

# Casting Judith

## The Construction of Role Patterns in the Book of Judith

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“Who can despise these people, who have women like this among them?” (Jdt 10:19). This is the question the soldiers in the Assyrian army pose when they meet Judith. They are so overwhelmed by her appearance that the whole camp is gripped with excitement (Jdt 10:18). “And they marveled at her beauty and because of her marveled at the Israelites” (Jdt 10:19). They are so fascinated by her beauty that they are not only astonished (ἐθαύμαζον), but experience Judith’s appearance as an epiphany (παρουσία). Obviously deeply impressed by this “parusia”, they project the whole people of Israel from her: “Who can despise these people, who have women like this among them?” (Jdt 10:19).

The portrayal of Judith’s arrival in the camp of the Assyrians (Jdt 10:11–23) is an important scene in the narrative of Judith. The typical ways of representation and strategies of narration are concentrated showing the style of the narrative. An important motif is Judith’s beauty. Her exceeding beauty is stated by the narrator and confirmed by the characters of the narrative through whose eyes the events are perceived and communicated to the reader. However, the motif of beauty is more than an aesthetic judgment as might originate from *Vogue*. The way in which Judith is presented, how she is seen and evaluated and which meanings are connected with these representations are keys to understanding the narrative.

For this reason the representation of the character Judith in the narrative will be the focus of this essay. Frequently the intertextual relations between the character Judith and her biblical models (Miriam, Jael, Deborah, David, Mose, Judas Maccabaeus etc.) have been demonstrated.<sup>1</sup> However, references between the character Judith and (gender) roles of women in biblical tradition have been neglected thus far. This analysis will therefore be concerned more with general roles (wife,

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1 Cf. e.g. VAN HENTEN, Judith; ZENGER, Buch Judit.

mother, widow etc.) than with the arrangement of roles concerning specific characters. In the narrative of Judith, her presentation uses several known or traditional female gender role patterns.<sup>2</sup> The analysis of these patterns is guided by three questions:

1. In which order are the role patterns in the narrative evoked? I will follow the text flow to observe from the dynamics of the narrative in which order what is portrayed, when, and then how.
2. How are these invoked role patterns displayed in the narrative and how is the perspective of the reader directed? The methodological basis for this question is the concept of focalization.<sup>3</sup>
3. Are these role patterns confirmed, modified, contrasted or negated and how are the role patterns dealt with in the course of the narrative?

A complete assessment of all patterns used in connection with the character Judith will not be attempted, but a presentation of some important concepts that prove to be significant for the background of the biblical scriptures for the portrayal of Judith. Others, for example Judith's appearance as a prophet in her speech before Holofernes (Jdt 11), her action as strategist (Jdt 14) or her role as a wreath-crowned and dancing woman (Jdt 15–16) are not taken into account. The analysis shall serve the accurate characterization of Judith, in order to find out how role patterns are processed.

## 1. General Comments About the Book of Judith

Before starting the analysis of the book of Judith, the exegetical tradition this treatment is based on will first be stated. The object of this exploration is the Greek text according to the edition of HANHART,<sup>4</sup> i. e. the narrative of Judith in the tradition of the Septuagint. It is presumed that the present narrative is not a translation of a lost Hebrew original,

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2 This question is distinctly different from the actantial model of GREIMAS; see GREIMAS, *Semantik*.

3 The question of focalization follows the theory of MIEKE BAL, who differentiates between the *focalizer* and the *focalized*. Focalizer can be the narrator (narrator-focalizer) or individual characters (character-focalizer). If it is a character-bound focalization, the focalized object is filtered twice by the narrator and focalizing character. The focalizing instances can also change within a narrative. For the query of focalization, three questions are relevant: *What* is focalized? *How* and with which attitude is the object focalized? *Who* focalizes? BAL, *Narratology* 142–161; BAL, *Story Telling* 75–108.

4 HANHART (ed.), *Judith*.

as long has been suggested, but was developed originally in Greek.<sup>5</sup> This makes unnecessary the question of which Hebrew or Aramaic phrases stand behind the Greek. The thought-world of the Judith-narrative is Greek. The biblical text that is cited and referred to is thereby not the Hebrew text but the Septuagint. This can plausibly be shown at the double citation of Exod 15:3 in Jdt 9:7–8 and 16:2, which is cited in the significantly different version of the Septuagint and not in the formulation of the Hebrew text.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond that, the book of Judith is a narrative of consistent origin and intentional literary design and composition. Hence, not only the analysis of the *Leitworte* is central and expressive but also the search for roles and role patterns is justified. This is because the whole narrative and the character Judith are constructed literary products. The narrative has been created with detailed knowledge of biblical and other Greek literature and presupposes this knowledge on the side of the audience as well.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore justified to ask about the construction of role patterns in the book of Judith.

