

## Milton and Noli's Samson

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### Abstract:

After a critical and inspiring reading of Judges 13–16 in the Old Testament, John Milton and Fan Noli engaged in the creative act of writing their dramas Samson Agonistes and Israilitë dhe filistinë (Israelites and Philistines), respectively. There are many similarities between these two dramas in which Samson, the protagonist, plays a key role in almost all the events. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the similarities and differences between Milton and Noli's Samson. Such a comparative analysis will provide a better understanding of how the character of Samson is depicted and portrayed by two different authors who belonged to two different literary, cultural, and religious traditions and periods. The methodology we employ is literary and historical, relying on the general methods of comparative literature. The paper concludes that both Milton and Noli's Samson have biblical, classical, personal, and autobiographical elements.

**Key words:** Milton, Noli, Samson, English and Albanian literature, comparative literature

## Introduction

The impact of the Bible on sixteenth-century Europe was most noticeable in authors such as Du Bartas and d'Aubigne in France, Grotius and Vondel in Holland, Boheme and Weise in Germany, Milton in England, and Calderon in Spain. Turning from biblical to general Judeo-Christian influences, we notice that this influence was greatest in Milton, a poet whose *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671) are based on the Old Testament and New Testament (Friederich and Malone 208). During the Renaissance and Puritan Age, the biblical code (writers inspired by the Bible) was adopted by a large number of English poets and playwrights of the sixteenth century, including Fletcher, Henrick, Donne, Fuller, and Bunyan.

In Albanian literature, biblical themes also have a long tradition. Albanian literature began with translations, paraphrases, and adaptations of the Bible. The first two documents in the Albanian language are derived from the Bible: *Perikopeja e Ungjilit (Pericopy of the Gospel)* dates back to the fourteenth century, while *Formula e pagëzimit* (baptismal formula) is from the fifteenth century<sup>1</sup>. *Mëshari i Buzukut (Buzuku's Missal)*, consisting of texts translated from the Bible, was published in 1555. The Bible had a considerable impact even during the Albanian Age of Independence, with biblical themes present in the works of the following authors in the Albanian literature of the twentieth century: Noli, Fishta, Asdreni, Prenushi, Haxhiademi, Zadeja, and Kuteli (Ahmeti 144–242).

Hence, Albanian literature, like English literature, has its own biblical literary tradition, which is based more generally on European culture and civilisation. Moreover, in both Albanian and English literature, there are not only different versions of the Bible and biblical commentaries in translation, but also a considerable number of authors that were inspired by biblical themes, symbols, characters, parables, and messages. Such religious influences can be traced through John Milton and Fan Noli's works, especially when it comes to the way in which they portray Samson. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the sources, parallels, and differences between Milton and Noli's depictions of Samson.

To this end, this paper will rely mainly on critical, analytical, and comparative methods to illuminate the similarities and differences between Milton and Noli's Samson in *Samson Agonistes* and *Israilitë dhe filistinë (Israelis and Philistines)*, respectively. This paper will rely mainly on the principles and methods employed in comparative literature. Stallknecht and Frenz provide a definition that best fits the aims of this paper: "Comparative literature often deals with the relationship of only two countries or two authors of different nationality or one author and another country (e.g., Franco-German literary relations, Poe-Baudelaire, Italy in the works of Goethe)" (10). In our case, the

focus is on the relationship between the works of two authors of different nationalities, namely, Milton and Noli, who were English and Albanian, respectively.

## 2. Milton's Samson

Milton used the Bible as his main source and inspiration to write *Samson Agonistes*, focusing only on the most important incidents in Samson's life. However, he also relied on autobiographical details and the structure of the classical tragedy based on Aristotelian principles to fashion the biblical tale into something new. Hence, *Samson Agonistes* beyond doubt a truly classical Miltonic tragedy.

Milton's political views are also expressed through Samson. During the English Revolution, Milton hoped for a change in government, religion, and literature, but this did not materialise—a fate he shared with Samson. While Samson's God was defeated by Dagon (a heathen god), Milton's religion was replaced by episcopacy. In a similar manner, they both failed in their politics—Samson wanted to save the Israelites from Philistine tyranny, whereas Milton wanted to save England from the Stuarts. Moreover, Samson's character can be compared to the English nation at large: Samson's remorse is analogous to the ethos of the English nation upon realising its mistake in restoring the Stuarts(Hawkins41–8).

