

MAKING A “BAD” WOMAN WICKED:
THE DEVILISH CONSTRUCTION OF DELILAH
WITHIN CECIL B. DEMILLE’S *SAMSON AND DELILAH* (1949)

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Abstract

Samson is publicly perceived as an Old Testament hero, although the last and worst of the twelve judges overseeing Israel’s politico-religious disintegration (Judg. 13-16). DeMille-as-Christian-apologist enhanced Samson’s sanctity by subtextually engineering him as a Christ-figure, and conversely, by subtextually engineering Delilah as a sexy serpent/Satan/Devil-figure. The critical literature is reviewed, and *Samson and Delilah* closely examined utilizing humanist film criticism to explicate Delilah’s wicked construction. It is concluded that DeMille was a far more artful biblical filmmaker than has hitherto been appreciated. Further research into the emerging interdisciplinary fields of religion-and-film, DeMille studies and the cinematic Bible are recommended.

Cecil B. DeMille: Master of the American Biblical Epic

Cecil B. DeMille (1881–1959),¹ known as “C.B.” (to close friends), “Generalissimo” (to commentators) and “Mr. DeMille” (to everyone else), helped turn an obscure California orange grove into a world class movie centre² that became *the* synonym for filmmaking worldwide—Hollywood. Not only was DeMille a founder of Tinsel Town and an

1. Many scholars have spelled Cecil’s surname as “De Mille” or “de Mille” or “deMille;” however, the correct professional (as opposed to personal) spelling is “DeMille” (DeMille & Hayne 1960: 6), and so it will be used herein unless quoting others.

2. Although there are significant ontological differences between “film,” “cinema,” “movies,” “videos,” “TV,” “DVD,” “Internet movies,” etc., they provide similar audiovisual images and will be treated herein as essentially interchangeable.

important film pioneer who helped trigger the “Age of Hollywood” (Paglia 1994: 12), but he would become *the* archetypal image of a movie director, complete with riding boots, puttees and whip (Birchard 2004; DeMille and Hayne 1960; Edwards 1988; Essoe and Lee 1970; Higashi 1985, 1994; Higham 1973; Koury 1959; Ringgold and Bodeen 1969). With his indelible classics, *The Ten Commandments* (silent; b&w), *The King of Kings* (silent; b&w), *Samson and Delilah* (sound; colour) and *The Ten Commandments* (sound; colour), DeMille became the master of the American biblical epic and was subsequently tagged the “high priest of the religious genre” (Holloway 1977: 26), a “prophet in celluloid” (Billy Graham quoted in Andersen 1970: 279) and “King of the epic Biblical spectacular” (Finler 1985: 32). As one Protestant church leader enthusiastically put it: “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). Nowadays, “televised DeMille is essentially the Bible for the TV generation” (Brode 1995: 68) and even DeMille himself claimed that “my ministry was making religious movies and getting more people to read the Bible than anyone else ever has” (Orrison 1999: 108).

As a creative producer-director,³ who ultimately achieved this ministering goal, DeMille certainly deserved these accolades. He became Hollywood’s leading cinematic lay preacher by employing the silver screen as his sermonizing tool and made as many Bible movies as the public wanted and his financial backers would countenance. Religiously speaking, DeMille was an Episcopalian, the son of a Christian lay minister father, Henry Churchill DeMille (DeMille and Hayne 1960: 12-13) and a (Sephardic) Jewish mother, Matilda Beatrice “Bebe” DeMille née Samuel (Edwards 1988: 14). Cecil saw himself as the twentieth-century cinematic translator of the Holy Word and claimed that: “all I have striven to do in any of my Biblical pictures, was to translate into another medium, the medium of sight and sound, the words of the Bible” (DeMille and Hayne 1960: 261), or as he put it elsewhere: “I don’t interpret the Bible...I reprint it in the universal lan-

3. There is not one DeMille but many DeMilles. His career was so long, complex and multi-faceted that to describe, let alone justify, each aspect would be prohibitive. Therefore, concise hyphenated compound terms will be used throughout the text to help disentangle DeMille’s various roles and avoid needless explanation, repetition and boredom. This same compound tactic will also be used elsewhere as appropriate.

guage of the motion picture” (Anonymous 1958: 92). Overall, DeMille was a Christian apologist, a self-confessed pop culture professional (DeMille and Hayne 1960: 195), and a maker of mass entertainment who quickly became the people’s director with movies that fed their dreams and fantasies. In that process, he became the acknowledged “master at visual detail, gadgetry and period objects” (Kaminsky 1980: 83) and the “master of spectacle and mob scenes” (Singer 1954: 119), which is still very impressive compared to today’s computer-generated special effects.

Therefore, it is not too surprising to find that DeMille went to great lengths to construct scripturally-plausible characters according to his Christian faith within *Samson and Delilah*, his Technicolor Testament of a man sacred to both Judaism and Christianity. Starring the beefcake Victor Mature as Samson and the seductive Hedy Lamarr as Delilah, this film about beauty, betrayal and blindness was a commercial success in its day and thereafter. For example, it earned first-place out of 13 nominees for the (1941–1950) “Box-Office Hits” for Paramount, earning US \$9 million in North American rentals (Finler 1992: 259). It was first-place out of 19 nominees in the 1950 “Annual Top Money-making Films,” earning US \$11 million (Steinberg 1982: 20), and by 20 December 1969 it had generated a net profit of US \$5,564,825.17 having originally cost US \$3,097,563.05 (Birchard 2004: 334). The film also received the Parents Magazine Award and the Grand Prix, Film Francais award (Essoe and Lee 1970: 245-247), plus the 1950 Academy Award Oscar for Costume Design (Colour) and a second Oscar for Art Direction (Colour) (Harkness 1994: 109).

More importantly, despite its 1940s vintage, it still stirs the hearts and minds of viewers today. For example, journalist Phillip Lopate (1987: 74) enthusiastically proclaimed: “the past-her-prime Lamarr and the stalwart Mature will always remain in my imagination the quintessential, the *actual* Samson and Delilah.” American film director Martin Scorsese (1978: 63) was similarly impressed by it and contended: “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.” 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...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 (Long 2001: 27).

This great story-telling talent was also the secret of *Samson and Delilah*. Even more significant, the enthusiasm for DeMille and the usually disparaged beard-and-bathrobe genre is increasingly being championed by academic biblical scholars.