The narrative itself may have developed around 100 B.C.E. in an environment familiar with the Greek-Hellenistic world of life, language and thought. Whether this was Alexandria, Palestine or another area of the Hellenistic Oikumene, cannot be determined.

The book of Judith is a fictional narrative and cannot – as a literary account – be traced back to a certain event or a specific person. The world of the text assembles historically separated events, persons and episodes into a collage and combines them in an intentionally incorrect way, e. g., the Assyrian (actually Babylonian) king Nebuchadnezzar (in LXX: Nabuchodonosor) resides in the city of Nineveh, which had long been destroyed by the time of the historical king. He is pictured according to the image of a Hellenistic sovereign and has Holofernes as a general at his side whose servant, Bagoas, bears a Persian name as well.

This collage has the function to reveal the fictional character of the narrative at first glance and to show that the narrated events and characters are invented. In this assortment, significant turning points and experiences of the calamity of Israel's history and the corresponding

5 Cf. ENGEL, HERR; JOOSTEN, Language.

6 9:7–8: ὅτι σὺ εἶ κύριος συντρίβων πολέμους κύριος ὄνομά σοι

16:2: ὅτι θεὸς συντρίβων πολέμους κύριος

Exod LXX 15:3: κύριος συντρίβων πολέμους κύριος ὄνομα αὐτῶ

Exod MT 15:3: הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

7 Cf. the references to Herodotus's histories: SCHMITZ, Achikar.

treatments in biblical tradition are focused on. This is with the aim of posing general theological questions to which the story of Judith has narrative answers. The search for role patterns that are actualized and modified in the narrative stands in this horizon of questioning.

## 2. Judith is Presented (Chapter 8)

The character Judith enters the narrative very late. The audience has to be patient for seven chapters before Judith appears for the first time; almost halfway through the book. With her entry, the whole narrative is set anew by grammatically and syntactically replicating the first verse of the book (Jdt 1:1). Jdt 8:1 is an incomplete sentence and is not finished until Jdt 8:9 (like Jdt 1:1 in 1:5). The verses in between stand as if in parenthesis within the started, but only later resumed, sentence. The inserted sequence provides important information for comprehending what follows. While it is information about the political situation in the first chapter, chapter eight introduces the character Judith. Through this correspondence, the character Judith is structurally paralleled with the political part already in the introduction that initially only deals with her personal and family history.

For the question of the portrayal of the character Judith, her introduction is of special interest. When looking for role patterns behind the character it is significant to note in what order information is provided, because each piece of information is connected to a certain female role.<sup>8</sup> First Judith's family background is described in the form of a genealogy (Jdt 8:1) and then her deceased husband Manasseh is introduced (Jdt 8:2). With this form of introduction, the perspective is guided in a certain way. The character Judith is not first of all presented as 'Judith', but before her introduction she is defined in relation to two male characters: the first role attributed to Judith in the narrative is that of the "daughter". The mentioning of her father Merari is followed by a long genealogy – the longest for a woman in the Bible – that traces her family back to her ancestor Israel / Jacob. In the next verse (Jdt 8:2), Judith's second role is specified. Judith is "wife" of Manasseh. With this role, she is again defined through a man. This short description is followed by the next. Judith is a "widow" (Jdt 8:2–3), because Manasseh has already died. The circumstances of Manasseh's death are de-

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8 The introduction of Judith (8:1–8) can be divided into three parts (8:1.2–3.4–8).

scribed remarkably elaborately although they are not important for the further plot (Jdt 8:2–3). It seems that first potential questions about her husband have to be clarified before the narrative can continue with Judith, because only then does the narrative move on with the description of Judith's situation.

In the first three verses, the narrator presents Judith in the triple role structure as daughter, wife and widow. Judith's introduction in the narrative thereby begins with exclusively stereotypical role patterns in which she is defined through a man and not introduced individually. Interestingly these role patterns are immediately replaced. Judith's status as daughter makes way for that as wife, which again is replaced by her status as a widow. This widowhood, however, is emphasized by stressing the duration of her being a widow; for three years and four months. Thereby the line of development is opened. How does Judith deal with her status as a widow? Instead of elaborating on urgent legal or economic aspects connected with the status of a widow, the narrator describes her personal and religious life and conduct. Judith lives in a tent on the roof of her house and "put sackcloth on her loins, and the garments of her widowhood were upon her" (Jdt 8:5). With this description, the reader's view is directed to her body. In describing her clothes and her place of living, it is insinuated that Judith would take on her role as a widow in mourning and assimilate to this new life. This description of a widow completely devoted to her religious orientation is continued in the next verse: "And she was wont to fast all the days of her widowhood, save on the day before the Sabbath and the Sabbath and the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon and the feasts and days of joy of the house of Israel" (Jdt 8:6).

