

Roads-Not-Taken, Taken by the Adapter: The Case of Biblical Samson^{*1}

DAVID FISHELOV

Adaptations: Dialogues and Logical Relations

In this essay I will argue that adaptations of a literary work bring to light roads-not-taken (but suggested) by the initiating text, and demonstrate the argument by presenting three adaptations of Samson's biblical story: Milton's play *Samson Agonistes*, Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky's novel *Samson*, and Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood film *Samson and Delilah*. I will also show how the close relationship between different adaptations and the notion of a road-not-taken support the idea that the literary text is a multi-layered system of realized and unrealized potentialities.

The field of adaptations and rewritings is quite wide and heterogeneous.² A useful way to approach this manifold phenomenon is by discerning three basic types of dialogue held between an adaptation and the initiating text: (1) *echo dialogue*, in which a text reproduces the main elements of the originating text, creating simple, predictable adaptations, tailoring a literary text to a new medium (e.g. the cinema) or to a specific target audience (e.g. children); (2) *genuine dialogue*, when important traits of the original text are kept alongside new elements, imbuing the generating text with new aesthetic sensibilities, themes and ideological preoccupations; (3) *dialogue-of-the-deaf*, whereby the adaptation is only superficially related to the initiating text, which serves as a springboard for developing an independent agenda.³ In this last type of dialogue, an author takes poetic license to

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debfishelov01813.htm>>.

an extreme, sometimes producing a work that is no longer recognized as an adaptation, but rather as a free variation, only remotely related to the initiating text.

The three abovementioned adaptations of Samson's biblical story epitomize the principle underlying genuine dialogues in a twofold way: they transcend the minimal-changes called for by the new genre or medium or target audience (characteristic of simple echo-dialogues) while maintaining a balance whereby the new elements are still related to central issues of the original text (unlike cases of dialogue-of-the-deaf).

The relationship between the initiating text and a new element introduced into an adaptation may be described in logical terms: along a spectrum from tighter to looser relations, a new element can be entailed, implied, suggested or merely enabled by the initiating text. Let me briefly illustrate these distinctions with regard to the biblical story of Samson. The biblical story explicitly states that Samson's eyes were gouged out (Judges 16:21). If an adaptation chooses to affirm the obvious fact that Samson could not see after his eyes were gouged out, it only adds an element *entailed* by the initiating text: if that which is stated in the initiating text is true, then the added element is also necessarily true. A version that exposes Delilah's only motivation as greed adds an element *implied* (but not necessarily entailed) by the biblical story. The original story tells us that Delilah was offered "eleven hundred pieces of silver" from the rulers of the Philistines (Judges 16:5), and the ensuing scene describes her attempts to learn the secret of Samson's strength, followed by her betrayal. We almost automatically assume that Delilah is driven by greed, although theoretically she might have been motivated by other reasons (for instance, a personal vendetta); hence, such an implication should not be considered an entailment.

In between 'implied' and 'enabled,' certain elements along the logical spectrum are *suggested* by a text, yielding a rich network of unrealized possibilities which nevertheless cross the reader's mind during the attempt to construe a fictional world and make sense of it.⁴ Unlike

instances of entailment or implication, it is quite impossible to provide a precise set of constraints or conditions necessary for the use of the term 'suggested.' Still, this concept is not totally open or subjective ("for me the story suggests X, for you it suggests Y") but rather points to a set of possibilities or associations shared by many readers. Unlike a purely personal association, we can stipulate that an element is *suggested* when it is compatible with a number of explicit, entailed and implied elements of a text.

The weakest logical relation is that of *enabling*, which encompasses perhaps the widest set of possibilities. If, for example, an adaptation represents Manoah, Samson's father, as a carpenter, it adds an element that is not entailed or implied or even suggested by the biblical text but merely enabled by it (as are the possibilities that Manoah was a farmer or a shepherd or an artisan). Needless to say, the addition of enabled elements may serve different aesthetic or ideological goals. To present Manoah as a carpenter may contribute to the social setting of the story, but it could also evoke an analogy between Manoah and Joseph, Jesus's father, thus reinforcing the Christian interpretation of the Samson saga.⁵

