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Creating the Cinematic Illusion of Samson's Phenomenal Biblical Strength in Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949)

Samson: The Strongest Man on Earth

[1] The *Old Testament* (OT) Samson of Holy Writ ("Judg." 13-16)¹ is the iconic biblical example of phenomenal physical strength. Scripture scholars have considered him "the iron man of the ancient world" (Trigilio Jr. and Brighenti, 2005, 211), the "real Incredible Hulk" (Weldon, 1995, 80) against which "Arnold, Sly, and Jean-Claude at their bench-pressing best wouldn't stand a chance" (Higgs, 2000, 114). Samson has also been tagged a "Hebrew Hercules" (Graham, 1996, 203), "the Paul Bunyan of the children of Israel" (Mary Ellen Chase quoted in Preminger and Greenstein, 1986, 552), and a "mountain of a man with muscles in places where most of us don't have places" (Jenkins, 1987, 41). His cultural reputation within the Western world has grown to the point where the name Samson "has entered the English language as a synonym for someone of superhuman strength" (Telushkin, 1997, 178). Therefore, it is not too surprising to find that Samson has been a pop culture icon frequently associated with a brand of sturdy hand luggage, padlocks and super glue (Gunn, 2005, 188).

[2] For others, Samson is "masculinity writ large" (Exum, 1996, 224). This is one reason why Victor Mature got the starring role in *Samson and Delilah*, for as Cecil B. DeMille² confessed in his autobiography, Mature embodied "in a large part of the public mind the essence of maleness" (DeMille and Hayne, 1960, 365). This deft casting choice proved to be a resounding success that not only contributed to the film's box-office fortunes, but it entrenched Mature with his "beefy looks and stolid demeanor" (Maltin, 1994, 580) as the biblical loincloth king of his day. This in turn afforded him further star status in the ancient world films *The Robe*, *The Egyptian* and *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (which if made today would probably be called *Robe II*).

DeMille: The Unsung Hollywood Auteur

[3] Historically speaking, Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959), affectionately known as "C.B." (to close friends), "Generalissimo" (to commentators) and "Mr. DeMille" (to everyone else), was a seminal co-founder of Tinsel Town who helped turn a Californian orange grove into a world class movie centre that became *the* synonym for filmmaking worldwide—Hollywood (see Birchard, 2004; DeMille and Hayne 1960; Edwards 1988; Essoe and Lee 1970; Higashi 1994; Higham 1973; Koury 1959; Orrison, 1999; Ringgold and Bodeen, 1969). In addition to instituting the "Age of Hollywood" (Paglia, 1994, 12), DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* was historically significant as a "watershed film" (Schatz, 1997, 394) that had triggered the 1950s rash of biblical epics. It also inspired its own sub-genre category, namely, the great Jewish lover films, alongside *David and Bathsheba* and *Solomon and Sheba*, which

itself was a desperate attempt to copy DeMille (Kozlovic, 2002c). As the classicist Jon Solomon (2001, 162) put it: "the colorful biblical spectacle simply didn't exist as a film genre in 1949. *Samson and Delilah*, in fact, created the genre and served as the prototype that was to culminate in DeMille's hands seven years later" with *The Ten Commandments*, DeMille's *magnum opus*, and the last film he personally directed before his untimely death in 1959.

[4] When Andrew Sarris advocated auteur theory to the West within *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968*, DeMille was not deemed a pantheon director (i.e., an auteur). Instead, he was relegated to "The Far Side of Paradise" category with the comment: "It is inevitable that the mere mention of Cecil B. de Mille will evoke complacent laughter in some quarters, and bristling patriotic speeches in others. If De Mille had the right enemies, he also had the wrong friends" (Sarris, 1968, 91). Yet, not only was DeMille an auteur, but the "*auteur* of *auteurs*" (Vidal, 1995, 303) who "left enormous traces of his authorship long before Francois Truffaut and Andrew Sarris made the term *auteur* fashionable in cinema studies" (Higashi, 1994, 5). He also became the master of the American biblical epic and claimed near the end of his life that: "*my* ministry was making religious movies and getting more people to read the *Bible* than anyone else ever has" (Orrison, 1999, 108). Not surprisingly, DeMille was tagged the "high priest of the religious genre" (Holloway, 1977, 26), a "prophet in celluloid" (Billy Graham quoted in Andersen, 1970, 279), and the "arch apostle of spectacle" (Clapham, 1974, 21). Indeed, one Protestant church leader went as far as to proclaim: "The first century had its Apostle Paul, the thirteenth century had St. Francis, the sixteenth had Martin Luther and the twentieth has Cecil B. DeMille" (Manfull, 1970, 357).

[5] Unfortunately, DeMille's numerous aesthetic skills as an auteur producer-director are frequently unrecognised, dismissed or disdained. For example, Barry Norman (1985, 182) claimed that *Samson and Delilah* "was certainly the worst and most absurd of all his films in that genre," and that DeMille "was a man who thought big—not often deeply, but big" (160). Similarly, David Thomson (1995, 182) claimed that DeMille was "silliest in his biblical and Roman films" whilst Giannetti and Eyman (1996, 40) argued that: "It is no longer fashionable to admire DeMille." Consequently, not many scholars have attempted an encomium of DeMille's work, or explored his complex nature or explicated his auteur signature, signs and personalistic stamps. This is a serious mistake. These negative claims are firmly rejected. *Samson and Delilah* is a masterful biblical epic and DeMille is a consummate pop culture professional who warrants praise and lionising. Why? Because he *did* think big, long and deeply when it came to his sacred cinema, and wherein his religious convictions and pop culture preferences creatively complemented not juxtaposed each other. Regrettably, Art Arthur's (1970, 283) decades old claim that: "Cecil B. DeMille was Hollywood's best known unknown" still rings annoyingly true today.

[6] His auteur craftsmanship encompassed an extensive personal knowledge of the *Bible* (Arthur, 1967, 224), which made him Hollywood's leading cinematic lay preacher, and an unrecognised master of the sexual subtext (Kozlovic, 2002a), the Christ-figure (Kozlovic, 2003, 2006a, 2006b), and deep focus characterisation (Kozlovic, 2002b). At least DeMille's superiors knew his true worth for as movie mogul David O. Selznick confessed to fellow movie mogul Louis B. Mayer:

However much I may dislike some of his [DeMille's] pictures from an audience standpoint, it would be very silly of me, as a producer of commercial motion pictures, to demean for an instant his unparalleled skill as a maker of mass entertainment, or the knowing and sure hand with which he manufactures his successful assaults upon a world audience that is increasingly indifferent if not immune to the work of his inferiors. As both professionally and personally he has in many ways demonstrated himself to be a man of sensitivity and taste, it is impossible to believe that the blatancy of his style is due to anything but a most artful and deliberate and knowing technique of appeal to the common denominator of public taste. He must be saluted by any but hypocritical or envious members of the picture *business* (Behlmer, 1972, 400).

[7] The anti-DeMille jealousies and disparaging remarks were so abundant throughout his career that no systematic evaluations of his entire *oeuvre* have been attempted to date. What little serious work has been done on him has been limited to a few classic silent films (e.g., *The Cheat*) and the more prominent of his sound films (e.g., *The Ten Commandments*), a mere handful of the seventy feature films he made during his directorial career (see Birchard, 2004; Ringgold and Bodeen, 1969). Indeed, DeMille worked in films from 1913 to 1959, the year of his death, but as late as 1967, the Museum of Modern Art critic, Kirk Bond opined: "DeMille does really seem a major filmmaker...Perhaps in another few years...we can—with, let us hope, more films to go by—begin to have some real idea of what DeMille actually did" (Card, 1979, 119). Regrettably, the profession is still waiting for this to happen. In the meantime, the oversight is slowly being rectified in revealing drips and tantalising drabs. For example, as DeMille's directorial peer George Cukor recently confessed:

A long time ago I thought what he [DeMille] did was a big joke, just preposterous, and I couldn't understand why the audience went for it in such a big way. There were always all sorts of orgies with belly dancers, veils and all the trappings. The eroticism was a joke. Then I saw *The Ten Commandments* [1956]...it was preposterous from the word go but I suddenly saw something new there, something which had escaped me before: the story telling was wonderful. The way that man could tell a story was fascinating—you were riveted to your seat. That's exactly what he was: a great, great story teller. It was often ridiculous with all those excesses and froth but the man did *tell a story*. That was De Mille's great talent and the secret behind his popular success (Lockyer, 2001, 27).

Of course, this very same talent was also superbly demonstrated in *Samson and Delilah*, DeMille's biblical precursor to *The Ten Commandments*.

***Samson and Delilah* (1949): A Scripture Scholar's Delight**

[8] Although David Thomson (1995, 182) thought DeMille's biblical films were silly, in a backhanded compliment he did confess to admiring *Samson and Delilah* for being "one of the great trash epics." In fact, C.B.'s Technicolor Testament is much admired by biblical scholars today, especially since its "trash" reputation has now "stabalized into one of camp respectability" (Murphy, 1999, 109-110). For example, biblicist Jack Sasson (1988, 339) considered it a "wonderful film," Donald P. Ryan

(2000, 281) considered it a "fine film," whilst their professional peer, J. Cheryl Exum (1996) enthusiastically proclaimed that it:

...offers a good example of cinematic impact on the culture at large. It is not a little-known film; I have seen it at least four times on television in the UK in the past three years. With the kind of promotion television offers, De Mille's Oscar-winning epic has certainly reached more audiences than when it was first released, and through repeated television showings it continues to be influential in forming people's opinions about the biblical story. For all its hokeyness *Samson and Delilah* is a brilliant film (13).

