CHAPTER FIVE

Judith

THE theme of Judith and Holofernes occupies a larger place in Artemisia Gentileschi's *oeuvre* than any other subject. In part, this may be an accident of survival, for although the artist is known to have painted more than one version of several themes—at least four Susannas, two Dianas, two Davids—many of these examples are lost or unknown to us today. But at least five autograph Judiths have been preserved, three of which are deservedly placed among her finest works. Moreover, the theme is likely to have held personal importance for the artist, for of all the female characters that she painted, Judith was the most positive and active figure, whose heroic deed held for Artemisia the greatest potential for self-identification.

Many writers have interpreted the gory decapitation shown in Artemisia's Uffizi *Judith* (Color Plate 8) in psychosexual terms, as an expression of imagined revenge against her rapist Agostino Tassi. The evidence for this interpretation resides simultaneously in the image of the executioner-heroine—for some, a presumed self-portrait of the artist—and in an equation that is both biblical and Freudian, between decapitation and castration: the just punishment for rape in an eye-for-an-eye tradition.[1] It is impossible to ignore the echo of personal experience in this *Judith*, even more overt than in the *Susanna* and *Lucretia*; indeed, the very imagery of the bloody bedroom scene invokes Artemisia's own description of Tassi's bedroom assault upon her, with its tangle of knees, thighs, blood, and knives (see Appendix B, ms. 18–19). Yet it is an oversimplification to interpret the Uffizi *Judith* purely as an expression of fantasy revenge against a rapist. Sensationalist fascination with the melodrama of Artemisia's rape, as well as facile association of stormy biography with violent pictorial imagery, have obscured for us not only the aesthetic complexity of the artist's identification with her depicted character, but also the fact that such artistic self-projection was by no means unusual. For if Artemisia included something of herself in the image of Judith slaying Holofernes, she followed a tradition already venerable in her day.

Giorgione, Titian, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio are known to have united their own literal self-images with the characters of their art: Giorgione painted himself as David, Titian as St. Jerome; and Michelangelo included himself as vanquished victim of his sculptural *Victory*, as the flayed skin of Bartholomew in the *Last Judgment*, and as Nicodemus in the Florentine *Pietà*.[2] The youthful Caravaggio may have portrayed himself as Bacchus and Medusa; and in the Borghese *David*, one of his final pictures (Fig. 267), he unquestionably conceived the suspended head of the stunned Goliath

in the image of his own mature physiognomy.[3] With a variety of expressive results, these major artists of the Italian Renaissance sought to convey, through autograph images that attest their psychic involvement with their characters, something about the eternal relevance of those mythic characters as spiritual role models for modern men. It is not surprising, then, that Artemisia Gentileschi, who had already demonstrated her sense of artistic connection with Michelangelo and Caravaggio, would now approach the Judith theme in a similar participatory spirit, recognizing the value of her iconographic character as a spiritual model.

For Artemisia, however, identification with the female character Judith had both a different personal meaning and innovative expressive implications. In contrast to many of the masculine examples of the "included self" (in Leo Steinberg's phrase), which frequently center on figures of penitence, remorse, and guilt, the woman painter Artemisia finds in her female characters—not only, but especially, Judith—models of psychic liberation, *exempla* for an imagined action upon the world, not meditative retreat from it. It is essential that we recognize the positive and healthy elements of the artist's identification with her character, all the more as they have been hidden by the prevailing and almost obsessive interpretations of the painting as savage revenge. For it is not so much the male character who is acted upon, but the female character who acts, that is of interest to Artemisia, and who offers her an avenue for psychic self-expansion. Through the central character of the Uffizi *Judith and Holofernes*, Artemisia was able not simply to carry out psychic vengeance against her sexual oppressor, but also to justify rebellious, antisocial instincts—which she understandably may have held—through the celebration of the *legitimate* aggressive deeds of the famous biblical character, heroic avenger of the Jewish people. It is pertinent to compare an important recent analysis of the female writer, who, as the authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic* have pointed out, "searches for a female model, not because she wants dutifully to comply with the male definitions of her 'femininity,' but because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavors."[4]

In her paintings of Judith Slaying Holofernes, Artemisia appears to have drawn personal courage from her subject, to go farther than any woman artist had ever gone—or would go, before the twentieth century—in depicting a confrontation of the sexes from a female point of view. The Uffizi *Judith* inevitably chills us, and it has offended many who commented on it, but not because of its violence, for violence is a staple of art. It offends and shocks because it presents an antisocial and illegitimate violence, the murder of a man by a woman. Beneath the rational veneer of the moralized biblical story lies a lawless reality too horrible for men to contemplate. Holofernes is not merely an evil Oriental despot who deserves his death, he is Everyman; and Judith and her servant are, together, the most dangerous and frightening force on earth for man: women in control of his fate. Other works of art show women exercising power over men, some of them *Judith*s, as we shall see. Artemisia's pictures differ from all of these categorically, including some by women, because she uniquely

has given imaginative life to a fully antipatriarchal female character. In narrow iconographic terms, her Judith is the heroic and strong defender of her people. In metaphoric terms, however, she symbolizes female defiance of male power.[5]

BEFORE examining the individual paintings of Judith by Gentileschi, it will be helpful to establish at some length the conceptual conventions that shaped the numerous presentations of the Judith theme in artistic, theological, and literary tradition. The subject of Judith and Holofernes has been enormously popular, in all art forms and in all periods. It was treated in medieval manuscripts, sculptures, and frescoes, and in an Old English poem; by painters, sculptors, and printmakers from the fifteenth century on; in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama and in an eighteenth-century oratorio; in nineteenth-century poetry and romantic fiction; and in twentieth-century plays by Arnold Bennett and Jean Girardoux, and an opera by Arthur Honegger. The popularity of the story in all these media may be ascribed in part to its extraordinary visual and narrative possibilities, for it is a story with multiple and visually vivid episodes, all of them important to its outcome and meaning.

The story that we read in the Apocrypha has a complex and already well-shaped plot.[6] The Assyrian general Holofernes, having blazed a destructive path through Judaea in his drive from Ninevah to Jerusalem, at last lays siege to the Israelite town of Bethulia. The inhabitants are on the point of surrender when Judith, a widow, volunteers to act to save the nation. Without explaining her plan, she dresses in her finest clothes and takes her maid, Abra, with her to the enemy camp, telling the guards, who are smitten by her beauty, that she has come to offer help to Holofernes. Confronting the enemy general himself, she explains that the Israelites cannot be defeated unless they sin against their God, thus confirming what the Ammonite commander Achior had earlier told him. But, she says, they are at the point of committing the fateful sin, for in their desperation, they are about to consume the food and wine that had been consecrated for the priests. Accordingly, Judith counsels Holofernes to sustain the siege.

On the fourth day of her stay in his camp, Holofernes invites Judith to eat and drink with him. Donning her fine clothes and ornaments, she goes to his tent and they dine. In the course of the meal, Holofernes begins to desire her sexually, but as he had drunk more wine "than he had ever drunk in one day since he was born" (Judith 12:20), he falls asleep. Judith tells Abra to stand outside the bedchamber and wait for her. Left alone with the sleeping libertine, she takes his scimitar and severs his head. She then goes out, gives the head to the maid, who puts it in her bag of food, and they leave the camp, returning to Bethulia. On her return, she is welcomed by the people of Bethulia, to whom she presents Holofernes's head, advising them to hang it outside the city walls. The Assyrians, frightened and confused by reports that Holofernes had been slain by Judith, start to disperse and are easily defeated by the Bethulians. After a prayer of thanksgiving led by Judith, the citizens go to Jerusalem,

where she dedicates the spoils of Holofernes to the temple. Returning to Bethulia, Judith remains honored and famous—and unmarried, despite many offers—until her death at the age of one hundred and five.

The Book of Judith, composed anonymously toward the end of the second century B.C., was excluded from the Hebrew canon and rejected as apocryphal by the Protestants.[7] Martin Luther, in his commentary on the Book of Judith, saw it as allegory, not history, and accordingly placed Judith, along with the rest of the Apocrypha, outside the canon of the Old Testament.[8] In a literal sense, Luther was probably right, for while some writers have argued that a historical incident may lie behind the legend of Judith, the story is unlikely to have had any basis in historical fact. The Roman Jewish historian Josephus was unfamiliar with a Jewish heroine by that name; there is no geographic Bethulia, and there was no Assyrian general named Holofernes. It has been suggested that "Judith" was, in fact, a personification of Judaism itself, and that "Bethulia" is a variant of the Hebrew *Beth Aloa*, "House of God."[9] Such an allegorical interpretation of the Judith story is consistent with other biblical *topoi* that symbolize the Jewish people in the figure of a matron or virgin, and Israel's affliction in the form of a widow.[10] Moreover, it is historically fitting that Israel, defined as frail and weak against her foes, her survival a function of intelligence rather than strength, should have come to be personified by a woman, Judith, and a boy, David.

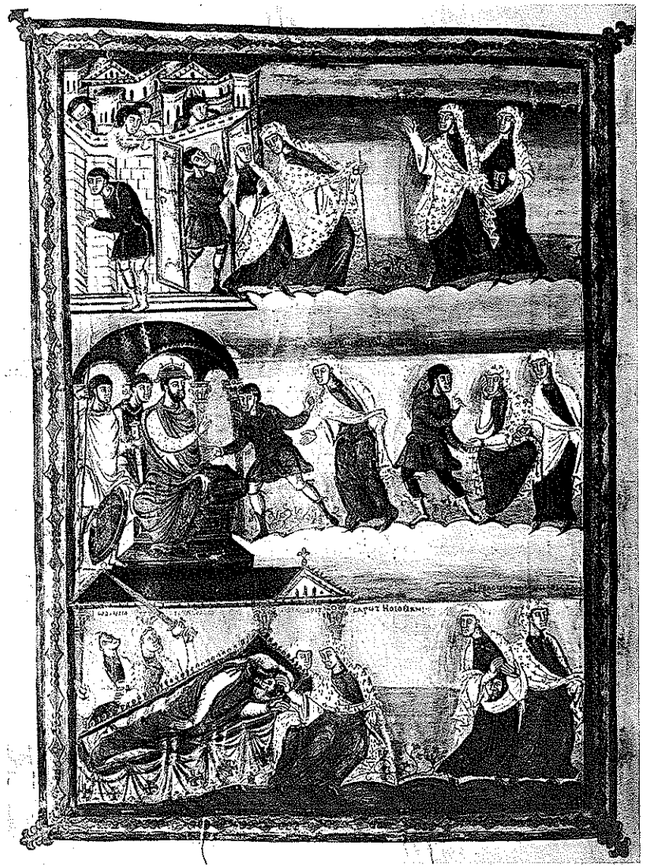
Yet the biblical legend is not without broader mythological foundation. Several elements of the Judith story find striking parallel in a Greek legend relayed in Herodotus's Lindian Chronicle, of an Hellenic spiritual elect under assault from Oriental barbarians (the Persians) who were saved by a female hero, Athena, after a specified five-day wait following the cut-off of water. Moses Hadas has concluded that the Judith story is a late creation of the Maccabean period, influenced from older Hellenic prototypes.[11] The story also conforms to an archetypal pattern of heroic myth. As in the Grail legend, the land—in this case, Bethulia under siege—is parched, deprived of water, and awaits rejuvenation by a heroic figure.[12] Judith, functioning as liberating hero, follows the three-stage pattern of heroic adventure: departure, contest with and slaying of the dragon (here, a bestial opponent), and triumphant return to the community. Like other mythic heroes, she is the "agent of life" who rescues and rejuvenates the kingdom.[13]

Despite the heroic potential of the story of Judith, however, and despite her close resemblance to masculine heroes of legend, the character of Judith has been subtly diminished and distorted in Western art and literature. She suffered at the outset from her absorption into the patriarchal Old Testament tradition, which had always subordinated its female heroes. The opening lines of Ecclesiasticus 44 are characteristic: "Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us." The list of famous forefathers is long—Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, Solomon, et cetera—and there are no women in this encomium to the heroes of Israel. Quite literally, these were

self-fulfilling prophets, whose stories became the canonical Hebrew texts, while the texts that bore female names were among those subjected to greater rabbinical scrutiny.[14] Such female paragons of Jewish heroism as did appear—Judith, Esther, and Jael—were construed to serve God by use of their seductive wiles, in keeping with the misogyny that shaped the earliest parable of Genesis, when woman was defined as a seducer of man and the cause of evil.[15] The highest conceivable achievement for a woman of the Old Testament was to turn her stereotypical ability—her only ability, in the Hebraic tradition—to the disadvantage of Israel's enemies. Thus, although Judith has continuously been perceived as heroic, her heroism was defined by ambivalent virtues and her character perceived as problematic, under the sharp critical scrutiny given her by masculine artists and writers. We may observe, consequently, that while heroic archetypes can and do apply to female characters,[16] art and literature have often worked to modify and change even those heroic women who survived the misogynist shaping of the Old Testament canon.

Early depictions of the Judith theme in manuscripts explored its full narrative range. The Bible of Charles the Bald, of the second half of the ninth century, contains one of the earliest preserved Bible illustrations of the whole Book of Judith (Fig. 244).[17] Here the entire story is recounted in continuous narrative episodes, beginning with Judith's exit from Bethulia and ending with her homecoming. As in other medieval depictions of the theme—e.g., an eighth-century fresco in S. Maria Antigua and a twelfth-century capital relief at Vézelay—special importance is given to the heroine's triumphant return to the walled city with the trophy of Holofernes's head. Since the city is identified with the Jewish nation, this emphasis underlines the importance of Judith's deed as a heroic act of national importance, the salvation of her people.[18] In their breadth of treatment, the manuscript illustrations of Judith are comparable to an Old English Judith poem of the tenth century, a work that has been described as an epic narrative.[19] Yet unlike other epic heroes such as Beowulf, the Judith of the manuscripts is an agent of the Lord, to whose will she subordinates her own. She acquires the necessary strength for her deed by praying for divine assistance and humbly covering her head with ashes, an episode illustrated in an archivolt on the north portal of Chartres (Fig. 245).[20] In these medieval conceptions of Judith, the spiritual message of the story is the miraculous power of weakness against strength, when armed by God.

