The fact that Samson is different has always been noticed when dealing with the stories in Judg 13–16 (Kegler 1985, 114; Greenstein 1981, 239–243). In more than one way he does not fit into the established text-worlds of the book of Judges. Well known and accepted social, ethnical as well as religious boundaries are transgressed and collapse in the course of the story (Camp 2000, 134). Thus the expectations the story evokes in its readers are not fulfilled, quite contrary, everything appears to be turned upside down. Based on contrasts and boundaries (Exum 1993, 72–77) the story sets into motion once Samson starts to transgress them. Samson is portrayed as ‘the other’ from different perspectives, nevertheless his otherness is neither clearly defined nor are the relations between the different aspects of his otherness evident. Samson appears to be entangled in his otherness.

While the biblical text shows Samson’s otherness as a multilayered picture, the literary adaptations of this story in the 20th century reduce this complexity and portray Samson as a more coherent other transferring Samson into the cultural boundaries of their own times.

1. Samson, the Other Hero, in the Biblical Text

In the biblical story otherness is not restricted to specific figures or groups of figures. Rather all relationships are affected. On a national level it concerns the relations between the Israelites and the Philistines, as well as the people’s relation to their deity. On a personal level the relations include Samson, his parents, his wife in Timnah and Delilah. Nonetheless, the borders between national and personal level are blurred and more than once an episode includes national as well as personal aspects. Furthermore the world of the figures is neither congruent with one another nor with the world of the narrating voice.1 This once more increases the possible perspectives on otherness.

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Israelites—Philistines

In contrast to preceding stories of the judges Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah, the relationship between the Israelites and the Philistines is ambivalent in Judg 13–16. According to the narrative frame that links all stories, the Philistines are introduced as Israel’s enemies and oppressors (13:1). Twice, this role becomes a subject of a discussion. Samson’s parents offer the first explicit negative view on the Philistines. In their rejection of Samson’s foreign wife, they call the Philistines ‘uncircumcised’ (14:3). This distinctive detail marks the Philistines as ‘the other’ and thus adds a pejorative valuation from the parent’s point of view. Later, when the men of Judah turn against Samson (15:11) it becomes obvious that they regard the Philistine presence as an occupation to be endured. Again the Philistines are clearly marked as ‘the other’.

This explicit differentiation forms the background of the story and is emphasised when Samson challenges it. While the Israelites try to keep their distance from the Philistines, Samson frequently looks for encounters. Contrary to his parents and his fellow countrymen, Samson does not consider the Philistines as enemies per se nor does he show them the respect an occupying force might demand. Samson does not share the common conception of ‘otherness’; he rather acts according to his own standards. Hence Samson feels free to take a wife from the Philistines, he considers ‘right in his eyes’ (14:3) and as his rightful property (14:18; 15:1). Additionally, his hostility towards the Philistines is not portrayed as an ethnical conflict; Samson rather acts on the spur of the moment and for private motives. His fighting with the Philistines resembles personal quarrels, the lost riddle (14:18–19), the murder of his wife and father in law (15:6) or the ambush in Gaza (16:2–3). When he reflects upon his actions, Samson explains his aggression as a reaction to sustained damage, but not as hostility towards the Philistines as Israel’s enemies (15:3,7). Even his last vengeance is shown as a personal matter (16:28). Samson refuses to accept a given otherness between Israelites and Philistines. Accordingly, otherness is not primarily a national concern but a personal one.

The contrast between the traditional ethnical difference and Samson’s ignorance thereof is further increased by Samson’s mission. Samson is chosen to ‘begin to save’ Israel from the hand of the Philistines’ (13:5). In

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2 The way Samson acts shows that he considers the Philistines as neighbours he interacts with.

3 Nevertheless, the narrator interprets Samson’s last success as a national achievement (16:30).