A new element can also hold negative logical relations with the initiating text: it can be either *contrary* or *contradictory* to the initiating text.⁶ An adaptation of the biblical story of Samson that ends with a scene in which Samson escapes Dagon's temple and spends the rest of his life with Delilah on the banks of the Nile, clearly *contradicts* the tragic ending of the biblical story, in which Samson dies while crashing down the temple (Judges 16:30). An adaptation portraying Delilah as a woman deeply in love with Samson would undoubtedly be perceived as adding something *contrary* to the biblical story. But since we can imagine such a possibility without directly violating the original storyline, it does not necessarily contradict it. To return to the title of this essay, it should be clear by now that some *suggested* elements are best qualified to be labelled as roads-not-taken: they are part and parcel of the initiating text's horizon of expectations. They might have crossed the author's mind while composing the text or might have

even featured in an earlier draft of the text. But rather than pursue unsubstantiated speculations regarding the author's mental or real draft (a road leading us directly to the intentional fallacy), we should focus on the reading experience, to which we can attest. We can even empirically test whether a specific possibility is part of the elusive (but not completely subjective) field of roads-not-taken. If, in response to the question, "what do you think will happen in the next scene?" subjects suggest similar answers, and the content of their answers does not coincide with the events that unfold in the following scene of the storyline, we have discovered something that is part of the reading experience; we have found a specific road-not-taken.⁷

Furthermore, adaptations may serve as *indirect evidence* for the existence of certain roads-not-taken in a text: the occurrence of a specific element in an adaptation or, even better, in a few adaptations, usually means that we have detected an element suggested (but not realized) in the initiating text.⁸

The Side-roads Taken by Milton, Jabotinsky and DeMille

Let us now examine how these three adaptations of the biblical story of Samson—John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's *Samson*, and Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah*—shed light on the notion of roads-not-taken. These three re-creations differ in language, period, genre and medium. Milton wrote his dramatic play (not intended to be put on stage) in 1671; Jabotinsky wrote his novel (originally published in Russian) in 1927; and DeMille released his epic Hollywood film (partly based on Jabotinsky's novel) in 1949 (Paramount Pictures). Interestingly enough, all three authors chose to add an episode which is *not* part of the biblical story: a belated meeting between Samson and Delilah, after he was betrayed, captivated and blinded.⁹ Upon performing her task, Delilah altogether disappears from the biblical story. And still, questions such as "what will Samson say to Delilah if he has the chance to meet her again?" or, "will Delilah try to justify her deeds in such a reunion?" might cross

the reader's mind. They have definitely occurred on at least these three readers-adapters, compelling them to devote lengthy episodes to such a dramatic meeting.

In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton elaborates on a scene in which Delilah visits Samson in his prison cell, in an attempt to gain his forgiveness. She is initially presented by the Chorus as follows:

But who is this, what thing of Sea or Land?
 Female of sex it seems,
 That so bedeckt, ornate, and gay,
 Comes this way sailing,
 Like a stately Ship
 Of *Tarsus*, bound for th' Isles
 Of *Javan* or *Gadire*
 With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
 Sails fill'd, and streamers waving,
 Courted by all the winds that hold them play,
 An Amber scent of odorous perfume
 Her harbinger, a damsel train behind;
 Some rich *Philistian* Matron she may seem,
 And now, at nearer view, no other certain
 Than *Dálila* thy wife. (710-24).¹⁰

Note how, in this first introduction, Milton uses the expression "seem" in conjunction with an elaborate simile ("Like a stately Ship [...] odorous perfume").¹¹ When we learn from the ensuing dialogue that Delilah has not come to express true repentance, we realize that this epic simile was but the first hint aimed at alerting us to the difference between appearance and reality, making us realize that eyes (and ears) can sometimes screen the truth.¹²

Delilah's plea to Samson is ostensibly sincere, and her speech is fraught with kind words:

With doubtful feet and wavering resolution
 I came, still dreading thy displeasure, *Samson*,
 Which to have merited, without excuse,
 I cannot but acknowledge; yet, if tears
 May expiate (though the fact more evil drew
 In the perverse event than I foresaw),

My penance hath not slack'n'd, though my pardon
 No way assur'd. But conjugal affection,
 Prevailing over fear and timorous doubt,
 Hath led me on desirous to behold
 Once more thy face, and know of thy estate.
 If aught in my ability may serve
 To light'n what thou suffer'st, and appease
 Thy mind with what amends is in my power,
 Though late, yet in some part to recompense
 My rash but more unfortunate misdeed. (732-47)

According to Milton, however, Delilah's words of comfort are but a façade, a further manifestation of her artful guile and wiliness. Samson does not succumb to her rhetoric, and at some point it becomes clear that Delilah's soothing words do not express genuine repentance. Towards the end of their meeting, Samson calls her bluff and in response, she says:

I shall be nam'd among the famousest
 Of Women, sung at solemn festivals,
 Living and dead recorded, who to save
 Her country from a fierce destroyer, chose
 Above the faith of wedlock-bands, my tomb
 With odours visited and annual flowers.
 Not less renown'd than in Mount *Ephraim*,
Jael, who, with inhospitable guile
 Smote *Sisera* sleeping through the Temples nail'd.
 Nor shall I count it heinous to enjoy
 The public marks of honour and reward
 Conferr'd upon me, for the piety
 Which to my country I was judg'd to have shown.
 At this who ever envies or repines
 I leave him to his lot, and like my own. (982-96)

