The Dramatic Hero in the Gendered Imaginary of Early Modern Germany

Judith and Holofernes

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In Early Modern Europe the typical hero was an exceptional ruler or warrior: a man characterised by greatness, courage, strength, and power. His community deemed him a hero by attribution of heroic status, historians have celebrated him and later scholars investigated or dismantled him and continue to do so to this day. What about the heroine, that truly exceptional and rare woman to gain the attribute 'heroic' in the early modern era? 'Heroine', the feminine derivative of 'hero', describes an unstable, oscillating category that does not really fit into prevailing notions of heroism – as the multiple re-inventions and re-interpretations of that rare and mythical woman warrior Joan of Arc illustrate. I would like to address the binary of hero/heroine by turning to the heroic pair Judith and Holofernes and look at their representations in early modern German drama, at heroisation techniques, practices, and structures with an eye to gender as an analytical tool. I am using the biblical story of Judith and Holofernes in selected dramatic works (by Sixt Birck and Martin Opitz).

Literary representations are embedded in a gendered social imaginary. The dramatic hero and all persons in a drama must relate in some way to this imaginary in order to be recognizable to, and appreciated by, the audience as a tragic hero. Studying the construction of the dramatic hero and heroine helps to explore ethical values and their relationship to the gendered early modern imaginary. It uncovers the story's ambiguity and embeddedness in the gendered literary and intellectual fabric as transmitted in texts. With the story of the warrior Holofernes and his murderess (albeit for a good cause) Judith, I will focus especially on the cultivation and sublimation of male-coded violence and the emerging theme of female-coded sexuality. A look at later dramatisations of this story (Hebbel) reveals a continuing tradition of gender categories in literary representations and in the theatre as a social institution.

The Dramatic Hero/Heroine in Aristotle's Poetics

Drama as a literary genre is to be performed or acted out, which requires human or human-like protagonists, that is to say a distinct individual or group acting along with an ensemble or a group of individuals. Creating veritable, believable, convincing figures lies at the centre of a successful drama. Aristotle, the founding father of European drama theory, famously suggested in his *Poetics* that a

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tragedy shows "men in action, and does not use narrative, and through pity and fear effects relief of these and similar emotions".[1] Aristotle's concepts of *mimesis* (imitation) and *katharsis* (purification) explicitly tie ethical considerations to the hero's actions and character traits. Aristotle presumes a web of ethical/moral values within which the drama functions.

Aristotle defines tragedy as "the representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of a certain magnitude"; it "represents men in action"[2] and foregrounds the protagonists' character and the heroic action or plot:

> One should not show worthy men passing from good fortune to bad. […] Nor again wicked people passing from bad fortune to good. […] Nor again the passing of a thoroughly bad man from good fortune to bad fortune. […] There remains then the mean between these. This is the sort of man who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, and yet it is through no villainy of his own that he falls into the fortune, but rather through some flaw in him […] like Oedipus and Thyestes and the famous men of such families.[3]

There is, of course, no explicit mention of gender, but the reference to "famous men" providing the protagonists for a drama reveals the gendered slant. The hero or protagonist ('heros' in the Homeric epics) is termed 'anthropos', the generic 'man' standing in for all mankind. Moreover, Aristotle's text implicitly conceives and foregrounds the hero as a male individual when he moves from theory to example, to actual heroic stories in Greek tragedy: his prime examples of dramatic heroes are Oedipus and Creon, while Jocaste or Antigone are mere tragic victims, they are instrumentalised in the dramatic action, suffering the action's consequences, but are only very secondary players in the dramatic scenario, not active driving forces. Aristotle's text does not mention a 'heroine' per se, but offers a cautionary sideline with reference to women and heroic character:

> Concerning 'character' there are four points to aim at. The first and most important is that the character must be good. […] But this is relative to each class of people. Even a woman is 'good' and so is a slave, although it may be said that a woman is an inferior thing and the slave beneath consideration, quite worthless. A second point is that the characters should be appropriate. A character may be manly, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be manly or clever.[4]

Gender as a marker underpins Aristotle's text that focuses on the male individual, on a masculine-coded character and his actions, a heroic figure that is clearly gendered *masculine and elite.* This perception then dominated the intellectual horizon and social order as represented in early modern literary texts.

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1 Aristotle in 23 volumes, Vol. 23, translated by W.H. Fyfe, Cambridge, MA 1932, Section 1449b: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,034:1449b, 7 June 2018.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., Section 1453a.

