

Judith: Poetry and Critical Commentary

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SUMMARY

A collection of poems translated from the Old English poem *Judith*, and loosely adapted to the period of English history between 980-1000CE, particularly the second wave of Viking invasions as recorded by Alfred in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. *Judith: A New Verse Translation* tells the story of Judith, an Anglo-Saxon woman who saves her town from destruction by seducing and beheading the enemy general, Holofernes. The collection uses multiple voices to create a multi-layered narrative experience, and to re-create textually the audience-adaptive nature of live storytelling. The critical commentary accompanying the poetry compares the central character of Judith with an important figure from the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* – namely, Grendel’s mother, the only other physically violent woman present in the Old English poetic corpus. Common critical perceptions of both women are deconstructed through the use of linguistic and historical analysis, and through a thorough examination of the traditions of translation surrounding both poems. The commentary also addresses the ‘myth of the scop’ by tracing the creation of the popular image of the itinerant poet employed by kings back to the Anglo-Saxons themselves. The Anglo-Saxon usage of storytelling and their creation of mythologized histories are discussed as methods of solidifying a collective cultural identity, and of ingraining social mores and taboos into the public consciousness. Lastly, the commentary offers an in-depth examination of the mechanics of Old English prosody, and explains how those techniques have been adapted for use in *Judith*, combined with contemporary poetic techniques. There is also a historically-based discussion of the narratological choices made in constructing the collection.

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For my uncle and grandfather, who would be proud.

Judith: A New Verse Translation

I Am: A Riddle

I am a warrior:
battle-tested feeder of eagles.
My fame is far-flung, a
thousand tongues
form my name in their prayers
for mercy.

Say who I am.

I am a war-lord:
leader of undefeated armies.
I command ruthless men
loyal to the end
be it yours
or theirs.

Say who I am.

I am a generous general:
glorious treasure-giver.
Feasts in my hall
last until all
have drunk their fair share
and more.

Say who I am.

I am a body forgotten:
asleep under the sky.
I am food for the worms
and beetles that churn the earth.
Carrion creatures make meals of
my flesh

Say who I am.

I am a skull:
staring blindly;
bones picked
clean by crows.
My open jaw
is voiceless.

Will anyone say who I am?

the scop introduces the enemy

We buried our fear in the frost-rimed river
though we knew the ice would not save us.
A slaughter-hungry enemy stalked our borders
like a winter-lean wolf waiting
for the fresh meat of spring.
One good thaw would bring
him: Holofernes hero of the Northmen.

He was known to us then,
that helmeted harbinger of death.
While he crept across the land, eating
armies like sheep we suffered,
lost men in endless raids,
and laid our own slain lord to rest
on an ally's battlefield.

His armies had glutted on stolen goods
all winter while we reaped
empty fields, planting our fallen in the earth.
As the weather warmed our hope waned.
We could muster no new lord to lead us,
nor find the strength of mind to stand against
what rode on the rising river's tide.

Had you been there had you seen,
could you have understood our surrender?
Offer useless resistance or
lie down and die: Holofernes had
already defeated our dignity.
With a wolf at our gate and no help on the way
could you have forgiven us for giving up?

She could not.

A day so brief does not deserve the name.

I cannot recall another season so cold. The world was subsumed by it—erased and unmade. Winter was an icy tightness in my chest, a hollow behind my ribs. I curled around it like a withered leaf while the ground outside grew white and barren. A bitter chill settled in my bones like snow drifted unmoveable against a door. And now, the mess of a world remade: winter's bare white blanket stripped back, leaving layers of slush and mud so thick it steals your shoes. Nothing green yet, nothing growing. No colour that says, 'I am here. I have survived.' This is not spring, but what comes before: the muck, the misery and waiting. When will the river thaw? When will the water move? There is ice in my veins, and everything is holding its breath.

Dryhtenburh begins to grow restless

A man facing the gallows finds faith;
so too did we in those days.
Hearth shrines shone in homes at night.
Old women wove word charms
tossed herbs over stooped shoulders.
Many knees knelt in a church whose
doors did not close
murmuring prayers to many gods
any gods old or new.
But weeks went and no Woden
rode in to rally us.
No warrior Christ climbed out of his grave
to reward our loyalty.
News drifted daily down to us
like flotsam floating on the river
each new story soaked in blood.
We washed our words with tears then.
Prayer's fire was wet ash in our mouths.
Gallows faith is a fickle thing.
It will not withstand waiting for long.

Siege Mentality

Our walls are on the wrong side.
We have spent days propping up packed-earth
ramparts,

Shoring up our defensive border, they say.

To what end, I wonder?
We have still got
our backside to
the enemy:
arse-end of the town
bound by nothing
but the river –
the river, and all that arable
farmland we are so proud of.

Holofernes will bring his boats
right
up
that river.
March his armies over
our newly planted fields.
He'll prop his muddy boots on our dead
lord's mead bench, and what
will we
do about it?

Better to pay them off, I say.
Offer them silver, gold, whatever we've got -
what leader would turn down willing servants?
They might let us be then –
save their strength and head off
down south,
after richer prizes,
bigger cities,
some underling of Holofernes left
behind:
a petty lord to make us all
hop to
—and if that thought stings your pride,
at least you will be alive
to feel it.
Honour is the province of saga, my lad—
and you are no Danish prince.
All you are is too young
to leave
a grieving widow behind, to mourn you
with poems and pretty tears.

Come on, lad. Leave
the empty mead hall,
the slain lord, your
glorious revenge.
I will write a song for you myself
if you help
me
dig this ditch.

Start (again) as you mean to go on.

Falling does not happen all at once. First, there is the trip, the miss-step, the stumble over something in your path. Then, the recovery – you try to right yourself, hold out your arms for balance, find your footing with little hop-step. You stand up, safe, perhaps laugh if you catch someone's eye. And you move on, for a while more aware of the ground, of stones and snarled roots, before relaxing back into movement, going forward as you always have.

But sometimes the stumble is worse than you think, and you cannot stop what is coming. There is the trip, the miss-step, then impact and pain – but in the eye-blink between *falling* and *fallen*, time slows. There is space enough to feel shock – This is not what I thought would happen. The moment creeps by like half-frozen honey, is gone before you can cry out. Now we live all our days in that space. We are caught somewhere between air and ground, hands thrown out, unable to balance. Something is going to break.

the townspeople prepare for invasion

...and so waiting gave way to action:
all hands that could hold a tool took up
hammer and axe against our falling wall,
or shovel to shore up the river's defences...

Water is only a metaphor.

You cannot wall away death like damming up a river; it will slip through all your cracks.

a survivor stumbles into the town; Dryhtenburh prepares to surrender

The day had not yet dawned
when some soldier stumbled toward our gate,
bleeding, breathless bereft of weapons.

Who leads you? Where is your lord?
he demanded
I have dire news to deliver.

The men at the gate exchanged sad glances.

You must say your words to us all, my friend.
No gold-giver has graced our hall
this whole winter long.
We will tend your wounds first
and let you rest.
It will take time to gather the town.

When the empty hall was opened,
spring sunlight lit the way inside.
A fire was laid as folk filed in
and our visitor stood
in the centre of the shuffling throng
to tell his tale.
He spoke of a battle of the bloody ruin after
and the fate of the few who survived.

Holofernes has sent me. He desires your surrender.
You can keep your lives if you can kneel.
His camp is less than a league away;
I can carry your answer back to him.

His message was met
with silence then shouting
most voices advising surrender.
Holofernes' price was a pound per head of silver:
pennies we could ill-afford to pay
but months of waiting had worn our us down
and no one wanted to die
in a fight so futile.

But as sombre silence fell again
a new voice was heard in the hall:
A woman's voice, but not woman's words.
She called us *cowards*
faithless flinching children.
Her tongue flayed the flesh from
every burgher's bone-house;
we were shamed as she spoke of
saving us from ourselves,

offering to go out to the enemy.
Five days she asked us for.
And why should we have stopped her?
Surrender would still be
waiting when she failed.
She promised us tales of our own to tell.
We promised songs would be sung for her:
meaning funeral laments elegies
But wise Judith proved us wrong.

Grief is an inherently selfish thing.

When I was a wife, you would have gone to war for me. I would have whispered brave words in your ear for you to carry into battle. When I was a wife, you would have gone to that hall for me. I would have given you my thoughts and sent you off with them; you would have spoken with our collective voice as you saw fit. When I was a wife, you would have found me here, would have helped me off the floor and dried my tears – but I am only here because you are not. I was no one's wife in that hall. And now, as I wipe at my own salt-stained face, the skin feels strange. Clay-cold, moldable. What would you make of that, I wonder? What will I?

the scop recounts Judith's speech

Listen to me you sad-eyed leaders,
you flinching, weak-minded warriors:
you are wrong to speak of surrender
to talk of tithes and taxes
to hand over your houses to the enemy.
Who are you to test God?
You cry that he will not come to our aid.
Should he stoop to save those who think
so little of their own strength?

Meet me tonight at the head of the town.
I will go out with my maid to greet the enemy.
Before the fifth morning I will be back among you.
Wait for me. Keep watch at the gate.
Do not ask what I will do.
I will not tell you until it is done.
It will be a tale worth telling.

Lancing wounds is violent work.

I swear I did not know it was my voice. I would not believe it now, if not for the soreness in my throat, scraped raw from screaming impossible things. I did not mean to speak at all – but they were so weak. So defeated. So ready to lie down and turn up their tender bellies to the enemy – they were disgusting. How do they stand themselves? How do they so meekly suffer losing everything? They were already mourning the loss of their freedom like a lover who yet lay dying. Like a husband hot with fever, sweating through our best sheets while I bathed your forehead with tears and offered no comfort, no prayers or remedies, just repeated whispered pleas: *do not do this to me*, as if you could stop—I was disgusting. And then you were gone.

I thought I would be happy to be silent forever, but then they said to me: *surrender*. Give in. Give up. Give away what you would keep, it is not yours. But I will not do it again. I will not yield the home you left me to appease these cowards. I never meant to speak, but I cannot pay the price of silence. Instead I will make speeches, shout encouragement, give them pretty stories for their smug fireside evenings. I will barricade with words what is mine.

Portrait of Handmaid as Squire

I found her
on the floor
in her underdress
weeping.

What will you do?
I asked.

Lie,
she said.

No one will believe those blood-shot eyes, my girl.

We'd best get you ready
for battle.

Judith prepares for war

Judith removed her widows' weeds
and bathed herself in scented water.
She bound up her hair in braids
gathered her war-gear:
bright-dyed gown gold bracelets
bauble-hung leather belt.
She was a magpie's prize, pretty
as a promise and just
as tempting to trust.

Before dusk she departed
handmaid with her.
A garnet brooch's bloody glitter
glinted in the sun's last glow.
It caught the gaze of the gathered crowd
shining as bright as her beauty.
We marvelled at her and moved away
watching her walk
looking on until she was lost
in the curve of the river,
red garnet glow growing dim.

Hue and Cry

She is dressed as she never was in the field, toiling
next to her husband:

 shoulder brooches
 strings of coloured beads
 face scrubbed clean of sweat and soot—
 she plays at being a lady of the hall.

Her handmaid carries

 food and wine,
 a single cup—
 does she mean to make peace?

Shall we all drink, share the cup round
 with Holofernes and his horde?

What are our lives worth? Half our wealth, and all
 our pride—

held yearly ransom to one man's
 vanity?

 —but one man with an army we cannot defeat,
so yes, Judith

 Go, Judith.

Offer the great general your gilded
 cup.

Use your words, little peace-weaver,
like spider's silk:

 to bind the hands
 of a man
 who will take
 what you offer, and reach

always
 for more.

Judith encounters the enemy; lies; is led away

Holofernes' scouts caught sight
of Judith's moon-lit movements
stopped her way with spears:
Who are you? Whence do you come?
they asked her.

She answered:

*I am a daughter of Dryhtenburb
and I am fled from them.
They spurn your mercy, though you
would swallow them whole.
Too stubborn to save themselves,
their pride makes them prey,
and I am afraid.
Take me to Holofernes.
I will tell him secrets show him
how he might best have victory.
Would a bloodless battle's
glory be good enough for him?*

Holofernes' men heard her words
and beheld her bright face.
They did not believe such beauty could lie.

You have chosen wisely in coming to our lord,
they said.
He will treat you well, and your words will cheer his heart.

And so Judith and her companion carried on in the enemy's company.

Walking through the darkness, I saw nothing, and was glad.

The camp shines like polished stone as we approach, still day-bright with bonfires. We draw close and the darkness slips away, a blanket sliding from my shoulders, letting in the cold. The guide leads our little entourage toward a tent at the far end of this make-shift town, one larger than the others, and my ears catch bits of conversation: *Traitor. Betrayer. Enemy woman.* They know me, then. Some scout has hurried back to spread the news, and now a crowd gathers to watch me wait. Holofernes has not yet appeared. I stand in a puddle of torch light, staring at his tent flap, wishing for my night-blanket back. Around me, they are whispering:

She looks like that and they let her leave?

She was wasted on the enemy.

Beware a fair face, my lads; a pretty woman can wrap the whole world round her fingers.

Best we keep her hands busy, eh?

The crowd laughs. My throat tightens. The tent's entrance opens.

My mistress is stripped bare—

her clothing a shed chrysalis, skin exposed
to spring-cold air, paleness turning pre-dawn pink.

Her scent is gone—

crushed camomile hands, damp woollen dress,
the animal smell of her sweat.

My mistress is a statue—

a sleek marble creature.

Come.

—say her sloping curves, her blank, carved face.

Paint me what you will.

Make me your whore, your slave, your courtesan.

Make me your captive; your queen.

Drape me in silk or sackcloth; let your eye find what your heart wants.

I will be that thing for you.

I will make her that thing for him.

A woman's toilet is a poisoner's art—

make the deadly thing delicious.

They say Holofernes has a hearty appetite,

but a man feasts first with his eyes.

I will dress my mistress

in a bright-dyed gown,

adorn her

with bracelets and rings.

She will smell like

honeyed wine and

look like

the warmth you feel, low

in your belly

when you've drained a cup

to the dregs.

I will make her eyes a promise,

her lips a poisoned chalice:

drink deep, mighty general—

and lie down.

Holofernes takes the bait; Judith makes a bargain

His eyes held her as a hawk would
watching a rabbit leave her warren
and she felt the trap snap closed.

You speak good sense
he told her.

Dryhtenburh will burn, but
your wisdom will save you.

Stay with me. Spill your secrets.

When I win I will reward you
with the life my lady deserves.

I have no practice in the art of possession.

Holofernes looks at me like some men look at gold, and I cannot tell what attracts him more: the baubles on my dress, or the body beneath it. When his eyes slide up to mine, his gaze is more *acquisitor* than *executioner*: a man like him will never kill what he can own.

No need to be frightened, he tells me,
though his toothy smile says otherwise.
*I have never yet hurt a woman who was willing
to serve.*
What have you come to offer me?

I offer myself, I say to him
*and all the knowledge I have. My people seek to
stand against you, and I have no wish to die with them.*
*Let me join you. Let me give you
their secrets, their weaknesses;*
I will tell you how best to trap them,
and in return,
*you will keep me
safe.*

Holofernes grins his predator's grin and laughs; the soldiers circled round him preen like hens showing off for handfuls of corn.

A bargain easily made, he answers. *I will gladly have you
and anything you can give.*

The circled soldiers cluck in approval.

Take her to the tent where I keep my treasures, he tells them,

and they hop to obey, lead me away; I am housed in a thick-fabric hall full of loot: my bed is made with linens stolen from some lady more noble than I. As cages go, it is comfortable enough.

Judith waits; Holofernes dreams

For days she forbore
to dine with him drawing him in
by her absence at table.
He saw her only for a single
mug of beer before bed
and while he slept his thoughts
were with her.

Every night ends in the river.

I take small stones to mark the time, turning them over and over in my palm through the long days spent waiting for his call and watching daylight fade through thick tent walls. It was an excuse at first: the nightly river trip, the ritual bath, the prayer. A reason for me to leave the camp without suspicion, so that when the moment came I might escape. Now I need it for more than that. Each night I kneel and pray and plunge my hands into icy water, pouring it over my tongue to chase away the sour taste of wine. No guards have ever followed me here. It is indifference more than trust – we all know I have no place left to go. If I run, I will only see them again when they come to kill or to conquer. No, it is not trust; it is just that I am not worth the bother. But sometime soon, a moment will come. I will be alone with him. He has promised me that with his eyes, his smile, the way his body leans into mine. And so I get up every night, force my frozen feet to carry me back to the wolf's den, where I wait through another day, sharp stones worried to smoothness in my hand.

A Handmaid's Battle Strategy

Decline

dinner in the hall.

Dine

alone, but

take

a single cup of wine before you

leave

to bathe for the night.

Don't

linger, whatever he asks.

Let

him think of you:

bare

feet in the river –

a lured fish will catch himself.

The lure of a fire is the heat it provides.

We meet in the evening, after the feasting is done, and I learn him in talk and textures: thick wool is a scratch in the back of my mind: my hand on another arm sweat-damp, work-warm I lean in, breathe the scent of him, half-expecting rain-soaked earth— sour wine sweat reminds me where I am.

Have you a husband?
he asks.
Some noble, perhaps?
Did he give you those pretty jewels?
When I meet him in battle, shall I kill him
for you?

His sun-hot eyes scorch my face. I feel his gaze like grasping fingers. I will blister, I will burn. Oh, my love, I am sorry.

I have no man,
I answer, trailing a fingertip along the linen sleeve of his under tunic.
There is only me.

His smile is a living thing: a coiled snake, a fox tail. Anywhere but here, he might be handsome.

All mine then,
he whispers.
Would you like to be a queen?
Serve the cup in my hall? Make peace with my enemies?

He is teasing. I imagine he broke robins' wings with slingshots as a child. He never asks for specifics, for strategies and tactics – none of the clever things I said he might have, but still I must accept his help to survive. My unsettled debt lies between us like an unmade bed.

Such a shame to slaughter so many servants,
I hear him say. He rests a hand on mine, his eyes slide
over me.
Are you certain they will never kneel?

Dread is an icy clench in my stomach. I pick at the stitching of his shirt sleeve, smooth down the decorative whorls. Who made him this tunic? How many times did the needle prick her finger? How many women have bled for him?

My people are ready to surrender,
I say, releasing his sleeve, curving my palm around the pommel of his sword.
They are afraid of your strength, my lord. I think
they will fold—

The metal under my hand is cold, and I shiver with the fire's heat on my face, with the wine's warmth in my mouth, with the sheer, stifling weight of his presence, pressed close and clinging like the fleece that lines his cloak.

I am drawn in. I pull away. I finish my drink and leave while he allows it.

Judith is Summoned to the Feast

I hear wolves in the woods:
hungry howls
in the empty night air.
A single deer stands
against the trees, white
tail twitching.
She ought to run.

Wolf chorus moves closer, and she
still just looks at me, big doe
eyes begging.
Sorry, sweetheart.
I'm weaponless.
Only came out here to piss.
And anyway, if I could, I'd
eat you too.
Just run.

Judith seeks strength

Judith's prayers went up
at all hours:
in her bed as dawn broke
and all morning while she waited
for his summons. She prayed
at mid-day with her maid
whispered charmed words
to herself while Holofernes
held her gaze each evening
pressing her with cups of wine.
Prayers followed her footsteps
to the river at night, and tucked her
into bed again guarding
her spinning sleepless thoughts
hiding her tears.

Holofernes' Hospitality

Cup kept full
all evening
last flagon
 lands like
a blow enemy
axe across
 unhelmeted head
Holofernes' hand
on my shoulder

Go get her, soldier
Bring my visitor here.

Spun sideways staggering
into the
 black
wine drips
 blood red
 down
 my
 shirt
 hope
 it won't
 stain
her.

The scop recounts Judith's prayer

Creator God heaven's guardian
I cry to you for compassion.
My heart is grown heavy,
swollen hot with sorrow's poison.
Give me a charm for this grief.

What words will banish fear?
What herbs will weaken sorrow?
I have no spell for what holds me still.
Holofernes waits a hungry wolf –
I must seem like such easy prey.
He will fall to my hand or I will fall to his:
this is the way of fate.
What I ask of you Maker of All
is only this:
a hero's mettle a warrior's strength of mind.

It is not like I imagined it, because I never did.

My husband's family were farmers. I joined him in the fields when we were wed, felling wheat together with our scythes, side by side. At night, we curled into one another, smelling of earth, savouring the salt-slick taste of each other, and the only blood I ever shed then was my own, spilled thick from a monthly wound while I waited for life to quicken—but I am no stranger to slaughter. My own family were herdsman, huntsmen, and I am my father's daughter. I have held the head of many a sheep raised up from exuberant lambhood and thought: food. My people were weapon wielders, sheep killers, wolf slayers. Bleating lambs were my lullaby, bloodstained skins my legacy—and still, the salt spray of my own first kill is a shock. The heft of a weapon in my hands is strange. The beast beneath me bleats just once as the blade comes down again, and I wonder what he sees—sheep herder? Wheat shearer? Or some new thing I have not yet been.

But that wicked man would not last the night.
His hollow words joined Judith's
in the ears of the gods:
Holofernes had poured his wine at their feet
but brave Judith offered her body.

Holofernes swaggered in flanked by soldiers.
His drunken honour guard slapped
their leader's back, sent him staggering
toward his lady while they laughed
and left to keep watch at the door.
The mighty general managed
the barest advances before sprawling
senseless on his own sheets
dragging aside the net as he fell,
deadly warrior turned drooling disgrace.
Brave Judith waited breath held
but the monster did not move again.
Swiftly she knelt to pray for the strength
to end her enemy's life.

She could hear his snores
as she approached.
He was still sleeping.
Filled with hope she quickly hauled
Holofernes forth by his hair
and grasped the sword at his side.
She laid him out and struck
a solid blow across his neck.
He awoke then in animal rage
thrashing limbs lashing out
reaching for his half-hewn head
but brave Judith was prepared
brought her blade to bear again
for a second time sinking it deep
consigning her enemy to sword-sleep.

Wise Judith wasted no time
in packing away her bloody prize.
It was time to return
to her people prove to them
that the war could be won.
Her handmaid shouldered the gory sack
and both women walked unhindered
out of the enemy's lair
heart-lifted heading for home.

Heading Home

I carry his head in my bread bag.

Blood seeps through like spilled
honey: viscous and sweet.

It is summer distilled
from steel flowers.

I am a child:
taking meals to men in the fields.

I am a girl:
serving her first mistress in the hall.

She was wed in the summertime,
bedded by nightfall; in spring,
we awaited her first child.

All women are warriors, really.
We are spared neither violence nor blood.

I am a woman grown:
sending that springtime child
to the marriage bed.

I am here:
bearing her burden
on the long road home.

Sweet Judith, the reason
my memories taste of metal.

Holofernes in Hell

I was awake.
I felt the last blood-slicked slide of her blade
the sting of shame at dying drunk
abed, deceived by a woman:
jewel-bright Judith
with her doe's eyes, and her lying
viper's tongue.

I am still awake
though there is no light to see by.
I am blind, bound to misery
witless and worm-enwrapped—
I feel their wriggling bodies burrowing
into mine. There is no light here,
no hope.

I will be awake
here forever, unrotting, though 'Holofernes' is finished.
I left no heir to be called by my name; no grandson
will inherit my *hamingja*.
I am held fast in hellfire while Judith walks free
the only women ever to lie to me
and live.

I was awake.
I am awake.
I will always be awake.
Surely a warrior deserves more than this?

‘Home’ is a direction, like ‘up’ or ‘east’.

Spring at night is a sleek, cold creature, creeping cat-like into uncovered places. Its rough wind tongue licks skin raw. Tonight it pulls at my torn seams and ripped stitches until those ragged fabric wounds look like real ones: battered skin showing blood-red through the gaps. I have no woollen cloak to keep me warm, my sheep’s clothing long since shed on his treasure tent floor where I left it when he called for me. But now he is behind me too, equally discarded save for a single gory token. We each stole something from the other, in the end: me, his life; he, my memory of warmth. It will be a long walk home.

Judith returns home; rallies her people

Men were watching when she came
just as Judith had asked them to be.
The night's watch swiftly woke the town
and as her people gathered round,
Judith spoke:

Listen!
These are thank-worthy things I say.
You need no longer be
mournful of mind.
God is good to you,
and I am mighty.

Then the glowing gold-adorned one
ordered her handmaid to unwrap the head
and hold it aloft, show off the bloody sign
of her victory:

See clearly, kinsmen!
she cried out to the crowd.
Look on the un-living head of Holofernes
who for months has murdered
our people and slaughtered our peace.
Never again my kinsmen.
You are avenged.
My own two hands have taken his life.
Now you shall finish our foes.
Arm yourselves! Put on your shining helms.
Bear up your bright linden-shields.
March with sharp swords
towards the enemy.
They are meant for death. You will mete it out.
I have made your glory possible. Now go.