Until this point the introduction of Judith completely meets the role expectations called forth by the mentioned three roles – daughter, wife and widow. Now the image of Judith is changed unexpectedly with two more descriptions: First Judith's beauty is characterized: "She was beautiful in appearance, and was very lovely to behold" (Jdt 8:7). Thereby the focalized object remains not just Judith's body as described by her clothes, but the orientation towards her body is intensified. From the description of Judith's appearance and the manner of her clothing the description moves to the form of her body. The description of her as beautiful stands in stark contrast to her unattractive attire which especially emphasizes her beauty. It obviously does not have to be produced or intensified by clothes or cosmetics.

Only at the end of the introduction does the narrator speak of the practical circumstances of Judith's life. Until now, the audience does not know what she lives on. On the contrary, the emphasis on her status as a widow and on her pious conduct conveys that Judith is a poor widow in need of protection. Most biblical references talk about widows in this role (cf. Exod 22:21; Deut 24:17; 26:12 etc.). Only now do the readers learn that Judith is a wealthy woman. In her possession are property, livestock, male and female servants as well as gold and silver (Jdt 8:7). It is startling at first that this information is given only here and not in connection with the description of Manasseh's death, but it serves to build a certain role expectation, which is then disappointed and modified by new information. Instead of a pious widow in need of protection, Judith emerges as a privileged woman who has become wealthy and independent by the death of her husband.<sup>9</sup> With this background, the motif of widowhood looks very different. Judith's status as a widow is "a kind of legal liberation for a woman, making her a legal entity of herself".<sup>10</sup> "Like the divorcée, the widow is autonomous, falling under no man's jurisdiction. So we expect her to have power to conduct her personal affairs freely within the limits of the law".<sup>11</sup> Judith's widowhood is therefore not referring to social distress, but to the decision to remain autonomous. Her way of life does not result from the role of a stereotypical "widow", but is a personally chosen life style possible on the basis of her material life circumstances. Independence and wealth are the presuppositions for Judith's secluded life allowing her to pray and to fast without having to work for her livelihood. "Judith, then, is allowed to remain her 'own person', independent of husband and children, and her wealth enables this unusual situation to be sustained".<sup>12</sup>

The last description of Judith in the introduction is her "fear of God" (Jdt 8:8). "Fear of God" signifies a comprehensive attitude in life

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9 Biblical woman who command property on their own are an exception (cf. Naomi [Ruth 4:3.4], Abigail [1 Sam 25], the woman of Schunem [2 Kgs 8:1-6] and the widow of Zarepta [1 Kgs 17:17; 2 Kgs 4:2]). Cf. in the Greek sphere Tomyris, queen of the Massagetes (Herodot I 205f; 212,3; 214,1.4); Kratesipolis, the female ruler of Sikyon (Diodorus S 19, 67,1f) as well as the literary character Melite (Achilles Tatius V 11,5f).

10 ILAN, Women 147. ILAN cites mQidd. 1.1: "A woman acquires her freedom (lit. acquires herself) in two ways . . . by a bill of divorce and by the death of her husband".

11 WEGNER, Chattel 138f. Cf. to widows in Hellenistic times also ELDER, Transformation 10-31.

12 SAWYER, Dressing up 27.

encompassing the relation to God as well as the relationships among fellow men and women and her personal way of life. It is understood as the beginning and source of wisdom (Prov 1:29; 2:5; 9:10 etc.) allowing for orientation and righteous behavior in a confusing and complex reality. This description does not only conclude Judith's introduction, but serves as a summary of what has been previously stated. In this way the pious life of Judith (Jdt 8:5–6) and her fear of God (Jdt 8:8) frame the description of her beauty and her wealth (Jdt 8:7) and thereby place beauty and wealth in the context of her life in devotion to God.