The Scholarly Importance of Samson and Delilah (1949)

Historically speaking, DeMille’s film adaptation of the Samson saga based upon Judges 13–16,⁴ is considered a “watershed film” (Schatz 1997: 394) that triggered the 1950s rash of biblical epics. It also inspired its own sub-genre category, namely, the great Jewish lover film alongside *David and Bathsheba* and also *Solomon and Sheba*, which itself was a desperate attempt to copy DeMille (Kozlovic 2002d). Despite its fifty-year-plus vintage, *Samson and Delilah* not only avoided the dustbin of film history, but its “reputation has by now stabilized into one of camp respectability” (Murphy 1999: 109-110), particularly amongst Western religion scholars. For example, Jack Sasson (1988: 339) called it a “wonderful film.” J. Cheryl Exum (1996: 13) claimed: “For all its hokeyness *Samson and Delilah* is a brilliant film” and that “Hedy Lamarr, with all of her trappings, *is Delilah* for me” (p. 13). Later, Exum (2002: 255) would called it “a masterpiece of biblical film making (it gets better after repeated viewings); the 1949 film sparkles in spite of its age, with memorable dialogue and impressive over-acting.” Their scholarly biblical peer, David Jasper (1999), even considered it to be of major significance for professional exegesis. As he argued:

4. The Authorized King James Version of the Bible (KJV; aka AV) will be used throughout, unless quoting other translations. This version 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 text to reinforce the Bible-film parallels where appropriate.

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 de-humanizing biblical perspective of Israel's salvation history and replaces it with a *countercoherence* of a Delilah following her heart and remaining true to Samson... (p. 51).

J. Clinton McCann (2002) was also impressed with the film and acknowledged DeMille's major role in shaping popular attitudes towards the Bible. As he argued:

The last and probably best known of the judges is Samson, although most people's knowledge of Samson is limited to his relationship with Delilah ([Judg.] 16:4-31); and the source of people's knowledge is as likely to be Cecil B. DeMille's film *Samson and Delilah* as it is the biblical text. Samson's story contains all the features that make for a top-rated movie—excessive violence, romance and sex, and R-rated humor. No wonder it attracted DeMille (p. 92)!

Or as J. Stephen Lang (2003: 295) put it: “Colorful, yes? No wonder the movie director Cecil B. DeMille made a grand epic out of it.”

This rediscovery of DeMille's religious credentials is heart-warming because it vindicates the decades-old prophecy of Henry Wilcoxon (1970: 276), namely: “True recognition for DeMille's greatness will come many years after his death [in 1959].” Therefore, it seems only appropriate to continue this (re-)discovery process and further recover C.B.'s rightful reputation as a pop culture artist who used the silver screen as his canvass and brought Christian audiovisual communication to the fore. Much can be learned by closely re-examining DeMille's page-to-projector skillfulness instead of automatically defaulting to the knee-jerk condemnations, snide remarks and superficial assessments that have traditionally (and unfairly) warped DeMille's reputation; that is, by going past what Babington and Evans (1993: 1) generically described as going “beyond the valley of the wisecrack.” The emerging fields of religion-and-film (aka celluloid religion, theo-film, cinematic theology, film-faith dialogue), DeMille studies and the cultural appreciation of the cinematic Bible deserve better treatment. Especially considering the disturbing “slim literature on film and religion” (Mason 1993: 649) in a “highly immature field” (Kraemer 2004: 243) that “remains a minority interest” (Telford 1995: 365), but which is fast

becoming “a developing industry” (Arrandale 2004: 490) and an increasingly important film genre (Babington and Evans 1993; Forshey 1992).

In Pursuit of DeMille’s Sacred Subtexts

The breadth, depth and range of DeMille’s artistic prowess and his cultural contributions to religion studies have not been fully appreciated to date, nor has *Samson and Delilah* given up all its cinematic secrets, albeit, this is slowly changing (Kozlovic 2002a, 2002c, 2003b). Nevertheless, much more work is needed to fully appreciate C.B.’s various contributions to the art of biblical epics, the religion-and-film genre, and American history in general. One of his frequently ignored trade secrets that contributed to his phenomenal box-office success was his deft use of sacred subtexts (aka holy subtexts; divine infra-narrations). What are sacred subtexts? A filmic narrative can have a dual nature, that is, an *overt* storyline plus a *covert* storyline of varying complexity that is comparable to the metaphorical or symbolic within literature. As Bernard Dick (1998: 129) described this relationship: “the narrative and infranarrative (or text and subtext) are not two separate entities (there is, after all, only one film); think of them, rather, as two concentric circles, the infranarrative being *within* the narrative.” In short, a subtext is a story hidden within a story, and it is a sacred subtext if it deals with holy stories, topics and characters.

Religious subtexts (as well as political subtexts and sexual subtexts) have been built into popular films since the genesis of the cinema (Kozlovic 2000, 2001a, 2003c), particularly Christ-figures (Kozlovic 2001b, 2002b, 2004). What is exciting about DeMille-as-screen-artist is that not only did he employ sacred subtexts, but he frequently employed an interlocking series of them within his overtly biblical films to make them extra thick with sacred meaning (i.e. religion hidden within religion). For example, *Samson and Delilah* was DeMille’s Old Testament (OT) film overtly (i.e. textually) based upon the Book of Judges. However, he also covertly (i.e. subtextually) reconstructed scenes within it from the Book of Revelation in the New Testament (NT) and the Book of Genesis (OT), and references to the Gospel Jesus (NT). This enhanced the potency of its religious meaning and legitimately earned DeMille his reputation as the master of the American biblical epic, albeit, grossly unappreciated today and in his day.

DeMille: The Unsung Hollywood Auteur

Praising C.B. has been difficult for many critics for a variety of unsavoury reasons, but particularly hard to accept is the “inexplicable hatred and contempt so many reviewers had for Cecil B. DeMille over the years” (Edmonds and Mimura 1980: 48). As James Card (1994: 114) noted: “No famous film director has ever endured the critical contempt consistently heaped on DeMille through the last thirty-five years of his career.” Regrettably, this contempt, and its mindless repetition thereafter has warped any honest, accurate or fair assessment of his artistic reputation. After all, who has seen all seventy of DeMille’s feature films (52 silent, 18 sound), let alone the ones he produced but did not personally direct, plus the unaccredited creative input he provided his many friends, colleagues and relatives throughout his long (1913–1959) filmmaking career (Birchard 2004; Higashi 1985; Ringgold and Bodeen 1969)?

Nevertheless, if his directorial longevity, legendary reputation and persistent box-office successes are not sufficient evidence of his professional stature and survival skills in a cut-throat industry where one bad film could mean your last, then at least DeMille’s industry superiors knew his true worth. 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*. But there has appeared only one Cecil B. DeMille (Behlmer 1972: 400).