The narrative approach continued in Renaissance art, but the emphasis changed from "epic narrative," in which the whole sweep of the story and its public conclusion is suggested, to a preferred focus upon the climactic event, the slaying of Holofernes and the removal of his head to a bag. Several versions of the theme by Mantegna concentrate upon this episode (Fig. 246), as does Michelangelo's *Judith* pendentive of the Sistine Ceiling (Fig. 247). In each of these examples, Judith's courage is expressively heightened in the juxtaposition of the formerly powerful, now helpless, body of Holofernes and the physically agile women who carry out the deed. Although



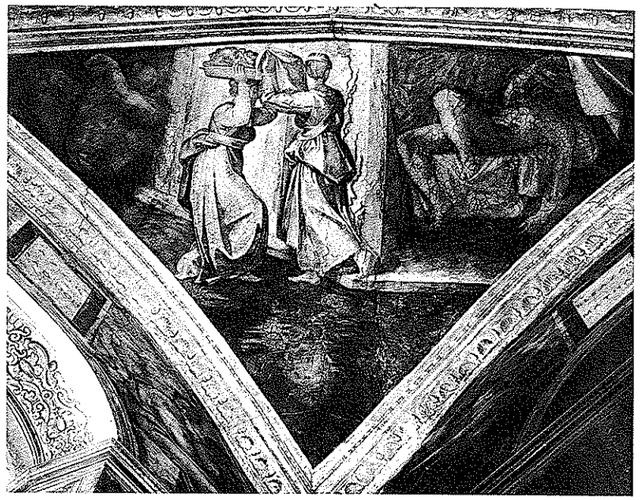
244. *Judith Departing Bethulia, Judith before Holofernes, Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 870. Bible of Charles the Bald, fol. 231v. Rome, S. Paolo fuori le Mura

245. *Judith Praying for Divine Guidance*, c. 1220. Chartres Cathedral, north porch, archivolt

the story of Judith might have lent itself to effective treatment in a fresco cycle, it was never given a public and heroic format in the Renaissance; in fact, examples of sequential narrative images of the theme became increasingly rare after the Middle Ages.[21] Botticelli's Uffizi diptych of c. 1470–72 (Figs. 248 and 249) is unusual for showing two episodes of the story, and also for its now rare recollection, in the background of the Judith panel, of the importance of the event for her city.[22]

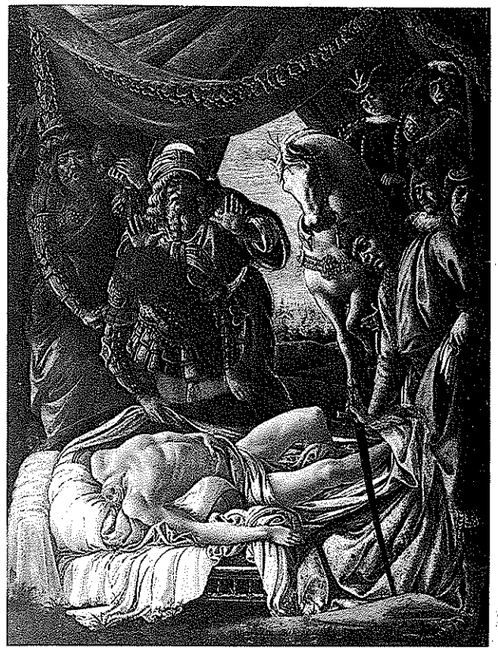
Like many other biblical characters, Judith assumed typological importance as a precursor of Christian triumphs. She appears, for example, as a niche statuette on

246. Andrea Mantegna, *Judith and Holofernes*, c. 1495. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art



247. Michelangelo, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, pendentive, 1509–1511. Rome, Vatican, Sistine Ceiling

Ghiberti's Paradise Doors, to the left of the David panel, joining David (whose typological meaning is closely linked with Judith's) and other Old Testament heroes as prefigurations of Christ's victory over death and salvation of mankind.[23] Along with Jael, Esther, and other biblical female paragons, Judith was often apostrophized in the Middle Ages as a prototype of the Virgin, especially the Virgin victorious over the devil, in keeping with the description of St. Bonaventura, who explains that the Virgin, like Judith, cut off the head of the devil, of whom Holofernes was the incarnation.[24] Judith appears in this capacity, conjoined with the Virgin, in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, and in a manuscript in Leipzig of 1436.[25] Through her association with the Virgin and her triumph over the ruler of the underworld, Judith became as well a prototype of the Church itself, in the established tradition by which militant women of the Bible were interpreted as types of the woman of Genesis (3: 15), who, God told the serpent after the Fall, "shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." The *mulier* of Genesis was, along with the *mulier fortis* of Proverbs



248. Botticelli, *The Slain Holofernes*, c. 1470–72. Florence, Uffizi

249. Botticelli, *Judith Returning to Bethulia*, c. 1470–72. Florence, Uffizi

31: 10 ff., understood by the early church fathers as both the Church and the Virgin, whose separate triumphs over Satan are echoed in Judith's defeat of Holofernes.[26]

In a related tradition that also originated in the Middle Ages, Judith became the embodiment of Chastity and Humility, victorious over Luxury and Pride. She is celebrated thus in a fifth-century Latin poem, the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, and in some medieval manuscripts.[27] The most memorable and important example of this allegorized conception of Judith is Donatello's bronze group in the Piazza Signoria, Florence (Fig. 250), in which Judith surmounts the drunken Holofernes whom she has conquered, in the ancient psychomachia formula of Good standing over Evil. No longer must we believe that her strength was solely the miraculous gift of God; this unusually heroic Judith has plausibly outwitted her dull and degenerate foe through her own continence, intelligence, and personal strength of will. In keeping with the values of the Quattrocento humanists, the polarity is here extended to include the victory of reasoned moderation over barbaric excess; and, as early inscriptions at-

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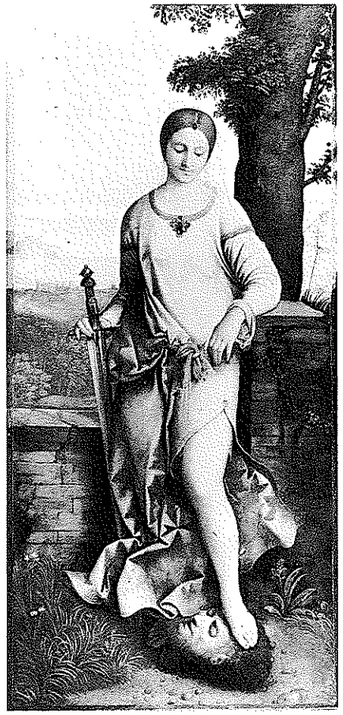

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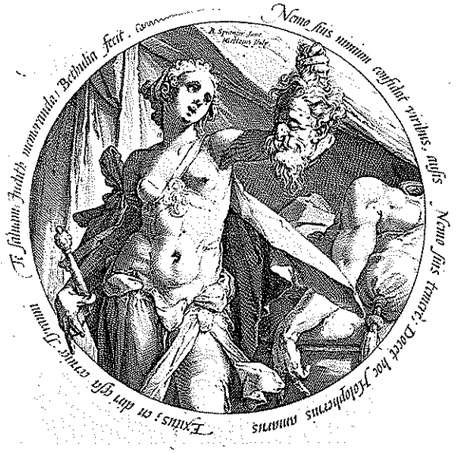

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250. Donatello, *Judith and Holofernes*, c. 1456–60. Florence, Piazza Signoria

251. Giorgione, *Judith*, c. 1500–1504. Leningrad, Hermitage

252. Hendrick Goltzius, after Bartholomaeus Spranger, *Judith*, c. 1585. B. III.83.272

tached to the statue attest, Donatello's *Judith* was employed in the fifteenth century, first by the Medici in support of their family association with enlightenment and virtue, and then as a civic emblem for the Florentine republic against her enemies.[28] As a public monument symbolizing the triumph of Humilitas (and also Fortitudo) over Superbia—the victory of a small but forceful figure over a luxurious, barbaric giant—the *Judith* of Donatello could fill, as did other Quattrocento *David*s, a metaphoric role first conceived for an ancient chosen people, the Israelites, and now suited to a Renaissance city-state in its struggle against modern political tyrants.

In certain High Renaissance paintings that extend Donatello's tropological emphasis, the character of Judith stands outside time. She comes to represent the distilled essence of the story's potential broader application: the heroine as an emblem of Virtue itself. Such is the case with Giorgione's *Judith* of about 1500–1504 in the Hermitage (Fig. 251), in which the heroine stands, monumental as a statue, with foot planted on the head of Holofernes.[29] Many late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century images sustain the psychomachia concept of Judith as an *exemplum* of Virtue, but with less concentrated effect. One example is a print by Goltzius, after Spranger (c. 1585; Fig. 252), in which Judith displays the head in a triumphant gesture reminiscent of Cellini's *Perseus* (which was itself inspired by Donatello's *Judith*).[30] The display of the head is later given a broader context that stresses Judith's role as civic heroine, while also satisfying a *maniera* taste for elaborate figure compositions, as we see in a small group of related drawings by Giorgio Vasari and Battista Naldini (Fig. 253). These drawings were carried out in apparent response to a request for a Judith painting by Borghini, who outlined in detail the expanded cast of characters and features that he wanted to see in this *historia*, to give it verisimilitude.[31] The display of Holofernes's head is the subject of Domenichino's design for a pendentive fresco in S. Silvestro al Quirinale, Rome, of c. 1625, and later still of Francesco Solimena's *Judith* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Fig. 254), where the walls of Bethulia are the backdrop for a large crowd scene.[32] Such images, despite their pictorial expansion of the scene, retain an essential link with the psychomachia tradition in their heraldic emphasis upon the statuesque victor and her trophy.

253. Battista Naldini, *Judith Displaying the Head of Holofernes*, drawing, c. 1564. Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts

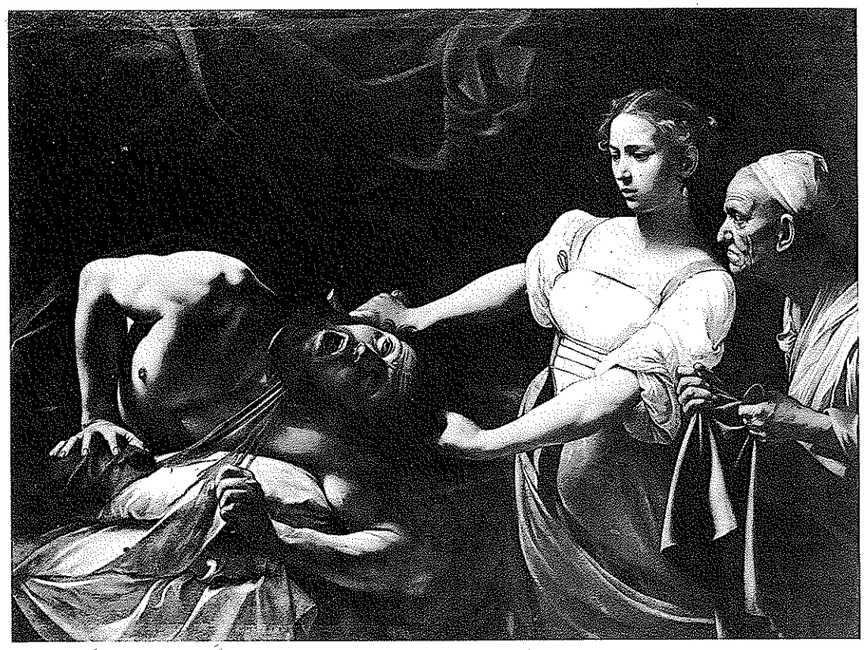
254. Francesco Solimena, *Judith Displaying the Head of Holofernes*, early eighteenth century. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

As an adaptable symbol for Virtue or Good, the figure of Judith saw a variety of political and religious applications in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although, following Luther, Protestants never accepted the Apocrypha as canonical, they nevertheless found the story metaphorically useful. In a play by Joachim Greff of 1536, Judith symbolizes the protection of God against papal tyranny; in Sixt Burck's drama of about the same date, Holofernes is identified with The Turk, who, like Holofernes, will be defeated by Christians through penitence and reform.[33] According to the investigations of Werner Schade, Judith was the protective patroness in the early sixteenth century of the Swabian league of cities, a league founded in 1513 by Protestant dukes against Charles V and his Catholic allies, a circumstance that may account for Cranach's depiction of the Judith story as heroic tyrannicide on panels at Gotha.[34] A particularly imaginative invocation of the Judith theme is that of the *Nicodesmi*, sixteenth-century followers of Calvin in Italy, who lived outwardly as Catholics while secretly rejecting Catholic doctrines and sacraments. When they came under scrutiny of the Council of Trent, the *Nicodesmi* invoked the paradigm of Judith, whose deception of Holofernes was not sinful because it was part of a higher, divine plan, thus using her story to justify deception itself.[35]

The voice of the Counter-Reformation also spoke through the figure of Judith. For the Catholic South, Judith's defeat of Holofernes was compared to the triumph of Truth over Heresy (the latter equated with Protestantism), and the story of Judith was, consequently, a frequent theme in the numerous Jesuit school dramas of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A characteristic example was the *Juditha* of the Jesuit Stefano Tuccio, produced in his native Messina several times in the 1560s, and eventually in Rome. In this and similar didactic plays, Judith is interpreted as a model of purity and chastity, whose typological connections with the Virgin Mary are reemphasized.[36] Elena Ciletti has recently brought attention to the spate of Latin commentaries on the Judith theme that appeared following the inclusion of the Book of Judith and other Apocryphal stories in the Latin *Vulgate* of St. Jerome (sanctioned by the Council of Trent in 1546) and in the Sixto-Clementine Bible of 1592. In these Jesuit exegeses, Ciletti pointed out, the vigorous efforts devoted to reinforcing the identification of Judith with Mary extended to the assertion of Judith's own virginity and innocence of original sin.[37] The Church's political application of the Judith theme is exemplified in the *Tragoedia Mundi*, a Judith drama of 1647, whose performance lasted two days, in which Act 3, following the Judith and Holofernes episode of Act 2, presented the symbolic triumph of Religion in the world over the forces of Evil.[38] This association of Judith with the Church Militant was implicit in numerous other plays devoted to the Judith and Holofernes theme, many of them Jesuit school plays, that were written and performed with particular frequency from the end of the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century.[39]

When that which is said figuratively is taken as though it were literal, it is understood carnally.

—St. Augustine



255. Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1598–99. Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini

A SIGNIFICANT change in the artistic treatment of the Judith theme was brought about by Caravaggio. In the *Judith Beheading Holofernes* of 1590–95 (Fig. 255), Caravaggio reintroduced a narrative emphasis, but focussing now upon the dramatic rather than the epic features of the story, and upon the human conflict between the two principal characters.[40] By contrast with the serially expansive field of action seen in manuscript illustrations, and with the spatially expansive ambients of many Renaissance paintings, the environment is now made intimate, closed, and dark. As

in contemporary theater, Caravaggio preserves the classical unity of time, place, and action,[41] making his fictive space an explicit description of the interior of Holofernes's tent, with the bed occupying nearly a quarter of the picture surface. The half-length figures are positioned close to the picture plane; we see them at close range, vividly, and in graphically concrete detail. The result is a fuller presence and a deeper psychological resonance of the characters themselves.