Thus, all her pleasant words and professions of love were meant to mislead and to camouflage the fact that she still takes pride in the honours conferred on her by the Philistines for betraying Samson. After these words she leaves, and Samson poignantly addresses the chorus:

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

In contradistinction to the Miltonic text, in Jabotinsky's novel, written about two and a half centuries later, the belated meeting between Samson and Delilah does not take place in the prison cell but in Dagon's temple, just prior to the horrific scene in which Samson smashes it down on "about three thousands men and women" (Judges 16:27). Unlike Milton's dramatic play, in Jabotinsky's novel Delilah does not beg for Samson's forgiveness. In fact, she confronts him in order to gloat on her victory over the mighty Danite. A quick, emotionally charged exchange of words takes place between the two. Delilah, whose original name in Jabotinsky's novel is Elinoar, still full of vengeance and the desire to humiliate Samson, taunts him by posing a series of riddles (a practice he himself had been fond of in the past): "Here is another riddle," she cried. "From the outcast came a conqueress, and the eyes that once looked on her with contempt will never see again. Do you know the answer to that riddle?" (340).¹³ When Samson attempts to ignore her and briefly responds "Elinoar? Who is she? I don't remember her," she moves on to her next riddle.

An exchange of invectives, riddles and counter-riddles ensues, until Delilah decides to pull her winning card. This time her riddle is not made up of words alone: Delilah carries a baby with her and makes Samson feel and touch it. Only then, after he asks her, "Whose child is that?" she triumphantly formulates her final and fatal riddle: "Guess! It will grow brave and strong like its father and I, since my milk has turned to poison, shall teach it to hate its father's race. And so, out of the judge and protector will come an enemy and destroyer" (341). Upon hearing these words and realizing that Delilah will raise his child as an enemy of his people, Samson undergoes a frightful transformation:

Then from the giant's throat came a strange gurgling sound that had little resemblance to a human voice. Stretching out his hands, he stepped for-

ward, but collided with one of the pillars that supported the roof above the figure of Dagon and the sacrificial altar. The woman stood her ground, laughing and pressing to her breast the child, which was now crying plaintively again [...]. But suddenly his [Samson's] excitement subsided, the smile came back to his face, and he said in his former voice, but very loudly and slowly: "Now you can all guess Samson's last riddle: In his lifetime he slew many, but more still in the hour of his death—who is that?" (341-42)

The formulation of the last riddle leads to the moment when Samson brings down the temple of Dagon on himself and on all those present—first and foremost Elinoar/Delilah and his own child. This suicidal act is thus the result of his outrage upon hearing that his own son is to be turned against his own people. Throughout the novel, Samson is presented as being on friendly terms with the Philistines, joining in their festivities, telling jokes and riddles, taking part in athletic competitions and, of course, making love to Philistine women. Even after he is captured and blinded, the Philistines and he still maintain a reasonably amicable relationship. Only at this stage, when faced with a dire and irreconcilable conflict between his role as national leader and his role as father, does he revert to basic tribal loyalties and destroys the temple, himself, Delilah, the child, and the Philistines in a fatal outburst of rage.

In Milton's version Delilah re-appears to test Samson's faith, and in Jabotinsky's novel she meets him again only to humiliate him. DeMille's Delilah, however, plays a more central role. She is deeply in love with Samson, bickering with Miriam (the proposed Hebrew bride) whom she perceives as her rival. Her passion also makes her defy the Saran of Gaza, her benefactor and partner, and, in the final scene, she sacrifices herself in order to be united with her true love. The final scene's overtones go beyond the act of a desperate woman. Samson is indirectly associated with Jesus Christ, and Delilah is portrayed as penitent and almost as a martyr.¹⁴

After Delilah discovers, to her horror, that Samson has been blinded, she falls into a state of self-torment. In a touching scene, we see her tossing sleeplessly on her bed, with the harsh words of the Saran echoing in her mind—"You cannot undo what you have done"—and

we hear her addressing Samson's God in an attempt to seek help. Thus, Delilah is not only a passionate woman in love but also a born-again monotheist. Deeply remorseful, Delilah decides to visit Samson again in his prison cell, this time without the Saran and without a guard. She throws herself into his arms asking him to do whatever he pleases with her. The fact that during her secret visit to the prison cell she is dressed in a way that is reminiscent of a nun lends her a chaste, sincere appearance. When Samson realizes that he is holding his betrayer in his arms, his first impulse is to take revenge and crush her to death. While making his first move towards this end, his chain breaks—a sign that his legendary strength has returned—and he hesitates. There and then follows an emotional and tender moment as he acknowledges Delilah's true love for him and his own love for her.