The Biblical Samson in the Book of Judges is presented as an irresponsible and aggressive man whose love of adventure and practical jokes caused his and his enemies' death. He is characterised as being of large proportions, strongly built, rebellious, and not very bright; his name (Samson, in Hebrew *Shimshun*) and the persistent motif of fire both relate to a primitive solar cult and a figure similar to Hercules. Hence, one cannot consider him an authentic representative of the tragic hero (Abrahams1591).

In Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, however, Samson is portrayed as a sinner. Milton's Samson strives to overcome his sins throughout the plot—largely unravelled in retrospect through Samson's sad mourning of past events (Legouis and Cazamian586)—by undergoing profound spiritual growth and self-awareness through the trials and temptations caused by Manoah, Dalilah, Harapha, and the Philistine Messenger. Samson's rude and revengeful nature, his fall because of a deceitful woman, and his blindness appealed to Milton (Abrahams1591).However, various challenges encourage Samson to show faith and repentance; his spiritual metamorphosis transforms him from a selfish, impetuous individual who only acts as he pleases into a man who responds only to the intimate impulses of “divine inspiring deeds” through which God entreats him to do His will<sup>2</sup>. (Tillyard304; Prince120–35).Therefore, Milton's

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drama is about Samson's remorse for his mistakes and his powerlessness to overcome those who imprisoned him and who he scorned (Legouis and Cazamian 586).

It is important to point out that Milton chose Samson, who received supernatural strength from God in order to free his people, due to perceived similarities between their missions and lives. Like Samson, Milton made great efforts "with divine instincts," for the freedom of his nation, especially after the defeat of Salmasius. Furthermore, a superficial reading of Milton's early writings and youth correspondence reveals that Milton saw himself as chosen by God for the virtuous mission of diligently reading selected works, carefully interpreting the fine arts, and other fields of knowledge and life, with the ultimate aim of "approaching God to man." Therefore, Milton often considered himself a man of great deeds who resembled Hebrew prophets like Samson (Milton 803).

Elected as Cromwell's secretary of state, Milton was considered a famous visionary writer for some time; then within an instant, upon the return of another Stuart monarch, he was beaten, attacked, stigmatised, humiliated, and imprisoned. He was mocked by his enemies, miserable, and a blind slave. He was even imprisoned and handcuffed by the leaders of the nation and its rulers.

Like the children of Israel in the Old Testament, the people of England did not side with their loyal defender in the most difficult moments, and left Milton to face the enemy alone; friends and acquaintances left him in the lurch without protecting him from attacks, insults, and persecution.

Thus, just like Samson, Milton's political career was tumultuous and tragic. Both Milton and Samson endured severe blows in their attempts to accomplish their mission and serve their God; both erred in their divine mission and suffered dire consequences.

Perhaps Milton felt he had been punished like as Samson for self-deception and abandoned as the useless servant in the Gospel of Matthew 25 who lived blind among enemies, which is even worse than being handcuffed like Samson. He was in prison, in poverty, old, and lived in darkness; in the light of noon abandoned without hope to see the day, precisely by those for whom he had given his eyes for their protection. However, Samson, blinded and physically crushed, tied to a rock almost like Prometheus, is shaken and tangled in spiritual agony because he has become a "moving tombstone," aware of his curtailed power, and his spiritual and intellectual captivity and incapacity.

However, frustrated and aggravated by the cynicism of the Philistines, who resurrect him from his spiritual "grave." Samson awakens from hibernation and is re-endowed with divine power and rises again like a phoenix from disappointment and the ashes of his failure. He rejects the Philistine challenger and presents to his assembled admirers

marvellous acts of physical strength, regarded as a kind of heroism by pagan opponents, while serenely enduring their offenses, provocations, and envy, like Christ himself. However, in the end, Samson will find himself between the pillars of the temple, and according to the will of God, he will pull down the roof of the house of Dagon onto the heads of his treacherous enemies. In this way, both Chorus prophecies will be fulfilled. According to these prophecies, Samson, who has an extraordinary, divine, superhuman, and colossal power, but who is blind, may either complete his mission, as God has endowed him with invincible and heroic power to crush his enemies, or, by having faith in his vision, he will become a saint filled with devotion, deep patience, spiritual power, and a self-liberator, victorious over all others and against tyranny and evil. As it turns out, both of these divine Christian heroisms are accomplished with the demolition of the temple, when Milton's Samson announces that he had a premonition that this day will be recorded in history, thanks to a major act that will be the last in his life.