Caravaggio's characters have been developed as dramatic opposites, in keeping, it has been suggested, with the sixteenth-century theory of contrapposto, in which contrasts of age, sex, and appearance were recommended.[42] The youthful, graceful Judith is contrasted with an elderly, weatherbeaten Abra, and in her delicate femininity, she is an antipode to the rough virility of the startled Holofernes. And yet Judith and Holofernes, the chief protagonists, are hardly equivalent in their degree of human realization. Holofernes, shown at the very moment his neck is being severed, is not yet dead, and he screams in outraged protest, a forcefully vital counterpart to the functionally effective but facially inexpressive Judith. His physically explicit, unidealized features contrast extremely with the emotionless, late *maniera* beauty of the mannequin-like heroine, whose wrinkles are grafted inorganically upon her marmoreal face. Caravaggio's rendering of such aesthetically imbalanced types—the female conventional, the male real—is less likely to be explained by Renaissance art theory or Jesuit theology than by the influence of gender on the practice of an artist who happened to be male. We need not imagine Holofernes to be a spiritual self-portrait of Caravaggio to recognize that for the artist, Holofernes's pain and surprise were more easily imagined than Judith's feelings at that moment. Like the assailants of Susanna in art created by men, the male character, even a villainous one, was simply more accessible and comprehensible to the male artist.

Yet Caravaggio's focus upon Holofernes was not an isolated phenomenon. As a moral example, the demise of the Assyrian general on account of his own vices was frequently as interesting to artists and writers as the heroism of Judith. Chaucer, in the Monk's Tale, used the story as an example of Nemesis, to illustrate the principle of retributive justice, "the sudden fall of man from power to impotence."[43] Didactic writers frequently employed Holofernes to exemplify the danger to man of lust, an emphasis borne out as well in manuscript illustrations in which the Judith and Holofernes story as a whole is taken to symbolize the vice of *luxuria*.[44] The cautionary message to men is also sustained in inscriptions that accompany prints depicting the theme, as, for example, an engraving after Goltzius that is inscribed FASTUS PRAECEDIT LAPSUM ("pride goes before a fall").[45] Here, Holofernes comes perilously close to being a tragic hero, whose hubris brings about his downfall. Indeed, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramas devoted to the Judith and Holofernes theme were quite often entitled "Holofernes," or "The Tragedy of Holofernes," rather than "Judith."[46]

As a negative moral example, then, Holofernes had greater relevance to the lives of men than did Judith, and it is thus not surprising that she is often depicted in art

as an uninspiring and unmemorable creature of bland and vapid beauty. It is true, of course, that vice is usually more interesting than virtue, but virtue can become interesting if it is made heroic. David and Hercules embody goodness through their power and strength, and as positive moral examples, they exhort men to good through the implied concomitant of physical power. Judith, on the other hand, though she triumphs over her barbaric foe through heroic courage as did David, can be defined as strong and powerful only with a great attendant risk: that her power will be seen as threatening to men, rather than a virtue they can imaginatively share. For the more physically vigorous and ferocious Judith appears in her act of slaughter, the more she approaches the virago, the unnaturally manly woman. Men's sensitivity to the Judith and Holofernes theme is acute, for while a Semiramis, a Queen Elizabeth, or a Vittoria Colonna might be called a virago on account of her "masculine" deeds, this biblical woman of manly strength wields her sword against man himself.[47] Not surprisingly, Judith and Holofernes were frequently included in artistic and dramatic cycles of the *Weibermacht* ("Power of Women") *topos*, in which examples of the dangers of powerful women to men were often indiscriminately combined with exemplary female figures meant to be seen positively. In 1511 in Metz, for example, a carnival procession included chariots carrying Judith and Holofernes, Hercules and Omphale, Samson and Delilah, Aristotle and Phyllis, followed by chariots conveying the Nine Worthies (a category for which Judith would also have qualified).[48]

Because of its conflicting psychological messages, Judith's decapitation of Holofernes has been regarded ambivalently through the ages. In its biblical and exegetical context, it is a "good" act, carried out decisively by a heroic patriotic woman who saves her people through her courageous deed, one that prefigures the triumph over the Devil by the Virgin and the Church. Yet Judith is not heroic in a straightforward way. Her conquest of Holofernes is made possible by her deception and seduction of him, and by her double talk,[49] strategies that evil women employ against good men as well. Salome, for example, the indirect agent of John the Baptist's decapitation and thus a morally negative figure, has enjoyed an iconographic tradition in art almost identical to, and sometimes confused with, that of Judith.[50] The story of Delilah's undoing of Samson very closely parallels that of Judith and Holofernes, though from a different moral perspective. Samson's vengeful assault upon the Philistines resembles Holofernes's attack of the Israelites, just as his sexual indulgences in Gaza and with Delilah recall those of the Assyrian general. Delilah's deception and betrayal of Samson and her emasculative cutting off of his hair established her as the arch-exponent of the duplicity of women. Yet while virtue is represented by Samson and vice by Delilah, an opposite situation to that of Judith and Holofernes, the secondary emotional messages conveyed by the two stories are very similar. Both Samson and Holofernes are victims of duplicitous women who betray their trust and exploit their sensual excesses; both Delilah and Judith are perceived as typical of their sex in their crafty and fatal deception of men.[51] The extended symbolic meaning

of these two female characters is sometimes fundamentally the same. A modern writer, for example, laments: "The cool ferocity of some young women is awful. Judith, Jael, Delilah, and Athaliah were not mythical. Is there a man who has not wakened from his dreams to find that the woman he trusted has stolen his strength or is just about to hammer the great nail through his temples?"[52]

Perhaps the clearest expression of masculine ambivalence about Judith as heroine is found in Chaucer, who presents her story from several different viewpoints in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the Merchant's Tale, the misogynist Merchant ironically cites the biblical figures of Rebecca, Judith, Abigail, and Esther as examples of good counsel offered men by women. Judith, he says, "By wys conseil she Goddes peple kepte, / And slow hym Olofernus, whil he slepte." As Emerson Brown, Jr. has pointed out in an admirable study of Chaucer's text, the Merchant has eliminated from his example the detail "that both mitigates the crime and explains its necessity," the fact that Holofernes had besieged and would have destroyed Judith's city, and, through ironic juxtaposition, he implies that the violent act was both gratuitous and treacherous.[53] Chaucer, Brown suggests, forces the audience to collaborate actively with the poet, obliging us to balance against the Merchant's cynical vision of the world the long exegetical tradition that saw Judith, Rebecca, and Esther as pure heroines of great typological and moral significance. Yet Chaucer, Brown explains,

> insists through the Merchant that we keep in mind the treachery as well as the virtue and typal significance of the Old Testament heroines. By having the embittered Merchant sarcastically introduce them as tainted examples of feminine virtue, Chaucer forces us to maintain a multileveled viewpoint on them, on their function in his tale, and, indeed, perhaps on all ostensibly virtuous women. We may recognize ultimately that the Merchant's view of the women is inadequate, but we can neither ignore the force of that view nor totally deny its insidious appeal to all male vanity and some male experience.[54]

Chaucer's dual vision of Judith was to be sustained in Renaissance and modern images of Judith in art and in commentaries on them. Botticelli's gentle figure (Fig. 249), praised by Ruskin as the only true image of the noble biblical heroine,[55] offers us the visual counterpart of the figure we may call the "good" Judith, who embodies (to borrow Gilbert and Gubar's description of such female paragons) the " 'eternal feminine' virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness."[56] The good Judith appears in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art, from Veronese to Elisabetta Sirani (Figs. 256, 257), and the latter example—if it is by Sirani[57]—reminds us that even women artists may have shared in sustaining the image of an eternally feminine Judith. Caravaggio's virginal Judith also upholds this saintly vision; he underlines it, in fact, by juxtaposing the ideal Judith with the real Holofernes. Both in her theological use as precursor of the

256. Veronese, *Judith*, c. 1570. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

257. Elisabetta Sirani (attributed to), *Judith*, seventeenth century. Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery

perfect woman, the Virgin Mary, and in her supporting function as the agent by which Holofernes's pride is brought down, Judith is the "angel in the house," as this female type was to be described in the nineteenth century,[58] whose essential virtue is her moral perfection, and her capacity to bring spiritual redemption.

Seen from this viewpoint, Judith assumes a special psychological function as the purifier of man's dark and bestial side. In the many artistic images in which a grotesque, shaggy Holofernes is brutally decapitated by an incongruously delicate and beautiful maiden, Judith is not so much a fearless heroine as she is the symbol of restraint and civility, refinement and good taste, who helps to contain the grosser impulses of the masculine sex by performing a violent, dream-like act of psychic restraint, like the terrifying fairy tale that frightens a child into acceptable social behavior. In this guise, Judith is a thoroughly positive, though personally neutral, figure. As the cultural guardian of the biblical Bethulia, symbol of civilization itself, who defends its values against uncivilized barbarians, she is a kind of culture princess, who

antiseptically neutralizes the antisocial forces of unbridled sexuality, drunkenness, and aggression that threaten both private lives and societies as a whole.

But if there is an angel in the house, there is also a monster. In the Florentine debate of 1504 over the placement of Michelangelo's *David*, Francesco di Lorenzo Filarete, herald of the Signoria, proposed having the new statue replace Donatello's *Judith* in front of the Palazzo Vecchio because

> the Judith is an omen of evil, and no fit object where it stands, as we have the cross and lily for our emblems; besides, it is not proper that the woman should kill the male; and, above all, this statue was erected under an evil star, as you have gone continually from bad to worse since then.[59]

Needless to say, no such superstitions attached to the statues of men that were subsequently placed in the same square—Cellini's *Perseus*, murderer of Medusa, or Giambologna's rapists of the Sabine women. Male violence toward females has been traditionally perceived as normal or heroic, even when the accompanying story is not clearly so; female violence, even when iconographically legitimate, is always questionable. Judith's deed has been described as distasteful rather than heroic by many writers. Balzac called Cristofano Allori's *Judith* "the immortal homicide."[60] Ruskin spoke of the "millions of vile pictures" of Judith in Florence, while Anna Jameson called Artemisia Gentileschi's Uffizi picture (then in the Pitti Palace) a "dreadful picture . . . proof of her genius and its atrocious misdirection."[61] W. R. Valentiner, writing in 1935 of Titian's *Judith* in Detroit, spoke of "the monstrous theme" and "the gruesomeness of the act."[62] And, lest one imagine these to be dated views, the 1986 edition of a popular art history textbook compares the ambient of Artemisia's Detroit *Judith* to a dark cellar "where unspeakable things are happening."[63]

Such misinterpretations of Judith's just tyrannicide may have been assisted by pictorial cues, however, for artists often collaborated in subtle ways to suggest that Judith was a negative figure. Her frequent depiction in Italian Renaissance and Baroque art in the closed, dark interior that is the enemy territory, killing or having just killed her foe, is a recurrent artistic choice that blocks from the viewer's mind the final triumphant consequence of her heroic deed, the liberation and protection of her people. The curtain, the tent, and the dark suggest a clandestine act, carried out in secrecy, against the law—though only a small part of this story occurs in the privacy of Holofernes's tent. The plot requires Judith to depart from and return to her city, which in mythic terms is not only a power base, but also a symbol of orthodoxy, stable social order, and the seat of justice and righteousness. After the Middle Ages, however, we see little of Bethulia. We see mainly the enemy camp of Holofernes, whose murky, ominous, and claustrophobic environment becomes, in art, Judith's own and only realm. Unlike David, who was adopted by the Florentines as a civic emblem, depicted (most notably by Michelangelo) as the watchful guardian, and centered in a

square he almost literally patrolled, Judith, the civic defender of the Israelites, has not enjoyed a metaphoric afterlife in art as cultural hero.

Other artists created pictorial interpretations of Judith that reflected the associations of evil intent and danger to men that had steadily accrued to the character at least since the misogynous description by Chaucer's Merchant.[64] For Baldung Grien (Fig. 258), the heroine of Bethulia is cast as a seductive, crafty nude with crossed legs (an image of female allurement, but also deception), who boldly flaunts her victim's head and her castrating dagger, as conspicuous a sexual instrument as the phallic knives of Cranach's *Lucretias* (Figs. 188, 189). As Charles Talbot has suggested, Baldung's painted *Judith* is presented with the attributes of fatal beauty that connect her with the characters of Eve and Venus, and with Dürer's figure of Nemesis, the latter seen not in her ancient identity as agent of retribution (which might have made her directly and positively relevant to Judith), but as the powerful female controller of fortune.[65] Baldung's *Judith* reflects the *Weibermacht* theme (especially popular in Northern Europe) and the concomitant folly of man in succumbing to lust, expressed also in his images of Aristotle and Phyllis and the Fall of Man.[66] Other artists depicted Judith as a cold-blooded executioner (e.g., Valentin; see Fig. 61), or as an evil figure

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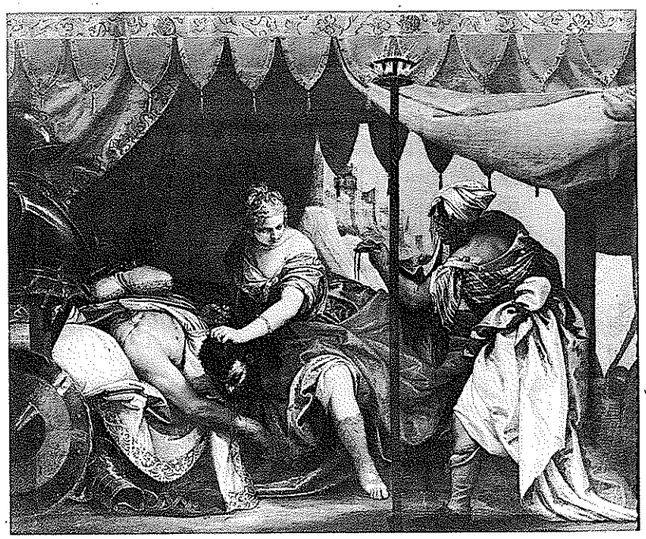


259

258. Hans Baldung Grien, *Judith*, 1525. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum

259. Attributed to Veronese, *Judith*, sixteenth century. Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts

260. Rubens, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, early 1630s. Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig

whose face projects guile and deceit. Such is the case in a variant in Caen of Veronese's Vienna *Judith*, also attributed to the artist (Fig. 259), whose heroine contrasts significantly in type with her immediate model (Fig. 256). Perhaps the most unforgettable "evil" Judith of art (at least, before the nineteenth century) is that of Rubens, in his Braunschweig picture of the early 1630s (Fig. 260). Here, a sinister, powerful protagonist glares out of the picture, menacing the viewer both through her gaze and through her militant gesture, even as the bared breasts are thrust upward, a combination that recalls simultaneously every negative association that has attached to Judith—her sexual entrapment of Holofernes (who looks unusually innocent here), her deceitful manipulation of him, and the unnatural masculine strength through which she confirms the inevitability of her victory over him.[67]

The innuendo of crime frequently conveyed in images of this heroine and her

heroic deed is often sustained by the figure of the maidservant, Abra. From the fifteenth century on, as early as the characters were at all individualized, Abra was traditionally shown either as an older woman or—a Venetian variant—as a black woman. In Correggio's tiny but powerful painting in Strasbourg (Fig. 261), the grotesquely distorted face of Abra vividly connotes an atmosphere of evil and wrongdoing, even as Judith herself, a pure-profile, beautiful maiden, sustains the sense of virtue.[68] In such an image, the erstwhile "good" character of Abra, who loyally aided and abetted her mistress's brave deed, is made to personify the evil and negative aspects of Judith's character, a transference that ingeniously makes possible the inclusion of both the good and evil Judiths within the same painting.