During the belated lovers' union Delilah suggests that she will help him to escape from prison and both of them will flee to Egypt—a neutral place, far from the national and religious feuds that plague their lives and hinder their love. Samson checks her fantasizing about this happy ending, pointing out that he is, after all, blind, and cannot exercise any power in the real world. At that point Samson's mind starts working on his final plan of revenge against his enemies the Philistines, this time with Delilah's help. Delilah's sentimental happy ending is rejected, and there is a more melodramatic conclusion awaiting the audience.

Thus, as the final scene in the temple of Dagon begins, we know that Samson and Delilah will in effect collaborate like a loving couple. When the camera zooms in on Delilah, she is seated next to the Saran like a queen, wearing a dress with a long peacock-like train. When Samson is brought into the hall—to be tormented, humiliated and eventually to be made to renounce his God and kneel before Dagon—Delilah expresses her desire to take an active part in the proceedings. The Saran rightly suspects that she simply wants to be close to her beloved; he warns her, "if you go to him, you cannot come back to me"—but Delilah dismisses his threat and approaches Samson.

Pretending to participate in the mocking, whipping and tormenting of Samson, she actually helps him reach the two columns that support the temple. At that point, Delilah already suspects Samson's intention, even if he does not express it. He only says to her, "Death will come into this temple. The hand of the Lord will strike." Before he starts pushing the two pillars, he wants to make sure that Delilah will escape the fate awaiting the crowds of Philistines gathered there. He asks her to leave the place and when he repeats, "have you gone?" she, still present, does not respond, giving him the impression that she has left. But she remains, hypnotized by Samson's renewed strength, willing to die, like a true martyr, with her beloved.

Thus, there are many significant differences between the ways in which the three artists portray Samson's and Delilah's belated meeting. For both Milton and Jabotinsky it is an opportunity to highlight Delilah's inherent wickedness. Her wickedness, however, is related to different themes: for Milton, Delilah's smooth talk is an emblem of Satanic temptation.¹⁵ He wants his reader to see beyond beautiful appearances and connect to deep, spiritual truth. In Jabotinsky's novel, the emphasis on Delilah's wickedness is meant to warn against falling into the trap of assimilation and the abandoning of Jewish national roots. Unlike Milton and Jabotinsky, DeMille attempts to exonerate Delilah, and the melodramatic reunion of the two lovers highlights the theme of Christian forgiveness and the American ethos whereby the love of individuals prevails over religious differences and ancient ethnic roots.

Despite these important differences (and many others), the fact that all three artists decided to add a belated meeting is not, I would like to argue, a coincidence. In effect, all three followed a road-not-taken. What makes for a belated meeting between Samson and Delilah a road-not-taken in the biblical story? Firstly, we should remember that readers have a deep-rooted need for narrative closure.¹⁶ The biblical story of Samson and Delilah provides only a partial sense of an ending; it moves quickly to the next scene, leaving unwoven certain threads presented in their story. Note that a significant part of the

saga's sequence (about a third) is devoted to the story of Samson and Delilah, and she becomes far more significant to the reader than the other two Philistine women he was involved with (the Timnath woman and the whore from Gaza). Furthermore, only in regard to Delilah does the biblical story explicitly state Samson's feelings: "He loved a woman in the river of Sorek and her name, Delilah" (Judges 16:4). Thus, the question as to whether her betrayal has made him stop loving her seems pertinent.¹⁷ Note also that just before the shaving of Samson's hair, we are told that Delilah "made him sleep upon her knees" (Judges 16:19), implying an unexpected tenderness on her part, making us also wonder about her state of mind, feelings and motivation.¹⁸ And what could be a more appropriate occasion to examine their feelings than a direct confrontation during a belated meeting?

Secondly, the story of their relationship is fraught with suspicion, deceit and counter-deceit: her ping-pong attempts to reveal the secret of his strength triggers a pendulum-like dynamics between the two. True, her fourth and final attempt is successful, but it cannot erase altogether the oscillating dynamics, making us wonder whether this is indeed 'the last word' between the two.

Thirdly, the story of Samson and Delilah clearly parallels a few episodes from his relationship with the Timnath woman (Judges 14:1-15:3): in both cases a woman attempts to extract a secret from him (the answer to his riddle with the Timnath woman; the source of his strength with Delilah); he tries to evade their persistent inquiries, but at some point breaks down and reveals the secret; they both betray his confidence, reveal the secret to the Philistines, who, in their turn, use it to harm him (forcing him to pay a very expensive wager; blinding and captivating him). After such a strong, conspicuous analogy has been established between the two stories, the reader also notes that, upon his betrayal, Samson returns to the house of the Timnath woman (Judges 15:1) in an attempt to reclaim her, only to discover that her father has given her to a friend of his. Thus, the reader can reasonably assume that Samson would also look for an opportunity to reencounter Delilah; after all, it is hard to kill old habits.

