

# BEYOND BOOKS: THE CONFLUENCE OF INFLUENCE AND THE OLD ENGLISH *JUDITH*\*

ANDY ORCHARD

OLD ENGLISH POETS, having inherited an extensive and venerable oral tradition, composed verse above all for the ear, and even at the end of the period were evidently still employing ancient techniques of emulation and innovation that harked back to an oral past.<sup>1</sup> One such Old English poet, likely working in the tenth century and perhaps in West Saxon,<sup>2</sup> offers a highly idiosyncratic verse version of the key dramatic parts of the story of the biblical Judith and manages to make creative use of alliterative ornament and unusual vocabulary while very consciously and deliberately recalling the specific words of previous poets for artistic effects, coining phrases that were then reused elsewhere to link sections of the poem. In turn, it seems that parts of the Old English *Judith* were echoed in other, later verses, by poets equally adept at interpreting, adopting, and adapting for their own purposes (and sometimes for ironic effect) aspects of what was evidently a lively combination of a living and an inherited poetic tradition. *Judith*, in other words, like all Old English poems, looks both forward and back.

Perhaps fittingly in this context, *Judith* notoriously lacks both a well-defined beginning and a clear end, since the manuscript is evidently damaged at the opening, and the closing six lines have been copied into the bottom margin of the final leaf by an unidentified early modern hand of about 1600 imitating Insular script. Both the original place of the poem in the *Beowulf*-manuscript (London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv) and the extent of the evident loss have been the subject of much discussion, given that the poem as it stands draws on only a part on the biblical Judith (Jth. 12:10–16:1).<sup>3</sup> The twin questions of whether the poet had access to a “pure” form of the Latin Vulgate or one that had been influenced by the *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin) version, and indeed whether the poet was working with a written text at all, are complex, the more so given the general looseness of the vernacular verse rendering. Here the equivalent passages from the Vulgate (with occasional *Vetus Latina* variants) are cited in the relevant footnotes for comparison.<sup>4</sup> The story of Judith was also retold around

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\* The conference from which this paper derives was held in St Andrews, and was a happy meeting in many ways, not least for the fine times spent with Mark Amodio, the editor of this volume, and John Miles Foley, to whom the present paper is dedicated: it is, after all, as John taught us so brilliantly in so many ways, always important to look beyond books.

1 See further Orchard, “Word Made Flesh.”

2 See further Griffith, *Judith*, 18–25 and 44–47. For an earlier approach, see Wenisch, “*Judith* — eine westsächsische Dichtung?”

3 See, for example, Lucas, “Place of *Judith*”; Chamberlain, “*Judith*: A Fragmentary and Political Poem”; and Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 39–44 and 88–95.

4 Griffith, *Judith*, 177–85, handily offers both versions, highlighting phrasing that appears closer

the year 1000 by Ælfric in 452 lines of alliterative Old English prose that explicitly link the tale of Judith's heroic resistance with the less heroic behaviour of Ælfric's contemporaries in the face of Viking depredations. In this light, it is intriguing to note that, as we shall see, the poetic account of the Battle of Maldon, fought against Viking raiders in Essex on 11 August 991, seems to draw on the earlier Old English verse *Judith*.<sup>5</sup>

The basic structure of the surviving 349 lines of *Judith* can be summarized as follows:<sup>6</sup>

Table 1: The Structure of *Judith*

<b>A. The Slaying of Holofernes</b>		
§1	Judith has divine help	1–7a
§2	The feasting of Holofernes	7b–34a
§3	Judith is brought to Holofernes's tent	34b–57a
§4	Holofernes, drunk, goes to his tent	57b–73a
§5	Judith cuts off the head of Holofernes	73b–121
<i>Judith's speech (83–94a)</i>		
<b>B. The Triumph of Judith</b>		
§6	Judith returns to Bethulia with her grisly booty	122–44a
§7	Judith's welcome at Bethulia	144b–70
<i>Judith's speech (152b–58)</i>		
§8	Judith describes the slaying and exhorts the warriors	171–200a
<i>Judith's speech (177–98)</i>		
<b>C. The Triumph of the Hebrews</b>		
§9	The Hebrew army sets out at dawn to battle the Assyrians	200b–35
§10	The Assyrians, surprised, discover Holofernes headless	236–91a
<i>The speech of the Assyrian warrior (285–89a)</i>		
§11	Battle and defeat of the Assyrians	289b–313a
§12	The Hebrew army returns to Bethulia with much booty	313b–23a
§13	The Hebrews gather the booty	323b–34a
§14	Judith is rewarded	334b–41a
§15	Judith gives praise	341b–46a
§16	The poet gives praise	346b–49

to the poem in the *Vetus Latina*. See too in general the systematic account of Brigatti, "Old English *Judith*," as well as Fee, "*Judith* and the Rhetoric of Heroism."

**5** Pringle, "*Judith*: The Homily and the Poem."

**6** Here, I rely mainly on the excellent edition by Griffith, as well as the text and translation by Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, 299–323. While the earlier edition by Timmer is largely superseded, in what follows I have also made much use of Cook's edition, which has a wealth of ancillary information. Likewise, my main source for the structure of the poem is Huppé, *Web of Words*, 136–89, especially 189. All other Old English poems are cited from Krapp and Dobbie, *ASPR*, unless otherwise noted.

Such a complex analysis, however, has the advantage of emphasizing just how commonly the *Judith*-poet favours beginning scenes and speeches on the b-line (as in twelve of the sixteen sections identified here), a feature that distinguishes *Judith* from (for example) *Beowulf* elsewhere in the same manuscript.<sup>7</sup> Further indications of the *Judith*-poet's idiosyncratic outlook and cold eye for structured patterning can be deduced from a ruthless pruning of characters, as several commentators have observed,<sup>8</sup> and a similarly reductive attitude towards speeches, where twenty in the corresponding Latin (Table 2) become just four in the Old English (Table 3). In reducing dramatically (as it were) the number of both speeches and speakers, the speaking Assyrians are anonymized and the Israelites speak only through Judith, whose own speeches are savagely truncated and amalgamated to coincide with climaxes to key moments in the restructured narrative.