[9] Biblicist David Jasper (1999) similarly claimed that:

In the Hollywood tradition of Old Testament epics...the cinema has occasionally contributed in a significant way to the history of biblical interpretations, perhaps unwittingly and most notably in the figure of Cecil B. De Mille in films like *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956)...[DeMille] re-reads the text of the "Book of Judges" midraschically as a love story which shifts the coherent and dehumanizing biblical perspective of Israel's salvation history and replaces it with a countercoherence of a Delilah following her heart and remaining true to Samson... (51).

[10] Jasper (1999) also considered that C.B.'s romantic repackaging of Scripture was a service to mainstream biblical scholarship because:

...De Mille's film [*Samson and Delilah*] does what art and literature has always in fact done, read the *Bible* and unpicked its historical and theological consistencies which have defined how religious orthodoxy has read it, and offered a countercoherence in terms of other priorities (in this case filmic melodrama) which may expose the dangerous assumptions that often underlie our reading of Scripture and the *Bible*... (51-52).

Another equally significant aspect of DeMille's ability as a "great, great story teller" (Lockyer, 2001, 27), and study of the *Bible* from childhood onwards (DeMille and Hayne, 1960, 28) was his complex cinematic construction of the illusion of Samson's phenomenal biblical strength. Especially via Victor Mature's non-body builder body to embody Samson's strongman reputation. Since the art of repetition is a common biblical narrative practice, with many techniques and permutations evident within the *Old Testament* (see Alter, 1981, chpt. 5), DeMille-the-Hollywood-lay-biblical-scholar embarked upon a similar repetitious path. However, he did so cinematically and extra-cinematically within his Technicolor Samson saga (see below) to convince audiences that Victor Mature was indeed Samson—"the strongest man on earth" (Trigilio Jr. and Brighenti, 2005, 238).

[11] For the purposes of this work, the critical film, religion and DeMille literature was reviewed and the results integrated into the text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavour). Using the VHS PAL version (RFM1294) of *Samson and Delilah*, the Samson strength theme was investigated through the analytical lens of textually-based, humanist film criticism (i.e., examining the textual world inside the frame, but not the world outside the frame—Bywater and Sobchack, 1989). DeMille's film was closely scrutinised to reveal his

page to projector skillfulness of this 20th century adaptation of the Samson saga ("Judg." 13-16). So, how well did Victor Mature embody Samson's biblical specifications, popular reputation, mythological traditions and associated cultural accretions according to DeMille?

Victor Mature as Samson: The Reign of the Beefcake King

[12] Victor Mature was monumentally powerful, and exuded raw male energy that eschewed the pumped-up, symmetrical perfectionism of Steve Reeves (in *Hercules*) or Arnold Schwarzenegger (in *Conan the Barbarian*). Mature was no body-builder, he was "muscular but not muscle-bound" (Solomon, 2001, 165), "untoned" in Lawrence Bassoff's (2000, 56) eyes, however, his ox-like build and "red-meat swagger" (Thomson, 1978, 16) jibbed with him being "as mischievous and playful as a big animal" (Doniol-Valcroze, 1989, 40). Even if he was also described by other commentators as "oafish" (Lopate, 1987, 73) and "rather like a totem pole with [a] toothache" (Wiseman, 1957, 206).

[13] Nor was Victor Mature a pretty-boy Samson like Anthony Hamilton in the 1984 remake of *Samson and Delilah* or a toy boy Samson like Eric Thal in the 1996 remake of *Samson and Delilah*. As Aljean Harmetz (1970, 1) described Mature at age fifty-five: "His huge feet dwarf the legs of the chair...His hands are foothills to the mountains of his chest. His flashing white teeth span the crags and gullies of his face like polished boulders on the edge of a cliff" and whose smile "seems to make a jack-o-lantern of his face." Although aged had definitely wearied him, Mature still possessed a monumental quality. He still demonstrated this quality in his cameo role as Samson's father, Manoah in Lee Philips' 1984 *Samson and Delilah*; ironically, what Samson may have looked like if he did not die in Dagon's temple and went to seed in God's service. In one sense, the biblical Samson is the James Dean of the ancient world because he lived wild, died young, and became a potent symbol for tragically wasted potential.

[14] Instead of physical narcissism, Victor Mature's patriarchally powerful physique was closer to the jungle primitivism of Elmo Lincoln (in *Tarzan of the Apes*), or the robustness of Johnny Weissmuller (in *Tarzan and the Mermaids*), both of whom fitted Samson's biblical reputation as an ancient "rustic hero of frontier days" (Kraft, 1985, 200). In fact, many scholars have noted the parallels between Samson and Tarzan (Guthridge, 1995, 22; Neil, 1969, 158) with Lois Miriam Wilson (1997, 66) considering Samson to be "an Israelite Tarzan, a Hebrew superhero." It is somewhat ironic that Mature once complained: "Nobody ever asked me to play Tarzan" (Wiseman, 1957, 208), although he did play a muscular, fur-clad caveman in *One Million B.C.* alongside Carole Landis. DeMille-the-artist had successfully straddled two worlds because Mature had "the physique both of the classical god-hero and of its contemporary, populist avatar, the comic-strip superhero, Batman, Superman or the Incredible Hulk" (Adair, 1989, 139).

[15] Scripturally speaking however, there is no description of what Samson actually looked like. As Phillip Lopate (1987, 74) pointed out: "there is nothing in the *Bible* that says Samson was a brawny, muscular person. Since his strength came from God's spirit inhabiting him, the theological point might have been better made casting Mickey Rooney or Arnold Stang." True! However, such diminutive casting choices would have gone against the biblical theme of Samson's strength when he

was *not* "a Spirit-enabled judge" (Smith, 2005, 425) or acting as a holy instrument of the Lord. In which case, casting a Mickey Rooney or an Arnold Stang performing astounding physical feats would have been laughable and cartoonist thus quickly loosing audience credibility. It would also have meant box-office suicide, and DeMille-the-businessman³ knew all too well the dangers of that trap. In fact:

The mystery of Samson was not that he was a great giant, huge in frame and large of limb, possessed of brute force, though he is often depicted as such, nor had he the over-developed body with bulging muscles of an all-in wrestler; his phenomenal strength reposed in a perfectly normal healthy body or ordinary proportions, which was athletic and virile (Thomas, 1982, 83-84).

[16] That is, a body somewhat like Victor Mature's, albeit, historically unverifiable and artistically tending towards brutishness, which many film critics found unsettling. For example, Gilbert Adair (1989, 139) considered Mature to be a "grotesquely bulging, glistening, lazy-lided actor." Jympson Harman (1951, 250) claimed that "Mature looks big and stupid," while William Poster (1950, 161) worried about Mature's "sluggish posturings" throughout *Samson and Delilah*. Nevertheless, Mature certainly played his biblical role with admirable "beefy pride" (Bartholome, 1990, 144) and truly earned his status as "Hollywood's beefcake king" (Ragan, 1985, 131), supposedly the "original beefcake boy" (Wiseman, 1957, 206). In fact, DeMille's casting choice was so apt that contemporary film scholars have argued that Victor Mature came to personify the biblical epic itself. He was acclaimed as "the highly colourful fleshly paradigm of its glories and banalities" who "through his outsized frame and agnostic features... [embodied] the crucial thematics of the genre" (Babington and Evans, 1993, 227). One would have to agree, and again marvel at DeMille's casting astuteness.

[17] Just as significantly, "Beefcake Victor Mature" (O'Brien, 1998, 131) was also "the idol of many a feminine heart" (Evans, 1962, 127) and considered to be "a beautiful hunk of a man" (Ragan, 1985, 131). Not only was he Hollywood bankable circa 1950s, but he was also sexually attractive to many women, as attested to by Esther Williams. She had an affair with him during the making of *Million Dollar Mermaid* and claimed: "Vic was a strong and fulfilling lover. Even better than I had fantasized. That first night, we made love over and over and into exhaustion. He adored the romance of it, too, offering me a surprisingly vulnerable and gentle side that was irresistible" (Williams and Diehl, 1999, 213). Alternatively known as "The Hunk of Man and The Body Beautiful" (Wiseman, 1957, 206), Mature possessed many popularly assumed Samson-like qualities, especially with his "hawk-like profile, shirt-busting biceps, a headful of batwing curls, and an arrogant toothy smile" (Ragan, 1985, 131). Despite the cinematic truthfulness of this scholarly description, it belied the artful, romantic sensitivity that DeMille managed to extract from Mature's performance (and which Esther Williams indicated that he possessed).