As Abra became more emphatically hag-like around the beginning of the seventeenth century (characteristic are the versions of Caravaggio and Rubens), she served another subterranean expressive function. As an old and ugly companion of Judith, she is like the crone who frequently accompanies Delilah, a figure who, as Kahr has noted, may be understood at least subliminally as a procuress, thus underlining Delilah's sexual duplicity.[69] The procuress implication takes a somewhat different

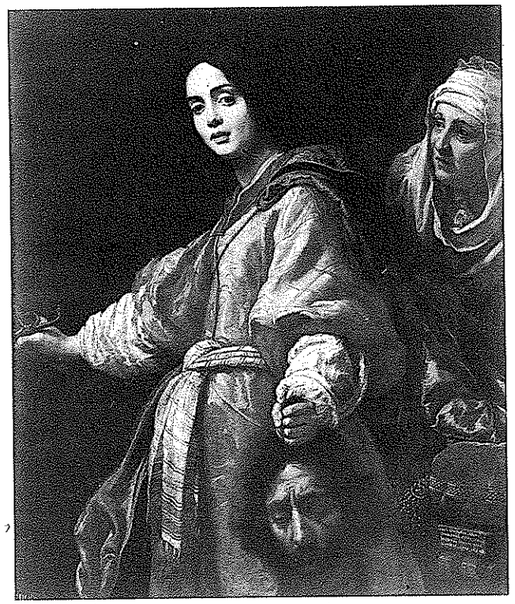
261. Correggio, *Judith*, 1512–14. Strasbourg, Musée des Beaux-Arts

form in the Judith paintings, for here the old servant serves to modify the potentially terrifying aspect of Judith's identity as castrating virago. She reminds us, albeit irrationally, that Judith is, after all, *only* a woman, a sexual creature who may be seen in the painting as exorcising the beast of man's darker nature, yet who remains, by virtue of the imagined intercession of the procuress-servant, perpetually available to the beneficiary of the exorcism—the refined and civilized male viewer of the painting. The Judiths of Correggio and Caravaggio are such creatures of masculine fantasy, sexual objects who lack sexual awareness, delivered to the viewer by their worldly-wise maid-servants, who are agents of their mistresses' innocent sexual promise and neutralizers of their independent power.

There is, however, another class of Judiths who are not merely generically erotic, as with Baldung Grien, nor passively available to the viewer on his own terms, as in Correggio, but who instead exercise their seductive powers directly upon the spectator, as if *he* were Holofernes. Rubens's Braunschweig Judith is to some degree such a figure, though her primary effect is more militant than seductive. The sexually self-aware Judith is personified most fully in the Pitti Palace version of the theme painted by Cristofano Allori (Fig. 262), in which we see a calculating and powerful woman who takes measure of the viewer, dominating him exactly as she has dominated Holofernes. In this instance, it is not only we, the viewers, who are the victims of her wiles, but the artist as well. Allori, we learn from his contemporary Baldinucci, painted Judith with the features of his mistress, La Mazzafirra, and depicted Holofernes as himself.[70] La Mazzafirra, it now appears, was the inspiration, not for the artist's well-known Pitti *Judith*, but rather for an earlier version, identified by John Shearman with the *Judith* at Hampton Court (Fig. 263).[71] Although the Pitti picture may be one step removed from the painful personal experience that prompted Allori's first autobiographical conception of the Judith theme, it nevertheless preserves the artist's idea of Judith as a cool and heartless mankiller.

Allori's self-image as Holofernes, the victim of emotional tortures imposed by the beloved, echoes Caravaggio's self-image as Goliath in his Borghese *David and Goliath* (Fig. 267), a conception that may have had as its own model Michelangelo's *Victory*.[72] Yet the lover-tormenters in the latter instances were male, the affairs homosexual, and perhaps for that reason, the victors were not presented as generic representatives of their sex. Allori, by contrast, painted his Pitti *Judith* as a deliberate and more generalized second draft, replacing his first image of himself as the victim of La Mazzafirra with a broader concept—Man as the victim of Woman. Allori's contemporary, the poet G. B. Marino, confirmed this universal masculine meaning of Allori's *Judith* in a poem written about the painting for his *Galeria*. The "beautiful, ferocious widow of Bethulia," he says, kills Holofernes twice, with Cupid's darts and with the sword, and she destroys the "felon" first with her beautiful gaze and then by her strong hand.[73] Judith's powerful and dangerous dual weapons, her sexual allure and her sword, invoke a Petrarchan juxtaposition of Love (or insidious beauty) and Death

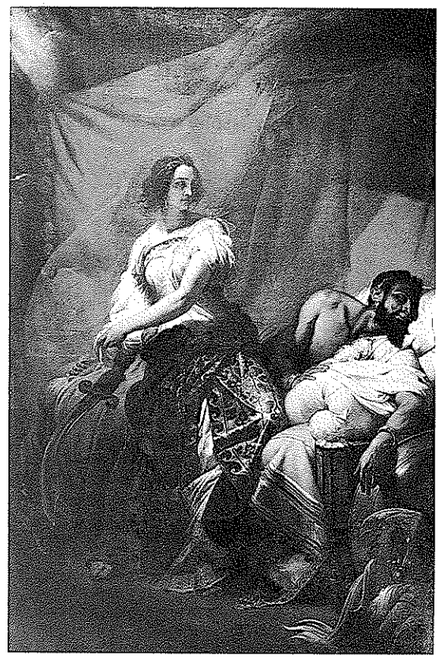
262. Cristofano Allori, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1616–20. Florence, Palazzo Pitti



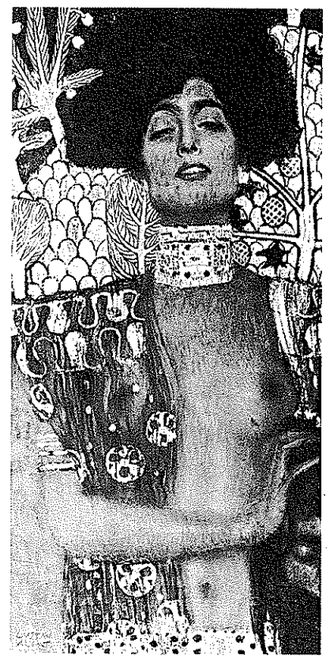
263. Cristofano Allori, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, signed and dated 1613. Hampton Court

that was popular with early seventeenth-century poets,[74] and would continue to flourish as a favorite nineteenth-century *topos*, *la belle dame sans merci*.

The residual anxieties and ambivalences provoked in male artists for centuries by the character of Judith received full and overt expression in the nineteenth century, when writers and artists treated Judith as a tragic but dangerous heroine, potentially independent of God's will (and, not incidentally, of men's as well). In Horace Vernet's painting of 1831 (Fig. 264), Judith broods majestically as she contemplates her deed, and Vernet's figure was the immediate inspiration for the 1840 Judith drama of Friedrich Hebbel, in which the theme was treated, on one level, as a battle of the sexes, with Judith cast as a tragically willful and self-assertive woman.[75] It remained for the "decadents" of the *fin de siècle*, with their avowed interest in the diabolic and satanic, to fully articulate man's anxious fantasies of the seductive woman's powers, in what for them were positive terms. Heine's conversion of Herodias from an evil woman into a grand character, and Wilde's transformation of Salome into the symbol of an amoral philosophy of beauty,[76] found their visual counterpart in Gustav Klimt's



264. Horace Vernet, *Judith*, 1831. Paris, Louvre



265. Gustav Klimt, *Judith*, late nineteenth century. Vienna, Osterreichische Galerie

portrayal of Judith as a supremely powerful, lasciviously triumphant fatal woman (Fig. 265), an openly erotic image that his contemporaries persistently mistook for Salome.[77]

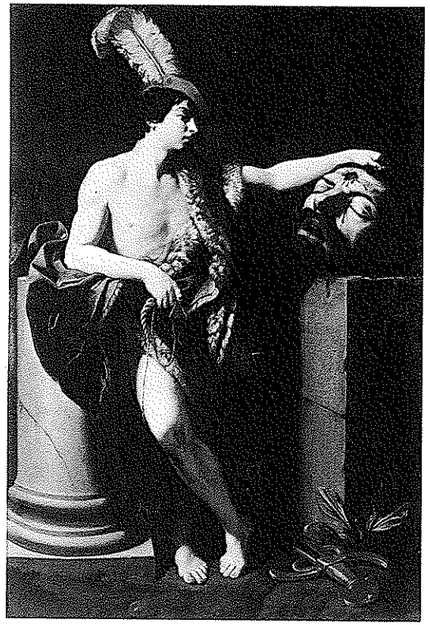
And so the image of Judith in art changed gradually from that of a paragon of chastity, strength, and courage to a dangerous and deceitful *femme fatale*, a transformation that was well underway in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when she was already presented ambivalently, as a beautiful but vacuous mannequin, or as a subtly evil figure. During that period, by contrast, Judith's biblical counterpart, David, continued and even developed as an uncompromised hero. In seventeenth-century painting, David became a more contemplative figure, who is often seen reflecting upon the decapitated head, silent and thoughtful. These images may convey the hero's intense meditation upon his deed, as we see in Orazio Gentileschi's Spada *David* (Fig. 266). Or, they may serve as vehicle for a profound spiritual commentary upon the self, as in Caravaggio's Borghese *David* (Fig. 267), in which the artist has incorporated in the figures of both David and Goliath elements of his own identity—

266. Orazio Gentileschi, *David in Contemplation after the Defeat of Goliath*, c. 1610. Rome, Spada Gallery

young and mature, heroic and penitent.[78] Following Caravaggio's conflation of himself with the biblical hero, an artist like Guido Reni could further enlist the David theme for personal expression (Fig. 268), suggesting, in an image that combines pride of conquest with contemplative speculation, the painter's stylistic triumph over Caravaggio himself.[79] Such introspective, private interpretations of David were enabled, however, through knowledge and through memory of the biblical hero's public, heroic side, so that we come to understand these changes in his depiction as a deepening of his personality. The meditative David acquires resonance in his new association with the philosopher, a figure whom we encounter in the paintings of Rembrandt, among others, and in his potential for conveying aspects of the painter's personal or artistic identity—recurring echoes that reflect the widespread seventeenth-century admiration of the contemplative man and interest in the melancholic artistic temperament.[80]

Such meditative Davids are not paralleled by a category of meditative Judiths. It is rare, even in the seventeenth century, to find a Judith who is not in some way a variant of the types that we have examined, whether she is a passive beauty (Saraceni, Fig. 56), a pious maiden (Stanzione, Fig. 269), or an ominous virago (Vouet, Fig. 270). One exception is the pensive, monumental *Judith* of Anteveduto Grammatica,

267. Caravaggio, *David with the Head of Goliath*, c. 1605–1606(?). Rome, Borghese Gallery



268. Guido Reni, *David with the Head of Goliath*, c. 1605–1606. Paris, Louvre

in Stockholm, c. 1620–25 (Fig. 271), whose queenly bearing and thoughtful absorption connect her at least superficially with Davids of the period.[81] But unlike the Davids, the object of this Judith's meditation is not the head of her enemy (in which she would have seen no mirror of herself). Yet the artist has not made clear what it is that has plunged the heroine into deep thought at the very moment when her companion anxiously urges their escape. We cannot understand this Judith's inner motivation, we can only apply such stereotypical concepts as the notion of Fortitude or Chastity. By contrast with David, Judith is not permitted to grow into a multi-dimensional character defined by psychological or philosophical complexity, because she could not be regarded by male artists as an heroic extension of themselves. Unlike David, she was not invested with the aspirations, doubts, and meditations of the dominant sex.

The four major *Judith*s of Artemisia Gentileschi present a concept of the heroine that differs significantly from the types that we have traced. In each of her interpretations of the theme—seen in the Pitti version, the Naples and Uffizi pictures, and the Detroit version—the character of Judith is an individualized figure who is neither glamorous nor manly, and who is convincingly engaged in a specific action. By contrast with most earlier images of the heroine, who functioned primarily on an

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269. Massimo Stanzione, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, early seventeenth century. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

270. Simon Vouet, *Judith*, c. 1618–20(?). Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

271. Anteveduto Grammatica, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, c. 1620–25. Stockholm, National Swedish Art Museums

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emblematic or tropological level, Artemisia's Judiths are imbued with a spirit of self-determination, and they project psychic complexity. In consonance with her era's interest in psychological development of character, and drawing upon her own inner resources, this female artist has developed Judith as a powerful three-dimensional heroine, but—by contrast to the Davids—she presents her as an active rather than a contemplative figure. In this construction of Judith, the artist suggests to us that the very dimension of female character that was inaccessible to male artists—more accurately, undesirable for them to contemplate—the realm of autonomous, independent action, was in fact the effective counterpart of a meditative David. For if the stereotype of the male hero is as a mindless doer of deeds who acts upon the world without reflecting on the consequence of his actions, the stereotype of the female is as a passive beauty who does not positively affect or change the world. If, in the interest of greater fidelity to human nature and experience, it is desirable to show that David can think, it is mandatory to show that Judith can act. The three Judiths invented by Artemisia Gentileschi, who drew creative inspiration from her own sense of personal autonomy, are possibly the freest of masculine stereotype in the entire genre of Judiths. They may also be the most completely developed female heroes existing in art.

AMONG Artemisia's extant works, the *Judith with Her Maidservant* in the Pitti Palace (Color Plate 5) has traditionally been regarded as her earliest interpretation of the Judith theme.[82] It now appears, however, that the Naples version (Color Plate 4) of the composition made famous by the Uffizi picture (Color Plate 8) may instead have been the first version of the latter composition, since x-radiophotography has shown a wealth of pentimenti and a slightly different design under its surface. The Naples *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, with its numerous sources in Roman art and its expressive relationship to the traumatic events of 1612, is likely to have been painted in 1612–13, before Artemisia left for Florence, probably predating the Pitti *Judith with Her Maidservant* by about a year. The continuous history of the Pitti *Judith*'s location in Florence, combined with strong Florentine allusions in the painting, point to her having painted the *Judith* shortly after her arrival in Florence in 1613. The Uffizi *Judith*, as discussed above, should be seen as a replica of the Naples *Judith*, carried out around 1620 at the end of Artemisia's Florentine period. The Detroit *Judith* (Color Plate 12) was painted about five years later, in the middle of the artist's second Roman period. In the discussion that follows, we may observe the growth and development of Artemisia's characterization of the biblical heroine over an approximately thirteen-year period.

272. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 1612–13. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte

> And [she] approached to his bed, and took hold of the hair of his head, and said, Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, this day. And she smote twice upon his neck with all her might, and she took away his head from him.
>
> —*Book of Judith* 13: 7–8.

THE Naples *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Color Plate 4; Fig. 272) represents Artemisia's first independent conception of the Judith theme. Although she found in Caravaggio her primary inspiration for the image, she demonstrated in this work a mature capacity to assimilate several pictorial sources, and to create a forceful original composition. Her debt to Caravaggio's *Judith* (Fig. 255) is evident in the clear, hard, tenebrist lighting and realist physiognomies, in the parallel diagonals of Judith's arms, and in the blood-spurting melodrama of the decapitation.[83] As Frima Fox Hofrichter pointed out (in a discussion of the Uffizi *Judith* that pertains equally to the Naples painting), Artemisia's composition is also closely related to a lost painting by Rubens, the so-called "Great Judith," whose composition is preserved in an engraving by Cornelius Galle I dated 1610 (Fig. 273).[84] Certain elements of Artemisia's design, such as the intricate interlocking of arms, may have been suggested by Rubens's work and combined with Caravaggio's model. Yet she decisively rejected from Rubens's prototype the image of the expansive and heroically outstretched arms of Holofernes. Instead, as we can see in the x-ray image of the Naples *Judith* (Fig. 274), the painter experimented independently with her composition, trying several positions for Holofernes's struggling arms,[85] and she wound up with an entirely new image for the figure of the Assyrian, more ignominious and powerless than in either Rubens or Caravaggio. Although Holofernes's legs are not now visible in the Naples painting, they are likely to have been included in the original composition. Technical examination has revealed that the canvas was cut on the left side (though not at the top), and we may infer that the missing portion of the painting resembled the left side of the Uffizi version, particularly since the foreshortened, diagonal position of Holofernes's legs, with raised knee, may be seen in Rubens's image. Artemisia's retention of this pose for the tyrant's legs—a vivid image of physical strength overturned—may have been influenced by other works as well, for we see it in the figure of Paul in Caravaggio's *Conversion of St. Paul*, and in the figure of the slain Aegisthus on the Orestes sarcophagus that served as a treasure chest of motives for Artemisia and Orazio (Fig. 167). And, as Keith Andrews has shown, Rubens's robust, sprawling Holofernes was itself inspired by a *Judith* composition of the Northern painter Adam Elsheimer dating 1601–1603 (Fig. 275), a picture that Rubens owned, by an artist he deeply admired.[86] Artemisia herself may have known the Elsheimer, since, as we shall see, she later echoed other aspects of its design in the Detroit *Judith*.

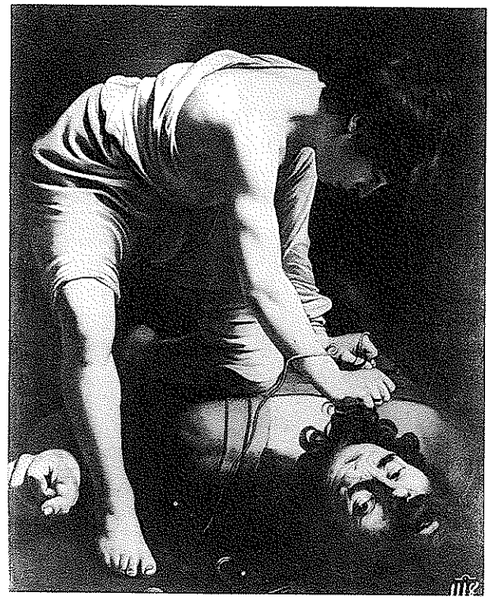
273. Cornelius Galle I, after a lost work by Rubens, *Judith Beheading Holofernes, known as "The Great Judith,"* engraving, 1610. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

275. Adam Elsheimer, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1601–1603. London, Wellington Museum, Apsley House

274. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 1612–13, x-radiograph. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte

Artemisia's image of the killing of Holofernes by Judith differs significantly from all of these precedents, however, in its powerful composition, which is more formally and dramatically concentrated than those of Caravaggio, Rubens, or Elsheimer. If, as it seems safe to assume, the Naples painting was centrally focussed like the Uffizi replica, its original format would have been roughly square, expansive horizontally, but compressed at the top. In such a format, the diagonals of arms and legs would have led, as they do in the Uffizi version, to a central nodal spot, from which the blood spatters and flows out, reinforcing the pinwheel structure. In Artemisia's first version of the decapitation imagery, centripetal and centrifugal forces are held in dramatic balance, heightening our sense of the precise moment as do none of the cognate images of the slaying. The x-ray also reveals that at one stage in the evolution of the design, Gentileschi indicated the setting through an open curtain flap on the left (with the loss of the left side of the painting, we can no longer determine how this might have related to Holofernes's legs). It is especially unfortunate that the overpainting and cutting down of this painting have obscured the original image, for what we may reconstruct from the x-ray and the Uffizi replica suggests that in its lightning-flash, split-second unity of light, action, and time, it was Artemisia's and not Caravaggio's *Judith* that offered the quintessential Baroque version of this theme of slaying. By comparison, both the Apsley House and Casa Coppi *Judith*s appear immature, awkward, and stilted, while in the Rubens *Judith* action is diffused in fluid and bombastic rhetoric.

Originality is also evident in the Naples *Judith* in the revision of the figure of Abra the maidservant. By contrast with the conventional passive, waiting crone, who appears in most versions merely as a foil to the active Judith, Artemisia's Abra is a vigorous young woman. The idea of a youthful Abra originated in Orazio's Hartford *Judith* (Fig. 277), but in Artemisia's reworking, she has become a critical figure, given special importance by her placement at the apex of the composition, actively assisting in the execution. For this memorable image of a determined young figure reaching down to a dismembered, bearded head, Artemisia may have drawn inspiration from the *David with the Head of Goliath* now in Madrid, an image by or after Caravaggio (Fig. 276),[87] but the figure is visualized from a different angle and smoothly integrated into a new context. Directly above and looking down upon Holofernes, with whom she is axially connected by the vertical thrust of his struggling right arm, this Abra might be mistaken at a glance for Judith herself—her own right arm could almost be wielding the sword. (Indeed, Abra's right hand is more fully exposed in the Naples than in the Uffizi version, and as the x-ray shows, this hand was completely defined before the sword pommel was painted in.) Judith, on the other hand, seems oddly subordinated to Abra, pushed off to the side. Moreover, she could not easily have accomplished the decapitation with arms in that position (the spurting blood tells us that the sword has passed through the neck, moving away from Judith's body). Having preserved the arm position of Caravaggio's Judith while changing the direction of the stroke, Artemisia uses Abra to make the action more physically plausible, as well as more complex. Abra holds down Holofernes, and has pinned his left arm against his chest, allowing Judith to move in front, wedging her knee on the bed, to sever the head as efficiently as a surgeon aided by a nurse.[88]



276. Attributed to Caravaggio, *David with the Head of Goliath*, c. 1603–1604(?). Madrid, Prado

The intensity of the women's engagement in their deed is perhaps better read in the x-ray than in the present surfaces of the Naples painting, which have suffered significant overpainting.[89] In her original form, Judith would not have been so bland and wooden in appearance, and she may have more nearly resembled Artemisia's *Susanna*, with a brow furrowed in concentration, a nose that may have been narrower and more pointed, and more loosely flowing hair. Abra too, to judge from the x-ray, wore a look of focussed concentration, and not the serene half-smile we now see. Working together like experienced professionals, the two women effectively accomplish the deed. Their performance is an ironic reversal of the persecution of Susanna by the two Elders, and also of Artemisia's own experience as the victim of Agostino Tassi and Cosimo Quorli. Given the artist's unusual biography, and given the validation by modern psychology of the Aristotelian principle of catharsis, it is surely justifiable to interpret the painting, at least on one level, as a cathartic expression of the artist's private, and perhaps repressed, rage.

Few artists have had so open an invitation to identify personally with their cre-

277. Orazio Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*, 1610–12. Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum

ated characters as Artemisia with Judith. Out of a manifest need to exorcise her own demon, the man who sexually exploited her and against whom her expressed anger is recorded, Artemisia depicted the killing of Holofernes in an unprecedented way, as a bloody murder carried out with clinical precision by two women whose cold determination is almost vengeful. Between them, the two women carry the burden of feelings that Artemisia must have brought to the painting of this picture. The important role played by the maidservant in the painting, as a supportive *aide-de-camp* to a lone woman, might well be understood as an inverted echo—a kind of redress—of Artemisia's personal isolation during the rape experience, and her betrayal by an older woman companion, Tuzia. We may thus see Artemisia's projection of self not only into the figure of Judith, but also, and perhaps more significantly, into Abra, the loyal and supportive young companion of her imagination.

The figure of Judith is not unquestionably a self-portrait, in either the Naples or Uffizi versions of this theme. She perhaps slightly resembles the image of Artemisia

in David's engraving (Fig. 51), yet it is Abra's face that more closely resembles the later Kensington Palace *Self-Portrait* (Color Plate 15). And as Richardson has noted, the pose of the maidservant in the Detroit *Judith* (Fig. 53), a work nearer in date to the *Self-Portrait*, is almost identical to that in Artemisia's self-image.[90] Why would Artemisia have identified more overtly in these paintings with the servant than the heroine? She might well have refrained from a too direct and exclusive identification with the executioner herself, the figure whose action could have been dangerously close to her own repressed fantasies. In painting the Naples canvas so soon after the rape experience, Artemisia might have subconsciously distributed her psychic participation in the picture between the two characters, who could embody complex feelings in a more elaborated, yet clarified, manner. In both the Naples and the Uffizi paintings, Abra is a double of Judith, and the energetic, individualized presence of both figures may result from the dichotomized projection of the personality of the artist, Artemisia Gentileschi.[91]

IN HER second independent version of the Judith theme, the painting in the Pitti Palace, Florence (Fig. 278), Artemisia turned away from the bloody violence of the decapitation scene to create an image of classic restraint. The Pitti version presents a later moment in the narrative when, after the slaying, the two women have gathered the head into a basket and are preparing to leave the enemy camp. Again, Orazio's Hartford *Judith* (Fig. 277) was germinal, not only for the idea of a youthful Abra, but also for the innovative moment chosen, one rarely if ever isolated in painting before this time. Although other artists of his era had shown the two women with the decapitated head—for instance, Fede Galizia (Fig. 279), in a painting of 1596[92]—Orazio managed to transmit a greater sense of narrative urgency than is found in many images of this type. Unlike Galizia's timelessly static heroine, whose maidservant is a mere subordinated attribute, Orazio's Judith and Abra impart, in their exchange of the head and their alertness to danger, the sense that this is a significant dramatic moment. Yet the figures' awkward interaction (perhaps a negative legacy of their classical prototype) inhibits their full psychological unity, and it is all too easy to see them as static, posed models, whose intensity comes not from a heroic crisis, but from holding the pose too long.

In her Pitti painting, Artemisia builds upon the atmosphere of watchful suspense seen in the Hartford *Judith*, but she develops a far more forceful image of the heroine and her youthful servant. The two figures, standing monumentally tall and acting in psychic unanimity, freeze in their leftward movement as they respond to a sound or threat from the right. The women dominate their space, self-possessed and centered around an axial core defined by their contrasting positions. The pairing is reminiscent of, and may have been inspired by, another Caravaggesque source: the pair of figures, Christ and a disciple, on the right side of Caravaggio's *Calling of St. Matthew* (Fig. 280), a recollection that vitalizes this dramatic narrative by implying a focus for the

278. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant*, c. 1613–14. Florence, Palazzo Pitti

279. Fede Galizia, *Judith*, 1596. Sarasota, Fla., John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art

280. Caravaggio, *Calling of St. Matthew*, 1599–1600, detail. Rome, S. Luigi dei Francesi, Contarelli Chapel

women's attention outside the frame. Their response to a specific danger from a single direction—a danger the armed Judith is implicitly prepared to meet—distinguishes them from the timid characters of the Hartford picture, who are seen from slightly above, huddling together fearfully, as if controlled by unseen superior powers. Artemisia's Pitti painting also portrays a more precise moment in the narrative: not merely the period of generalized anxiety following the women's deed, but, more subtly, the moment when, beginning to leave the enemy camp, they hear a sound that signals danger. Orazio's Hartford *Judith* is not so decisively positioned in time.

In her radical deviation from Orazio's model, Artemisia reveals a talent for character development and dramatic tension that may fairly be said to exceed her father's.[93] Her painting, in its precise definition of the frightful moment when the ominous sound is heard, simply makes for better theater. Indeed, the picture may literally draw inspiration from the theater, since the figures' response to a sound from the side, in the lateral plane, recalls the conventions of the stage, and especially those of the seventeenth century, when noises and music were usually produced in the wings, which

accommodated many entrances and exits as well.[94] Artemisia's simple focussed image would not have been literally derived from the elaborate, spatially deep and visually complex stage set designs of her day, especially not those marvels of fantasy and extravagant tricks of light, sound, and effect produced at the Florentine court (though the Roman stage was in her day shallower and more restrained).[95] Rather, she may have responded more generally to theatricality itself, and to the dramatic conventions that permitted events to occur both on and off the stage. In the numerous Judith dramas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries especially, the device of offstage action was employed for an obvious logistic reason, since the execution of Holofernes was not often attempted on stage.

Tellingly, however, dramatic attention was not normally given in the theater to the immediate aftermath of the execution. In the Judith plays of the sixteenth century, far more time is given to the earlier verbal interchanges between the men, Nebuchadnezzar and Arphaxad, Ozias and Holofernes. The killing itself is typically followed by a swift denouement in Judith and Abra's return to Bethulia.[96] The moment in time that was tentatively isolated by Orazio and creatively explored by his daughter—when Holofernes has been killed and the two women prepare to leave his camp—finds no major theatrical counterpart before Federico Della Valle's *Iudit* of 1627, a drama that was notably more complex, both aesthetically and psychologically, than its predecessors.[97] In this play, a full scene is given to the women's preparation to leave Holofernes's tent. Judith's cautionary remarks to her accomplice following the execution, "*Abra, esci cheta; ascolta: / è giunta l'ora a l'opra / destinata, pregata . . .*" ("Abra, leave quietly; listen: / the hour has come for our divinely mandated work"), and a few lines later, "*Or qui ti ferma, e s'alcun viene, avvisa*" ("Now stay here, and if anyone comes, warn me"),[98] strikingly evoke the visual imagery of Artemisia's *Judiths*, not only the Pitti version, but also the Detroit painting, which may have preceded Della Valle's drama by a year or two. Thus Artemisia's innovative Judith images—which must have been known fairly widely through replicas—may well have held dramatic power sufficient to stimulate dramatists in their own trade.