Regrettably, rather than being saluted, DeMille is more frequently derided as a Victorian throwback devoted to kitsch aesthetics and erotic titillation hidden behind a pious facade. This is a serious mistake

needing urgent correction, particularly the revealing of his considerable aesthetic contributions to the art of sacred cinema.⁵

But why did DeMille need to resort to this aesthetic tactic to uprate Samson’s sanctity in the first place? Because, scripturally speaking, Samson is a biblical bad boy, a very bad boy.

Samson: The Weak Strongman

This ancient He man with a She problem was notoriously inept as the last of the twelve judges of pre-monarchal Israel. These judges were not judicial officers but charismatic “tough guys, strongmen, military leaders” (Lang 2003: 292). Not only did Samson oversee the downward spiral of Israel’s politico-religious disintegration (Judges 13–16), but his personal history was itself a living mirror of this national disintegration. As Richard D. Nelson (1998: 100) noted, Samson is “Israel’s most colorful but least effective judge,” or as J. Clinton McCann (2002: 93) more bluntly critiqued him, Samson is “the *worst* of the judges...after Samson, things degenerate into utter chaos. As the final judge, Samson represents not the glorious culmination of the series of judges, but rather its abysmal conclusion.” Samson is so bad that John Dancy (2002: 207) suggested that: “the three references to the Nazirite vow (13.5, 7; 16.17)—and perhaps the whole-birth story of ch. 13—were added later to give the [Samson] cycle a pious character otherwise notably lacking.”

Such negative assessments of Samson fly in the face of the public’s traditional perception of him as an “Israelite hero” (Jeter Jr. 2003: 104), a “Hebrew Hercules” (Graham 1996: 203), “a child of nature” (Dancy 2002: 206), a “roguish hero” (Nelson 1998: 93) and a man-of-God who was cruelly betrayed by that “Double agent Delilah” (Sheldon 2003: 17). In fact, professional biblicists have not been very kind to Samson at all, especially in recent times where they appear to be out-doing each other in deriding him. For example, he has been mercilessly tagged as:

5. Consequently, below I review the critical film, religion and DeMille literature and integrate it into the text to enhance narrative coherence (albeit, with a strong reportage flavour). Utilizing textually-based, humanist film criticism as the analytical lens (i.e. examining the world *inside* the frame, but not the world *outside* the frame—Bywater and Sobchack 1989), the video version of *Samson and Delilah* (VHF PAL RFM1294) is closely examined to reveal DeMille’s multi-layered construction of a wicked Delilah.

“Samson, the dodo” (Bledstein 1993: 49), “a great big simpleton” (Josipovici 1988: 123), “the most foolish champion Israel ever had” (Williams 1993: 45), “perhaps the greatest jackass in the Bible” (Bledstein 1993: 48), “a foolish buffoon” (Niditch 2001: 187), “incredibly stupid” (Leneman 2000: 148), a “chowderhead” (Jeter Jr. 2003: 105), “dense” (Higgs 2000: 120), “a jerk” (Mary Cartledge-Hayes quoted in Bellis 1994: 125), “all brawn, little brain aside from street smarts with riddles” (Bledstein 1993: 50), “not necessarily the brightest man [in the world]” (Laffey 1988: 104), the “Dupe of Delilah” (Jeter Jr. 2003: 104), “a model of bad male behavior” (Streete 1997: 52) and a “Deuteronomistic Oskar Schindler, both of them selfish, oversexed dummkopfs” (Jeter Jr. 2003: 102)!

Indeed, “Samson could have been the poster boy for the ‘big stupid male’ stereotype” (Bell Jr. and Campbell 2003: 98). As John Dancy (2002: 213) summed him up: “Samson was no more a tragic hero than he was a sun myth. As an anthropological type, he is closest to the Wild Man of medieval Europe. As a literary figure, he is a (typically Hebrew) down-market version of Enkidu or Heracles.” Yet, neither Christianity nor DeMille-the-cinematic-lay-preacher could write Samson off as a loser *par excellence* because he was included in the list of God’s faithful (Heb. 11:32), what J. Stephen Lang (2003: 33) called the “Faith Hall of Fame,” alongside such notables as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sara (Sarah), Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gedoen (Gideon), Barak, Jephthae (Jephthah), David, Samuel, and the prophets (Hebrews 11). This New Testament naming honour, plus the fact that God did infuse his body with his holy spirit, had the theological effect of redeeming Samson and generating further attempts by Christendom to do likewise, culminating in the 1940s screen adaptation by DeMille—“Hollywood’s reigning Biblical scholar” (Friedman 1982: 16). Therefore, what could DeMille as a professional-pop-culture-religious-filmmaker-and-Christian-believer do to satisfy the peoples’ perceptions of Samson as a good, religious man while simultaneously playing down his true biblical bozo status?

One practical solution was to enhance Samson’s sanctity by filmicly reconstructing him as a rustic Christ-figure (Kozlovic 2003b). That is, to uprate his reputation by subtextually constructing Samson as a proto-Jesus, itself a traditional theological practice (Crenshaw 1978: 139-140), albeit, frowned upon by some preachers today (Jeter Jr. 2003: 109). However, there is only so much that can be legitimately done in

this direction, whether by biblicists or DeMille, before exhausting the limits of incredulity, especially for a religious leader who was *not* religious, did *not* conduct ritual services, did *not* adjudicate disputes and did *not* lead his men into battle. As Joseph R. Jeter Jr. (2003: 116) pointed out: "we find not one single picture of Samson in a leadership role... Everything Samson did was for himself and not for others" and therefore no role model for the faithful to emulate, either then or today, and as also evidenced by the many children's Bibles that erase the Samson story altogether (e.g. Knowles 1989).

However, Samson's misdemeanours do not end there. He also acted very badly by violating his people's endogamy traditions (Judg. 14:1-3), ignoring his Nazarite vow (Judg. 13:7), tainting his parents' ritual purity (Judg. 14:6, 8-9) and treating them with gross disrespect (Judg. 14:1-4). As Harris, Brown and Moore (2000: 243) put it: "We expected a little more than a spoiled brat who orders his parents around and has no regard for family values." Samson was also a vengeful arsonist (Judg. 15:4-5) who visited harlots (Judg. 16:1), murdered and robbed innocent merchants to pay off his unwise riddle debts (Judg. 14:18-19), and he "played fast and loose with women and killed Philistines almost as a pastime" (Jeter Jr. 2003: 101). Even at his death, the blind Samson dedicated himself to a murderous mission via a spectacular form of suicidal terrorism, namely, crashing Dagon's temple upon the heads of the Philistines and himself (Judg. 16:25-30). Not for some God-instructed, noble or spiritual cause, but for bloody revenge, so "that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes" (Judg. 16:28). As John Dancy (2002: 213) pointed out, Samson's act of suicidal revenge was not heroic "unless kamikaze pilots and suicidal Muslim terrorists are all heroes."