With this ends the introduction of Judith, who has been presented first with the roles of daughter (Jdt 8:1), wife (Jdt 8:2), and widow (Jdt 8:3) and subsequently with the characteristics pious (Jdt 8:5–6), beautiful (Jdt 8:7), wealthy (Jdt 8:7), and with fear of God (Jdt 8:8). This order shows the procedure of the narrator. He builds up a certain, usually traditional role expectation, in which women are defined through the men superior to them. However, the role expectation is then broken in order to fill it with new and absolute opposite content – Judith as a wealthy, autonomous woman with a personally chosen life style. This strategy is confirmed by another observation.

The first thing that the audience learns of Judith is not that she is a “daughter” but that she “hears” (Jdt 8:1): “Now in those days Judith heard . . .”.<sup>13</sup> It is not mentioned what she hears. Instead of designating the things heard, the sentence ends abruptly and is followed by her long introduction by the narrator. Only verse 9 takes up the beginning of Jdt 8:1 with the verb “to hear”.<sup>14</sup> The interrupted action is continued in Jdt 8:9: Judith hears what happened in Bethulia, sends her maid to call the elders of the city to her and gives them a lengthy and theologically profound speech in which she accuses the elders of a complete misjudgment of the situation. This is an ingenious narrative composition. The first thing the readers would hear (*fabula*)<sup>15</sup> would be an

13 Most translations add a general object even though this is not in the Greek text: The *New Revised Standard Version* translates: “Now in those days Judith heard *about these things: she was the daughter of Merari*” (the words in Italics are added). The *New Jerusalem Bible* translates even more free: “Judith was informed at the time of what had happened. She was the daughter of Merari”.

14 Jdt 8:1 και ἤκουσεν ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἰουδιθ θυγάτηρ Μερარი υἱοῦ Ωξ [ . . . ] Jdt 8:9 και ἤκουσεν τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ λαοῦ τὰ πονηρὰ [ . . . ].

15 Following the definition of MIEKE BAL the ‘fabula’ is the (logical) sequence of events, whereas the ‘story’ is the way in which these events are presented, BAL, *Narratology* 6.

action by Judith presenting her immediately as an independently thinking and autonomously acting woman. If the readers were first made acquainted with this Judith, a different picture of her would emerge automatically. Judith hears, becomes active and orders the elders of the city to her with the intention of explaining to them in detail (Jdt 8:11–27) how far wrong they have gone, politically and theologically. Thereby the first impression of the character Judith would be that of a highly educated and sophisticated thinker who not only reflects her concerns theologically but also boldly advocates them. However, this first impression of the fabula is interrupted by her introduction which is inserted in the narrated flow of events (story). Instead of introducing a self-confident Judith, the narrator introduces the reader to a Judith described with traditional role patterns. These modest role attributes are carefully modified by catching up to the real character Judith step by step. The course of events is continued only after this introduction. By this strategy, it appears that the envisaged readers have to be acquainted slowly with the “real” Judith. Potential prejudices arising from Judith’s first appearance on the level of the fabula (Jdt 8:1a.9), where she is acting directly, have to be alleviated. The aim of this construction is to defuse the character in view of the reader. Instead of the independently acting person, it is Judith’s status as daughter, wife and widow that is remembered. Already by the first few verses, the sophisticated narrative of Judith shows how it deals with roles and role stereotypes, with role expectations and their alterations.

### 3. Judith Prays (Chapter 9)

After Judith has been introduced as a theologically reflective speaker in chapter 8, she is presented as a praying woman in the ninth chapter. Of many aspects, two observations relating to role assignments to the character Judith should be mentioned. Firstly, the description of the role and position Judith prays in and secondly, the continuation of the motif “widow” by Judith herself in her prayer (Jdt 9:4.9).

After the elders have left Judith, she remains alone on the roof of her house. A threefold preparation to pray is then portrayed: “Then Judith fell upon her face and put ashes on her head and laid bare the sackcloth which she had put on” (Jdt 9:1). The combination of these three preparations for prayer seems unusual at first. Again, it starts