Marching off to War

Well, now we will have to fight.
No more noble surrender –
Judith's bloody head has seen
to that.

We all look round,
same sour-milk taste
in our mouths, and maybe
a bit more hope
in our eyes?

We can be as brave as she was, surely?
Even if only as acknowledgement.
Even if only to thank her
as we die.

first blood is shed; the enemy flees

Surrender's taste had grown sour on their tongues.
The host arose hurried to arms;
Judith's bloody offering goaded them onward.
Her warriors wore her will like armour,
binding the fire of battle to their skin
with leather and mail making the red dawn ring
with shouts and clattering linden-shields.

Overheard, dusk-feathered ravens drew in.
Dew-damp eagles eager for flesh
sang a battle song.
Waving war banners excited blood thirsty birds.
Lean-flanked wolves stalked the wood's edge
waiting for a feast. They would eat
their fill of men fated to die.

They went forward without restraint
those brave soldiers striding boldly
covered in the same curved shields
that had so oft before suffered scorn
and spear-play the sting of battle-adders' bite.

With drumbeats Judith's duguð drew out the enemy
land-stealing cowards loathsome men.
The heathen horde had no battle flags.
They flew from the storm
of arrows our archers let fly
were hewn down by our horned bows.

A line of soldiers stern of mood
stout of heart sent forth their spears
into the throng.
Strong hands drew bright swords
from sheaths struck earnestly
with the battle-tested edges.
They spared not a one neither highborn nor low.
To a man, they repaid the half-drunk heroes
of Holofernes for their dishonour
leaving the slaughter field scattered with remains,
a banquet set for hungry beasts.

Sated, victorious soaked in battle-sweat
the tireless band turned their sights
to the general's stronghold.
The spoils of war awaited them there.

I have never waded in this river before.

A flood of people greeted me at the gate and I rode it better than I thought I would, cresting the wave of them with a lifted head and a shout. They gathered round to listen, and it was like that first dawn in the hall, and also not like that at all: every one of them met my eye. No more shamed gazing at the ground. They were buoyed by something like hope and so I spoke to that, pulling my words from the want in their faces, the longing for someone to lead them. They were my people then as they had never been before, in a way that came with obligation, expectation. We are bound together like braided rope now. I am home. I can never go home again.

Holofernes has no head for wine; his men despair

Those few who had early fled the battle
found their way home to Holofernes' camp
as mead-weary morning dawned.
They dragged the eldest thanes from death-like
sleep and proclaimed in hurried speech
of the sunrise slaughter the terrible edgeplay
and how the enemy would soon fall upon them.
They went quickly as one heavy-heated crowd
to rouse Holofernes who was surely scheming
battle strategy, hidden behind his golden net.
The host approached waited expectantly
with held breath but he did not appear.

And not a one of them dared to enter.
To pull aside that curtain without permission
was forbidden, and no one wanted to be first
in line to disobey. Time dragged on
while they waited growing worried
and restless, their patience a taut-stretched hide
left too long on the rack. They coughed loudly
scuffed their feet and laughed at themselves:
Holofernes' elite hovering at his door
making noise like timid women until
one man, grown bold at last and mindful
of minutes slipping past parted curtain and golden net
to find his leader sprawled as he had fallen
after all his drunken feasting:
head lost to wine and a woman.

The soldier staggered back outside
and fell to the ground before the gathered crowd
hands clutching claw-like at his clothes
tearing his hair as he told the news:

*We are undone, made nothing;
what good are warriors with no heafodweard—
no head to direct the whole?
Here is our destruction made flesh, manifest
in the sword-bewn
stump of his neck:
a sign of our future, we who are well-nigh
strangled
by enemy hands.*

*My lads, we are marked for death.
Shall we shamble on, sheep to the slaughter?
Do we fight?*

The leaderless heroes of Holofernes
stared at the mess of his body.
They had the look of loyal dogs
left masterless. Some stayed
to see the end. Some dropped
their swords and scattered.

In the quiet that followed, we saw one another.

Not a one of them ever asked. They saw my torn dress, the mess of blood in my tangled hair, and the questions in their eyes stayed silent. Whatever I had done, allowed, endured to win that head at my feet would never matter to them. Would never tarnish me. Instead, they stood like an honour guard assembled round a ragged queen; they led me away, stripped off my battered battle armour, washed the red stains from my skin in silence.

Judith Lies with Holofernes

Holofernes' men lead him to bed as if leaving
a bridal feast:

 with back slaps and laughter.

We hear them coming:

 the chief cockerel and his clucking comrades—
some stand guard outside as he stumbles in.

His first clumsy grope grabs the sleeve of Judith's gown,
 tears it down as he trips
 across the floor.

His weight is a tidal wave; she falls
 like water
 breaking on rocks.

I turn my face to the wall.

The wine-soaked scent of Holofernes' heavy
breath sticks in
my mistress' throat,
clogs her half-formed groans.

I know when he bears her back
 to the bed.

I hear his hands rending her
 dress,
touching her
 flesh.

I clench my fists in the corner.

The heathen's men lie
 in a snoring heap outside;
their slumber sounds as counterpoint to
panic:

I hear a struggle, a cry, my own rushing blood—
 then nothing

—but the sound of our breathing,
my mistress' and mine.

I look back.

Holofernes' bruising grip has grown
slack, his hands slide from her
skin. He is dead
weight, pinning her dress to the bed while
she shoves him aside, slipping
 free.

She crouches—
 covers
in a heap on the floor.

I wait.

Judith stands.
Her would-be lover lies
across the bed, head
dropped back,
sheen of lamplight shining in the arch of his neck.
She leans over him,
fingers of one hand carded in his hair,
and tugs him closer, as if
to kiss.

Sweat from her brow beads
falls
mingles with his.

She reaches down, draws forth
his sword,
hefts the warm weight of it slowly
over
her head.

Sudden downward slice—
spilled blood spreads like blooming flowers.

Holofernes opens his eyes, lets out a single stifled cry —

Judith pulls the sword free and swings again
forcing it
completely
in
past sinew and bone—

Holofernes' head drops to red-drenched earth;
Judith follows, scrubs her hands with dirt.

I move toward her and the bed, gather the head into my bag.

Judith is crying. She will want that dress
mended.

I shoulder her bloody burden, hold
her hand
all the way home.

She doubted [not].

Please.

Please please please.

Oh, God

do not let

him

wake up.

further slaughter; spoils of war

Her battle-proud heroes surprised
the scattered soldiers who
had stayed to guard their general's treasure.
They wrought a war-path through
the stragglers shearing down their
ragged defense with sharp-edged swords
and then went after those
who had fled felling them with arrows.
Enemy corpses covered the earth.
Few came living to their kinsmen again.

For weeks, the ring-locked lady's tribe
reaped the spoils of war,
carrying off weapons and carved shields
byrnie and helms swords and heavy corselets
gilded armour and household goods.
More treasure than tongue could tell
they laid at the feet of their lady.

When they were finished
and assembled at home
generous Judith gave out gifts
to match the measure
of each man's merit.
She bestowed her favour with bracelets
and shields torques and swords
with armour and silver and rings.
Every soldier received fair reward.

At last, Judith's earls laid all
of Holofernes' battle-gear before her:
his helm and sword his bloody armour.
All these did she keep for herself
as her own due honour
rejecting all further reward.

As for Holofernes' feast gear
his fine plate and wine flagons
all these she gave to the flames
of a vengeful fire.
She stripped the linen sheets
from his bed, tore down the golden net
and burned them all as well.
No trace of the hated heathen remained
save the symbols of his defeat:
a bloodied helm hung on Judith's wall
and a sword that would serve only her.

Because every mess must be cleaned, I went back.

I stripped his tent myself. That golden net ripped easily free of its fastenings; it felt flimsy in my hands. Absurdly delicate. How could anyone have hidden behind this? How could it have shrouded such a multitude of sins? I let it fall there by the door, and trampled its shine into the floor while I pulled his bed linens free, piling them up as if to be washed. I will burn them all instead. Set them aflame like so much rubbish. Behold the hero's funeral pyre; see his headless body wrapped in dirty cloth and mud-caked gold. I will bury his head in my field, behead him again at every harvest – not as revenge, but as reminder.

The Damned Body Addresses Itself

When Judith's blood-mad men split
the sad defense
of our shield wall,
the battle was already lost.
They were meant to be an easy defeat, a reward
for weeks of hard-fought battles won, but
we had over-reached, over-
indulged, and we were
over-run.

Now we are over.

I saw a few retreating friends-in-arms, men
I fought beside for years,
fall face-first
to the earth, enemy arrows buried
in their backs.
The rest of us turned to the battle, like men
unafraid to die, but
we were not brave.
We were already dead,
our lives ended when
we opened that tent, and saw Judith
had pruned the rotten fruit
from the tree.

The field is quiet now. The enemy have moved on.
I hear only cawing crows, a few pained
cries, bugs rustling the grass.
What a pretty sight we must make:
valiant battle-slain, laid out
on the sun-gilded earth, final breaths steaming
the early morning air, our passage to the afterlife
paid in blood.
But soon we will be eaten up—
by wolves and birds, by worms
and the earth
beneath.

The sky is a dimming blue blur through the trees. I am fallen, rotting.

Consequences, like a man's worth, are arbitrary.

If there had been children, would I find this familiar? Would I have grown used to holding out my hand for flower petals and wriggling insects, and saying, *Yes. They are lovely. You have done well?* I wonder this as a soldier drops ruined armour at my feet, its drying blood still beetle-wing bright. But they are not children, these men who have murdered in my name. They do not require my praise. Nor are they market women bartering for milk; they want more than the doled out treasures of the dead for services rendered. We have struck the sort of bargain kings make – my guidance for your might. I have given up my cup for a sword.

Canticle of Judith

In those days our doom
rode on the river.
Our foes were a flood
come to carry us off.
Holofernes' evil hoard
had set their sights
on our people promising death
unless we surrendered.

The mighty general made great
boasts of how we would bow
at his feet and yield
up our treasure to keep our lives
but this was not to be.
The heathen wolf howled at our door
but his fate was already woven.

Faithful Judith fortune's daughter
fought Holofernes with weaponed words.
Her clever wit and comely face
lured her prey into peril
and with his own sword
she stole his life.

Made bold by her bravery
Judith's people pursued
the enemy until all
had perished. They spared
not one soul from the slaughter.

And so it goes after danger had gone
that Judith justly divided
the battle spoils amongst her soldiers
and they installed her in the hall
where their old lord had lived.
Many suitors sought her
hand, but she would have none
and so remained alone
with her handmaid filling the hall
again with scops and songs
and the gladness of her gathered kin
as it had been in the days before.
No more were her people made
afraid, or troubled by any enemy
not once in all the long days of her life.

And they all lived.

When my song is sung in the hall, I sit tense as any listener, hands gripped tight to my seat in anticipation, gasping in all the right places. No two tale-spinners tell the same story, and I love the most inventive versions best: the ones that praise my superior strength, or give me impossibly pretty speeches. In none of them am I ever afraid. I do not cringe or cry. No one speaks of my doubt, of the derision of the town – but those things do not make them wrong. What are tales, after all, but the truth we prefer? And with so many willing to speak for me, I am never asked to share memories. That is not what anyone wants from me. Other people's stories are the box I keep my secrets in.

Because all stories must end, they will give me one: paint my fate with the false finality of an imagined ever-after. For now, it is a stop-gap, a place holder – for no hero ever retires. We are public property, captive to contracts we can only fulfil with a noble death. The story is ruined if we live long enough to see our own defeat. There is no freedom in fairytales, only roles to be played, and I hope, for my own sake, that there is a battle ahead, an obliging dragon to swallow me down – something suitably dramatic to please the singers.

**An Artist's Re-creation:
A Critical Commentary for *Judith***

INTRODUCTION

In the early days of my *Judith* project, I struggled for a word to describe the process I was undertaking. I did not feel, initially, that “translation” was entirely accurate – or, at the very least, it was not entirely honest. My ideas for adapting *Judith* for a contemporary audience involved taking a certain amount of liberty with the text – changes I was not certain the label of “translation” would allow for. However, in the field of translation studies, the idea of what a translation can be and should do is ever-expanding. The tug-of-war argument of “word-for-word” versus “sense-for-sense” translation that has existed since the days of Cicero still goes on, but has been made more complex by the addition of concepts from theories of translation outside the purely linguistic, and by new, more nuanced ways of asking old questions.¹ Meanwhile, Old English translation has also flourished in recent years, with a wealth of excellent translations from both Anglo-Saxon specialists and non-specialist poets and translators appearing since Edwin Morgan’s 1952 translation of *Beowulf*. In the last five years, these fields have begun, tenuously, to meet.² The result is an incredibly rich conversation that creates space for a variety of translational approaches to Old English texts. In this introduction, I will briefly outline the history of translation studies and the concepts that are most relevant here, and discuss how current trends of thinking in the field of translation studies relate to specifically Old English translation. The end result will be a methodological context through which I can offer commentary on my own Old English translation – for such, I feel assured, it may be termed.

The history of translation studies appears to be one of a competition of terms. John Dryden, in the preface to his 1680 translation of Ovid’s *Epistles*, divided all translations into three categories. He borrowed the Greek ideas of metaphrase (literal or ‘word-for-word’ translation) and paraphrase (or ‘sense-for-sense’ translation), and added his own third

¹ In *After Babel*, theorist George Steiner proposes four eras of translation theory. The first era begins with Cicero’s statements, encompasses Dryden whom I shall discuss further on, and concludes with Alexander Fraser Tytler’s essay “Essay on the Principles of Translation” published in 1791. The second era, which runs through 1946, moves away from purely linguistic considerations to hermeneutic enquiry, and marks a development in methodological approaches to translation. The third era, beginning in the 1940’s, is characterised by the inclusion of structural linguistics and communication theory in the study of translation. Steiner’s fourth period, beginning in the 1960’s, “sets the discipline [of translation studies] in a wide frame that includes a number of other disciplines,” among them comparative literature, philology, poetics, and grammar, as well as Marxist and post-colonial theories. It is during this latest period, in 1978, that Andre Lefevre first proposed that the name “translation studies” be applied to what had become a wide and varied discipline in its own right, rather than an off-shoot of linguistics or literature studies.

Susan Bassnet-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 1, 42-43.

² A note on terminology: Within the confines of this commentary, I use the term ‘Old English’ to refer specifically to language, and ‘Anglo-Saxon’ to refer to elements of culture or history.

category – imitation (or adaptation), which he saw as an abandonment of both words *and* sense³. Dryden advocated using a mixture of metaphrase and paraphrase for achieving the best translation. He identified the goal of translation as seeking from the target language the most accurate equivalent for the words or phrases used in the source language, and devised several prescriptive rules to aid in that aim – very few of which he seemed to follow in his own work.

In the 20th century, Eugene Nida, a foundational theorist in the modern field of translation studies, seized upon the idea of equivalence and coined the terms dynamic (later, functional) and formal equivalence. Formal equivalence, characterised by a fidelity to the lexicographical details and grammatical structure of the source language, can be seen as metaphrase's modern-day descendant. Dynamic or functional equivalence, described by Nida as the ability of a translation to transmit in the target language the message of the source text in such a way that the response of the new reader is essentially like that of the original reader, is analogous to paraphrase.⁴ Both concepts, however, are more complicated than their parent ideas. Following on from the European Formalists, Nida's work pushed the field of English-language translation towards the idea that words have no inherent, fixed meaning, and instead acquire meaning and significance from their context. This would seem to make strict word-for-word translation something of an impossibility – if words can express idioms, metaphors, and linguistic jokes, then they cannot always be trusted to say, literally, what they say; translation becomes an exercise in semantic analysis.⁵

A more modern permutation of the metaphrase vs. paraphrase debate is Lawrence Venuti's concept of foreignization vs. domestication, which brings post-colonial theories to bear on the question of equivalence. Venuti discusses these methods of relating to the target culture of a translated text in his book *The Translator's Invisibility*. He defines domestication as the extent to which a translation assimilates a text into the target language and culture, and foreignization as the effort of a translation to signal the distinct differences of the source text.⁶ To Venuti, foreignization is the ethical choice for translators. He argues that domestication violently erases the values of the source culture, and creates a text that follows

³ Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 25. Dryden more specifically defines imitation as “[writing] as [the translator] supposes that the author would have done, had he lived in our age and in our country” – a methodology he later endorses in the Preface to his translation anthology *Sylvae*.

⁴ Eugene Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964), pp. 159-160.

⁵ Nida, pp. 37-43.

⁶ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 14-15, 19.

the cultural norms of the majority of speakers of the target language.⁷ Venuti's arguments, which he applies predominantly to the hegemonic nature of English-language translation, are undeniably important to the progress of translation studies in a post-colonial world that continues to study and translate new literature gleaned from minoritised languages; however, this fact does not immediately spell out their relevance to the field of Old English, a language which has no living speakers around to use it, or enact its cultural context.

A potential answer lies in the act of canonization – in who gets to decide what is a good translation or a poor one, and what criteria are used to make those decisions. Venuti himself addresses these questions in his discussion of Ezra Pound's 1911 translation of the Old English elegy *The Seafarer*. He describes how Pound's efforts to foreignize the text often appear as archaisms. Pound "adheres closely to the Anglo-Saxon text, imitating its compound words, alliteration, and accentual meter," but often draws words from Middle English, Early Modern English, and various Scottish and northern dialects.⁸ A sense of the poem's antiquity, its cultural and linguistic distance from his reading audience, and its original prosody are thus maintained. But Pound is not, Venuti points out, entirely invisible. His own modernist sensibilities influenced his editing choices as well – most famously demonstrated by Pound's complete removal of Christian references from the poem. In the words of medievalist Christine Fell, the poem contains "two traditions, the heroic...preoccupation with survival of honour after loss of life – and the Christian hope for security in heaven."⁹ The balancing act of representing these two contradictory modes of thought is a challenge faced by many translators of Anglo-Saxon poetic texts. Pound chose to answer this challenge by omitting one of those modes of thought entirely. Susan Basset explains that Pound's editing choices are symptomatic of "the cultural political agenda" that typify modernist literary experiments.¹⁰ While Pound's efforts at foreignization through structural means decentralize the translator and the target culture, his revisions of the source text's content highlight heroic individualism over the collectivism of the removed Christian elements – a move Basset sees as a response to the "crisis of human subjectivity that modernists perceived in social developments like...the creation of a mass workforce and the standardization of the work process."¹¹ In allowing his own views to influence his editing choices, Pound has ironically

⁷ Venuti, p. 14.

⁸ Ibid., p. 29-30.

⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 30

replicated the “individual vs the collective” contradiction from the original text, albeit in a new and unique way.

The point Venuti makes about Pound’s translation is that his aim in analysing the translation was not to assess it against the “literal” vs. “free” binary, but rather to expose the standards of accuracy by which Pound produced and judged his own translation. “Fidelity,” he argues, “cannot be construed as mere semantic equivalence.”¹² All texts are susceptible to many different interpretations; which texts – or versions of texts – are deemed canonical is “culturally specific and historically variable.”¹³ Pound’s translation, he says, cannot be dismissed as “too free” because it is informed by a scholarly understanding of the original text.¹⁴ Twentieth century scholarship could not answer as to whether the Christian elements of *The Seafarer* were present in some earlier, oral form of the poem, or were added later during monastic transcription, or if indeed the poem as we have it is an original creation based on several existing but unrecorded versions. Therefore, Pound’s choice of removing the Christian elements as if they were an unnecessary overlay on an originally pagan poem is just as valid a response to that historical question as another translator’s choice to treat those elements as if they are integral to the poem.

Recently, some Anglo-Saxonists have begun to expand on Venuti’s application of his own theories to Old English translation by offering their own analyses. Hugh Magennis’ *Translating Beowulf: Modern Versions in English Verse* examines trends in Beowulf translation post-1950, looking specifically at translations by Edwin Morgan, Burton Raffell, Michael Alexander, and Seamus Heaney. Magennis frames his examination with a discussion of Venuti’s theories, and offers thoughts on how and where they apply to Old English translation. *Beowulf* translation, he says, has a long history of foreignizing via the poetic – through using imitations of Old English syntax, diction, and metre to “suggest” the original poem.¹⁵ This is tempered, however, by the translator’s desire for readability. Many *Beowulf* translations have been targeted at introductory-level students, and sometimes at a more general popular readership; they have been undertaken by instructors who want (and need, if they wish to remain relevant to an increasingly nuanced undergraduate curriculum) to create a text fit for instruction that is also accessible and engaging, and by authors who, while

¹² Venuti, p. 30.

¹³ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵ Hugh Magennis, *Translating Beowulf: Modern Versions in English Verse* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), p11.

wishing to maintain some fidelity to the original text, also want to get their books read. “Reviews of translations,” Magennis says, “have been from the point of view of the instructor, who needs a version that will maintain the interest of his students.”¹⁶ Thus modern translations of Old English texts are increasingly assessed on the dual aims of being linguistically and prosodically accurate representations of the original text, and on their success as works of modern poetry; whether, in creating this new text, a translator “unacceptably reconstitute[s] the original poem,” Magennis argues, “may be a matter of judgement in each case,” much as Venuti argued in his assessment of Pound.¹⁷

Having begun by acknowledging the importance of Venuti’s work in pushing forward the field of modern translation studies, Magennis ends his discussion of it with a critique. Foreignizing, he points out, “inevitably distorts” the text as well.¹⁸ Here he also turns to Pound’s *The Seafarer* as example, explaining that foreignizing a text so as to make translation visible means that “a text that did not sound unnatural originally is made to do so in its translated form.”¹⁹ He also reiterates John Corbett’s point that, in order for a text to avoid being domesticated, there must be an agreement about what domestication looks like in the target language – there must be a standard from which to deviate. Were I to translate *Beowulf* into my particular dialect of Middle Tennessee English, I would certainly domesticate the poem to my own linguistic culture, but the text would still remain foreignized to many English-speaking audiences, even in the U.S.

And in the case of Old English translation, any print edition – even, Magennis reminds his readers, the “revered critical edition” – that changes the layout, grammar, or punctuation of the source text has already significantly altered it. This is even truer of electronic versions. Any access to a medieval text that happens outside of its original manuscript form is mediated access; “how satisfactory that access is considered to be,” Magennis argues, “will depend on the particular translation, taken in its own context.”²⁰ If a translation is too domesticating, the original poem is lost; if a translation is too foreignizing, then it is potentially the audience who is lost. Magennis’ argument makes a case for translation which sensitively and justifiably employs elements of both foreignization and domestication. His later chapters are an exacting analysis of the choices of individual poet-

¹⁶ Magennis., p. 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

translators. He assesses their vocabulary, prosody, presentation, grammar, and narrative choices – and, where possible, their own commentary on those choices, to demonstrate how each author balanced the equation of textual fidelity and poetic originality. My commentary on *Judith* will take a similar form. Looking first at character and narrative structure, I will situate my discussion of those elements in the context of Anglo-Saxon history, culture, and several complex issues surrounding their formation of a national identity. I will also discuss my engagement with other Old English translations, and contemporary lyric poetry outside of Old English translations, highlighting notable sources of inspiration - most specifically, U.S. poet Rita Dove. Lastly, I will elaborate on my own translation methodology, which started with a literal, word-for-word translation of the source text, and ended with the creation of several methods of rendering the complexity of classical Old English verse in language aimed at readers of contemporary poetry.

CHAPTER ONE:

Historical Fiction - Collective Identity, Cultural Authenticity, and the Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Scop

In navigating the balance between preserving the historical and cultural integrity of the original text and creating something accessible to a poetry-reading audience whose only familiarity with Anglo-Saxons might come from pop culture perceptions of them, there was one idea I was obliged to contend with early on: the myth of the *scop*.²¹ Roberta Frank, in her 1993 article, “The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet,” lays plain the extent to which the concept of the Anglo-Saxon *scop* has been shaped not so much by textual evidence of bardic existence as by the literary fashions of other ages. Frank narrows her focus down to the three periods of English history she holds primarily responsible for modern preconceptions of the Anglo-Saxon poet: the second half of the 18th century, the last half of the 12th century, and 10th century Anglo-Saxons themselves.²²

She discusses the 18th century as a clamouring for authenticity and originality, words which largely became synonymous with ancient as the regard for “primitive poetry” grew.²³ Though neither scholars nor poets could find evidence or description of the original English bard they sought to emulate, they knew what he should be like:

a chosen friend and favourite of kings, a praiser of battle glory,
an admirer of 'the beauties of the fair, and the joys and cares of
virtuous love'; his verse was 'picturesque and figurative' to the
core, for he descended from a northern race for whom 'a skill in
poetry' was 'a national science'.²⁴

Their imaginings were not entirely baseless. In her assessment of 12th century Latin chronicles, Frank implicates no less a figure than William of Malmesbury in giving rise to a romanticised view of Old English poets. Malmesbury recounted for English audiences the tale of how Aldhelm, four hundred years earlier, had lured in folk with songs and poems before slowly interspersing scripture into his rhymes, thereby sneakily edifying the

²¹ poet, bard

²² Roberta Frank, “The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 75.1 (1993), pp. 11-36, p. 11, p. 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁴ Frank, p. 19. She is quoting here from Thomas Warton’s 1774 *History of English Poetry*.

populace.²⁵ Malmesbury is also responsible for the story of how King Alfred, disguised as a traveling bard, entered a Danish camp as a spy.²⁶ It seems the writers of history were themselves fascinated by the idea that there had once been bards in England.

