

MÆGÐ MODIGRE OR ÆODNES MÆGÐ: JUDITH'S HEROISM IN THE
ANONYMOUS ANGLO-SAXON *JUDITH*

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to The Department of English at Sam Houston State University. I could not be more grateful to the English faculty for helping me realize, cultivate, and grow my potential as an English student in the last five years. I hope I continue to make you proud in my future as a teacher and scholar.

ABSTRACT

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Studies on female heroism in Old English literature have recently taken hold, and many scholars of the Old English anonymous poem *Judith* perform such analyses by comparing Judith's display of heroism to other conventional expectations of the hero, namely the female saints Juliana and Elene or the epic hero Beowulf. Such arguments, though the aim is to understand and seemingly conventionalize Judith's heroism in the poem, are possibly limiting our understanding of Judith's potential as a female heroine by forcing her into one of two categories in which she does not fully meet the expectations.

Thus, I move to reexamine the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet's source, Jerome's translation of *Judith* in *The Vulgate*, and reconsider the literary model for Judith's heroism, the story of Jael in *Judges 4*, to bring to light the poet's intentional and significant modifications to his version of Judith's character. I also move to examine Judith within the generic contexts that scholars often limit the *Judith* poem to, the female *vita* and the epic poem, in order to demonstrate that such comparisons are problematic and, ironically, do not bring scholars closer to understanding Judith's display of female heroism. I conclude by providing two possible avenues I see future research on this subject taking: a deeper look into the poem's authorship or a greater understanding of the limitations applied to fictional women in Old English literature.

KEY WORDS: Judith, Female Heroism, Feminist Criticism, Sam Houston State University, Graduate School, Texas.

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CHAPTER I

The Problem With *Judith* Scholarship

For the last thirty years, Old English studies has seen a boom in feminism scholarship following the third-wave of feminism in the early 1990s. In the beginning, much of the scholarship focused on what Anglo-Saxon scholars often call “women-in” criticism; that is, examining the woman’s place in various works that had previously not been discussed, such as the role of Grendel’s mother in *Beowulf*, and on the female narrators in the *Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*.¹ Much was also done on powerful Anglo-Saxon female saints, including the Virgin Mary, Juliana, and Elene.²³ Though feminist criticism has broadened our understanding of the role of women in Old English literature, I fear that, in the case of the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem *Judith*, scholars have focused too diligently on examining Judith against other literary figures to determine her potential as powerful woman or hero, rather than letting Judith’s potential be determined by her own merits in the poem.

The Old English *Judith* tells the story of a Jewish virgin whose people, the Bethulians, are subjugated under the Assyrian King Holofernes by the orders of the great King Nebuchadnezzar. The Old English version is only extant in one manuscript (BL MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv) and is missing the first three-quarters of the story, so it begins with

¹ See Christine Alfano, Jane Chance, William Sayers, and Reneé Rebecca Trilling for a few examples on Grendel’s Mother’s place in *Beowulf* being reevaluated. See Marilynn Desmond, Dolores Warwick Frese, Barrie Ruth Straus, and Dorothy Ann Bray for a few examples of scholarship on female narration in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *Wife’s Lament*.

² See Mary Clayton, Marie Nelson, Stacy Klein, and Shari Horner for articles written on Elene, Juliana, and the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon literature.

³ Also in the last 30 years, there have been other waves in *Judith* scholarship that are irrelevant to my study but are important to note. See Chamberlain, Olsen, Lochrie, and Herbison for discussions on *Judith* as a political poem. Also, Powell and Koppelman have published studies including applications of monster theory to *Judith*.

Holofernes's feast on Judith's fourth day in the camp. We are told that Holofernes finds Judith physically attractive, so he invites her to his bedchamber after the feast, with intentions to rape her. When Judith enters Holofernes's tent, she realizes that he is passed out drunk with wine on his bed, so she uses his sword and, in two blows, chops off his head, places it in a bag, and runs back to her soldiers outside the city gates. She shows the men Holofernes's head and encourages them to take on the enemy soldiers in battle. Inspired, the Bethulians, fight the leaderless Assyrians and take over the city. The poem ends with Judith's men free from Holofernes's control. It is clear that Judith is somehow heroic in the poem—she kills the army's leader and makes it possible for her people to succeed in the final battle. The bigger question, one that will be addressed in this thesis, is: Is Judith a hero? And if she is a hero, what kind of hero is she?

Scholarship on Judith's heroism since the 1990s has been incredibly dissonant. Some critics, namely Peter Lucas, argue that the potentially-heroic Judith is “not a fully-heroic figure” because she does not fulfill the expectations set forth for a male hero by comparing *Judith* to *Beowulf* (26). Others, like Christine Thijs' article on feminine heroism, argue for modifications to the Anglo-Saxon definition of *hero* to accommodate Judith. Some, such as Alfred Litton, claim that she is an equally powerful hero to Beowulf, despite her “feminine purity on the physical level” (42). Finally, some scholars, most notably Marie Nelson, argue that Judith is a hero by fulfilling the expectations of what a female hero should be using Juliana and Elene, two saints, as examples of the religious hero. It is clear that among feminist *Judith* scholars there is little agreement as to Judith's purpose and place in the text. I argue that this disagreement rests on one significant problem: scholars are looking at *Judith* in context—either a hagiographic

context alongside Elene and Juliana, or in MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv context with *Beowulf*. What no one has done yet, surprisingly, is to examine Judith and her heroism independently and on her own heroic merits.

Influenced by the French feminists—namely, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, and Julia Kristeva—American feminist Alice Jardin in *Gynesis* examines women in discourse, arguing that women in a subject position are often defined by a lack or an absence. In her own words, *gynesis* is "the putting into discourse of 'woman' as that process diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorization of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is, historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking" (25). Jardin builds on Kristeva and the psychological analyst Jacques Lacan, arguing that, because of Western thought and its phallogocentric culture (that is, a culture that expresses male attitudes and reinforces male dominance), woman is identified with what Western culture seeks to control, express, and exclude.⁴

As a result, by examining Judith alongside and against *Beowulf*, scholars are performing a reading of Judith that defines her by her lack of the masculine/heroic *Beowulf*-qualities she exhibits. In this setting, as those scholars have determined, there is not a possibility for Judith to be an Anglo-Saxon hero because she cannot fulfill the expectations of the male Anglo-Saxon epic hero. Concomitantly, those scholars who compare Judith to Juliana and Elene are equally as destructive to Judith's potential. Though these readings rest on comparing Judith to other women rather than to a man, they still signify Judith as lack of what it takes to be a saint. Though the discussion of

⁴ See Alice Jardin's *Gynesis*, especially the first section titled "Intersections."

Judith as hero is central to my study, I must first examine her alongside the Anglo-Saxon understanding of woman in order to examine Judith within the literary and historical expectations.

In the field of Anglo-Saxon studies, historians have come to understand that women were agents in both the social and ecclesiastical spheres in Anglo-Saxon society. Christine Fell argues that women in Anglo-Saxon society actually had more agency and power in society than women in later time periods—specifically, their female counterparts after the Norman Conquest.⁵ I argue, though, that they had more agency in real life than in fiction. Jane Chance remarks that Anglo-Saxon women had power, but only if they fit a specific model—the Virgin Mary type or the Monstrous Eve type.⁶ Chance’s binary aligns with St. Jerome’s fourth-century writings and his expectation of the role of the woman in his religious audience. For Jerome, a woman’s life was worthless if she was too concerned with materialism or if she was spiteful and flirtatious like Eve. In order for a woman’s life to have meaning, she must be fully devoted to God, have no care for worldly matters, and must be totally non-sexual like the Virgin Mary.⁷ This binary is very important to understanding *Judith*, for I argue that the Anglo-Saxon Judith fits somewhere in the middle, resisting a dichotomous categorization and creating

⁵ See Christine Fell’s *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*.

⁶ See Chance’s *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*.

⁷ Jerome states, “I will say it boldly, though God can do all things He cannot raise up a virgin when once she has fallen. He may indeed relieve one who is defiled from the penalty of her sin, but He will not give her a crown. Let us fear lest in us also the prophecy be fulfilled, “Good virgins shall faint.” Notice that it is good virgins who are spoken of, for there are bad ones as well. “Whosoever looketh on a woman,” the Lord says, “to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” So that virginity may be lost even by a thought. Such are evil virgins, virgins in the flesh, not in the spirit; foolish virgins, who, having no oil, are shut out by the Bridegroom” (Halsall).

a spectrum—not a binary. However, scholars have situated her as either a saint (placing her with Virgin Mary) or as an epic hero (placing her as a monstrous Eve) instead of analyzing her for what she might be—a complex, liminal woman that resists easy categorization.

I propose that in order to release Judith from the forced categorizations of the Virgin Mary or Monstrous Eve, scholars might follow Helene Cixous' proposal in *Laugh of the Medusa*: that is, reading the poem without contexts that signify Judith by lack and, instead, let Judith's actions and her poem signify her as hero or not hero. Cixous states:

She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history, first at two levels that cannot be separate... By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display... An act that will also be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression (879-880).

Thus, I hold that the answer to interpreting Judith's heroism should not lie in an unfair comparison to other figures that only serves to highlight Judith's inability to fulfill a particular set of conventions. The answer to the question of Judith's heroism, instead, should rest in analyzing Judith and her place in the poem by her own potential, allowing her to signify herself as hero, saint, or something else.

Therefore, I propose that it is necessary to compare *Judith* to female *vitae*, *SS. Juliana* and *Elene*, and also consider its place in the context of the Cotton Vitellius A.xv

manuscript with the epic *Beowulf*.⁸ Analyzing *Judith* alongside female *vitae* and an epic poem will invite a comparison of Judith to two different models of the hero, the saint hero and the epic hero. Comparing *Judith* to the generic conventions of the *vita* and the epic poem will allow an analysis of Judith against two different models: woman saint and epic hero. Though other scholars have done this, I move to emphasize the harm that reading *Judith* alongside other, non-similar displays of heroism does. Such a reading prohibits Judith from being measured on her own potential and, instead, compares her to a model she cannot fulfill—thus, significantly limiting her heroic potential. Doing so begins a new conversation and raises a question that has not yet been answered to my satisfaction—what is *Judith*? Is it a saint’s life, a religious epic poem, or, perhaps, neither? Is Judith a hero, a saint, neither, or both? By analyzing *Judith* in the contexts of saints’ lives and epic poetry, I will show how the poem consistently undercuts Judith’s ability to be hero in both a *vita* and an epic. I contend that the Anglo-Saxon poet of *Judith* intentionally muddles any clear-cut notion of genre and, further, that the character Judith intentionally confounds and potentially re-writes our expectation of an Anglo-Saxon female hero.

In chapter one, I situate the Anglo-Saxon poem *Judith* within the overarching Judeo-Christian *Judith* tradition. I analyze the extant versions of the story, including the version in the *Septuagint*, the canonical book in *The Vulgate*, Ælfric’s tenth-century *Homily on Judith*, and the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem *Judith*. Examining Judith

⁸ I am very much aware that, here, I am analyzing Judith alongside other literary figures just as I have called out previous *Judith* scholars have done. However, I am examining Judith in a hagiographic and epic context in order to definitively, I hope, demonstrate that she does not and cannot belong with either category. Thus, in order to extend this analysis, I must do as previous scholars have done and examine Judith in the same limiting and detrimental contexts. I hope, by doing so, I might bring to light how problematic these analyses are and, more importantly, demonstrate that they only hinder our full understanding of Judith’s femininity and heroism.

across these versions will bring to light common inconsistencies and revisions that many scholars have noted separately but have not yet been drawn together. These revisions are key to understanding the Anglo-Saxon *Judith* because recognizing the changes in previous versions allows us to look at the Anglo-Saxon poet's clear, and, I argue, intentional modifications. I demonstrate how these changes alter Judith's character and how they prevent us from situating *Judith* within a single genre. I propose that it is necessary to read the Anglo-Saxon version within the contexts of *vitae* and epic poetry (using the sole manuscript containing it) in order to arrive at a new understanding of *Judith*.

In chapter two, I analyze *Judith* in the context of the saint's life by comparing it with the *vitae* of SS. Juliana and Elene. I will discuss the poems' plot and structure and compare them each to the conventional saint's life model to show that *Elene* and *Juliana* each follow it, but that *Judith* does not adhere to the model closely enough to be labeled as a *vita*. I also examine each woman in a historical and hagiographic context, so I can identify their place in Chance's binary of accepted roles for women. Paying close attention to the structure, purpose, rhetoric, and limitation on the woman in *vitae*, I examine *Juliana* and *Elene* in order to demonstrate their clear categorization as *vitae* and, therefore, Juliana and Elene's obvious categorization as a Virgin Mary type saint. By examining each saint's place in her respective *vita*, her function as a woman, and her potential as a saint, I arrive at a conclusion of what makes a woman a saint in the *vita* tradition. I argue that Juliana and Elene each fit the mold, but that the Anglo-Saxon *Judith* does not and, thus, cannot function as a saint. This chapter reveals Judith's inability to be saint and *Judith's* inability to be categorized as a saint's life.

In chapter three, I read *Judith* in context of the Cotton Vitellius A.xv manuscript by comparing her heroism to an epic hero, Beowulf. I compare moments where both Judith and Beowulf are physically described; the “heroic” fighting scenes including how the potential hero and others react to their feats; and the scenes where Judith and Beowulf are rewarded for their potential heroism. From this analysis, I determine that Judith is not an epic hero, like some scholars suggest. I also draw attention to the problem of comparing Judith to Beowulf—that it limits Judith’s potential because it does not recognize her heroism on her own merits, but rather against Beowulf’s obvious superiority.