with the role patterns the readers are familiar with. Whoever wants to pray falls down before God as a sign of reverence and adoration. The second preparation is familiar to the readers, too. Putting ashes on one's head is a sign of grief and lament (cf. 2 Sam 13:19; Job 2:12; Lam 2:10) as well as repentance (Isa 58:5; Lam 3:16; Dan 9:3). This common gesture, however, is surprising in this place. Why should Judith pray here as a penitent or in mourning? In addition, the third preparation is completely strange. When Judith opens the sackcloth she has put on her skin, the reader wonders if she is probably naked.<sup>16</sup> Most translations picture Judith showing her sackcloth, but then the scene is defrauded of its decisive aspect. In the whole of the Ancient Near East, nudity is a sign of low status including in the Old Testament where it is qualified negatively (2 Sam 6:14; Exod 20:26). If she is naked, Judith humbles herself in voluntary nakedness and moves herself into a situation of no status. And in Jdt 9:1, the scene of the narrative of Tamar is taken up to describe Judith's posture when praying. Tamar tore her clothes after being raped and put ashes on her head (2 Sam 13:19). This scene is taken up in Jdt 9:1. Therefore, the character Judith behaves like a raped woman who turns to God in prayer after the violence done to her. This fits the content of the prayer that follows. Here Judith compares herself to Dinah who was raped as well. In this way, Judith prays herself into a raped woman through ritual anticipation. This has to be confusing to the reader – why does she do so? Judith has announced a plan to save Israel to the elders without disclosing it (Jdt 8:32–34). Therefore, neither the elders nor the reader know what Judith plans. Only afterwards will they be able to understand the significance of the scene of prayer depicted in 9:1. In the camp of the Assyrians Judith is in danger of rape. In light of this risk, she asks God for strength and power. She specifically asks God in prayer for the strength of Dinah's brother Simeon who, with the help of his brothers, killed the rapist of his sister as well as the fellow countrymen of this man (Gen 34).

With the outer form of her prayer, Judith takes on two roles in chapter nine: As a praying woman and as a raped woman. As in chapter eight, we find her a movement from things familiar to the readers and corresponding to their expectations towards the surprising, maybe even the scandalous. The praying character Judith conforms to the role expected of a pious widow living withdrawn, but by praying to God

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16 The verb γυμνῶ "to be naked" is found in the Septuagint again only in reference to the naked and exposed Noah (Gen 9:21).

naked as a raped woman asking for the strength of the brother avenging his sister, she breaks this role fundamentally.

The second observation regards the motif of the widow resumed in Judith's prayer. In her prayer she emphasizes her status as a widow twice: "O God, my God, now hear this widow too" and "Give to me, a widow, the strong hand to do what I plan" (Jdt 9:4.9). In the biblical tradition, God is portrayed as the helper of widows and orphans again and again (Exod 22:21–23; Deut 10:18; Jer 30:5 [LXX]; Ps 67:6; 145:9 [LXX] etc.). Judith's self-designation in the prayer works to remind God of his special relationship to the widows in order that he might help her. Thereby Judith takes on the position of a poor widow in need of protection, without any rights or power, even though this is everything she is not. She is wealthy, autonomous and independent (Jdt 8:4–8). As Judith in chapter nine takes on the role as a raped woman – which she is not – here she speaks before God as a poor widow – which she is not either.

While in chapter eight there are role ascriptions to the character Judith by the narrator, the roles in chapter nine are chosen by the character Judith herself. This shows how the Judith narrative uses different role patterns arising out of different perspectives. So the role assignment "widow" has a different aim in chapter eight than it has as self-designation in chapter nine. These different perspectives appear within the narrative as well, as the reaction of Uzziah to Judith's speech shows. In his answer, Uzziah emphasizes that Judith has a true heart, wisdom and understanding, and that she is a pious woman and may therefore pray to God for rain (Jdt 8:28–31). Hence, he sees in Judith the woman the narrator presented in his introduction (Jdt 8:1–8): the pious, withdrawn, God-fearing widow. With this he does not only underestimate Judith, he also misunderstands her.<sup>17</sup> This misjudgment of Uzziah becomes even more obvious when Judith's radical self-dramatization as a raped woman follows immediately after his belittling estimation.

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<sup>17</sup> In Uzziah's speech, the decisive keywords of Judith's introduction in 8:1–8 are picked up.

#### 4. Judith Changes (Chapter 10)

After Judith has finished her prayer with the self-designation as a raped woman, she goes down into her house: “She removed the sackcloth she had been wearing, took off her widow’s garments” (Jdt 10:3). Taking off the sackcloth and her widow’s garments, is more than a change of clothes. Judith takes off her self-chosen life-style to carry out a change of roles. She “bathed her body with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment. She combed her hair, put on a tiara, and dressed herself in the festive attire that she used to wear while her husband Manasseh was living. She put sandals on her feet, put on her necklaces, bracelets, rings, earrings and all her jewellery” (Jdt 10:3–4).<sup>18</sup> The perspective is again directed entirely to Judith’s body; here the change of roles takes place. While Jdt 8:7 states that Judith is a beautiful woman, here it is described that Judith makes herself beautiful. “She *made* herself beautiful” (Jdt 10:4). Beauty is staged. The way in which Judith dresses up and adorns herself with jewelry reminds of another biblical text. In Isa 3:18–20 the jewelry and the appearance of the women of the Jerusalem upper class is described: “In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets”.<sup>19</sup> The jewelry mentioned in Isa 3:18–20 is repeated in Jdt 10:4 word-for-word.<sup>20</sup> The scene makes clear that Judith behaves like a woman of the wealthy upper class. She is indeed a woman of this upper class and has everything that belongs to a life of the high society. Even though she is part of this class she does not live accordingly, which emphasizes the image of Judith built up until now. Her life style is chosen by herself. She could live differently if she wanted, but she refuses to do so. She