Frank acknowledges early on that the Anglo-Saxons themselves were in part to blame for the mythos surrounding them, and bases her arguments in a lack of existing textual evidence, noting that the only mentions of bards in action in Old English poems come from *Beowulf*, *Widsith*, and *Deor* – three poems whose narrative voices all hail from a continental past rather than from a present Anglo-Saxon England.²⁷ She assigns responsibility for this harkening back to forgotten Danish and Germanic ancestry to the same sort of “historical imagination,” and “longing for the past to speak to the present” that fuelled 18th century poets’ search for the bard, and declares that any real sense of what, if any, function a bard might have had in early Anglo-Saxon England is both unknown and unknowable.²⁸

I could not, however, accept Frank’s succinct conclusion that further effort in the direction of the Old English bard would prove fruitless. The sheer fact that the poem I intended to adapt was a third-person narration of a heroic tale meant that the idea of an Anglo-Saxon bard was one which I would have to address, and ultimately translate. And if the Anglo-Saxons were themselves pre-occupied with storytellers to such an extent that they wove them into their own mythologised past, then it behoved me to understand as much as possible what drove that fascination, so that I might work out how best to convey that to an audience. Though Frank is accurate in saying that none of the depictions of bards in Old English poems represent how poets functioned in that society, they certainly demonstrate how Anglo-Saxons conceived of their own art of poetry.²⁹

In direct response to Frank, John D. Niles discusses the Anglo-Saxon invocation of oral poets as a product of nostalgia and anxiety. “Nostalgia,” he says, “was the primary mode

²⁵ Frank., p. 31-32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁹ Emily Thornbury’s excellent book *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* thoroughly investigates who and what pre-Conquest poets actually were – what social roles they held, what type of poetry they created and for what purpose. Based on an exhaustive survey, she found that no historical Anglo-Saxon identified himself as a *scop*, and that the term was rarely applied to living people. Poets generally held other positions – scribe, scholar, teacher, musician, courtier – in which they used poetic writing as a function of their job. If a person were particularly skilled, then the special title of ‘poet’ might be applied, probably after the person’s death; thus the Anglo-Saxon conception of poetry as both a practical and necessary tool, and as a part of their ancient past that held special status.

Emily Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 24, 35-39.

in which [the Anglo-Saxons] conceived of their Northern ancestral past.”³⁰ Therefore, the Anglo-Saxons’ own search for oral poets formed “one aspect of the cultural myth” that helped to solidify their changing social and cultural identity, exacerbated by the shift from a “state of primary orality” into a bilingual blending of orality and literacy.³¹

Niles uses Frank’s poetic examples of *Beowulf*, *Widsith*, and *Deor* to demonstrate his claims. *Widsith*, he suggests, provides the clearest and most emphatic expression of the bard’s role in “bestowing the immortality of fame,” as all things, save reputation, must end.³² *Deor* boasts similar themes, but presents them in a unique way: unlike *Widsith* and the bardic scenes from *Beowulf*, *Deor* does not place a narrative framework between the reader and the voice of the ‘ancient bard’. Where both *Widsith* and *Beowulf* both have narrative voices that lead the reader into and back out of the sections of text devoted to scopic verse, *Deor* simply *is* the voice the *scop*, addressing the reader directly. The effect is a feeling of immediacy: we, as readers, are not invited to *remember* the historical events referenced in the poem, but to *experience* them. To imagine ourselves a part of them. The same would have been true of 10th century readers, separated by both space and time from a past to which they still felt an obvious connection.

Nostalgia need not be a pleasant thing, however. It is possible to both yearn for the places of one’s past and be aware of why one no longer lives there. Nostalgia such as this is less about clinging to the past than it is about dealing with a conflicted present while hoping for a clearer future. While the Anglo-Saxons took pride in their heritage and the culture of their ancestral forebears, they were undoubtedly “grateful to have been born in a later age.”³³ Tenth century audiences were well aware that all the kingdoms and dynasties listed in poems like *Widsith* and *Beowulf* had long since come to an end, and that “the good old days” had not been “uniformly good” for those who lived through them.³⁴ In a subsequent chapter, I will explore an example of this anxiety that is present in *Beowulf*, surrounding the concepts of *wergild*, revenge killings, and centralised law-making; tenth-century Anglo-Saxons, inhabiting as they did a time of Viking raids, growing literacy, and increasingly centralised bureaucracy, might have been uncertain about their present, but they could identify which aspects of even a romanticised past it would not be wise to carry into their future.

³⁰ Niles, p. 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Niles notes that images of the *scop* in poetry became dominant in periods when literacy was gaining ground, “when written laws and contracts were superseding the spoken pledge...and when a strong centralized state was doing its best to subsume man-to-man relations.”³⁵ The draw to the myth of the oral poet then was not only the historical and cultural bond to the past it represented; it also celebrated fellowship, face-to-face communication, and the special relationship between poet, patron, and audience. Niles rightly points out that this anxiety is hardly unique to Anglo-Saxon culture. The “cult of the oral poet,” as he calls it, is likely to develop in any place where anxiety over the “impersonality of written communication” and the lack of intimate “face-to-face social relations” is felt.³⁶ Perhaps this could go some way toward explaining the pre-occupation with the medieval (and pseudo-medieval) expressed in U.S. and U.K. popular culture, while we also simultaneously enjoy, exploit, lament, and occasionally question the dangers of communications technologies like Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and smartphone texting apps. Certainly the existence of several film adaptations of *Beowulf*, and the commercial success of books and shows like *Game of Thrones*, *Vikings*, and *The Last Kingdom*, to name only a few, prove that early medieval history, whether presented as historical fiction or pure fantasy, still captures the modern imagination.

I was given a unique opportunity to explore modern-day iterations of bard-hood when I was invited to participate in the Medieval Storytelling Project in April of 2014. The Medieval Storytelling Project is an on-going AHRC-funded collaborative skills development program co-organised by Hannah Ryley and Gareth Lloyd Evans, both currently DPhil students at Oxford University.³⁷ I was one of eighteen doctoral students and early career researchers chosen to participate in a weekend of workshops led by professional storytellers Jenny Moon and Daniel Morden. The aim of the workshops was to give researchers who work with medieval narratives the skills to adapt those narratives into oral stories for modern audiences who might be unfamiliar with medieval literature. Because of changing primary school curricula in England, the workshops were targeted for telling stories to Key Stage 2 children, but a wide variety of adaptive and storytelling techniques covering a range of potential audiences were explored. The final day of the workshop was a practical application of those new skills. At the end of the previous day’s session, all the participants had been

³⁵ Niles, p. 40.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁷ An overview can be found on the project’s website: [<https://medievalstorytelling.co.uk/>]

invited to choose a narrative from a selection of medieval and folk tales provided by Moon and Morden; based on who had selected the same story, we were paired into groups of two or three to adapt and perform our chosen stories. We were given less than an hour with our partners the next morning to discuss ideas, make adaptations to the text, and run through our joint delivery. The brief time frame proved to be a welcome pressure; our decisions had to be quick and deliberate, and we had little time for overthinking or nervousness. The choices my partner and I made very rapidly that day mirrored the sorts of decisions I had the luxury of much more time to make for my *Judith* translation, but the pace at which I had to make them taught me valuable lessons about quickly assessing the meat of a plot, and cutting away the extra bits. It would not be necessary to find an appropriate Anglo-Saxon analogy for every detail of the missing beginning. I just needed to construct a bare skeleton on which I could hang relevant historical details as opportunities suggested themselves.

Since the workshop, I have put my storytelling skills to use adapting and performing Anglo-Saxon narratives in a variety of professional, academic, and entertainment settings. I often use an oral adaptation of the Judith narrative for these purposes, and my poetic translation has gained something from every storytelling experience. It is not really enough that the *story* told at a live event be a good one; audiences have expectations of the storyteller as well. They expect to be entertained and engaged, to be made to feel emotion; they expect to be able to trust the storyteller's knowledge and command of her material. A good storyteller is both author and book – both the generator of words, and the medium through which those words are experienced. Telling a story, even with the general shape and details of the narrative prepared beforehand and well-rehearsed, is an active and adaptive experience requiring the storyteller to read and react to her audience while also subtly manipulating them to feel, think, and respond in the way the story is meant to make them feel, think, and respond. I began to wonder in what way this live, oral experience could be translated onto the printed page.

It was this experience, along with the idea of the cult of the oral poet and my desire to explore it that informed my decision to split the story of Judith into multiple voices. My aims, in separating the voices, were to make use of pre-conceived ideas about oral poets while also subverting them, to provide an accurate-as-possible look at Anglo-Saxon culture and history, and to replicate something of the live storytelling experience by rapidly shifting the mood and tone of the collection through use of strong characters. The voice of the *scop* is of course the voice of the idealised past, relating a heroic tale to which the audience is invited to feel a

personal connection, and from which the audience is meant to learn something. One of Ælfric's stated aims for his original Old English prose translation of *Judith* was that the story should encourage the men of his day to defend their homeland, and in translating this intent, I have favoured the narrative approach of *Deor*, with some alterations. Take the opening poem "the scop introduces the enemy" as example. Unlike in *Widsith* or in *Beowulf's* Finnsburg section, there is no double narration present in "the scop introduces the enemy" – no moment where the poem's narrator introduces a second narrator to relate a story. Instead, as in *Deor*, the narrator aligns himself directly with the events of the text, in this case by using plural pronouns like "we," "us," and "our" to indicate that what he says is an eye-witness account. He is the ultimate voice of authority in this situation. The penultimate line of the poem, however – "...could you have forgiven us for giving up?" – both implicates and alienates the audience. Readers are not invited to be a part of the "us," but they are invited to pass judgement on them. "Would you have done any differently?" is the implied question. The rest of the storyteller strain is designed to lead the audience, through dramatic storytelling, to the idea that giving up was, in fact, the wrong answer – and to keep them from choosing that answer themselves, should they ever be in a situation that requires such a choice. But by not being directly implicated in the story, merely invited to learn from it, the audience can feel confident about what choices they would (now) make without having to feel shamed by the early cowardice of the people of Dryhtenburh – thereby achieving an appropriate recreation of Ælfric's stated intent.

The storyteller strain contains elements of historical and even topographical translation as well. Though intentionally not dated, the poems are based as much on the events of 866-867 AD as related in King Alfred's additions to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* as they are on the Vulgate and Old English versions of *Judith*. In 866, a Viking contingent established itself in Northumbria and was paid a ransom. They wintered in York before moving south into Mercia in the spring, eventually capturing the Mercian capital of Nottingham. In my recreation of the missing beginning of *Judith*, I map the Vulgate description of Holofernes' movements, sieges, and capturing of cities onto the Viking march from Northumbria to Mercia, and adapt the historical event to include the fictional town of Dryhtenburh, located in a fertile flood plain at the junction of the Trent and Humber rivers

that has yielded archaeological evidence of Anglo-Saxon settlements.³⁸³⁹⁴⁰ All this again directs the collection toward Ælfric's intentions for the original Old English *Judith*, and furthers my own aim of incorporating as much cultural and historical authenticity into a fictional work as possible.

The poems in the collection that reflect the imagined perspective of Judith herself are intended to fill in the narrative gaps left in the original poem (and replicated by my storyteller voice) and to probe the myth of the hero. If the storyteller strain is a heroic tale told for a specific purpose, then the Judith voice is intended to expose that purpose and offer an alternative narrative – a different, and ostensibly truer, perspective.

The other voices present in the poem, those of Judith's handmaid, of her people, of Holofernes himself and his followers, are intended to support the translation agendas represented by the primary narrative strains. Judith's handmaiden is mentioned directly only twice in the Old English poem – once when she gathers Holofernes' head into her provision sack, and once when she unwraps the head at Judith's instructions to show to the Bethulians. In those instances, she is described as "pale-cheeked" and "thoughtful." However, she is also included in the collective "the women" when she and Judith leave Holofernes' camp; then, they are both described as "bold in courage" and "fierce-minded." Because of those few details, it is clear that she is with Judith during the attempted rape and beheading, and stands at her side when Judith makes her triumphant return speech; calling her a second-in-command is not really accurate as she gives no commands and takes no charge herself, but she does appear to fit the role of squire. This is especially relevant since Judith is paralleled so directly with Beowulf; her handmaid takes on the role of Wiglaf, the one companion who does not abandon Beowulf in his final battle.

Holofernes' voice appears infrequently in the collection, generally filtered through dialogue from the perspective of other characters. Only twice does he speak for himself, though he is a presence throughout the rest of the collection. I wanted to retain the legendary

³⁸ The fictional city's name of Drhytenburh was inspired by the most probable meaning of Bethulia, the city from source text – 'house of God' (See p. 21.) *Drhyten* is an Old English word indicating a lord or ruler, but was often used in reference to God. *Burh* indicates a walled town or other fortified dwelling; it is a common place-name ending in England and Scotland.

³⁹ During the Anglo-Saxon period, the Humber formed a natural barrier between Northumbria and the kingdoms to the south. From 1989-1991, the University of Nottingham's Department of Archaeology undertook a significant excavation project 8km south of the Humber estuary, in an area overlooking the floodplain of the River Trent, near the modern-day village of Flixborough. Their project overview and a list of publications can be found here: [<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/current/flixborough.aspx>]

³⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, coll. & trans. by Anne Savage (Godalming: Coombe Books, 1996), pp 90-92.

nature of his character and some of the mystery surrounding him, and avoid the tropes of making him into either a sympathetic ‘misunderstood bad guy’ figure, or an overwrought caricature of a bumbling super-villain. I opted to let him filter through the perceptions of others: to the storyteller, he is by turns drunken incompetent and terrifying enemy; to the townspeople, he is an inescapable fate; to his own soldiers, he is a unifying presence until his downfall; to Judith, he is a compelling antagonist; and to her handmaid, he is a man made up of appetites. This parallels his role in other versions of the story as the Ultimate Enemy, standing in for whatever evil threatened the story’s audience at the time of its composition; I will discuss this in more detail in chapter two.

The voices of Judith’s people and Holofernes’ soldiers broaden the scope of the world the more directly plot-related poems create, and dramatise its historical context. As the project developed, I looked for more and more ways to deliver information in as story-driven a manner as possible; to this end, U.S. poet Rita Dove’s 2009 collection *Sonata Mullatica* became a primary inspiration.

Sonata Mullatica dramatizes the life story of violinist George Bridgetower, the son of a white European woman and a black “African Prince” whose musical genius attracted the attention and tutelage of no less a musical luminary than Ludwig van Beethoven.

Bridgetower inspires Beethoven’s most famous violin sonata and seems on track to secure lasting fame until he and his mentor fall out over a woman, and Bridgetower is subsequently erased from history.⁴¹ Very little information is available about Bridgetower’s life. Dove relied heavily on historical texts, documentation surrounding Beethoven himself, and accounts of the court of George III – including the diary of Charlotte Papendiek, a lady-in-waiting and Assistant Keeper of the Queen’s Wardrobe. Dove freely owns that her story, while based absolutely in fact, is also heavily fictionalised – “incidental details, behavioural quirks, and philosophical musings,” she says, “are either full-blown figments of the author’s imagination or are amalgams of truth and fantasy.”⁴² In terms of character, she creates whole and detailed portraits from what amounts to rough, half-faded sketches, but her backdrop, the historical context of her story, is a thoroughly researched exploration of race, class, and power in 18th century Europe.

⁴¹ Beethoven’s *Violin Sonata No. 9* was originally dedicated to George Bridgetower, and debuted by him in 1804. After their falling out, Beethoven erased the original dedication and re-dedicated the sonata to Rodolphe Kreutzer, by whose name the sonata is most commonly known today.

⁴² Rita Dove. *Sonata Mullatica*. Introduction (New York: Norton, 2009).

There were other lyric collections that provided structural inspiration – most notably Catherynne M. Valente’s *Under in the Mere*, Gregory Orr’s *Orpheus & Eurydice*, and Meghan Purvis’ similarly conceptualised 2013 translation of *Beowulf*.⁴³ However, it was ultimately Dove’s collection that I looked to again and again for help in forming answers to several very specific difficulties in translating *Judith* that presented themselves early on. For example: the Old English *Judith* is incomplete. It begins *in medias res* – literally, in fact, mid-sentence.⁴⁴ One knows, quite suddenly, that a person called Judith is in the camp of a warrior called Holofernes, who is throwing a banquet – and Judith is seeking him out. The whys and wherefores of who these figures are and how they’ve come to be where they are are not available. But the Old English *Judith* is far from the only or even the oldest extant version; I assumed I would be able to reference the previous Greek and Latin versions of The Book of Judith to re-create a suitable a beginning. However, it quickly became apparent that this would not be possible, at least not as I had imagined it; the cultural, historical, and religious contexts in which those Judiths existed were not compatible with an Anglo-Saxon Judith whose story had been so thoroughly domesticated by the original Anglo-Saxon poet. To complete the story, then, I would need to complete the domestication – to construct characters and an opening sequence of events that were normalised to an Anglo-Saxon context. I would need to do as Dove had done, and create my characters and events from details gleaned from a wide range of textual sources.

⁴³ Catherynne M. Valente, *Under in the Mere* (St. Paul, Rabid Transit Press, 2009). Valente’s verse novella grafts characters from Arthurian legends onto the archetypes represented by the 22 Major Arcana cards of a tarot deck.

Gregory Orr, *Orpheus & Eurydice: A Lyric Sequence* (Port Townsend, Copper Canyon Press, 2001). Orr’s collection retells the classical Greek tale in a sequence of alternating voices.

Meghan Purvis, *Beowulf* (London: Pinned in the Margins, 2013). Purvis’ collection splits the *Beowulf* story into separate, linked poems, and combines the familiar sort of faithful linguistic translation with innovative poetic style and poems from viewpoints not present in the original narrative.

⁴⁴ *Judith* begins “...tweode/gifena in this ginnan grunde.” ‘Tweode’ is a past-tense meaning ‘she/he/it doubted/hesitated.’ The sentence as it stands reads ‘she doubted [God’s] gifts in this wide world.’ Because of the original Latin and Greek texts, it is supposed that the negating word that would come before the verb is in the missing first half-line. In my prose translation, I have rendered the opening half-line ‘she doubted [not]’.

CHAPTER TWO:
Violent Femmes – Cultural Translation and Gender Representation
in *Beowulf* and *Judith*

The first question I asked before beginning the process of domestication was the simplest to answer, and the most complex to put into practice: who *is* Judith? The simple answer: an Anglo-Saxon woman. Then the inevitable follow-up: what does that mean? Determining the answer to *that* question led, as is often the case, to more questions: how was Judith's narrative viewed by her Anglo-Saxon audience? Did she typify women of her status? Did she stand apart? How is Anglo-Saxon culture enacted through her? The contextual framework needed for answering these questions was enlarged by the fact that *Judith* is itself a translation. Anglo-Saxon Judith differs from the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew Judiths; therefore, to better understand *my* Judith, it was necessary to first navigate the gaps between her various iterations.

The Judith of the Septuagint, the 3rd century BCE Greek translation of the Hebrew Torah, is a pious, sharp-tongued, competent woman who uses both her physicality and her facility with words to defeat Holofernes. Her story has all the hallmarks of an epic tale: a dire situation, an impossible enemy, an unlikely heroine, a gruesome plot twist, and a happy ending. What it lacks is any solid grounding in historical or geographical fact. In the story, Judith and the Israelites are besieged by the Assyrian army, which would place the story in the 6th or 8th century BCE, at the behest of Nebuchadnezzar, an early 6th century BCE Babylonian king, who is said to reign from Nineveh, an Assyrian city that was destroyed long before Nebuchadnezzar's time.⁴⁵ The origin of the hostilities in the Book of Judith is Nebuchadnezzar's war with a neighbouring king, which is not recorded in any historical sources. To confuse matters even more, events from the second half of the narrative would seem to place the events of the Book of Judith even later than any dates mentioned thus far. Centuries of Biblical scholars and historians have debated which historical figure might be the king referenced in the Book of Judith; the common contemporary critical view is that the book is from the Maccabean period of Jewish history, but invokes events from much earlier in that history to draw a parallel between the anti-Semitism of the Persian Period (538-323 BCE, the era from whence comes the Book of Esther and the basis for the Jewish festival of

⁴⁵ Benedikt Otzen, *Tobit and Judith* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 81.

Purim) and the Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BCE).⁴⁶ In this view, Judith's story becomes a politically motivated tale of triumph, composed in a time of religious persecution and rebellion, and Judith herself becomes a symbol for Jewish perseverance. The Book of Judith is also linked, both thematically and structurally, to a variety of earlier Biblical and non-Biblical sources.⁴⁷

By the time, then, that the Book of Judith came into the hands of the Anglo-Saxons, the precedent of Judith-as-allegory had been set. The Anglo-Saxon prose version of the Book of Judith (as opposed to a later Latin translation, also composed in the early English period) was translated by Ælfric of Eynsham, a prolific and highly regarded 10th century homilist. Ælfric was likely not translating from the Greek Septuagint, but from the later Latin Vulgate.⁴⁸ He was also influenced by the long history of Biblical commentary surrounding the Latin translation, which had commonly praised Judith for her chastity and virtue.⁴⁹ Ælfric's intended audience for his homily on the Book of Judith was nuns, and his exegesis of the text in that instance stressed Judith's chastity, faith, eloquence, and wisdom. He also comments on her abnegation of earthly wealth in refusing the riches and spoils of war brought to her by her people after their victory over the Assyrians – in short, Ælfric holds up Judith as a suitable role model for both religious women and noblewomen of the time.

However, Ælfric's second mention of the text, likely a few years later, is very different in purpose. In a letter to Sigeward, a friend and colleague, Ælfric recommends as excellent reading his own *Treatise on the Old and New Testament*, which contained his translation of the Book of Judith. Ælfric briefly outlines the plot of the narrative for Sigeward, and stresses Judith's prowess in battle and decisive victory over her enemy, commending the work to his friend as an example of the importance of defending one's homeland.⁵⁰ Ælfric's homily on the Book of Judith was composed sometime around 1000 CE;

⁴⁶ Otzen, p. 86.

⁴⁷ For a thorough discussion of cultural and literary sources for the Book of Judith, please see chapter 12 of Otzen's *Tobit and Judith* – “Biblical and Non-Biblical Sources of the Book of Judith” – wherein he discusses Judith in the context of the rest of the Old Testament and some books relegated to the Apocrypha. Otzen also explores the ‘rescue story’ genre, of which the Book of Judith is an example, and its influence on Old Testament narrative structure.

⁴⁸ The Vulgate is a late 4th century translation of the Bible into Latin, completed largely by St. Jerome, who was commissioned by Pope Damasus I.

⁴⁹ Heide Estes, “Feasting with Holofernes: Digesting Judith in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Exemplaria* 15.2 (2003), pp. 325-350 (p. 326).

⁵⁰ Catherine Cubbit, ‘Ælfric’s Lay Patrons,’ in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. by Hugh Magennis and Mary Swann (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 165-192 (p. 178).

Mary Clayton, “Ælfric’s *Judith*: Manipulative or Manipulated?” *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), pp. 215-227. Estes, p. 327.

this is also the most likely date put forward for the compilation of the Nowell Codex, the manuscript in which the poem *Judith* is contained.⁵¹ Dating for the poems contained within the manuscript is a matter of some debate. Dates as early as 680 and as late as 990 have been proposed for *Judith*, both of which would place the poem within the scope of works Ælfric could have been familiar with. Regardless of when the poem was composed, it was deemed important enough to include in a collection in the same period when Ælfric was also writing about Judith.

To understand the story's sudden militaristic relevance to tenth century Anglo-Saxon audiences, one need only look at the history of the period. The last decade of the tenth century saw a renewed onslaught of Viking raids and increasing political unrest; what more perfect timing for the story of a besieged, hopeless people and a miraculous heroine? The one problem with Judith as warrior in her new Anglo-Saxon context is, seemingly, her gender. Ælfric discusses the character of Judith as both a role model for women and as a warrior – a realm not traditionally open to women in the early English period. How, then, is Judith's gender to be reconciled with her violent behaviour?