In the last act of his long career of using his crude Herculean power of ruthlessly settling accounts with enemies, Milton's Samson goes through a phase of bravery and strict determination in accordance with the ancient and classical tradition, until he arrives at the stage of performing his final act, thanks to the instinct, inspiration, power, and will provided by God. Thus, he becomes the true forerunner of Christian heroism. These alternatives imply that, from the non-Christian perspective, Samson died in his folly as a slave, but from the Christian standpoint Samson died for the glory of God. This is how Samson ends in the biblical legend. However, in Milton's drama, Samson believes that he is also sacrificing himself for his homeland.

Though Samson completed his mission in accordance with the resolution and conclusion of his battle, he is still blind after he accomplishes his divine mission. On this occasion, he had previously been disgraced and betrayed by a woman, deceived by arrogance and conceit, and then blinded, insulted, humiliated, and disappointed, as he appears even at the beginning of the tragedy; however, he still hopes and believes he can be useful to his people and that he can carry out his divine mission.

Milton's Samson seeks guidance; he subconsciously waits for a word and a signal to turn his determination into a useful and devoted mission. If he did not have such an intention, he would not have rejected the offers of help from Manoah, Dalilah, Harapha, and the Messenger. These rejections of his are not evidence of disappointment, but evidence of a sustaining and invincible hope. Remaining in prison, as Manoah points out, is an incorrect decision, so he asks Samson if he wants to be in the service of the Philistines, despite the mission God has given him. Therefore, disagreeing with the humble and meek Samson, Samson's father suggests to his sinful son to misuse the gift given to

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him by God in the prison in Gaza. He reminds him that God, who can do miracles, can also easily bring light back to Samson's eyes, so that he can serve him better than before.

Therefore, he hoped that light could return to his eyes, that his Almighty God would not want his gift to remain unused. He would find a way to enable him to use his rare talents and power. Even though Samson had plunged into deep despair, remorse, doubts, and reluctance, yet he speaks, endures, and waits. His waiting and patience keeps him alive because by waiting and hoping for redemption and the accomplishment of a sacred mission, Samson, like Milton, had to be patient, and to put up with the consequences. Likewise, Milton, the defender of the Cromwell Republic, thinks that his talent is useless, but he nevertheless does his best to put himself in the service of God the Creator and presents the truth to him, as he remains convinced that he can make a significant contribution to the world, the nation, and society, something for which God would endow him supernatural power to carry out this mission. His pride suggests that God needs man; God could choose Samson or Milton for a mission, though God could also use other means. God uses Samson for his purpose, but not in the way that blind Samson had foreseen.

Although marriage to Delilah seems to Samson to have been predestined by God, any reader of Milton's pamphlets on divorce will understand what idealised vision Milton had about the marriage of Samson and Delilah: being lonely, in the first stanzas of the poem, sinful Samson, like Heraclitus, has the advantage of being the only source of the reader's impressions. Similarly, Satan at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* has a similar advantage. Despite Dalilah's condemnation "as a real dragon "because of the trap she sets for Samson, using marriage for her material, selfish and political gains, Samson openly declares that his motive for marrying her is to crush the oppressors of Israel and if he had the opportunity, he would do the same to her. In other words, he would use her, deceive her, sell her, and get rid of her without remorse. It can be said that in a way Delilah's betrayal of Samson is like Eve's betrayal of Adam, given that each of them puts men who have sworn to love and honour them to death in an unenviable and dangerous state, inciting them to commit sins that they would have avoided. Therefore, in this context, Samson remembers that she intended to betray him and to make him betray himself and then, after receiving the reward for sins committed, she shamelessly apologises to her husband, thus becoming an indirect mediator and catalyst of his renewal.

Like Eve in the Book of Genesis, Delilah's speech when she triumphantly meets Samson, leaves the impression of a complex statement intertwined with motives and impulses, with the main goal being to see if she can bring Samson back again. However, aware that the situation has more serious consequences than she had thought, she

feels a physical desire to bring Samson back and the need to defend herself and to prove to herself that she might not be as bad as she looks. In the end, we see the wrath of a despised woman, who tries to show that she is not hypocritical. Whatever her motives, the power of her friendly approach to Samson causes a marked change in Samson: she makes Samson forget about his loss and urges him to give a firm answer; at the same time, she reveals her deceptive tactics, which rely on flattery and cheating.