18 Jdt 10:3–4: καὶ περιέλατο τὸν σάκκον ὃν ἐνεδύκει καὶ ἐξεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς χηρεύσεως αὐτῆς καὶ περιεκλύσατο τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καὶ ἐχρίσατο μύρω παχεῖ καὶ δέταξεν τὰς τρίχας τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπέθετο μίτραν ἐπ’ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐνεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς εὐφροσύνης αὐτῆς ἐν οἷς ἐστολίζετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνδρός αὐτῆς Μανασση καὶ ἔλαβεν σανδάλια εἰς τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς καὶ περιέθετο τοὺς χλιδῶνας καὶ τὰ ψέλια καὶ τοὺς δακτυλίους καὶ τὰ ἐνώτια καὶ πάντα τὸν κόσμον αὐτῆς καὶ ἐκαλλωπίσατο σφόδρα εἰς ἀπάτησιν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀνδρῶν ὅσοι ἂν ἴδωσιν αὐτήν.

19 Isa 3:18–20: ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκεῖνη καὶ ἀφελεῖ κύριος τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἱματισμοῦ αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς κόσμους αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ἐμπλόκια καὶ τοὺς κοσμήμβους καὶ τοὺς μηνίσκους καὶ τὸ κάθεμα καὶ τὸν κόσμον τοῦ προσώπου αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν σύνθεσιν τοῦ κόσμου τῆς δόξης καὶ τοὺς χλιδῶνας καὶ τὰ ψέλια καὶ τὸ ἐμπλόκιον καὶ τὰ περιδέξια καὶ τοὺς δακτυλίους καὶ τὰ ἐνώτια.

20 Cf. RAKEL, Judit 278–282.

knows all the better the role she now takes on and she knows how to appear in it. The aim of her change of role is clearly stated: “to beguile the eye of any man who saw her” (Jdt 10:4; another translation: “to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her”).

The Greek semantic field ἀπάτω signifies “cheat, trick, outwit, beguile, deceit”.<sup>21</sup> Judith herself has said earlier in her prayer to God that she aims to deceive and seduce (Jdt 9:10.13), yet referring not to her body, but to her words. Only after she has accomplished her goal she reiterates the connection between her body and the deceit (Jdt 13:16; 16:10) – again in prayer. In the whole narrative the semantic field of ἀπάτω oscillates between “seducing” and “deceiving” and thereby corresponds to Judith’s change of roles in Jdt 10:3–4. Judith disguises herself as a seductress in order to seduce and deceive with this role. This means that Judith is beautiful, but not identical to the role of the “beautiful, seducing and dangerous woman”. She reckons with a certain way in which men will see her. She anticipates the reaction of the men and develops a strategy to face the reason for their gaze. As Judith chose the role of the raped woman, she now chooses that of the beautiful and seductive dangerous woman.

## 5. Men See Judith (Chapter 10–11)

In her new role, Judith leaves her house and already has striking success in her hometown Bethulia (Jdt 10:6–10). The elders, with whom Judith has spoken as a withdrawn widow are astonished at her change, “When they saw Judith, her face so changed and her clothes so different, they were lost in admiration of her beauty” (Jdt 10:7). Through the eyes of these men, the readers see Judith anew and can discover her in her new role. Thereby it becomes clear that in the moment Judith leaves her house, the perspective of her changes. As before the focalized object is Judith’s body, but now the audience perceives Judith through the eyes of the men surrounding her. This change of focalization is important for the perception of Judith’s roles. While the readers first become witnesses of Judith’s personally chosen change of roles, they now see Judith and her body through the eyes of strange men.