No wonder Caroline Pressler (2002: 208) described Samson as a "brawny, bawdy, amoral adventurer" or that Samson is seen as violent, vengeful, bitter, libidinous, uncontrollable, destructive, murderous and, in Joseph R. Jeter's (2003: 112) eyes, "a moral pig." In fact, he is the only biblical judge who failed in his God-sanctioned, national rescue mission. He did not liberate his people from their oppressive yoke, instead he would only "*begin* to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines" (Judg. 13:5) (my emphasis). Even DeMille's Samson freely admitted his personal failure to young Saul (Russell Tamblyn) when he remorsefully referred to himself as "a leader who failed his people,"

and who had “led them a crooked path” before dutifully dying in spectacular, disaster movie fashion at film’s end.

Since DeMille’s christomorphic tactic was not sufficient to cinematically redeem Samson (Kozlovic 2003b), he employed another practical solution that worked in tandem with Samson’s subtextual christification. Namely, he deliberately character-assassinated Delilah, Samson’s female nemesis, by subtextually engineering her as a serpent/Satan/Devil-figure (with other serpentine associations). DeMille had thus uprated Delilah’s traditional “bad” girl status into the realms of devilish wickedness. This androcentric, patriarchal strategy has been employed by the Christian Church for centuries, and so DeMille-the-cinematic-lay-preacher likewise employed it within *Samson and Delilah*. In addition, DeMille’s cunning aesthetic solution also matched his auteur penchant for constructing binary oppositions for both dramaturgical and scriptural authenticity reasons (Kozlovic 2002c).

Delilah: The Strongman Weakener

Delilah is traditionally considered a biblical “bad” girl by Judaeo-Christianity. Why? Because biblical “women often lacked financial resources and education, charm and beauty were their only means of gaining power and influence. Such women have been classified as either ‘good’ (Judith, Jael, Esther) or ‘bad’ (Delilah) depending on whether or not they used their power for the Hebrew people” (Kirk 2004: 171). Therefore, the “bad” Delilah is deemed so from the perspective of male ideology and Israelite politics, but not Philistine politics. Why? Because in their ethnic eyes, Delilah is the equivalent of a Philistine national hero for defeating their enemy, Samson—the strongest man on Earth. DeMille had captured the essence of this gender-political fact when the Saran of Gaza (George Sanders) said to Miriam (Olive Deering) about Samson within Dagon’s temple: “He was not captured by force of arms, but their softness.”

Consequently, Delilah is traditionally viewed by Judaeo-Christian scholars (and most of the general public) as a sexy, enemy betrayer. For example, she has been tagged: “a temptress *par excellence*” (Smith 1999: 113), “the biblical ‘temptress’ extraordinary” (Koosed and Linfelt 1996: 175), the “*femme fatale par excellence*” (Fewell 1992: 73), the “classic *femme fatale*” (Guthridge 1995: 22), “an evil foreign temptress” (Rowlett 2001: 106), “the paradigm for the myth of ‘woman

as spy and seducer” (Sheldon 2003: 17), a “cultural symbol for temptation and deceit” (Mills 1999: 88), a “double-crossing lover” (Sheldon 2003: 17), “a treacherous temptress who betrays her lover for money” (Jeter Jr. 2003: 119), a “gold-digging femme fatale” (Jeter Jr. 2003: 119), and “a witch, a bitch, a termagant, a whore” (Wurtzel 1998: 47). Indeed, her alleged sexual salaciousness is frequently documented within the critical literature, albeit, scripturally unsupported. Nevertheless, Delilah has been tagged as a “Philistine prostitute” (Lockyer 1967: 43), “a harlot” (Josephus quoted in Whiston 1989: 147), “a hus-sy” (Harris, Brown and Moore 2000: 261), “a wanton” (Thomson 1978: 16), a “femme dominatrix” (Rowlett 2001: 106), “the epitome of slut-tish perfidy” (Lopate 1987: 91), a “Whore, instrument of the devil. Philistine bitch” (Ostriker 1994: 166) and “the bitch of Sorek” (Ryan 2004: 45).

DeMille-as-Christian-believer had likewise constructed his Delilah as a sexy, seductive temptress as per his public’s expectations and his pop culture proclivities. He envisioned her as a “dark-eyed temptress...her beauty, her love and her greed on display” (Birchard 2004: 336), while his Samson called her “the great courtesan of Gaza” and one of “the fleshpots of my enemies.” Even DeMille’s casting choice of Austrian actress Hedy Lamarr to play Delilah was apt for she epitomized the Continental exotic with barely repressed eroticism. Lamarr’s own private life embodied a troubled past full of sex, sin and scandal that enhanced her on-screen characterization and provided free pre-release publicity for DeMille and Paramount. For example, she was notorious for her starring role in the Czechoslovakian film about adulterous intercourse, *Ecstasy*. It had portrayed “in the most minute detail a woman’s facial expressions and reactions during orgasm accompanying sexual intercourse” (de Grazia and Newman 1982: 48), which caused a media storm in its day and later followed Lamarr to America, thus attracting many viewers to see *Samson and Delilah* for other than its holy content.

In many ways, Lamarr was a modern day equivalent of Delilah herself. As Dorothy Kilgallen wrote in 1952: “Hedy Lamarr became this generation’s version of the Vamp – a synonym for the woman who launches ships, wrecks homes and sends countless men to glory or to doom” (Negra 2001: 103). After Samson’s devastating betrayal by Delilah, DeMille had Samson angrily say to her: “Your arms were quicksand. Your kiss was death,” in addition to calling her a “Philistine

gutter rat” and prophesying that “the name Delilah will be an everlasting curse upon the lips of men.” Of course, given the censorial limits of his day, DeMille could not have Samson be any more explicit in his verbal condemnations; certainly not to the level enjoyed by biblical commentators today, as documented above!

By character-assassinating Delilah in this subtextual way, DeMille-the-director-of-perfection was also being true to another authentic stream of biblical interpretation, namely, the long historical association between women and evil forces. For example, this association was graphically depicted in Andrea Mantegna’s fifteenth-century painting entitled *Samson and Delilah*. This classic artwork left no doubt about Delilah’s evil status and devilish association. Delilah was calmly sitting down cutting Samson’s hair while he slept. Inscribed upon the tree trunk in the background was the phrase: “FOEMINA / DIABOLO TRIBVS / ASSIBVS EST / MALA PEIOR” (“A bad woman is three times worse than the devil”)” (Martindale and Garavagila 1967: 119). Sometimes this phrase is translated as: “Woman is a worse evil than the devil by three pennies” (Wilenski 1947: 20). Thus, it is not too surprising to find the biblicist Herbert Lockyer (1967) arguing that the scriptural Delilah:

...stands out as one of the lowest, meanest women of the Bible—the female Judas of the Old Testament. This Philistine courtesan was a woman of unholy persistence and devilish deceit...behind her beautiful face was a heart as dark as hell, and full of viperous treachery (p. 43).