[18] DeMille-as-pragmatic-filmmaker had to reach a compromise between the scriptural Samson, the folklore Samson, the Jewish Samson, the Christian Samson and the Christ-figure Samson (Kozlovic, 2003). Let alone the numerous non-canonical embellishments (whether physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, mythological, textual, cultural etc.) plus, the public's expectations and (mis-

)perceptions of this famous biblical hero (see Bartholome, 1990; Gunn, 2005). Whilst working with the available and sometimes limited acting talent of his day, and all without losing too much credibility in the inevitable film adaptation compromises. Nevertheless, DeMille's chief Samson problem was to convey the idea of incredible strength according to the hyperbolic *Bible* accounts, and do it within Victor Mature's normal physical limitations; the first barrier of which was to get Mature to lose thirty pounds of ugly fat (Higham, 1973, 286-287)! DeMille's pragmatic filmmaking tasks were especially challenging in an age where computer-generated images were almost non-existent, and its mundane SFX alternatives were prohibitively expensive, unsatisfactory or impossible to do. DeMille-as-Christian-artist in particular faced enormous incredulity problems concerning the scriptural Samson that would severely tax non-believers and make believers squirm. For example, Samson stealing the gates from the Philistine city of Gaza.

Stealing the Gaza Gates: A Major Samson Incredulity Problem

[19] The biblical evidence for Samson-as-strongman is undeniable during his pre-emptive, midnight, gate-and-post stealing adventure in Gaza, and their subsequent transportation "upon his shoulders...to the top of a hill that is before Hebron" ("Judg." 16:3). This distance was calculated by scholars to be between "twenty" (Margalith, 1987, 69) and "forty miles and involves an ascent of more than three thousand feet" (Metzger and Murphy, 1994, 323). It was certainly a physical act beyond the earthly norms of human power and endurance, especially after a presumed bout of lovemaking with the nameless harlot of Gaza and lack of recuperative sleep thereafter ("Judg." 16:1-3), plus no textually acknowledged divine support for either activity! (Imagine Mickey Rooney or Arnold Stang here and not laugh disapprovingly). Samson's vigorous post-coital vandalism was not only physically incredible, but also a symbolic act of Danite sexual oneupmanship over their Philistine overlords. How? Because "Gaza" in Hebrew means ""the strong one," feminine gender" (Browne, 1984, 164), and thus the entire city is characterised as a woman. "Her" gates were "the symbol of their city's strength" (Hildebrand, 1988, 310) and the porthole to Gaza's inner delights (physical, sensual, economic, symbolic, subtextual), which Samson had just dramatically violated by ripping open and absconding with. So, Samson's masculine deed of super-strength was also a metaphor for sexual penetration and abandonment, and by one who had just committed the same deed with the Gaza harlot before running away from her without a scripturally recorded goodbye or payment!

[20] The sheer physicality of Samson's gate-and-post stealing exercise also exceeded the physical effort of killing a young lion with his bare hands, even though the Spirit of the Lord *was* upon him during that animal fighting incident ("Judg." 14:5-6). As Phillip Lopate (1987, 77) explained, under such holy circumstances, Samson's "body itself doesn't quite belong to him—it's a sacred weapon for God to inhabit with His spirit when He so desires," or as Thomas Pauly (1980, 477) more colloquially put it, Samson is "a sort of nuclear weapon only to be used when the situation fully warranted it." One is therefore forced to momentarily ponder whether Samson could have performed the lion-killing feat without divine help, but then immediately assume that he could given his physical prowess with the huge Gaza gates when *not* divinely supported. Besides, DeMille, the self-confessed pop culture professional (DeMille and Hayne, 1960, 195) was working in a media milieu flooded with Tarzan lion-fighting stories and images. Whether Elmo Lincoln in the 1910s,

Gene Pollar, James H. Pierce and Frank Merrill in the 1920s, Buster Crabbe, Herman Brix and Johnny Weissmuller in the 1930s which Weissmuller then dominated throughout the 1940s before being overtaken by Lex Barker, Gordon Scott and Dennis Miller in the 1950s (Essoe, 1979). If a mundane Tarzan could repeatedly subdue lions and other wild beasts with no divine support, then the powerful Samson could have easily done the same, with or without God's help.

[21] The physicality of the Gaza gate-stealing also greatly exceeded the physical effort needed to destroy Dagon's temple ("Judg." 16:25-30), especially given that shifting two key support columns underpinning the temple was a plausible option for a normal circus strongman. Let alone assuming that God intervened and granted Samson super-strength for his suicidal death wish ("Judg." 16:28-30). Scripturally speaking, there is some doubt if the strength displayed here was *from* God because Samson only prayed for it. There is no record that God actually *granted* Samson's vengeance-filled wish. Nor is there any other textual clue along the usual lines of the Spirit of the Lord coming upon Samson to divinely invigorate him as evidenced elsewhere in the Samson saga ("Judg." 14:6,19; 15:14), and as God had previously done for Gideon ("Judg." 6:34) and Jephthah ("Judg." 11:29), Samson's brother judges (i.e., charismatic leaders). Indeed, as Simcha Shalom Brooks (1996, 22) pointed out, in the final chapter of the Samson saga "there is no longer a mention of YHWH's spirit." God suffers a textual death here, possibly because of the *Torah* injunction against using the blind for God's purposes ("Lev." 21:18; "Deut." 15:21). Judges 16:30 only stated that: "And he [Samson] bowed himself with all *his might*; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were herein" [my emphasis]. The use of the words *his might* is suspicious. The writer imagines a biblical statement to the effect that God granted Samson's request, and/or His/God's holy might were directly involved. God's granting of Samson's revengeful strength-request is only *implied* because Samson performed his "kamikaze gesture" (Browne, 1984, 167) and successfully achieved his death-and-destruction wish.

[22] However, again one must ponder if Samson was capable of doing the temple-toppling without God's help (and momentarily avoiding the theologically troubling precedent of God allowing suicide as a legitimate human option). But yet again, one must assume that the brawny Samson *could* do so because of his phenomenal gate-and-post ripping and carrying prowess (and continually assuming that the biblical account is true, factual, and not in any error, i.e., the fundamentalist, true believer perspective). DeMille also worked in the same pop culture world equally familiar with circus strongmen breaking chains and dragging elephants, as well as other various Tarzan strength acts, as he lovingly recreated in his Oscar-winning *The Greatest Show on Earth* produced immediately after *Samson and Delilah*. (And temporarily ignoring the logical possibility of shoddy temple workmanship making it ripe for opportunistic toppling in the ancient world equivalent of a Philistine builder's scam, which DeMille similarly depicted in the modern portion of his silent *The Ten Commandments*). Nevertheless, DeMille-the-Christian-apologist avoided this theological debate by strongly implying that his Samson's power was from God and for God. In any event, Samson overcame his weakened state, and death was his reward for this (Pyrrhic) victory over the Philistines in an act of suicidal terrorism (Wicker, 2003).

[23] In the end, DeMille-the-businessman did not subject *Samson and Delilah* to this potentially serious incredulity problem by visually depicting the Gaza gate-and-

post stealing incident. However, he did not ignore it but rather had Delilah (Hedy Lamarr) verbally refer to this incredible strength incident when Samson was subdued by Philistine soldiers. Why? To touch base with the biblical facts and preserve C.B.'s reputation as a stickler for authenticity. Interestingly, Nicholas Roeg's 1996 *Samson and Delilah* depicted closed and barred gates with Samson crying out: "I am the instrument of the Lord" before manhandling them, accompanied by some minor earthquake-like rumblings in a nearby pagan temple. Later, a troubled young soldier reported to his superior that the city gates had been "torn off, they're gone." Finally, there is a shot of a gaping hole in the city wall where the gates were supposed to be, and even more surprisingly, some workers trying to put one half of the gates back onto its hinges. Thereby implying that Samson may not have taken them on their 20-40 mile journey to the hill before Mount Hebron according to Judges 16:3. Lee Philips' 1984 *Samson and Delilah* avoided the Gaza gates incident altogether. Instead of generating audience incredulity, and to flashily demonstrate Samson's strength, director Philips depicted another (unscriptural) incident. His Samson angrily uprooted a secured torture pole in the Governor's compound and tossed it to the ground (later re-inserted into the hole by the Philistines). This event was unscriptural and unrelated to the harlot of Gaza incident, but it was a more plausible strength act for a normal strongman, but not the phenomenal power of the biblical Samson!

[24] Notwithstanding the above, DeMille-the-film-artist still needed to reinforce the notion of Samson as an exceptional strongman (the unavoidable biblical motif), while avoiding expensive special effects and still keep his audience believing, sympathetic and entertained. Having robbed them of a SFX feast to avoid incredulity problems and diluting his dramatic temple-crashing finale, DeMille still needed to nurture the audience's willing suspension of disbelief. Consequently, he embarked upon an incredible aesthetic campaign to convince viewers that his Samson was indeed very strong as the *Bible* documented and the public traditionally believes, expects and demands from their cinematic fare. DeMille-the-Christian-artist surmounted this major dramaturgical obstacle by artfully employing the biblical narrative principle of multiple repetitions (for emphasis, focusing, story unification, memory enhancement, and as a sign of importance) that he skillfully applied and repeated throughout his film.