4 Ibid., Section 1454a.

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The *Poetics*' textual reference to 'the slave' also references the particular class system in antiquity. Similarly, for the early modern social order a well-articulated and observed class – feudal – system was in operation, assigning to each individual his/her particular place in this order. The Shakespearean "All the world's a stage" was an apt metaphor for the early modern worldview; this metaphor's extended inscription above the Amsterdam Schouwburg theatre more explicitly read: "De weerelt is een speeltooneel, Elck speelt zijn rol en krijght zijn deel": the world is a stage, each player has a role and a text (gets his part) in this *theatrum mundi,* that is to say, each individual was believed to have a station in real life and play his/her part accordingly in the moral and social order.[5]

Gender and Heroisation in Early Modern Germany

Gender is much more than 'female experience' though in present-day German academia gender is often reduced to being 'by, about, and for women'. Gender studies investigate "how men and women assimilated or altered gender norms and how they interacted with each other […], the dynamics of gender experiences, politics and everyday life".[6] Sociology defines gender as a system of social practices, a system that creates and maintains gender distinctions, organises relations of both sexes including inequalities and differences; gender is considered to be enacted or reproduced, is "done" (performed) and not only talked about.[7] Monika Mommertz refines this paradigm by regarding gender "as a *marker* not only for 'men' and 'women' but rather for a difference that produces these categories"; she suggests investigating the "meanings associated for that difference and their role in the construction of both the male and the female hero". [8] With

5 See Peter Eversmann, "Founded for the Eyes and Ears of the People". The Amsterdam Schouwburgh from 1637, in: Jan Bloemendal / Peter Eversmann / Elsa Strietman (Ed.), Drama, Performance and Debate. Theatre and Public Opinion in Early Modern Europe, Leiden 2013, pp. 269–298, here p. 279, note 21.

6 Ulinka Rublack (Ed.), Gender in Early Modern German History, Cambridge 2002, p. 2. Articles in this volume convey "the multifacetedness and dynamics of gender experiences, politics and everyday life across early modern Germany" (p. 2), by concentrating on experiential vagaries of (historically documented) individuals like men in witchcraft trials (Labouvie), women in midwifery (Rowlands), or the "multiple identities of Maiden Heinrich" (Lindemann) – these are historical examples of impressive, often sensational exceptions – outliers (in modern statistical terms) – that flaunted prescriptive gender norms.

7 Amy S. Wharton, The Sociology of Gender. An Introduction to Theory and Research, London 2005, pp. 7–8. Gender is described here as a system of social practices, a process and a fixed state; as occurring at all levels of social practices, far-reaching and interlocking; gender is considered as existing independently of individuals; as being of importance in organising relationships.

8 Monika Mommertz, Geschlecht als *Markierung, Ressource* und *Tracer.* Neue Nützlichkeiten einer Kategorie am Beispiel der Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit, in: Christine Roll / Frank Pohle / Matthias Myrczek (Ed.), Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung, Köln/Wien/Weimar 2010, pp. 573–594, here pp. 574–576.

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reference to early modern society, Mommertz points to mono-gender areas, institutions occupied by only one sex – the male – like the early modern university, the army, the church hierarchy, and she looks in these seemingly homogeneous and unstratified fields for gender as a *tracer* and as a *resource* in understanding early modern cultures of knowledge. This approach allows the use of gender as an analytical category on multiple levels when addressing the complex and asymmetrical heroisation of men and women.

"Meanings of gender are historically situated",[9] Ulinka Rublack asserts for the historical perspective, and it does bear repeating that, different from today's secular views, the early modern moral and social order was believed to be supported by the Bible, albeit in often diverging and debated theological (but not social) interpretation of the Great Book. The polarisation of gender attributes was by no means an invention of the late eighteenth century, nor did the belief in two sexes arise only around 1800, as is sometimes implicitly assumed by modernists without consideration of earlier developments.[10] With respect to the gender order, the Story of Creation (especially in Genesis II) and the Fall from Paradise provided the basic paradigms, just as biblical stories served as *the* material for weekly sermons in church, evening readings in the home, and countless religious, devotional, and fictional texts.[11] These contributed to and informed the social and moral order, a frequently articulated set of ideas about how a person should act, and why the social world was arranged in the way that it was. The Early Modern social imaginary presumed a system of gendered duties, capacities, and functions, imagining men and women as actors taking on set roles. The Early Modern worldview was dominated by a perceived gender polarity of men and women and in practice had different respective roles at all levels of society. This manifested itself in divergent roles and asymmetrical status of men and women with respect to life-cycles, the economy, literacy and learning, the creation of culture, the position in religion and church, legal status and laws, roles in politics and power, as extensive recent historical research has documented and Merry Wiesner has presented succinctly.[12]

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9 Rublack, Gender (Fn. 6), p. 1.