DeMille-as-devout-Christian-filmmaker had likewise followed this condemnatory trajectory, but he went one artistic step further by constructing an evil subtext for this “bad” woman of Sorek. Namely, by crafting Delilah as a serpent/Satan/Devil-figure to dramatically enhance her wickedness and make Samson look even less bad (i.e. more holy) by comparison, thereby, further intensifying the Bible’s androcentric worldview.

Delilah as Evil Archetype: Revelation and Genesis Revisited

DeMille dramatically contrasted Samson-the-Nazarite, the holy instrument of God, with Delilah, the seductive sorceress of Sorek, by subtextually turning her into an archetype of evil. From a Christian perspective, “the great dragon...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” (Rev. 12:9) is the traditional

arch-enemy of God, of Jesus and of all mundane humanity. He is the living personification of evil and the father of the lie (Jn 8:44) whose unholy mission is to harass and deceive humanity. For example, he is notoriously famous as the deceiver serpent in the Garden of Eden who lied to Eve about the effect of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden (Gen. 3:1-12), popularly assumed to be an apple tree (but scripturally unspecified). This caused Eve, and then Adam, to deliberately violate God’s instruction to treat the tree as off-limits (Gen. 3:1-6), thus making God very unhappy at their subsequent transgression. Later, God cursed the beguiling serpent, saying, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

DeMille tapped into this archetypal story of evil tainting innocence by subtextually recreating the idyllic Garden of Eden in Tubal’s (William Farnum’s) house—the home of Semadar and Delilah (albeit, unscriptural). This recreational courtyard with in-built garden (symbolically Eden) contained Samson (Victor Mature), Semadar (Angela Lansbury), Delilah (Hedy Lamarr) and Ahtur (Henry Wilcoxon). Metaphorically speaking, Samson is the besotted Adam. Semadar is the easily tricked Eve. Delilah is the cunning serpent/Satan/Devil-figure, who used plums instead of apples as her fruit of manipulation.⁶ Ahtur can be seen symbolically as the apple itself. After all, he was desirous (tasty fruit), Semadar desired him (as Eve did the apple), both Semadar and Delilah easily manipulated (consumed/used) him, and he was off-limits (forbidden fruit) to Samson and to Semadar as Samson’s wife-to-be due to custom and tradition. Both Samson and Semadar derived temporary but no lasting pleasure from him (as did Adam and Eve from the apple), although he was a source of Philistine wisdom and power (tree of knowledge), and he eventually precipitated Samson’s and Semadar’s

6. However, the use of plums was entirely appropriate for DeMille’s seductive Delilah, who was motivated by sexual jealousy. Why? Because the “plum is sometimes understood in psychoanalytic dream interpretation as a female sexual symbol” (Matthews 1990: 151). DeMille went to great pains to build in as much sex as he could into the character of Delilah without incurring censorial retaliation or the prudish wrath of the churches, women’s organizations and governments (Kozlovic 2002a). Besides, although popularly assumed an apple, the Bible does not specify what type of fruit came from the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:3, 6, 11-12). Some scholars have suggested that it could have been an apricot, and that apple references in other places in the Bible may have been referring to oranges (Lang 2003: 9-10).

ultimate downfall (expulsion, pain and death). Therefore, when Samson and Semadar left Tubal's garden (albeit separately, with Samson's departure being more pronounced), it symbolically resonated with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the idyllic Garden of Eden into the harsh wilderness beyond its boundaries, a place full of pain and danger (Gen. 3:16-19).

This Genesis expulsion-event was mirrored by Samson and Semadar when they immediately left Tubal's lush, walled garden to go chariot riding-cum-lion hunting in their local wilderness that was also full of pain and danger, particularly related to wild beasts. At the initial stages of their journey into lion country, Semadar accompanied Ahtur (Eve with apple), while Samson (Adam) was accompanied by Delilah-the-serpent/Satan/Devil-figure who gleefully clung to his back like an impish demon (Satan happy with his easy manipulation of Adam). This devilish Delilah subsequently became the master of the Philistine-dominated world (Earth) when she became, according to DeMille's Samson, "the woman that rules the ruler of the five cities," namely, the Saran of Gaza (George Sanders), just like the scriptural Satan/Devil who was master of the Earth and kings, and prowled around like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8).

Neither Samson (Adam) nor Semadar (Eve) ever saw Tubal's garden (Eden) again. Philistine swords had barred their entry and flames burned the surrounding house to the ground. This is like Adam and Eve who never entered the Garden of Eden again because Cherubim barred their entry with flaming swords (Gen. 3:23-24). Samson bitterly regretted Semadar's misdeed (presumably as Adam did over Eve's transgression). Both Samson and Semadar suffered greatly at the hands of Delilah—they both died prematurely (just like Adam and Eve who suffered premature death because of Satan's deception). Samson and Semadar's life changed dramatically on that fateful day, just as all of Earth's history was irrevocably changed following the biblical Fall. Of course, DeMille's Edenic parallels within *Samson and Delilah* are not exact because of the textual limits of the Samson saga that DeMille needed to conform to, and because of his need to engineer other interlocking subtexts to buttress his construction of Samson as a Christ-figure, but it resonated well with this foundational Old Testament myth. DeMille had tapped into this sacred subtext to enhance the biblical potency of his sacred cinema and make it more dramatic, which is missing from the disturbingly non-religious flavour of the original biblical

story (Judg. 13–16). DeMille was clearly the better biblical storyteller here.