It goes without saying that Milton's Samson is a creature who belonged to the material world for most of his career; in fact, he was to some extent a "classic killing tool," boasting of his physical strength and his victories on the battlefield, where he wreaked havoc, though he was aware of the shortcomings in his intelligence and ethics. "O impotence of mind, in body strong!"(Line 52),he cries in disappointment, recalling how weak he has been with his lack of judgement because he had power without sufficient wisdom.

Though he rejected her three times and laughed at her, his lustful desire for the beautiful Delilah apparently scares him, especially when she tries to contact him. Therefore, he reacts and attacks her strongly as if he were annoyed and terrified, shouting: "My Wife, my Traytress, let her not come near me" (Line 725). When she begs him to at least approach her and touch her hand, he sternly warns her not to because otherwise memory will arouse his anger and he will tear her to pieces. Thus, Samson at that moment remembers that many wise people have been deceived like fools by the tricks, quarrels, and traps set by the likes of Delilah.

Finally, the act of demolishing the temple is an act of choice, an act of free will in which Milton's Samson submits to the will of God. In addition, although neither Milton's Samson nor the other characters are aware of this, the act of defending Israel concurs with certain values. His stay in the temple, his arms outstretched towards the massive pillars, foreshadows a future event, and the physical liberation foreshadows the liberation of Israel and the accomplishment of the Messiah's mission.

The Chorus and Manoah appreciate the fact that Milton's Samson does not die humiliated or without heroism, but dies as a servant of God, guided by his lofty mission. They are also unaware of the greatness of the events they witness, so with all the unconscious irony, they will articulate their sense of that moment, through an image that future generations will remember as resurrection:

But though blind of sight,  
Despised and thought extinguish'd quite,  
With inward eye illuminated

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Her fiery virtue roused  
From under ashes into sudden flame,  
Like that self-begotten bird  
In the *Arabian* woods embroste,  
That no second knows nor third,  
And lay erewhile a Holocaust,  
From out her ashy wombs now teem'd  
When most unattractive deem'd;  
And though her body die, her fame survives,  
A secular bird ages of lives. (Lines 1687–1707)

The Chorus' phoenix is a mythological bird that regenerates cyclically or is otherwise reborn. A phoenix, synonymous with the sun, achieves a new life by emerging from its predecessor's ashes. Though Manoah views Samson's death from a more practical perspective, he, too, with his limited vision, finds comfort and pride in a degree of spiritual courage:

Like *Samson*, and heroically hath finish'd  
A life Heroic, on his Enemies  
Fully revenged, hath left them years of mourning,  
And lamentation to the Sons of *Caphtor*  
'Though all Philistian bounds; to *Israel*  
Honour hath left, and freedom, let but them  
Find courage to lay hold on this occasion,  
To himself and Father's house eternal fame;  
And which is best and happiest yet, all this  
With God not parted from him, as was fear'd,  
But favouring and assisting to the end. (Lines 1710–1720)

It seems to all witness that Samson's virtuous vigour had returned him to his rightful place as the faithful protector of God. According to them, his victory, both spiritual, physical, and heroic, is as important as the victory over Philistine power. With an understanding and sense of religious purpose, inspired by Samson's perfect experience, the Israelite Chorus says goodbye at the end of the drama:

All is best, though we oft doubt,



What th'unsearchable dispose  
 Of highest wisdom brings about,  
 And ever best found in the close.  
 Oft he seems to hide his face,  
 But unexpectedly returns  
 And to his faithful Champion hath in place,  
 Bore witness gloriously; whence *Gaza* mourns  
 And all that band them to resist  
 His uncontrollable intent,  
 His servants he with new acquist  
 Of true experience from this great event  
 With peace and consolation hath dismiss,  
 And calm of mind all passion spent. (Lines 1750–1758)

Milton's *Samson Agonistes* has a lot of subjective, personal and autobiographical elements that are indirectly expressed in the play, including Milton's education, his first marriage, and his political career. In many ways, this tragedy reflects and depicts the last years of Milton's life, which had become fruitless and unsuccessful (Hawkins<sup>54</sup>).