So much is clear from a comparison of the speeches in *Judith* with those in the relevant sections of its biblical source, where eight different individuals and groups speak on twenty separate occasions, as follows:

Table 2: Speeches in the Biblical Book of Judith

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V1	Holofernes addresses Bagao (12:10)
V2	Bagao addresses Judith (12:12)
V3	Judith addresses Bagao (12:13–14)
V4	Holofernes addresses Judith (12:17)
V5	Judith addresses Holofernes (12:18)
V6	Judith prays (13:7)
V7	Judith prays (13:9)
V8	Judith addresses the Israelite watchmen (13:13)
V9	Judith addresses the Israelites (13:17)
V10	Judith to the Israelites (13:19–21)
V11	The Israelites praise Judith (13:22)
V12	Ozias, prince of Israel, praises Judith (13:23–25)
V13	The Israelites assent (13:26)
V14	Judith to Achior, general of the Ammonites (13:27–28)
V15	Achior praises Judith (13:31)
V16	Judith exhorts the Israelites to fight (14:1–5)
V17	The Assyrian chiefs ask the chamberlains to rouse Holofernes (14:12)
V18	Bagao to the Assyrians (14:16)
V19	Joachim the high priest comes from Jerusalem to Bethulia and praises Judith (15:10–11)
V20	The Israelites assent (15:12)

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It is clear that the carefully choreographed alternate exchanges between Holofernes, Bagao, and Judith in V1–5 (12:10–18) give way to a sequence of five speeches by Judith

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Orchard, *Critical Companion to Beowulf*, 205–8.

<sup>8</sup> See further Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament*, 127–28; and Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 7–8.

(V6–10 [13:7–21]), with two prayers to God immediately preceding the beheading of Holofernes, a brief address to the watchmen on the walls, and two speeches to the Israelites before and after she presents them with the severed head. Judith is then richly praised, first by the Israelites in general and then by Ozias their prince in particular (V11–12 [13:22–25]); the Israelites endorse his praise, saying “Fiat, Fiat” (V13 [13:26]) (so be it, so be it).<sup>9</sup> Judith then addresses the gentile Achior and shows him the severed head, at which point Achior too praises Judith (V14–15 [13:27–28 and 31]), whereupon she rouses the Israelites and instructs them to hang the severed head on the city walls (V16 [14:1–5]). At this point, Achior converts to Judaism and is circumcized. Attention then turns to the Assyrians, who hear the sound of the approaching Israelite army and crowd round outside the tent of Holofernes, hoping to wake him. Their leaders ask the chamberlains to go in (V17 [14:12]), and Bagao does so and attempts to wake Holofernes by clapping his hands before discovering the blood-drenched trunk of Holofernes, whereupon he cries out to the others (V18 [14:16]). The Assyrians immediately lose heart and flee before the approaching Israelites can engage them. The Israelites give chase and eventually pursue them out of the land, plundering the abandoned Assyrian camp and collecting much booty, which they bring back to Bethulia. After the victory, achieved without a formal fight, Joachim the high priest comes from Jerusalem to Bethulia and offers his own praise of Judith (V19 [15:10–11]); the Israelites again endorse his praise, saying “Fiat, Fiat” (V20 [15:12]) (so be it, so be it). There is a certain elegance in the evident patterning of these twenty speeches, nine of them spoken by Judith herself, who is the object of praise by Ozias, Achior, and Joachim, as well as by the Israelites in general, who endorse the words of Ozias and Joachim in identical terms.

In sharp contrast, the *Judith*-poet drastically reduces the number of speeches and speakers of whom only Judith is named, taking on the majority of speeches and speaking lines, as follows:

Table 3: Speeches in the Old English *Judith*

J1	Judith prays (83–94a [loosely based on Jth. 13:7 and 13:9])
J2	Judith addresses the Israelite watchmen (152b–58 [loosely based on Jth. 13:13])
J3	Judith addresses the Israelites (177–98 [loosely based on Jth. 14:2])
J4	An unnamed Assyrian addresses the rest (285–89a [loosely based on Jth. 14:16])

Whereas the speeches in the biblical sources come in clearly delineated sequences, often involving spoken responses, those in the Old English are all unanswered, with significant gaps between them. Before the first speech, there is a spirited account of feasting, followed by Judith being taken into the tent of Holofernes, while the speech itself is a prelude to the beheading. On her return to Bethulia, Judith speaks first to the Israelite watchmen before producing the severed head of Holofernes and exhorting the Israelites who have thronged around her. Immediately, the Israelites assemble for a pitched battle that differs significantly from the pursuit of the fleeing Assyrians in the biblical account.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Vulgate translations are from the Douay-Rheims version.

There, the flight is prompted by panic after Bagao's desperate clapping of his hands and his grim discovery of the headless Holofernes, while in the Old English there has already been a lengthy account of fighting before the Assyrians try to wake Holofernes, here rather comically coughing and clearing their throats outside his tent before an unnamed man enters.<sup>10</sup> It is his speech, the last in *Judith*, that causes the flight that is biblically sanctioned, which is rendered in Old English as a clear echo of the early and more elaborately phrased battle. In the analysis of *Judith* that follows, there is a particular focus on the speeches (which occur in §§5, 7, 8, and 10), alongside the accounts of feasting, decapitation, and fighting that they punctuate.

*Judith* is notable for its extensive use of hypermetric lines, which evidently come in artfully arranged clusters,<sup>11</sup> but there is also evident metrical and syntactical artistry in the disposition of "normal" lines, such as in the exuberant description of the feasting-scene, which comes to a rousing crescendo in ways that owe little to the Latin biblical source.<sup>12</sup>

Da wearð Holofernus,  
gold-wine gumena, on gyte-salum,  
hloh ond hlydde, hlynede ond dynede,  
þæt mihten fira bearn feorran gehyran  
hu se stið-moda stymde ond gylede,  
modig ond medu-gal, manode geneahhe  
benc-sittende þæt hi gebærdon wel.  
(21b–27)

(Then Holofernes, the gold-friend of the men, was gleeful for pouring, laughed and bellowed, roared and revelled, so that the sons of men could hear from far off how that stout-hearted one stormed and yelled, spirited and mead-flushed, repeatedly egged on those sitting on the bench to enjoy themselves well.)

This is perhaps the most celebrated and sustained description of drunkenness in all Old English literature, a busy and skittish vignette containing an extraordinary concatenation in lines 23–26 of no fewer than seven finite verbs focusing on the giddy actions of Holofernes, the first five of which are emphasized through alliteration and end-rhyme (“**hloh** [...] **hlydde hlynede** [...] **dynede** [...] **stymde** [...] **gylede** [...] **manode**”); the contrast with the rather sombre, indeed in stylistic terms somewhat counter-intuitively sober, Latin source is striking indeed.<sup>13</sup> Six of the finite verbs appear in three doublets, in one case emphasized through rhyme (a feature that the *Judith*-poet employs twenty

<sup>10</sup> On the precise sense of the verb *cohettan*, found uniquely here in Old English, see Robinson, “Five Textual Notes,” 49–50.

<sup>11</sup> Raffel, “*Judith*: Hypermetricity and Rhetoric”; Hieatt, “*Judith* and the Literary Function”; and Hartman, “A Drawn-Out Beheading.”