In fact, DeMille subtextually evoked Garden of Eden imagery for a second time during the wedding festivities when Samson is to about to marry Semadar, his Philistine bride-to-be (Judg. 14). Delilah attended the wedding (albeit, unscriptural) and was as beguiling, slippery and manipulative as the Edenic serpent. Indeed, during the earlier lion hunt episode, the Saran of Gaza claimed that Delilah had “the wisdom of a serpent” when she mischievously suggested inviting thirty Philistine soldiers to Samson’s wedding feast (which helped engineer its subsequent disaster). Much later, at the oasis love-nest, Samson said to Delilah, “your kisses are the sting of death” and then after his devastating betrayal, “your kiss was death,” just like a lethal snakebite. Delilah was most definitely on the side of the forces of oppressive evil, represented by the occupying Philistines for whom she worked at a rate of 1,100 pieces of silver from each of the Philistine lords (Judg. 16:5). She was a willing tool of the Philistines who actively sought to manipulate God’s chosen agent (Samson) and disadvantage God’s chosen people (the Israelites/Hebrews/Danites). Interestingly, the Bible is silent on her presumed racial/ethnic identity as a Philistine, and she may *not* have been one, considering that “Delilah” is a Hebrew name, not a Philistine name (Dancy 2002: 211; Exum 1993: 69), but she is regularly assumed to be Philistine. Why? As a warning about the evilness of foreign women, which further character assassinated Delilah, and so did DeMille-the-Christian-apologist-filmmaker.

The interpretation of Delilah as an evil figure was further reinforced by DeMille when she became the courtesan of the Saran of Gaza and during one of her muted temper tantrums, the Saran soothingly said, “Delilah, what a dimpled dragon you can be flashing fire and smoke.” Although unscriptural and dialogically reeking with George Sanders’s style of urbaneness, this comment thematically linked Delilah with “the great dragon” of Rev. 12:9, “the dragon” of Rev. 20:2, and the popular imagining of dragons as fire-snorting beasts, just like Drago (voice of Sean Connery) in *Dragonheart*. The “dimpled dragon” dialogue also clearly displayed DeMille’s pop culture credentials as the people’s director, and not some Bible-bashing, fundamentalist, hell-and-brimstone preacher. In addition, DeMille’s Samson called Delilah a “daughter of Hell” while at the oasis love-nest to confirm her evil female status. For Christians, this “Hell” word subtly resonated with

the Hell-heading hypocritical Pharisees whom Jesus had berated (Mt. 23:33). Just as importantly, it is a word *not* specifically mentioned within Judges 13–16, but it is well understood by the public nonetheless. “Hell” is the traditional home of the Devil, the hottest metaphysical property in town, and thus frequently equated with badness, as in the slang word “hellcat,” which is “a wild, devil-may-care person...a witch...a furious or high-spirited girl or woman” (Spears 1982: 199).

Just like a hellcat, DeMille’s Delilah persistently tried to interfere with Samson and physically possess him during Semadar’s wedding feast, which symbolically resonated with the traditionally harassing function of the Devil. At one dramatic moment, Samson annoyingly retaliated by saying: “Hold this fork-tongued adder before I put a heel on her.” DeMille’s choice of a snake-related word (“fork-tongued adder”) and the “heel” reference was no accident. It symbolically equated Delilah with the Edenic serpent/Satan/Devil, Samson with Adam and the descendants of the children of Eve, and Jesus who would use his heel to control this intimate snake-like danger (Gen. 3:15). To emphasize his Delilah-equals-serpent point even further, DeMille had Hisham (Julia Faye) quote Samson’s passionate words back to an emotionally devastated Delilah, who was mournfully watching her house burn down. Hisham angrily said: “He called you a fork-tongued adder” to which Delilah angrily replied: “He’s going to feel its sting,” thereby, repeating and enhancing the snake metaphor as well as accurately pre-figuring Samson’s painful fate-to-come. Indeed, by using the serpent equivalent of a kiss and Delilah’s sexy tool of trade as *femme fatale*, it resonated with the betrayal of Jesus with a Judas kiss (Lk. 22:47-48), the iconic act of a betrayer known worldwide. Thus, we have this further character-assassination of Delilah—“the female Judas of the Old Testament” (Lockyer 1967: 43)—while she was in the very act of threatening revenge.

Delilah as a Devilish Liar and Opposer

Theologically speaking, the sharp tongue of serpents is used figuratively to denote evil schemers (Ps. 140:3). Within Western popular culture, it resonates with lying and is much favoured by Hollywood Indians speaking the famous Pidgin English phrase: “he speak with forked tongue” (Blevins 1993: 96), while scripturally speaking, the Devil is the father of the lie (Jn 8:44). Therefore, to further shore up the

Delilah-equals-evil equation, DeMille had his Delilah boldly admit to lying amidst the earthly abundance of the wedding feast, just like the Edenic serpent had boldly lied to Eve amidst God’s paradisiacal abundance (Gen. 3:1-5). Ahtur aptly described Delilah after Samson’s fatal haircut and capture: “Satan himself taught her all the arts of deception” (i.e. character assassination by association). Just as deftly, Delilah’s self-admitted lying behaviour and Samson’s anti-Delilah serpent dialogue combined to evoke an additional christomorphic resonance that further layered Delilah’s evil characterization. Namely, the serpent is the biblical progenitor, in a spiritual sense, of all the opposers of God’s will, hence Jesus’ reproach of the hypocritical Pharisees: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Mt. 23:33; see also Mt. 3:7; 12:34; Lk. 3:7).

Therefore, on another interlocking, subtextual level, DeMille had defined Delilah as the Satanic archetypal opposer of the fleshly embodiment of God’s will on Earth, Samson, in the very act of manipulating him at the wedding feast. Indeed, Delilah-the-manipulative-opposer physically grabbed hold of Samson, coupled with an in-your-face glare and passionate oratory to underscore the intensity of her possessiveness-cum-erotic desperation. This Delilah was the ancient forerunner of the libidinous Alex Forrest (Glenn Close) in *Fatal Attraction* and the manipulative Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone) in *Basic Instinct*. No wonder some critics referred to DeMille’s Delilah as “the arch-betrayer...a snaky seductress” (Fraser 1988: 9). However, to buttress his Delilah-as-instrument-of-the-Devil point still further, DeMille cunningly employed a major prop serpent on five separate occasions throughout the film. It was a masterful DeMilleian stroke of genius.

Delilah and the Five Serpent Prop Incidents

Serpent Incident 1

During the film’s opening narration, DeMille explained how humankind had been afflicted by “devil gods,” and he displayed a parade of despicable deities for the audience to visually inspect. However, just after his voice-over narration had finished pronouncing the words “devil gods,” a close up of a serpent head with a long thin body was prominently displayed through the misty clouds (but with its lower parts visually obscured). This was immediately followed by a mini statue of the Philistine’s pagan god, Dagon. DeMille had depicted these

devil deities residing high above the Earth; that is, in the Devil's new home after his heavenly expulsion (Rev. 12:9). DeMille had thus linked the evil, god-like Devil with the serpent. He also linked the biblical Devil with the Philistine's god, Dagon, thus implying that the Philistine nation were pagan Devil worshippers or, at least, evil inspired. Indeed, with Dagon's gargoyle-like statue in full view, DeMille's voice-over narration complained about "idolatry," another Christian evil (Exod. 20:4-5), which concluded in a devastating act of divine comeuppance when Dagon's statue came toppling down by Samson's hands.