Finally, I conclude with the question that started this project: what is *Judith*? I propose that the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version’s inability to clearly fit into a single genre (epic or *vita*) perpetuates this Judith’s inability to be a conventional Anglo-Saxon saint or epic hero. Moreover, I contend that The *Judith* poet has made a clear and conscientious decision to characterize Judith not as a Monstrous Eve (like a female epic hero) or a saint (like Elene or Juliana), but instead he has allowed her to break the binary and create a spectrum, falling somewhere in-between the two ends. Because I cannot possibly conclude this project by defining Judith as a hero type without extensive further research, I will conclude by demonstrating two potential avenues that *Judith* feminist scholarship can move towards. The first is to further examine *Judith* through a post-structuralist feminist lens—that is, to closely analyze the poem, determining Judith’s potential as the subject of the poem. In my own short analysis, I determine that Judith is disallowed the subject position throughout the entire poem, save the moment she violently beheads Holofernes, which makes Judith appear monstrous. Thus, future

scholarship should resist such a reading and, instead, seek to uncover why a literary Anglo-Saxon woman is denied agency and deemed monstrous simply because she does not fit in to the preconceived notions of Anglo-Saxon woman (the Virgin Mary/Monstrous Eve expectation). Second, I move that deeper research should be done on *Judith* authorship. Because Judith is written as a liminal, multi-dimensional woman who resists categorization and defies the conventional expectation of woman, it is possible that Judith could have been written by a female author who could better embody and represent the female psyche. I argue that Judith is an interesting, multi-dimensional character in a period of literature that often supplies one-dimensional, easily categorizable women and, as a result, the author of Judith becomes an important piece of in the puzzle of determining Judith's place in the poem. Thus, I move that deeper research into potential female authorship could help uncover the reason behind Judith's seemingly dissonant character qualities and femininity.⁹ Therefore, my thesis addresses the notion of feminine expression and heroism in the anonymous Anglo-Saxon *Judith*, and lays the foundation for future, more in-depth studies on the poem and Judith's discordant heroism and gender expression.

⁹ Though, obviously, the possibility of finding sufficient enough evidence to prove female authorship is almost completely out of the realm of possibility, I move that it should be considered. Even if it can never be truly known, the potential of female authorship could help answer some of the contradicting qualities in Judith. Simply put, a female author could easily write a multi-dimensional female character with the motive of detailing that woman can be more than only saint, woman, or hero; but, in fact, she could exemplify characteristics of each at different points in the poem.

CHAPTER II

Judith's Peculiar Heroism

The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem *Judith*, collated in the Cotton Vitellius A.xv manuscript dated 975-1075 AD, is peculiar in its treatment of Judith's heroism. In earlier and contemporary versions of the biblical story, Judith is an especially memorable female figure who infiltrates the enemy Assyrian camp, beheads their leader in his own tent when he declares intent to rape her, and then carries his head back to her people, the Bethulians, for inspiration to kill the rest of the enemy army. The literary model for Judith's heroism is found in Judges 4, dated as far back as 1250 BC. In these two chapters, a woman named Jael intentionally lures the enemy general, Sisera, after he is defeated by the Israelites into her tent and gives him warm milk, lulls him to sleep, and then drives a tent spike in his head. Though the two plots are slightly different, Jael's story in Judges sets a precedent for a heroic, biblical female hero to kill a pagan male enemy in the Jewish tradition. Through the Anglo-Saxon period, Judith is recognized as a saint and an exemplum for other religious women (and men), as evident by Jerome's prologue to his translation of *Judith* in *The Vulgate*:

Receive the widow Judith, an example of chastity, and declare triumphal honor with perpetual praises for her. For this one, imitable not only for women, but also for men, has the Rewarder of her chastity given, Who has granted such strength, that she conquered the one unconquered by all men, she surpassed the insurpassable.¹⁰ (Jerome, Prologue to *Judith*).

¹⁰ Translated by Kevin P. Edgecomb.

Ælfric's Old English *Homily on Judith* (c. 1000 AD), much like Jerome's *Vulgate* version, affirms her as a perfect role model for Ælfric's Christian audience.

The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet, however, debuts a Judith who is clearly not a saint, and based on the heroic diction in the poem, is somewhat like an epic hero. Such a stark shift from Jerome's Judith is peculiar, given that Ælfric, a contemporary of the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet, maintained Judith's character as an obvious model for Anglo-Saxon Christian women. Given the emphasized heroic diction and the conventional epic elements in the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version, the poet is likely appealing to an anticipated audience and is writing this poem for a specific purpose. In this version, the anonymous author highlights what is not typical in previous Judiths' behaviors—bravery, selfishness, and violence—and, instead, creates a multi-dimensional Judith who adapts her actions and motivations to her situation. If the Judith that contemporary Ælfric writes, who is influenced solely by Jerome's Judith, is meant to be the exemplum of the Christian, Anglo-Saxon woman, then the anonymous poet's Judith deviates significantly and, perhaps, provides another possible model for the Anglo-Saxon woman—one who resists easy categorization into the accepted Anglo-Saxon expectation of the female character. I move, then, that a more detailed analysis of the previous (*Septuagint, Vulgate*) and contemporary versions (*Ælfric's Homily*) of the Judith story, focusing specifically on Jerome's Judith as a direct source for the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet, should be made and the literary model for the original *Judith*, the story of Jael in *Judges*, should be brought to bear in order to understand the significance of the anonymous Anglo-Saxon *Judith's* peculiar protagonist.

The Biblical Versions of Judith: The Septuagint, Vulgate, and Ælfric's Homily on Judith

Dated 3-2nd Century BCE, the Septuagint is the earliest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew, presumably made for the Jewish community in Egypt when Greek was the common language throughout the region. The *Septuagint* translation of *Judith* depicts Judith much like the expected heroic saint. She is recognized by her family line, and she is said to be a beautiful, very rich widow. It is first important to note that the translator emphasizes her femininity. We are consistently reminded that Judith is a widow (notably, not a virgin) and, therefore, must follow a strict set of rules. She must remain chaste, she must mourn her passing husband appropriately, and she must spend her days in the company of her lady servants. Thus, Judith is aware of her own shortcomings and limitations as a woman.¹¹ However, she is also aware that she has womanly assets she can use to her advantage. Judith cultivates her physical assets in the scenes where she enhances her beauty and flaunts her sexuality in the presence of men—creating the illusion that she has control over her body.

Though Judith's physicality is central to this version, she is also known for her cunning wit and wisdom. Using her womanly advantage, she anoints herself with oils, dresses up in a beautiful, revealing gown, and makes sure to appear sensual so that she might attract Holofernes' attention. The translator claims, "she made herself up provocatively for charming the eyes of the men.... Furnished with raiment and every feminine adornment" ("Ioudith" 10.1-5, 12.15). This version plays on Judith's sexuality and femininity, and praises Judith for being clever enough to use it against her enemies.

¹¹ Before she leaves her tent to infiltrate Holofernes' camp, she prays and asks God to "shatter their stature by the hand of a female" (9.10).

Furthermore, when she relays her concerns about her people to Holofernes, he tells her he is “awestruck by her wisdom”; then, she falls on her knees and bows to him, giving the illusion that she is submissive to authority, though this act is clearly part of Judith’s plan (10.19). The *Septuagint* paints Judith as a chaste, yet sensual widow who is savvy enough to successfully manipulate men using only her feminine wiles.

After the feast, when Holofernes has had his fill of wine and passes out on his bed, Judith exercises her wit again. She knows immediately that she should kill him, and she does the deed quickly. She tells her maiden to stand outside and then prays to ask God to “defend your inheritance and accomplish my mission for the wreck of the enemies who rose up against us” (“Ioudith” 13.5). After her prayer, she takes Holofernes’ scimitar off the wall, strikes his head twice, rolls his body off the mattress and bags his head in the mosquito netting hanging off one of the posts.¹² This scene is described in 3 lines: Judith kills Holofernes quickly and cleanly with little weight placed on the specifics of the murder. She takes Holofernes’ severed head back to her soldiers who commend her for accomplishing “all these things by your hand”—recognizing her role in the matter (15.10). Once Holofernes is dead, the Hebrews seize his camp, loot the city, and reward Judith with Holofernes’ tent and his silver. Instead of keeping it for herself, she loads it all on a cart, dedicates it to God, and divides her possessions among the people. The translator reminds the reader that Judith remains chaste for the rest of her life, though every man knew of her renown and desired to be with her. He also reminds us, again, of Judith’s femininity— “The omnipotent Lord set them [Holofernes’ army]

¹² This is the only version in which it is made clear that Holofernes’ sword is a scimitar (a short, curved sword that is used originally in Eastern countries). It appears the translator made this distinction possibly to make Holofernes’ out to be more of a pagan foreigner than the tradition suggests, but without the preceding Hebrew text, I cannot be sure.

aside with the hand of the female” (16.5). The translator of the *Septuagint* seems to be reinforcing Judith’s feminine disadvantages, but Judith proves herself as capable and victorious in spite of an unrelenting spotlight on all her limitations. She uses her feminine characteristics to take down the male villain and, when all is said and done, she returns to her role as chaste widow and caretaker of her people. Judith takes her rightful place as approved woman, biblical hero, and saint.

Jerome’s Latin translation of *Judith* in *The Vulgate*, published in the late fourth century, is the source for the two Anglo-Saxon versions of the Judith story: Ælfric’s Homily on *Judith* and the anonymous Old English poem *Judith*. Jerome relied heavily on the *Septuagint* and the Aramaic¹³ versions for his translation. In Jerome’s *Vulgate* version, Judith is recognized by her familial relations and her place as a rich widow; but, Jerome pays more attention to her appearance and beauty than the *Septuagint* translator does. He pays attention to her dress and sexuality when she dresses up for Holofernes:

“And she washed her body, and anointed herself with the best ointment, and plaited the hair of her head, and put a bonnet upon her head, and clothed herself with the garments of her gladness, and put sandals on her feet, and took her bracelets, and lilies, and earlets, and rings, and adorned herself with all her ornaments” (*Vulgate* 10.3).

Before the feast, Jerome only tells us that she dresses herself with her garments, but—again—he pays a peculiar amount of interest to Judith’s beauty, more so than the *Septuagint* does. She is supposedly one of the most beautiful women any of the men have ever seen, and yet God still grants her with more beauty when she is meant to seduce

¹³ The Aramaic translation is lost.

Holofernes. According to Jerome, God does this because “all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality, but from virtue” (*Vulgate* 10.4).

Jerome’s beheading scene is also very similar to the *Septuagint*. It is equally as quick and dirty—only three lines without emphasis or detail. She strikes twice with Holofernes’ sword, cuts off his head and bags it in the canopy around his bed, and then rolls his headless body onto the floor. She is praised when she returns to the soldiers with Holofernes’ head, and she states that “Judith, the daughter of Merari, weakened him with the beauty of her face” (*Vulgate* 16.8). In the *Septuagint*, Judith defeats Holofernes by the lesser strength of a woman’s hand, but here Holofernes is defeated by Judith’s unsurpassed beauty. Jerome seems to be suggesting here that Judith is equally as in control of her body as the *Septuagint* Judith, but he deemphasizes her strength and her heroic moment. Judith is rewarded with spoils from the very short, non-descriptive battle, but she gives them away to her people. At the end, he reinforces Judith’s chastity again—claiming that she did not take another man before her death—and he again makes a note about Judith’s beauty. Jerome’s Judith, then, is uncharacteristically beautiful, has the appropriate feminine strength and virtue, and is generous—a perfect model for a Christian woman.

Ælfric’s tenth-century version of *Judith* in his *Homilies* diverges significantly from Jerome’s. Though his homily is a contemporary of the anonymous Old English *Judith*, his depiction of Judith follows much more closely to the *Vulgate* source than the anonymous poet. Ælfric’s Judith, like Jerome’s Judith, is similarly emphasized as a rich and chaste widow, devoted to and observant of God, and living rightly by the Hebrew law of Moses. Ælfric also states that she is beautiful—though it is not an extravagant or

unsurpassable beauty like Jerome suggests. In Jerome's version, God actually grants her more beauty, since her intention is with virtue instead of sensuality. Ælfric's Judith, instead, dresses up in gold and purple clothing (not silk or satin raiment and jewels), and there is very little attention paid to her appearance in this scene. Ælfric essentially glosses over this part in his translation, insinuating that the focus should not be on Judith's beauty or her outward appearance, but rather on her devotion and observant faith in God. He specifically states in the scene where Judith is brought to Holofernes' feast that she "came adorned with no lust, stood before him very fair in beauty" (Hawk). It seems as though Ælfric is blaming Holofernes for any lustful desire that arises from Judith's presence, since she is obviously showing no intention to be sexual in appearance.

Ælfric drastically drastically cuts the beheading scene short as well. His treatment gives absolutely no detail whatsoever: "she took his own sword, struck it into his neck, and with two strikes cut him in the throat and would the body with bedsheets, took his head and went out with prayers" (Hawk). The emphasis is not on the violence of the scene—it is treated as though Judith had no other choice but did not revel in her duty at all. When she returns to her people, she tells them to praise God, for it was through her that he "fulfilled his mercy, which he promised to the house of Israel; and now, tonight through my hands he slew the enemy of his people!" (Hawk). Judith takes no claim or pride in her victory but gives all of the victory and praise to God for working through her. Judith, then, is merely an instrument for God.