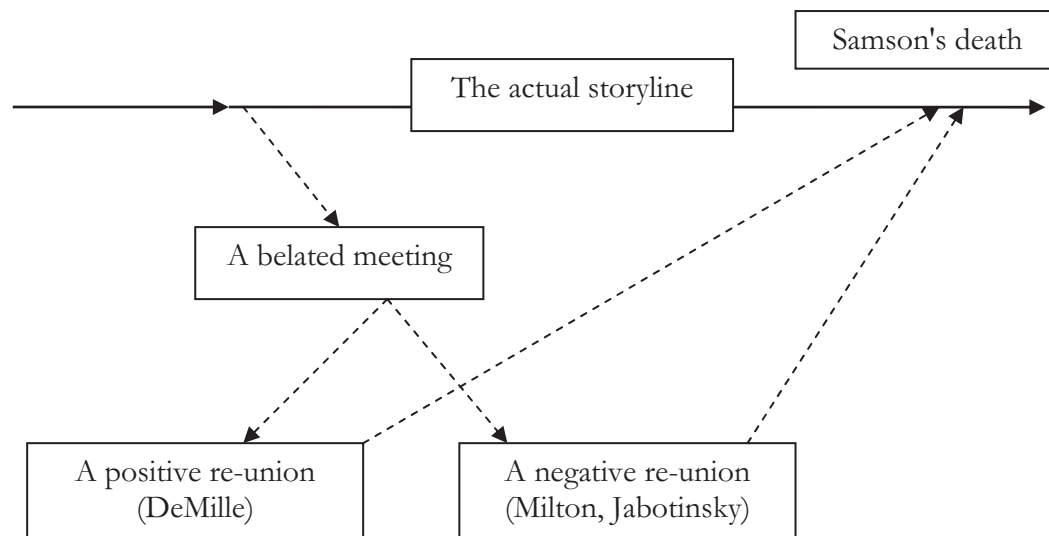
Each of these reasons is sufficient, in and of itself, to create in the reader's mind a vague expectation for a reunion of the two protagonists. With all three combined—the need for closure of an emotionally intense story, the pendulum-like structure of the Delilah story, and the detailed parallelism established with the Timnath woman episode—an expectation for such a reencounter becomes part of the story's suggested meanings; it becomes an important road-not-taken. Thus, when Milton, Jabotinsky and DeMille introduced a belated meeting scene (in DeMille's version there actually are three such scenes), they did not invent a totally unanticipated move but rather trod a road already hinted at by the biblical story.

Conclusion (With a Few Drawings)

By way of conclusion, I would like to present three drawings. The use of these drawings does not imply that I subscribe to a structuralist approach to the literary text, let alone to any version of story grammar.¹⁹ These illustrations simply sum up in a clear, graphic manner, some of the major arguments developed in this essay concerning the relationships between explicit, implied and suggested meanings in a literary text.

The first drawing (Drawing I) presents the relationship between the actual storyline as it unfolds in the biblical Samson story—represented by an unbroken arrow on the top—and the road-not-taken of a belated meeting of Samson and Delilah, as developed by Milton, Jabotinsky and DeMille—represented by a broken line.

Drawing I

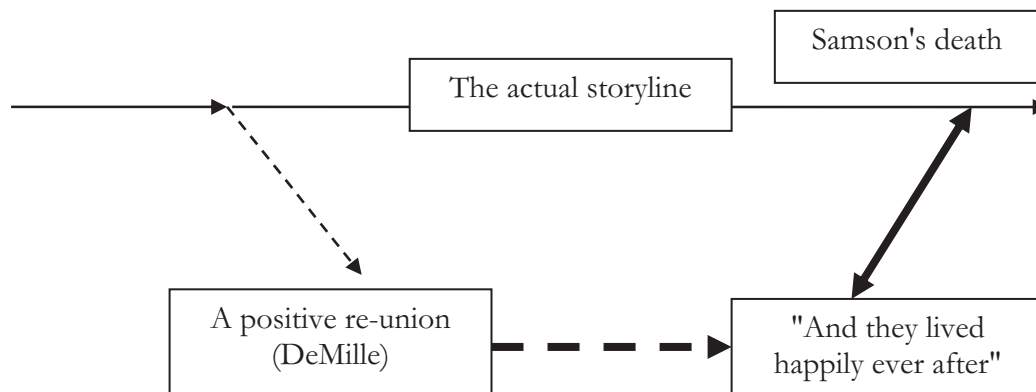


The road-not-taken of a belated meeting, hinted at by the biblical story, has been realized by the three re-creations. The three artists took it to different directions, expressing their respective ideological and aesthetic preoccupations. Note that pursuing the road-not-taken of a belated meeting does not necessarily commit an artist to developing the story along expected lines. DeMille, for example, uses the reencounter in order to acquit Delilah as far as possible and to develop her positive qualities as a true penitent and lover. Whereas such qualities are not foreseen in the biblical story and may even create tensions with it, it is important to see that DeMille is cautious not to *contradict* any explicit element of the biblical story: Delilah does betray Samson and the film leaves the catastrophic ending of the story intact, with Samson performing his horrific suicidal plan. Had DeMille opted for a happy ending in which the two lovers flee to Egypt and live there happily ever after, he would no longer be treading on a road-not-taken but would rather be paving a new road altogether.