<sup>12</sup> Herbison, “Heroism and Comic Subversion,” 15–16; and Chickering, “Poetic Exuberance,” 132–33. The passage is also remarkable both in terms of its metre and its metrical grammar, as highlighted by Griffith, *Judith*, 37–39. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

<sup>13</sup> The Vulgate, Jth. 12:20, says simply: “et iucundus factus est Holofernis ad illam bibitque uinum nimis multum quantum numquam biberat in uita sua” (And Holofernes was made merry on her occasion, and drank exceeding much wine, so much as he had never drunk in his life).

further times in his text), and the appearance in the same passage of a fourth adjectival doublet (“modig ond medu-gal”) surely only underscores the point. Moreover, the key line describing the outlandish actions of Holofernes (“hloh ond hlydde, hlynede ond dynede” [23] ([Holofernes] laughed and roared, shouted and revelled) is the only one in all extant Old English verse where both half-lines are comprised of paired finite verbs linked by a conjunction.

A similar clustering of doublets is also found in the description of the Hebrews gathering to greet the triumphantly returning heroine:<sup>14</sup>

Ʒa wurdon bliðe burh-sittende,  
 syððan hi gehyrdon hu seo halige spræc  
 ofer heanne weall. Here wæs on lustum;  
 wið þæs fæsten-geates folc onette,  
 weras wif somod, wornum ond heapum,  
 ðreatum ond ðrymmum þrunon ond urnon  
 ongean ða þeodnes mægð þusend-mælum,  
 ealde ge geonge. Æghwylcum wearð  
 men on ðære medo-byrig mod areted,  
 syððan hie ongeaton þæt wæs Iudith cumen  
 eft to eðle, ond ða ofostlice  
 hie mid eað-medum in forleton.

(159–70)

(Then those sitting in the city were happy, once they heard how that saintly one spoke over the high wall. The army was in high spirits; people hurried toward the fortress-gate, men and women together, in crowds and groups, bands and hosts, old and young thronged and ran in their thousands to meet the handmaid of the Lord. The heart of everyone in that mead-stronghold was gladdened as soon as they understood that Judith had come back to her homeland, and then straightaway they let her in with humility.)

The difference is that here there is only one doublet consisting of finite verbs (“þrunon ond urnon” [164b] [pressed forward and ran]); that doublet is immediately preceded by three other noun-pairs (“weras wif somod, wornum ond heapum, / ðreatum ond ðrymmum” [159–60a] [men and women together, in crowds and groups]), and followed by an adjectival doublet (“ealde ge geonge” [166a] [old and young]). A further difference between the passages lies in the use of compounds: here, there are two, “fæsten-geates” (162b) (fortress-gate) and “þusend-mælum” (165b) (by thousands), the first of which is unattested elsewhere, while the second is relatively commonplace.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the description of Holofernes’s boozing contains five compounds, one of which (“gytesalum” [22b] [joy at pouring]) is unattested elsewhere, two more (“medu-gal” [26a] [mead-flushed] and “benc-sittende” [27a] [bench-sitters]) are only found in one or two

<sup>14</sup> See further Griffith, *Judith*, 84–85. The simple language of the Vulgate, Jth. 13:15, has provided only the barest basis for this passage: “et concurrerunt ad eam omnes a minimo usque ad maximum quoniam speraverunt eam iam non esse venturam” (And all ran to meet her from the least to the greatest: for they now had no hopes that she would come).

<sup>15</sup> The compound appears six further times in verse, in *Exodus* (196a), *Andreas* (872b), and *Christ and Satan* (234a, 507a, 568a, and 630a), once in a doomsday passage in homiletic prose, and in a gloss, glossing “melena” (presumably for “millena” [thousands]).

other poems;<sup>16</sup> while the other two (“gold-wine” [22a] [gold-friend] and “stið-mod” [25a] [stout-hearted]) are rather more widely attested, they too bear witness to specific aspects of the *Judith*-poet’s style. The compound “gold-wine” (gold-friend) appears outside *Judith* only in *Beowulf* (five times), *Elene* (once), and *The Wanderer* (twice),<sup>17</sup> while the complete half-line “gold-wine gumena” (gold-friend of men) is found once in *Elene* (201a) and three times in *Beowulf* (1171a, 1476a, and 1602a). Beyond *Judith*, the adjective “stið-mod” is found five times in verse, once each in *Genesis A*, *Beowulf*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Dream of the Rood*, and *Christ and Satan*, and five times in prose, mainly in works written by or associated with Wulfstan.<sup>18</sup>

Other critics have highlighted the idiosyncratic fondness of the *Judith*-poet for compound nouns and adjectives formed from present participles in *-end(e)*; there are fifteen examples in the poem as a whole, comprising eleven different compounds, but it is particularly striking that six of those examples, involving four separate compounds, all appear within the passage describing the feast (7b–34a [§2]), with another introducing the description of the thronging Israelites, here “burh-sittende” (those sitting in the city), which is linked back to the feasting-scene in other ways.<sup>19</sup> As if to emphasize the consistency of the selection, all seven are based on just two suffixes, namely *wig(g)ende* (fighting) and *-sittende* (sitting).<sup>20</sup> Such clustering of forms is echoed further in the usage here of an adjectival form as a substantive (“se stið-mod” [25a] [the stout-hearted one]), another aspect of the idiolect of the *Judith*-poet that has been remarked upon previously. Such a usage forms an envelope-pattern for the surviving poem as a whole: God is mentioned as the recipient of prayers “to ðam ælmihtigan” (to the almighty) at lines 7a and 345a, and nowhere else in the poem in such a way.<sup>21</sup> This feature is particularly noticeable in the prelude to the slaying of Holofernes, who is himself referred to by such substantive

**16** Outside of *Judith*, both “benc-sittende” and “medu-gal” (twice) are found in the *Fortunes of Men* (52a, 57b, and 78a), while “medu-gal” also appears in *Daniel* (702a).

**17** *Beo* 1171a, 1476a, 1602a, 2419a, and 2584a; *El* 201a; and *Wan* 22b and 35b.

**18** *Gen A* 2425a; *Beo* 2566a; *Dream* 48a; *Fates* 72b; *XSt* 246a; also five times in prose, generally in Wulfstan or Wulfstan-related material.