Lastly, the end of the poem is equally as glossed-over as the beheading scene. The final battle between Holofernes' men and the Hebrews is almost non-existent—war and bloodshed are clearly not Ælfric's priority. Ælfric's Judith has fewer speaking parts than

the previous versions allow her, and the speeches she does give are mainly prayers to God—she does not command soldiers or give the long speech to Holofernes. Heroic behavior, then, is also not part of Ælfric’s emphasis—he states clearly that Judith’s desire was not “to have the bloodthirsty one’s warspoils, but she accursed all his clothes, she did not desire to have any sin. Look how cleanly she lived!” (Hawk). In previous versions, Judith merely accepts the spoils and then divides them among her people out of the goodness of her heart; but Ælfric’s Judith clearly denounces the war spoils—even cursing them—and they are not mentioned again in the poem. Instead, Ælfric lauding Judith’s chastity and cleanliness—for they “have great power” (Hawk). Ælfric’s modifications are clarified with the understanding that this text was meant for nuns to read, revere, and copy Judith’s behavior. His reverence of chastity and cleanliness, his denouncement of all things sexual and material, and his minimalistic treatment of violence all demonstrate his intentions with Judith. Thus, Ælfric illuminates the plot points and exposition that the tradition thus far had marginalized or explained differently in an attempt to highlight characteristics that he wishes for his nuns to follow—even if it deviates significantly from tradition; such as, Judith’s obedience and submissiveness instead of her cunning wit.

The Anonymous Anglo-Saxon *Judith*

In the Anglo-Saxon anonymous poet’s *Judith*, the feminine signifiers from Jerome’s *Vulgate* version are removed from the description of our protagonist. Judith is signified with adjectives such as “snotor”, “beorhtan”, “Scyppendes maegð”, “ellen-rof”,

“ellen-þriste”, “modig”, “æðele” and “ead-hriðige”.¹⁴¹⁵ The poet mainly focuses on her bravery, courage, and her loyalty to God. It is also important to note that many of these descriptors—specifically “modig”, “æðele”, “ellen-rof”, and “snotor”—are also applied to Beowulf.¹⁶ This is the first instance in the version that points to the poet’s tendency to represent Judith as a liminal character that blends masculine and feminine characteristics.

Judith’s dress, which has been an important component in the story in the *Vulgate* version, is only discussed using one line in the Anglo-Saxon anonymous version. In Jerome (as in the *Septuagint*), Judith dresses provocatively in order to seduce Holofernes’ attention when she meets him for the first time and then again when she goes to the feast on the fourth day. However, the Anglo-Saxon poet pays almost no attention to Judith’s dress. When Holofernes calls her to his bedchamber, he commands she is to be brought “adorned with bracelets” to his bedchamber, but there is no mention of Judith taking special precautions to dress seductively like she does in previous versions (“Judith” 36). In fact, the poet emphasizes Judith’s dressing down when he notes that her hair is “wunden-locc” or bound. A ring-adorned Judith is brought to Holofernes with tied up hair. This version clearly seeks to de-emphasize Judith’s femininity by writing out all of the moments where Judith is clearly meant to be feminized.

The beheading scene in the Anglo-Saxon poem is, by far, the most violent, descriptive, and peculiar of all the versions in the tradition. When Judith is brought to

¹⁴ Respectively: clever/intelligent, brilliant/shining, the Creator’s maiden, courageous/powerful, bold/daring, courageous, noble, blessed/triumphant. I have chosen to translate Judith’s crucial signifiers on my own because other translations differ so greatly, and it is crucial that I be as close to the original meaning of the author as possible.

¹⁵ In some translations, like S. A. J. Bradley’s, she is described with adjectives that repeatedly appeal to her beauty, but a close reading of the original text in Old English only notes her physical characteristics a few times.

¹⁶ Courageous, noble, powerful, and clever.

Holofernes's tent, it is clear that she was hesitant to some extent. The poet tells us that Judith is "pearle gemyndig" when she sees Holofernes passed-out drunk, insinuating that she is nervous about confronting the enemy and, possibly, that she has not yet thought out a plan.¹⁷ When Judith notices that Holofernes is incapacitated, she specifically draws a sword with her left hand and prays to God for restoration of confidence and spirit. She claims that her "heart [is severely] inflamed now and my mind is troubled, greatly afflicted with sorrows," making no clear attempt to relay that she is killing Holofernes for her people, like in previous versions ("Judith" 86-87). The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet suggests here that Judith is acting on her own for her own benefit—the relief of the anxiety that has been plaguing her. After her prayer:

She seized the heathen man fast by his hair,
 Dragging him towards her with her hands shamefully,
 And skillfully laid out the baleful one, the hateful man,
 As she could most easily manage the accursed one well.
 Then she, curly-haired, struck her hateful enemy,
 With the splattered sword (99-104).

She strikes twice and removes his head, as in the other versions, but the poet uses descriptive, violent language to describe Holofernes' death. Whereas Jerome describes the beheading scene in 3 verses, the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet spends multiple paragraphs relaying every specific detail of the beheading, Holofernes' body rolling onto the floor, and his soul descending into Hell, which is exclusive to this version only.

In the *Vulgate*, it is clear that the beheading scene is the climax of the story

¹⁷ Literally, "severely mindful".

because the events that occur after it—specifically the battle scene—happen in quick succession and with little description. However, the Anglo-Saxon poet is very detailed in describing it. When Judith returns to her Hebrew camp, she tells her people that “I deprived him of life by the help of God” and then requests that the soldiers prepare for battle now that Holofernes has fallen (84-85). At this point, the soldiers take over the story. The battle scene between Holofernes’ soldiers and the Hebrew soldiers is much more graphic and descriptive than previous versions and lasts much longer than the preceding 15-20 verses. Once the elongated battle scene ends, Judith is rewarded with spoils—specifically, Holofernes’ sword (which we are left to assume is the one she used to kill him) and his bloody helmet. The poet modifies this scene by adding: “Indeed, at the end she doubted not in the rewards for which she had long yearned” (344-345). In the *Vulgate*, Judith receives no reward, giving the riches back to the people. Here, she is granted and keeps “hyre weorð-mynde geaf” or her “worthy-minded gift”, which some translate as “renown”—just like Beowulf and other Anglo-Saxon heroes are gifted at the end of their poems.¹⁸

The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet’s reworking of the *Vulgate* do something unprecedented with Judith’s character. The *Vulgate* Judith is cast as a religious, saintly woman. This trend runs all throughout Jerome’s sources as well. In the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version, she is signified as a chaste woman, prays to God repeatedly, stays faithful to God, and accomplishes a victorious task with his blessing. Unlike the *Vulgate*, though, the anonymous Anglo-Saxon Judith is much more secular and androgynous. The signifiers that define her are ones that are applied to heroic males, namely Beowulf. The

¹⁸ I refer here to S. A. J. Bradley’s translation.

poet is less concerned with her virginity, loyalty, and wisdom, but places emphasis instead on her courage, bravery, and battle wisdom. There are also elements of Judith's physical appearance and her actions in the story that demonstrate a masculinization of Judith. Instead of dressing beautifully or seductively, Judith arrives at Holofernes' bedside with her hair tied up, not sensuously oiled. In the beheading scene, her violent act is described in as much gruesome detail as the soldier's violence in the upcoming battle. After the battle, she is rewarded for her works with war spoils (including Holofernes' battle gear) and renown. These characteristics and actions are applied to only the Anglo-Saxon Judith, seemingly, to make her more masculine.¹⁹

Effects of the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Poet's Modifications

There are many points at which the Anglo-Saxon poet deviates and modifies the original story, and yet there are two overarching trends that emerge from the smaller modifications: Judith's gender and her heroism. First, the Anglo-Saxon version masculinizes Judith where the *Vulgate* source emphasizes her femininity. St. Jerome writes her dressing up sensually and claims God provided her with more beauty, but the Anglo-Saxon Judith ties her hair up, a sign of a married or unavailable woman, and makes no attempt to feminize her appearance when she confronts Holofernes. The Anglo-Saxon poet's intentional modifications to the feminine aspects of Judith's character mark a divergence from Jerome's *Judith*: the Anglo-Saxon version androgenizes Judith where

¹⁹ There is a later version of the Judith story in the *Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*. It is outside of the scope of this study, but it is worth noting that *MEMP* version's Judith is signified as wise, deceitful, friendly, and obedient. Furthermore, her speaking parts are drastically reduced in this version, though the *MEMP* Judith appears to have a greater control over her sexuality than previous versions allowed her. There is also a stronger emphasis on violence in this version. In the beheading scene, Judith bashes Holofernes' brains instead of removing his head; however, the battle scene is cut short and the poem ends rather abruptly with little description. The poem states that Judith encouraged her people to thank God for the victory, and she lived out her days as a chaste widow.

there was not a precedent to do so. The Anglo-Saxon poet, though, is the first to apply masculine characteristics and signifiers to the once clearly feminine Judith. However, the Anglo-Saxon poet does still emphasize Judith's virginity, even though the tradition states she is supposed to be a widow, and he does not remove Judith's dedication to God and God's will. She performs her duty in the story, allowing God and the Jews to be glorified through her actions. Thus, the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet muddles Judith's previously clear categorization as a feminine woman and a saint.²⁰

The masculinization of Judith's character in the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version, I argue, is what allows for the second major modification in the poem—Judith's heroism. The *Vulgate* Judith performs exactly the task she is supposed to do and, at the end, returns back to her role as caretaker and widow. The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet, however, dramatizes it by calling attention to Judith's violent strength and Holofernes' lifeless body in spilled blood left on earth while his soul descends into Hell. It could be said that the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet, with these intentional modifications, is anticipating his audience. The Anglo-Saxon audience would be receptive to the anonymous author's insertion of heroic tradition, given that it echoes the violent imagery of the Old English epic poetry, like *Beowulf* or *Battle of Maldon*. The audience would also see, however, that the anonymous poet clearly has no intention of making Judith out to be a scaled-down replica of Beowulf, which is why Judith's heroism is clearly and obviously weaker than that of conventional epic heroes. More importantly, though, is the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet's source for this model of Judith's heroism, since it significantly deviates from the supposed source, the *Vulgate*, and contemporary

²⁰ I am referring to, of course, Jerome and Ælfric's models of Judith.

depictions (*Ælfric's Homily*) of Judith's character.

The Literary Model for Judith's Heroism: The Story of Jael in Judges 4

The anonymous Anglo-Saxon *Judith* poet would have had access to and been familiar with Jerome's *Vulgate*, given that it was the sole source for his *Judith* poem. With this assumption, the poet would have likely also had access to the book of Judges in the *Vulgate* and Jael's story in chapter four. Though Jael's story is succinct, using only five verses in Jerome's translation, it provides a model of female heroism most applicable to *Judith*. The story of Jael in Judges 4 reads:

And Jahel went forth to meet Sisara, and said to him: Come in to me, my lord; come in, fear not. He went into her tent, and being covered by her with a cloak, Said to her: Give me, I beseech thee, a little water, for I am very thirsty. She opened a bottle of milk, and gave him to drink, and covered him.

And Sisara said to her: Stand before the door of the tent, when any shall come and inquire of thee, saying: Is there any man here? thou shalt say: There is none.

So Jahel, Haber's wife, took a nail of the tent, and taking also a hammer: and going in softly, and with silence, she put the nail upon the temples of his head, and striking it with the hammer, drove it through his brain fast into the ground:

and so passing from deep sleep to death, he fainted away and died (4.17-21).

The similarities with the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version of *Judith* are obvious: Jael and Judith both seduce enemy men from the without, masculine space into the domestic space to kill them discreetly. Jael, then, provides a precedent for Judith's female heroism.

There are many points in the Judith story that mirror Jahel's—first, the two protagonists' femininity. The initial seduction in both *Judith* and *Judges* is not

necessarily sexual, especially considering that Jael lures Sisara to her tent by seducing him with comfort and protection. Unlike Jerome's description of Judith, the physical attributes of Jael are of little concern to the story. Though Jerome emphasizes Judith's physical beauty in the *Vulgate* version, the anonymous Anglo-Saxon author focuses on Judith's bravery and courage, rather than her beauty or sexuality. In the later version, Judith is not lured to Holofernes' tent at all—she is brought to him by his men—and she does not dress herself up and emphasize her femininity like Jerome's Judith does. The anonymous Anglo-Saxon author's Judith has no intent to seduce with her beauty, like Jael, but instead they are both confident in their ability to overcome the enemy without having to rely on their femininity. This display of female heroism is much different than the Judith presented in Jerome's *Vulgate* and Ælfric's *Homily*: she is not powerful because she is a woman, rather she is powerful *despite* her femininity.

It is also important to note that Jael and Judith are also indicative of a realistic display of female heroism in the Anglo-Saxon period. Obviously, the *Beowulf*-poet or any learned author at the time would not subscribe to the notion that Jael or Judith are scaled-down female replicas of Beowulf, but would see both women as real, believable interpretations of female heroism. Neither woman is unbelievably strong or powerful to an Anglo-Saxon audience—she is merely a heroic female figure in her own right. Jael's heroic killing is done swiftly. She lulls her enemy to sleep with warm milk and then drives a tent spike into his head with a hammer. Judith's kill is drug out and much more violent. She takes the enemy's sword and beheads him with it; but it takes her two strokes to completely remove his head. Her display of strength, like Jael's, is no more than any average female could display; therefore, the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet's use of

heroic diction and epic conventions suggests that Judith is meant to be read as an epic hero of sorts.