One common critical method of addressing this issue is to view Judith as *Ecclesia* – as a metaphor for the early Christian church.⁵² In such a view, Judith's gender need not be a problem – she is a physical embodiment of the 'bride of Christ', and therefore female, but as a metaphor, her violent actions need not be taken as literal examples for women to emulate. This argument encompasses previous incarnations of the story easily. Judith's name in Hebrew is Yehudit, a feminine form of Judah, which can be translated as 'Let Him be Praised', but also as 'Jewess'.⁵³ Her mythical city of Bethulia is possibly another case of linguistic obfuscation. Modern critics and translators feel the town's name is likely an error in the Greek transcription of the Hebrew phrase *bêt 'lôah*, or 'house of God'.⁵⁴ This links Bethulia with the Temple, and with Jerusalem; Bethulia is *not* Jerusalem, but stands as a

51 John D. Niles, "Locating *Beowulf* in Literary History," *Exemplaria* 5 (1993), pp. 131-162 (p. 143). The Nowell Codex also contains the epic poem *Beowulf*. *Judith* is at the end of the manuscript, immediately following *Beowulf*, but conditions of the original manuscript indicate that this was not always so. It is possible that *Judith* was a later addition, perhaps by the scribe who copied them – *Judith* and the latter half of *Beowulf* are written in the same hand.

52 Paul deLacy, "Aspects of Christianisation and Cultural Adaptation in the Old English *Judith*" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* (Bulletin of the Modern Language Society) 97.4 (1996) pp. 393-410 (pp. 404-407).

The article gives a fairly comprehensive analysis of the various allegorical approaches to *Judith*.

53 Arie Uittenbogaard, *Biblical Name Vault*, (Abarim Publications, 2001-2015), <http://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Judith.html#.VbYGtPIViko> [accessed 27/7/2015]. Obviously in its original Jewish context, the 'Him' would have referred to God, and not to Christ.

54 Otzen, p. 94.

symbol for it, as Judith stands in for the Jewish people.⁵⁵ However, though the Biblical Judith functions as metaphor here, she also continues a long tradition of Biblical heroines. Moses' sister and mother both risk their lives to protect him as a baby; Deborah, in the Book of Judges, helps to lead the Israelites in battle; Queen Esther risks her life to save the Jewish people when her Persian husband is duped into persecuting the Jews by his advisor, Haman; and Jael, Judith's most closely linked narrative counterpart, helped to ensure victory against an enemy army by seducing their general and driving a tent spike through his skull. Sarai and Rebekah are both prominent Old Testament women who use cunning to ensure the continuation of their favoured heirs. These are but a few examples. Old Testament narratives are full of women participating in their own defence, and often engaging in violent offence as well. No such tradition can be readily found in Anglo-Saxon writings, and so Judith is often interpreted as *Ecclesia* so that she can be made to fit within the confines of feminine behaviour as described in works of the same period, such as *Maxims I*.⁵⁶ In this manner, she is usually examined alongside Juliana and Elene, female saints from Anglo-Saxon poems who champion their faith. Juliana refuses to marry a pagan husband and is tortured and eventually martyred for her resolute beliefs; Elene leads an army to Jerusalem and directs them in locating the true cross. Though both women, like Judith, are shown to be skilled in the use of words and cunning, neither of them actually engage in the sort of physical violence for which Judith is famous.

Therefore, while the examination of Judith as a religious metaphor is both valid and useful, it does leave some aspects of her character unexplored. By looking at Judith as an example of Anglo-Saxon womanhood, as Ælfric encouraged his audiences to do, one can begin to unpack her complicated narrative and what it might have to say about the avenues of behaviour, action, and expression actually open to Anglo-Saxon women. Judith the warrior behaves in ways that Judith the saint never could. Certainly a woman like Judith would be the exception rather than the rule, but Anglo-Saxon history is not devoid of women rising to power in the absence of male authority. Though the *Judith* poem was written at a period when a Germanic, tribal past had given way to something more closely resembling early

⁵⁵ Otzen; see "Jerusalem" in *Tobit and Judith* for a thorough discussion of this symbolic linkage, and what it means in the historical and geographical context of the Book of Judith. The setting implies specific authorial engagement with two separate political ages of Jewish history, and allows one to recall the other without overshadowing it.

⁵⁶ *Maxims I-B*, generally considered to have been written in the latter half of the tenth century, outlines the behaviour expected of a noblewoman: that she be gracious, generous, favoured among her people, and full of good counsel for her husband. *Maxims I-A* suggests embroidery as a suitable occupation for women.

English feudalism, holdovers of that identity remain, and can be seen, among other places, in the performance of gender. It is a common theory that the poems in the second section of the Nowell Codex are linked because of their discussion of monsters and monstrosity; Andy Orchard suggests they can also be linked by a preoccupation with what he calls ‘pride and prodigies’: “a twin interest in the outlandish and in the activities of overweening pagan warriors from a distant and heroic past.”⁵⁷ These two themes are of particular importance to *Judith* and *Beowulf*, which, examined together, offer insight into Anglo-Saxon cultural identity, and demonstrate an anxiety over the preservation of that identity. Therefore, to facilitate an exploration of Judith’s gender portrayal and performance in the context of Anglo-Saxon society and culture, I have chosen to compare Judith not with Juliana or Elene, but with the only other woman to commit violence with her own hands in existing Anglo-Saxon poetry: Grendel’s purportedly monstrous mother.

This original approach might not at first seem an obvious or easy comparison to make. One figure is a paragon of virtue and heroic triumph, and the other is regarded as a murderous demon. However, I have used close textual and linguistic analysis to work against the grain of these commonly held habits of reading, and expose some of the gaps between the general conception of each character and how their texts actually portray them. The terminology and adjectives used to describe Judith and Grendel’s mother, and the critical traditions surrounding those words, give insight not only into how each woman was intended to be perceived by her respective audience, but also into how historical and cultural preconceptions affect the process of translation.

This can be seen in even a brief examination of *Beowulf* scholarship to date. Though we can thank J.R.R. Tolkien for the shift in critical approach that allowed *Beowulf* to be viewed as literature rather than solely as artefact, he also set a precedent in reading Grendel’s mother that has been difficult to escape. In Tolkien’s analysis of the text, Beowulf’s fight with Grendel’s mother is subsumed into his fight with Grendel, and Tolkien refuses to engage with Grendel’s mother as a separate entity.⁵⁸ This way of reading has been perpetuated in part by the linguistic choices of subsequent translators. In her chapter contribution to the *Beowulf Handbook*, Alexandra Hennessy Olsen explains that:

⁵⁷ Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 1.

⁵⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, “The Monster and the Critics,” from *The Monster and the Critics, and Other Essays* ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: Harper Collins, 2006), pp. 5-48.

“Grendles modor” (Grendel's mother, 1282a) is often translated as “Grendel's *dam*.” This translation enables the critic to ignore her humanity and womanness by equating her with animals, just as the monstrous nature of Grendel rather than his humanity has often been stressed.⁵⁹

Grendel's mother has been described by critics as “half-bestial,” “evil incarnate,” “troll-dam,” “ogress,” and simply “monster.”⁶⁰ Often, even those who move beyond the critical precedent of viewing Grendel's mother as less than, or at least other than, human still interpret her character negatively; a prime example of this is Jane Chance's analysis of Grendel's mother as a sort of anti-queen, a failed example of an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman, because of the violence she both condones in her son and perpetrates herself as revenge for his death.⁶¹ Because she steps outside the prescribed role of peace-weaver, she becomes monstrous, an anathema.

Recent criticism, however, has begun to explore and support the idea of Grendel's mother as an unnecessarily demonised and even sympathetic character. M. Wendy Hennequin's article “We've Created a Monster: The Strange Case of Grendel's Mother” briefly outlines the most widely cited of those critics, and expands on their position. Hennequin argues that the language of the poem does not support the idea of Grendel's mother as a monster, and instead presents her as a brave and worthy opponent for Beowulf.⁶² Part of her argument examines the terminology surrounding Grendel's mother. She is referred to twice as *ides*. The Bosworth-Toller dictionary glosses this word simply as “a woman.”⁶³ While the Clark Hall dictionary does add “lady or queen” to that definition, it is likely that the word lacks a modern English equivalent.⁶⁴ *Ides* is an Anglo-Saxon word related etymologically to the West Germanic *idis*, the word used to denote a “dignified or well-

⁵⁹ Alexandra Hennessy Olsen, “Gender Roles,” *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), pp. 311-324 (p. 319).

⁶⁰ M. Wendy Hennequin, “We've Created a Monster: The Strange Case of Grendel's Mother,” *English Studies* 89.5, 2008, pp. 503-523, (p. 503, 520).

⁶¹ Jane Chance. “The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The Problem of Grendel's Mother”, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 248-261.

⁶² Hennequin, p. 503.

⁶³ Joseph Bosworth. “Ides,” *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller and Others. Comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý. (Prague, Charles University, 2010) <<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/020436>> [accessed 14 Nov. 2014]. This entry is found on page 586 of the original print work.

⁶⁴ J.R. Clark Hall. “Ides,” *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. 4th Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 202. Hennequin, p. 515.

respected woman”.⁶⁵ However, in Germanic mythology, the *idis*, (pl. *idisi*), was also a figure that fell somewhere between ordinary human and goddess, something like the Scandinavian Valkyrie; an example of this usage of the word can be found in the Old High German Merseberg Charms.⁶⁶ Jacob Grimm, in his multi-volume work *Teutonic Mythology*, proposed a connection between *idisi* and the Norse goddess Iðunn, based upon an etymological linkage between *idis* and the Scandinavian *dísir*, who were similar mythological figures.⁶⁷ Lindow links the *dísir* and the *idisi* to the Latin *matronae* found in North West Europe, and to religious motifs prevalent in Indo-European cultures.⁶⁸ In Anglo-Saxon culture, the word lost the mythological component of its etymological past, but continued to refer only to powerful women, and only in a complimentary light.⁶⁹ One can see the potential for correlation between the use of the term as a word for goddesses and super women, and the use of the term as a poetic device to denote a woman who is especially worthy of note or praise. Grendel’s mother, along with all the other noblewomen and queens mentioned in *Beowulf*, is referred to as *ides*, as well as the more generic *wif*, which always denotes a female human being.⁷⁰

The word that generally stands most firmly in the way of Grendel’s mother’s humanity is the compound *aglæcwif*. Most commonly translated “monster-woman,” the word is made up of *wif* and *aglæca*. Hennequin, citing the arguments and translations of other critics and linguists, points out that the word traditionally is translated as “hero” or “monster,” depending upon whether the word was applied to an antagonist or protagonist, but that the word itself does not directly connote humanity or inhumanity.⁷¹ Hennequin explains that word has been redefined by recent scholarship, based on its use elsewhere in the Anglo-Saxon corpus, to mean “great warrior” or “formidable one.”⁷² In light of this evidence, the

⁶⁵ Rudolf Simek. *A Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, 2nd ed., tr. Angela Hall (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2008) p.171.

⁶⁶ Simek, p. 61.

⁶⁷ Jacob Grimm *Teutonic Mythology Vol I*. (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1882), p. 405, <<https://ia700406.us.archive.org/12/items/teutonicmythol01grimuoft/teutonicmythol01grimuoft.pdf>> [Accessed 14 Nov. 2014].

⁶⁸ John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 224.

⁶⁹ Hennequin, p. 516.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 510, 520. Hennequin’s essay also includes a chart tracking several mistranslated words related to Grendel’s mother, *aglæcwif* among them, across the most popular dictionaries and translations since 1940. There is a steady progression away from the literal “woman warrior” and towards more demonic depictions of Grendel’s mother – the product of modern cultural bias affecting the work of the translator.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 510.

Dictionary of Old English defines the term *aglaecwif* as “female warrior, fearsome woman.”⁷³ Hennequin also lists a host of other adjectives used to describe Grendel’s mother’s braveness, ferocity, and prowess as a fighter – many of which are used elsewhere in the poem to describe male warriors, and even Beowulf himself.⁷⁴

If the character of Grendel’s mother may be rescued from the swamp of monstrosity in order to be viewed as an active participant in Anglo-Saxon culture rather than someone rejected from it, then the character of Judith may be pulled down from clouds of sainthood. Descriptions of Judith in the Old English poem always contain a feminising noun. Like Grendel’s mother, she is *ides*, but she equally as often referred to as *mægþ*. Like *ides*, *mægþ* is almost entirely confined to poetry, and like *ides*, it implies more than just gender.⁷⁵ In addition to “woman,” *mægþ* is also translated as “maiden,” “girl,” or “virgin” – implying youth, virginity, or both. Though the character from the Book of Judith is described as a young widow, the *Judith* poem gives no indication of Judith’s age or marital status aside from the use of the word *mægþ*. The word has cognates in several other Germanic languages that equate to “maiden” or “girl” in their respective tongues, and those cognates are all etymologically related to an Indo-European root word that meant “young person.”⁷⁶ It is possible that the poem intends to allude to Judith’s unmarried and virginal status, but the original tale’s Judith was a widow, and there is no real reason to diverge from that in the poem version – in fact, there were historical precedents that would have argued in favour of a chaste, powerful widow.⁷⁷ An unmarried virgin is not the same as a widow who chooses not to remarry, however, and the poem’s Judith need not be a stranger to sexuality.

The question then becomes one of whether or not Judith knowingly turned her sexuality to her own advantage. Inasmuch as various translations of the Judith story emphasise different aspects of her character, they also sometimes have differing things to say about Judith’s role as seductress. The *Septuagint* describes Judith as “beautiful in appearance

⁷³ Dictionary of Old English Project, *Dictionary of Old English*, on-line ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986-), <<http://doe.utoronto.ca/pages/index.html>> [accessed 14 Nov. 2014].

⁷⁴ Hennequin, p. 509.

⁷⁵ Bosworth-Toller, p. 687.

⁷⁶ Maghos’ *Indo-European Lexicon*, (Austin: University of Texas at Austin), <<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/ielex/X/P1210.html#OE>> [accessed 14 Nov. 2014].

⁷⁷ Æthelflæd, daughter of Alfred the Great and wife of Æthelred of Mercia, ruled Mercia for seven years after husband’s death. She did not remarry, and was a powerful political force in the north and the midlands during the first quarter of the tenth century. Widowed noblewomen also had the option of becoming nuns; a position as abbess would have given them access to money, power, and influence.

and quite lovely to see” (Jd 8.7).⁷⁸ A later scene describes in detail how Judith washed, anointed, and dressed herself before leaving for Holofernes’ camp, stating specifically that her intention was “the charming of the eyes of men, all who would cast eyes upon her.”⁷⁹ The same chapter later describes the reactions of her own people, of Holofernes’ men, and of Holofernes himself, all of whom notice her beauty.⁸⁰ However, while the *Septuagint* Judith is clearly a woman who knows how to dress for the occasion, the text is very certain about the outcome of her seduction: “my face deceived [Holofernes] for his destruction, and that he caused no transgression with me, for defilement and shame.”⁸¹ The *Septuagint* Judith lures Holofernes to his death, but does not actually go to bed with him.

St. Jerome, in his *Vulgate* version of the Book of Judith, presents a very different story of Judith’s sexuality than its counterpart in the Greek tradition. He replaced the assertion that Judith had deliberately dressed to entice men’s eyes with the following translation:

And the Lord also gave her more beauty; because all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality but from virtue and therefore the Lord increased her beauty so that she appeared to all men’s eyes incomparably lovely (Jd. 10.4).⁸²

Though the preceding verses describe Judith’s preparations of clothing and hair in the same way as the *Septuagint*, Jerome’s translation edits out her agency in plotting Holofernes’ downfall, placing control of Judith’s sexuality firmly in God’s hands. One can see the long-lasting effects of this translational choice in the Anglo-Saxon prose *Judith*, addressed as it is to an audience of chaste nuns who are encouraged to view Judith’s surrendering of her physical self to the Lord as allegorical for their own.

Before discussing how these approaches to Judith’s sexuality are translated in the poetic *Judith*, some mention should be made of the only extant Hebrew copies of the text, which come from 5th century CE historical writings and later medieval *midrashim*. Some of

⁷⁸ ‘The Book of Judith’, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, trans. by International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), <<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/18-ioudith-nets.pdf>>, [accessed 29 July 2015]. Referred to hereafter as G-Jd.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.4

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.7, 14-23

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13.16

⁸² The Book of Judith’, *Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible*, (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1899), pp. 524-538. Referred to hereafter as L-Jd.

these re-tellings assert that Judith did in fact sleep with Holofernes before she killed him.⁸³ André Dubarle has speculated, based on various aspects of the Hebrew texts in relation to the Greek and Latin versions, that these versions may represent a separate Hebrew Judith tradition, and that some of their differences reflect elements of Jewish folk tales.⁸⁴ However, while Judith scholars are not in doubt about the existence of a pre-Christian Judith-story tradition, most find Dubarle's reasoning in linking the later medieval Hebrew versions with that tradition fragile at best.⁸⁵ Even if the later medieval Hebrew versions are not significantly linked to older versions of the story, it is worth noting that this broader view of the role of Judith's sexuality in the slaying of Holofernes had crept into historical and religious writings by the 5th century CE – long before Ælfric's prose Book of Judith, and long before even the earliest date for the Anglo-Saxon *Judith* poem.

To determine what the Anglo-Saxon poet makes of Judith's sexuality, one must turn again to linguistic evidence. Though the poetic Judith does not, as she does in the Greek and Latin translations, reassure her people when she returns to them that she has not been defiled by Holofernes, the text makes certain that the reader knows Judith has escaped this fate:

	Ne wolde þæt wuldres Dema
geðafian, þrymnes Hyrde	ac he him þaes ðinges gystyrde
Dryhten dugeða Waldend. ⁸⁶	
	Not would that Glorious Judge
allow it, Guardian God	but he in this thing cut him off,
Wielder of Dugths.	

This Judith, however, does seem to be an active participant in the sexual discourse between herself and Holofernes. Because of the poem's fragmentary nature, we cannot be certain how the poet would have translated the previously discussed crucial statement of Judith's intentions found in chapter ten of the Latin and Greek versions. The actual length of the original poem is a matter of much debate, and we cannot be sure if the poem ever included the events from the first half of the Book of Judith, or if it was always a shorter work focusing specifically on the beheading and ensuing battles. In either case, it is

⁸³ Otzen, p. 140.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 140.

⁸⁶ 'Judith', *Beowulf and Judith*, trans. Richard M. Trask, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), pp. 219-240 (p. 222, l. 59b-61a).

Referred to hereafter as Jd-OE.

reasonable to assume that, if the additional sections of the story were translated, the portrayal of Judith's sexuality in the latter half would match up with the poet's portrayal in the first half, and if the additional sections were not part of the original poem, then the existing evidence must suffice to interpret the poet's stance on Judith as seductress.

The first time Judith is mentioned by more than a feminine pronoun (*heo* or *seo*) in the poem, she is called "*Iudithe...ides ælfscínu....*"⁸⁷ The word *ælfscínu* is an Anglo-Saxon poetic compound made up of *ælf* (elf) and *scíne* (beautiful, bright, fair).⁸⁸ *Ælfscínu* is used only three times in Anglo-Saxon poetry – twice in *Genesis A*, and once in *Judith*. Various translations of the word have been offered, ranging from the contextually and linguistically unrelated "inspired by God," to the somewhat more supported "beautiful and holy," stressing *Judith*'s religiosity. Alaric Hall offers evidence for a different interpretation in his book *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*.⁸⁹ Hall translates the phrase literally as "beautiful as an elf" and examines the context of each usage. Both occurrences of the word in *Genesis A* describe the seductiveness of Abraham's wife Sarah – first in lines 1822-29 when Abraham and Sarah encounter the Pharaoh in Egypt, where Abraham expresses to Sarah that he is afraid one of the warriors will kill him and take her for himself because of her beauty. In the Anglo-Saxon translation from the Vulgate, Abraham uses *ælfscínu* to describe Sarah in this instance. Abraham's worry is later validated when the Pharaoh, filled with lust, takes Sarah for his own wife, and is punished by God. The second time the word is used, in lines 2729-35, repeats the pattern of Abraham's fear and Sarah's abduction, this time with Abimelech, the king of Gerar, who believes Sarah to be Abraham's sister. Abimelech, upon being informed by God of his error, makes reparations to Abraham and releases Sarah; this time, he is the one to describe Sarah as *ælfscínu*.

Sarah is called *ælfscínu* when she is spoken of as being distractingly – almost fatally – beautiful. Judith is *ælfscínu* when she goes out to seduce Holofernes. As discussed previously, the *scínu* element of *ælfscínu* means 'beautiful', etymologically, but there is a strong association between lightness/brightness and female beauty present throughout medieval Germanic-language literature. Consequently, *scínu* carried connotations of and sometimes denoted brightness in medieval English, but Hall argues that, were brightness the most important factor in any of these instances, one would expect a word that more

⁸⁷ Jd-OE, 1. 13-14a.

⁸⁸ Bosworth-Toller, p. 14.

⁸⁹ Alaric Hall. *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), pp. 88-95.

commonly denoted this, such as *tohrt* or *beohrt*.⁹⁰ Indeed, the *Judith* poet commonly uses both of these words to refer to Judith throughout the rest of the poem. One must assume, then, that ‘beautiful’ is the primary connotation of *scínu* in each of these instances. What remains to uncover, then, is how *ælf* modifies the beauty of Judith and Sarah.

Hall assesses the noun + adjective relationship present in *ælfscínu* as one of comparison, related to other compound words such as *gærs-gréne* (‘grass-green’, or ‘green as grass’) and *hrím-ceald* (‘frost-cold’, or ‘cold as frost’), and suggests that Sarah and Judith represent paradigmatic examples of beauty in the same way that frost represents a paradigmatic example of cold. “*Hrím-ceald* may tell us that frost is cold,” he argues, “but its function within the lexicon is to denote a specific severity of coldness.”⁹¹ The word, then, would appear to draw on the often negative or malignant connotations of *ælf* in Anglo-Saxon, and suggest that Sarah and Judith are, as Hall concludes, “beautiful in a dangerously seductive way.”⁹² The physical description of Judith as she is fetched to Holofernes’ tent is ‘*beagum gehlaste/hringum gehrodne*’ (bracelet burdened/ring adorned”), which parallels the detailed scene, not present in the poem, of Judith adorning herself to meet Holofernes from chapter ten, verse three of the Book of Judith.⁹³ Hall suggests that, because of the supernatural nature of *ælf*, the use of the word *ælfscínu* may parallel Jerome’s assertion in the Vulgate translation that Judith’s beauty is enhanced by God and therefore virtuous. This argument, however, would seem to contradict the associations of ‘beautiful but deadly’ already ascribed to the word, and does not factor in the word’s usage to describe Sarah, about whom no such statements of supernaturally-enhanced beauty are made. Rather, Sarah’s beauty, albeit a cause for worry, seems to be inherently her own, as Judith’s is in the *Septuagint* Book of Judith. Neither woman is condemned for being physically attractive. Sarah is portrayed as a passive victim of men’s lust rather than a seductress, and God’s wrath falls on the men who steal her from her husband, not on Sarah herself for being an object of desire. Judith’s role is more active. The B verse of the line describing Judith as *ides ælfscínu* contains the word *gesohte*, a conjugated form of the verb *sécan*.⁹⁴ While Judith’s stated intention to seduce Holofernes from chapter ten of the Book of Judith is missing from the

⁹⁰ Hall, p. 92

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹³ Jd-OE, l. 36b-37a.

⁹⁴ Bosworth-Toller, p. 854.

poem, the poem does tell us that Judith, adorned with jewellery, sought out Holofernes with the intent to do him harm.

That intent, of course, highlights the second aspect of Judith's character that might have been hard for medieval Anglo-Saxons to swallow: her physical violence, that trait she shares with Grendel's mother. The last section of this chapter will further examine the social, political, and cultural contexts of *Judith* and *Beowulf*, and analyse both Judith's and Grendel's mother's behaviour in terms of gender performance. My arguments will proceed from the idea that all gender *is* performance, and that gender identity is socially constructed based upon what behaviour society at large deems acceptable and expected of men and women. I argue that Judith and Grendel's mother, in being performatively male, find ways to also become culturally male. In this way, Judith's violence becomes understood, contextualised, and acceptable, and Grendel's mother, while considered an enemy, is condemned for larger reasons of collective cultural identity, and not because of her performatively male actions.