DeMille's Strength-Enhancing Cinematic Techniques: Show Me the Ways

[25] DeMille flooded *Samson and Delilah* with numerous strength indicators that he supported with copious comments from Samson himself, plus his relatives, friends, lovers, enemies and rivals, including DeMille-as-narrator and Gustave Dore-as-extra-cinematic-artist. It is argued that DeMille *did* think deeply about the construction of his cinematic text, and that it was the product of artfulness not artlessness, especially for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear (aka "Ezek." 44:5). DeMille-the-lay-scholar had embraced the biblical narrative principle of repetition (see Alter, 1981, chpt. 5) to enhance his sacred cinema. These DeMille cinematic techniques for underscoring Samson's strength can be sorted into eight, self-evident categories (with some minor overlaps) derived from a close inspection of the film and associated advertising. Namely: (1) demonstrable strength-suggesting events; (2) covert, indirect and subtle strength-suggesting events; (3) direct verbal references to Samson's strength and their sources; (4) word images of

Samson's strength and their sources; (5) strength-enhancing costuming and props; (6) the deployment of various physical size comparisons; (7) filmic design, strength-enhancing techniques; and (8) extra-filmic strength-enhancing techniques: the film poster. The following is an introductory explication of each of these finely discriminated techniques. Albeit, potentially boring the reader in the course of recounting the laundry list of repetitions, but well worth the concentrated effort for the insights gained into what may at first appear to be inconsequential prop decisions and innocuous dialogue. It will become quickly evident that DeMille artfully designed *Samson and Delilah* with great aesthetic skill and attention to detail hitherto unappreciated by the critics. It is what helped elevated him into the realms of biblical epic mastership in tandem with his other epic engineering skills, as revealed elsewhere (Kozlovic, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2006a, 2006b).

1.0 Demonstrable Strength-Suggesting Events

[26] DeMille employed many direct and creative means of getting his biblical strength point across. For example:

1.1 *Samson and Delilah* started with an anonymous muscle-bound strongman forcefully holding open a parchment scroll containing the film's credits, thus firmly setting the tone of strength for the rest of the film.

1.2 While in Tubal's (William Farnum's) garden before Semadar (Angela Lansbury), Ahtur (Henry Wilcoxon), and a distantly observing Delilah, Samson easily bent a metal warrior's spear into an inverted "U." This feat astonished them all, especially after they had physically admired the sturdiness of the spear beforehand. It was a powerful strength act in and of itself (enhanced by a frontal shot of Samson's chest-expanding width), that his awed observers had behaviourally confirmed three times. The number three being the Bible's symbolic number "to represent intensity, emphasis, or added strength" (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania/International *Bible* Students Association, 1988, 511).

1.3 Later in Tubal's garden, Samson easily straightened out the misshapen metal spear (albeit crookedly) before an accepting, lovelorn, girlish Delilah (i.e., applying his power in a restorative fashion).

1.4 While on their way to a lion-hunt, Samson eagerly attacked, wrestled and defeated a young lion barehanded (the quintessential Samson image) before a terrified, excited and amazed Delilah; and which biblical scholar Donald P. Ryan (2000, 281) considered was "Especially exciting."

1.5 Samson defeated the Saran's (George Sanders') giant bodyguard-cum-wrestler Garmiskar (William Davis) by easily lifting him above his head (with accompanying "lifting" music) before throwing him onto the ground and injuring him, thus winning the strength contest and associated wager with the Saran. To reinforce this physical feat, DeMille had the onlooking entourage visibly and aurally express their amazement. The Saran subsequently rewarded Samson with the "hunter's prize," an expensive ring, later traded in for a wish-cum-wife, Semadar, plus a hundred pieces of silver, thus further reinforcing Samson's strength reputation via prize-giving (itself indicative of exceptionalness). Giving Semadar away was also the Saran's political way of binding Samson to him, and on a deeper symbolic level, it amplified Samson's power if the powerful leader of the Philistines was eager to

neutralise him by matrimonial co-optation.

1.6 After his lost riddle wager at his wedding feast, a very embittered Samson easily crushed a metal drinking cup with his right hand before going on his deadly garment-hunting spree. This was an exceptional physical act of brute strength, symbolically reinforced by Samson performing the feat single handedly (itself a metaphor for easiness and thus further indication of his massive physical strength).

1.7 When Samson stole the first of thirty garments from the Philistine citizenry to pay his gambling debt, he pulled a fat merchant (Arthur Q. Bryan) straight off his moving donkey in one effortless move, thus actively demonstrating his extraordinary physical prowess.

1.8 When an angry Samson violated Semadar's nuptial chamber, an outraged Ahtur attacked him, but Samson quickly out-maneuvered him. Samson then humiliated Ahtur by wrapping him in a curtain, easily lifting him above his head, and tossing him effortlessly into the astonished wedding crowd.

1.9 When Samson started warring with his Philistine wedding guests, he easily picked up a heavy marble fence-beam and threw it at them, followed by an adjacent weighty beam, followed by a third marble pedestal (three being symbolic of emphasis). This latter pedestal had a fire flickering on top of it, which was symbolic of dangerous volatility (just like Samson himself—the hot head). Samson then picked up this pedestal single-handedly (a physical metaphor for easiness), and again effortlessly tossed it into the fearful and astonished crowd who groaned under its deadly weight (further reinforcing the notion of Samson's power).

1.10 During the wedding party fracas, Samson threw enemy spears and swords with deadly effect at his hostile and visibly stunned Philistine targets. Indeed, Samson acted like the proverbial bull in a china shop while vigorously displaying his physical acts of exceptional strength-cum-damage/carnage/death/disorder to become the ancient world equivalent of "a Danite Terminator" (Carol Fontaine quoted in Wurtzel, 1998, 47).

1.11 At the Lehi pass, Samson vigorously killed the amassed Philistine soldiers using the jawbone of an ass to bash in their metal helmets, despite the enemy vigorously attacking him with their bodies, swords and spears.

1.12 To emphasise his incredible strength, and avoid turning a thousand Philistines into an incredulous carpet of corpses, DeMille avoided the potential on-screen monotony (and potential disbelief) by having Samson easily flip over Prince Ahtur's chariot. This injured the prince's arm, and dramatically counterpointed Philistine weakness with Danite strength, which also symbolically indicated Danite power over Philistine impotence in another act of oneupmanship.

1.13 During his rabid Philistine slaughter, Samson also uprooted a small tree. This act was a visually effective, dramatic, and economical way of conveying the idea of incredible strength. Although this specific incident is not recorded in the *Bible*, DeMille-the-authenticity-stickler was being true to Samson folklore here because "a tradition surviving in central Europe in the 12th century knows Samson as the mythical uprooter of trees" (Margalith, 1987, 65-66).

1.14 All the Philistine lords were willing to (and did) pay Delilah eleven hundred pieces of silver each for the secret of Samson's strength (Judges 16:5). This was an astonishing amount of money, and thus indicative of Samson's power, importance and intense annoyance value to warrant such a fabulous bounty. Indeed, DeMille had his Philistine lords initially outraged at the asking price before being seduced by Delilah-the-seducer into agreeing to her steep financial demand.

1.15 In Delilah's oasis love-nest trap, Samson easily broke from the restraining seven green withs ("Judg." 16:7-8) that Delilah had cunningly wrapped around his wrists to bind him. Samson treated them as if they did not exist, thus emphasizing his incredible strength once again.

1.16 While in the Gaza prison gristmill, Samson grabbed Delilah and easily lifted her above his head ready to dash her to death. During that automatic revenge act he accidentally, and at first unknowingly, broke his metal chains as if made of butter, which Delilah excitedly pointed out to him (and the audience). Samson's strength was therefore highlighted and reinforced visually, aurally, and emotionally by both protagonists.

1.17 In Dagon's temple, DeMille depicted Samson powerfully pushing apart two key support columns. He broke them, one at a time, concentrating upon their thin base, with appropriate cracking, grinding and silent sound effects. This was coupled with astonished crowd looks, batted breaths and awed cries to supply tension and panic, which reinforced the awesome quotient of the scene. The scriptural account ("Judg." 16:29-30) was definitely not as tension-packed as DeMille's artful rendition of architectonics meeting apocalypse.

1.18 Samson succeeded spectacularly in his destructive task. The temple with its fiery, gargoyle-looking statue of Dagon was toppled and many Philistines were killed in the process. According to Scripture, "upon the roof there were about three thousand men and woman" ("Judg." 16:27) and so "the dead which he [Samson] slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" ("Judg." 16:30). DeMille used a lot less actors, but still managed to create a spectacular and credible effect nonetheless.

2.0 Covert, Indirect and Subtle Strength-Suggesting Events

[27] One layering of meaning for DeMille's epic film was not enough. In addition to these above-mentioned direct techniques, DeMille employed many less direct means to get his biblical strength point across to the audience. For example:

2.1 In the opening film credits, the texturing of the parchment scroll used to house the production details looked like rippling muscles with a black *de facto* navel and faint body hairs. This subliminally implied manly, muscular strength, which was also thematically linked to the manly Samson who "even displays some Semitic chest hair for once" (Solomon, 2001, 165).

2.2 In her rustic kitchen, Samson's annoyed mother/Manoah's wife (Fay Holden) hit him across the back with her soup ladle and it instantly broke without Samson flinching in the slightest, thus implying his impenetrable strength. Her motherly feistiness was itself a courageous act against a son who could crush her like a twig if he desired, and it suggested a genetic link for Samson's murderous feistiness

elsewhere (Kozlovic, 2006a).