**19** The full list of such compounds in *Judith* (and their distribution elsewhere) is as follows: “benc-sittende” (27a [also *Fort* 78a]) (bench-sitters); “burh-sittende” (159b [also *Gen A* 1089a, 2328b, 2816a, and 2839a; *Dan* 298b [Az 19b], 659b, 723b, and 729b; *Christ A* 337b; *El* 276b; *Ridd* 25 3a; *And* 1201b; *Met* 27 17b; once in prose, in the Old English *Luke*]) (townspeople); “byrn-wigende” (17a [also *El* 224a and 235b; *Descent* 38a]) (mailed warriors); “eald-hettende” (320b) (ancient enemies); “flett-sittende” (19a, 33a [also *Beo* 1788a and 2022b]) (hall-sitters); “her-buende” (96a [also *Gen A* 1079a; *Met* 29 60b]) (those dwelling here); “land-buende” (226a and 314a [also *Beo* 95b and 1345a; *Wid* 132b; *Ridd* 95 11a; *Gifts* 29b; *OrW* 80b; *XSt* 683b; and fourteen times in prose and glosses]) (land-dwellers); “lind-wigende” (42a [also *El* 270a; *Met* 1 13a]) (shield-warriors); “nið-hycgende” (233a [also *Christ C* 1109b]) (evil plotters); “and-wigende” (11a, 20a, and 188a [also *Ex* 436a]) (shield-warriors); and “woruld-buende” (82a [also *Met* 8 35b, *Met* 27 27b, and *Met* 29 81b]) (dwellers on earth). Note that in the passage describing the thronging Israelites, Bethulia is described as a “medo-byrig” (mead-stronghold), a term found only in *Judith* (167a) and in the *Husband’s Message* (17b).

**20** See Momma, “Epanalepsis,” 61–66; and Tyler, “Style and Meaning.” For a useful analysis of how posture is depicted in the poem, see Arthur, “Postural Representations.”

**21** See Griffith, *Judith*, 92–93, for further links connecting the relevant passages here.

adjectival means no fewer than eleven times in the space of fewer than sixty lines, with nine different epithets, as he appears in turn as “se rica” (20b, 44a, and 68a) (the powerful one); “se stið-modra” (25a) (the stout-hearted one); “se inwidra” (28a) (the wicked one); “se bealo-fulla” (48a) (the evil one); “se modiga” (52b) (the proud one); “se brema” (57b) (the (in)famous one); “se deofol-cundra” (61b) (the diabolical one); “þone atolan” (75a) (the dread one); and “se unsyfra” (76b) (the unclean one). Given the *Judith*-poet’s practice of deliberately varying the substantive adjectival usages describing Holofernes, it is striking that a similar strategy seems to apply to the poet’s characterization of Judith herself. In extant Old English verse, there are eighteen examples of the form “mægð” in the sense “woman” (the same form also functions as the nominative plural), fully ten of which are in *Judith*, all applying to the eponymous heroine, once in conjunction with her maid. What is most evident is that the *Judith*-poet seems to have taken extraordinary care to employ different adjectives or qualifying genitives in every single one of those ten cases: Judith is variously “blessed,” “radiant,” “the creator’s,” “wise,” “shrewd,” “the lord’s,” “bright,” “holy,” “brave,” and (together with her maid) “triumphant.”<sup>22</sup>

The differing designations for the two main protagonists become notably more polarized as Holofernes draws towards his shameful death, which is linguistically lingered over in a lengthy passage of almost fifty lines (73b–121 [§5]). In the first description of how Judith tackled Holofernes, the action concludes with the first of her speeches, an invocation to God in the anachronistic form of the Trinity that perhaps unsurprisingly owes little to the biblical source:<sup>23</sup>

Genam ða wunden-locc  
 scyppendes mægð    scearpne mece,  
 scurum heardne,    ond of scaeðe abræd  
 swiðran folme;    ongan ða swegles weard  
 be naman nemnan,    nergend ealra  
 woruld-buendra,    ond þæt word acwæð:  
 “Ic ðe, frymða god    ond frofre gæst,  
 bearn alwaldan,    biddan wylle  
 miltse þinre    me þearfendre,  
 ðrynesse ðrym.    þearle ys me nu ða  
 heorte onhæted    ond hige geomor,  
 swyðe mid sorgum gedrefed.    Forgif me, swegles ealdor,  
 sigor ond soðne geleafan,    þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote  
 geheawan þysne morðres bryttan;    geunne me minra gesynta,  
 þearl-mod þeoden gumena.    Nahte ic þinre næfre  
 miltse þon maran þearfe.    Gewrec nu, mihtig dryhten,  
 torht-mod tires brytta,    þæt me ys þus torne on mode,  
 hate on hreðre minum.”

(77b–94a)

**22** The relevant forms are: “eadian mægð” (35a) (blessed); “torhtan mægð” (43a) (radiant); “scyppendes mægð” (78a) (the creator’s); “snotere mægð” (125a) (wise); the plural form “eadhreðige mægð” (135a) (triumphant); “searo-ðoncol mægð” (145a) (shrewd); “þeodnes mægð” (165a) (the lord’s); “beorhte mægð” (254b) (bright); “halgan mægð” (260a) (holy); and “mægð modigre” (334a) (brave).

**23** Chickering, “Poetic Exuberance,” 131–32.

(Then the curly-haired one, the creator's handmaid, seized a sharp blade hardened in war-storms, and drew it from its sheath with her right hand; she then began to name by name the guardian of heaven, the saviour of all those dwelling in the world, and spoke these words: "I want to ask you, God of created things and spirit of comfort, son of the almighty, the power of the Trinity, for your mercy on me in my need. My heart is now sorely inflamed and my spirit sorrowful, greatly weighted down with cares. Grant me, lord of heaven, victory and true belief, so that with this sword I may cut down this dealer in slaughter. Grant me my deliverance, stern-minded lord of men. I never had greater need of your mercy. Avenge now, mighty lord, bright-minded dealer of glory, what is for me so bitter in my breast, so hot in my heart.")

The continuous alliteration on *sc-* of lines 78–79 throws emphasis on both Judith and the instrument of her vengeance: "scyppendes mægð scearpne mece, / scurum heardne, ond of sceaðe abræd" (the creator's handmaid, seized a sharp blade hardened in war-storms, and drew it from its sheath). In this context, it is useful to note that there is a particularly close parallel in *Andreas*, one of a dozen identified so far as part of a sustained pattern of that poem's echoes and borrowing:<sup>24</sup>

Sceolde sweordes ecg,  
*scerp* ond *scur*-heard, of *sceaðan* folme,  
 fyr-mælum fag, feorh acsigan.  
 (1132b–34; emphasis mine)

(The sword's edge, sharp and storm-hardened, from the sheath, in the fist, decorated with fire-patterning, has to search out a life.)