Serpent Incident 2

This same serpent figure resurfaced on Earth as a large lamp holder containing small flickering flames that illuminated Delilah's oasis love-nest-cum-Philistine trap. DeMille had thus linked Delilah, and her secret-extracting mission involving cunning, with the Devil serpent, the iconic father of lies and deception. The Devil was metaphorically lighting Delilah's evil way via a literal serpent lamp, while he roamed the Earth realm as a nasty heavenly refugee (1 Pet. 5:8), but currently residing in Delilah's oasis campsite. Indeed, in a masterful act of manipulation, Delilah cunningly said: "I'm stupid Samson...to think I could deceive you," which she then promptly proceeded to do and *proved* to the audience that she was an inveterate liar. Subsequently (and truthfully), she admitted to Samson, "I came to betray you," the bold, iconic act of a devilish daughter of Hell, which she also did quite successfully, thereby, dialogically confirming her betrayer mission, her evil nature and her Judasean subtextual status.

Serpent Incident 3

The same serpent lamp holder was prominent yet again in another scene as a subtle background prop in Delilah's oasis love-nest. This occurred when Delilah complained to Samson about him not revealing the real secret of his phenomenal strength after her multiple extraction attempts failed. She even accused Samson of deceiving her (scripturally true; he had deliberately lied to her three times—Judg. 16). Lying and deception were thus the central topics of conversation and behaviour while in the serpent prop presence of this iconic father of lies. Delilah then embarked upon another manipulative strategy to get Samson to comply with her wishes, namely, emotional blackmail. She told Samson that she had decided to leave the Valley of Sorek and go back

home to Gaza as Samson had originally wanted: “You were right. It is better I go,” thus implying that Samson did not really love her. Her cunning strategy worked this time because Samson succumbed to her will and revealed the secret of his strength (i.e. his uncut hair—Judg. 16.17). Later, he was betrayed to the Philistines and Delilah forever became the “cultural symbol for temptation and deceit” (Mills 1999: 88). Even today, baby book authors strongly advise their readers *not* to name their daughters after Delilah (Gardner and Gardner 1996: 37).

Serpent Incident 4

This is the most profoundly evil moment in the film. The serpent lamp holder played a very prominent role in Delilah’s ultimate betrayal of Samson during a pivotal moment of deception and treachery. Samson was about to leave Delilah’s oasis love-nest to rescue a troubled parent and pay back the Philistines “a new debt,” but Delilah decided to stop him leaving having discovered the true secret of his strength. She was contemplating a plan when suddenly Delilah was inspired (by the Devil?) and decided to drug his parting cup of wine (albeit, unscriptural). In the background is the same serpent prop, which visually appears to be tracking her as the camera pans across the scene. While Delilah poured the sleep-inducing drug into his wine cup from her trick finger ring (itself a practical accoutrement of deception), her body partially covered the serpent figure standing in the background. Then she fully obscured the serpent figure for a moment, before partially exposing it again a moment later. Metaphorically speaking, Delilah was at one with the serpent at this peak moment of betrayal. DeMille appeared to be subtly saying that the Devil was literally behind Delilah’s egregious act. After a cup-swapping routine cunningly manipulated by Delilah (itself indicative of her deceptive skills), Samson drank the drugged wine and collapsed unconscious. He then had his hair shorn, in what J. Stephen Lang (2003: 292) wittily called an act of “Shear Malice,” and was successfully captured by the Philistine soldiers who bound, blinded and imprisoned him.

Serpent Incident 5

The serpent lamp holder was removed from the oasis love-nest and repositioned in Delilah’s bedroom in Gaza (i.e. her city love-nest). However, she was not sleeping well in her huge bed overseen by the serpent (and itself another powerful symbolic association between the Devil, a

seductress, and a bed—the accoutrement of sexuality). She was unsettled about her betrayal of Samson and was having hallucinations of a suffering Samson in bondage (akin to erotic dreams of desire, romance and unrequited love). After calling out to the “god of Samson” and then immediately hearing a town crier in the background refer to Samson being in the prison house (as if in divine response to her heartfelt call), Delilah suddenly got inspired (by God?), then miraculously changed her evil ways. (This “loving” inspirational moment was the binary opposite of her “wicked” inspirational moment at the oasis). With love and hope in her heart, she immediately went to visit Samson in jail (at considerable physical risk to herself from Samson and prying Philistine eyes). Delilah then slowly embarked upon a path of love, submission and self-sacrifice to rescue Samson and redeem herself (albeit, unscriptural, but great romantic drama to warrant the “great Jewish lover” sub-genre category).

This was a profound act of God-induced repenting, and itself a subtle, subtextual tagging of Delilah—a former courtesan (i.e. prostitute) who turned good just like Mary Magdalene, the supposedly former prostitute turned passionate penitent in Jesus’ time. It also suggested that calling upon God was sufficient to cast out the Devil, even for one who had acted so devilishly while under his evil influence (and akin to the expunged seven devils from Mary Magdalene—Lk. 8:2). Indeed, faithful Christians throughout history have believed in the powerful petitionary act of prayer. Repenting was also DeMille’s subtle God-mediated means of redeeming Delilah in the eyes of the box-office paying public. Even DeMille’s blinded, humiliated and paining Samson was prepared to accept Delilah’s change of heart after initially suspecting that “the Devil sent me you [Delilah].” Why do this? Because forgiveness was a defining Christic act for the DeMillean constructed Samson-as-rustic-Christ-figure (Kozlovic 2003b). However, even in that very act of reconciliation, DeMille had yet again cunningly forged another association between Delilah and the Devil, in addition to being another component of his auteur signature, namely, “the irresistible formula of having one’s cake (sin) and eating it too (piety)” (Lopate 1987: 72).

Additional Snake Props and Serpentine Associations

In a complementary, but subtler example of symbolic tagging-cum-subtextual engineering, DeMille hinted at the natural power of a serpent to wrap itself around its prey. He did this via coiled serpent jewelry worn on the forearm of the Saran of Gaza. While wearing this ornamental snake, he, the lords of Gaza, and Delilah were discussing the renegade Samson, now the “Che Guevara of the Sinai Peninsula” (Wurtzel 1998: 47), “a type of Mosby’s or Quantrill’s Raiders during the War Between the States” (Jeter Jr. 2003: 102) and a phenomenally successful “terrorist hitman” (Wicker 2003: 42). Samson had used guerrilla tactics against the Philistines (e.g. burning their crops—Judg. 15:4-5) in addition to directly slaughtering a thousand of them (Judg. 15:14-16).