21 In the narrative of Judith ἀπάτη is found in Jdt 9:3.10.13; 16:8, ἀπάτησις in 10:4 and ἀπατώ in 9:3; 12:16; 13:16.

With the men of Bethulia the readers watch as Judith and her servant maid go to the camp of the Assyrians: “while the men of the town watched her all the way down the mountain and across the valley, until they lost sight of her” (Jdt 10:10). The way to Holofernes is narrated in three stages. On the way, Judith and her maid are seized by soldiers and taken to the camp until they reach Holofernes’ tent (Jdt 10:11–23). At each stage it is described how men see Judith and are amazed at her beauty (Jdt 10:7.14.19.23; cf. 11:8.20).

By leaving her hometown and entering the camp of the Assyrians the context for the role as a beautiful woman that Judith has taken on changes fundamentally. While in Bethulia Judith is a well-respected woman of the upper class, she becomes an endangered woman the moment she enters the camp. There she is facing the real danger of rape. Endangered and as a stranger, she is without any rights or protection. She faces this risk with her role as a beautiful woman who wants to be desired by men and thereby hopes to get access to Holofernes. This is exactly the strategy of her ἀπάτησις in both its connotations. She tries to seduce and deceive the men.

Here, the differences between lying and deception should be explained:

“Lying is the intentional prevarication of facts through the manipulation of language. Deception is the intentional production of (a) misleading message(s) – through linguistic or other means – or the intentional concealment of required information. [. . .] To deceive is to signify something to which no real state of things corresponds”.<sup>22</sup>

With this strategy, Judith speaks to Holofernes. She does not lie, but phrases her concerns in a way that Holofernes has to understand them as misleading messages. She masks the truth of her words with intentional double meanings.

In this respect, Judith’s behavior can be interpreted as *trickery*. “[T]rickery is used by a person in a position of social disadvantage in order to influence the course of events. [. . .] each of the stories is not without a comical side to it”.<sup>23</sup> *Trickster*-narratives thereby belong to underdog-situations:

“[W]hen individuals lack authority – whether it be political, economic, religious, or domestic authority – they resort to strategies which allow them to achieve their goals and gain compliance with their wishes. I under-

22 FUCHS, *Way of Women* 68f.

23 STEINBERG, *Tricksters* 7.

stand trickery to be a kind of power available to persons in a subordinate position vis-à-vis another individual".<sup>24</sup>

In trickery-narratives, creative potential arises out of these underdog-situations so that alternative models of behaviour can be developed:

"As norm-breakers, boundary-crossers, paradoxical beings, tricksters embody other ways of doing things. [...] Tricksters make available for thought the way things are not but might be; their stories can function as critiques of the *status quo* as well as models for other possible arrangements. Whether and how such stories activate those functions depends upon the interpretive community in which they are told."<sup>25</sup>

Israel as an interpretive community knows the role Judith is playing here. In the camp of the Assyrians she is the 'strange woman'. In biblical scriptures, men are warned repeatedly of the 'strange woman'. The beautiful female stranger is dangerous because she beguiles the men with her words and her beautiful appearance, makes them bewildered and seduces them (cp. Prov 5:1–14; Sir 26:9–18). The Judith narrative plays with this pronounced androcentric assessment. Judith is fascinating as a beautiful, strange woman not only for the soldiers (Jdt 10:19), but she also seduces Holofernes to make him confused first psychologically and then physically. The renewed adornment with jewelry and festive dresses is not emphasized without any reason before the feast of Holofernes where Judith's saving murder of the enemies' warlord happens (Jdt 12:15).

## 6. Judith's Life Afterwards (Chapter 16)

Returning after her mission (Jdt 13:11), Judith comes home in all her festive adornment, jewelry, and cosmetic aid in the role of the beautiful woman. The severed head of Holofernes serves as a proof for her success. With this return not only does the masquerade of the beautiful, dangerous woman end, but also the mentions of Judith's beauty generally.<sup>26</sup> She is now depicted as theologian and praying woman, as a strategist and a general, and as a dancing and wreath-crowned woman (Jdt 14–15). She leads the festive procession to Jerusalem, interpreting in a long review what happened and donating the captured goods from Holofernes' tent to the temple (15).

<sup>24</sup> STEINBERG, Tricksters 6.

<sup>25</sup> ASHLEY, Deception 113.

<sup>26</sup> Exceptions can only be found in her prayer in chapter 16, which do not count insofar as in this prayer the events are reviewed and interpreted in retrospect.

The last five verses of the book of Judith (Jdt 16:21–25) narrate how Judith returns to the original lifestyle she has chosen, thereby returning to herself. It is significant that her wealth is mentioned first of all (Jdt 16:21). It is the material basis for her life in autonomy. Accordingly, it is told secondly that she turns down any proposal of marriage. This is how she can maintain her freedom (Jdt 16:23).