It is, at first glance, difficult to reconcile Judith's homiletic history as a figure of chastity and *Ecclesia* with Ælfric's sudden recommendation of her as a martial figure. Ian Pringle, in his essay "Judith: The Homily and the Poem," offers a context for these two disparate ideas by examining the predominant religious mind-set of tenth century Anglo-Saxon England.⁹⁵ The Vikings, he contends, were often regarded either as pitiable people who had no chance at salvation because of their denial of divine truths, or as "embodiments or manifestations of diabolical forces," the enemies of God given human form.⁹⁶ If the Vikings were often thought of as the unwitting instruments of the devil, then the English, by contrast, could align themselves on the side of God. In this mind-set, military action becomes linked to religious faith, and engaging in battle with Viking invaders could be seen as a literal embodiment of a Christian's eternal battle against evil. Pringle goes on to elaborate on this connection, discussing the opinion expressed by homilists and religious leaders of the day that the renewed Viking raids were a direct punishment from God for the spiritual laxity of the English.⁹⁷ Ælfric himself expressed this viewpoint in his homily on the prayer of Moses, wherein he attributes the Viking attacks to the collapse of the monastic system.⁹⁸ Thus Ælfric's suggestion to Sigweard that Judith be held up as an example to men to defend their

⁹⁵ Ian Pringle, 'Judith: The Homily and the Poem', *Traditio* 31 (1975), pp. 83-97.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

homeland is not as contradictory to his previous treatment of the story as it appears; from his perspective, the invisible, spiritual battle of avoiding sin and the physical, martial defence against Viking invaders were one and the same.

Pringle's poetic analysis of *Judith* also aligns with this argument. He highlights the poem's parallel structure, disregarding the unquantifiable missing portion of the poem and dividing the remaining text into two halves, the first half of which underscores Ælfric's use of Judith as an example of virtue, and the second half which sees Judith's virtuous behaviour carried out on a national scale in the form of battle against an invading enemy.⁹⁹ In the first half of the story, Pringle argues, Judith and Holofernes are paralleled as the obvious embodiments of good and evil, and Judith's brave handmaiden is set up as a counterpoint to the un-named captain who dares to break the rules by entering his leader's tent to wake him, but fails to lead the army as second in command when he finds Holofernes dead, thus indicting his own commander with his display of cowardice.¹⁰⁰ The second half of the narrative moves away from the individual characters and concerns itself with armies. The Assyrian army is portrayed as largely incompetent after the death of their leader, in comparison to the advancing Hebrew forces, who have been inspired by Judith's speech upon returning victorious from the enemy camp.¹⁰¹ Pringle concludes by suggesting that the careful structure of the poem both demonstrates the relevance of Ælfric's interpretations of Judith's story, and underscores Ælfric's main point: that the Anglo-Saxons could never hope to defeat their physical enemy unless they had addressed their spiritual deficiencies first.¹⁰²

It should be noted that the *Judith* poem's treatment of the battle scenes contained therein is original to the poet. The Vulgate version specifically states that the Assyrians fled before there could be a battle, and none of the commentaries up to and including Ælfric elaborated on the story by adding a battle scene.¹⁰³ The poet also expands upon the beheading scene, drawing out the violence and suspense as much as is reasonable for an audience likely to be already familiar with his story. This bit of storytelling flair upon a detail mentioned only in passing in the Vulgate – namely, that Judith took two blows to sever Holofernes' head – makes it easy to link the beheading scene with the two-pronged Hebrew attack in the second half of the poem. With these physical elements thus emphasised, and with the parallel

⁹⁹ Pringle, p. 97.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁰³ L-Jd.15:1-3; Pringle, p. 95.

between personal action and national responsibility thus drawn, it is worth considering the poem in the context of the tenth century political climate alone, untwinned from religious considerations. David Chamberlain touches on this in his essay on the fragmentary nature of the *Judith* poem. He cites several examples of linguistic evidence that demonstrate how the language used to describe the Bethulian and Assyrian peoples in the poem is the same vocabulary used to describe the English and Viking peoples, as well as foreign invaders in general, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.¹⁰⁴ Details of Judith's behaviour also indicate a poet in touch with the current political climate. The poetic Judith does not sit through Holofernes' drunken feast, as Vulgate Judith does. While this could be a storytelling technique used to heighten the tension of Judith being brought to Holofernes' tent without knowledge of his plans for her, Chamberlain suggests that this might have been a move made so that Anglo-Saxon noblewomen could more easily identify with Judith.¹⁰⁵ In a similar vein, he mentions that, though in the Vulgate version it is Judith herself who removes the bloody head from the bag, it is Judith's handmaid who does so in the poem. Gone also is the display of the head on the city walls, a custom "not commonly practiced by Anglo-Saxons in the tenth century."¹⁰⁶ It is also important to note that the character of Ozias, the cowardly ruler of Bethulia who had planned to surrender to Holofernes, is not present in the poem; therefore, when Judith steps in, she is filling a power vacuum, not usurping power from an ineffectual male leader.¹⁰⁷ This omission, in addition to tightening the plot by incorporating fewer characters, ensures that Judith's behaviour can be held up as an example to Anglo-Saxon noblemen as well, without directly shaming them.

Chamberlain proposes the political situation present in England from 990 to 1010 as a likely source of inspiration for the poem.¹⁰⁸ The first instances of Danish invasion, begun in 793 with the raiding of the abbey at Lindisfarne, were finally halted after the defeat of the Northumbrian Danes at the Battle of Tettenhall in 910, and the next several decades often saw Vikings defeated in battle. However, a second wave of invasions began in 981, and the Vikings continued to be a real and constant threat until 1066.¹⁰⁹ Ælfric's sermons and

¹⁰⁴ David Chamberlain, "Judith: A Fragmentary and Political Poem," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson and Delores W. Frese, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 135-159 (p. 157).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey Hindley, *A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, (London: Robinson, 2006), xxvi, pp. 176-204.

homilies were written during this period, as were sermons by Wulfstan on many of the same themes. The *Chronicle* reports tense fighting, with leaders actually fleeing the battlefield, from 980 to 994, a period which could easily have inspired both the writing of the poem and Ælfric's martial interpretation of it.¹¹⁰ Chamberlain's and Pringle's analyses of both the text of the poem and of existing *Judith* scholarship lead them to complementary conclusions; taken together, they provide a perspective of Judith that allows one to view her simultaneously as religious allegory and as exemplar of Anglo-Saxon cultural and political life.

But what of Judith the person, the individual participant in a larger cultural context? She moves between the traditionally masculine and the traditionally feminine, sometimes a peace-weaver and sometimes a warrior, but always clearly, demonstrably Anglo-Saxon. In being absent from Holofernes' feast, and in exhorting her menfolk to battle after she has returned with the head, but not actually leading men onto the battlefield herself, Judith is performing fairly familiar female roles from Anglo-Saxon epic poetry, but her assumption of authority, the beheading of her enemy, and her acceptance of spoils of war at the end of the poem are in the realm of masculine activity. Erin Mulally offers explanation for this by examining the system of gift exchange upon which the enactment of Germanic warrior culture was based.¹¹¹ She argues that it is not so much Judith's transformation from "passive to aggressive, nor from 'masculine' to 'feminine'" that is noteworthy, but her transition "from 'possessed' to 'possessor'."¹¹² Judith, she says, moves from being an object to be possessed by Holofernes to a possessor of objects – namely, her enemy's head and the treasure she is awarded after the final battle.¹¹³ Once she becomes a possessor of objects of value, Judith can participate in the – generally male – system of exchange wherein goods signify social status.

Mulally explains that the gift exchange, as it existed in Anglo-Saxon culture, consisted of "an obligation to give, an obligation to receive, and an obligation to reciprocate."¹¹⁴ The gift exchange differs from other sorts of direct exchange and, indeed, from commerce, in both the obligation to reciprocate, and the further stricture to reciprocate

¹¹⁰ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, coll. & trans. by Anne Savage (Godalming: Coombe Books, 1996), pp. 14-145.

¹¹¹ Erin Mulally, 'The Cross-Gendered Gift: Weaponry in the Old English Judith', *Exemplaria* 17.2 (2005), pp. 255-284.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

in kind. For example, a commodity exchanged for its basic monetary value would not be considered a gift exchange. The important factor is the social debt created, not economic balance. “Though the object itself is never irrelevant,” Mulally explains, “it is rarely the focus of or purpose for exchange...the type of objects chosen for exchange, and the social situations that demand exchange, inform our understanding of any particular culture.”¹¹⁵

To understand how Judith operates in the economy of gift exchange, it is first useful to examine how Holofernes, a male who already possessed objects, functioned within it. As a war leader, he is meant to be the ‘ring-giver, the ‘gold-friend of men’ who generously rewards his soldiers; as Mulally points out, “he is literally a man whose relationships are predicated on his ability to give.”¹¹⁶ However, the *Judith* poem’s portrayal of Holofernes shows him to be a leader who gives in excess. As a leader, he is obligated to present wine to his retainers, but Holofernes’ feast is a riotous mess:

Ða wearð Holofernus,
 goldwine gumena, on gytosalum,
 hloh ond hlydde, hlynede ond dynede,
 þæt mihten fira bearn feorran gehyran
 huse stiðmoda stymde ond gylede,
 modig ond medugal, manode geneahhe
 bencsittende þæt hi gebærdon wel.¹¹⁷

Then was Holofernes,
 the gold-friend of men, gladdened by drink.
 He bellowed with laughter, roared and rioted,
 that mighty chief of men, and far off was heard
 how that stubborn man stormed and shouted,
 merry and mead-drunk, and bid
 his bench-sitters to beer themselves well.

The descriptors here turn quickly from the celebratory merry laughter and loud boisterousness to a negative depiction of rage, yelling, and arrogance. His men do not fare any better for the proffered gift of wine:

Swa se inwidda ofer ealne dæg

¹¹⁵ Mullaly., p. 259.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 269.

¹¹⁷ Jd.-OE, l. 21b-27.

dryhtguman sine drencte mid wine,
swiðmod sinces brytta, oðþæt hie on swiman lagon,
oferdrencte his duguðe ealle, swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene,
agotene goda gehwylces¹¹⁸

So the evil one, over the whole day
drenched his warriors with wine,
that stern-minded treasure-giver, so that they swooned,
so over-drunk was his duguð, as if they had been slain.

Their death-like stupor is a deliberate foreshadowing of the actual death awaiting them by the poem's end, and the metaphor here squarely accuses Holofernes of being the cause of that destruction. His excessive giving has skewed the gift exchange; as Mulally points out, Holofernes' men have no choice but to accept their lord's gift, but "their acceptance renders them incapable of reciprocity."¹¹⁹ They are unable to render unto Holofernes the service they owe him.

Holofernes' excess clearly leads to his own downfall as well; it is because of his drunkenness that Judith is presented with such an open opportunity to murder him. The passage from the poem describing the beheading foregrounds Judith's active role here, drawing out the scene wherein she seizes Holofernes by the hair and drags him into position on the bed. Mulally, in her analysis of the beheading scene, draws attention to the word *bysmerlice*, used as an adverb to describe how Judith enacts those verbs upon Holofernes' person, and discusses the translational considerations surrounding it. Some critics maintain that the word specifically denotes lust or shame of a sexual nature, and others argue for simply 'shame' or 'derision'.¹²⁰ In my own translation, I have agreed with Mulally and those in the 'shameful' camp by translating *bysmerlice* as "shamefully" or "mockingly". However, Mulally feels that the text is ambiguous about to whom the shame applies here – is Holofernes mocked because he has been made to submit to a woman, or is Judith shameful because she has taken on an active, performatively male role? Though the text does not specifically state who is shamed in this act of beheading, I believe a clear case can be made for concluding that Holofernes is the intended recipient of the adverb's ire. At no other point is Judith shamed for her actions in the poem – she is not condemned for leaving her people to

¹¹⁸ Jd-OE, l. 28-32a.

¹¹⁹ Mulally, p. 269.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 271.

enact her own plan, she is met with rejoicing upon her return with Holofernes' head, and she is given Holofernes' treasure and armour as the spoils of war at the end of the poem. The poet also expands the beheading scene from the original Vulgate text – while the description of Judith striking two blows to completely sever Holofernes' head is consistent with the Vulgate version, the Anglo-Saxon poem expands the event from one line in the Vulgate version to nine graphically descriptive lines in the poem, leaving the reader unable to escape the fact that Judith is an active, violent participant in the poem's dramatic climax. It seems unlikely that the poet would draw out and emphasise Judith's role in the beheading, praise the action in the content of the Bethulians' and Judith's own speeches, and refer to the scene consistently as a 'battle' if the intent were to imply that Judith has abandoned her femininity in a shameful way by moving from passive possession to aggressive possessor. Pringle's arguments about the use of the poem as a vehicle for encouraging resistance to Danish invaders support this argument as well. The men Ælfric refers to in his letter to Sigeward were intended to identify with Judith, not be shamed by her. As I will explain below, Judith's gender, when she reports on her victory to the Bethulians, is de-emphasised in relation to her violent action. The shame of the moment of beheading falls on Holofernes as a failed leader, and as the enemy of both God and man, and not on Judith for having stepped into a position of power that was left vacant.

After this dramatic moment in the text, Judith is left with an object of value – Holofernes' head. As Mulally points out, the head “serves as both a gift to the Behtulians and as a sign of a larger gift, victory in battle.”¹²¹ The head has no monetary value, but as a sign of the defeat of one enemy, and as the signal of the potential for a much larger victory, it is vital. As an example of similar usage, Mulally recalls that Beowulf, after defeating Grendel, brings back only his head to Hrothgar, as a symbol of “the fragility of an almost mythical enemy.”¹²²

By bringing the head back to the Bethulians, Judith enters into the typically masculine exchange system demonstrated in *Beowulf*, and in the Icelandic Sagas. Drawing further parallels with *Beowulf*, Mulally notes how poetic Judith, in contrast to Vulgate Judith, does not touch the head of the enemy she has killed – instead, she has her handmaid, standing in for Beowulf's four men, reveal the head to the Bethulians. Judith then delivers a speech to the Bethulians, entreating them to gaze upon the head, to see what she has done for them, and to

¹²¹ Mulally, p. 273.

¹²² Ibid., p. 274.

view the head as a “bloody sign” of victory. Mary Godfrey compares this section of the poem to *Beowulf* as well, describing how the returns of both heroes are occasions “for exhortation and display: the demonstration of rhetorical finesse and successful martial prowess...summoned up through the visible sign of the decapitated head.”¹²³ Vulgate Judith’s post-reveal speech derides the men present for allowing a woman to do their job for them; the Anglo-Saxon Judith engages in no such gender-shaming. Rather, she speaks of herself as God’s instrument – the “chosen one,” Mulally calls her, through whom God has decided to enact his will.¹²⁴ Mulally highlights the contrast between Judith’s downplay of gender and the Vulgate narrative’s foregrounding of it, explaining that Vulgate Judith proclaims that Holofernes has died “by the hand of a woman,”¹²⁵ echoing the phrasing used in Judges 4:9, when Deborah prophesies that Sisera will die “by the hand of a woman” (Judges 4:9).¹²⁶ “Emphasising the gender of the slayer,” Mulally explains, is the method by which the narrative portrays God’s power.¹²⁷ By contrast, the Anglo-Saxon Judith simply states, “I forced him from life,” and assures the Bethulians that they will achieve victory through her hand.¹²⁸ The death of Holofernes and the ensuing victory for the Bethulians are only possible through Judith, but her gender is not deemed relevant to her success here.

In the system of exchange, the Bethulians, who have received a gift in the form of Holofernes’ head, are now obliged to reciprocate. They do so by relinquishing to Judith Holofernes’ sword, helmet, armour, and all the loot that he had amassed. Gillian Overing explains the significance of the nature of gift brought to Judith:

...treasures form a moral, emotional currency as well: they approve [the hero’s] actions and complement his courage, they express the sentiments of the giver, and transmit honour to the receiver...Treasure squires significance through its distribution.¹²⁹

¹²³ Mary Godfrey, “*Beowulf* and *Judith*: Thematizing Decapitation.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 35.1 (1993), pp. 1-43 (p. 5).

¹²⁴ Mulally, p. 277.

¹²⁵ L-Jd. 13:19

¹²⁶ King James Bible Online, ‘Book of Judges’, *The Holy Bible*, (Cambridge: 1769), King James Bible Online, 2015 < <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Judges-Chapter-4/>>, [accessed 29 July, 2015].

¹²⁷ Mulally, p. 277.

¹²⁸ Jd-OE, l.185b. “ic him ealdor oðþrong”

¹²⁹ Gillian Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 43.

In the bestowing of battle treasure, Judith's worth as a warrior has been legitimised. In contrast to Anglo-Saxon Judith, Vulgate Judith received Holofernes' domestic goods – his tent, plateware, and furniture – and explicitly refused his armour and weaponry. She also returns to her position of chaste widowhood, remaining unmarried until her death. Many Anglo-Saxon commentators upheld Vulgate Judith's desire not to clothe herself in the enemy's armour and finery as an example of humility and chastity. The Anglo-Saxon poetic version ends with Judith's acceptance of Holofernes' armour, weaponry, and treasure, and does not comment further on what becomes of Judith. Regarding this end, Mulally suggests that it “recalls the gendered associations of weaponry in the gnomic verse – ‘the shield shall be for the warrior.’”¹³⁰ By accepting Holofernes' weaponry and not re-donning her widow's weeds, Judith becomes linked with a masculine social position.

The tale ends with Judith as the possessor of treasure. If she has now entered into the Anglo-Saxon warrior system of exchange, then she has both given to and received from her people. But recall the cyclical nature of the exchange – Judith would now be expected to reciprocate. And “having given Judith armour,” Mulally concludes, “the Bethulians acknowledge that they expect a particular type of reciprocation – martial prowess.”¹³¹ The implications of Judith's ability to engage in this system of exchange are that gender might be less relevant to heroic status than the ability to give and receive treasure.¹³² Therefore, while Judith's gender might make it more difficult for her to participate in such a cultural system, it does not completely bar her from it.

The task of demonstrating a similar cultural participation enacted by Grendel's mother is made more difficult by her status as antagonist, but is not made impossible. The friction here comes not from Grendel's mother's position as ‘enemy’, but from the friction generated by her enactment of social mores that she and Beowulf share. Having established linguistically that the textual descriptions of monstrousness that apply to Grendel do not extend to his mother, the task remains to demonstrate how her behaviour also differs from that of her murderous son. Hennequin says of the criticism surrounding Grendel's mother's behaviour that she is condemned because she “does not behave like Wealtheow, Hygd, or Hildeburh, whom scholars consider to be proper models of womanhood.”¹³³ There are also other factors to consider. Grendel's mother, while not necessarily monstrous, is certainly

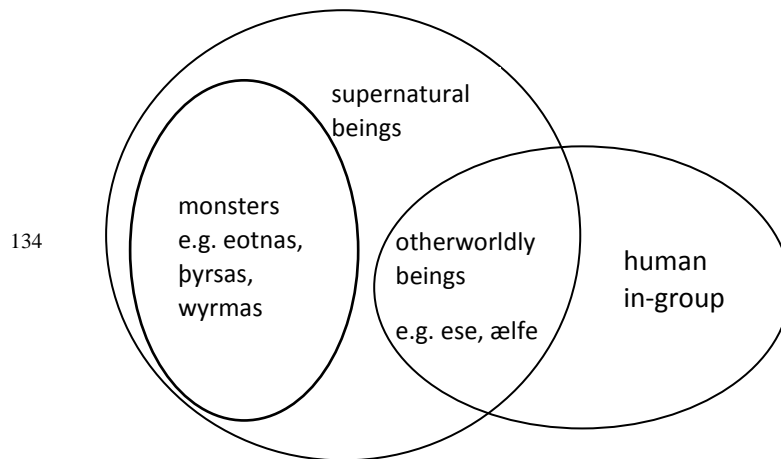
¹³⁰ Mulally, p. 281.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 284.

¹³² Ibid., p. 284.

¹³³ Hennequin, p. 504.

supernatural. This alone would not normally be enough to assign a being the label of “evil,” but *Beowulf* is particularly conservative in this respect. In investigating the nature of *ælfes* in Germanic mythology and literature, Hall has found that the earliest Scandinavian evidence for the relation of humans, *ælfes*, and monsters is echoed in the earliest, pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon evidence, and that that evidence suggests that *ælfes* were human-like, supernatural creatures aligned with humans in a semantic and systematic opposition to monsters. He expresses the relationship between these three states of being in the field diagram below:



What the diagram demonstrates is that while elves could commit evil acts as easily as any human could, they were not automatically deemed inherently evil for racial reasons. Evidence of this traditionally positive view of elves is born out in early Anglo-Saxon personal and place names, but becomes more complicated in the literature.¹³⁵ The one certain reference to elves in *Beowulf* comes in line 112, in a section describing Grendel’s origins. Elves are mentioned in the same breath as sea-monsters and giants, and all are described as enemies of God, the cursed result of Cain’s slaying of Abel. But what does this mean for Grendel’s mother, who is not an elf, nor explicitly linked with Cain’s kin in the way that her offspring is? A potential answer lies in understanding the cultural placement of *Beowulf*.

Tolkien asserted that *Beowulf* “was inspired by the debate that had long been held and continued after...: shall we or shall we not consign the heathen ancestors to perdition?”¹³⁶ At the heart of *Beowulf* is a crisis of identity – a continental, Germanic, pre-Christian past mingled with an English and increasingly Christianised present. The alignment of all supernatural beings with monsters in *Beowulf* can be seen as an effort on the part of the

¹³⁴ Hall, p. 67, Fig. 5.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

¹³⁶ Tolkien, p. 23.

Beowulf poet to reject non-Christian mythological elements; a similar demonization of elves is present in an 8th century Royal Prayer Book and the Old Saxon Catechism from later in the same period.¹³⁷ The most likely proposed dates for *Beowulf* are the 8th and 9th centuries, which would place it as a contemporary to the Prayer Book and the Catechism.¹³⁸ These examples, however, need not necessarily imply that the coming of Christianity caused a radical shift in religious mind-set, or in developing Anglo-Saxon culture. The formation of the kingdom of Northumbria, as related by Bede, was begun by Æthelfrith, a pagan warlord Bede seemed to much admire. Æthelfrith was followed by Edwin, another pagan who converted some years after marrying a Christian princess, but sent the land into turmoil with his death at the hands of a neighbouring pagan king. Edwin's bishops fled, and the rules of two other territories north of the Humber reverted to paganism, no doubt taking some of their people with them and undoing the work of the mass baptisms that had followed Edwin's own conversion. Edwin was eventually followed by Oswald, who ostensibly converted to Christianity as well; however, when he too was slain in battle by a rival pagan king in 642, he became the focus of a sort of royal cult – a blend of saint and pagan icon.¹³⁹ This sort of religious back-and-forth is evidenced in the histories of many Anglo-Saxon territories, and the seam created by the stitching together of older Germanic traditions and beliefs with new Christian ideas was palpable for centuries. Furthermore, Hall argues that evidence attesting traditional Scandinavian beliefs suggests that “an individual might seek the patronage of one god, and both criticise other gods and face their displeasure.”¹⁴⁰ The evidence of evil elves in the Royal Prayer Book, the Old Saxon Catechism, and *Beowulf* can be understood in the same way: the transfer of adherence from one belief system to another, and the denigration of the previous belief system, while not denying the existence of the gods, monsters, and supernatural beings of the previous system of belief.¹⁴¹ It is therefore likely that the demonization of elves was a slow and by no means all-encompassing process. The tension between the two perspectives on elves remains apparent in later Anglo-Saxon literature, and the switch in the characterization of elves from positive to negative was never as complete as the pejoration undergone by cognates in Continental West Germanic cultures.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Hall, pp. 71, 73.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

¹³⁹ Hindley, pp. 60-91.

Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 96-128.

¹⁴⁰ Hall, p. 73.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 74.

Grendel's mother, then, is caught in the cross-fire of this meeting of ideologies, but the struggle for identity in *Beowulf* encompasses more than just religion. The very fabric of Germanic warrior culture is being questioned. Grendel's mother operates within a codified system of behaviour just as Judith does, but it is a system that the poet would like to reject. Beowulf must defeat Grendel's mother because of what she represents rather than because of any inherent evilness on her part, and she can be interpreted as a worthy antagonist.

Hennequin's article cites a number of critics who consider Grendel's mother to be a poor warrior whose attack on Hrothgar's mead hall failed.¹⁴³ There is, however, no clear basis for regarding her as such, or for assuming that her aim in attacking Hrothgar was not met. Hennequin demonstrates Grendel's mother's effectiveness by looking at the descriptions of the battle, and of Beowulf's preparations for it. She first references the moment when the men asleep in the mead hall awake and realise that Grendel's mother is among them:

Wæs se gryre læssa
 efne swa micle swa bið mægþa cræft,
 wiggryre wifes be wæpnedmen,
 þonne heoru bunden hamere geþruen,
 sweord swate fah swin ofer helme
 ecgum dyhtig andweard scireð.
 Her onslaught was less
 only by as much as an amazon warrior's
 strength is less than an armed man's
 when the hefted sword, its hammered edge
 and gleaming blade slathered in blood.¹⁴⁴

Hennequin notes two things regarding this passage: first, that it invites the audience to compare the strength of male and female warriors, thus implying that the latter was, at least, a familiar idea to the poem's audience; and secondly, that it compares the terror felt by opponents when attacked by female warriors versus male warriors, and *not* the strength and effectiveness of those warriors.¹⁴⁵ She follows on, quoting the next few lines of the text, and suggests that the men attacked don't actually seem any less terrified of Grendel's mother than they did of Grendel:

¹⁴³ Hennequin, p. 505.