2.3 During their mother-son kitchen conversation, Samson effortlessly lifted his mother into the air and startled her in an affectionate display of powerful but gentle, controlled strength. Although Samson was not a man to be toyed with, he could easily toy with others, and thus another subtle indicator of his physical power. Fortunately, DeMille's Samson loved his little mother greatly.

2.4 When Samson impishly spied upon Semadar in Tubal's private garden, he hung effortlessly off the walled fence. He did so for some time without struggling to maintain his balance, thereby subtly demonstrating great upper-body power and control.

2.5 The captured and blind Samson worked like a beast of burden in the Gaza prison house ("Judg." 16:21). DeMille had also prefigured Samson as a "blind working animal" (Chalcraft, 1990, 187) when Delilah negotiated with the Philistine lords and demanded that he be "whipped and driven like an animal," thereby subtly implying servitude and animal-like potency even when not at superhuman level.

2.6 To reinforce the lowly domestic nature of his beast-of-burden task, DeMille had the Philistine overseer ride the gristmill contraption as if Samson was indeed a transport animal and he was an indolent jockey. This scene was itself a resonant image of the fat Philistine merchant whom Samson effortlessly pulled off his donkey to steal his garments and pay back his promised riddle debts.

3.0 Direct Verbal References to Samson's Strength (and their Sources)

[28] To reinforce these direct and indirect Samson strength acts still further, DeMille added another layer of meaning via selective dialogue from a variety of protagonists under a variety of circumstances. For example:

3.1 Director DeMille: In the prologue, DeMille-as-narrator described Samson as "greatness and weakness, strength and folly," thus deftly orientating the audience to the issues of strength and foolishness (which is usually associated with excesses of many sorts).

3.2 Ahtur - Philistine Romantic Rival #1: In Tubal's garden, Samson told Ahtur that he is going to marry Semadar, and so Ahtur replied: "Your humour is even greater than your strength." Thereby, officially acknowledging Samson's strength from a powerful political, ethnic and romantic rival, thus adding further credibility concerning Samson's strength.

3.3 Desiring Girlish Delilah: Later, Delilah confessed to Samson: "Semadar doesn't love your strength like I do." Thereby, confirming Samson's physical power, plus his muscle-based romantic power that was strong enough to enchant a foreign woman's heart. The writer imagines that if Delilah was interested in Samson-the-man and not Samson-the-strongman, she would have said something like: "Semadar doesn't love you like I do." However, the writer contends that DeMille was purposely using this dialogue as a *de facto* strength indicator.

3.4 Desiring Girlish Delilah: After Samson killed the young lion barehanded, Delilah enthusiastically declared to the Saran: "never has there been such power in

any man" and "only a god could do what he did." Thus, DeMille left little doubt in the audience's mind that Samson was exceptionally strong, and enough for someone to brag about to it to an extremely powerful authority figure. Delilah's reference to "a god" also tagged the divine origins of Samson's power, even if she did not know consciously about the spirit of the Lord working through Samson's body at the time ("Judg." 14:6). Equating Samson with a god also implied incredible power.

3.5 Philistine Enemies: At Samson's wedding feast, a Philistine guest is heard saying: "No man can kill a lion with his bare hands." Thereby, re-emphasising Samson's incredible strength from an incredulous enemy, and prompting the audience to side with Samson by mentally say: "Oh, yes he can!"

3.6 Desiring Girlish Delilah: During the wedding feast, Delilah referred to Samson as "an ox" (just as Samson's mother had done beforehand), thus reinforcing notions of Samson's beast-like strength and associated stubbornness from two upset females angry at him (and indicative of truth being spoke at such an annoying time).

3.7 Ahtur - Philistine Romantic Rival #1: Ahtur cunningly procured and then correctly answered Samson's unbeatable neck-riddle and said: "You're a bad loser strongman, pay your debt." Samson's political, ethnic and romantic rival had again openly labelled Samson's strength by cunningly using the eponymous word "strongman" to do it.

3.8 Philistine Enemies: When an angry and embittered Samson easily crushed a metal drinking cup with only his right hand, his Philistine wedding guests were audibly amazed at his physical prowess. Since many were big, strong, mature men themselves, it implied something extraordinary if they were impressed enough by Samson's physical power to be vocally astonished themselves.

3.9 Desiring Girlish Delilah: When Samson returned to his wedding party and rejected Delilah as a replacement bride, she became passionately angry. She reminded Samson of how she told the Saran that he had killed a lion with his bare hands and the Saran believed her (and so should the audience who should also be very impressed with Samson's strength). Indeed, DeMille was cunningly massaging the audience to consider this now iconic Samson strength act for a second time (i.e., repetition as emphasis and memory enhancement).

3.10 Danite Friends: When Lesh Lakish (John Miljan) confirmed that Samson was to be handed over to the Philistines ("Judg." 15:11-13), Miriam's (Olive Deering's) grandfather said: "Why will men always betray the strongest among them." Thereby, reinforcing Samson's strength reputation, and indicating his number one ranking amongst the Danites (which itself implied exceptionalness).

3.11 Philistine Enemies: During Samson's Philistine killing spree at the Lehi pass ("Judg." 15:14-17), DeMille enhanced the deadly chaos with cries of panic from armed, seasoned, and putatively manly Philistine soldiers. If they collectively cried out in terror facing only one man, then DeMille wanted the audience to believe that Samson must have indeed be an incredibly fearsome adversary.

3.12 Ahtur - Philistine Romantic Rival #1: When Ahtur reported the deadly

demise of his soldiers to the incredulous Saran and his Philistine lords, he defensively cried out: "This Samson has some unknown power...some, some secret that gives him superhuman strength. No man can stand against him." Thus, Samson's enemies had again acknowledged his extraordinary strength, but this time implying divine invincibility and indirectly authenticating the secret source of Samson's true power (i.e., God).

3.13 Desiring Mature Delilah: When Delilah was negotiating with the Saran and his Philistine lords for the right to secure Samson's secret, she claimed: "Even Samson's strength must have a weakness." Thereby, acknowledging his physical power before the politically powerful, and further reinforcing the idea of Samson's exceptionalness.

3.14 Desiring Mature Delilah: When Delilah and Samson first met at the oasis love-nest trap, Delilah, his most dedicated enemy, referred to him as "the mighty Samson." This title-cum-description not only reinforced his strength reputation, but it also implied its now semi-institutional status (and itself symbolic of exceptionalness).

3.15 Desiring Mature Delilah: In the oasis love-nest, Delilah complained to Samson about him not being bound by new ropes as he had (deceptively) claimed ("Judg." 16:11-12). She was upset for a second time when Samson had easily broken her loom. He had again lied to her about his strength being depleted if his hair was woven into the loom ("Judg."16:13-14). These verbal incidents referred to Samson's strength indirectly.

3.16 Desiring Mature Delilah: When Samson is finally betrayed, his hair shorn, his superpower gone, and he is captured and physically bound by the Philistines, Delilah taunted him with: "Are you not stronger than a hundred men ["Judg."15:15 scaled down ten-fold]? You cannot carry away the gates of Gaza again ["Judg." 16:1-4]. You cannot kill a lion now ["Judg." 14:5-6]. You're *weak* as any other man." Ironically, Samson's strength reputation was reinforced by an emphasis upon his newly found weakness.

3.17 Sorrowful Samson: Captured by the Philistine soldiers and recognising his God-forsaken plight, Samson said with an air of resignation: "Throw your spears. The shield of my God has gone from me. [pause] What do you fear? My blood will flow as red as yours." Thereby, indirectly acknowledging his loss of strength by directly acknowledging his loss of divine protection. His "fear" comment verbally reinforced his former powerful status, while his "red blood" comment reinforced his newly acquired status of normalness at this God-forsaken time (and thus by implication, his exceptionalness at other non-forsaken times).

3.18 Ahtur - Philistine Romantic Rival #1: In a philosophical mood, Ahtur told the captured Samson: "With all your strength you're a fool Samson." This directly reinforced the strength thematic while Samson is subdued (physically, emotionally, morally and spiritually).

3.19 Sorrowful Samson: Immediately prior to his physical blinding, Samson argued: "If I have no strength to fight you, I'll need no eyes to find you," yet, Samson still looked physically powerful without his long hair. DeMille had verbally reinforced the strength motif in the act of claiming its dilution via Samson's own

mouth (which itself was tantamount to a confession of truth, namely, he was once a strongman).

3.20 Philistine Enemies: While Delilah is being paid her monetary reward from the Philistine lords, one visitor asked another colleague: "Do you believe Samson's strength was in his hair?" Thereby, emphasising the strength thematic while DeMille-the-Christian-artist posed this ancient theological question in his rational sceptical mode; thus cunningly inviting the audience to ponder the true nature and source of Samson's strength.

3.21 Saran - Philistine Romantic Rival #2: After Delilah received her huge monetary reward, the Saran was concerned about her emotional loyalty to him. Indirectly referring to Delilah he said: "A man [Samson] who could stop the heart of a lion might stir the heart of a woman." This again reinforced the reputation of Samson's physical prowess whilst simultaneously linking it to his emotional/erotic power over a rich, determined, powerful, beautiful and very independent women (i.e., Delilah).