Thus, having a literary model for Judith's heroism does not provide an answer to why the anonymous Anglo-Saxon author made such obvious and intentional changes to the *Judith* tradition. If the purpose of the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version of *Judith* was to provide women with a different model of female heroism than Jerome and Ælfric's biblical Judith, then it is peculiar that the anonymous poet also goes to such great lengths to embed conventional elements of the epic tradition into the poem, such as the recurring heroic diction and Judith's reward of war spoils at the end of the poem. My conclusion of the anonymous poet's intentional changes to the *Judith* story, then, is that Judith's seemingly understood and accepted display of female heroism is called into question. If the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version's Judith does not follow Jerome and Ælfric's exempla of Judith as saint, but she is not a scaled-down version of the epic hero, namely Beowulf, then what is she?

I propose that the answer to these questions can be found if we consider *Judith* without pre-conceived generic expectations that some scholars force onto her and the poem to fulfill. In the next two chapters, I will compare Judith to other female saints—SS. Juliana and Elene—and also consider her in *Judith's* place in the context of the Cotton Vitellius A.xv manuscript with the epic *Beowulf*. Analyzing *Judith* alongside female *vitae* and an epic poem will invite a comparison of Judith to different Anglo-Saxon examples of women: the female saint, or the Virgin-Mary type, and the female hero, or the Monstrous Eve type.

CHAPTER III

Judith, Juliana, and Elene: “Three Fighting Saints”?

Cynewulf is one of few Old English authors known by name, writing around the 9th century (though some dates go back to the 8th century and forward to the 10th.) Cynewulf is regarded as one of the pre-eminent figures of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry and is responsible for *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Juliana*, *Elene*, and *Christ II*. Two of Cynewulf’s poems, *Juliana* and *Elene*, are often read and regarded as Anglo-Saxon saints’ lives. The Christian Juliana, a martyr saint, refuses to marry her father’s pagan match, defeats the Devil in a battle of words, and then is killed for protecting her virginity and her son; while Elene, the model confessor saint, fulfills her call to find the Holy Cross for Constantine and convert the famous traitor Judas to Christ. In their discussion of these two saints, some scholars also include the anonymous Anglo-Saxon *Judith* as a *vita* and discuss the three poems alongside one other. Marie Nelson, for example published a translation of all three poems side-by-side, dubs Juliana, Elene, and Judith the “three fighting saints” (Nelson 12). Jane Chance labels them all as three saints to make historical and literary observations about Anglo-Saxon women: she claims, “three major biblical models for the AS woman existed in the figures of Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Judith” where the latter category includes the examples of Judith, Juliana, and Elene. She posits that, not only are the three texts related in theme and genre, but the three protagonists serve as exempla for Anglo-Saxon women to imitate.²¹

I argue, however, that reading *Judith* as a *vita* alongside *Juliana* and *Elene* forces the protagonist into a set of expectations that the protagonist does not fully meet. Shari

²¹ See Chance’s *Woman as Hero* chapter three.

Horner reasons that “scholars group *Juliana* with the poems *Elene* and *Judith*, as these are the only three extant Old English narratives to have a female protagonist, and all three exemplify the heroic values of Christian sainthood” (673). *Judith* shares a similar plot with *Juliana*, and Judith also exhibits much of Elene’s masculine-seeming physical strength and heroism; but, Judith beheading Holofernes and her seemingly-masculine characteristics set her apart from the *vita* tradition. Indeed, a close reading of Judith against Juliana and Elene will demonstrate that Judith is not part of the female *vita* tradition and, as such, Judith is not a female saint. As a result, Judith does not belong alongside Juliana and Elene and, therefore, should not be included in the category that defines the female saint as an appropriate model for Anglo-Saxon women. Rather, she is a peculiar female character in the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition who might exist outside of the current categorization imposed by previous scholars. Therefore, I move to reexamine Jane Chance’s models of Anglo-Saxon womanhood in the context of *Judith* to remove Judith from scholars’ limiting categorization of saint.

Chance states that “three major biblical models for the AS woman existed in the figures of Eve, the Virgin Mary, and (the *Vulgate*) Judith” (13). However, later she conflates the Vulgate and Old English versions as if the latter might easily fit the same as the Vulgate Judith does. There is a great deal of scholarship done on the differences between the many versions of *Judith*, and most scholars agree that the anonymous Anglo-Saxon *Judith* is far different than the previous biblical versions.²² The Vulgate Judith is, most scholars agree, a saint; but the Old English Judith is, at best, saint-like. Thus,

²² Such scholars are Hugh Magennis—“Contrasting Narrative Emphases in the Old English Poem *Judith* and Ælfric’s Paraphrase of the Book of *Judith*”—and James Doubleday—“The Principle of Contrast in *Judith*.” Also, see my outline of the *Judith* tradition in the previous chapter.

conflating the two versions leads to an inaccurate representation of Judith's character in the anonymous Anglo-Saxon version. Furthermore, Chance discusses the three women as a type of their own, but then claims that Juliana, Judith, and Elene are each types of the Virgin Mary. I find these opposing claims contradictory to the monograph's larger thesis: that there were "two archetypes of women that ordered the Anglo-Saxon social world," namely, The Virgin Mary and the often-Monstrous Eve (xvii). Thus, as a measure of clarity, I maintain Chance's thesis, but move to reorganize her smaller categorizations to claim that Juliana and Elene cleanly fit into the Virgin Mary type, but that Judith is her own female model that resists categorization.

I am not the first to arrive at the conclusion that Judith should not be categorized so easily with Juliana and Elene. Nelson for instance, posits that Judith is simply different from the other two saints, but by doing so she creates another category in which Judith does not fully belong: the "secular saint."²³ To an extent, this characterization better fits Judith's character; it is clear that the Anglo-Saxon Judith is religious, but not specifically a religious saint, and calling her a "secular saint" removes the expectation of religious qualities that are arguably absent from Judith's character. That said, Nelson's argument of Judith as secular saint is used in her later monograph as a reason for including her along with Juliana and Elene to complete the trilogy of the "three fighting saints" (97). Thus, while Nelson has come the closest in attempting to remove Judith from the category, she ultimately continues on the tradition of lumping the three together. Judith exhibits some saintly qualities, such as her devotion to God. She is not a "peaceweaver" as Chance reasons she should be. Instead, she uses actions—not words—to do her

²³ See Nelson's article "Judith: A Story of a Secular Saint."

bidding, and, the most obvious reason for her differentiation is that she actually kills someone.²⁴ However, she also demonstrates many qualities of the epic hero when it suits her purpose; meaning, Judith's exhibition of a few saintly qualities is not enough reason to classify her as a saint—religious or secular.

I move for a different reading of Judith—one that refuses forced categorization or bias on Judith or her poem; but, rather, pushes her towards existence as an Anglo-Saxon woman in the middle of the Mary/Eve spectrum, rather than firmly situating her on the side of the Virgin Mary. If scholars revisit the *Judith* poem without superimposing the *vita* categorization and without consulting the preceding biblical tradition, we can remove the biases associated with this reading of the poem. Doing so establishes Judith as a liminal figure who exhibits traits from multiple traditions—as many scholars have argued about other similar texts.²⁵ With *Judith*, I wish to demonstrate that Judith has leanings in two different traditions—*vita* and epic—and that, in order to mitigate the dissonance between the two readings of Judith, we must revisit the poem with a fresh perspective. Thus, instead of reading only one side of Judith's character, we can strive toward a conclusion on the peculiarity of Judith's character that addresses and, potentially, provides an answer for her contradictory characteristics.

Conventions of a Saint's Life; Juliana and Elene as Saints

Because so many scholars have argued for Judith as a saint, I will use previous scholarship and my own close reading of *Judith*, *Juliana*, and *Elene* to demonstrate that

²⁴ Based on *Juliana* and *Elene* as examples of female *vitae*, it is unheard-of for the female saint to kill anyone—even a pagan foe. Also, see *Chance Woman as Hero* for discussion of woman as peace-weaver.

²⁵ I am referring specifically to the work of Kimberly Bell and Julie Nelson Couch, among other scholars, who revisit the generic expectations of *Havelok the Dane* and propose to classify the text traditionally seen as romance as a *vita*. See their book, *Reading Devoutly: Havelok the Dane in the Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108 Manuscript*.

the poem is clearly not a *vita*. The reading of Judith as saint, I argue, is the product of a biased reading based on the perceived similarities between *Judith*, *Juliana*, and *Elene* as well as the *Vulgate* source for the Anglo-Saxon version of *Judith* which clearly solidifies Judith as a saint figure. When these two biases are removed, it is clear that the tension in the Anglo-Saxon version is too great to definitively and completely classify *Judith* as a *vita* and Judith as a saint.

The traditional saint's life story has a particular rhetoric, purpose, structure, and, with female *vitae*, a limitation on the female protagonist. According to Thomas Heffernan, the authors of saints' lives—or the “sacred biographers”—use specific rhetoric in order to emphasize their intended purpose. For example, in Walter Daniel's *Life of Aelred*, Heffernan argues that Walter chose specific language that best conveyed what happened—even if he did use hyperbole, figurative language.²⁶ Heffernan also argues that the *vitae* authors focus on rhetoric to show how “the saints share collectively in the luminous life of the incarnate Christ” (Heffernan 7). Thus, the more character traits the subject of a *vita* had in common with Christ, the more likely that he or she is a saint. The saints, because of their commonality with Christ, were established as “models of behavior... worthy of emulation” and each of their actions are never “without an ethical dimension” (6, 69).

John Kitchen discusses the changes made to the structure of the male *vitae*, drawing attention to the extra limitations placed on the female saint in female *vitae*. Traditionally, the female saint begins the narrative in a womanly role—be that a wife, a mother, a virgin, a widow, or a desirable fiancée. She desires to follow Christ but is

²⁶ See Thomas Heffernan's *Sacred Biography*—esp. “Sacred Biography as Historical Narrative.”

pushed to leave that role in order to follow Christ: “unlike the male saints, the holy woman is taken out of her desired religious environment by a husband who compels his wife to return home” (Kitchen 107). This role stands in contrast to her life as a saint; thus, she must go against the male demand and fully adhere to life as a saint. Kitchen’s assertion here is obviously literal, but I also believe there is a metaphorical level here where the woman in her role (in *Juliana’s* case, virgin) is taken out of her desired religious environment by a controlling male (suitor). It is in this struggle between God and man’s expectations for her that the female saint makes her decision, and in Juliana’s case, her decision to denounce men and follow God solidifies her as a female saint.

The female saint’s sexuality is a large part of the female *vita* convention. Not only is the saint limited by the role placed on her by males, but she often has her sexuality threatened. Most female saints are martyrs who die because their virginity or their status as a woman dedicated solely to God is threatened by a pagan man, and they choose to die faithful to God rather than live as a non-Christian woman or as a despoiled virgin.

Another difference Kitchen finds in female *vitae* is the authors’ compensation “for the gender by stressing the masculine qualities that holy women can acquire through the living of an ascetic life” (124). A male saint would already have masculine qualities, but the female saint must practice them, and the audience must be reminded that she does so. Female *vitae*, then, usually begin with the author noting “the possibility of overcoming femininity at the outset of their stories” (157).

Juliana is arguably the best example of an Anglo-Saxon female martyr saint’s life, according to Nelson and Rosemary Woolf, who each maintain that “Juliana is the story of a Christian saint” (Nelson 12). Set during the time of the Diocletian persecution,

Juliana tells the story of the Christian Juliana, the daughter of pagan Africanus, who is being forced by both her father and the ruler Maximian to marry the pagan Eleusias. Maximian rules that her father is free to punish her, so Africanus has Juliana stripped naked, hung from a tree by her hair, and has her whipped and beaten before throwing her into prison. When she is in prison, she is visited by Satan who, by pretending to be one of God's angels, tries to trick her into blasphemy. Juliana's unwavering faith prohibits her from falling prey to the charade, so she instead forces the demon to confess all of his wickedness. After Juliana's victory over the demon, her promised Eleusias comes to her cell to offer a change of mind for the last time. When she refuses, Eleusias in his anger buries Juliana in hot lead, but she arises unburned. In a final attempt to persecute her, Eleusias has Juliana beheaded. Juliana's story, then, is the textbook story of a martyr female saint, as defined by Thomas Heffernan and John Kitchen.

Juliana fulfills the conventions of the female saint's life in its structure, rhetoric, purpose. Kitchen's analysis of the female saint's life in particular lays out a specific set of expectations and a clear structure that differs from the traditional male saint's life. Unlike male saints, she desires to follow Christ but is pushed to denounce her role in order to follow Christ. In this poem, Juliana is unmarried, but she does have men who attempt to compel her to abandon her desired religious role. Africanus, Juliana's father, is forcing her to marry a pagan man against her will; Maximian decides that Africanus can by law punish his daughter for failing to forfeit her Christian beliefs; and Eleusias physically punishes Juliana four separate times by hanging and beating her, locking her in a prison cell, attempting to burn her alive, and finally beheading her. The three men in

Juliana's life each use the power dictated to them to forcibly convince her to marry Eleusias and denounce her Christian beliefs.

Also according to Kitchen, the saint's sexuality is a large part of the female saint's life convention. Not only is the saint limited by the role placed on her by males, but she often has her sexuality threatened. Most female saints are martyrs who die because their virginity or their status as a woman dedicated solely to God is threatened by a pagan man, and they choose to die faithful to God rather than live as a non-Christian woman. *Juliana* begins with a statement of Juliana's devotion before it is revealed that her virginity and devotion to God has become threatened by a man's attempt to force marriage upon her. Thus, man's control of the female's sexuality is the crux of the story. Maximian, Eleusias, and Africanus' attempts to force Juliana out of her desired religious life and take away her control of her own sexuality is overridden by her claiming and enforcing her control over both of those situations. First, the female saint's sexuality and Christianity must be threatened; then, she must be punished by man for her loyalty to God; then, she will be rewarded by God in some manner for remaining true. Juliana is threatened in the beginning of the story, punished by man for her success in passing the test, and then the second test is posed and passed when she refuses Eleusias's final reach after her imprisonment. After these tests, she has proven herself a true follower and devotee to God and is rewarded with the greatest gift a Christian can attain—martyrdom. Thus, Juliana's structure situates the story firmly into the *vitae* tradition.