¹⁴⁴ *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, Trans. Seamus Heaney, (New York: Norton, 2000), l. 1282b-87.

¹⁴⁵ Hennequin, p. 506.

Ða wæs on healle heardecg togen
 sweord ofer setlum, sidrand manig
 hafen handa fæst helm ne gemunde,
 byrnan side þa hine se broga angeat.
 Then in the hall, hard-honed swords
 were grabbed from the bench, many a broad shield
 lifted and braced; there was little thought of helmets
 or woven mail when they woke in terror.¹⁴⁶

As further evidence of Grendel's mother's worthiness, Hennequin discusses Beowulf's preparations to go after her, citing how he covered himself in armour and armed himself with a legendary sword – despite having already fought and defeated Grendel using only his bare hands. Beowulf's reasoning for not wearing armour or using weapons in his fight with Grendel had been Grendel's ignorance of such things – that he, Beowulf, was a match for Grendel's strength and, because Grendel knew nothing of swordplay or the art of war, Beowulf would not take advantage of those things to defeat him.¹⁴⁷ Beowulf's use of weapons and armour in the fight with Grendel's mother implies that she understood those things and could be expected to use them – which she does, to great effect. Between armed combat and unarmed wrestling, Grendel's mother gives Beowulf more of a challenge than her son had.

During the battle in the mere, the terminology used to describe Grendel's mother alters. She is referred to by masculine pronouns, and described by adjectives used to describe the prowess of other male warriors in the poem. One might assume this is because of her assumption of a male role in engaging in a physical fight with Beowulf, but there are other factors at work here as well. Before his death, Grendel should have been the ruler of the underwater hall in which his mother fights Beowulf, but Hrothgar specifically says that it is Grendel's mother “who, sword-greedy, held the floods' circuit for a hundred half-years” – the same length of time that Hrothgar and Beowulf ruled their kingdoms, respectively.¹⁴⁸ Hrothgar also uses the male pronoun to refer to Grendel's mother here, indicating that leadership is another typically male cultural activity into which Grendel's mother has entered, making up for the lack of a male counterpart capable of doing so (Grendel, who is portrayed

¹⁴⁶ *Beowulf*, l. 1288-91.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 677-85a

¹⁴⁸ Hennequin, p. 511.

as something closer to a rabid animal than to a human male, could certainly not have ruled in her stead, and no other male Grendelkin are mentioned in the poem). Like Judith, she appears to have stepped into a power vacuum rather than to have usurped power for herself.

This explains her motives, then, in attacking Hrothgar's hall. The text recognises several times that Grendel's mother attacks for revenge rather than for joy at killing, and her reasons for doing so are understood.¹⁴⁹ It was a cultural tradition for male relatives to exact revenge on the murderer of a slain relative, but again, in the absence of a male figure capable of doing so, Grendel's mother must step in to seek revenge for her murdered son. While Grendel is something otherworldly and violent, descended from the cursed Cain, his mother appears to operate within the same culture, laws, and moral codes as Hrothgar and Beowulf.

Why, then, must Grendel's mother be condemned for her participation in masculine culture where Judith is celebrated? The answer lies in a central theme of the *Beowulf* narrative and in the complicated nature of blood feuds and vengeance compensation. The concept of *wergild* or 'man-price' was meant to be a curtailment to the sort of generationally-protracted feuds that could arise from two families constantly seeking revenge for the death or severe injury of a relative. A *wergild* payment was a monetary compensation rendered to the family of the murdered or injured person to curtail that family from seeking revenge in the form of reciprocal murder or harm. Anglo-Saxon law codes attest to what sort of price would be due, based upon factors such as gender, social class, and leadership standing.¹⁵⁰ Where a family was not offered *wergild*, vengeance might legally be pursued. It is clear that these ideas persisted for a long time in Anglo-Saxon culture. A 10th century law enacted by King Edmund sought to limit the vengeance option by stating that the family of an unlawfully killed person could exact revenge only on the murderer himself, and only after a period of twelve months in which the offending family had been unable or unwilling to pay compensation.¹⁵¹ Later laws of King Alfred sought even further restrictions.¹⁵²

When Grendel is murdered, no *wergild* is likely to be forthcoming for his mother. Grendel's mother, acting out of a sense of vengeance, seeks out a single target for revenge, rather than engaging in a bloody free-for-all like her son. The man she kills, Æscher, is a favourite of Hrothgar's, his counsellor and companion in a lifetime of battles. When Beowulf

¹⁴⁹ *Beowulf*, l. 1278, 1333, 1337b-40, 1383-85.

¹⁵⁰ Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), pp. 38-47, 83-86, 97, 108.

¹⁵¹ Sally Crawford, *Daily Life in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2009), p. 209.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 209; Whitelock, p. 40.

realises that he will have to avenge Æscher's death and kill Grendel's mother, the poem's narrator makes his only comment concerning any of the actions of Grendel's mother:

Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til,
þæt hie on ba healfa bicgan scoldon
freonda feorum!
The bargain was hard,
both parties having to pay
with the lives of friends.¹⁵³

It is the feud itself and the loss of life that are condemned, not Grendel's mother. Vengeance is a bad bargain, and neither side is benefiting here.

Beowulf, however, appears to disagree. Before leaving to slay Grendel's mother, he tells Hrothgar that it is better to seek revenge than to mourn a fallen friend; clearly, he subscribes to the heroic code that demands blood pay for blood.¹⁵⁴ This theme of revenge, and the ultimate unhappy outcome of it, are rendered again when Beowulf gives Hrothgar the broken hilt from the sword he had used to slay Grendel's mother and behead Grendel. It is described as depicting how the giants were drowned in a flood sent by God as retribution for their wickedness; clearly, the ultimate price of vengeance is total destruction. While holding the lavishly carved sword hilt, Hrothgar lectures Beowulf on the fragility of life and the dangers of pride and greed. His examples of ring-hungry kings who failed to reward their followers and died unhappy directly foreshadow the gold-hoarding dragon that is Beowulf's own ultimate end. Beowulf, though a fair-minded ruler, remains throughout his life the impossibly mighty warrior obsessed with honour, heroism, and his own epic story – so much so that, at the end of his life, his men desert him, he has no heirs, and his last words are a lament that his people will inevitably be swallowed up by all of the feuds that peace-weaving women have failed to end because of the violence of their male counterparts. Grendel's mother, far from being condemned as a monstrous woman, ultimately fails because she is an example of the same sort of honour-bound outlook that makes Beowulf's own last moments so grim. They are both willing participants in a cultural system that cannot have a positive outcome – a cultural system that was repeatedly condemned by both the poem and the laws of the society that produced it.

¹⁵³ *Beowulf*, l. 1305b-6a.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 1383-85

The value of looking at both *Beowulf* and *Judith* from this angle is more than just in gaining knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture – it also grants an awareness of how that culture saw and attempted to regulate itself. Both poems demonstrate political and religious fluctuation; both poems celebrate heroes and condemn villainy. The most relevant and useful information for my re-creation of the character of Judith, however, came from examining the gaps between the two poems, and defining the reasons why certain behaviours and ideas were accepted or rejected. Creating for myself a fuller picture of the intricacies of Anglo-Saxon cultural identity gave me freer rein in moving about inside that culture, and allowed me to create a thorough and fleshed-out version of Judith who is accessible without being alienated from her own culture for the sake of modern readers.

CHAPTER THREE:

Unlocking the Wordhoard – Old English Prosody in a New Age

Cultural and historical questions thus addressed, the next hurdle in my way was the language itself. I began with a literal, word-for-word translation of the Anglo-Saxon text. Preferring to work by hand rather than be constrained by a computer, I carefully hand-copied the poem in ink onto every other line of several sheets of plain notebook paper. The blank space between each line of the poem gave me room to pencil in my translation word choices. I used a variety of dictionaries, linguistic references, and grammatical texts, both online and in print.¹⁵⁵ The work was fascinating and fun, but also frequently slow and tedious; to make the task easier, I ultimately split the text into 8.5 more easily digested narrative sections, and colour-coded each one.¹⁵⁶ (See Fig. 2 below.) This method of dividing the text proved to be very useful during poem composition as well; it helped me to highlight the plot's main events, and ensure that I covered them thoroughly from all angles.

After finishing the word-for-word translation, I turned each section into a prose translation, keeping the grammar and word choice as close to my word-for-word translation as I could while creating sentences that were understandable in modern English. These became the working basis for my poems - most particularly, the storyteller voice. I often lifted words, descriptions, or whole phrases from my prose translations and worked them into the scop's narration. Where changes occur in those lifted passages, the reason is often expansion (a moment of the text that is not fully explored, or that I thought would benefit from a more thorough treatment), inclusivity (I wished to include some further element of Anglo-Saxon culture that the moment lent itself to), or technicality (what works in prose does not always work in a poem). I have included below a worked example of my method using the prayer Judith prays just before beheading Holofernes. It is one of the most significantly changed textual moments, and thus serves to demonstrate my thought process clearly.

The first image is a scan of my hand-written literal translation:

¹⁵⁵ Primarily referenced were: J.R. Clark-Hall's *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Stephen Pollington's *First Steps in Old English*, Mitchell & Robinson's *A Guide to Old English*, the on-line iteration of the Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, and the on-line Old English Translator project.

¹⁵⁶ The half section is Judith's Prayer; it is a monologue that comes within the larger narrative arc of the beheading, and I wanted to deal with it separately.

I ^{original/creator} frymda God ^{and} and ^{consoling/comforting} frofre Geast, ^{ghost}
 Child All-ruler ^{aselenweil/peace} biddan wylle ^{order/command require well}
 Beorn Alwddan, thine? I ^{need/want} need/want ^{poor} poor
 Miſe pinre ^{gloom/pain} me ^{pearferdre} pearferdre ^{is my now} is my now ^{immediately} ^{then/at that time} ^{serve/because}
 Drynſe Drym. Pearle ys me nuda ^{heart} heart ^{become hot} and ^{thought/love} ^{thought/love} ^{troubled/sad} ^{miserable}
 hearte onhated ^{and} and ^{hugre} hugre ^{geomar} geomar ^{Give to me,} ^{night/learn} ^{elder/learn} ^{master/lord/prince}
^{exceedingly} ^{with} ^{sorrow} ^{anxiety} ^{Give to me,} ^{night/learn} ^{elder/learn} ^{master/lord/prince}
 Swyðe mid ſorgum gedetred. Forgive me, ſwegles Ealdor,

Sigor and ^{truly/faith} ſoðne ^{trusting} geleafan ^{that} that ^I I ^{with} ^{this} ^{sword} ^{kill/tribute?} ^{note}
^{head/neck} ^{strike/loose} ^{curse/death} ^{this} ^{murder/death?} ^{part} ^{ic} ^{mid} ^{pys} ^{sweorde} ^{to} ^{me} ^{mihe} ^[reward?]
 geheawan ^{Stem/severe} ^{Violence/Strong} ^{Chief of a} ^{tribe} ^{rule/prince} ^{men/lad} ^{not to be} ^{bound} ^{not to} ^{swint} ^I ^{thine} ^{never}
 Pearlmod ^{mercy} ^{compassion} ^{thine} ^{declare} ^{proclaim/celebrate} ^{glorify/honour} ^{pay} ^{destitute} ^{me} ^{now} ^{mighty} ^{rule/king/land} ^{prince} ^[God]
 miſe ^{glorious} ^{noble} ^{fame/quest} ^{honour} ^{exponent?} ^{treasure} ^{give!} ^{Brittans?} ^{that} ^{me} ^{ys} ^{pas} ^{torne} ^{on} ^{moðe}
 forhtmod ^{not/ly} ^{formah?} ^{on} ^[heart] ^{mine} ^{He} ^{then} ^{judge}
 rate on hride minum. Hi da hehſta Dema ^{on} ^{heart/land} ^{spirit} ^{ambition} ^{pride}

This version is my prose translation of that word-for-word base:

Creator God, Consoling Spirit, Child of the All-Ruler, I beseech
 your compassion on my decrepit state. Sorely enflamed is my
 heart in this moment, and my mind is exceedingly troubled with
 sorrow. Give to me, Sky-Father, triumph and true faith that I
 may with this sword strike down the death-dealer. Grant this
 victory to me, strong-minded Chief of Men; I have never needed
 your mercy more. Avenge me now, mighty king, glorious
 treasure-giver, on that which grievously devours my mind and

heats my heart.

And this version was my attempt at ‘poemetising’ the prose translation:

Creator God Consoling Ghost
Child of the All-Ruler to you I commend
my cry for your compassion.
My heart is grown heavy
swollen hot with sorrow’s poison.
Give to me, great Sky-Lord
triumph that I may
hew down this death dealer.
Reward me this, strong minded ruler.
Never have I needed mercy more.
Vengeance, I ask, O glory-giver
on that which heats my heart
and consumes my courage.

And finally, the version present in the completed collection:

Creator God, heaven’s guardian
I cry to you for compassion.
My heart is grown heavy,
swollen hot with sorrow’s poison.
Give me a charm for this grief.
What words will banish fear?
What herbs will weaken sorrow?
I have no spell for what holds me still.
Holofernes waits like a hungry wolf—
I must seem like such easy prey.
He will fall to my hand, or I will fall to his:
such is the way of fate.
What I ask of you, Maker of All
is only this:
a hero’s mettle, a warrior’s strength of mind.

The prose translation of the text is an attempt to render a literal, word-for-word translation in recognisable modern English syntax and vocabulary. The words have been rearranged to make grammatical sense, and some words have been altered for clarity of meaning (e.g., - ‘beseech’ for the literal phrase ‘pray well’), but the text is as natural a rendering of the Old English text in Modern English as was possible. The first poetic translation is an attempt to translate both the content and the framework of the poem from Old English into Modern English. Care has been taken to preserve the rhythm and syllabic alliteration of an Anglo-Saxon poem.

The second poetic translation is a deliberate effort to fit a particularly problematic piece of text into the cultural milieu I was creating for my version. Previously, I mentioned the issues often surrounding the translating of religious thought in Anglo-Saxon poems; this poem represents a direct moment of contention with that particular concern. I briefly considered following in the footsteps of Pound and removing religious references altogether, but my desire for fidelity to the culture of the poem would not allow for such a stripping back. Concepts of God and the balance of relying on a higher power while accepting responsibility for one’s reality are central themes in *Judith*; the work was held up to its contemporary audience specifically for reasons of moral edification. Not only did the option of stripping out religious references feel disingenuous, but doing so would have decimated the story’s power.

Jane Holland’s 2008 translation of *The Wanderer* takes the opposite approach. Rather than removing the religious overtones, she replaces Christian concepts and terminology with elements of Germanic polytheism.¹⁵⁷ While choosing this option for *Judith* could have certainly answered questions of faith present in the text, it would not have accurately conveyed the more complicated picture of culture-in-flux that was my goal. I did not feel the representation and function of religion in Old English poetry was a matter of either/or; as Michael Matto explains in his introduction to *The Word Exchange*, “Anglo-Saxon poetry is far from being a record of pagan culture co-opted and rewritten by Christian monks. Christianity is the sea Anglo-Saxon poetry swims in.”¹⁵⁸ With this idea in mind, I set about crafting poems that highlighted, but also normalised, this tension between competing ideologies. As I have demonstrated thus far, heroic poems like *Judith* and *Beowulf* show plainly a “world where the ethic of an older warrior culture underlies and co-exists with but

¹⁵⁷ Jane Holland, *The Lament of the Wanderer*, (Coventry: Heaventree Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁸ *The Word Exchange*, ed. Greg Delanty & Michael Matto, (New York: Norton, 2011), p. 15.

has not entirely been co-opted by a new Christian faith.”¹⁵⁹ Judith’s prayer, a famous portion of the Latin Vulgate version and specifically set apart by the Anglo-Saxon poet as a monologue, presented a perfect opportunity to demonstrate this dual identity.

Names for God in Anglo-Saxon poetry are varied and creative, many of them tinged with elements that relate the Christian God to a Germanic war leader, the pagan god Woden, or both, while also managing to maintain some specifically Christian connotation. In my final version of Judith’s formal prayer, which is given over to the *scop*’s voice rather than to Judith herself, I have retained the epithet for God in the first line, but removed the obvious reference to the Holy Trinity: Consoling Spirit and Child of the All-Ruler, or the Holy Ghost and Jesus, respectively. The references to God return at the end of the poem, but the middle section serves as a space in which to showcase the complexity of Anglo-Saxon religious thought.

Rather than turning to other heroic poetry, I chose to borrow from the genre of medical remedies and healing charms, many of which appear in verse form and appeal to a combination of Christian faith, pagan deities, natural herb lore, and the power of the spoken word to aid in everything from crop growth to child birth. The remedy charm *Wið færstice* (‘against a sudden stitch, or sharp pain’), demonstrates this curious blend beautifully. The poem, intended to be recited as a charm, opens with instructions to use butter, feverfew, and nettle to concoct a potion, then proceeds to the recited portion, which is presented in the form of a battle narrative where a warrior is attacked by elves wielding poisoned spears and arrows. At the end of the poem, the speaker pleads to God for help against supernatural forces – elves, furies, even other gods. This idea is embedded into Judith’s plea in the central section of the prayer poem.

There are other elements of Anglo-Saxon culture at work here as well. Matto argues that “the heroic ethos requires the hero to trust in himself, in fate, and in God (not necessarily in that order).¹⁶⁰” As the idea of fate, or *wyrd*, is such a pervading one in Anglo-Saxon poetry, it seemed natural to include it here, in Judith’s certainty that her confrontation with Holofernes is inevitable and her uncertainty as to what the outcome of that encounter will be. In the end, she does not ask God to grant her a victory; instead, she asks for the strength of mind – *modthryth* – to turn the tides of fate in her favour. In this way, the growing idea of the Christian God as the source of all mercy is apparent, while the warrior’s perilous position on the wheel of fate is preserved.

¹⁵⁹ *The Word Exchange*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Once I had a base translation of the original text from which to work and an idea of the tone and setting that I wanted to convey, it lastly remained to find a poetic language in which to render my translation – a process that took a lot of trial, error, and experimentation, as well as a thorough investigation of Old English prosody. That Old English verse followed specific metrical rules is a fact obvious to readers upon gaining even a cursory familiarity with the original texts; however, identifying and codifying those rules, with such a limited amount of textual evidence remaining, is a vast undertaking, and is still an area of active research today. The publication of Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson’s definitive grammatical work *A Guide to Old English* in 2007 sparked a renewed interest in Anglo-Saxon syntax and grammar, and a recent resurgence of interest in Anglo-Saxon poetic metrics has prompted some researchers to look at the two areas of study in conjunction with one another.¹⁶¹ A few scholars have offered alternatives to the established methods of analysing Old English verse¹⁶², but many have sought instead to answer the lingering question of *why*: Why did Old English verse develop in the way that it did? Why are certain rhythmic and alliterative patterns, though possible, almost completely avoided? These new lines of research, aided by the wealth of technological assistance available today, have led to a deeper understanding of the development of Old English metrical systems, and what role grammar and syntax played in rhythmic structure, alliterative patterns, and word choice in Old English poetry.¹⁶³

Each line of Old English poetry consists of two half-lines, referred to as the a-verse and b-verse, with a strong caesura, or metrical break, existing between the two.¹⁶⁴ Each half line contains at least two accented syllables and at least two unaccented syllables. The most

¹⁶¹ Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 7th ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2007).

¹⁶² See Terasawa’s preface to *Old English Metre* for a succinct list of scholars from the last two decades who have in some way challenged fundamental principles proposed by Eduard Seivers in the late 19th century. Today, Seivers’ work in Anglo-Saxon verse types is generally regarded as technically accurate, but theoretically deficient.

¹⁶³ Computer technology and the internet have been incredible boons to the study of Anglo-Saxon literature. Thanks to computer databases compiling the literary corpus, metricists today have a much broader range of texts and textual analyses to work with than Seivers did. For a comprehensive list of such sources that have made their way onto the internet, including the incomparable Metric Syntactic Scan of the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records hosted by Oxford University, please see the large list of links collected by Heroic Age, a digital peer-reviewed academic journal publishing on early Medieval Northwestern Europe. It can be found at www.heroicage.org.

¹⁶⁴ Jun Terasawa. *Old English Metre: An Introduction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. p4. In modern printed editions of Anglo-Saxon works, this caesura is indicated by a gap of three or four space between the a-verse and b-verse, which gives Anglo-Saxon poetry its characteristic shape on the page. In its original manuscripts, the poetry was written from margin to margin; however, line boundaries and metrical breaks were sometimes marked by some form of punctuation. The Junius MS is an example of this.

widely accepted theory regarding where these syllables must fall in relation to one another was developed by Eduard Seivers, a 19th century Germanic language philologist, and expanded upon by A.J. Bliss decades later.¹⁶⁵ ¹⁶⁶Seivers' theory, demonstrated via a metrical analysis of *Beowulf*, proposed five main verse types present in Anglo-Saxon poetry that followed specific metrical, syllabic, and alliterative patterns. He called the verse types after the first five letters of the alphabet, in descending order of frequency. Each half-line, he posited, exhibited one of these types, with the lines linked by alliteration on certain stressed syllables in each half-line. Seivers' patterns (followed by a metrical example in contemporary English and an example from *Beowulf*) are as follows:

A: ' x ' x	<i>Anna angry</i>	<i>gomban gyldan (11a)</i>
B: x ' x '	<i>And Bryhtnoth bold¹⁶⁷</i>	<i>ond Halga til (61b)</i>
C: x ' ' x	<i>In keen conflict</i>	<i>forgrand gramum (424a)</i>
D: ' ' ' x or ' ' ' x `	<i>Ding down strongly or Deal death to all</i>	<i>frean Scyldinga (500b) or woeld widerferth (702a)</i>
E: ' ` x `	<i>Each one with edge</i>	<i>liscar gebad (815b)</i>

' indicates a syllable receiving primary stress (lift)

` indicates a syllable receiving secondary stress (half-lift)

x indicates an unstressed syllable (drop)¹⁶⁸

A poem might contain any combination of these five verse types. On occasion, one or two unaccented syllables might come before the stressed syllable at the beginning of an A or D verse type; these extrametrical syllables are called anacrusis, and are generally marked off from the rest of the metrical line by a vertical bar (|). ¹⁶⁹Vowel quantity could also affect the rhythm of Old English poetry. Normally, the accented syllables in a line have naturally long vowels, or short vowels that are made long because they are followed by two consonants. A third option is resolved stress – a condition wherein a word consisting of two short syllables may act as one long syllable. ¹⁷⁰

The syllabic patterns of the half-lines in Anglo-Saxon verse were held together by complex patterns of alliteration; one of the two accented syllables in the a-verse had to

¹⁶⁵ Eduard Seivers, *Altergermanische Metrick*. (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1893).

¹⁶⁶ A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

¹⁶⁷ Verse types B and C are the most often disputed; the most prominent alternative configurations are offered by Bliss (1967), Pope (1966), Russom (1987), and Suzuki (1996), for varying reasons.

¹⁶⁸ Mitchell & Robinson, pp. 163-166.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

alliterate with the first accented syllable of the b-verse. Both of the accented syllables in the first half-line could, and often did alliterate, but it was permissible to alliterate only the first accented syllable in the second half-line. If only one of the accented syllables of the first half-line alliterated, it was generally the first accented syllable, and only rarely the second.

AA:AX and AX:AY represent the most common patterns of alliteration found in Anglo-Saxon poems.¹⁷¹ Consonants only alliterated with other like consonants – for example, *s* alliterated only with *s* and *p* alliterated only with *p*. The same was true of certain consonant clusters, such as *sp-*, *st-*, and *sc-*. *G* and *C* are unique cases, as two forms of each letter existed in Anglo-Saxon English. Both could be either velar (with *g* pronounced as in the modern word *gas* and *c* as in the modern *king*), or palatalized (with *g* pronounced as in *y* the modern word *yes*, and *c* as the *ch* in the modern word *chill*). Both types of each consonant could alliterate with each other, despite the difference in sound, though prefixes such as *ge-*, which were usually unstressed, were not often used in alliteration.

An initial *h-* could participate in consonantal alliteration, but it could also be silent and alliterate with vowels. Vocalic alliteration followed a different set of rules to consonantal alliteration; all vowels and diphthongs could alliterate with one another, and indeed identical alliteration was often avoided. This might suggest that what is actually alliterated, rather than the vowels themselves, is the “prevocalic ‘glottal stop’ – the sound that is heard in modern English between adjacent vowels, as in *co-operate*.¹⁷²

Occasionally, Anglo-Saxon poets broke their own metrical rules of two feet and four metrical positions per line, instead constructing hypermetric verses with three rather than two accented syllables in each half-line.¹⁷³ These verses are composed differently, depending on where the hypermetricity falls; in the a-verse, it is typically demonstrated by an additional falling foot which usually participates in alliteration.¹⁷⁴ In the b-verse, hypermetricity is generally expressed by adding a long string of unaccented syllables to an otherwise normally constructed half line.¹⁷⁵ Hypermetric verses usually occur in clusters, and often occur in conjunction with speech in poems, but there are exceptions to both of these generalities; they

¹⁷¹ See Terasawa (p.18) for a demonstration of further even more complex patterns of alliteration, such as crossed alliteration, in which all four lifts in a line participated in alliteration (making an AB:AB pattern), and transverse alliteration, which is similar to, though less frequent than crossed (and created an AB:BA pattern).