10 Karin Hausen, Die Polarisierung der "Geschlechtscharaktere": Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben, in: Werner Conze (Ed.), Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas: Neue Forschungen, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 363–393: https://archive.org/stream/HausenPolarisierungDerGeschlechtscharaktere/Hausen-Polarisierung_der_Geschlechtscharaktere_djvu.txt, 7 August 2017. Karin Hausen's foundational text is often mistakenly applied to earlier periods and Thomas Laqueur's sweeping generalisations in: Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, MA 1990), claiming that a one-sex theory originated around 1800, have obfuscated historical specificity, and not only in regard to the early modern period.

11 For a summary, see my: Der lange Weg zur Mündigkeit. Frauen und Literatur in Deutschland von 1500 bis 1800, Munich 1989, pp. 19–51.

12 See the excellent chapters in Merry Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, Cambridge 1993, 2nd revised edition 2000.

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Masculinity studies have created many new perspectives on gender roles, relations, and especially on gender and power in the Early Modern era. They have shown how male domination (now termed *hegemonic* masculinity) perpetuated itself by invisibility and was further upheld by a traditionally assumed male/female binary as the cornerstones of the early modern religious and social imaginary. Hegemonic masculinity was also the ideal that informed structures in all other aspects of society including division of labour, structures of power, religious doctrine, education, learning, book culture, and entertainment like the theatre.[13] Powerful men formed the basis of political and social institutions; powerful – if not heroic – men assumed a privileged place in the collective identity with a large measure of consent to its ideals.[14] Hegemonic masculinity was (and is) constructed through the social interplay of *various masculinities and femininities*, it always contains "contradictions, compromises and sources of instability".[15]

Hegemonic masculinity in the texts of the cultural elite – theology, philosophy, and literature in its traditional sense – has made gender all but invisible in the Early Modern social imaginary. The conflation of man with human, of male individuals as the human norm, the generalisation from male to generic human experience has caused an invisibility, as it were, of human beings as *gendered individuals* in the texts of the cultural elite whose works we read and study.[16] Once the masculine order has achieved the appearance of neutrality, it maintains dominance by exempting itself from gendered discourses, as Pierre Bourdieu observed: "The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: The androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it."[17] For centuries of literary criticism, gender as a category of analysis appeared thus ahistorical and alien for traditional scholarship on German drama – until about fifty years ago, when perspectives and interests shifted away from elite academic learning mostly oriented towards hegemonic male culture to a more inclusive view of humanity and its different cultures. In terms of Early Modern research: interest shifted from heroising antiquity in the learned products of the Renaissance to investigating the *conditio humana* at *all* levels of society and its cultures; historians then skirted earlier periodisations like The Renaissance, Humanism, and The Baroque and renamed the period 'the Early Modern' (for the centuries from the discovery of the New World 1492 to the French Revolution 1789).

13 Cf. Raywyn [formerly Robert] Connell, Masculinities, St. Leonards 1995, esp. pp. 67–85.

14 Raywyn Connell, Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics, Stanford, CA 1987, pp. 184–190.

15 Anthony Fletcher, Manhood, the Male Body, Courtship, and the Household in Early Modern England, in: History 84, 1999, p. 420.

16 Cf. Harry Brod (Ed.), The Making of Masculinities. The New Men's Studies, Boston, MA 1987, pp. 2–3.

17 Pierre Bourdieu, Masculine Domination (1998), translated by Richard Nice, Stanford, CA 2002, p. 9.

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Heroes and Heroines in Early Modern German Drama: Judith and Holofernes