The authors of saint's lives also emphasize two key conventions of a saint's life. Heffernan also argues that the authors of saints' lives also focus on rhetoric to show how "the saints share collectively in the luminous life of the incarnate Christ" (Heffernan 7).

Thus, the more character traits the subject of a *vita* had in common with Christ, the more likely that he or she is a saint. Throughout the story, Juliana is constantly referred to as a virgin, she bears “in her soul the holy troth, eagerly intending that her maidenhood would be preserved for the love of Christ, pure from any sin” (“Juliana” 31). She has a great fear of God which fuels her to “firmly set herself against that warrior’s [Eleusias] love, although he owned wealth... uncountable jewels upon the earth” (32-36). She condemns her father’s push to marry, stating “if in fact [Eleusias] confide[s] in an inferior god through devil-worship, or call[s] to heathen idols, [he] cannot have me nor can [he] compel me to be [his] wedded wife (48-52).” Clearly, Juliana’s impassioned rhetoric here is strongly Christian, but Cynewulf also emphasizes Juliana’s holiness as opposed to Maximian, Africanus, and Eleusias’s heathenness. He calls her “blessed,” “wise,” “dear to God,” and “holy woman,” while the men in the story are “fiendly,” “darkened,” “heathens sick in their sins,” who are “wrath-wretched, swollen with rage.” It is clear, in Juliana’s speeches and Cynewulf’s narration, that the rhetoric of the traditional *vita* is present in this poem.

The saints, because of their commonality with Christ, were established as “models of behavior... worthy of emulation” and each of their actions are never “without an ethical dimension” (Heffernan 6, 69). According to Heffernan, the *vita* should show how Juliana “share[s] collectively in the luminous life of the incarnate Christ” and establish her as a “model of behavior...worthy of emulation” (Heffernan 69). Cynewulf’s rhetoric fulfills that exact purpose. Juliana has “firmly founded her wifely friendship to God,” she bears “the holy troth” and she is the “maiden of glory” (31). She is clearly and closely associated with Christ as demonstrated by Cynewulf’s rhetoric, which allows her to be a

model for emulation. Juliana is the perfect servant for Christ. She chooses God's love over Eleusias's "wealth acquired within hoard-locks, uncountable jewels upon the earth" (43-44). She gives up potential wealth, a potential family, and the happiness and approval of her father in order to firmly align herself with God, knowing that she will be punished for it. She is the ultimate model for any true servant of Christ to follow; thus, the carefully chosen rhetoric has fulfilled its purpose.

It is clear that *Juliana* fits clearly into the *vita* tradition, which means that Juliana fulfills the expectations of a female saint. According to Chance, because Juliana is a saint, she is also a type of the Virgin Mary and a biblical model for Anglo-Saxon women. According to Pat Belanoff, "the mental attributes ascribed to Mary resemble those of Juliana" (Belanoff 822). Specifically, Belanoff claims that the "difference between the women of Christian sources and those of pagan sources shows up in portraits of other prominent women also, but it is nowhere so clear as in Juliana"; thus, Juliana is the prime example of a woman from the Christian sources (Belanoff 822). She performs her resistance perfectly by denouncing the pagan gods:

Never will you persuade me to promise tribute
by hypocrisy unto deaf and dumb devil-idols, the enemies of souls,
the worst thanes of torture but I will worship the Lord of Glory,
of Middle-earth and the Power Majestic—. ("Juliana" 148-151).

She even competes in a battle of wits with the devil's spirit and rejects the most common human folly: pride. Bzdyl states, "Juliana's rejection of pride comes when the devil, disguised as an angel, appears to her in prison and commands that she sacrifice to the false gods rather than endure martyrdom. The saint's vanity is tempted by the devil's

implicit suggestion that her own well-being takes precedence over her obligation to worship God alone” (Bzdyl 172). It is easy to see how Juliana fits the virgin Mary archetype: she is a beautiful virgin who prizes her relationship with God, her virginity, and her faith over marriage to a wealthy man and her own self-preservation through torturous persecution. Furthermore, she consistently denounces pagan gods and, instead, dedicates her life to God and remains steadfast in her faith through her entire journey; thus, she is a perfect model for the Anglo-Saxon woman to follow.

Elene, though equally as saintly, is a confessor saint rather than a martyr. *Elene* begins with Constantine, emperor of Rome, riding out to battle when he sees a vision in the sky, and is told that he will halt his enemies by showing them a symbol: the cross. The cross sends his enemies running in all directions. Upon his return, he converts to Christianity, and after reading the crucifixion passage in the Bible, sends his mother, Elene, on a quest with an army to find the True Cross. When she lands in Jerusalem, she calls an assembly of sage Jews, scorns them for having condemned Jesus to death, and threatens the Jews with death lest they help her find the cross. They give her Judas who also refuses to help her, so she throws him in prison for a week before he agrees to lead her to the cross and converts to Christianity. He digs up three crosses and, unsure which one is Jesus’, decides that God will show them the true one by reviving a corpse with its power. When Satan appears in a grotesque form angry at Judas for converting, Satan promises that he will retaliate by bringing a new king to fight against him—Constantine. Elene writes to her son who commands her to build a church on the hill where the crosses were found. She encases the true cross in gold and jewels and places it in the church where Judas is baptized. Unfulfilled, Elene decides to search for the nails that held Jesus

to the cross and finds them, along with a lifetime's promise of wisdom and protection as a saint, with a sign from God. She is counseled to place the nails in the bit of Constantine's horse, so he will always be victorious in battle.

Clearly, based on *Elene's* radically different plot structure from *Juliana*, there is one stipulation to Heffernan and Kitchen's stated structure: they apply specifically to a martyr saint. In *Elene's* case, she is not as limited in her femininity as *Juliana* is, likely because her virginity is not at the core of her saintliness. This type of *vita* is different in content and structure from those lives of the martyr saints because the plot does not revolve around the saint's virginity; rather, the confessor saint is rewarded upon the fulfillment specific task and the life-long dedication to God and the faith. Thus, these female *vitae* do not build the story around the protection of a saint's chastity, and therefore, it is of little concern to us that *Elene* is not a virgin, but a mother. Confessor saints like *Elene* typically demonstrate their adherence to the Virgin Mary type and their saintliness differently.

In *Elene*, the structure follows that of a confessor *vita*. *Elene* begins the story from a non-enlightened state (or, at least, a less-enlightened state than she will finish the story in), and then she is tested by God with a task that will ultimately prove her dedication to Christianity. In *Elene*, she is tested with the task of finding the True Cross for Constantine which she fulfills completely and then some. She finds the True Cross, establishes the church on the hill, and then finds the nails used to put Jesus on the cross and brings them back to Constantine. She is presented with her task, fulfills her task, and then performs another significant task with the nails as an extra measure of loyalty. One

of the most significant moments in the story comes at the end when Elene is awarded wisdom from God.

It is appropriate that you keep the word of the Lord,
 O best of queens, in your heart by holy secret,
 and diligently observe the commandment of the King,
 now that God has given you the victorious success of the soul
 and the skill of wisdom, the Savior of Men (“Elene” 1167-70).

It is at this point that *Elene* fulfills the structure of the confessor *vita*—she ends the poem as an ordained saint.

Not only does she become a saint by God’s word, but she begins to act like a saint. At the start of the poem, she is signified by her prowess as a warrior. She is dubbed a “magnificent war-queen”, “triumph-blessed”, “mighty queen / bold among the cities” before she finds the True Cross (“Elene” 320, 64, 412). This strength and prowess manifests when she meets Judas. She is merciless in her original punishment:

Then she ordered her companions to lead him still living
 and shove him in his guilt—her servants made no delay—
 into a dry well, where he, lacking support, dwelt
 for the space of seven nights in his sorrow under the harm-closure,
 tortured by hunger, clung to with chains (691-695).

She is committed to getting the information she needs, and she knows that God supports and is adorning her plan. She tells Judas before he is sentenced to his imprisonment:

I swear by the Son of the Measurer, the Hanged God,
 that you must be killed by hunger before your kinsmen,
 unless you abandon these lyings
 and patently reveal to me the truth! (685-90)

Here, Elene is an agent of God—working through him to obtain the truth she needs to fulfill her task. However, once Judas commits to telling her where the True Cross is, she softens.

When Elene, wielding power over her warriors,
 heard of Judas's bearing, she quickly ordered that he
 be allowed up from the nearness and from the constraining chasm,
 up from that cruel house. This her men immediately carried out,
 and they mercifully let him up from his imprisonment,
 just as the queen had commanded (709-714).

She begins to fulfill the expectation of a female saint—one with compassion, mercy, determined to fulfill God's task with a gentle heart: she becomes the Virgin Mary figure. Following the Marian expectation, she is referred to as the "Queen of Christians" and her focus shifts from war to God:

Then the mind of Elene was frequently mindful about the famous fate
 of those nails that pierced the Savior's feet and hands likewise,

by which upon the cross was the Sovereign of the Sky, the Mighty Prince
fastened (1063-1066).

Much like Juliana, she finds the strength and success of her mission in her devotion and
completion of God's plan:

She thanked God the Glory-King, because her desire
had come to pass through the Child of God in each of two ways
both in the sight of that victory-tree and of the faith that she knew
so clearly, a glory-fast gift in the breast of that man (963-966)

In Cynewulf's epilogue, the narrator states:

Then Elene sought sooth-fastness eagerly with the spiritual mysteries
within her heart, a way to glory. Indeed, God of Armies,
Father in Heaven, you helped her, Almighty King, so that the queen
achieved her desire in this world (1147-1150).

Elene fulfills her task and her sainthood in full fashion—she sought “eagerly”, fulfilled
her purpose, and did it all with God's influence so that she could bring the appropriate
glory to him—achieving “her desire in this world” (1150).

Based on this outline, the rhetoric of the poem fulfills a much different purpose
than *Juliana*. Juliana fulfills the role of the female martyr saint, one who fights for her
Christian beliefs and, by extension, God's control over her body until the very end,
knowing it means her own certain death. Elene, though, must be softened to fit the Virgin

Mary type—she shifts from a “magnificent war-queen adorned in gold” to the “queen of Christians” (“Elene” 331, 1067). Thus, the rhetoric in this poem is meant to demonstrate how a woman can achieve her saintliness without dying, but by cultivating and maintaining her own spiritual power with the help of God and those—like Judas—who are placed along the way to help her fulfill her larger task.

Elene becomes a saint under different circumstances than Juliana, but that is not to say she is a lesser example of the Virgin Mary archetype. Lawrence Erussard claims that “Elene stands in contrast to the expected stereotype of the holy woman” but, when the time comes for her to confront the Jews with her army, “she draws strength from her religious authority rather than from her military superiority” (Erussard 23-27). Thus, Elene’s seeming differences from the Virgin Mary archetype are resolved by the fact that she places her might and strength in God instead of in herself. Furthermore, Lionarons claims that Elene “functions within the body of Cynewulf’s text metaphorically as the ‘spiritual mother’ of Judas” and literally as Constantine’s mother (Lionarons 55). In her faith, she follows Constantine’s wishes to find the True Cross, just as the Virgin Mary obeyed her son in the will of his spirit. This depiction of Elene underscores her as a Virgin Mary archetype. Whereas Juliana fulfilled the Marian archetype as the virgin protecting her chastity, Elene is the chaste, religious, and devoted mother to both Constantine and Judas. In the second part of the poem, Elene is:

Transformed... into the spiritual mother of Judas: there she becomes a woman who speaks masculine words and relies on the masculine weapons of physical force, but who is curiously absent from even the metaphorical site of the spiritual rebirth of the man who, by his ordination, will become her priestly father in his

turn. By part three, she is Cynewulf's inspiration, but only as a male-authored textual figure, a narrative to be reshaped and retextualized at will by the poet, her literary "son" and creator" (Lionarons 68).

Not only does Elene fulfill the Virgin Mary archetype by being a physical and spiritual mother, but she also, like Juliana, obeys her faith and becomes a saint. Though she has physical power and an army at her control, she uses neither to find the True Cross. Her success along the way is ordained by God who, at many times in the text, provides Elene either directly or tangentially with signs that lead her way. The first sign from God points her to the True Cross and the second shows her where to find the nails—in neither circumstance does Elene use her army and, it is important to note, that no physical force at all was enacted to find the two relics. She placed Judas in the prison cell but did not use any physical violence to entice him to speak: She merely denied him food. Nelson articulately claims that “Elene’s mission is not to defeat human enemies in battle; it is to find the true cross, bring it home, and establish the Roman Church on a firm foundation of Christian belief” (Nelson 12). Thus, Elene fulfills the roles of the Virgin Mary type and the confessor saint in order to establish herself as an appropriate model for Anglo-Saxon women: She dedicates her life to finding the True Cross for her son and her God and, more importantly, remains faithful to God throughout the entire journey, not once straying from the appropriate actions she is to take.