### 3. Noli's Samson

Noli's Samson is depicted and portrayed as a supernatural character. In his mission, he is willing to do anything, even sacrifice himself to achieve his goal; he is an idealist, who has a strong belief and determination. After his dialogue with the Chief Rabbi (Krye-Rabin), Samson reiterates: "If the whole world rose up against me, I would still not be afraid, nor would I change my mind" (Act I, line 1). He believes God has given him a "divine mission" to spread the new Hebrew religion through communication and peaceful preaching, and not by force. Noli's Samson is a complex and dynamic character with a divine and patriotic mission, a faithful wife, friends, and authority among his people. His weakness and flaws relate to his fatal love affair. Because of this weakness, he sins, but after terrible suffering, he finally accomplishes his patriotic and divine mission.

In Act II, Noli's Samson begins his mission of spreading religion through preaching, but in the meantime, he falls in love with the beautiful Philistine Delilah (Dalilja), who somehow takes Samson away from his mission and purpose. However, when the Philistine king (Mbret i Filistinëvet), with his many advisers, secretly visits Delilah (Dalilja) and begs her to help them set a trap to capture and kill Samson for the good of their endangered homeland, she does not refuse the king's order, but only begs the king not to kill Samson but allow her to marry him in order to

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convert him to her religion. Noli's Samson therefore is not defeated by the brutal force of the enemies, but by the cunning of his flattering and treacherous girlfriend Dalilah (Dalilja).

The Philistines not only cut the captive Samson's hair and beard, but also blind, humiliate, and ridicule him. Having learned a lesson from the bitter experience after his hair begins to grow back and his eyesight returns, Noli's Samsonrealises that the Rabbi (Rabin-i) was right when he advised him to go to the Philippines to spread the true religion by taking soldiers with him. After capturing Samson once again, the Philistine archbishop (Kryepriift' i Filistinëvet) and king (Mbret' i Filistinëvet) bring the exhausted, shattered, and defeated Samson in front of the gathered Philistines. Samson calls Rachel (Rahil), repents, and apologises for cheating on her with Dalilah (Dalilja), who is a liar and a traitor. When Rachel (Rahil) shows understanding and sympathy for him and forgives him, he begs her to leave the temple as soon as possible; he also calls Dalilah (Dalilja) and kisses her for the last time, and tells her to leave as well. Immediately after that, Samson demolishes the pillars of the Philistine temple; the temple collapses over his enemies and Samson himself.

Samson is a positive, heroic, dynamic, and tragic protagonist. In addition, he is also a symbol and the embodiment of the passionate or ardent aspirations of his people, of an ancient age, civilisation, and religion. In line with Aristotle's classical theory of tragedy, Noli also portrays Samson as an exceptional man. Samson's character adheres to the traditional concept of the life of a Christian (similar to the Judaic principle), in which life is considered a series of temptations, trials, and sufferings, in which Samson's moral and ethical metamorphosis passes through stage A (falling into sin), to stage B (knowing and being aware of the sins committed), and to stage C (repentance, suffering, and the washing away of sin). One gets the impression that Noli's Samson expresses Noli's ideals and preoccupation with his destiny during a particular period in his life.

According to Northop Fry's classification, Samson is a typical tragic hero (Bulo, Xhiku, and Zheji 28). Samson stands out from others in his circle where he lives by his power, honesty, spirituality, deep religious, patriotic beliefs, determination, bravery, dignity, and awareness of the importance of his high mission. Consequently, the dimensions of his feelings and actions(including his sins and weaknesses) are greater, and they have greater consequences than for ordinary people. According to the principles of the ancient Greek tragedy, the mission of the hero, due to a weakness no matter how small, often ends tragically or with self-sacrifice. However, such a hero over time becomes an idol, a subject of worship and mythologized by future generations.

The situation in Albania at the beginning of the twentieth century, after the suppression of the Albanian uprisings of the League of Prizren 1878–1881, was a volatile time foreshadowing Albania's readiness to overthrow Ottoman rule. It was exactly during this time that Noli adopted the ideal of self-denial in the service of justice, truth, and freedom. Through Samson, Noli linked the biblical parable to modern Albanian reality, offering a revolutionary solution for the Albanian people through rifles and pens, or rebellion and knowledge (Papagjoni145)

It is the motherland that gave power, stimulated and privileged twenty-year-old Noli to write *Israilitë dhe filistinë* (*Israelis and Philistines*), to become Prime Minister of Albania, and finally to emigrate to the United States of America. Immortality for Samson is immortality for Noli himself, and Samson's words echo Noli's own patriotic sentiment,

I love my Rachel (Rahil) and this land despite the fact that I lost my power and independent of my grudge, annoyance, hardships and difficulties, I would gladly exchange the eyes of my soul with my burnt and blinded eyes by my enemies, only to see for the last time this wonderful land (Rusi 46).