Thus, it is important to distinguish between adaptations and rewritings that elaborate on roads-not-taken, on the one hand, and cases where an artist takes the liberty of adding elements, events, developments that are not part of the elusive but still detectable field of roads-not-taken, on the other. An adaptation that follows a road-not-taken can sometimes step into the zone of *contrary* elements, but would

avoid *contradicting* important elements of the initiating text. That is, if it is still to be considered an adaptation. The next drawing (Drawing II) illustrates this latter possibility, with a continuing line representing the actual storyline, a broken line a road-not-taken, a bi-directional thick arrow a contradiction, and a broken thick arrow an event contradicting something important on the actual storyline.

Drawing II

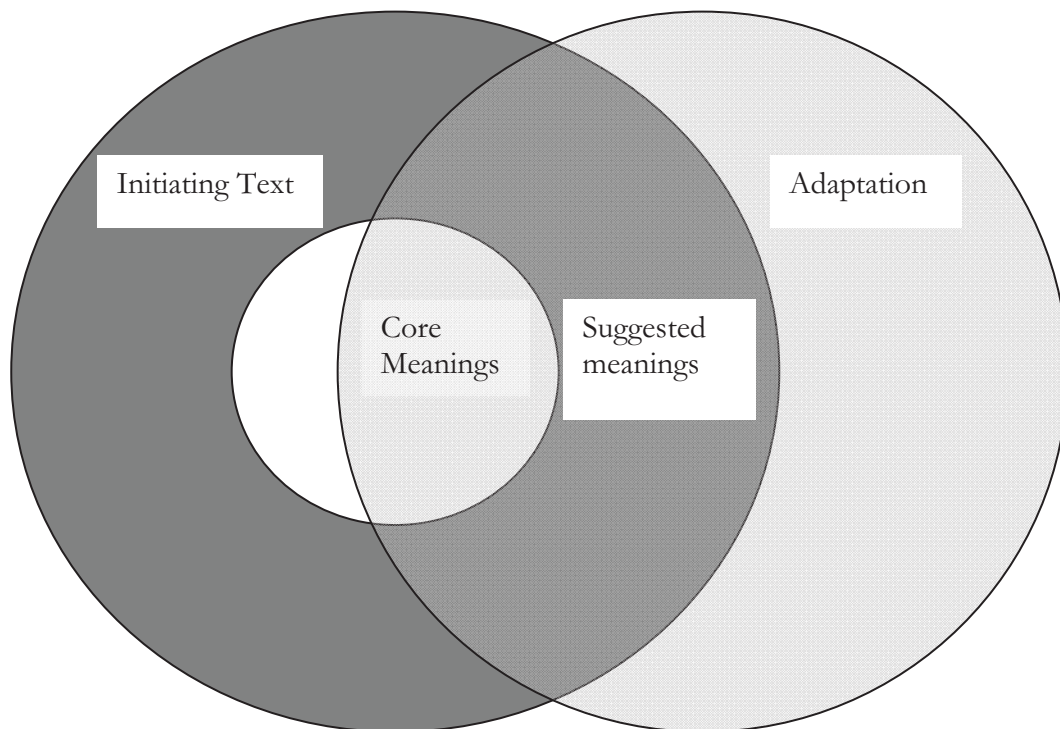


Had an artist opted to wind up the Samson story with a happy ending, he or she would be trespassing the realm of roads-not-taken. By distinguishing between the options of either following suggested meanings or introducing contradictory elements, I wish neither to praise the former nor object to the latter. To opt for the latter would simply aim at different effects than those elicited by the majority of adaptations and rewritings: a parody of the initiating text, a provocation against it, and so forth. To use previously introduced terms, most adaptations can be described as moving between simple illustrations of the principle of echo-dialogue to the creation of different versions of genuine dialogues with the initiating text. When conspicuous contradictory elements are introduced, we move to a different zone: from genuine, provocative dialogues to dialogue-of-the-deaf.

The third and concluding drawing (Drawing III) presents, from a bird's-eye-view, the relationship between a text's core meanings—explicit, entailed and implied—and its suggested meanings (or roads-

not-taken), hovering around the core. These potential, suggested meanings sometimes resurface in adaptations, highlighting the fact that a literary text is a complex system of realized and unrealized potentialities.