3.22 Philistine Enemies: When Delilah secretly visited Samson in the Gaza prison gristmill, the huge jailer advised her: "Don't go near him mistress, he'd tear you to pieces." Thereby, reinforcing Samson's animalistic death-dealing power, especially from a huge, unchained Philistine strongman who is scarred of a blind, weakened Samson-in-chains. The imagery of the phrase is also a resonant throwback to Samson's lion-killing prowess to cunningly refresh the audience's mind about Samson's strength and power.

3.23 Philistine Enemies: On a much deeper level, tearing also has a sexual power connotation because "it shares with that other kind of tearing that give pleasure: defloration" (Bal, 1987, 45). This sexual sub-theme also reflected the *Samson and Delilah* love story, namely, one of pleasure and pain, domination and submission, victory and defeat, and of weakness capturing and subduing strength, which itself is symbolic of sexual intercourse. No wonder Elizabeth Wurtzel (1998, 38) called the Samson saga: "the story of sexy stories...always an entertaining and sacred scandal sheet."

3.24 Saran - Philistine Romantic Rival #2: When Miriam pleaded for Samson's life in Dagon's temple, the Saran enviously confessed: "For his strength I admire Samson..." Therefore, if his chief political, ethnic and romantic rival thinks this, should not the audience?

3.25 Philistine Enemies & Saran - Philistine Romantic Rival #2: Prior to the Dagon temple-toppling, a Philistine lord said: "This man has the strength of a devil," but the Saran quickly corrected him and said: "No! The strength of a god." Thereby, confirming Samson's extraordinary power and its divine origins. This is especially believable coming from a powerful enemy and also the sophisticated villain-leader of Samson's enemies complete with his "pointy beard, vengeful sneers, and insidious conniving" (Solomon, 2001, 165), so, it *must* be true!

3.26 Danite Companion & Danite Romantic Rival: Following the temple's destruction and Samson has joined the diaspora of the dead, the despondent young Saul (Russell Tamblyn) said to Miriam: "He was so strong...why did he have to die?" Miriam stoically replied: "His strength will never die Saul." Thus, reinforcing

Samson's strongman reputation (but not his religious, spiritual, political, social, or moral reputation) by two people who loved him dearly (but not sexually). This last scene poetically end-framed the film's strength thematic, which was begun by the anonymous parchment-holding strongman during the start-up credits.

4.0 Word Images of Samson's Strength (and their Sources)

[29] Not too surprisingly, DeMille also liked to weave word images throughout his dialogue to get his biblical strength point across. For example:

4.1 Danite Companion: When a burly Philistine soldier menaced Miriam near the village water well, young Saul defensively leapt up and said: "If you come near Miriam, Samson 'll crack your head like a walnut." Thereby, implying that Samson possessed greater physical power than one-to-three huge soldiers did. With this word-picture, DeMille had also cunningly reinforced the image of a brain because a cracked walnut (usually opened with intense force), physically resembles a brain-like structure, which is then gleefully consumed by its conqueror. Samson was definitely a man who used brawn over brains, physically, metaphorically, and on-screen, especially when he bashed in Philistine helmets containing enemy brains with the jaw bone of an ass at the Lehi pass ("Judg." 15:15).

4.2 Danite Friends: The bullied old Story Teller (Francis J. McDonald) warned the menacing Philistine soldiers that: "the power of the Lord is in Samson's arm." Thus, indicating the divine source of Samson's power and implying its potency by invoking this handy God metaphor.

4.3 Danite Romantic Rival: When Miriam restrained the angry young Saul she told him: "Samson is our warrior," thereby, overtly tagging Samson's fighter and protector functions. For one critic, Miriam's words had "an Edgar Rice Burroughs flavor" (Anonymous, 1949, 36) that had obviously triggered off Tarzan associations. DeMille had thus conjured up in this critic's mind, notions of defender, justice, primitive hero, animal strength, and verified his own filmmaking skill in the process.

4.4 Danite Relative & Cheeky Samson: In his rustic home, Samson's frustrated and annoyed mother called him "a stubborn witless ox" when he would not marry his kinswoman, Miriam. Later, Samson would also call himself "a stubborn witless ox" in a humorous repartee bout with his mother. The "ox" references conjured up associations of hugeness, brutish strength and stubbornness. It also prefigured his future occupation as a blind prisoner working the Philistine prison millstone like a dumb ox. Even seasoned critics cannot disassociate themselves from the Samson-beast comparison. For example, after Samson's fateful haircut, novelist Fay Weldon (1995, 73) called him a "poor, genderless, impotent ox!," which itself evoked another sexual subtext, namely, the cutting of Samson's hair was the symbolic equivalent of castration (physically, emotionally and spiritually).

4.5 Philistine Enemies: After Samson defeated the huge bodyguard/wrestler Garmiskar, one Philistine soldier quietly but enthusiastically noted Garmiskar's weight as "four hundred pounds." This was quickly followed by another soldier who just as quietly and enthusiastically claimed that Samson threw Garmiskar around "like a sack of grain." The Saran later referred to the defeated Garmiskar as a "lion," and an upset Ahtur called Samson a "mad dog." All these comments were designed to emphasise Samson's incredible strength, power and beast-like ferocity.

4.6 Philistine Citizenry/*De facto* Enemies: After Samson robbed the Philistines merchants of their garments to pay back his lost riddle debt, they bitterly complained to the Philistine soldiers. One said that he was attacked by "a demon" that was "as big as a camel," while another said "a giant hung me in the air and stripped me." These words were designed to evoke the concepts of Samson's animalistic, demonic, gigantic ferocity. DeMille's "giant" reference was also a subtle nod to those commentators and believers who literally though Samson was a giant, as graphically depicted in Erte's serigraph painting *Samson & Delilah*. Whilst simultaneously providing a plausible context for hyperbole for those seeking a rational explanation for the Samson-as-giant legend.

4.7 Philistine Enemies: Samson's power reputation was officially reinforced by the Wounded Messenger played by George Reeves (ironically, Superman in a future TV incarnation), who had escaped the massacre at Ramath-Lehi. He passionately reported to his Philistine masters: "And when he called upon his God, the thunder and the whirlwind and the lightning were in his blows, a hundred killed...perhaps a thousand, there was no counting of the slain." Here DeMille was trying to be: (a) scripturally authentic ("a thousand" - "Judg." 15:15,16); (b) a rational sceptic (more likely "a hundred killed"); (c) incredulous ("perhaps"); (d) a lay biblical scholar with doubts ("there was no counting"); (e) a filmic artist evoking images of elemental savagery thematically linked to Samson's rampage ("the thunder and the whirlwind and the lightning were in his blows"); and also (f) theological authentic because the OT "God is a god of nature, of the wild, of hair" (Niditch, 1990, 616). The audience could identify with any of the propositions that reinforced their own beliefs, and be temporarily satisfied. This engineered ambiguity and harmonising tactic was another DeMille specialty that helped forge his unique auteur signature and ensured his box-office successes.

4.8 Soulful Samson: When Samson finally confessed his Nazarite hair secret to Delilah, he provided another strength hint. He referred to his invisible God and said: "It's a gift that...makes men greater than themselves." This indirect reference to the divine source of his phenomenal strength jibbed with later biblical scholars tagging Samson as a "spiritual Hercules" (Lockyer, 1967, 43). Hercules is another ancient lion-fighting strongman on a divine mission. Samson's "greater than themselves" comment also implied strength above-and-beyond that which the powerful Samson already demonstrated in his non-spirit-enabled times.

4.9 Philistine Enemies: The blinded Samson worked like an animal in the Gaza prison gristmill. DeMille had the overseer refer to him as a "jackass" whilst a Philistine gawker called him a "two-legged mule" and another cried out: "He still looks strong as an ox." Thus, further reinforcing the idea of Samson as a beast-of-burden and its related animalistic strength associations using three different animal referents (jackass, mule, ox), with three being the number of emphasis deployed yet again.

4.10 Desiring Mature Delilah: When Delilah visited the captured Samson in the Gaza prison gristmill she said: "He's magnificent, even in chains." If a defeated and blinded man whom God had abandoned was still viewed as magnificent by an emotionally scarred enemy-lover, then Samson-the-holy-handicap must indeed be an extraordinary physical specimen, or so DeMille hoped the audience would believe.

4.11 Philistine Enemies: While being tormented in Dagon's temple, a Philistine lord referred to Samson as "a man of iron," while another Philistine called him a "blind bear," and another man called him a "whale." All three verbal tags implied strength, power and hugeness, and created a more varied lexicon of power associations-cum-metaphors to help DeMille sustain the strength illusion.

