samson has been physically blinded by the enemy to whom his wife has betrayed him. As the heart of Philistine power, Gaza marks first the nadir and later the zenith of Samson's faith and power. Each of his visitors, the chorus, his father (Manoa), Dalila, and the giant from Gath, Harapha, allows him to show moral strength, revealing to him the strength of his faith and the use to which God plans to put his restored physical strength.

Theater. Site where Philistines from Gaza and the surrounding cities gathered for the festival. The theater becomes the focal point of irony and divine justice when Samson turns a potentially degrading spectacle of enslaved strength into a triumphant act of faith, self-sacrifice, redemption, and the power of his God.

Bibliography:

Crump, Galbraith M., ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Samson Agonistes."* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968. Assembles seven seminal articles and eight shorter selections of critical commentary. Following an introductory critical survey, the selections offer a wide range of literary criticism dealing with the tragedy's biographical significance, structure, style, themes, and genre.

Hanford, James Holly, and James G. Taaffe. *A Milton Handbook*. 5th ed. East Norwalk, Conn.: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970. Presents an overview of the tragedy and a survey of previous criticism. An excellent starting point. Bibliography.

Hunter, William B., ed. *Milton's English Poetry*. Cranbury, N.J.: Bucknell University Press, 1986. Reprints articles on Milton's poetry from *A Milton Encyclopedia*, written by distinguished scholars. The long entry on *Samson Agonistes* provides a detailed survey of the numerous important critical issues and controversies associated with the tragedy.

Low, Anthony. *The Blaze of Noon: A Reading of "Samson Agonistes."* Ithaca, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1974. Offers a scholarly analysis of origins, style, and characters of the tragedy. The extended scholarly discussion is developed with the general reader in mind; the book is accessible and erudite.

Witreich, Joseph. *Interpreting "Samson Agonistes."* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986. A challenging but highly informative book, it surveys the biblical and Renaissance traditions related to Milton's tragedy. Furnishes a comprehensive assessment of modern criticism.

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