¹⁷² Terasawa, p. 16.

¹⁷³ Mitchell & Robinson, p. 166.

¹⁷⁴ Terasawa, p. 47.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

obviously had some metrical significance to poets of Old English verse, but precisely what that significance was is uncertain.¹⁷⁶

All of these structures could influence the grammatical and linguistic choices of the poet. The need to conform to an alliterative pattern might lead a poet to forego the more common prosaic syntax of adjective-noun for the noun-adjective construction often seen in poetry. This also accounts in part for the use of compound words, another key feature of Old English poetry. Also, alliteration of nouns, adjectives, and verbs was most common, while pronouns and prepositions rarely participated in alliteration; this would have bearing on where a poet might place certain words in a line, and on what words were chosen, based on the letter participating in the alliteration. Word choice was also affected by metrical rules. For example, both uninflected and inflected verbal infinitives could occur after *tō*; a poet could choose the infinitive form that fit into the metrical line he or she was composing. Similar concerns might also lead a poet to choosing a specific morphological variant of a word.¹⁷⁷

Because initial stress often fell on the primary syllable of a word, end rhyme has long been understood not to be a common feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry. When used at all, it was generally as an additional ornament to the verse-organising alliteration present. An obvious exception to this is the *Riming Poem*, wherein end-rhyme was the poet's main consideration; however, there are examples from poems composed later in the Anglo-Saxon period where rhyme features more heavily, and alliteration seems to take a more background role. This is demonstrated in *Judith*, which contains the highest instance of end rhyme in Anglo-Saxon poetry outside of the *Riming Poem*.¹⁷⁸

The above outlines the most commonly accepted metrical rules for Anglo-Saxon poetry, which are, as I have stated, based largely upon expansions of and corrections to Seivers' original work. It is important to note that this complex network of metrical rules deals with Classical Old English verse – that is, of verse dating from the early Old English period, and typified by *Beowulf*. The general scholarly opinion of late Old English verse – that is, verse composed after the latter half of the tenth century – is that it is somehow failed Old English verse, or, to put it more bluntly, bad poetry. It is discussed in terms of decay,

¹⁷⁶ Terasawa, p. 47; Mitchell & Robinson, p. 167. Several scholars offer theories, based on poetic analysis, as to what might have been the purpose of these hypermetric passages; I will discuss some of these in conjunction with a metrical analysis of *Judith*.

¹⁷⁷ Terasawa, p. 8-9.

¹⁷⁸ Burton Raffel, *Poems and Prose in the Old English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p24. According to Raffel, *Judith* has the second highest instance of both hypermetric lines and near- and end-rhyme in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus.

viewing the metrics of Late Old English verse as a breaking down of the complex rules of Classical Old English verse. In his 2005 work *Early English Metre*, scholar Thomas Bredehoft tackles both the question of why Anglo-Saxon verse developed as it did, and the dismissal of Late verse as ‘failed,’ by proposing new classification systems for both Late and Classical Anglo-Saxon verse.

Bredehoft’s initial complaint of the commonly accepted rules of Anglo-Saxon verse is that they have become unnecessarily complex and cumbersome.¹⁷⁹ He is of the opinion that so much of the follow on from Seivers’ famous Five Types has been a series of efforts to patch the holes in metrical rules that have eventually been proven not to work, and that perhaps it would be useful to develop a new metrical framework – an opinion he is not alone in holding. Bredehoft does just this in proposing his own classification system of early Anglo-Saxon verse. He takes as his starting point the idea that the overly technical and mechanical rules ascribed to Anglo-Saxon poets by scholars today do not reflect the intuitive way in which oral poets would have composed their work.¹⁸⁰ Putting aside his argument’s over-reliance on the orality of an increasingly literate culture, what Bredehoft manages to highlight here is the gap between Old English poetic metrics and Old English linguistics, a gap which is currently being explored by many contemporary metricists. Bredehoft’s “New Formalism,” as he calls it, borrows some foundational principles from the Seivers-Bliss system, and is heavily influenced Russom’s concept of word-feet, but departs from traditional metrics from thereafter. His chapter on New Formalism begins with three very clearly stated principles governing the whole of early Old English verse, but his further assertions about verse feet and feet combinations become so complex and riddled with exceptions that they are rendered much less useful to either the casual student of Anglo-Saxon verse or the serious scholar of metrics than he had hoped. Bredehoft’s intent was to identify a system of versification that allowed both for definitive metrical principles and for poetic originality – to describe “how poems are alike one another and how they differ from one another.”¹⁸¹ However, this aim may have been too broad to provide a satisfactory outcome, and thus his proposed classification system is not immediately more useful than the established Seivers-Bliss system of classification. As one reviewer put it, “This new formalism is perhaps no less

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Bredehoft, *Early English Metre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp 3-7.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

satisfactory than the Sieversian (and as such deserves consideration) but it is hardly more so.”¹⁸²

Where Bredehoft’s innovations shine, however, is in his proposal of a classification system for late Old English verse that recognises it as an entity separate from, but developing out of early Old English verse, and in his in-depth assessment of Old English poetic style. In the latter of these two arguments, he looks specifically at *Judith*, which he points out is “exceptional within the corpus of classical Old English verse for its usage of hypermetric lines and rhyme.”¹⁸³ There are 349 lines in the poem fragment; by line 121, Holofernes has been dispatched by Judith, leaving 228 lines to explain the ever-increasing consequences of the main dramatic scene, all winding down to the inevitable Hebrew victory and Judith’s speech. Bredehoft notes that 49 of the poem’s 69 hypermetric lines occur before line 100.¹⁸⁴ There has been much debate over the precise purpose of hypermetric lines in Old English verse, but the general consensus is that their unusual syllabic qualities are intended to alter pace. The *Judith* poet uses Type 1 hypermetric lines, which have “roughly double” the amount of non-alliterating syllables of a regular line; Bredehoft argues that the use of so many of these lines in the opening segment of *Judith* serves to slow down the pace of the reader, so that special attention must be paid to these first 121 lines.¹⁸⁵ Ian Pringle echoes Bredehoft’s ideas, pointing out the “steady, inexorable pace” led to the narrative of the poem by the combination of hypermetric and regular lines, and arguing that there is “a very keen sense” of just how long the poet can “afford to delay each step in the action in order to heighten the feeling satisfied expectation when the climactic moments come.”¹⁸⁶ Howell Chickering, in his article “Poetic Exuberance in *Judith*” agrees with this assessment, and expands on Bredehoft’s argument by discussing the pacing and temporality of the events in the poem.¹⁸⁷ The hypermetric lines give a “leisurely pace” to the first part of the poem, but the events are “described by adverbs of speed”: *snude*, *ofoste*, *aedre*, *fromlice*¹⁸⁸. The poet couples this use of hypermetricity and speedy adverbs with skilfully accomplished dramatic irony to create a sort of double time scheme. The poet’s often derogatory asides foreshadow the fate of Holofernes and the Assyrians. The warriors present at Holofernes’ feast are called

¹⁸² Pamela O’Neill, *Early English Metre (Review)*, *Parergon*, 26.1, 2009, pp. 292-293.

¹⁸³ Bredehoft, p. 63.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁸⁶ Pringle, “Homily and the Poem,” 93.

¹⁸⁷ Howell Chickering, “Poetic Exuberance in *Judith*.” *Studies in Philology* 106.2, pp 119 – 136.

¹⁸⁸ To go quickly or directly; haste, speed; quickly, promptly; boldly, speedily

weagsiþas, or “companions in woe.” By the end of the poem, is it clear that this description refers not only to the woe inflicted on the Hebrews by the Assyrians, but also to their own eventual demise.¹⁸⁹ Shortly after this is the poet’s first dramatic aside, wherein he describes the warriors as fated to die, but utterly unaware of that fate.¹⁹⁰ Later in the poem, the quick pace of the normal lines helps to show the sharp contrast between the Hebrew army and their Assyrian counterparts – rather than adjectives of speed to match the rapid pace of the lines, the Assyrians are described in terms of paralysis and ineptitude. Through word choice and careful use of metrics, the poet creates a dramatic first section that is rhythmically slow but semantically rapid to create an intensity of suspense around Judith’s beheading of Holofernes, and a second section that is rhythmically quick-paced but semantically plodding to portray the complete ineptitude of the enemy, and to dispense with the sort of drawn-out intensity that would be inappropriate when the outcomes are so readily apparent.

Clever metrics are not the only tool at the *Judith* poet’s disposal. Great use is also made of multiple sound-patterning techniques, again clustered primarily in the first 121 lines. Thirteen of the poem’s 27 instances of cross alliteration occur in that space. In lines 83-86, cross alliteration is used in Judith’s prayer for strength before killing Holofernes (participants in cross alliteration shown in highlight):

Ic ðe, fryða god, ond frofre gæst,
 bearn alwaldan, biddan wylle,
 miltse þinre, me þearfendre,
 ðynesse ðrym, þearle ys me nu ða

The effect of the cross alliteration here heightens the eloquence of Judith’s speech and produces a powerful rhetorical effect.

Bredchoft also highlights the dense web of poetic effects surrounding the poet’s discussion of Holofernes’ death and the departure of his soul to hell:

		Næs ða deað þa gyt
	ealles orsawle;	sloh ða eornoste
	ides ellenrof	oðer siðe
110	þone hæðenan hund,	þat him þat heafod wand
	forð on ðe flore.	Læg se fula leap
	gesne beæftan,	gæst ellor hwearf

¹⁸⁹ Chickering, p. 128.

¹⁹⁰ *Judith*, l. 19b-21a.

under neowelne **næs** ond ðær genyðerad **wæs**
 susle gesæled syððan æfre,
 115 wyrnum **bewunden**, witung **gebunden**,
herde gehæfted in **hellebryne**
 æfter **hinsiðe**.

Lines 108 and 112 contain cross alliteration (shown in blue), lines 113 and 115 contain verse rhyme (shown in purple), there is secondary alliteration in line 111b (shown in yellow), line 110 contains off rhyme, and continuation of primary alliterators is demonstrated through lines 108-109 and 116-117 (shown in bold).¹⁹¹ In the last instance continuing alliterators, across lines 116-117, the sound patterning saves the final half-line from feeling incomplete without its b verse. It is important to note that this scene is not in the Vulgate *Judith* or in Ælfric's homily; it is entirely a creation of the poet, and the full complement of the Old English poetic arsenal has been brought to bear on it. By this point, the poet has already foreshadowed the fate of Holofernes and his soldiers, and Holofernes himself has obviously been beheaded in the climactic scene; what is happening is the frightening, otherworldly coda to that act. The dense clustering of alliterative, rhyming, and repeated sounds lends a very distinct rhythm and music-like quality to the passage's language.

The poet's consideration of sound is not confined to techniques that affect rhythm, however. There is a lushness of sound outside of alliteration and hypermetric lines: the 'th' sounds in the eth and thorn characters in the first half-line, separated by the hard 'd'; the sibilance of line 109 that pairs with the 'th' sound that carries over from the preceding line, and continues throughout line 110, thus linking the first syntactic sentence of the passage; the way in which the 'th' sounds fall away in line 111b, which is instead linked to the next four lines by open vowel sounds. Bredehoft notes that the repeating alliterators from lines 108-109 and 116-117, mentioned earlier, are not an uncommon occurrence in *Judith*, but in this passage in particular, they have a nice framing effect that separates this passage out from the action that both precedes and follows it.¹⁹² Separation is a theme here: separation of this section of text from the action of the rest of the poem, of earth and hell, and, as Bredehoft points out, of Holofernes' head and soul from his body.¹⁹³ The separation is also echoed in word play; Bredehoft calls the use of 'hund' and 'wund' in line 110 "probably the most

¹⁹¹ Bredehoft, p. 64. Colour coding is my own.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 65.

effective off-rhyme in all of Old English poetry,” as it evokes both the ‘hand’ of Judith and the ‘wound’ of Holofernes.¹⁹⁴ In contrast to this theme of separation, there is also the matter of the binding of Holofernes’ soul in hell; the poet emphasises the importance of this with rhyme and secondary alliteration in lines 110-115.¹⁹⁵ The binding of Holofernes is echoed in the interlacing of sound.

Word choice is also affected by the poet’s readily apparent sense of humour and irony, and a careful manipulation of the heroic poetic mode. In her analysis of heroic language in *Judith*, Elizabeth Tyler points out that the most likely dating for the poem puts its composition “after the passing of the ‘heroic code’ as a realistic guiding principle for aristocratic society” and that the poet was not a “slave to the heroic” idiom.¹⁹⁶ Tyler’s careful analysis of word usage in *Judith* reveals that words of a particular martial connotation, such as *hæleð* (warrior, hero) and *wiggend* (armoured soldier) are used genuinely and in a typical heroic poetic mode when applied to Judith and the Hebrew people, but are only used to refer to the Assyrians at the most inappropriate of moments.¹⁹⁷¹⁹⁸ For example, Judith refers to the Bethulians as *hæleð* twice when encouraging them to fight the Assyrians, and the poet, in his narration of the battles scenes, uses the word twice to comment on the Bethulians’ bravery. In contrast, the Assyrians are called *hæleð* when they bring Judith to Holofernes to be raped, and when they awaken the morning after, hungover and on unprepared for battle. Chickering, citing several critics’ analyses of *Judith*, also comments on this portrayal of the Assyrians as a parody of the heroic, and on the proliferation on *heafod* or ‘head’ puns that can be seen throughout the text.¹⁹⁹ The poet demonstrates a clear understanding of hagiographic poetry in his method of using Judith/the Behtulians and Holofernes/the Assyrians to exemplify good vs evil and God vs Satan, and a clear understanding of heroic poetry in his deliberate – and deliberately ironic – usage of heroic language. All of this, coupled with the poet’s masterful use of formal poetic techniques, suggests a skilled author.

If Bredehoft considers *Judith*, anomalous though it is in the existing Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus, to be an excellent example of late classical Anglo-Saxon verse, then it is worth looking briefly at *Judith* in the context of what came after it. Bredehoft conceptualises late

¹⁹⁴ Bredehoft, p. 64.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁹⁶ Elizabeth Tyler, “Style and Meaning in Judith,” *Notes and Queries* V. 237, 1992, pp. 16-19.

¹⁹⁷ *Warrior or hero and soldier*, respectively.

¹⁹⁸ Tyler, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ Chickering, p. 128. See his footnotes 19 and 20 for a list of critical discussions on the use of irony, wordplay, and the heroic mode in *Judith*.

Old English verse as something grown out of, but formulaically different to, classical Old English verse. In proposing a potential metrical system for late Old English verse, Bredehoft suggests that, in the tenth century, the poetic form began visibly responding to linguistic changes.²⁰⁰ The three main changes that Bredehoft notes are the loss of resolution (late verse made no meaningful distinction between stressed syllables based on their length), the recognition of two rather than three types of stress (late verse utilised only ‘stressed’ and ‘unstressed’ syllables, rejecting the semi-stress or half-lift of earlier verse), and the ability of anacrusis to precede any foot, rather than only the first foot of a line.²⁰¹ All of these, he suggests, caused alterations to the rules of alliteration. Bredehoft looks at the texts of several late Old English works in verse, but perhaps most intriguing is his analysis of Ælfric’s ‘rhythmic prose’, using the lens of his new classification system to discuss it as an example of verse that, whilst looking very different from its early verse counterparts, was no less governed by metrical rules.²⁰² Bredehoft also discusses pointing, or punctuational marking, in late Old English verse texts, and notes a marked increase in punctuation being used to mark metrical boundaries rather than syntactical ones. His suggested reasoning for this shift is that it is a response to the new poetic style – unfamiliar verse types and a culture that was becoming increasingly literate meant that an audience encountering late verse for the first time would not know how to read it, metrically.²⁰³ In his last chapter, Bredehoft expands beyond Old English verse by discussing Layamon’s writings in both Old and Middle English, and suggests possible relations between his use of late Old English verse and early Middle English alliterative verse.

The implications of Bredehoft’s ideas regarding verse classification and formal metrics have very little impact on the Old English *Judith*, resting as it does in the classical verse period, but the possibilities such a line of thought suggested to me, as a poet and translator of Old English poetry, were intriguing. It is entirely logical that poetic forms respond to the linguistic demands of a language. Contemporary English establishes rhythm through stress patterns rather than through a combination of stress pattern and syllable length; in that sense, there is an aspect of Old English verse structure that is lost to modern speakers of English. The vocabulary of modern English also borrows heavily from Latin and French, as well as a host of other languages; comparatively little of the remaining lexicon can be

²⁰⁰ Bredehoft, p. 70.

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 73-75.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 81-91.

²⁰³ Ibid., pp. 84-85.

traced to Germanic root words. It cannot therefore be expected that contemporary English will behave similarly to Old English in poetry – much in the same way that late Old English poets and early Middle English alliterative verse poets found their methods of composition changing due to the changing demands of their language. In the language of my poetry for the *Judith* collection, I have attempted to adapt sound techniques found in classical Old English strict metre verse for use in contemporary English lyric verse. My goal was to create a sound and form that were not direct reproductions of Old English poetic techniques, but could be seen to have descended from them, and which have an appealing unfamiliarity to the contemporary ear.

The multiple voices in the collection run literally counterpoint to each other, as in a musical arrangement – they are all linked together harmonically, but each strain has its own rhythm and structure. Each is a separate melodic line. Because of this, it makes the most sense to discuss each voice separately. The voice I've dubbed the 'story teller' is, for reasons that are no doubt readily apparent by now, visually and sonically the closest to Old English metred poetry. This is the 'voice of the *scop*', and as such, it sticks primarily to third-person narration of the story, with occasional authorial interjections. Before I began to deal with language and sound, I knew I wanted these poems to visually mimic the most common appearance of Old English poetry in translation: left-justified left column of text, visible caesura, and irregular right column of text. The visual marker would serve not only to set the story teller text apart from the other voices in the collection, which all have their own structural specificities, but also to set up an expectation for the reader. Though I have crafted my collection with a specific prosody and rigorously researched historical framework in mind, I have always endeavoured to translate those ideas for non-specialist readers. Making my story teller poems match visually with a fairly common printed layout for Old English verse translations immediately lets a reader know what they are in for, and connects my work with other Old English poems or translations they might be familiar with. To have the other poems formatted differently, then, signals that the poems themselves will be different. The caesura, which generally separates a verse from b verse in an Old English text, serves a similar purpose here in separating two halves of a line that are linked by alliteration.

I also turned to a familiar source to for the titling convention I used for the story teller poems. The margin notes in the bi-lingual edition of Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* serve several functions; they provide a small safety net to students who are dealing only with the Old English text and want quick reassurance that they've understood a passage correctly,

and they serve handily as a speedy way to find a specific passage. They also encapsulate the action of each page in an almost headline-like way – miniaturising the story. It was this last function that I was most interested in. The titles of the story teller poems are intended to gloss the events of each poem, and can be read as the story itself in miniature. The story teller poems progress in a strictly linear fashion, which is not always true of poems in other voices; in this way, the story teller voice is the accepted “canon” version by which the other versions are marginalised.

While experimenting with sound play in the story teller poems, I read Old English texts in translation extensively – starting with the 20th century translations of Auden, Pound, Merwin, Morgan, and Heaney to get a sense of what had gone before and how each poet had adapted Old English sounds to modern English language. Chris Jones’ analysis of Old English influences on the poetry of 20th century translators was helpful and enlightening. He examined the work of Auden, Pound, Morgan, and Heaney, providing a “detailed narrative account” of how they “discovered, appropriated, and re-deployed Old English poetry in their own work.”²⁰⁴ Of the 20th century translations I had surveyed, my own preference was for Seamus Heaney; I was drawn by the simplicity of the language he used in his *Beowulf*, and how his use of alliteration sounded natural rather than as if it were an added-on adornment. In the introduction to *Beowulf*, Heaney himself said that, in working with Old English, he began to notice ways in which his other work conformed to Old English rules of syllabic and alliterative patterning.²⁰⁵ Jones’ chapter on Heaney examines this claim, and Heaney’s tale of how he came to Old English first through the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, specifically “The Wreck of the Deutschland.” Jones’ conclusion is that the structure of Heaney’s verse is not so strictly Old English as he would like to believe; he also points out that “The Wreck of the Deutschland” was written in 1882 – six years before he began his study of Old English poetry.²⁰⁶ I am familiar with the Hopkins poem Heaney references; it is, in fact, a product of Hopkins’ experimentation with Welsh strict metre verse traditions, and contains many instances of English-language *cynghanedd*. Heaney mentions elsewhere in his introduction that his Northern Irish linguistic background played a role his vocabulary choices for *Beowulf*, and credits both Old English gnomic verse and “a kind of Native American solemnity of utterance” for the straightforward nature of his language, but seems somewhat

²⁰⁴ Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), second cover.

²⁰⁵ Heaney, *xxiii*.

²⁰⁶ Jones, p. 195.

less willing to acknowledge the similar melange of cultural influences that come to bear on his prosody.²⁰⁷ I considered this position against the ideas of other translators like Burton Raffel, whose translation of *Judith* I admire and referenced frequently, and Jane Holland, whose translations of *The Wanderer* is, in terms of innovation, the modern-day equivalent of Pound's *The Seafarer*. Holland explains in the preface to her translation how she rejected the strictures of Old English prosodic rules, but utilised alliteration to create instead a sort of "backing track" rather than a rigid structure.²⁰⁸ Raffel stresses the need for "creative subjectivity," and insists that a poet-translator should be "guided by" the source text, but not "trapped" by it.²⁰⁹ He decries Edwin Morgan's translation as "too academic," considering Morgan's approach to be that of the "scholar-critic," and his own "that of a poet."²¹⁰ However, as finely poetic as Raffel's translation may be, it distorts prosodic aspects of the source text that Morgan's translation – which is fine poetry in its own right, though in a different way to Raffel's work – preserves. Each translation is constructed differently because they function differently; there is room for both, and both are satisfactorily justified by their creators. Insofar as either had influence on the poems in *Judith*, I favoured Raffel's music over Morgan's sometimes unlovely unconventionality, but preferred Morgan's strong scholarly underpinnings to Raffel's insistence upon disconnecting *Beowulf* from its historical context in order to make it more accessible. It is perhaps no wonder that that largest language influence on *Judith* was Heaney's *Beowulf*, as I, like him, find myself to be neither entirely "scholar-critic" nor "poet-translator", but in the middle ground of scholar-poet who has taken upon herself the task of translation.

For my own collection, I rejected the strict syllabic patterns of Old English verse, but did favour shorter words with fewer syllables in general, using longer words to slow down the pace of line. Alliteration links every line of the storyteller poems, and though I did alliterate with vowels, I drove the rhythm of the storyteller poems as much as possible with alliterating hard consonants. 'D' and 'G' consonants played a large role here – both as front-of-word alliterating elements, and as repeated sounds in the middle and end of non-alliterating words. For obvious reasons, I found myself often needing to mention, and then alliterate with, the name 'Holofernes' – an aspirate consonant that fit not at all with the sonic atmosphere I was creating. Favouring hard consonant alliteration, and choosing words that

²⁰⁷ Heaney, *xxv-xxviii*.

²⁰⁸ Holland, *Intro*.

²⁰⁹ Magennis, p. 109.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

contained hard consonants in them, allowed me to maintain a cohesive sound and balance out breathiness of the ‘th’ and ‘H’ sounds present in frequently used words like ‘Holofernes’ or ‘north’. Because the aspirate sounds then stood out as separate from the rest of the poem’s music, Holofernes could be a subtly different presence to the hard-consonanted people of Dryhtenburh, and from Judith’s complicated affricate ‘j’.

In addition to driving the rhythm of the poems, I also used alliteration to help create suspense. The first storyteller poem, “the scop introduces in the enemy,” actually utilizes lots of weaker-sounding consonants – fricative f’s, sibilant s’s, velar w’s. D’s are present at the beginning of words dealing with Holofernes: die, defeat, dignity. The effect makes the storyteller sound soft-voiced, and lets the growing threat stand out. The next poem, “Dryhtenburh begins to grow restless,” still utilizes the f’s and w’s, but balances them with harder g and d sounds – hard times ahead. By the time we reach “a survivor stumbles into town; Dryhtenburh prepares to surrender,” hard consonants take the fore immediately: trouble is here, and the real story is beginning.