Quite different from Spanish drama or 'heroic tragedy' in England, the prominent texts of Early Modern German drama that have entered and somewhat endured in the literary canon were school dramas in the humanist tradition of (neo-Latin) drama. Sixteenth and seventeenth century German tragedy was foremost a 'school' drama written and performed as a rhetorical exercise for Latin School boys (not for performances at court – more about court theatre later). The plays and stories were to incalculate Christian-Stoic Lutheran ethics and politics (e.g., Gryphius in Breslau) or Catholic tenets and politics (e.g., the Jesuit Balde's *Jephtes,* performed 1637 in Ingolstadt). Latin School teachers and clergy authored these plays that were memorised and performed in Latin or German respectively by *school boys* (not by adults or professional actors, nor were there female participants) to an audience of teachers, fathers or guardians, and distinguished citizens.[18] Playbills explained the (often intricate) plot for the urban-patrician, academic, rarely aristocratic audience who were as a rule literate and relatively well-read. These, for modern ears rather restrictive, conditions need to be considered when looking at the play's protagonists and heroisations presented on stage that found their way into contemporary publications after passing censorship. Many of "such texts reflect an aesthetic no longer appreciated or well understood […] [and may] defer to a set of now archaic values […] that seem alien to our sensibilities today," as Judith Aikin has observed in her fine study on "A Ruler's Consort" (2014).[19] Shrovetide and Carnival Plays may be more appealing to modern sensibilities, but the Thirty Years' War finally put an end to that tradition as well as to the English wandering troops of whose textual heritage very little has survived. Values, perspectives, heroes shift and mutate with time and individuals, they are not really "elusive",[20] but they are changeable in time and history: just as the social imaginaries are mutating, so are their heroes.

When considering heroisation in German school drama, we encounter a seemingly all-male space – in text production, dramatic protagonists, actors and stage,

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18 Helen Watanabe O'Kelly (and others) have used the position of the female spectator to flesh out the purpose and effect in heroisation techniques of sixteenth-century German drama. See Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, Das weibliche Publikum und die soziale Funktion des deutschen Dramas im 16. Jahrhundert, in: Wolfram Mauser (Ed.), Verbergendes Enthüllen: Zu Theorie und Kunst dichterischen Verkleidens, Würzburg 1995, pp. 67–75.

19 Aikin's remarks refer to devotional literature but also apply to much of Early Modern German drama; Judith P. Aikin, A Ruler's Consort in Early Modern Germany. Aemilia Juliana of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, Farnham 2014, p. 12.

20 Ronald Asch, The Hero in the Early Modern Period and beyond: An Elusive Cultural Construct and an Indispensable Focus of Social Identity?, in: helden. heroes. héros. Special Issue 1, 2014: Languages and Functions of the Heroic, p. 5. DOI: 10.6094/helden.heros./2014/QM. It seems to me counter-intuitive to construct an *Idealtypus* for the hero.

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and, to a large extent, also audience and critical reception – in which tracing gender and heroisation leaves much to be desired and to be explored.[21] Sara Colvin's perceptive study *The Rhetorical Feminine* (1999)[22] has carefully examined exoticism and the oriental in a large number of dramatic texts and concludes that playwrights, librettists, and even composers were using rhetorical techniques to construct, reinforce and perpetuate heroes and heroines in binary oppositions between male and female, white and black, western and oriental, and reason and passion. Colvin could show how in these binary pairings, the positions of male, white, Western, and reason are valorised and dominate, while the respective others are devalued. Colvin's findings underline once more the historical mission of early modern German drama: to teach in the service of the moral and social order. Heroisation then stood in the service of male dominance and masculinity and of religious and political issues, but it was not intended as a social critique (of the feudal or gender system), nor was it a mode of rebellion; any troubling aspects in the social imaginary were displaced into oriental costume, comedy, fancy rhetoric, and theatricality (elaborate theatre machines).

Classical literature und the Bible provided the models for dramatic heroes. The complex, colourful story of Judith and Holofernes appears in the apocryphal Book of Judith in the Septuagint. The biblical narrative has all the trappings for great tragedy: war, conquest, victory, hubris, drinking, lust, violence, and eventual punishment and death – are the lot of the warrior Holofernes; divine calling, chastity, feminine beauty, self-sacrifice for her city, cleverness, deception, disguise, betrayal, transgression and murder, albeit for a just cause, are assigned to Judith. The biblical passage reads (in Luther's translation):

> She grabbed him [drunk Holofernes] by his hair and thus spoke, Lord give me strength in this hour. And she stabbed his throat twice with great force, then she cut off his head and rolled the body from the bed and took the blanket with her.[23]

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21 Cornelia Plume, Heroinen in der Geschlechterordnung. Weiblichkeits-Projektionen bei Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein und die "Querelle des femmes" (Ergebnisse der Frauenforschung; 42), Stuttgart 1996 is one of the very few studies on Early Modern German drama that include aspects of gender in discussing male heroes *and* female heroines, focusing on what feminine / masculine traits or coding would be appropriate for, to stay with the best-known German dramatist of the Baroque, Lohenstein's combative women in *Sophonisbe*, *Epicharis*, *Agrippina* and *Cleopatra*, all models of extraordinary theatrical villains, or at best multivalent, labyrinthine characters that defy any pinning down of meaning, as Jane Newman has claimed in: The Intervention of Philology. Gender, Learning, and Power in Lohenstein's Early Plays, Chapel Hill, NC 2000. Newman's retreat to postmodern ambiguity and polyvalence only reveals our difficulties with historical research and subject matter.