Judith’s Potential as a Saint

If we wish to read Judith as a saint and her text as a *vita*, the expectations of Judith should be very similar to Juliana, given that both plots center around the female’s protection of her chastity. It is inferred from the beginning of the anonymous Anglo-

Saxon version that Judith has been staying in Holofernes' camp for four days and that he has a sexual draw to her. He has her royally dressed and called to his room, and it is clear here his intentions are not pure: he means to "defile her" ("Judith" 59). Thus, we should expect Judith, like Juliana, to remain steadfast in her faith, reject the sexual advance of the man—continually, if necessary—and then she should die for her chastity. However, before Holofernes even makes his sexual advance, Judith beheads him while he lies unconscious on the bed. There is no ignoring the strength of Judith here, but it is clear that this action does not fit clearly into the expectations of a female saint's life. Even Elene, given her strength and military courage, does not behead anyone for the sake of self-preservation or furthering her faith—she only starves her perpetrator. Thus, our expectations of Judith as a saint are shattered.

The structure of *Judith* is also very unlike Juliana or Elene. The poem certainly does not fit the mold of a martyr saint's *vita*; furthermore, Judith does not at all match the structure of Elene. If Judith were a confessor saint's poem, it would be focused on her evangelism and her dedication to faith through converting others and spreading the message of Christianity. Judith is, instead, concerned with a siege, beheading, and strength. This detail alone makes *Judith* seem more like an epic poem with a hero rather than a *vita* with a saint. *Judith*, then, is neither a true martyr *vita* nor is it a confessor's *vita*.

The beginning of *Judith*, as we have it, sets up a martyr *vita* structure. Judith is being held in a camp where her sexuality is being threatened by a pagan man—almost exactly like Juliana. Where the poem breaks from this structure is in Judith's beheading of Holofernes. There is no precedent for a female saint killing her adversary or, frankly,

killing anyone at all. It can only be assumed that Judith's beheading Holofernes was a fulfillment of a confessor saint-type task, like Elene's finding the True Cross. Thus, from this point, we should see Judith spreading the good message of Christianity and attempting to convert those around her. Instead what we find is that Judith returns to her camp, the men siege and overrun the city now that Holofernes is dead, and Judith is rewarded with spoils of war at the end. To point out the obvious here, Judith is being treated and praised like an epic hero, and she shows no desire to convert those around her. She is merely trying to save her people from their oppressive predicament, meaning that, not only is Judith being praised as an epic hero, but she is actually fulfilling the duties of an epic hero as well. There is no precedence or place in the *vita* tradition where a female saint has had a similar role. Thus, I don't believe Judith fits the expectations or the structure for a typical female *vita*—even when it is analyzed as a potential hybrid *vita*.

Not only does Judith fall short of fulfilling the conventions and expectations of both a martyr and confessor saint in a *vita*, she falls short of the Virgin Mary type. Chance claims, "the virgin Juliana... and the chaste mother Elene represent attempts to imitate these individual roles of Mary," but there is no mention of Judith in this category (Chance, 65). Belanoff further posits:

Most of these women [Virgin Mary-type saints] accomplish their goals through words, often directly quoted... Elene accomplishes her ends through a succession of speeches in which she threatens her adversaries; and, after she converts Judas, she pleads with him to complete her mission. Juliana expresses her firmness, faith, and defiance through words (Belanoff 823).

However, Judith accomplishes her goals through the very violent action of beheading Holofernes. Also, it appears that the defeat of her adversaries has a different motivation than the other two saints. Juliana refuses to give up her virginity and hand in marriage because of her Christian faith; Elene goes on her quest in order to find the True Cross and ends up establishing the great Church; but Judith defeats Holofernes in order to relieve the anxiety in her mind and heart and free her people from the pagan king's rule.

I wish to ask you, God of Origins
and Spirit of Comfort, Son of the All-Wielding,
Glorious Trinity for your mercy to a needy me.
Severely is my heart inflamed now
and my mind is troubled, greatly afflicted with sorrows ("Judith" 84-87).

Here, Nelson asserts that "Judith is more the defender an earthly people than she is the defender of her own eternal soul" (Nelson, 12). Though her action is not exactly selfish—she is killing Holofernes in order to allow her people to finally defeat the pagan army—she does not perform her action *for* God or her faith, but rather *with* God's help and *for* her people. Judith's motive, then, is political—not religious; thus, she does not fulfill the type of the Virgin Mary.

The rhetoric and purpose of a *vita* is equally as important as the woman's actions as a saint or the Virgin Mary type. An analysis of *Judith's* rhetoric and purpose, however, supposes an altogether different categorization for the poem and its protagonist. Unlike Juliana and Elene, where the rhetoric is fitting for the woman's role as a saint, Judith is described in her poem as an epic hero. Many of her signifiers--specifically "modig", "æðele", "ellen-rof", and "snotor"—are ones also found in *Beowulf* as character attributes

of the hero Beowulf.²⁷ Judith is much like Grendel's mother in this respect, because they are two of the only women in Anglo-Saxon poetry to be described with such hero-centered language. Furthermore, in both the beheading scene and the battle scene, there is a great deal of battle-driven language.

Then abundantly in her mind hope was renewed for the holy woman—
 then she seized the heathen man fast by his hair,
 dragging him towards her with her hands shamefully,
 and skillfully laid out the baleful one, the hateful man,
 as she could most easily manage the accursed one well (“Judith” 98-102).

This action reduces Holofernes to a drunken suppliant and raises Judith to the position of a powerful hero with Holofernes' life in his hands. Judith's strength in this scene is peculiar, given that there is no precedent for such a violently described beheading in the female *vita* tradition—even Juliana's cruel suffering at the hands of the men around her was not described in such detail. Finally, the battle scene is the last piece that solidifies Judith's inability to be a saint's life poem. Previous *vitae* have had battle scenes in them, but this scene is Anglo-Saxon to its core, with no nod to the saint's life tradition. The battle is detailed in very war-charged rhetoric: “the warriors went forward, men to the battle, covered by their shields, their hollow shields, those who had previously suffered the scorn of the strangers, the insults of the heathens” (213-216). There is precedent for battles in saint's life stories, but they are described as a battle for God, not a battle for repayment for oppression. There is no indication here that the battle is for God and, furthermore, the “saint” in question here has no place in the battle. Judith has vanished

²⁷ “brave, courageous, daring, wise/prudent”

from the story and the men have taken over her task. Once the elongated battle scene ends, Judith is rewarded with spoils—specifically, Holofernes’ sword (which we are left to assume is the one she used to kill him) and his bloody helmet. The poet states that she was given the gifts: but peculiarly, “at the end she doubted not in the rewards for which she had long yearned” (344-345). These rewards are earthly gifts for heroes, not spiritual ones like a saint is supposed to receive.

If *Judith* were a saint’s life, there should be a message at the end that aligns with the other poems. Juliana’s message was to remain true to Christ through all obstacles; Elene’s was to fulfill your given task and convert as many Christians in the process as possible; thus, the purpose and message behind Judith should be something similar. Because Judith is a hybrid of the two female *vitae* I’ve listed here—she has a great task like Elene, but her virginity is threatened, and she is almost persecuted like Juliana—I would imagine that the purpose of this poem as a saint’s life should be something along the lines of: stay true in your faith, do all things for God, and fulfill your great task. However, it is clear that neither of the expected messages is present in Judith. Instead, the message appears to be one more closely tied to an epic poem: that is, fight boldly for revenge, kill any foe who gets in your way, and you will be greatly rewarded with earthly things. This message is clearly not Christian. If the rhetoric and purpose of this poem is a telling sign of its genre, this poem appears to be an epic. Even the structure—hero comes face-to-face with foe, kills foe, incites a large battle, the hero’s army prevails—is indicative of the epic genre. Thus, scholars’ continuing desire to establish Judith as a saint actually hinders a greater understanding of Judith’s character as not saint and, potentially, epic hero.

CHAPTER IV

Judith and Beowulf: Epic Heroes?

In the last 30 years or so, scholars of the anonymous Old English version of *Judith* have tended to read the poem in its manuscript context alongside *Beowulf* in order to highlight the epic-heroic qualities in the text and its protagonist. While, indeed, Judith does exhibit some masculine heroic qualities, the anonymous *Judith*-poet describes the protagonist with the same adjectives the poet of *Beowulf* uses to depict his protagonist, Judith heroically and physically overpowers her foe (as Beowulf does three times), and she is rewarded for her heroism with riches, just as Beowulf is. Because of these similarities, scholars often consider *Judith* alongside *Beowulf* as a statement of female heroism. However, as a result of reading the two poems alongside each other, scholars are unjustly measuring Judith's different and, arguably, lesser heroism against the conventional (nearly) perfect epic hero, Beowulf. Thus, Judith's heroism is being unfairly measured against an unattainable model and, as a result, Judith is unjustly viewed in such scholarship as weaker and less heroic.

Judith scholars are in disagreement on the anonymous Anglo-Saxon Judith's potential heroism and fall into three camps regarding Judith as an epic hero: she is either a lesser epic hero who doesn't measure up to Beowulf; a clearly-defined female version of the epic hero (which has no precedent in Anglo-Saxon scholarship to date); or a female hero who exhibits an entirely different set of characteristics than the conventional epic hero. In the first camp, Peter Lucas states, "Judith is not a fully heroic figure. She does not announce what she is going to do (as opposed to prophesying the general Israelite success), nor does she make vows about it" (26). Ivan Herbison, on the other hand, claims, "There has been a failure to recognise that *Judith* is essentially a poem of

contradiction and paradox: a heroic poem with a female ‘hero’” (22). For Herbison, Judith’s heroism is not lesser than Beowulf’s; however, by examining the two poems and categorizing Judith with Beowulf, he ignores the obvious and common places of tension in the poem where Judith doesn’t fulfill the expectations of an epic hero. Mary Dockray-Miller argues for Judith as an equally capable, but non-masculine epic hero: “In *Judith*, Judith is a hero, but not because she appropriates male power and uses it to her own ends. She is heroic because as a maternal figure she creates a bond with her metaphorical daughter, her maid, and they work together to achieve a common purpose” (171). All of these interpretations of Judith’s heroism are problematic. Dubbing her an epic hero holds Judith up against a set of conventions that she doesn’t meet fully, which, inevitably, draws attention to Judith’s lack or necessary adaptation of conventional heroic qualities to cater to her perceived weakness. I will demonstrate how Judith does not fulfill the expectations of the epic hero and, more importantly, draw attention to the result of a forced categorization: Judith’s potentially different heroism is unjustly, and severely hindered by the comparison to Beowulf.

Beowulf’s Heroism

Beowulf’s epic heroism is generally uncontested, as he embodies the conventional ideals of the Anglo-Saxon epic hero. In this chapter, I will examine the heroic moments from which *Judith* differs, specifically: the instances where Beowulf physicality is described; the three fighting scenes and the hero’s boasts before and after them; and the scenes where Beowulf is rewarded for his heroism.

From the moment Beowulf first speaks, the narrator constantly reminds his audience of Beowulf’s reputation. At Hrothgar’s first introduction to Beowulf, the hero is

described as “courage-bold” and “hearty under his helmet” (*Beowulf* 340-343). His reputation precedes him in Hrothgar’s hall and, once Beowulf announces himself, the poet emphasizes Beowulf’s reputation among men. He is not only courageous, but “illustrious in spirit”, a “warrior battle-brave”, and “wise and mighty souled” (*Beowulf* 624, 1646, 827).²⁸ Not only does the *Beowulf*-poet remind his audience of Beowulf’s power, but the other characters in the story continuously praise the hero²⁹: Hrothgar himself says that Beowulf is “best of all men” (*Beowulf* 947). Part of being a hero is creating a reputation based on heroic deeds and actions; however, arguably more telling, though, is the way Beowulf describes himself. In his formal boast before the fight with Grendel, Beowulf states: “I must perform this deed of manly courage, or else I will await my final day here in this mead-hall” (636-638). Beowulf signifies himself with “manly courage” and the proclamation that he will fight to his death—the ultimate declaration of a true hero being the willingness to die for his renown. Packed in his own description of himself is his dedication to himself, his purpose, and the lord whom he is fighting for. Beowulf, then, is signified and defined by his reputation detailed by other important men in the poem, the way the other men respond to his actions, and his boasts—not just by the poet’s adjectives. Arguably, Beowulf is defined in these ways as a true Anglo-Saxon epic hero.

Beowulf’s actions in the poem are easily heroic. He defeats three powerful monsters: the giant Grendel and his vengeful mother who both plague Hrothgar’s hall,

²⁸ I am using Aaron Hostetter’s translation of *Beowulf* instead of translating the Old English on my own purposefully, as I agree with his very literal translation of Beowulf’s signifiers.

²⁹ See Wulfgar’s speech introducing Beowulf and his men to Hrothgar (lines 361-370) where he calls Beowulf “their chief” who “is most competent he who guided these battle-warriors hither” (369-370).

and the later havoc-wreaking dragon who plagues the Geats and burns Beowulf's hall. In his first fight, the hero overpowers Grendel with his first physical contact:

Beowulf seized [Grendel] at once with malicious purpose,
 setting himself against his arm. Immediately
 that keeper of crimes realized that never,
 in all of middle-earth or its distant corners,
 in any human, had he met a greater hand-grip.
 He became fearful at heart, in his very soul:
 he couldn't get away from this one soon enough! (*Beowulf* 748-764).

From the moment Beowulf takes hold of Grendel's hand, Grendel recognizes his strength and immediately grows fearful as he recognizes his imminent death—a testament to Beowulf's battle strength. When Beowulf mortally wounds Grendel and angers his mother into vengeance, she returns to Hrothgar's hall to exact revenge, thus driving Beowulf to follow her to her underwater cave for their battle. Initially, Grendel's mother seems less fearful than Grendel; however, the poet states:

At once, she discovered that, who had ruled
 the coursing water, gore-greedy, for hundreds of half-years,
 grim and gluttonous, that a certain human
 tested out that monstrous home from above.
 Then she grasped him, seizing the war-fighter
 in horrible chains, but no sooner could slash open
 that hale body. She could not penetrate that corselet,

the rings shielding him without, the locked
limb-guard, with her hateful fingers (1497-1505).