The climax of the first phase of the poem comes with the slaying of Holofernes, which the *Judith*-poet depicts in ways that are largely without parallel in the biblical source and again emphasize the originality of the Old English and its debt to a broader tradition. The Latin is by no means without artistry of its own, notably a repeated invocation to the God of Israel (Jth. 13:7 and 9).<sup>25</sup> The *Judith*-poet, as befits one who has routinely inserted Christian language and imagery into this Old Testament tale, elsewhere describing Holofernes and Judith as "nergende lað" (45b) (hateful to the saviour) and

<sup>24</sup> See further Orchard, "Originality of *Andreas*," especially 352–70. Note that the compound adjective "scur-heard" here is uniquely matched in *Beowulf* 1033a in the half-line "scur-heard scepðan," from which it may indeed be derived; the compound "fyr-mæl" is unique to *Andreas*.

<sup>25</sup> Compare the Vulgate, Jth. 13:6–9: "stetitque Iudith ante lectum orans cum lacrimis et labiorum motu in silentio [7] dicens confirma me Domine Deus Israhel et respice in hac hora ad opera manuum mearum ut sicut promisisti Hierusalem civitatem tuam erigas et hoc quod credens per te posse fieri cogitavi perficiam [8] et haec cum dixisset accessit ad columnam quae erat ad caput lectuli eius et pugionem eius qui in ea ligatus pendebat exsolvit [9] cumque evaginasset illud adprehendit comam capitis eius et ait confirma me Domine Deus Israhel in hac hora" (And Judith stood before the bed praying with tears, and the motion of her lips in silence, [7] Saying: Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, and in this hour look on the works of my hands, that as thou hast promised, thou mayst raise up Jerusalem thy city: and that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by thee. [8] And when she had said this, she went to the pillar that was at his bed's head, and loosed his sword that hung tied upon it. [9] And when she had drawn it out, she took him by the hair of his head, and said: Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, at this hour).

“nergendes þeowen” (73b–74a) (the saviour’s handmaid) respectively, here plays down the references to the God of Israel, speaking instead in the voice of the poet of the “swegles weard” (80b) (guardian of the sky) and the “nergend ealra / woruldbuendra” (81b–82a) (the guardian of heaven, the saviour of all those dwelling in the world), and putting first in Judith’s mouth what looks like a clear invocation of the Trinity.<sup>26</sup> There are other echoes that structure this passage, notably the sequences “miltse [...] þearfendre [...] heorte onhæted ond hige geomor, swyðe mid sorgum gedrefed and miltse [...] þearfe [...] torne on mode, hate on hreðre minum.” Note the pervasive use of ornamental alliteration in this passage, beginning with three lines in the speech that all exhibit cross-alliteration, followed by nine lines, eight of which demonstrate double alliteration. The invocation of the Trinity (“ðrynesse ðrym” [85a] [the power of the Trinity]) continues the alliteration of the preceding line, and summarizes the previous careful listing of the three persons of the Trinity as “God of origins and consoling spirit, son of the Almighty” (83–84a) (frymða god ond frofre gæst, / bearn alwaldan), the essential unity of which is highlighted by the singular “ðe.” It is also intriguing that the four subsequent invocations of God (“swegles ealdor [...] þearl-mod þeoden gumena [...] mihtig dryhten, torht-mod tires brytta”) are all echoed elsewhere in *Judith*, each appearing in just one other place. The two simpler phrases, “swegles ealdor” (89b) (lord of heaven) (which recalls the earlier “swegles weard” [80b] [guardian of heaven]) and “mihtig dryhten” (92b) (mighty lord) both recur later in the poem (at lines 124a and 198a) in passages celebrating Judith’s triumph, while the alternating longer phrases “þearl-mod þeoden gumena” (91a) (stern-minded lord of men) and “torht-mod tires brytta” (93a) (bright-minded dealer of glory) both echo earlier designations of Holofernes himself as “þearl-mod ðeoden gumena” (66a) and “swið-mod sinces brytta” (30a) (strong-minded dealer of treasure). Note too that even within this passage, a contrast is made between Holofernes as “morðres bryttan” (90a) (dealer in slaughter) and God as “tires brytta” (93a) (dealer of glory). Beyond this passage, the phrases “tires brytta” and “morþres brytta” appear once each elsewhere in *Christ B* (462b) and *Andreas* (1170b); “swegles ealdor” appears four times in *Genesis A* (862b, 2542a, 2808a, and 2879a, each time as “swegles aldor”), while various forms of “mihtig dryhten” are commonplace, appearing around fifty times elsewhere (including here at 92b and 198b).

After the calm elegance of Judith’s invocation of the Trinity, the slaughter itself comes with striking abruptness:<sup>27</sup>

**26** See further Momma, “Epanalepsis,” 68–69; also Hill, “Invocation of the Trinity,” who highlights no fewer than eight separate passages in Old English poetry where characters invoke the Trinity in particular instances of peril, so suggesting that here too Judith’s anachronistic response is a part of a widespread vernacular poetic convention, albeit one ultimately derived from St Patrick’s *Lorica*.

**27** On the beheading of Holofernes, see in general Herbison, “Heroism and Comic Subversion,” 20–21; Chickering, “Poetic Exuberance,” 132–35, at 134–35; L. Garner, “Art of Translation,” 176–77; Astell, “Holofernes’s Head,” 126–31; and A. Olsen, “Inversion and Political Purpose.” The Vulgate, Jth. 13:10, is much simpler: “et percussit bis in ceruicem eius et abscidit caput eius et abstulit conopeum eius a columnis et euoluit corpus eius truncum” (And she struck twice upon his neck, and cut off his head, and took off his canopy from the pillars, and rolled away his headless body).

Sloh ða wunden-locc  
 þone feond-sceaðan fagum mece,  
 hete-þoncolne, þæt heo healfne forcearf  
 þone sweoran him, þæt he on swiman læg,  
 druncen ond dolh-wund. Næs ða dead þa gyt,  
 ealles orsawle; sloh ða eornoste  
 ides ellen-rof oðre siðe  
 þone hæðenan hund, þæt him þæt heafod wand  
 forð on ða flore. Læg se fula leap  
 gesne beæftan, gæst ellor hwearf  
 under neowelne næs ond ðær genyðerad wæs,  
 susle gesæled syððan æfre,  
 wýrmum bewunden, wítum gebunden,  
 hearde gehæfted in helle-bryne  
 efter hin-siðe. Ne ðearf he hopian no,  
 þystrum forðylmed, þæt he ðonan mote  
 of ðam wýrm-sele, ac ðær wunian sceal  
 awa to aldre butan ende forð  
 in ðam heolstran ham, hyht-wynna leas.  
 (103b–21)

(The curly-haired one then struck the ravaging enemy, the one with evil intent, with a decorated sword, so that she sliced through half his neck, so that he lay in a daze, drunk and greatly maimed. He was not yet dead, not quite devoid of his soul; the courageous-minded lady then struck the heathen dog in earnest a second time, so that his head flew off onto the floor. The foul trunk lay, bereft, behind, after the spirit disappeared elsewhere, under a steep cliff, and was sunk there, moored in misery ever after, wound round with serpents, bound round in torments, cruelly made captive in hell-fire after his going hence. Wrapped in darkness, he need never hope that he might ever come away from that serpent-hall, but there he had to stay for ever and ever on without end in that dim home, deprived of any happy hopes.)