4.12 Philistine Enemies & Saran - Philistine Romantic Rival #2: In Dagon's temple, Samson was being harassed by the pestering pagan dwarfs who were playing a grotesque form of blind man's buff with him. These mischievous dwarfs were variously referred to as "bees," "devils," "monkey-men," "little spiders," and "little fish." The Saran knowingly stated that: "The weak always band together against the strong" (which resonated with the claim of Miriam's grandfather), while a Philistine lord replied: "Your lion has become a mouse." This exchange was followed much later by a crowd gawker yelling out: "put a ring through his nose," then a Philistine lord referring to Samson as an "ox," and another crowd gawker said that Samson "leads like a goat." Samson's strength was thus referred to via its various phases of diminution, coupled with additional animal associations. Indeed, the "goat" comment resonated with the traditional religious use of goats as sin offerings to God ("Lev." 16:7-9), which itself resonated with Samson-the-goat's eventual sacrificial, goat-like fate.

5.0 Strength-Enhancing Costuming and Props

[30] Given the nature of film art, it is no surprise to find that DeMille had pursued his strength thematic using costumes and props to buttress his filmic desires. For example:

5.1 Not only was Samson big, and his back wide, but the earthy coloured stripes on his coat are similarly wide with thick stitches holding the pieces together. This physically suggested hugeness and wide-as-an-ox power at the very first moment the audience is introduced to Samson on-screen.

5.2 When Samson took off his stripped coat, his remaining costume was designed to reveal his huge, naked chest, another iconic indicator of manly, brutish strength. This costume feature was further complemented by huge shoulder pads that enhanced the illusion of Samson's width-cum-strength. Apparently, both DeMille and his costume designer Edith Head were aware of the principles of power dressing.

5.3 Samson wore various thick armbands and wristbands that accentuated the physical power and danger thematic. In particular, his armband dagger signified power, danger and lethal force, just like Samson himself - the original lethal weapon before Mel Gibson played Detective Martin Riggs in *Lethal Weapon* (and its many sequels).

5.4 During the kitchen conversation with his mother, Samson briefly toyed with a small, weighted, hand net. This resonated with the image of Samson as a gladiator—the hero-warriors of another ancient arena. This prop also thematically linked Samson with his later net capture by the dwarf tormentors in Dagon's temple, especially when Garmiskar was menacingly moving towards him. Samson-the-strongman then became Samson-the-pitiful-clown-cum-fallen-gladiator-of-God.

This scene also invoked the traditional "how the mighty have fallen" sympathies and associated feelings of comeuppance for good dramatic effect.

5.5 During the initial encounter between Samson and Delilah in the oasis love-nest, Samson is busily gathering up rich booty from her tent. One particular item that he threw over his shoulder looked suspiciously like a machine-gun belt full of bullets. Of course, it was not, nor was it appropriate for the historical and cultural setting of the Samson saga, but that suggestive image subtly resonated with both Samson's lethality and his own warring behaviour. This prop deception was especially appropriate in post-World War II (1939-1945) America with its strong gun culture ethos.

5.6 At Ramath-Lehi, the bound Samson not only easily broke loose from his scripturally accurate "cord" bonds ("Judg." 15:14), but also from DeMille's (scripturally unspecified) metal chains. However, DeMille's use of chains for the renown strongman was plausible given the Philistine's reputation for the "control of the manufacture of iron tools and weapons giving them arms superiority over the Israelites" (Comay, 1993, 278). DeMille had therefore reinforced the theme of strength from a natural and (ancient) high tech source. In effect, DeMille's chains acted as a Samson strength enhancer, which jibbed with the Philistine lord's comment about Samson, the "man of iron" now in metal chains himself.

5.7 Prior to his physical blinding, Samson is bound by chains repeatedly wrapped around his body, and another chain loop is placed around his forehead (all scripturally unspecified). This would be excessive wrapping for a normal captive, but it jibs very well with Samson's strength reputation, and thus the obvious need to go to extra lengths to control him adequately.

5.8 Samson slaved in the Gaza prison gristmill wearing formidable metals chains and a big waist belt akin to a wrestler's prize and/or a weight-lifters safety apparel. This implied immense personal power in need of huge restraints and conjured up thoughts of muscular antics; which was partially fulfilled on-screen when Samson suddenly grabbed Delilah and lifted her above his head as if to body slam her down, wrestler style (and itself another strength enhancing connotation).

5.9 Samson is physically dwarfed by the huge Gaza prison millstone, itself a captured machine of crushing power going around in circles. Metaphorically, the millstone was Samson, a slave-tool, a monotonously crushing human counterpart who would later dwarf dwarfs, and stagger around in Dagon's temple before crushing the Philistines into (proverbial) dust.

5.10 In Dagon's temple, the majority of the support columns have thick tops and chunky bases, however, the two columns that Samson cracks apart have much thinner bases compared to the rest of the columns. DeMille is simultaneously engineering the idea of temple hugeness (and implying great Samson strength to destroy it) while building in a plausible excuse for Samson's temple-collapsing capacities. These two special DeMilleian columns were not really *that* thick, and so any ordinary strongman could have moved them unassisted with a bit of reasonable effort.

6.0 The Deployment of Various Physical Size Comparisons

[31] Given all the strength indicators used so far, DeMille was not averse to engineering strength differentials via cunningly crafted size comparisons for further dramatic effect. For example:

6.1 Early within *Samson and Delilah*, huge Philistine soldiers walked three abreast into the Zorah village streetscape. This physically and symbolically emphasised their size, menace and intrusive threat potential. This scene linked with an earlier establishing shot showing many Philistine soldiers marching across the screen in Fascist fashion (itself symbolic of fierce, dominating power), especially as DeMille-the-narrator simultaneously referred to tyranny ruling the world. These three soldier-brutes were in direct physical (as well as political, religious and ethnic) opposition to the feeble old Story Teller, the weak Miriam, and the small boy Saul (and another symbolic set of three emphasising diminution). The three brutes were also symbolically stamped as evil because they were not nice to old people, woman or children, the tripartite hallmark of barbarians (and another symbolic set of three to emphasise the essence of victimisation, and therefore weakness - the opposite of Samson-like strength).

6.2 During the Saran's lion hunt, the physically smaller Samson was in intense physical combat with the brutish man-mountain Garmiskar, but he beat him quickly and resoundingly. This dramatically proved Samson's extraordinary physical prowess. Symbolically speaking, as Garmiskar was the servant of the Saran, and Samson was the servant of YHWH, it prefigured the winning power of Danites over Philistines and thus the true (invisible) God over the (visible) pagan deity Dagon. Political oneupmanship was implied by Samson's physical oneupmanship.

6.3 Samson's hugeness and strength was counterpointed with the physical smallness and intrinsic weakness of the woman-folk and youth surrounding him. This primarily consisted of his mother, Semadar, Delilah, Hisham (Julia Faye), Miriam, and especially young Saul who mirrored Samson gender-wise (i.e., male), costume-wise (e.g., headband, personal weapons) and behaviourally (e.g., hot tempted, aggressive). As such, Samson was always physically superior in such "weaker" company, he was treated as such, and he was perceived as such by both on-screen characters and off-screen audiences alike.

6.4 Samson was tormented by a hoard of dwarfs in Dagon's temple arena (which resonated with the arena-and-dwarf scenes in DeMille's Christian adventure film *The Sign of the Cross*). Samson was definitely huge compared to these genuine little people. In addition, the size comparisons and its intrinsic evilness were reinforced in two ways. Firstly, dwarfs in the *Bible* are associated with rejection by God ("Lev." 21:20). Secondly, a crowd member referred to the dwarfs as "little spiders" who had caught Samson in their net, just like some real spiders who can catch big insects, birds etc. in their net-like webs. Spiders are also traditionally associated with fear, danger and discomfort. DeMille's dialogue resonated with Samson being caught in Delilah's web-like loom, physically speaking ("Judg." 16:13-14), and then caught in her black widow-like oasis love-nest trap, metaphorically speaking. Especially when Samson referred to the oasis tent and mentally twigged: "The oldest trick in the world, a silk trap baited with a woman." Silk being akin to the thread of a spider.

6.5 A temple audience member called Samson a "whale" while he was caught in the cruel net of the "little fish" dwarfs. Not only does a whale conceptually invoke

hugeness linked to Samson, especially compared to little fish, but the maritime reference was DeMille-the-authenticity-stickler's subtle indicator of the sea-people origins of the Philistines (Comay, 1993, 290). As Jon Solomon (2001, 164) pointed out concerning DeMille's design of Dagon's temple: "Scholars know that Delilah's Philistines were actually a seafaring people who might have come to Philistia from Minoan Crete, so DeMille used the inverted Minoan for these Philistine columns."

6.6 DeMille also cunningly *prevented* the on-screen confrontation between Samson and the three Philistine soldiers in the Zorah village streetscape at the film's beginning, thus deliberately avoiding any size comparisons. Miriam assured Samson that the trouble had passed and so there was no need for his personal intervention. Devaluing Samson's size and strength at that time would have been counterproductive to DeMille's strength-engineering desires, and it would have dramatically weaken the dramatic Samson confrontations with rival powers to come.

6.7 DeMille also *prevented* a major physical confrontation between the blind and humiliated Samson and the huge Garmiskar in Dagon's temple. Garmiskar menacingly approached a kneeling Samson when the smaller Delilah intervened, took away his whip, dismissed him and then gently used the whip on Samson herself. Later, Delilah led the shuffling Samson to the fateful temple columns. Therefore, Samson looked small when weak and fallen, average height when led to the columns, and then big and strong when temple-toppling. Subtextually speaking, it was a symbolic set of three increasing height states that physically tracked Samson's spiritual elevation prior to his sacrificial death.