Beowulf, then, is the first human in many hundreds of years to penetrate her “monstrous home,” establishing him as a worthy foe. Furthermore, in her initial physical contact with Beowulf, she expects that Beowulf is unable to “penetrate that corselet,” hinting that she believes she has the strength to beat him. The following fight is described much like an exchange of blows, each movement reinforced with Beowulf’s strength and the foe’s malice. When he finally defeats her with a stab through the neck, he finishes his initial task by decapitating Grendel. He defeats Grendel’s mother easily and punctuates the defeat by defacing the very reason she fought him in the first place: “She wanted to avenge her son, her only kin” (1547). This defeat for Grendel’s mother, then, is not just physical—it is emotional, too. Beowulf reinforces his ability to defeat the foe easily by vanquishing her life and her purpose.

In the final battle as the king of the Geats, Beowulf fights the dragon that plagues his own people. This fight is different for a significant reason: Beowulf succeeds in defeating the foe, but only with the help of one of his men because he is mortally wounded in the fight. His might, in this fight, does not rest in his actual physical ability to overpower the dragon as he defeated his first two foes. Instead, it rests in his speech before the battle, which ends with a final boast:

I am firm of heart, renouncing the boastful word
against this battle-flyer. You all wait here
on the hillside, protected by your sarks,
men in armor, for which of us two should

be able to survive the better,
wounded after the deadly clash.
This is none of your mission, not fit for man,
except me alone, fighting against that monster,
doing a nobleman's work. I must survive by my courage,
acquiring the gold, or else battle will seize,
the fearsome deadly bale, your own lord (*Beowulf* 2527-2537).

In previous fights, Beowulf does not infer to his men that he has the capability of dying in the upcoming fight. It is likely that the speech is made here, as opposed to the two previous fights, for two reasons: First, Beowulf is now the king, not merely a loyal thane; second, Beowulf is fifty years older than he was when he fought Grendel and his mother. In those first two fights, Beowulf did not second guess his strength against the foe—he was sure of his defeat, as evident by his showing up to Hrothgar's hall in the first place: He knew he was strong enough to defeat Grendel. At this point, however, Beowulf prepares his men for his death in his final line, meaning that his heroism shifts from physical power to the willingness to die if it means the foe will be defeated. This dedication is the testament of the true hero—he fights even when death is imminent. Though Beowulf has rightfully proven his heroism, it is in this last fight that he finalizes his reputation—he dies saving his people and fighting a worthy adversary, gaining the highest possible renown for an epic hero.

Lastly, an epic hero is rewarded for his heroism—both by the boost of his reputation and by the monetary reward as compensation for his heroic deed. Following the defeat of Grendel, Hrothgar rewards Beowulf and his men with many gifts:

Then the blade of Halfdane he gave to Beowulf,
 and a golden ensign as recompense for his victory,
 an ornamented battle-flag, a helmet and a mail-coat...
 A crest contained it from without, woven with wires
 about the roof of the helmet, that head-protection
 so that the well-filed relic, shower-hardened, could not
 grievously harm it, when the shieldsman
 must wade into the gruesome fray.

Then the shelter of nobles ordered eight horses,
 with gilded cheeks, to be led onto the floor,
 inside the enclosure...

Moreover, the lord of nobles gave treasures,
 heritable relics to every one of those who drew
 themselves down the sea-road with Beowulf... (1020-1053).

Hrothgar rewards him similarly after he defeats Grendel's mother in the second fight; but, a greater reward comes from his own people later. When his king, Hygelac, dies, Beowulf is offered the greatest possible gift: the Geatish throne. He initially refuses, but following the death of King Heardred, Beowulf accepts the throne, which he controls for 50 years. Finally, and potentially ironic, the final gift Beowulf receives comes at the cost of his own death. He gains an enormous amount of treasure from Hrothgar, a hall and throne from Hygelac, but the physical gains make little match to the greatest gifts he receives in death. First, the acquisition of truth: "Then his soul turned / from his chest to

seek the glory of the sooth-fast. (2819-2820). And second, the greatest renown a warrior can receive:

So the Geatish people
grieved over the fall of their lord, his hearth-companions—
they told that he was the mildest of men,
the kindest of worldly kings, most gracious
of chieftains and the most eager for praise (3178-3182).

Thus, Beowulf is rewarded like a true hero for his deeds—monetarily, politically, and eternally. Clearly, based on the way he is defined by the poet, himself, and his peers, his heroism displayed in his epic fights, and his rewards for his deeds, Beowulf fulfills the expectations and conventions of an epic hero.

Judith's Heroism

It is clear that Judith is somehow heroic in the poem—she kills the army's leader and makes it possible for her people to succeed in the final battle. Based on the seemingly heroic diction and the epic-like plot structure in the second half of the poem, it is clear why scholars have situated the poem in the heroic poem/epic genre. However, just as Judith doesn't fit the mold of the saint, she also does not fit appropriate conventions and expectations of epic hero.

In the anonymous *Judith*, the protagonist is signified with adjectives such as “snotor”, “beorhtan”, “Scyppendes maegð”, “ellen-rof”, “ellen-priste”, “modig”, “æðele” and “ead-hriðige”.³⁰ The way Judith is described in the poem is telling. Unlike other

³⁰ Respectively: clever/intelligent, brilliant/shining, the Creator's maiden, courageous/powerful, bold/daring, courageous, noble, blessed/triumphant. I have chosen to translate Judith's signifiers on my own because translations differ so greatly, and it is crucial that I be as close to the original description as possible.

Anglo-Saxon literary women, she is defined by her characteristics and her loyalty to God, rather than her physical beauty. The *Judith* poet not only modifies the way an Anglo-Saxon woman is often described, but he also uses the same descriptive terms used to define Beowulf— “modig”, “æðele”, “snotor”, and “ellen-rof.” The similar descriptions are one of the obvious links between the two characters that scholars cite as an example of Judith’s heroism; however, too much weight is being given to these four signifiers. The terms themselves do little to modify the agent they are subscribed to. Yes, both Judith and Beowulf are brave, clever, courageous, and powerful, but there is more than one way to fulfill those expectations. Judith is brave in her decision to behead Holofernes, because she knows she is surrounded by enemies who could behead her just as easily. She is courageous and powerful in that she is able and willing to overcome a man, which does not happen often in Anglo-Saxon literature. She is also incredibly clever for thinking of such a plan in the first place. Nevertheless, compared to Beowulf’s courage and bravery, Judith falls immeasurably short. Beowulf singlehandedly takes on Grendel and his mother, who are far stronger and much more menacing foes than a drunken, slumbered “hund.” It is also important to note that Judith is only described as courageous or brave after she beheads Holofernes—before this display of heroism, she is only described in the text as “wise in her thought, a woman elf-brilliant”, who is a “blessed maiden”, and “wise lady” (*Judith* 13-14, 35, 54). Beowulf, on the other hand, is described as “courage-bold” and “hearty under his helmet” before he even speaks his first word in the poem. It seems as though Judith has to prove her bravery and courage before the poet will allow her to be defined by it. More interestingly, is the way Judith is not

described. In *Beowulf*, the hero is described using much more than just character-based adjectives—the poet states after Beowulf defeats Grendel:

There was Beowulf's glory
announced—many kept on saying aloud
that neither south nor north, between the seas,
across the vast earth, there was no other man
under the course of the skies, that could be any better
of all the shield-bearing warriors, more worthy of the realm (*Beowulf* 856-864).

Beowulf's "glory" is announced by others in the poem, while Judith's descriptors are only given by the narrator. No other character in *Judith* boasts of her feats, not even Judith herself, though it is conventional for the Anglo-Saxon hero to boast before and after his feats. A significant portion of Anglo-Saxon heroism rests in the hero's boasting and reputation among other men. It is clear that, given the way Judith has to work for her heroic signifiers (i.e. "courageous", "brave", etc.) and the fact that these terms are only applied to her by the narrator and not by another character in the poem, Judith's heroism does not measure up to Beowulf. While it is surely significant that Judith and Beowulf have a few descriptive terms in common, that this pattern alone is not enough to claim that Judith is *equal* to Beowulf.

Arguably the most dissonant comparison between the two, is the difference in power in each protagonists' heroic moments. To put it bluntly, Judith's power is no match for Beowulf's. Beowulf fights each foe with a superhuman strength and fatally wounds each one. Judith, on the other hand, has to pray for extra strength from God to overpower her enemy, and it still takes her two strokes to chop off Holofernes's head

completely. Even if the poet is following Jerome's version of *Judith* in giving her two strokes, he is also making a statement here that Judith is too weak to have taken his head with one blow. Ciaran Arthur states: "Every description before, during and after his decapitation reveals [Holofernes] to be sitting, lying down, in active descent or subordinated by the hands of a woman. From the very beginning, Holofernes never really has a leg to stand on" (Arthur 881). Thus, Judith's big moment is overshadowed by the relative weakness of her enemy. Because Holofernes is already an easy foe to overpower in his bent-over, drunken state, Judith's task is not received as a testament to her strength, but rather an undermining of Holofernes strength.

Second, Judith's "heroic" action is not performed in battle like Beowulf's, nor is she an illustrious warrior or soldier. She is given the soldierly adjectives that the figure Beowulf gets, but the way she is portrayed by the narrator is anything but soldierly. Judith's task is not to defeat a foe in combat, but rather to manhandle a drunken "heathen hound" off his bed and overpower him the only way she possibly can—by completely removing his head so he has no hope of fighting back (*Judith* 98). Beowulf, on the other hand, fights his foes in close hand-to-hand combat so he can properly demonstrate his power over them. He does not have to manipulate and behead his enemy because he can defeat them without doing so. Moreover, Judith's "heroic" action occurs in the bedroom, traditionally the domestic sphere in which the female is granted control. Thus, Judith can paint the beheading as a protection of her virginity, which makes her vicious action noble in the Church and God's eyes; finally, she invades Holofernes' private sphere while he is intoxicated and unarmed so that the beheading action reads more like a symbolic castration, because she is removing a part of Holofernes' body in the bedroom and he is

shown in a passive, feminized position on the bed. Judith's weakened display of heroism in the bedroom, then, is different and arguably lesser than Beowulf's reinforced might on the battlefield.

Additionally, the way Judith is rewarded at the end of the poem is a clear indicator that she does not live up to the expectations of an epic hero as set in *Beowulf*. It is true that epic heroes are often compensated monetarily for their wins—they are often given battle armor of the opponents, gold or silver, or some other means of reward. Judith, similarly, is gifted with Holofernes's armor and "all that the arrogant lord of warriors / owned of treasure or moveable goods, / rings and bright treasures" as a reward for her help in the Assyrians' defeat (*Judith* 338-341). This reward is significant, no doubt; but, it is peculiar that Judith is only rewarded with Holofernes's belongings. There is no mention of her receiving any other warspoils, so it appears that Judith is compensated for defeating Holofernes by receiving what was justly Holofernes'—an eye for an eye, so to speak. Beowulf on the other hand, is rewarded for his overpowering of Grendel and his mother in a way that makes Holofernes's armor and belongings relatively small compensation—he is rewarded by Hrothgar with Hrothgar's own money and belongings and by his own king, Hygelac, with the throne. Compared to Beowulf's haul, Judith's seems relatively insignificant. She was given no compensation from the soldiers for her help like Beowulf was, she was only given the belongings of he whom she defeated. Speculation as to why Judith is rewarded this way is unanswerable without greater knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon practice of dividing war spoils; however, it is still arguable that there is a considerable difference in the way each hero was compensated for his or her heroic deed(s)—which likely is meant to draw attention to the fact that Judith

only completed one seemingly doable task, while Beowulf saved both Hrothgar's and his own people from three nearly invincible foes. Based on the way she is and is not described in the poem, her seemingly weak heroic deed when compared to Beowulf, and the small amount of compensation she receives for it, Judith does not fulfill the expectations and conventions of an epic hero as fully as Beowulf does.

Conclusively, then, this analysis that defines Judith as not hero is a harsh reading of her capabilities. Unlike any other woman in Anglo-Saxon literature, Judith kills an enemy in the name of God, and for the good of herself and her people—surely, then, there must be some heroism in that feat. This understanding demonstrates that scholars' constant intention to compare her to someone else only displays her weaknesses rather than focusing on her strength. In other words, they are performing the very action that the Alice Jardin protests: namely, defining woman by her 'lack' of man.³¹ Because there is no existing set of expectations and conventions of an Anglo-Saxon female hero defined in criticism, Judith is rarely defined by what she does accomplish as a potential hero and is instead held up to the heroic expectations of Beowulf. The result is crippling for Judith. She is either unjustly defined as a hero without true reason, or she is held accountable for her inability to live up to the heroic expectation that Beowulf sets forth. In other words, Judith is recognized by the heroic traits that she lacks—not what she embodies. This definition by lack exemplifies Alice Jardin's argument that the female is defined by what male characteristics she lacks, rather than what she is as a female. Thus, Judith is limited not by her own actions or her own heroism, but by the constant comparison to other

³¹ See Alice Jardin's *Gynesis*.

heroes, most frequently to Beowulf. As a result, her interesting, challenging, and different heroism is often swept under the rug.

Returning to Herbison's evaluation of Judith—that "Judith's strength is moral and spiritual rather than physical, and her leadership is based on her relationship to God rather than to a *comitatus*"—it is clear that he measures her by her inability to fulfill the physical strength and expectations of the *comitatus* (22). Dockray-Miller comes close to examining Judith's heroism on her own heroic plane; but she defines Judith as hero by the relationship she has with another woman in the poem, rather than the more obvious expression of physical strength in beheading the enemy.