This is a motive that fatally accompanied Noli all his life. Certainly, he was not aware at the beginning of his career that fate would make him face several difficult choices, whereupon after rising to the land of triumph, he would fall and would have to start from scratch with difficulty (Rusi 46).

Therefore, it is important to point out that Noli dedicated his life to his country and religion, with the former representing his strength of mind and the latter representing his soul and faith. Noli superimposes Hebrew history on the existing reality of Albania at that time, endowing his work with distinct autobiographical elements. In other words, Noli selected a biblical parable to make parallel interpretations of the Albanian reality at that time, to lay out alternative solutions for the Albanian cause, and actualise his ideas as a spiritual and political leader of the Albanian movement for freedom and independence. For Noli, Samson's mission represents Noli's own national cause, while the Philistine "defensive walls" represent the dilemmas, challenges, difficulties, and shadows of his historical-political journey. Thus, we can say that Noli, as a spiritual and political leader of the Albanians, identified with Samson, given his challenges and contribution to the events in Albania during the 1920s and 1930s. Through Samson, Noli conveyed his vision and views, which accompanied him throughout his political and religious career (Liçi, 191).

In Noli's work, Samson seeks to accomplish his mission by preaching without using violence and weapons. Noli, of course allows his readers to discover the efficacy of this strategy through the plot. At the time Noli wrote the play, the above enigma was of paramount importance and as we read his drama, we realise that when Noli was still a

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young boy, his thoughts, opinions, and dilemmas fluctuated. Will obedience or violence triumph? If we associate the word with power (according to the wise rabbi [Rabin]), will the mission be carried out successfully? Samson, who opposes violence (represented by the rabbi [Rabin]) speaks figuratively to the stormy sky,

I want to teach the Philistines to see God in Nature and Eternity in Love. But these beliefs do not spread with fire and iron, but only when one is free and willing to admit and embrace such a belief (Shyta 69).

These lines are important to understand young Noli's attitudes and opinions, but also to learn why the rabbi's attitudes and thoughts in Noli's drama *Israilitë dhe filistinë (Israelis and Philistines)* are initially ignored.

Noli believed and maintained that a leader has to be a visionary, not short-sighted, and rely on experience.

I shouldn't have gone there like I did. I now hear their (Philistine's) laughter that cuts my heart, thus now I fully understand and support Rabbi's (Rabin-i) attitude; Ah! How right he was. I should have come with an army of Israelis to burn, crush and destroy this whole rotten and deceiving world (Shyta 69).

Noli wanted to serve the people of his country in all situations and for all causes. This was a great responsibility that required an all-round spiritual and physical commitment. Like Samson, he realised that truth does not spread without force, without the broad support of the people. According to Noli, slaves always need a leader born as "Samson whom God has given physical and spiritual strength and power."

The Samson biblical narrative is thus reframed by Noli as an ideological dilemma of whether to use force or not to achieve one's political goals. Hidri, an Albanian researcher and scholar, agrees with Brookus' opinion, who points out that the role of dramaturgical writings at historically volatile times is strongly associated with nationalist overtones. Hence, according to Hidri, Noli's *Israilitë dhe filistinë (Israelis and Philistines)* is his personalisation of the biblical narrative, and was written and published exactly at the time of serious manifestations of national consciousness, especially among Balkan peoples (Hidri 50). Considering the Philistines as his friends and leaving Dalilah (Dalilja) to close the final act with her song, Noli's Samson, as the creator of his destiny but also the victim of his fate, finally overcomes the biblical Samson. Samson's biblical endurance thus becomes Noli's examination of human progress and desire not to assimilate different cultures (Hidri 54–5).

#### 4. Conclusion

Samson is a positive, heroic, dynamic, and tragic protagonist. In addition, he is also a symbol and embodiment of the passionate and ardent aspirations of his people, of an ancient age, civilisation, and religion. Samson stands out from others because of his power, honesty, spirituality, deep religious and patriotic beliefs, determination, bravery, dignity, and awareness of the importance of his high calling. Consequently, the dimensions of his feelings and actions, including his sins and weaknesses, are greater and have more profound consequences than those of ordinary people. According to the principles of ancient Greek tragedies, the mission of the hero, due to a weakness, no matter how small, often ends tragically or with self-sacrifice. However, such a hero over time becomes an idol, a subject of worship and is mythologized by future generations.