The whole passage is simply dripping with double alliteration, as well as both half- and full-rhyme (“hund [...] wand”; “bewunden [...] gebunden”): of the last fifteen lines of this passage (107–21), only three do not exhibit the feature (112, 117, and 119). The description of the actual slaying of Holofernes echoes in its opening the previous passage, with “Sloh ða wunden-locc [...] fagum mece” (103b) (The curly-haired one then struck [...] with a decorated sword)<sup>28</sup> providing a close parallel to the earlier “Genam ða wunden-locc [...] scarpne mece” (77b–78) (Then the curly-haired one [...] seized a sharp blade), a parallel only emphasized by the fact that, while the compound “wunden-locc” also appears later in the poem (325a) as a description of the Hebrew people,<sup>29</sup> these are the only occurrences of the word *mece* in the poem. The purely aural echo of “feond-sceaðan” and “of sceaðe” also highlights the connection,

**28** The description of the weapon as “fagum” (decorated) is echoed three further times in the poem (194b, 264b, and 301b: all “fagum sweordum” or “fagum swýrdum”); the phrase echoes *Beowulf* 586a, “fagum sweordum.”

**29** The compound “wunden-locc” only appears outside its triple appearance in *Judith in Riddle 25*, a so-called “onion riddle,” at 11a; for a suggestion that the two texts are related, see Shaw, “Hair and Heathens.”

and throws further focus on Judith's prayer to God and its favourable reception as the static centrepiece between Judith's seizing and drawing of the sword and her employment of it, effectively retarding the action.

Judith's final speech in the poem is equally artistically arranged:<sup>30</sup>

Spræc ða seo æðele to eallum þam folce:  
 "Her ge magon sweotole sige-rofe hæleð,  
 leoda ræswan, on ðæs laðestan  
 hæðenes heaðo-rinces heafod starian,  
 Holofernus unlyfigendes,  
 þe us monna mæst morðra gefremede,  
 sarra sorga, ond þæt swyðor gyt  
 ycan wolde, ac him ne uðe god  
 lengran lifes, þæt he mid læððum us  
 eglan moste; ic him ealdor oðþrong  
 þurh godes fultum. Nu ic gumena gehwæne  
 þyssa burg-leoda biddan wylle,  
 rand-wiggendra, þæt ge recene eow  
 fysan to gefeohte. Syððan frymða god,  
 ar-fæst cyning, eastan sende  
 leohtne leoman, berað linde forð,  
 bord for breostum ond byrn-homas,  
 scire helmas in sceaðena gemong,  
 fyllan folc-togan fagum sweordum,  
 fæge frum-garas. Fynd syndon eowere  
 gedemed to deaðe, ond ge dom agon,  
 tir æt tohtan, swa eow gatacnod hafað  
 mihtig dryhten þurh mine hand."  
 (176–98)

(The noble lady then spoke to all of that people: "Here, you victory-bold warriors, leaders of men, you can clearly gaze on the head of that most hateful heathen battle-warrior, Holofernes, lifeless, the one who of all men has brought about for us the most slaughters, painful sorrows, and would have increased them still more, but God did not grant him a longer life, for him to harm us with afflictions. I drove the life from him with God's help. Now I want to ask every man among the people of this town, every shield-bearer, that you swiftly hasten to prepare for battle after the God of created things, the benevolent

**30** See Astell, "Holofernes's Head," 130–31; and Chickering, "Poetic Exuberance," 129–30. The Vulgate, Jth. 14:1–5, reads as follows: "dixit autem Iudith ad omnem populum audite me fratres suspendite caput hoc super muros nostros [2] et erit cum exierit sol accipiat unusquisque arma sua et exite cum impetu non ut descendatis deorsum sed quasi impetum facientes [3] tunc exploratores necesse erit ut fugiant ad principem suum excitandum ad pugnam [4] cumque duces eorum cucurrerint ad tabernaculum Holofernis et invenerint eum truncum in suo sanguine volutatum decidet super eos timor [5] cumque cognoveritis fugere illos ite post illos securi quoniam Dominus conteret eos sub pedibus vestris" (And Judith said to all the people: Hear me, my brethren, hang ye up this head upon our walls. [2] And as soon as the sun shall rise, let every man take his arms, and rush ye out, not as going down beneath, but as making an assault. [3] Then the watchmen must need run to awake their prince for the battle. [4] And when the captains of them shall run to the tent of Holofernes, and shall find him without his head wallowing in his blood, fear shall fall upon them. [5] And when you shall know that they are fleeing, go after them securely, for the Lord will destroy them under your feet).

king, sends from the east his shining light. Carry forth your linden-protection before your breasts, also mail-coats, gleaming helmets, into the enemy fray; cut down their war-leaders, their doomed chieftains, with decorated swords. Your enemies are condemned to death, and you have the glory, the honour in the conflict, as the mighty Lord has revealed to you through my hand.”)

Judith’s speech concludes with another aural flourish: seven of the final ten lines (189–98) contain double alliteration, including a pair of lines with continued alliteration on *f* (194–95) that introduce successive examples of paronomasia (“fæge [...] fagum [...] gedemed [...] dom”). The reference to “frymða god” (189b) (God of created things) echoes Judith’s own earlier invocation quoted above, “Ic ðe, frymða god” (83a),<sup>31</sup> while her exhortation to the Israelites to go and gain “tir æt tohtan” (197a) (honour in the conflict) has a close and unique echo in the *Battle of Maldon*, where just before the English side enter the battle against the Vikings, reference is again made to “tir æt getohte” (104a) (honour in the conflict). Elsewhere in this passage, the close and unique echo in Judith’s description of the dead Holofernes as “the one who of all men has brought about for us the most slaughters” (181) (þe us monna mæst morðra gefremede) of Wiglaf’s praise of the dead Beowulf as “the one who of all men has brought about the most glorious deeds” (2645) (forðam he manna mæst mærdða gefremede) is ear-catching indeed, and is one of a number of parallels which suggest that the *Judith*-poet may have borrowed directly (and ironically) from the longer poem with which it now shares a manuscript-context.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere, I have indicated the extraordinary sequence of parallels that links an extended version of the first and longest battle-scene in *Judith* (which has no warrant in the biblical warrant) very specifically to a similarly extended battle-scene in *Elene* (where, though the poet Cynewulf elaborates massively on his source, he does at least have a battle on which to base his brilliant set-piece).<sup>33</sup> Indeed, this passage contains just three out of a total of thirty-three parallels linking *Judith* and *Elene* overall.<sup>34</sup> There are more than 140 distinct compounds in *Judith* (roughly one every two-and-a-half lines), of which thirty-eight are unique in extant Old English (roughly one every nine lines), and a further five only paralleled in prose (bringing the strike-rate up to roughly one every nine lines). On these figures, one might expect the central thirty-line battle-scene (220b–50a) to contain around a dozen compounds, of which three or four might be expected to be unique in Old English verse. In fact, there are twenty-seven compounds in these thirty lines, of which just under half (thirteen) are unique to *Judith*, comprising ten distinct compounds.<sup>35</sup> Put another way, this one passage, representing 8.6 percent