Drawing III



This drawing requires three clarifications. Firstly, around core and suggested meanings one should also imagine a much larger circle, encompassing the amorphous field of elements enabled by the text. Secondly, the drawing highlights the fact that adaptations must include at least some core meanings and usually draw on a few suggested meanings; the rest consists of elements that are either part of the fluid field of enabled elements or elements that are contrary (but not contradictory) to the initiating text. The more an adaptation is faithful to core meanings, the more the outcome is simple and predictable. By the same token, the more an adapter uses only a hand-

ful of core meanings, elaborating on suggested meanings, the more imaginative the adaptation becomes.²⁰ And when a few contrary meanings are also introduced, the new adaptation turns into an unpredictable, genuine dialogue with the initiating text.

Finally, the circles represent the text's meanings as static fields, thus disregarding the important dynamic dimension of the reading process. We usually think of the reading process as an *accumulation* of meanings, but the reading process has another, complementary dimension as a continuing *elimination* of meanings; to construct meaning, we need to collect and connect specific units of information so that we are not left only with vagueness, but the very operation of specification implies, ipso definitio, the elimination of potential meanings. This dual perspective may become clearer by using the metaphor of sculpting: the story is constantly carving its boundaries and creates its contours out of a mass of raw material (=meanings); each and every cut with the chisel (=the author's chosen words and our mental processing of these words) simultaneously gives the artifact a specific shape (=meaning) and does away with irrelevant material, the remainders (=eliminated meanings). In other words, the reading process can be described as a kind of trade-off between a certain (and increasing) amount of information needed to provide meanings and an elimination of meanings brought about by additional information (disambiguation). The accumulated and integrated information concerning characters (who and what they are), setting (when and where the story takes place), and storyline (what and why something is happening), leaves out, ipso facto, an enormous body of possibilities.

Let me illustrate this process with a small example. When we start reading the Samson saga in the book of Judges, after the formulaic exposition about the state of the children of Israel ("And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines forty years" 13:1), we read: "And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, and his name was Manoah" (13:2). At that point, we can imagine that Manoah (Samson's father) is going to be the protagonist of the story

("Manoah the Judge"). The ending of this verse ("and his wife was barren, and bare not") encourages us to eliminate the imagined possibility of "Manoah the Judge" (in case it was raised) and to focus on a different frame (a story about the birth of a chosen character).²¹ From an abstract, static point of view, the core and suggested meanings of the story can be described as representing but a small fraction of a vast field of potential meanings, and every tiny bit of added information also eliminates a number of theoretically possible meanings. Thus, for example, the second clause of 13:2 ("of the family of the Danites") eliminates the possibility that the character was of the family of Judea or of Benjamin, or of any other tribe; the third clause ("whose name was Manoah") further eliminates the possibility that his name was Terach or Shiloah or any other. Note, however, that not all theoretically possible meanings *function* in the reading process, which requires the establishing of certain relevant coordinates. There is an important difference between imagining (even hesitantly and momentarily) that the character introduced in 13:2 is going to play the role of protagonist in the unfolding story, and starting to imagine a list of other theoretically possible names for that character: to imagine the former is supported by reading conventions (introducing the protagonist at the beginning of a story), the latter seems to be just a theoretical exercise, detached from the psychological reality of the reading process. And this minute example illustrates similar processes that take place on larger and deeper levels of the story.

By the time we reach the end of the biblical story of Samson (Judges 16:31), a significant body of core and suggested meanings has been accumulated. And these meanings are there also thanks to the mirror-like process of elimination of an even greater body of potential, logically enabled meanings. Unlike roads-not-taken that may attract our imagination (e.g. a reunion scene), most of the eliminated meanings (e.g. that Manoah was of the family of Judea) do not even enter our consciousness during the reading process, and if they do, they have only a fleeting presence there.

Even after the operation of these processes of elimination, the reader is still left with large and multilayered fields of meanings, describing a unique figure which combines strength and weakness, heroism and failure, erotic drive and death-wish. Different elements in this complex system of meanings have captured the imagination of readers, translators, interpreters, artists and adapters throughout the ages. And some of these adapters have chosen to revivify the biblical story by treading on its intriguing roads-not-taken.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

NOTES

¹I wish to thank the anonymous reader of the article and Matthias Bauer, co-editor of *Connotations*, for their useful comments, which spurred me to improve my arguments, to add a few clarifications and to avoid undesirable implications enabled by the text of my original manuscript.

²For different mappings of this field, see Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997 [1982]); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), and Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³Note that whereas the term 'deaf' implies that the adapter is unable to hear the initiating text, in literary dialogue-of-the-deaf we usually witness unwillingness to hear (or a mixture of inability and unwillingness). For a systematic presentation of these three types of dialogue, see my essays "Dialogues with/and Great Books: With Some Serious Reflections on *Robinson Crusoe*," *New Literary History* (2008) 39: 335-53; "What Is, Empirically, A Great Book?" *New Beginnings in Literary Studies*, ed. Jan Auracher and Willie Van Peer (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 423-45; and the first two chapters of my *Dialogues with/and Great Books: The Dynamics of Canon Formation* (Brighton: Sussex Academic P, 2010).