The visual force of Artemisia's Pitti *Judith* is carried by the simple, archetypal clarity of the characters, viewed at close range (as they would not have been in a real theater).[99] In the figure of Judith, particularly, Artemisia established important associations with heroic tradition. The motive of the sword resting on the shoulder establishes her as vigilantly on her guard, and also evokes the allegorical figure of Justice, as seen, for example, in an early painting by Orazio (Fig. 281), an association that establishes this Judith as the agent of justice and, like David, the *manu fortis*, strong hand of God.[100] With a stroke, Artemisia reconnects her Judith with Donatello's heroic figure, whose powerful sword-lifting right arm creates an inspired fusion of Judith, Justice, and Fortitude, and also with the ancient Judith, paragon of righteousness who, as Prudentius described her, fought under the shade of the law (*sub umbra Legis adhuc pugnans*).[101]

281. Orazio Gentileschi, *Justice*, fresco, 1597–99. Farfa, Abbazia

Our full attention is focussed upon Judith's head (Fig. 282), an unidealized, shaggy-haired, toothy figure, whose pure profile has the force of iconic simplicity. The physical type was perhaps suggested to Artemisia by one of the numerous images of Judith in circulation by her day, such as an engraving of 1528 by Jacques Bink (Fig. 283) in which a monumental Judith looks to the right, her lighted profile silhouetted against a dark ground.[102] Here, as with Artemisia's figure, loose locks of hair fall in front of the ear, and here too the lips are slightly parted. Yet there is another model whose physical resemblance to Artemisia's Judith is less obvious, but whose relevance may have been more compelling. Judith's bulging, upturned, and shadowed eyes, her intense gaze out toward danger, the weapon-holding hand close to the shoulder, and the imperious strength of the profile, inevitably call to mind Michelangelo's marble *David*, and the most memorable view of his upper body (Fig. 284). Artemisia's intentional association of her Judith with a masculine hero is confirmed and reinforced in the tiny image on the ornament in her hair (Fig. 285), an armed male figure with a lance and a shield, who might be a small replica of Donatello's *St. George*, or possibly one of the many sculptural and painted *Davids* who, along with St. George, represented the heroic guardian ideal of Quattrocento Florence.[103]

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282. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith with Her Maidservant*, c. 1613–14, detail of head. Florence, Palazzo Pitti

283. Jacques Bink, *Judith*, engraving, copy from H. S. Beham, 1528. B.VIII.263.8

284. Michelangelo, *David*, 1501–1504, detail of head in profile. Florence, Accademia

285. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith with Her Maidservant*, c. 1613–14, detail of brooch in hair. Florence, Palazzo Pitti

286. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith with Her Maidservant*, c. 1613–14, detail of sword pommel. Florence, Palazzo Pitti

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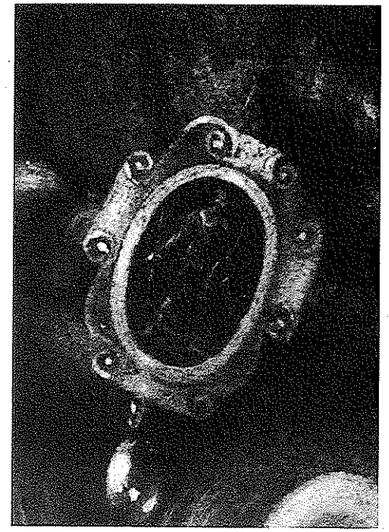

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Another heroic analogue is indirectly evoked in the prominent image on the pommel of Judith's sword (Fig. 286) of an open-mouthed, screaming head, a Gorgon or Medusa, which recalls Caravaggio's *Medusa* (then, as now, located in a Florentine collection). In a general way that is given focus by the Medusa reference, the Pitti *Judith* recalls Cellini's *Perseus* statue in the Piazza Signoria, who holds forth the bloody severed head of Medusa as Judith and Abra hold the blood-dripping head of Holofernes. Yet the Medusa association has undergone a sea-change with the reversal of sex roles, for Judith's opponent was not the female Medusa or Gorgon, but the male Holofernes—and women are immune to the Gorgon's fatal stony gaze. The head on her sword's pommel is not a trophy of conquest, but a talisman, like the brooch in her hair, that complements and extends her own identity. One would not want to make too much of an ornamental detail, yet in light of Artemisia's other astonishing evocations of female archetypes, it is suggestive that this Medusa or Gorgon head, lacking the traditional snakes that so frightened male heroes Perseus and Odysseus, is more appropriately linked with a broader iconographic type, of Medusa as powerful mother image, a positive Medusa type that apparently survived into the Renaissance in gems and jewelry.[104] Artemisia's adaptation of a benevolent Medusa head as personal female emblem thus complements the male David/St. George emblem in her hair, a balance that helps to support the image of Judith as an androgynous hero. In a broader perspective, the painter's use of the Medusa image in support of female

heroism is in keeping with a later literary tradition traced by Gilbert and Gubar from George Eliot to May Sarton, in which Medusa is associated with female power and creativity.[105]

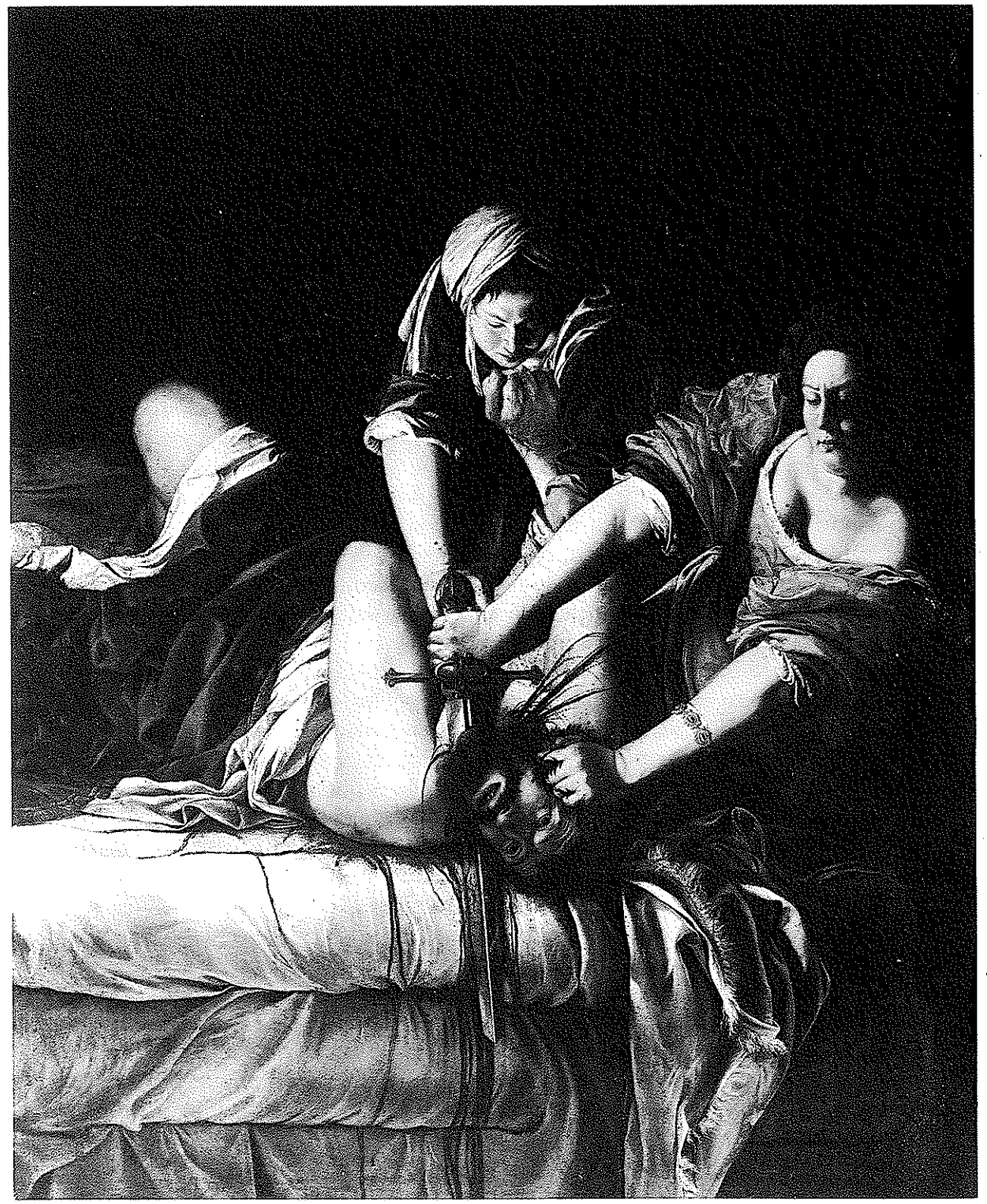
Judith's electric concentration and intense readiness dominate the Pitti painting. But Abra, too, is an important figure, whose relationship with Judith is heightened through contrast. Her left arm, for example, is slightly more relaxed than Judith's sword-bearing arm, to set off Judith as the bolder and more forceful of the two. The taut cloth of Judith's sleeve is similarly contrasted with the more randomly flowing folds of Abra's sleeve, initiating a descending drapery sequence, to the softer, more inert fabric supporting the head of the dead Holofernes, and finally, to the completely limp cloth that hangs from the bottom of the basket. This gloss of the differing levels of vitality among the characters is echoed on the right side in a more purely formal cadenza, which begins with the tightly knotted folds surrounding Abra's head, and flows down, broadening and loosening, to her waist. Yet the tensely gathered knots embracing Abra's head remind us that the maidservant, too, is psychically engaged in the dangerous adventure, and that her own acute alertness, though expressed obliquely, closely parallels Judith's own. As in the Naples *Judith*, though it is there differently expressed, the artist emphasizes the union of the two women as collaborators. Contrasted in some respects, they are made equal in others. Judith, sword-wielding, her fully lighted face in heroic profile, is the chief protagonist, but Abra's statuesque, counterpoised body is more fully seen than Judith's, and she carries the head with authority and strength, matching Judith in heroic capability. The women's intimate psychic linkage in the adventure is conveyed in the rhythmic echo in Judith's neckline of the curves of Abra's drapery and her own neckline. The echo of Judith's pure profile in Abra's shadowed lost profile sustains their essential unity as a pair, even as it acknowledges a slight hierarchic difference. A telling detail confirms the solidarity between the two: Judith's firm but intimate grasp of Abra's right shoulder, a gesture that closes the group, emphatically redefines the women's relationship. At this moment, Abra is not her servant but her sister.

Although the Pitti *Judith* is less overtly dramatic than the Naples *Judith*, Artemisia nevertheless preserved in it, now through more subtle means, an emphasis upon the heroic action of the chief character and her formidable lieutenant. In both works, the artist reinstated the positive heroine of the biblical legend, eliminating any hint of sexual appeal or availability, while emphasizing through pose, countenance, and attributes those qualities that reflect strength, both moral and physical. The character she has created—neither beautiful, nor virginal, nor seductive—is nothing less than a reintegrated female hero, no longer dichotomized into saint or sinner, Mary or Eve, "good" or "evil." She is, rather, a lifelike individual transformed by a courageous action into a larger-than-life figure who, through her deed, has acquired the power that we associate with the heroic consciousness.[106]

> Then he called hastily unto the young man his armour-bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him.
>
> —*Judges* 9:54

THE relative unpopularity of Artemisia's Uffizi *Judith* (Fig. 287)—reflected in the fact that this major Baroque painting has been literally banished to dark corners and inaccessible museum stairwells for several centuries[107]—may be partly explained by the image of psychological terror and shame that it holds forth for men. To be defeated by a woman was explicitly defined as humiliating in the Old Testament and in the Talmud, and inscriptions accompanying Judith images often hint openly of scorn in their descriptions of mighty forces being brought down by the hand of a woman.[108] In our patriarchal culture, there is no such thing as a fair fight between a man and a woman: if he wins, he is brutal; if she wins, he is shamed. Perhaps for this reason, artists have painted, on the whole, relatively few images of the killing itself,[109] and even fewer that show an intact and physically capable Holofernes, since such an image calls to mind the acute and shameful pain experienced by the male victim of the contest, whose struggle against mere women is to no avail.

Artemisia presented this image not once but twice, in her Naples and Uffizi versions of Judith Slaying Holofernes. The second version was apparently ordered by Cosimo II de' Medici, and although we do not know why her patron might have requested a replica of the Naples *Judith*, it is difficult to imagine its having had a favorable reception.[110] Through slight but significant reworkings of the composition, the artist has heightened the very qualities likely to have induced masculine dread. In pitch darkness, outlined by a cold spotlight, two determined women efficiently decapitate a stunned and struggling man. One would not know, from a naive reading of the painting, that Holofernes is a drunken beast, nor that the two women are necessarily doing a good deed. They might be, as Germaine Greer has observed, "two female cut-throats, a prostitute and her maid slaughtering her client."[111] Unlike Caravaggio's carefully balanced antithesis of beauty and beast, and unlike Artemisia's Pitti *Judith*, which, though its heroines are not conventional beauties, nevertheless preserves an unthreatening focus upon the virtuous figures rather than upon their deed, the Naples and Uffizi *Judiths* offer no conventional moral cues. In them, we witness an existential killing, with no heroes and no villains, a murder in a realm outside the law. There are precedents, as we have seen, for the violent physicality of Artemisia's Naples version of the Slaying of Holofernes, but not for the moral neutrality that is implied in it, a quality distinctly heightened in her second version.



287. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 1620. Florence, Uffizi

In creating the Florentine replica, Artemisia made one major compositional change—the augmentation of the space above the figures. She may have revised the setting as well, defining the back plane as totally blank and dark (a revision, if the open curtain flap at the left of the Naples version that is visible in the x-ray was preserved in the completed painting). And in the second version, the blood does not merely stain the bed, but spurts explosively from Holofernes's neck. These decisions are significant, for she has replaced the compressed intensity and temporal immediacy of her first draft with an image of high theater, grander in setting and scale, yet more chilling in its evocation of absolute silence and a horrible moment forever frozen in time. Like her Pitti Judith, Artemisia's Uffizi heroine displays virility and phallic power in the wielding of the sword, yet she is given a new dimension in being clearly defined as a sexually developed woman. Her female sexuality, indicated in the curve of a breast, is a natural aspect of her body, neither modestly concealed nor flagrantly offered to the viewer. (Significantly, no writers have commented on the sexual *appeal* of Artemisia's Judiths, despite their decolletage.) In contrast to Caravaggio's paragon of chaste morality, and also in contradistinction to Rubens's virago, Artemisia establishes her heroine as a fully-sexed, mature woman, who is physical without being beautiful, a rare female character who escapes the stereotypes of maiden, virago, and crone. This Judith is plausibly the sexually experienced widow of the biblical account, whose sexuality could be drawn upon in the entrapment and conquest of Holofernes but was not accessible to others—not even the connoisseur-voyeur of the painting.