## 7. Conclusion

The construction of roles of the character Judith is complex. Based on the circumstances of her life, Judith is wealthy, beautiful, has a large estate (Jdt 8:7), and belongs to the leading class in Bethulia. Thereby she fulfills the outer criteria of the female against which Jesus Sirach warns so emphatically, “Do not be taken in by a woman’s beauty, never lose your head over a woman. Bad temper, insolence and shame hold sway where the wife supports the husband” (Sir 25:21–22). While in her hometown she actually belongs to the high society, she renounces voluntarily a life of wealth, luxury and paraded beauty. Thus, the difference between Judith and the type of woman warned of in Jesus Sirach is marked. Judith instead chooses a simple lifestyle but maintains enough influence to be able to call the leading men of town into her house, to dispute with them about their behavior, and criticize them in a fundamental way, theologically and politically.

In view of her plan, Judith humbles herself even before God like a raped woman. However, her role in the camp of the Assyrians is quite the opposite. Here Judith is a woman and stranger without protection who has no rights and depends on the will of the men surrounding her. There she is in an underdog-situation, in which she shows herself as a beautiful woman. The woman belonging to the upper class in Israel becomes the endangered woman at the edge in the camp of the Assyrians. To face this risk, she masks herself as a beautiful woman, thereby becoming a dangerous woman. This change of roles is the reason why Judith, while in the camp of the Assyrians, fits the model of the ‘strange woman’ known in biblical literature. Judith can carry out this change of roles only because she is a beautiful woman. However, her beauty is understood as a sign and expression of her fear of God. Thereby Judith proves to be the dangerous-endangered savior of Israel not based on her beauty, but based on her fear of God. She is indeed what she claims to be before Holofernes: θεοσεβής – god-fearing (Jdt 11:16)!

Looking at the order of the role constructions, a frame at the beginning and the end of the story dealing with well-known role patterns can be recognized. As Judith's traditional role stereotypes (daughter, wife, widow) are included in the introduction, they are also mentioned at the end (widow), but the connotations have changed entirely. It is completely clear to the readers that instead of the widow in need of protection they are faced with a woman who uses the space she has been given by the circumstances (wealthy and without a husband) for an autonomous and self-determined life.

Within this framework, a whole array of female roles is connected to Judith. They can be divided into two groups. Firstly, there are roles which Judith takes on herself. Judith becomes the praying woman falling down before God (Jdt 9:1) and acting like a raped woman (Jdt 9:3). She prays before God like a poor widow in need of protection (Jdt 9:3.9) and finally transforms herself into a beautiful woman of the upper class (Jdt 10:3–4). All of these roles are chosen by the character Judith herself. The second group of role patterns arises out of the changed context when Judith goes to the camp of the Assyrians. Now she cannot decide freely, instead others decide her fate. Her only bonus is her beauty. The change of focalization correlates to this different context. Judith is now seen through the eyes of men. The transition from the first to the second group takes place in 10:7–10. At the border between Bethulia and the surrounding area besieged by the Assyrians the readers are confronted for the first time with this changed perspective of perception, now seeing the women through the eyes of the men in Bethulia. In the camp of the Assyrians, Judith is turned into the dangerous woman by the changed context, now fulfilling the androcentric stereotype of the 'strange woman'. All of these chosen roles take place with reference to Judith's body, which is central as a focalized object. Like signatures, the role patterns are inscribed into Judith's body. This seems to be the reason why the character Judith emphasizes the integrity of her body, "Glory to the Lord who has protected me in the course I took! My face seduced him, only to his own undoing; he committed no sin with me to shame me or disgrace me" (Jdt 13:16).

The function of the different roles and the narrative dynamics created by their order are products of the narrator. His strategy of narration appears to aim at taking the readers – familiar with and affirming traditional role patterns – on a journey with a fictional story where he wants to attain their agreement. This journey ends with Judith's life



beyond these traditional roles which she has used to her advantage. A woman who is wealthy and beautiful is not necessarily a dangerous and strange woman. Such a woman, however, can accomplish a great mission using the possibilities she has. It is the wealthy, beautiful and educated Judith who saves all of Israel. Indeed the book of Judith contributes to overcoming restrictive role ascriptions to women in Hellenistic time.

The question of the soldiers "Who can despise these people, who have women like this among them?" (Jdt 10:19) is not answered explicitly in the narrative, but passed to the readers. Their answer might be as clear as the last sentence of the narrative: "No one ever again spread terror among the Israelites during the lifetime of Judith, or for a long time after her death" (Jdt 16:25).

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