Rhyme is used primarily for emphasis, by adding an extra eye-catching bit of ornamentation to an alliterative line (eg, “she felt the trap snap closed,” in “Holofernes takes the bait; Judith makes a bargain”). End rhyme and internal rhyme appear frequently in battle scenes, to quicken the pace of the lines and because these were some of the most densely decorative portions of the source text. In keeping the flavour of the original text, I also made use of kennings (e.g. “bonehouse,” for skeleton, “battle-adder” for arrow), and preserved the original author’s predilection for puns on the word ‘head.’ The eagle, raven, and wolf – the “beasts of battle” – that are present in every Old English battle poem make an appearance in the storyteller poems because they were present in the battle descriptions of the source text (see “first blood is shed; the enemy flees” for an example), but I chose to carry the animal imagery throughout the rest of the collection as well, linking Holofernes with predatory animals, Judith with prey animals, and Holofernes’ army with domesticated creatures.

Though constructed with the same ideas of storytelling in mind, Judith’s voice is closer to an internal monologue than a public performance, as if she is speaking to herself or a single listener rather than to an audience. They are less formal and more conversational in tone and in structure, and influenced more by Old English lyric poetry than heroic epics. In particular, I looked at Eavan Boland’s translation of “The Wife’s Lament” and Paul Muldoon’s version of “Wulf and Eadwacer” helped me form a general idea of the tone I

wanted for this voice.²¹¹ Also influential was Vicki Feaver's collection *The Handless Maiden*; the poem "Judith," contained in that collection, and Feaver's commentary on it informed my concept of Anglo-Saxon Judith's grief, anger, and vulnerability.²¹² This was a sticking point in constructing Judith's half of the narrative - historical research had answered for me *how* Judith could take charge of an army and behead a general, but I needed to know *why* she would bother to do so. Turning initially back to historical and cultural research, I found the beginnings of a possibility in Rolf Bremmer's "Widows in Anglo-Saxon England."²¹³ There are a few recorded laws concerning widows, but the unwritten laws and customs of individual communities would have played a huge role in how they were treated.²¹⁴ This is another area where Christian doctrine and Germanic tradition warred with one another; whereas tradition called for a widow's kin to support her, and custom often left her the means to support herself until remarriage, Christianity reinforced the idea of an increasingly centralised state that bore the responsibility for supporting the vulnerable.²¹⁵ In the case of Judith, this means she would have been ruled by male relatives until her marriage, and by her husband afterward; male relatives would also have been involved in any re-marriage negotiations, but being a widow left Judith as something of a free agent.²¹⁶ Judith's dowry, presented by her father, would have belonged to her husband and would revert back to her male relatives' possession after the husband's death, but her husband's *morgengyfu*, or morning gift, would have belonged solely to her.²¹⁷ Traditionally, the *morgengyfu* was a substantial gift of land and goods.²¹⁸ By owning land, Judith joined the class of land-owning freemen – another movement from possession to possessor. Depending on what constituted the "goods" portion of the gift, she might also have been financially well off. What might a woman who had found that rare freedom do to keep it? But there was every indication from the Vulgate *Judith* that Judith had deeply loved her husband, that she had become something of a recluse after his death and continued to mourn him. Feaver's poem shows a Judith who

²¹¹ All poems referenced here can be found in *The Word Exchange* anthology.

²¹² From Feaver's comments on the Poetry Archive website: "I discovered reading the story that her husband had died and she was in a state of grief and the rage of grief and somehow she had nothing to lose and she used the power of that grief and anger to carry out this incredibly brave act. So I wrote the poem in her voice."

Vicki Feaver, *Judith: Poem Introduction* (The Poetry Archive, 2014)

<<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/judith>> [14 June, 2016].

²¹³ Rolf Bremmer, "Widows in Anglo-Saxon England," *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in in the History of Widowhood* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), pp. 55-88.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-75.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 60.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

misses her husband, who misses companionship and physical closeness – and also misses the stability those things had provided. Anglo-Saxon Judith’s personal story evolved into one of constant battle with autonomy: she loses a husband, but unexpectedly gains freedom over her choices. I imagined the survivor’s guilt she might feel – to miss the husband she loved, but to slowly learn to function without him, only to have that independence threatened once more by outside forces in the form of Holofernes and her own community. A woman like that, so unexpectedly ousted from all her familiar roles in life, might be desperate enough to forge a new place for herself. Ultimately, of course, the freedom that she earns for herself is relative, and her power comes with new obligations; in a community in which a person’s well-being depended so directly upon the co-operation of every other person in fulfilling their roles, there could be no other end.

In addition to the less formal, more confessional tone, hard-consonant alliteration in the Judith poems is balanced with sibilant and fricative consonant alliteration, for a softer sound. Rhyme is only an occasional ornament here, to preserve the tone of natural speech. Structurally, Judith’s poems are all prose poems – they make use of sound and repetition, of metaphor and rhyme, but there are no line breaks or enjambment, just paragraphs of text arranged in a justified alignment. I opted for this hybrid form to differentiate Judith’s poems as distinctly as possible from the storyteller’s, and to emphasise the introspective, confessional nature of one in contrast to the crafted, deliberate nature of the other: private truth versus public declaration. As is suggested in Judith’s final word, neither voice is necessarily more correct or valid; every story shifts based on the perspective and intent of the teller.

The two halves of the story arc thus defined, the remaining voices serve to populate and personalise the world that the Judith and storyteller voices create between them. Judith’s handmaid is the most frequently heard voice in the chorus of other characters. She is Judith’s near-constant companion. At first, influenced by Baroque artist Artemisia Gentileschi’s paintings *Judith Slays Holofernes* and *Judith and Her Handmaiden*, I intended to make the handmaid character a woman of similar age to Judith, but having two characters of similar age and type in positions of similar vulnerability threatened to unbalance the story.²¹⁹ The growth of the story arc needed to focus on Judith, and ultimately having an older female

²¹⁹ Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – c. 1656) is best known for *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, which she painted between 1614 and 1620. Both that painting and the companion piece *Judith and Her Handmaiden* (painted 1613-1614) are unique in portraying the handmaid as a young woman; she is generally depicted as much older than Judith.

presence maintaining an air of practicality and cynicism throughout was more interesting than having a second young female character who worried for, but was even more helpless than, her mistress. Judith's handmaid represents an understanding of the world and her role in it that Judith only comes to gradually. Where Judith's perspective is tinged with grief and desperation, her handmaid is clear-eyed and pragmatic.

In finding a tone for these characters, I turned to persona poems like those in Carol Ann Duffy's collection *The World's Wife*, and found particular inspiration in the character of Mrs. Papendiek in Rita Dove's *Sonata Mulattica*.²²⁰ Structurally, the handmaid's poems fit somewhere between Judith and the storyteller: they have shorter, less prose-like lines and make more use of line breaks than Judith's paragraphs of text, but they are less formally arranged than the storyteller poems. Often, they are constructed of a simple, declarative sentence or phrase and an indentation or line break followed by detailed description or more complex sentences. The structure makes them obviously visually different than Judith or storyteller poems, but also implies the handmaiden's character – concerned with specific practicalities first, and details second, in an almost to-do list fashion. The simply structured first lines portray an objective, goal-oriented viewpoint, but the indented, secondary sections, often concerned with sensory details, imply a not unwelcome but certain uncomfortable personal connectedness with the events she describes. The language of her poems demonstrate this dichotomy as well. They move back and forth between hard and soft consonant alliteration and employ rhyme very sparingly. There is little in the way of ornamentation here.

By contrast, Holofernes' few personal appearances in the text are deliberately stylised. Only "I Am: A Riddle" and "Holofernes in Hell" are constructed in stanzas of matching length, separated by short lines that repeat like a chorus, and the former makes repeated deliberate use of rhyme. The language and form of "I Am: a Riddle" are borrowed from Anglo-Saxon riddle poetry. Riddle poems work by making the reader view an everyday object in a variety of uncommon or unexpected new ways. The nature of the object in question is explored, but also obfuscated; by the end of the riddle, when the answer is revealed, the reader inevitably compares the object with whatever incorrect answers they had come up with upon hearing the riddle's descriptions. In this way, the object at the centre of the riddle is never only itself. In "I Am: A Riddle," Holofernes uses a series of images to

²²⁰ Carol Ann Duffy, *The World's Wife* (London: Picador, 1999).

discuss himself in the context of his various roles in the text, entreating the reader, in riddle poem convention, to name him. By the end of the poem, the named object, Holofernes, is linked to bravery, ferocity, gluttony, and helplessness – and cannot be unlinked from them. This was, to me, a more satisfying method of obliquely revealing the complicated nature of Holofernes' character than structuring his poems as internal dialogue or exposition, as I had done for Judith's. I also liked the performative, speech-like element that the form allowed, and imagined Holofernes delivering it a bit like a Shakespearean soliloquy – a fourth-wall-breaking speech rather than a monologue uttered for his own benefit.

While the format was adapted from riddle poetry, descriptive phrasing in the first two stanzas was inspired by battle poetry such as the *Finnsburg* fragment, and *Battle of Brunanburh*, and the third stanza drew from Old English *Judith*'s descriptions of Holofernes. The images of Holofernes' body were influenced by *Soul and Body II*, from the Exeter Book.

Holofernes' only other moment of direct address in the collection is drawn from an intriguing moment in the original Old English text. After he is dispatched by Judith, Holofernes' soul is whisked away to hell. The text blended descriptions of both physical and mental torture, and seemed to me to blend Christian ideas of the evil soul in torment after death with echoes of the Norse idea of hell as a place physically underground, where a part of the soul would remain with the body. This moment does not happen in any other version of the Judith story, and is an invention of the Anglo-Saxon poet. The effect is horrifying: after regaining some level of consciousness halfway through his own beheading, Holofernes then finds himself trapped in hell, bound in misery and flame, but also covered in worms. He is described as existing in darkness, a 'shadowy home, lacking all joy' from which he had no hope of escape. In translating the imagery, I used sibilant consonants to describe the hell-like elements of the place where Holofernes has found himself, and harder consonant alliteration to describe the more underground, body-centric imagery, and to convey Holofernes' anger and helplessness. Repetition became an important element to express the perpetual nature of the torment, and Holofernes' horror at it: 'no warmth, no light, no hope'... 'no heir, no grandson'... 'I was awake. I am awake. I will be awake.' The word *hamingja* here refers to a Norse concept of the soul: that part of it might be inherited by one's younger male relatives. The *hamingja* was the valour and good fortune possessed by the dead person while alive. Here, as in other places in the text, I have left a Germanic term untranslated where I felt it fit better than a translated term or definition might, and was understandable enough in context.

The remaining moments of intervention in the collection divided between Judith's people and Holofernes' soldiers. In "Siege Mentality" and "Hue and Cry," the Dryhtenburhers carry the thread of cynicism and futility that Ælfric was addressing in his second audience.²²¹ "Marching off to War" is no less cynical, but also acknowledges their duty to a leader, and the long-held heroic tradition of dying in battle. These poems are structured in deliberately broken and indented lines, and liberally use punctuation to divide phrases and impose rhythm – things that are common features of my poetry in general. Their language, however, is still heavily consonant driven, relying on alliteration, repeated sounds, and slant rhyme to create a cohesive sound.

"Holofernes' Hospitality" and "Judith is Summoned to the Feast" feature individuals in Holofernes' army. They both paint a picture of the slow slide into decadence and incompetence that will ultimately see Holofernes defeated, but also underscores how real the threat of danger is to Judith: though Holofernes is the enemy she contends with most directly, she is surrounded by men who are also a threat to her. These two poems are crafted to portray their characters: the short, straight forward, neatly broken lines of "Judith is Summoned" are a soldier's view of a prisoner; the unbroken, run-on sentence of "Holofernes' Hospitality" is the drunken thought process of a soldier who exemplifies his commander's excesses. The last word from Holofernes' army is markedly different. It is made up of the same short, neatly broken lines as "Judith is Summoned," but the language is less formal – closer in tone to the storyteller in the way it waxes lyrical about battles and blood. It is the final betrayal – a good soldier denied life, denied victory, and denied even the pretty fiction of a glorious and worthwhile death. The title is an alteration of the Old English poem *Soul and Body II* or *The Damned Soul's Address*, wherein a soul bound for hell considers the rotting corpse it has departed from, and blames the body's sinful life for condemning the soul to hell. The body, of course, cannot reply.²²²

²²¹'Hue and cry' is a medieval common law legal term for the process whereby townsfolk were responsible for alerting the authorities when they witnessed a crime.

²²² *Soul and Body II* is found in the Exeter book. A longer version, which also contains a heaven-bound soul's praise for its fallen body, is found in the Vercelli Book. I referenced Maurice Riordan's excellent translation "The Damned Soul Addresses the Body," found in *The Word Exchange*.

CONCLUSION

By whose definition, then, may I call *Judith* a translation? I have, in places, fulfilled both the Greek ideas of metaphrase and paraphrase by lifting passages unchanged, or with slight alteration, from the Old English source text. I have, in morphing a single poem into a collection of voices, borrowed Dryden's idea of imitation and created a work "based on" another one. I have engaged with Nida's ideas on semantics, I have gone to considerable effort to both foreignise and domesticate Judith's story as necessary, and I have taken Magennis' advice in creating a context through and by which my translation might be judged. I have even answered the old Latin term *translation*, from verb forms meaning "to carry or bring across" by carrying across language, culture, idea, intent, and history – bringing them from one form into another. In obliging several definitions of what translation *should* be and do, I have created an example of the possibilities of what translation *can* be and do.

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APPENDIX 1:

Prose Translation of *Judith*

Introduction:

...she doubted [not] [his] gifts in this wide world. She readily found favour from that famous lord when she most had need of it; grace from the greatest judge, creation's lord, sheltered her from her greatest fear. Her the heavenly father, glorious one, benefited, because she had strength devoted always to the Almighty.

The Feast:

I have heard Holofernes then invited eagerly his men to wine, and prepared a wonderful banquet of glorious food. He commanded his oldest thanes to come. His shield-bearers came with great haste. That was the fourth day, when Judith, keen of mind, tantalisingly lovely, sought him out. They then sat to the feast, splendidly wine-drinking, all of his companions in crime, bold byrnie bearers/maile wearers. There were cups born often to benches, also full vessel and flagons to the hall-sitters. The doomed men drank, strong shield-bearers, though the ruler knew not their end, that awful earl. Then was Holofernes called gold-friend of men. Bellowed and roared that might child of men, so that he could be heard fro far away. The strong-minded on stormed and shouted, bold and mead-drunk, bid the bench-sitters often to beer themselves well. So the enemy, stubborn treasure giver, all the day long, taunted his retainers, drenched with wine, until they fell down with dizziness, over-drunk, his duguð all, as if they had been slain dead, drained of every good thing.

So he, the elder chief, the hall sitters obeyed until night crept over the company. Commanded the evil one the blessed maiden to be hastily fetched to his resting place, bracelet decorated, ring adorned. They quickly carried out, the camp retainers, what the sword elder commanded. In a flash, advanced they to the guest place and thither they met wise-minded Judith, and then swiftly the linden-shield bearers led the radiant maiden to the tent where the rich one rested at night, saviour-hated Holofernes. There was a beautiful gold flynet hung around the commander's bed so that the baleful one might gaze through on/at whosoever came therein, and on him no man cold look unless the brave leader bid him come near for secret counsel. They then to the resting place had brought quickly the wise woman. The stern-minded warriors went to tell their leader that the holy maiden had been brought to his tent. The was the nobleman happy in mind; the nation's prince thought the bright lady with impurity and sin to besmirch. The glorious Judge allowed it not to happen, the shepherd of the host, but restrained him form that thing, the war leader. The fiendish lord left his men, threatening in

mood. The baleful one sought out his bed; there he would bid his life/glory farewell in a single night. His ultimate end came ungently to earth; he was after condemned, the severe-minded man, for all the while he had dwelled under the cloud roof. Drunken with wine, the ruler fell in the middle of his bed, as if he were senseless (lit. 'as if he had no learning within his head'). The warriors advanced outside from within very swiftly, the wine-sated retainers, they who led the faithless one, loathed folk-hater, to be for the last time.

The Beheading/Judith's Prayer/Holofernes in Hell:

Then was the Saviour's mighty handmaiden mindful of how she might that terrible one of his life deprive, ere the unclean one alarmingly awoke. Took the braided lady, the lord's maiden, a keenly sharp blade, by battle hardened, and from its sheath extracted it with her right hand. Approached she Heaven's Guardian, called him by name, the Saviour of all world-dwellers, and these words spoke:

Creator God, consoling spirit, child of the All-Ruler, I beseech your compassion on my decrepit state. Sorely enflamed is my heart in this moment, and my mind is exceedingly troubled with sorrow. Give to me, Sky-Father, triumph and true faith, that I may with this sword strike down the death-dealer. Grant this victory to me, strong-minded chief of men; I have never needed your mercy more. Avenge me now, might king, glorious treasure-giver, on that which grievously devours my mind and heats my heart.

Then the highest judge quickly with courage inspired her, as he doth each and every earth-dweller who Him for help seeks with counsel and with right faith. Then she was raised in spirit, her holy hope renewed. Then that heathen man firmly by the hair she took, dragged him with her hands toward her, shamefully, and the baleful one deftly laid out, loathsome man, so that she readily might take life from him with much violence. Struck the braided-lock lady that fiend with blood-stained blade, hit the hostile one such that she half-hewed the nape of him. Then he, in a semi-conscious swoon, lay, drunken and wounded, not yet dead or entirely soul-less. She the earnest lady with remarkable strength struck again the heathen hound, so that his head rolled forth onto the floor. The headless corpse lay lifeless hereafter, soul headed elsewhere, under the abyss, and was there condemned, to misery bound for ever after, worm enwrapped, bound and witless, hard fastened in hell-fire, after death. Nor had he any hope, in darkness enclosed, that he thence might leave the serpent hall; but there he is bound to dwell for ages outside of forever (for all time), in that shadowy home, lacking all glory.

Judith's Return and Speech:

God granted Judith, bright leader, victory in war. That clever maiden quickly put the battle-leader's bloody head in the sack her handmaiden, pale-cheeked lady, had packed their provisions in, and gave it into her hands, the head sack so gory, to carry home. Directly, then, the women went, bold in courage, fierce-minded, out of that enemy camp. Heart-lifted, they came to the shining walls of beautiful Bethulia. Ring-adorned, they hastened forth on the footpath, glad of mood, until they came to the gated walls. Warriors sat watching, waiting at guard in the fortress as earlier Judith, sad-minded, had commanded them to do, the cunning woman, when she on her journey had departed, remarkable lady. She had bid some of the men of that spacious city to await her return and, when she was come again the second time to her beloved kinsmen, to hastily allow her through the gates. And these words spoke Judith to those heroic folk:

Fairly I say to you thank-worthy things, that you need no longer be of mournful mind. To you is the creator kind, glorious king. Now revealed through the wide world is the splendour bestowed on you, and the glory that is granted against these loathed ones whom you have long endured.

Then were the burg-dwellers blithe after they heard he holy one's speech on the high wall. Here was lust, appetite; the folk hastened toward the fortress gate, men and women going together in multitudes to the lord's maiden, thronging in the thousands, young and old. Everyone, all in that mead-city had exhilarated minds that Judith was come home again. Hurriedly, and with great reverence, she was let in. Then the glowing one, with gold adorned, ordered her thoughtful handmaid to unwrap the head, that these war-hunters might take it for a bloody sign, showing to the city-dwellers how she at war had prospered. Spoke the she-noble to all the folk:

See clearly here, victorious kinsmen. Consider, city-dwellers, this, 'head man' of the heathens. Stare at the unliving head of Holofernes, who for months the most heinous murders carried out upon us, sore sorrows, and again increased his harming, but God allowed him not length of life that he might continue to maliciously molest us. Through God's mercy, I forced him from life. Now, folk of this land, shield-warriors, I bid you hasten to fight for the Sky-Father, honourable king. From the east he sends radiant light. Bear your shields forth, armour yourselves, don shining helms, and in dangerous hordes, fell folk-leaders, march against the doomed enemy with fateful swords. Your fiendish enemies are doomed to death, and you will deal it to them. Glory in war will be granted to you by God, through my hand.

Battle, Part 1:

Then the host quickly arose, equipping themselves at once, keen for combat. The nobles one strode forth, soldiers and officers, bearing victory banners forward to the fighting; forth in righteousness went the helmeted heroes from their holy city. Shields rang, loudly resounded. The lean-flanked wolf rejoiced in the wood, and the dark raven, that blood-thirsty bird. They knew that for them the warriors thought to provide their fill of doomed men. The wet-feathered eagle, eager for flesh, hard-beaked, dark-coated, sang a battle song. The men went forward without restraint, covered in/with curved linden-shields that had a short while before suffered scorn and heathen blasphemy. With hard spear-play, they repaid the Assyrians; the Hebrews, under battle flags, came to their camps. They fiercely let fly an arrow storm, battle adders from horned bows, hard missiles. Loudly storming, the soldiers angrily sent forth their spears firmly into the throng. The land-dwelling heroes against the loathsome race went forth, stern of mood and stout of heart, rising up violently against their old foes. Hands drew bright swords from sheaths, struck earnestly with their battle-tested edges the Assyrian champions, hate in their hearts. They spared not one of those battle-folk neither high-born nor low, no living man who might overcome them.

Battle, Part 2:

So the thanes on the morningtide pursued the foreign host all of the time, until the cruelly chased chief wardens were swiftly introduced to the sword-swinging Hebrews. They [the chief wardens] hurried to tell the eldest of the thanes, proclaimed in sudden speech of the mead-weary morning mauling, the terrible edge play. Then I quickly received word that the death-doomed warriors pulled themselves from sleep and to the baleful one's tent, heavy hearted, went in, as a crowd, to Holofernes. They thought quickly to give their leader the battle news before the horror of the Hebrew house came down upon them. They knew all that the master the bright maiden were together in the beautiful tent, noble Judith and the wanton, sour, licentious Holofernes. Not a one of the earls, however, would dare to awaken that warrior, or know how the warrior with the holy maiden had fared. The mighty force neared; the Hebrew folk fought sorely, had strong swords of war, hard paid their ancient strife with fateful swords, the old offense; that day was Assyrian rule in judgement destroyed, pride humbled. The men stood around their lord's tent, sorely discouraged, with minds grown gloomy. They then all undertook to cough and cry aloud and gnash their teeth, destitute of goodness, with violent sorrow biting. There was their glory at an end, their deeds and successes. The earls thought to awaken their lord; no hope of that! Then at long last and

slowly, some bold soldier went into that tent when necessity humbled him to it. Found he then on the bed, blackly lying, his gold-giver, of spirit deprived, lacking life. He fell at once to the ground, tearing at his hair, tempestuous in mind, rending his garments, and spoke these words to the warriors who were there outside assembled:

Here is declared our own destruction, a sign of the future to come, we that are well nigh strangled by the enemy. We are for destruction, undone, become nothing. Here lyeth our sword-hewn hero, our leader beheaded.

They then, weary in mind, threw their weapons down, went weary-spirited, in flight quivering. The Hebrew heroes followed their foot tracks until the greatest of the force was laid low, cast down in that victory plain, cut to pieces by swords, willed to the wolves. Flew they then, the enemy host. The Hebrew force slew them all, in victory valued, in judgement glorified. Then the Lord God grasped firmly in support, maker Almighty.

Battle, Part 3:

They then fiercely, with shining swords, battle proud heroes, a warpath wrought through the hated hoard, hewing down shields, shearing shield walls. Bowman were war-provoked, the Hebrew men, seasoned thanes, strongly lusting for the spear-fight. There on the earth fell the greatest part of the host, the Assyrian elder duguð, the enemy kinfolk. Very few came living to their kinsmen again. The noble warriors to the retreating dealt death, leaving steaming corpses. Room there was for taking from the loathsome land-dwellers, their old enemy, the unliving, the bloody spoils of war: shining armour, shield and broad sword, dark helmets, treasure dear. They silenced judiciously the fiends in the battle place; the lords of the realm eradicated the old hated ones with swords. Those who fell by the wayside were to them in life the loathliest of living races. Then all the tribe of the ring-locked lady, glorious maiden, within the space of a month carried and were laden with their burden to their bright city of Bethulia: helms and hip swords, heavy corselets, warrior's armour adorned with gold, and more silver treasure than any man could ever say, however wise.

Conclusion and Aftermath:

All [the treasure] the warriors had violently brought forth under banners from battle, through Judith's wise counsel, that spirited maiden. As recompense for her, from that journey, the spear-strong earls brought for her Holofernes' sword and bloody helm, likewise his armour adorned with reddish gold, and all the treasure that the strong-minded warlord had or hoarded, bracelets and bright gems; all this to the bright lady, wise in mind, gave they. For all this Judith said glory to the lord of hosts, who bestowed on her the honour that she was due,

glory in earthly lands, and also in heaven - reward in glory of heaven because she had faith in the Almighty.