31 There is a parallel in *Elene* (again), “syððan him frymða god” (502b), as well as in *Guthlac B*, “þætte frymþa god” (820b); there is also a similar reference early on in *Judith*: “gefrīðode, frymða waldend” (5a).

32 I explore this connection further in my edition of *Beowulf*.

33 See Orchard, “Computing Cynewulf.”

34 The thirty-three parallels in question are listed in Orchard, “Computing Cynewulf,” 77–80.

35 The compounds unique to *Judith* are as follows: “bur-geteld” (57a, 248b, and 276b) (tented chamber); “cumbol-wiga” (243b and 259b) (banner warrior); “ecg-plega” (246a) (sword-play);

of the total lines in the poem, contains 26 percent of its uniquely attested compounds, a strike-rate more than three times what one would expect. Yet despite the verbal pyrotechnics and strikingly original diction in this battle-scene, it seems that *Elene* is not the only earlier poem that the *Judith*-poet has laid under contribution, as is suggested by the description of the Israelites unsheathing their swords:

mundum brugdon  
scealcas of sceaðum scir-mæled swyrd,  
ecgum gecoste

(229b–31a)

(warriors drew with their fists from their sheaths their bright-decorated swords, trusty in edges.)

These lines echo closely a passage in *Genesis A*, describing strikingly similar martial endeavour in the so-called “battle of the kings”:

Handum *brugdon*  
hæleð of *scaðum* hring-mæled *sweord*,  
ecgum dihtig

(1991b–93a; emphasis mine)

(with their hands warriors drew from their sheaths their ring-decorated swords, doughty in edges.)

It seems worth noting that the adjectives “hring-mæled” (ring-decorated) and “scir-mæled” (bright-decorated) are both unique in the extant corpus, where they are indeed the only compounds formed from *-mæled*, although “hring-mæl” appears both as a noun “ring-patterned sword,” “ring-adorned sword” (*Beo* 1521b and 1564b) and as an adject-

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“here-folc” (234a and 239a) (battle-army); “medo-werig” (229a and 245a) (mead-weary); “morgen-colla” (245b) (morning-slaughter); “scir-mæled” (230b) (brightly decorated); “slege-fæge” (247a) (slaughter-doomed); “stede-heard” (223a) (firmly fixed); “styrn-mod” (227a) (stern-hearted); and “swyrd-geswing” (240a) (sword-stroke); note that four of them occur more than once in the poem, two in this very passage. Of the remaining fourteen compounds in the passage, nine are purely poetic, and five are also attested in prose, as follows: “eald-geniðla” (228b) (ancient enemy) (also *And* 1048b and 1341b); “ealdor-þegn” (242b) (chief thegn) (also *Beo* 1308a; *XSt* 66a; *Men* 130a; as well as twice in prose, in two Vercelli Homilies); “fær-spell” (244b) (sudden bad news) (also *Ex* 135b; *Jul* 267b and 277a; *Guth B* 1050b; *And* 1086a); “guð-freca” (224a) (battle-warrior) (also *Beo* 2414a; *Phoen* 353a; *And* 1333a); “heafod-weard” (239b) (chief guard; head guard) (also *PPs* 77:19 3a; as well as twice in two glosses, glossing “excubitores” and “tribunus”); “hilde-nædre” (222a) (battle-adder; arrow) (also *El* 119b and 141a); “horn-boga” (222b) (horn-bow) (also *Beo* 2437b; *PPs* 75:3 1a); “land-buende” (226a and 314a) (land-dwellers) (also *Beo* 95b and 1345a; *Wid* 132b; *Ridd* 95 11a; *Gifts* 29b; *OrW* 80b; *XSt* 683b; as well as fourteen times in prose and glosses); “mago-þegn” (236a) (retainer) (also *Beo* 293a, 408a, 1405b, 1480b, 2079a, and 2757a; *And* 94b, 366a, 1140a, 1207b, and 1515a; *Wan* 62a; *Men* 82a); “morgen-tid” (236b) (morning-time) (also *Beo* 484b and 518b; *Brun* 14a; as well as thirteen times in prose and glosses, mainly psalm-glosses, glossing “matutinum”); “nið-hycgende” (233a) (evil-plotters) (also *Christ C* 1109b); “oret-mæg” (232b) (warrior) (also *Beo* 332a, 363b, and 481b; *And* 664b; *DEdw* 11b; as well as twice in glossaries, glossing “agonista” and “anthleta”); “sterced-ferhð” (55b and 227b) (stout-hearted) (also *El* 38a; *And* 1233b); and “werig-ferhð” (249a and 290b) (weary-hearted) (also *And* 1400a; *Whale* 19b).

tive “ring-patterned”; “ring-adorned” (*Beo* 2037a).<sup>36</sup> This apparent echo of *Genesis A* in *Judith* is one of twenty-six so far detected, including the use of the uniquely shared compound adjective “ælf-scýne” (1827a and 2731a; *Jud* 14a) (having elven beauty; dangerously beautiful; seductively beautiful), used to describe Sarah and Judith as women whose beauty proves fatal to those whose intentions towards them are less than honourable.<sup>37</sup>

After the extensive battle-passage, the final speech in *Judith*, at least in the form in which it survives, is given to an anonymous Assyrian:<sup>38</sup>

He þa lungre gefeoll  
 freorig to foldan, ongan his feax teran,  
 hreoh on mode, ond his hrægl somod,  
 ond þæt word acwæð to ðam wiggendum  
 þe ðær unrote ute wæron:  
 “Her ys geswutelod ure sylfra forwyrd,  
 toward getacnod þæt þære tide ys  
 mid niðum neah geðrunge, þe we sculon nu losian,  
 somod æt sæcce forweorðan. Her lið sweorde geheawen,  
 beheafdod healdend ure.”