Metaphorically speaking, this ornamental serpent was just like Delilah herself—an elegant piece of elbow jewelry who had coiled her way around the affections of the most powerful Philistine man-of-arms, the Saran of Gaza, her human sexual prey. Indeed, the snake ornament worn by this national leader subtly reinforced the link between the pagan Philistines and the “devil gods” mentioned in DeMille’s voice-over narration in the prologue, and thus it also functioned as a *de facto* badge of the club of evil. To enhance the snake theme even further, Delilah-the-dragon-serpent performed a number of subtle serpentine body movements as she weaved her way around the seated Philistine lords waving her red plumed fan. Even this red fan was symbolically reminiscent of a serpent’s flicking tongue, and of the “red dragon” of Rev. 12:3, plus the Saran’s description of Delilah as a “dimpled dragon...flashing fire and smoke.”

What is intriguing about all of these DeMilleian snake props and serpentine associations is that there are no scriptural references to *any* serpents whatsoever within the Samson saga (Judg. 13–16)! Their use was a deliberate aesthetic tactic crafted by DeMille to advance his Delilah-as-evil subtext. Indeed, as DeMille employee Phil Koury reported:

...snake symbols were everywhere on DeMille sets. Some we cast in bronze as ornaments, pot holders, cane tips, often placed close to the heroine, on her person, or as part of her furnishings. In speech, too—

“forked-tongue adder” was the phrase he used to describe Delilah (1959: 202).

In a consistent auteur fashion, DeMille had used the snake as a master symbol to represent all women, thus typify the terrifying, predatory power of the feminine (Koury 1959: 202). Therefore, the direct and indirect references to multiple serpents within *Samson and Delilah* were deliberately deployed to help elevate Samson’s sanctity by directly contrasting him with the snaky Delilah’s predatory evilness.

In fact, DeMille also counterpointed Samson with this iconic serpent symbol of unholiness because Samson was himself a DeMillean-crafted shepherd. He even lovingly held a cute lamb in his mother’s kitchen, although *no* sheep imagery is recorded within the Samson saga. Why associate Samson with sheep and shepherding? Because it was the signature beast and spiritual occupation of Jesus Christ—“the Lamb of God” (Jn 1: 29, 36), “that great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20), which DeMille also used when he constructed Samson as a rustic Christ-figure (Kozlovic 2003b). Such deftly-crafted binary oppositions (i.e. Danite–Philistine, male–female, strong–weak, lamb–serpent, good–evil) are the essence of the dramatic arts and another significant part of DeMille’s auteur signature. Therefore, DeMille would naturally employ this binary contrast in his film, whether overtly or covertly, using physical props, dialogue, biblical quotations, biblical symbolism or multi-layered, interlocking infra-narratives.

DeMille: The Successful Biblical Auteur

The engineering of these complex religious subtexts into his biblical epics was an important DeMillean trade secret, and a signature sign indicative of a master filmmaker worthy of his tag: “*auteur* of *auteurs*” (Vidal 1995: 303). It also helps explain the secret of DeMille’s directorial longevity and phenomenal success that propelled him far beyond his directorial peers and into the realms of Hollywood legend. None of Hollywood’s other non-believing, religious filmmakers could hope to match DeMille’s auteuristic uniqueness, biblical insights or use of sacred subtexts (i.e. his master storytelling ability). They were simply missing DeMille’s biblical heritage, intimate scriptural understanding, and profound religious convictions, and so they could not translate what they did not have onto their own screens. As Art Arthur (1967: 224) reported: “Startling as it may seem, I say unhesitatingly that Mr.

DeMille knew the Bible more intimately, and could quote chapter and verse more accurately, than at least 90 percent of this country's clergy." No wonder DeMille was master of the American biblical epic and still has a compelling effect upon contemporary audiences. He exuded religion through his very pores, which spilled over into his films and assisted him in becoming "a great, great story teller" (George Cukor quoted in Long 2001: 27). He truly was that good, even without Art Arthur's hyperbole.

Unfortunately, DeMille's critics were too quick to ignore, dismiss or devalue his auteur status and aesthetic contributions to Hollywood cinema, let alone the art of biblical epics. Some film scholars even claimed that: "It is no longer fashionable to admire De Mille" (Giannetti and Eyman 1996: 40). This is a serious mistake. DeMille should be brought to the forefront of religious film scholarship because of his undeniable skills in this most difficult of genres, especially considering that there is always *someone* to offend, annoy or disappoint with *any* attempt at sacred cinema! Just think of the persecution-like reaction to *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (Hewison 1981), the Papal condemnation of *Hail Mary* (Locke and Warren 1993), the violent reactions over *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Poland 1988), and the recent heated debates over *The Passion of the Christ* (Plate 2004). Much can still be learned from DeMille, whether about film, faith, communication, gender studies or American cultural history.

Conclusion

DeMille was a far more accomplished, perceptive and artful biblical filmmaker than has been appreciated, acknowledged or honoured to date, albeit at the expense of both Samson's and Delilah's negative reputations. In fact, DeMille's cinematic repackaging of Scripture was deemed by David Jasper to be an important service to mainstream biblical scholarship. As he claimed:

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 (1999: 51-52).

This fact is sufficient reason alone for the field of religion-and-film to be warmly embraced by the profession. Why? To reveal facets of scriptural truth via its extra-ecclesiastical rendition that are not usually accessible by traditional exegetical methods (Kozlovic 2003a). After all, popular feature films have to make *explicit* what may only be *implicit* within the sacred text. Herein lies a world of text-as-reader-construct variance that can exercise scholarly minds for decades, and bring new eyes and a breath of fresh air into a research world bogged down with old methodologies, as evidenced by Mark Goodacre's (2000) solution to the synoptic problem using Jesus films. No doubt, other fruitful examples of religious exegesis, Hollywood style, will come to the fore soon. Culturally speaking,

Since film is the most pervasive art form in American culture, it is imperative that scholars take seriously the religious role of film, however they understand that role, and delve more deeply into this exciting and dynamic area of religious production and dialogue (Kraemer 2004: 249).

Pedagogically speaking, video exegesis can be put to productive, entertaining use in the classroom, home and pulpit. After all, as Larry J. Kreitzer (1993: 20) put it: "It seems to me that there is nothing inherently virtuous or self-authenticating in having theology be something that the reader must endure rather than enjoy." A closer, more sympathetic examination of DeMille-as-biblical-artist will yield many more insights and delights unappreciated to date. Further research into the emerging and exciting interdisciplinary fields of religion-and-film, DeMille studies and the cinematic Bible is warranted, recommended and certainly long overdue.

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