As a result, I move that scholarship on *Judith* should cease to examine her heroism alongside Beowulf's, as it only biases scholar's interpretation of her heroism by comparing it to an unachievable expectation. However, that is not to say that I advocate for the removal of discussion on her clearly masculinized power. Judith is, in fact, the only Anglo-Saxon female who defeats and kills another man, no matter the logistics of the fight. Her heroism, then, cannot just be because of her perceived motherhood, as Dockray-Miller suggests; but, it should still contain an analysis and explanation of her heroism by account of her heroic deed in saving herself and her people. By defining Judith as hero based on the heroic traits she exhibits, the feminine strength in her heroic deed, and the unusual rewarding of war spoils to a woman, scholars can more appropriately account for Judith's heroism without defining her by lack or asserting that she is lesser than the set of male heroic expectations. Judith (and her heroism), then, should be defined as hero by her own merits in order to understand fully her role in the poem as both a woman and a hero.

CHAPTER V

What is Judith?

The previous chapters have demonstrated what Judith is *not* based on the current scholarly conversation regarding Judith as a potential hero. She is not an epic hero in the Beowulfian sense (the Monstrous Eve), nor is she a female saint (The Virgin Mary). Scholars have relied on Judith's lacking feminine or heroic characteristics, and, as such, *Judith* criticism has consistently attempted to examine her as saint/Virgin Mary or epic hero/Monstrous Eve. Instead, I argue that Judith creates a spectrum of woman out of Jane Chance's Virgin Mary/Monstrous Eve binary, and a spectrum of hero expression out of the Anglo-Saxon saint and epic hero types. Thus, though my criticism of Judith in the previous chapters may seem harsh, focusing on what Judith is unable to accomplish, I argue that Judith's potential as a powerful Anglo-Saxon woman and hero has yet to be determined. If Judith were to be analyzed with no preconceived or gendered expectations, and solely analyzed based on her own merits, I believe scholars could finally answer the question that instigated this research project: What is Judith? Because this question cannot be answered without much further analysis, I will conclude this project by detailing the potential outcomes I see to the future research on this question.

First, *Judith* might be an example of the patriarchal society's control over women by disallowing agency to those who do not fit into Chance's binary. I propose that the Anglo-Saxon poet's choice to write *Judith* out of single genre (epic or *vita*) perpetuates Judith's inability to boast of her agency and, thus, define herself. Further research, then, could determine what Judith's categorization as a liminal figure means: potentially, how her undefined place on the spectrum between saint and temptress limits denying her the subject position and, thus, the role of a traditional saint or hero. The *Judith* poet's

intentional manipulation of the tradition actually reinforces the Anglo-Saxon constriction of the liminal woman, which prohibits her from speaking for herself, holding subject over the male characters, and ultimately being a saint or a hero.

A post-structural feminist reading of the poem would define Judith as lack of man and lack of subject, which would demonstrate the message of the subversive, limited woman that would have appealed to a patriarchal society. From the beginning of the poem to the scene where Judith strikes king Holofernes, a man remains in the subject position, though Judith is spoken of many times. In the first paragraph of the poem, God is introduced as the “Highest Judge, the Wielder of Creation,” and he holds the subject position (*Judith* 3). In the next paragraph, the subject position is handed off to King Holofernes. The “terrifying lord of earls” and the “wicked one” gathers his invitees, the “shield-warriors,” to a banquet on Judith’s fourth day in the camp (21, 28, 43). The King and his men remain in the subject position for the next paragraph as the banquet continues and the soldiers become merry, drunk, and insolent. The king retains the subject position for the next five paragraphs, as he returns to his chamber and asks that Judith be brought to him, so he can “defile that bright lady with pollution and with stain”—i.e. rape her (58-59). In the next paragraph, God is reinstated in the subject position when Judith humbly prays to him for courage:

Give me, Lord of the Skies, victory
and true belief so that I might cut down
this dispenser of crimes with this sword—
grant me my prosperity, Stern Prince of Men. (88-92).

God instills courage within Judith and he is then removed from the subject position for the next two paragraphs. The King Holofernes is also removed from the subject position, as he becomes a “heathen hound” synonymous with the abject (108). He is objectified. God is removed from the narrative, so Judith is briefly able to take the subject position in the story.

In her short time as subject, she fulfills her purpose in the narrative. She takes Holofernes, the “heathen hound,” by his hair and lays him out to kill him (*Judith* 108). She decapitates him, and his spirit is removed from his body:

His soul departed elsewhere under the deep chasm
 And was prostrated there, sealed in torment forever afterwards,
 Wound up with worms, bound up with torments,
 Cruelly captived in burning hell after his departure (111-114).

The description of Holofernes’ mutilated body and spirit here further establishes him as the physical embodiment of the abject in the poem. It is obvious, then, why Judith is granted the subject position at this exact point in the narrative. Not only can she only gain subjectivity when the men are removed from the poem, but she is only subject in the poem when the subject is associated with the monstrous. In this graphic mutilation of the King, God is only mentioned before and after—not during. King Holofernes’ name is not mentioned in this section either, as he is only referred to as the “heathen hound.” Thus, she takes the subject position only in the moment where she is at her most violent. When Judith decapitates Holofernes, the abject “heathen hound” is removed from the story, and thus, Judith is removed from subject position and retakes her position as the suppressed object.

Judith's violence in this scene is very important to this reading of the poem. First, it is crucial to notice that, up until this point in the poem, only the men have been violent. Holofernes and his men are violent in controlling and subjugating the Bethulians and in their determination to rape and defile Judith.³² God can also be perceived as violent, given that he granted Judith the strength and courage to behead Holofernes. Judith, though, until the beheading scene, was non-violent. Even in the latter half of the poem following Holofernes' beheading, she displays no other act of violence. Interestingly, even though Holofernes becomes the "heathen hound" in the beheading scene, Judith is the one who appears monstrous:

Then she seized the heathen man fast by his hair,
 Dragging him towards her with her hands shamefully,
 And skillfully laid out the baleful one, the hateful man,
 As she could most easily manage the accursed one well.
 Then she, curly-haired, struck her hateful enemy,
 With the splattered sword. She chopped through half his neck,
 So that he lay in a daze, drunken and maimed.
 He was not dead yet then, not entirely lifeless—
 Then the courageous lady struck the heathen hound
 Another time so that his head rolled
 Forth on the floor (*Judith* 98-111).

³² I am conflating Holofernes and his shield warriors here because Holofernes' men are instruments in his violence. They do not actively try to rape Judith, but their complacency can be perceived as violence, given that they are the ones who brought Judith to the tent knowingly. Similarly, they do not actually attack the Bethulians until the end of the poem, but they are equal and complacent participants in the harm done to Judith's people from the beginning of the poem.

She seizes, drags, strikes, and chops Holofernes, all while he is lying “drunken and maimed” under her power (107). Thus, the first effect of the phallogocentric language is that Judith is unable to attain the subject position, save when she is the monstrous character associated with the object—the “heathen hound”—and, even when she is able to take control of the subject position, she is perceived as the monstrous woman who defeats a lifeless foe.

Judith’s position as the suppressed object in the poem leads to a second material effect of the phallogocentric language: the subjects in the poem—both God and Man—treat her as commodity. In the speech she makes to the soldiers after killing Holofernes, she states “God would not grant him / a longer life so that might torment us / with wrongs—I deprived him of life / by the help of God” (*Judith* 82-85). However, at the end of her speech when she “urges” the men to go to battle with the enemies, she states that the men should not fear because they “shall own the glory, / honor in the battle, just as the Mighty Lord / has betokened to you all, through my hand” (*Judith* 196-198). Judith’s heroic action does appear to be a statement of her power, but a means by which to show the soldiers that God is on their side and will grant *them* victory.

God not only commodifies her as instrument, but he also, along with Holofernes, outright reduces her to her sexual value, stripping her of her value as a human being. After the feast at the beginning of the poem, Holofernes calls for his servants to bring Judith, the “noble virgin” to his chamber so he can “defile the noble lady with filth and with pollution” (*Judith* 56-61). Holofernes’ mentality here is important. He requests a virgin to his chamber and plans to rape her so that she will leave filthy and polluted. He

does not view Judith as an individual here, but rather an object of purity that he can taint. God, to an extent, also shares this mentality. He prevents Holofernes from following through with this plan, because to rid Judith of her virginity is to taint her beyond repair. She must remain pure for him to use her. Thus, the two strongest male figures in the poem view Judith as no more than her sexual value. Given this short example of such a reading, it is clear that Judith's inability to fit into either expected category of gender expression could be read as a message from a patriarchal society that refuses to supply non-conforming, potentially dangerous women with power and agency—even in literature.

I move that a more in-depth post-structural feminist reading of the poem (specifically, the beheading scene) should be performed in order to better understand Judith's potential heroism. I move that, even though the aforementioned *Judith* scholars have likely not consulted a post-structural feminist reading of the poem, they are furthering the depiction of Judith as lack and denied subject in their unequal comparisons of Judith against Beowulf. Furthermore, by comparing Judith against the female saints Juliana and Elene, scholars are effectively ignoring the fact that Judith is denied the subject position and, more importantly, commodified in a way that Juliana and Elene are not. Thus, I move that scholars merit the post-structural feminist reading of *Judith* and that future scholarship resist it to attempt an answer to an important question: why a seemingly powerful and possibly heroic literary Anglo-Saxon woman like Judith is denied agency and deemed monstrous simply because she does not fit in to the preconceived notions of Anglo-Saxon woman. And, furthermore, studies should be done

to see if there are other literary women in the Old English corpus that are treated similarly.

Secondly, should more detailed research be performed on *Judith* authorship, an unlikely but potential answer could emerge: It is worth positing, even if we can never know as a certainty, that a woman may have composed the anonymous Anglo-Saxon *Judith*.³³ As Chance's binary demonstrates, literary women were meant to fall into the set categories of Virgin Mary and Monstrous Eve; thus, multi-dimensional women are not common in the Anglo-Saxon corpus. Because Judith breaks precedence and does not conform to either side completely, Judith reads like a multi-dimensional, complex woman. As the previous chapters demonstrate, Judith embodies qualities of both the female saint and the epic hero types but fulfills neither type entirely. Instead, she takes on the traits of a particular type when it matches her situation. For instance, when Judith is brought to Holofernes' bedchamber after the feast, she takes on role of the endangered virgin. When she is brought to the chamber, the poet writes:

Into the guest-hall where they found spirit-wise Judith,
 And then quickly the shield-warriors began to lead
 That bright maiden to the high tent where the powerful one,
 Holofernes, always rested himself during the night,
 Hateful to the Savior (*Judith* 42-46).

Judith is situated as "spirit-wise" and "bright maiden" where Holofernes is described as "hateful to the Savior." The poet is situating Judith as the virgin threatened with

³³I am fully aware that we know very little about the anonymous author and, furthermore, that examining authorship in Anglo-Saxon literature is difficult because of the lack of records. Discovering a female author would be difficult or impossible to trace; however, I move that the possibility remain open.

defilement and the man who plans to rape her is written grotesquely. Once Judith enters the bedchamber and sees that Holofernes is passed out drunk, she calls upon God for courage. After this prayer, though, Judith begins to take shape as the epic hero killing the monster, as Beowulf's fight with Grendel is described.

Then she seized the heathen man fast by his hair,
 dragging him towards her with her hands shamefully,
 and skillfully laid out the baleful one, the hateful man,
 as she could most easily manage the accursed one well.
 Then she, curly-haired, struck her hateful enemy,
 with the splattered sword. She chopped through half his neck,
 so that he lay in a daze, drunken and maimed.
 He was not dead yet then, not entirely lifeless—
 then the courageous lady struck the heathen hound
 another time so that his head rolled
 forth on the floor (98-111).

Here, very importantly, Holofernes becomes *her* hateful enemy—not God's. She takes on the agency of her action—she is doing the seizing, dragging, chopping, and maiming—and Holofernes becomes nothing more than a “hateful enemy” and a “heathen hound.” This section paints Judith as an epic hero fighting the enemy for her own gain. Thus, when it becomes appropriate for Judith to switch roles in the story, the poet writes her into a different woman-type—the Monstrous Eve who destroys men, much like Grendel's mother.

Furthermore, the anonymous *Judith* author shows a basic knowledge of religious and epic literature, given the hagiographic feel of the poem and the long, descriptive battle scene at the end. A female author could have been familiar with both traditions. Many women of political power or in the noble class in the Anglo-Saxon period would have been familiar with both the epic and hagiographic tradition, as she would have been educated and literate in the necessary languages to do so. I admit that this theory needs much more research and evidence; however, a female author could explain the peculiarity of Judith's character.

Whether future scholarship determines that Judith is a complex, multi-dimensional female character or that she is merely an example of the rule-breaking woman controlled by the patriarchal society, I believe that Judith's role in her poem can shed light on the feminist criticism of other pieces of Anglo-Saxon literature or on historical scholarship on the period. Because scholars have long been focusing on what Judith does *not* accomplish in their comparisons with *Beowulf* or *Juliana* and *Elene*, they have yet to discover Judith's true expression of gender and heroism in the poem. Thus, following my statement that Judith does not belong in the *vita* or epic tradition, I argue that scholars need to revisit *Judith* without generic contexts, thus resisting the reading of Judith as lack and commodity, and reconsider the authorship of the poem to determine Judith's true potential as a woman in *Judith* and in the larger Anglo-Saxon societal expectations of women.

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