(280b–89a)

(Then he at once fell trembling to the ground, began to tear his hair, perplexed of mind, and also his garment, and delivered this message to the warriors who, disturbed, were there outside: “Here is revealed our own imminent destruction, signified with violence that it is drawn near the time when we shall now be lost, perish together in conflict. Here lies our protector slashed by a sword, beheaded.”)

Once again, the biblical source is characteristically plain, albeit that there the speech of Bagao introduces a poignant element of panic that immediately sends the other Assyrians into headlong flight.<sup>39</sup> In the Old English, by contrast, one might note again

**36** One might also note here that the final half-line in *Genesis A*, “ecgum dihtig” (1993a) has a close parallel twice in *Beowulf*: “ecgum dyhttig” (1287a) and “ecgum þyhtig” (1558b). Likewise, the noun “mundum” appears only here in the parallel passage from *Judith* (229a); elsewhere in *Judith* the form “hand” appears (130b and 198b).

**37** See further Orchard, “Multiplication, Intoxication, and Fornication,” especially 348–54. Note that Griffith, *Judith*, 62–70, uses precisely the same pair of passages quoted here to argue for a broader shared tradition, although the narrow nature of the echoes and their sheer number argues otherwise.

**38** See further Astell, “Holofernes’s Head,” 131–33. Here, I adopt the reading of Griffith, “nu” (287b), rather than that of Fulk and earlier editors (“nyde”); for the choice, see further Griffith, *Judith*, 140. Note that the half-line “sweorde geheawen” (288b) is repeated almost immediately, in the form “sweordum geheawen” (294b).

**39** See the Vulgate, Jth. 14:14–16: [14] “sed cum nullum motum iacentis sensu aurium caperet accessit proximans ad cortinam et eleuans eam uidens iacens cadauer absque capite Holofernus in suo sanguine tabefactus iacere super terram et clamauit uoce magna cum fletu et scidit uestimenta sua [15] et ingressus tabernaculum ludith non inuenit eam et exiliuit foras ad populum [16] et dixit una mulier hebraea fecit confusionem in domo regis Nabuchodonosor ecce enim Holofernus iacet in terra et caput ipsius non est in illo” ([14] But when with hearkening, he perceived no motion of one lying, he came near to the curtain, and lifting it up, and seeing the body of Holofernes, lying

the emphatic double alliteration of 286–89 that concludes this speech, just as there is a rash of double alliteration at the conclusion of Judith’s final speech when she shows the severed head of Holofernes to the Israelites; in this speech by the unnamed Assyrian, the anaphora of “her [...] her” (here [...] here) is perhaps prompted by the Latin “ecce,” but the passage as a whole more readily recalls Judith’s final speech again, with opening words (“Her ge magon sweotole” [177a]) matched in here (“Her ys geswutolod” [285a]), especially when it is considered that the two speeches contain the only three occurrences of the word *her* in the whole of *Judith*. More intriguing still is the further striking parallel with perhaps the most quoted lines of the *Battle of Maldon*, which must have been composed after the date of the battle itself, which took place in 991, long after any suggestion of the date of the composition of *Judith*. There, the old retainer Byrhtwold makes his grim observation on the heroic code:

“Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,  
 mod sceal þe mare, þe **ure** mægen lytlað.  
**Her lið ure** ealdor eall for**heawen**,  
 god on greote. A mæg gnornian  
 se ðe nu fram þis wig-plegan wendan þenceð.”  
 (*Mald* 312–16; emphasis mine)

(“Courage must be the harder, heart the keener, spirits the greater, as our strength wanes. Here lies our lord entirely cut to pieces, a good man in the dirt. Ever may he mourn who thinks now to turn from this battle-play.”)

Earlier in the *Battle of Maldon*, the term “forheawen” has appeared three times, each time associated either with Byrhtnoth directly or with those most closely associated with him.<sup>40</sup> The proposed parallel between *Judith* and the *Battle of Maldon* is all the more poignant and ironic when it is recalled that, according to the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis* (*Book of Ely*), Byrhtnoth too had been beheaded in battle by his Viking foes; certainly when his skeleton was examined at Ely Cathedral in 1769, there was no skull. Just as the *Judith*-poet relies heavily on parallel phrasing to structure the narrative and seems to have borrowed from earlier poems, notably *Elene*, *Genesis A*, and *Beowulf*, in *Maldon* we may find an indication of how *Judith* was remembered and repurposed some time after 991.

While the biblical Book of Judith has been more recently considered deutero-canonical, it was in England during the early period viewed very much as an integral part of the bible, and was discussed by such learned Anglo-Saxons as Aldhelm and Ælfric towards the beginning and end of the written record, in Latin and Old English respectively. But the Old English poem now known as *Judith* seems regularly overshadowed in

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upon the ground, without the head, weltering in his blood, he cried out with a loud voice, with weeping, and rent his garments. [15] And he went into the tent of Judith, and not finding her, he ran out to the people, [16] And said: One Hebrew woman hath made confusion in the house of king Nabuchodonosor: for behold Holofernes lieth upon the ground, and his head is not upon him).

**40** The three other occurrences appear in *Maldon* at the death of Wulfmær, Byrhtnoth’s sister-son, “swiðe forheawen” (115b), in a description of how Byrhtnoth died, given by Ælfwine, Byrhtnoth’s loyal retainer, “forheawen æt hilde” (223a), and at the death of Offa, Byrhtnoth’s loyal retainer, “Offa forheawen” (288b).

modern discussions, rarely anthologized, and evidently undervalued when compared with other company, often in negative terms: *Judith* is deemed somehow less successful than the other Old Testament poems in Old English verse, less effective than Ælfric's account of the same story, and somehow less compelling than that other poem in the so-called *Beowulf*-manuscript. If the undoubted skill of the *Judith*-poet has perhaps been undervalued, and if the text itself has seemed somehow secondary in discussions of Old English literature, the importance of the poet and the poem in assessing how verse was read and heard, created, recreated, and conveyed throughout the period seems primary indeed.

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**Author Biography** Andy Orchard is the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford, and a Fellow of Pembroke College; he is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and the British Academy. He has supervised or co-supervised more than fifty doctoral dissertations to completion, and has been awarded teaching prizes at both Oxford and Cambridge, being voted Most Acclaimed Lecturer in Humanities by the Oxford Student Union in 2015. He has published widely, and his books include *The Elder Edda: a Book of Viking Lore* (2011), *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (2005), *Cassell Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (1999), *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (1995), and *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (1994). He is currently completing further book-length studies on *Cynewulf and the Crafting of Anglo-Saxon Verse* and *The Anglo-Saxon Riddle Tradition*, as well as a new edition with facing-page translation of *Beowulf*.