⁴My discussion of entailed, implied and suggested elements draws on Monroe C. Beardsley's classical analysis of the explication of a poem—see his *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1958) 129-47—and on the concept of gap-filling as developed by Menakhem Perry in "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates its Meanings," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 35-64; 311-61; and Meir Sternberg in *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978). Note, however, that the distinction between different types of logical relations offers a nuanced tool for discerning between different elements added to an adaptation that would be

lumped together as “explication” (Beardsley) or “gap-filling” (Perry and Sternberg). Note also that, whereas gap-filling is an activity necessary for the reader to make sense of the story, to become aware of possibilities suggested by a text is an optional activity: a reader can basically make sense of a story without imagining some of its suggested potentialities.

⁵For the tradition of Christian interpretations of the biblical story of Samson, see Michael Krouse, *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1949), and my *Samson's Locks: The Transformations of Biblical Samson* (Haifa and Tel Aviv: Haifa UP, 2000) 158-74.

⁶Whereas life and death are *contradictory* terms (if you're not alive, you're dead; you cannot be neither alive nor dead), black and white are *contrary* terms (something can be neither black nor white). For a systematic presentation of these logical relations, see John Lyons, *Semantics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) 270-80; 772-73.

⁷In such an empirical test we should try, of course, to neutralize as much as possible contextual features not actually suggested by the story. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the results of such a procedure would be clearer and (statistically) significant when subjects would face coherent narratives and note, say, post-modern texts that frustrates the reader's expectations on every textual turn.

⁸Note that suggested elements that the author has ‘bypassed’ are not necessarily valuable: an author may have studiously avoided some suggested elements because they are clichés (which are later adopted in a popular filmic adaptation).

⁹This addition cannot be explained by certain generic conventions of the discussed three works; there are other plays, novels and movies based on the biblical story of Samson that do not include this specific scene (see my *Samson's Locks*, note 5).

¹⁰Quotations are from John Milton, *Paradise Regained, the Minor Poems and Samson Agonistes*, ed. Herritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: The Odyssey P, 1937). Following each quote, line numbers are indicated.

¹¹Milton's description of Delilah-as-a-ship is partly modelled on Enobarbus's literal description of Cleopatra's barge in *Antony and Cleopatra*, see *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974) 1343-91 (II.ii.190-225).

¹²Note also the irony directed here towards Delilah: her flamboyant show is utterly inappropriate and futile considering that Samson is blind.

¹³Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, *Samson*, trans. Cyrus Brooks (New York: Judea Publishing Company, 1986 [1927, in Russian]). Page numbers will be indicated in parentheses after citations from this edition.

¹⁴Forshey attributes DeMille's decision to redeem Delilah to the “need for film heroines to be saved from their wicked ways”; see Gerald E. Forshey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars* (Westport, Coon: Praeger, 1992) 62.

¹⁵This is one important aspect of Milton's Dalila. For the rich net of meanings, including classical allusions, associated with her character see, for example, Maggie Kilgour, "Heroic Contradictions: Samson and the Death of Turnus," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 50 (2008): 201-34, and the works she cites in her essay.

¹⁶For the reader's need for a closure, see the classical study by Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968).

¹⁷The biblical story's tendency to refrain from explicitly elaborating on the characters' inner world does not mean that their thoughts and feelings are not part of the world constructed by readers. Sometimes the story's silence has the opposite effect of triggering hypotheses about characters' inner worlds. For the classical discussion of the Bible's concise style, with its multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, see Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1953) 7-23; see also Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg, "The King through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Reading Process," *Poetics Today* 7 (1986): 275-322.

¹⁸The motherly tenderness of this gesture (Cf. Michaelangelo's "Pietà") is underlined by Rubens in his "Samson and Delilah" (1609-1610). See Madlyn Kahr, "Delilah," *Art Bulletin* 54 (1972): 282-59.

¹⁹For influential articulations of the former, see Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980); for an interesting attempt to apply Chomskian generative grammar to story analysis, see Teun van Dijk's *Some Aspects of Text Grammars: A Study in Theoretical Linguistics and Poetics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972).

²⁰The use of a cluster of elements characteristic of the initiating text is required for the work to be considered an adaptation. Featuring a hero endowed with superhuman powers is not a sufficient condition to establish a work as an adaptation of the Samson story because such a motif is common also to the story of Hercules or of Superman. It is only when this hero is involved with the enemy's woman and loses his power as a result of this involvement that there are grounds for defining the story as an adaptation of the biblical tale.

²¹For the dynamics of the reading process, including the raising, maintaining and eliminating of different hypotheses (or frames or headings) under which we integrate elements, see Perry, "Literary Dynamics" (cf. n4).