The frowning face of Judith, with half-closed, slanting eyes, is distinctly less idealized than that of the earlier Pitti Judith. Distorted by the lighting into unglamorous harshness, the face is hard, expressionless, betraying no emotion except concentration on the work at hand. Measured by conventional expectations of female characters, especially heroic and devout ones, Judith seems almost a sinister figure, who takes cruel satisfaction in her deed. Yet it is the discrepancy between the brutality of her action and traditional female decorum that makes her seem so. This Judith violates all our socialized expectations of woman's behavior in appearing neither modestly indifferent to her action nor piously noble about it, and it tells us a great deal about our sex-role socialization that into this moral void we so readily project malice. Even so, the artist has drawn a distinction between the images of Judith and Abra in the Uffizi version that was not discernible in the Naples painting. Judith's face seems slightly older now, and her hair more stylized, its stiff, smooth contours suggesting a wig, by contrast to the free-flowing locks of her earlier counterpart. Abra has not comparably aged, and although Judith now wears a somewhat finer dress than previously, Abra's dress is perhaps plainer, while her identity as servant is stressed by the fully defined and more prominent headdress. The differences between the women in age and social status have consequently become more pronounced.

These subtle changes point to a new expressive dimension that is developed in the Uffizi painting, one that must have resulted from a deeper understanding of the

story. Just as Judith seems sinister to our eyes, though we know she is not, so the discrepancy between appearance and reality, expectation and consequence, has become the core of the painting's meaning. Judith's luxurious appearance and her feminine refinement (she here wears a delicate bracelet) are now more shockingly juxtaposed with the brutal act of decapitation. Indeed, the blood spurting from Holofernes's neck has begun to spot her dress. Artemisia points up the fine dress and exposed bosom (and, perhaps, the wig), contrasting the elegant costume with the act of butchery, to underline the strategic use of clothing by Judith as her mask, the disguise that is essential to the success of her campaign. The irony is that while to Holofernes, Judith's elegant dress seemed natural, in reality, it was the artificial bait. And Judith's grimacing face is not, as Holofernes might think if he could see it, the face of evil or cruelty; it is, rather, the face of an ordinary woman who has suddenly dropped the mask of seduction and allurement to carry out a forthright action.

Here, as in Shakespearean tragedy, things are not what they seem, and in this image of duplicity and reversal we are particularly reminded of *Macbeth*: "fair is foul and foul is fair" (Act 1, Scene 1), and "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (Act 2, Scene 1). In Artemisia's painting, however, the contradiction is not between real evil and apparent good, but within an apparent good (Judith as temptress) that conceals both an apparent evil (her sinister danger for Holofernes) and an ultimate good (her heroic deed). The abrupt transformation of the heroine from temptress to executioner—a moment of horror for Holofernes, but of triumph for Judith—is expressed in the painting with electrifying swiftness, paralleling very closely the extraordinary lines in Judith's hymn at the end of the biblical narrative:

> Her sandal ravished his eye,
> Her beauty made captive his soul,
> The sword passed through his neck.
> (*Judith*, 16:9)

In these lines, as in the painting, there is a symmetry between Judith's artful female weapons and the deadly sword; but more than that, there is a causal sequence in which the apocalyptic finality of the latter redeems the moral questionableness of the former. In this respect, it is as if Artemisia cast Judith as that part of herself which experienced personal satisfaction in the act of retribution, not only against the specific man who had raped her in her youth, but also, privately, against the patriarchal world that had imposed upon her a need to dissemble and to trick.

In reconceiving the two characters, Artemisia has set up a subtle echo, in reverse, of the traditionally dichotomized women of the Judith theme, the innocent heroine and the wizened crone maidservant. For if Judith is, contrary to our expectations, the darker figure, Abra is more overtly righteous. Younger and less worldly in appearance, Abra bends over Holofernes in direct vertical alignment with the sword, and in spite

of Judith's intervening arms, our eyes run from Abra down the blade of the sword and back. The ultimate moral justification for the bloody deed is offered us subliminally through this sword, for the artist has designed its blade and straight quillon in the shape of a cross. Artemisia's cruciform rendering of the sword is surely calculated here, since she has explicitly rejected the curved scimitar blade used by Rubens and the falchion of Caravaggio,[112] and she has also replaced the S-shaped quillon of her own Pitti *Judith* with a straight bar, whose flaring ends recall the terminals of a liturgical crucifix. This instrument by which Judith triumphs over Holofernes is thus clearly meant to recall Christ's victory over Satan as well. The Christian analogy was similarly invoked in a Judith drama of 1607, the *Meysterlied von der Gottsfortigen Frawen*, whose moral epilogue explains that Holofernes is the devil, from whom we are delivered by Christ, and that Christ's death is the holy sword used by Judith.[113] The idealistic part of herself, the humble agent of the Lord who carried out God's will, Artemisia assigned to Abra the maidservant, whose dramatic function in the painting is to balance and justify—quite literally to rectify—Judith's devious and slanted behavior. In this painting, Abra represents divine justice, while Judith is allowed to stand for human vengeance.

Artemisia's interpretation of Judith as nether-heroine and Abra as Christ-hero stands out as especially unusual in the context of Counter-Reformation doctrine and imagery, in which, as we have seen, the medieval association between Judith and the Virgin Mary was revived and heightened. If we follow Artemisia's independent way of thinking, the connection of Judith, instrument of a people's salvation, with Mary may have seemed less pertinent than an association with Christ. (The contradiction is partly acknowledged in the rather strained efforts of theologians to characterize Mary in relation to Judith—in the interest of sexual symmetry, no doubt—as "savior of her people."[114]) Given Gentileschi's patent reluctance to depict Judith as chaste and bland (as did her contemporaries), one is encouraged to imagine that she saw a discrepancy between Judith's active heroism and her definition in Tridentine theology in the terms of Mary's passive virtues—her modesty and humility (when Judith displayed exceptionally aggressive courage), her purity and chastity (when her deed's success depended upon her sexual experience). To be compared to the Virgin is, of course, the highest compliment Christian theology is prepared to pay any woman, but ultimately, as modern feminists have recognized, comparison with a paragon of sexual perfection can be as restrictive for living women as its opposite parallel with Eve.[115] Artemisia Gentileschi's response to the potentially confining equation between Judith and Mary popular in her day was to go for something better, to enlarge upon the heroic associations of Judith and Abra by invoking Christ himself. In an image rich with associational attributes and shifting secondary identities, Judith and Abra play a variety of roles that both draw upon and aesthetically broaden the traditional Christian categories. Wielding the sword of just deliverance with powerful arms, Judith is David/Hercules, combining moral right with physical strength,[116] just as she is also

the Lord stamping out the Antichrist. Abra, who resembles a David but also evokes Christ, plays to Judith's Christ the *ancilla Dei*, handmaiden of the Lord.

Artemisia's references to masculine models in the Uffizi *Judith* are consistent with her evocation of Michelangelo's *David* in the Pitti *Judith*, and of Christ's agony in her anguished *Lucretia*. Because of Judith's longstanding position as an ambivalent and tainted heroine, and in the light of her recent vindication by the Church as a paradigm of the milder Marian virtues, it is understandable that Gentileschi would have wished to stress Judith's identification with paragons of moral clarity and active strength, models afforded chiefly by male heroic figures. Yet in her insistent blending of male gender traits with female characters, the artist has gone beyond a mere impatience with empty feminine stereotype to give us images of an androgynous whole: manly courage in a woman's body.

For such a creation, there are few prototypes. But Artemisia may in effect have "signed" this painting with a clue to her own sources of inspiration, from both without and within. The bracelet worn by Judith in the Uffizi painting bears two partly legible images (Fig. 288). The upper figure looks rather like a female holding a bow, the lower one is a human figure, one arm raised, with an object or animal at her foot. These hazy but suggestive sketches together recall separate well-known images of one

288. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 1620, detail of bracelet. Florence, Uffizi

character: Diana, or Artemis (Figs. 289, 290), ancient goddess of the hunt, the moon, of animals, forerunner and prototype of the Virgin Mary, whose own virginity was the sign of her independence from masculine domination. Her indirect namesake, Artemisia, would hardly have been unaware of the legend of Artemis,[117] and I think it not unlikely that she added the images as a kind of signature, revealing her proud identity with a strong and independent female mythological figure, and her formidable self-confidence as well.

289. Domenichino, *Diana with Nymphs at Play*, detail, 1616–17. Rome, Galleria Borghese

290. "Diana of Versailles," Paris, Louvre, line drawing from Oskar Seyffert, *Dictionary of Classical Antiquities*

If a woman fights,
she must fight by stealth,

with invisible gear;
no sword, no dagger, no spear
in woman's hands

can make wrong, right:
—H. D., *Helen in Egypt*.

THE inverted distinctions between Judith and her maidservant, in a context of concerted teamwork between the two women, are repeated and strengthened in the fourth major *Judith* by Artemisia, the painting in the Detroit Institute of Arts that is considered by many to be her masterpiece (Fig. 291). This large work, whose figures are more than life-size, was painted in the 1620s, when Artemisia had returned to Rome after her brief sojourn in Genoa, and it represents the climax of the Caravaggesque realism of her early career.[118]

In her third staging of the event, Artemisia continues to explore the range of dramatic variations that the Judith theme afforded. Again, but now with full and elaborate orchestration of the imagery, she restates her interest, nearly unique among her contemporaries, in the story's suspenseful climax, as experienced by its heroines. In the Detroit painting, the artist avoids once more the bloody moment of the slaying, as she had done following the Naples version, choosing to focus this time upon the moment just after the decapitation, and just before that seen in the Pitti *Judith*. The women are still in Holofernes's tent, as we are informed by the overhanging canopy and the table with candle, scabbard, and glove of armor; and as Abra gathers up the head from the floor, Judith, clenching the sword she has just used, turns from the act completed to face an implied intruder.[119]

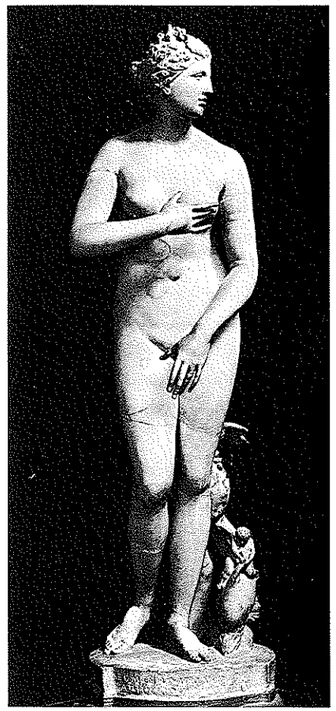
The amplified physical setting may have been partly inspired by Elsheimer's Apsley House *Judith* (Fig. 275), which it resembles in such details as the curve of curtain in an upper corner, the windblown candle flame, and the table with assembled objects, their edges picked out in tenebrist light. In the figures, however, Artemisia demonstrates studied indifference to Elsheimer's gentle characters, and pursues instead the more innovative, and for her more fruitful, implications of the Uffizi painting. Again we see a graceful, noble Abra, whose fully lighted profile is contrasted with that of the frowning, dark, and again somewhat harsh-featured Judith. As in the Uffizi version, Judith's face is illuminated in irregular patterns of light and dark, which here break down the volume of the head, giving a sense of the incomplete, of a heroine strangely eclipsed in her own theater. In physiognomy, Judith is equally antiheroic. The exaggerated facial features, the painted curve of her lips, the heavy brows, the

291. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*, c. 1625. Detroit Institute of Arts

scowl, convey the sense of a woman hardened by experience, or—perhaps more accurately—of an actress dressed up for a part. As in the Uffizi version, Judith has gotten herself up as the kind of beauty who would attract Holofernes, but more make-up is now required. The Judith of the later painting is older than the figure in the Uffizi painting, who in turn is decisively older than both the Naples and Pitti Judiths, and Abra has matured correspondingly, a progression consistent with the maturing painter's self-identification with her characters. The contrast in the Detroit painting between Judith and Abra poignantly suggests the distinction in two major phases of Artemisia's own life thus far: between her present self, toughened by experience in the decade or more since the rape, and the sexually innocent, perhaps idealistic young girl that she may have been before the rape.

Artemisia's growing understanding of woman's life experience is registered for us quite tellingly in her Judith paintings. Like Judith, she would not have been unaffected by the obligations imposed by a woman's life in a man's world, obligations to play roles in relation to men that increasingly diverge from, but also subtly erode, one's natural sense of self. When the painter copied her father's Hartford *Judith* in the Vatican replica, she ascribed to the maidservant a tough worldliness she could not yet herself have acquired, while sustaining in Judith the innocent countenance, though not the physiognomy, of the model for Orazio's picture, who may have been Artemisia herself. Increasingly, in the four independent paintings of the theme that postdate the rape, Artemisia reverses this understanding of character, attributing to Judith the world-weariness, and to Abra the innocence, revealing to us a fuller dimension of the biblical heroine than the text allows us to see. For if through identification with her Judith and Abra the artist Artemisia found a liberating courage inspired by a heroic model, identification also permitted her to apply her own life experience to liberate Judith from the confining stereotypes of heroine and seductress, and to imbue her with human complexity.