Milton's Samson has a lot of biblical and classical but also subjective, personal, and autobiographical elements that are indirectly expressed in the play, including Milton's education, his first marriage, and his political career. In many ways, this tragedy reflects and depicts the last years of Milton's life, which had become fruitless and unsuccessful. Hence, Milton chose Samson, who received supernatural strength from God in order to free his people, due to the perceived similarities between their missions and lives. Like Samson, Milton made great efforts to the gain the freedom of his nation. Milton often considered himself a man of great deeds who resembled Samson. Milton served as Cromwell's secretary of state and was considered a visionary writer for some time; then, upon the return of another Stuart monarch, he was captured and imprisoned. Thus, just like Samson, Milton's political career was tumultuous and tragic. Both Milton and Samson had received severe blows in their attempts to accomplish their mission and service to God and their nation; both had erred in their divine mission and suffered dire consequences. Milton's Samson is a sinner like Adam, who was expelled from a divine mission. However, Samson manages to overcome his fall through spiritual growth, ennoblement, and a deeper awareness of his station and mission, especially in the face of trials and temptations made by Manoah, Dalilah, Harapha, and the Philistine Messenger. The challenges encourage him to show faith and repentance; thus, with the development of his healing process, the divine mission that had been initiated in the Garden of Eden, is restored. Therefore, it is possible that this spiritual metamorphosis represents his spiritual and educational growth, which transforms Milton's Samson from a representative with personal motives who acts according to his instincts and his mind, into someone who responds only to the intimate impulse of divine inspiration, through which God puts him into an active divine service.

## Milton and Noli's Samson

Noli's Samson is a complex and dynamic character who has a particular divine and patriotic mission, faithful wife, friends, and authority among his people. In his mission, he is willing to do anything, even sacrifice himself to achieve his goal; he is an idealist, who has a strong belief and determination. Noli's Samson is also portrayed as a supernatural character. He believes that God has given him a divine mission and has chosen him for this mission, which is to spread the new Hebrew religion through communication and peaceful preaching, and not by force. His weakness and flaws are his fatal love affair and naivety. Because of this weakness, he sins, but after terrible sufferings, he finally accomplishes his patriotic and divine mission. In line with Aristotle's classical theory of tragedy, Noli also portrays Samson as an exceptional man. Samson's character adheres to the traditional conception of the life of a Christian in which life is considered a series of challenges. Thus, in Noli's drama, Samson undergoes a moral and ethical metamorphosis because he first commits a sin, acknowledges the sin committed, and finally repents, suffers, and is cleansed of his sin. Furthermore, Noli's Samson expresses Noli's ideals and preoccupation with his destiny during a particular period in his life. For Noli, Samson's mission represents Noli's own national cause, while the Philistine "defensive walls" represent the dilemmas, difficulties, and shadows of his historical-political challenges. Therefore, we can claim that Noli, as a spiritual and political leader of the Albanians, can be identified with Samson, given his challenges and contribution to the events in Albania during the 1920s and the 1930s. Through Samson, Noli conveys his vision and views, which remain him throughout his political and religious career.

Finally, we can conclude that both Milton and Noli's Samson have biblical, classical, personal, and autobiographical elements. Both Milton and Noli's Samson had received severe blows in the accomplishment of their missions and services to the Lord and to their nations. Both of them had sacrificed themselves and had erred and sinned in their divine, political, and patriotic missions and consequently suffered severe consequences. Hence, in keeping with Northop Fry's classification, both Milton and Noli's Samson are typical tragic heroes.

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>*Mesbari* (Albanian for "Missal") is the oldest book published in Albanian. The book was written by Gjon Buzuku, a Catholic cleric, in 1555. The book contains 188 pages and is written in two columns. *Mesbari* is the translation of the main parts of the Catholic liturgy into Albanian. It contains the liturgies of the main religious holidays of the year, comments from the book of prayers, excerpts from the Bible as well as excerpts from the ritual and catechism. It

was written to help Christians pray in the daily religious services. The only known copy of the original book is currently in the Vatican's library.

*Meshari* is written in the Gheg Albanian dialect and uses the Latin alphabet, one letter (h) from Cyrillic, with some modified letters. The book has a rich vocabulary and its orthography and grammatical forms seem to be well established, which is indicative of an earlier tradition in the writing of the Albanian language.

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