7.0 Filmic Design, Strength-Enhancing Techniques

[32] In addition to costumes and props, DeMille-the-filmmaker used other camera techniques to continue enhancing the Samson strength illusion. For example:

7.1 When Samson visited his mother at her rustic home, the opening shot was of Samson's big, brawny back. This visually signalled hugeness and power, and symbolically implied that Samson was very big because he literally filled the screen in blanket fashion.

7.2 When Samson started vigorously killing Philistine soldiers at the Lehi pass, DeMille filmed the battle scene in a narrow passage-like space (scripturally unspecified). This geographic choice symbolically emphasised Samson's physical confinement while minimising the need for numerous actors. Only a dozen or so extras were needed to fill up the available space and still create the illusion of a huge crowd, especially when the (even smaller number of) dead filled the screen. It also tactfully avoided the scriptural credibility issue of whether one man with the jawbone of an ass could kill a thousand armed soldiers ("Judg." 15:14-17). DeMille opted for cost-cutting plausibility without losing the essence of Samson's killing credibility or the dramatic effect of the scene.

8.0 Extra-Filmic Strength-Enhancing Techniques: The Film Poster

[33] In addition to all the above, DeMille-the-businessman employed cunning marketing to get his strength point across, particular through the advertising film poster.

8.1 One of the various advertising posters for *Samson and Delilah* showed Samson pushing over the pagan temple (Reid, 1988, 181), but rather than a blown-up still from DeMille's film, it was actually a reproduction of Gustave Dore's sketch of the same biblical incident (Dore, 1974, 66). These sketched columns were roughly three times as thick as Samson's body, and not the two thinly tapered props used in DeMille's actual film (albeit, his other temple columns were wider in the Dore fashion). The accompanying poster caption proclaimed: "A story timeless, tumultuous, overpowering!" Another symbolic set of three used for emphasis, thereby firmly anchoring its possible meanings by metalingually cueing in the DeMille-desired strength interpretation.

8.2 The use of Gustave Dore, the famous French book illustrator, was also cunning because it gave DeMille artistic credibility by associating his pop culture product with a master artist (i.e., a success-by-association tactic). After all, DeMille-the-film-artist was also DeMille-the-businessman who wanted box-office success and to continue working in a cut-throat Hollywood that did not easily tolerate failure.

DeMille: Master of the American Biblical Epic

[34] As the above detailed explication has amply demonstrated, DeMille had visually, verbally, textually and subtextually implied Samson's incredible strength on multiple occasions, at multiple levels, in multiple ways. He saturated *Samson and Delilah* with as many manifestations of the strength thematic that he could artistically muster short of having Samson boast aloud about his super strength! DeMille's epic engineering and filmic craftsmanship left no doubt in the audience's mind (consciously and unconsciously, overtly and covertly) that Victor Mature-as-Samson was a very strong man; and unnaturally so, whether in his spirit-filled mode or not. DeMille's strategy of having his film poster, the narrator, Samson, and his own relatives, friends, lovers, enemies and rivals confirm his strength was a masterstroke of thematic aesthetics. And yet, despite these innumerable repetitions, it did *not* overwhelm the audience or detract from its primary entertainment function as an ancient love story gone awry (i.e., a he-man with a she-problem). Most importantly of all for DeMille-the-Christian-apologist, it did not generate audience incredulity problems that the hyperbolic *Bible* account could generate in 20th (and now 21st) century readers. DeMille made the Samson saga simultaneously believable *and* enjoyable, which was a feat and pay off not surpassed by either of his latter-day directorial rivals, Lee Philips or Nicholas Roeg!

[35] For DeMille-the-businessman, the multiple verifications of Samson's strength also had a scattergun marketing impact across the broad demographic of his viewers that ensured box-office success. For whatever character one identified with, they were inclined to believe their assessment of Samson's incredible strength, thus further ramping up the credibility quotient of the film. No wonder George Macdonald Fraser (1988, 8-9) claimed that: "Victor Mature was a Samson fit for fundamentalists and Covenanters," or that Joel Finler (1985, 32) considered Cecil B. DeMille to be the "King of the epic Biblical spectacular," or that director Martin Scorsese (1978, 63) was so impressed by *Samson and Delilah* that he argued: "De Mille presented a fantasy, dreamlike quality on film that was so real, if you saw his movies as a child, they stuck with you for life."

[36] Regrettably, DeMille's biblically-inspired multiple repetition strategy and his

many other auteuristic techniques are still grossly unappreciated today, but nonetheless, they are still indicative of a master filmmaker worthy of the tag: "*auteur* of *auteurs*" (Vidal, 1995, 303). Contrary to popular belief and spiteful industry reviews, DeMille was a very accomplished biblical epicist who could work successfully within the innumerable pragmatic limitations of his day. He was also an accomplished Christian artist who did think long, hard and deeply about his film craft. The above explication also verifies Henry Wilcoxon's decades old claim. Namely:




I think Cecil B. DeMille was always grossly misunderstood and downgraded by the critics...Yes, he liked his films to make money, but he was a great showman, and the effects he got came from more artistic ingenuity and solid thinking than is realized...I can tell you that he was a very conscientious craftsman...though often accused of superficiality and pretentiousness, was actually very simple and direct and uncomplicated in his desire to promote movement and clarity (Quirk, 1985, 68).

Conclusion

[37] Not only is DeMille the American master of the biblical epic, a legitimate Hollywood legend, and a true cultural icon, especially remembered as *the* archetypal image of a Hollywood film director, but as David Thomson (1995, 182) pointed out: "from about 1918 to 1950, De Mille did more than anyone—including [D.W.] Griffith—to make the American public appreciate directors." No wonder Jon Solomon (2001, 174) considered that DeMille was a directorial giant who (along with John Huston) stood taller than the rest in making *Old Testament* biblical epics. C.B. was truly that good, and his films were full of artfulness not artlessness, despite the "inexplicable hatred and contempt so many reviewers had for Cecil B. DeMille over the years" (Edmonds and Mimura, 1980, 48). It is just a pity that it has taken over half a century to recognise DeMille's aesthetic genius with genre. In addition to the even slower appreciation of his passionate religious convictions (Higham, 1973, ix-x) and detailed scriptural knowledge that made him "virtually the Sunday school teacher for the nation (Beck, 2005, 27).

[38] The writer argues that DeMille's filmic *oeuvre* warrants a more thoughtful re-evaluation than has been evidenced to date within academia. Especially considering that: "DeMille's parting of the Red Sea in 1956 [*The Ten Commandments*] and his Samsonian destruction of the temple of Dagon [*Samson and Delilah* (1949)]...will be remembered as the most representative and iconographical Old Testament depictions of the twentieth century" (Solomon, 2001, 175). Somewhat appropriately, this belated re-discovery (the Second Coming of DeMille?) is now being spearheaded by biblical scholars themselves (Exum, 1996; Jasper, 1999; Murphy, 1999), where no doubt even greater DeMilleian secrets await revelation, explication and dissemination. Further research into DeMille Studies, *Bible* films and the emerging interdisciplinary genre of religion-and-film (aka cinematic theology, celluloid religion, theo-film, film-faith dialogue) is warranted, recommended and certainly long overdue, which is itself worth repeating!

Notes

- ¹  All scriptural quotes refer to the Authorized King James Version of the *Bible* (KJV aka AV). This edition was frequently used by DeMille, especially in his early days because of audience familiarity with it (Higashi, 1994, 180). Bracketed scriptural references will also be employed throughout the work to reinforce the *Bible*-film parallels, as appropriate.
- ²  Many scholars have spelled Cecil's surname as "De Mille" or "de Mille" or "deMille" however, the correct professional spelling is "DeMille" (DeMille and Hayne, 1960, 6), and so it will be used herein unless quoting others.
- ³  There is not one DeMille but many DeMille personas. His career was so multi-faceted that to describe, let alone justify each aspect would be prohibitive. Indeed, it is "impossible to describe the career of Cecil B. DeMille in a few words. A whole book is needed" (Kardish, 1972, 133). Therefore, concise, hyphenated, compound terms will be used throughout to help disentangle his various roles and avoid needless explanation and reader boredom. This same principle will be applied elsewhere as appropriate.

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- David and Bathsheba* (1951, dir. Henry King)
- Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954, dir. Delmer Daves)
- The Egyptian* (1954, dir. Michael Curtis)
- The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)
- Hercules* (1959, dir. Pietro Francisci)

Lethal Weapon (1987, dir. Richard Donner)

Million Dollar Mermaid (1952, dir. Mervyn LeRoy)

One Million B.C. (1939, dir. Hal Roach)

The Robe (1953, dir. Henry Koster)

Samson and Delilah (1949, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)

Samson and Delilah (1984, dir. Lee Philips)

Samson and Delilah (1996, dir. Nicholas Roeg)

The Sign of the Cross (1932, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)

Solomon and Sheba (1959, dir. King Vidor)

Tarzan and the Mermaids (1948, dir. Robert Floey)

Tarzan of the Apes (1918, dir. Scott Sydney)

The Ten Commandments (1923, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)

The Ten Commandments (1956, dir. Cecil B. DeMille)