Such autobiographical implications are at most an undercurrent in the painting, for this last Judith created by Artemisia is one of the grand figures of art, a formally and allusively rich image that stands on its own, quite independent of our knowledge of the artist's life. With heavy, powerful gestures, she assumes a posture of combat readiness, like the Pitti Judith, but with more specifically militant bearing. Her vigorous contrapposto is implied rather than stated, since the body itself is concealed, conveyed through contrasting arm movements and summarized in the S-shaped quillon of the sword and its curved blade. Judith's pose in this painting embodies, in fact, a classical reference, as did Artemisia's figure of Susanna. In this case, it is the type of the Venus Pudica, whose best-known example—one that the artist would have known in Florence—is the *Medici Venus* in the Uffizi (Fig. 292). Artemisia's almost ironic transformation of the antique goddess of love into a female warrior heightens our sense of Judith's angry defiance, even as the subliminal association with Venus underlines the heroine's manipulative use of her feminine attributes—the fine dress, diadem, and earrings. (Judith's neckline may originally have been more fully exposed, for according to one conservator, the drapery across the breast could be a later addition.[120]) As in the Uffizi painting, but in a more dramatically staged manner, Judith is characterized as a physically powerful woman whose sexuality is her real weapon, a weapon more powerful and dangerous than the sword she wields. On both levels, the words of the Talmud are recalled: "Woman had an army with her, that is sex."[121]

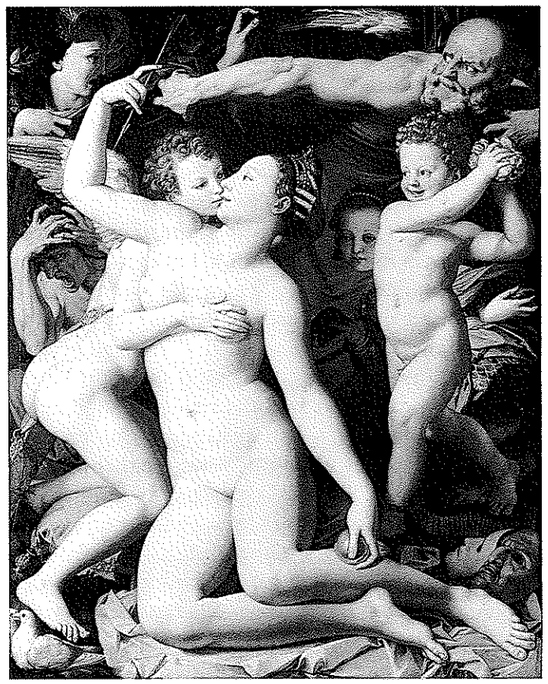


292. Greco-Roman, *Venus dei Medici*. Florence, Uffizi

That Judith's dress, tiara, and make-up have disguised a warrior whose true identity is revealed in her violent deed is tellingly conveyed in a small but critical detail. Judith's foot is exposed, permitting us to see that she wears a heavy shoe. Normally, in paintings of this period, either a female figure's feet are bare, especially but not only mythological characters (e.g., the queen in Orazio's *Finding of Moses*), or else her dress covers her feet. The feet of most Judiths are not shown, but when they are, as in Rubens's "Great Judith," they are sandaled (perhaps in accord with the biblical text).[122] The expressive consequence of Artemisia's decision to expose Judith's booted foot is our recognition of the garments as disguise. With her feet firmly rooted and sword in hand, she is equipped for the second phase of her task, to make her escape swiftly and safely. Artemisia's Judith seems prepared to shed her deceptive

garments, just as she has shed her stylized "feminine" behavior, and one senses that this massive, heavy, strong woman is in both respects larger than the skins she has temporarily worn.

The themes of appearance and reality, deception and revelation, first developed by Artemisia in the Uffizi *Judith*, are sustained in the Detroit version by means of inventive visual variations. Through the boots beneath the fine dress, Judith reveals her real identity to the viewer on a naturalistic level. Yet this same image could have had another resonance for the seventeenth-century viewer, for it might have evoked the image of *Hippocrisia*, Hypocrisy or Deceit, who, as described by the sixteenth-century iconologist Cesare Ripa, has feet like a wolf concealed under her fine clothes.[123] Judith's crossed arms—the most singular aspect of this striking visual image—would reinforce the allusion to deceit in the Renaissance iconographic imagination, since crossed arms, hands, or even legs were sometimes used by artists to indicate treachery or deceit.[124] A combination of these motifs may be seen in a painting very likely known to Artemisia—Bronzino's *Allegory* (Fig. 293), now in the National Gallery, London, a work painted for Cosimo I de' Medici, grandfather of



293. Bronzino, *Allegory*, c. 1545. London, National Gallery

her own Florentine patron. The specific meanings of the figures in this subtle and complex picture remain in dispute, but Panofsky was certainly correct in recognizing Hypocrisy, or *Fraude* (Deceit), in the partially hidden woman on the right, who has animal legs under her dress, and makes her duplicitous offering to the viewer with crossed hands, whose crossing is concealed by an intervening body.[125]

Gentileschi's formulation of the crossed arm motif, dramatically emphasized by intense chiaroscuro, bears a closer formal relationship to the temptress in Vouet's *Temptation of St. Francis* (Fig. 58), a figure who is graphically engaged with the object of her sexual deception. Since Vouet's temptress closely predated—or, less likely, closely followed—Artemisia's *Judith*, we may gauge as deliberate Gentileschi's subtle conflation of an image of sexual trickery with one of heroic resolve, and we may better understand the brilliance of her creation of a character whose heroism is built upon the imagery of masculine misunderstanding. Iconographic conventions are inverted in the *Judith*, the crossed arms and booted feet that to the male eye symbolize entrapment and deceit have been converted by the female artist into symbols of power and mobility. The resulting dramatic tension, between allusions to good and evil in the same image, reminds us once more that masculine and feminine perceptions of "good" and "bad" women may not only differ, but blindly coexist.[126]

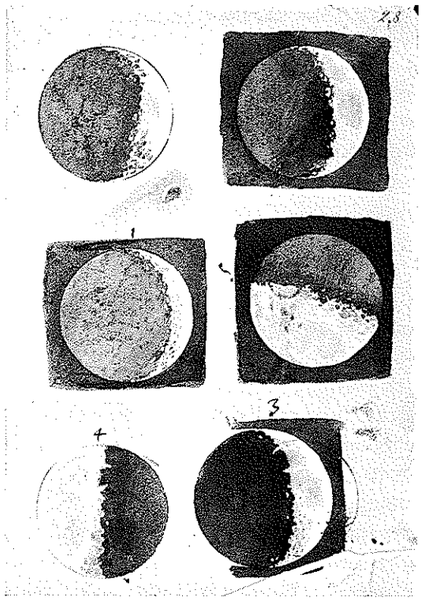
The psychological interplay between Judith and Holofernes, metaphoric and archetypal, is subtly suggested in the painting. Although we do not see Holofernes's body, we are shown the physical reminders of his power and his aggressive intentions. On the table are his scabbard and part of his armor, indicating that it is his sword that Judith holds, which would have been used against the Israelites but has been turned against the villain himself. Yet Judith, who fills the vacuum left by Holofernes, armed with his own destructive tool, parodies the qualities of her antagonist in her aggressive stance, and in the echo of his metal glove in her right hand. In this, Artemisia is surely responsive to the aesthetically rich implications of the biblical story, whose characters echo each other with fine literary irony. Holofernes's sensual luxury, the immediate cause of his loss of physical power, was his ultimate undoing, even as Judith's seductive luxury—her fine dress, her beauty—were her compensations for lack of physical power, and the instruments of her physical conquest of him. These two characters, the story implies, were mirror opposites of each other, the one positive, the other negative, yet they were made up of the same elements, differently valued.[127] Through the transference and mimicking of attributes and traits, Artemisia demonstrates that pictorial theater can be psychologically richer, and more aesthetically satisfying, than conventional moral stereotypes.

Also invisible, though thematically as significant as Holofernes, is the threat from outside the picture that has riveted the protagonists' attention. As in the Pitti painting, Judith does not see this threat, she hears it. In this painting, however, the point is made more dynamically. Judith's body turns away from the right side of the space where the decapitation occurred and toward which her armed right hand still points,

and rotates to the left, toward which she suddenly looks, the instantaneity conveyed by the momentary gesture of the left arm. Facing in the opposite direction as she was, her attention could only have been caught by something heard and not seen, and the extended hand seems quite literally to say, "Stop, hush, I hear something." The extended hand also serves to block the strong light from her visible eye, and to cast a dramatic shadow over most of her face. Strictly speaking, the shadow is not cast by her hand, which would create a more irregular contour, and would not intercept the light of the candle, positioned farther back, near Judith's shoulder. The shadow over the face is more plausibly caused by the swag of curtain, the opening of the tent, which must be in front of the figures. Yet the advanced hand, boldly relieved in intense chiaroscuro, is so implicated in the optical and metaphoric drama of light and shadow in this painting, and so positioned (in the two-dimensional plane) between the candle and the head, that we instinctively read it as the agent by which Judith shades her face from the light.

Artemisia's decision to cast Judith's head in nearly complete shadow may be understood simply as a theatrical Caravaggesque device. Or, with full respect for the artist's inventive powers, we may be prepared to see in this curious subordination of the heroine a stroke of startling originality, and a personal imprint of the artist. Judith's head, a rounded shape overlaid by a regular circular curve, strikingly resembles a crescent moon whose spherical wholeness is partly obscured by the earth. The crescent moon is, of course, the principal attribute of Diana, or Artemis, as Domenichino (Fig. 289) so conventionally demonstrated. Having placed Artemis images in her Uffizi Judith's bracelet, Artemisia now creates a more indirect allusion to her namesake goddess, one that draws strength from its understatement. By an accident of shadow, Judith temporarily becomes Artemis, as she becomes Artemisia, in some fundamental—or perhaps only apparent—way that transcends literal explanation. The artist's means of alluding to the moon, astronomical rather than symbolic, is naturally explained if we recall her friendship with Galileo, formed in Florence where both were members of the Accademia del Disegno (see above, pp. 37–38), soon after he had published his telescopic studies of the moon's surface in the book *Sidereus nuncius* (1610). Galileo's own wash drawings of the moon (Fig. 294), which have been recently published by Samuel Edgerton, are remarkably accomplished chiaroscural images, more luminescent than the published engravings,[128] and on this sheet they are contextualized pictorially in separate *quadri*. These drawings, recalled a scant decade later, may have been the stimulus for a highly sophisticated personal conceit on the part of his friend Artemisia, who was able to translate scientific fact into a poetic private emblem.

Artemisia's complex arrangement and lighting of solid objects in an airless space does more than evoke Galileo's moons, however, for in the light and dark imagery of the Detroit *Judith*, intricately developed in the juxtaposition of candle, hand, and face, we are directed to another reading of the painting. Judith blocks the light from her



294. Galileo, drawings of the moon, c. 1610. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, Gal. 48, fol. 28r

eye, the better to hear what is approaching. The shading of the eye, to enhance her other senses, reminds us that in this world of deception and danger, light is not the agent of good, but itself betrays, by exposing the assassins to discovery, and by inhibiting hearing, in this instance the more acute and reliable perceptory sense. For the guerrilla invader of the enemy camp must operate by stealth, under protection of night, not by the direct strategies of daylight military combat. While vision is the adjutant of the open aggressor and the entrenched army—to see is to measure, to control, to possess what is before you—hearing is the friend of the guerrilla, who must adjust and react to the dominant force, learning about it what it does not wish to reveal through surreptitious, indirect methods. In the story of Judith, it is darkness, not light, that supports the women's courageous deed.

The richly developed imagery in the Detroit *Judith*, juxtaposing light and dark, deception and revelation, seeing and hearing, takes us to a more universal plane on which this painting and Artemisia's other *Judith*s can be understood. Her guerrilla warriors, functioning heroically in an alien territory, are the surrogates of women in male-dominated societies. In the broadest metaphoric sense, these *Judith*s present a fully realized, archetypal expression of the female hero, from the viewpoint of the female artist. Artemisia's Judiths are not simply Davids in female dress, viragoes who

mimic the postures and powers of the male in a straightfaced, serious way. Rather, they defy our conventional sense of the morally responsible hero in their unidealized faces, their stealthy and uncivilized behavior, and their alliance with darkness. These Judiths, amoral from the patriarchal point of view, trailing no associations with the culture princesses whose task it is to civilize men, nor even with the mandate of the father God of the Israelites, challenge by omission the value structure of the society in which they were produced. Artemisia's Judiths are neither glamorous, nor pious, nor humble; they are, in a figurative sense, women beyond social or theological masculine control, whose independent power is subject to only one force: the immediate worldly threat outside the tent.

And in this specifically delimited vulnerability lies the paintings' symbolic truth and their universal relevance to the experience of women. Unlike the male hero, whose power, pride in power, and blindness to vulnerability are both the qualities of his greatness and the cause of his downfall (the concept of hubris is relevant to male heroes only), the female hero is by social decree perpetually aware of her essential vulnerability. It is her obligation to adapt imaginatively to alien and repressive environments, and her ability, not to control, but to transform such environments constitutes her heroism. The male viewer, perceiving the Judith and Holofernes theme from the viewpoint of Holofernes's world, sees only the subversive power of Judith; for the female viewer, the story is a metaphor for the real life of women. Unable to master and dominate openly, women live by their wits, their alertness, and their acumen; and in the real world, the man's world, of which Holofernes's camp is the symbol, Judith/woman who defies its values, strikes down its chief, is always in great danger. Her survival is the measure of her success, and to survive, she must be constantly vigilant. Holofernes has been killed, but there are other guardians of this temple, outside the tent, threatening that survival. Artemisia's Judiths, poised between the death blow they have delivered the patriarch and their potential capture by his lieutenants, driven by danger to the height of their courage and strength, embody the only kind of heroism realistically available to women in a patriarchal world. The female hero is perhaps less exalted than the male, but she at least does not exploit the weak, and as survivor, creative coper, and resourceful protector of alternative values—the values of minorities and underdogs—she may yet speak for a broader segment of humanity. For it is only in patriarchal myth that the underdog hero wins; in the world of women the underdog's triumph is self-realization.

CHAPTER SIX

The Allegory of Painting

> You see me holding this shiny mirror which I carry in my right hand in place of a scepter. I would thus have you know truly that no one can look into this mirror, no matter what kind of creature, without achieving clear self-knowledge.
>
> —Lady Reason to Christine de Pizan, from the *Cité des Dames*.

THE painting that hangs today in Kensington Palace, Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (Color Plate 14 and Fig. 295), may well be her major achievement. The importance of this deceptively modest work of art lies in its audacious claim upon the core of artistic tradition, as a sophisticated commentary upon a central philosophical issue of later Renaissance art theory. Artemisia indicates in the picture, her only preserved self-image, a special personal identification with her profession in terms that were quite literally unavailable to any male artist. Whereas in her individualized treatments of other iconographic themes she was concerned to offer uniquely female interpretations that were alternative to men's versions, in the *Allegory of Painting* she demonstrated not an alternative understanding of a subject, but a fusion of two themes that, under existing conventions, only a female artist could have combined.

The painter who imaginatively entered the stories of Susanna, Lucretia, and Judith as empathizing spectator, charging her interpretations of their lives with an expressive authenticity born of shared female experience while sublimating herself in the identity of the mythic heroine, now depicts herself directly, the subject in her own right. In the *Judiths* she had set her personal stamp in the form of an Artemis bracelet or a passing moon shadow, but here she imprints the fully lighted face with her own features and includes a signature for the first time (among preserved works) since the Uffizi *Judith*, inscribing on the table the simple initials "A. G. E." (*Artemisia Gentileschi fecit*). Yet even here, the artist's own presence is mediated by another iconographic figure. Artemisia presents herself as artist, engaged in the act of painting, accompanied by several, though not all, of the attributes of the female personification of Painting as set forth in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. These include a golden chain around her neck with a pendant mask, which stands for imitation; unruly locks of hair, which