22 Sara Colvin, The Rhetorical Feminine. Gender and Orient on the German Stage 1647–1742, Oxford 1999.

23 All English translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. "Sie ergriff ihn [den betrunkenen Holofernes] beim Schopf und sprach abermal Herr Gott stärke mich in dieser Stunde. Und sie hieb zweimal in den Hals mit aller Macht, danach schneidet sie ihm den Kopf ab und weltzet den Leib aus dem Bette und nahm die Decke mit sich." Luther's

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Judith even escapes with the help of her maid, taking Holofernes' head along in a bag. The head is displayed on the city wall and frightens the attacking enemy army into surrender. Judith is honoured with a triumphal procession in Jerusalem, but returns to a quiet life in her hometown and declines all marriage proposals. In the biblical story, Judith is clearly the heroine as saviour of her country, while Holofernes is the villain.

In his preface to the Book of Judith, Luther saw in Judith a typological figure representing wider politico-religious implications:

> For Judith means "Judea", that is to say the Jewish people, a chaste, holy widow. […] God's people are always a deserted widow […] Holofernes means leader or governor, a heathen, godless or unchristian lord or prince […] Bethulia, an unknown city, means to signify a virgin, that during that time the faithful, pious Jews were like a pure virgin […] therefore they remained invincible.[24]

Judith as a religious model, as an emblem for Israel[25] – this signals the Protestant theological view as the just cause and legitimate church.[26] Luther likened his then fledgling and weak church (in the 1530s) to a 'holy, chaste' widow, a heroisation of the weak underdog and potential martyr with a strong encouragement of faith in victory and invincibility. The warrior Holofernes serves as a fallen hero on the wrong side, as an anti-hero, and stands in for an indictment of armed conquest and military violence. Judith and Holofernes became a popular theme in art and literature from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century. [27]

translation (in modern orthography) quoted from Robert Hanhart, Text und Textgeschichte des Buches Judith, Göttingen 1979.

24 "Denn Judith heisst 'Judea', das ist das Jüdisch volck, so eine keusche, heilige Widwe ist: Gottes volck ist jmer eine verlassene Widwe. [...] Holofernes heisst 'Prophanus dux vel gubernator', Heidnischer, Gottloser oder unchristlicher herr odder fürst [...] Bethulia (welche Stadt auch nirgend bekand ist) heisst 'eine jungfraw', anzuzeigen, das zu der zeit die gleubigen, fromen Jüden sind die reine jungfraw gewest [...] dadurch sie auch unüberwindlich blieben sind." Quoted from Martin Sommerfeld, Judith-Dramen des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts (Literarhistorische Bibliothek; 8), Berlin 1933 , pp. 2–3.

25 See Adelheid Straten, Das Judith-Thema in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert. Studien zur Ikonographie – Materialien und Beiträge, Munich 1983, p. 140.

26 The catholic interpretation saw Judith as a prefiguration of Mary, her victory over Holofernes as a victory of chastity. Judith became an allegory for chastity's victory over sin or humility's over pride, see Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Judith und ihre Schwestern. Konstanz und Veränderung von Weiblichkeitsbildern, in: Annette Kuhn / Bea Lundt (Ed.), Lustgarten und Dämonenpein. Konzepte von Weiblichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, Dortmund 1997, p. 347.

27 Among many studies, see the broad thematic overview in Marion Kobelt-Groch, Judith macht Geschichte. Zur Rezeption einer mythischen Gestalt vom 16. bis 20. Jahrhundert, Munich 2005. A comprehensive philological study of Medieval renderings of the Judith theme is Henrike Lähnemann, "Hystoria Judith". Deutsche Judithdichtungen vom 12. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert (Scrinium Friburgense; 20) Berlin/New York 2006, for Birck's *Judith* (German version), see pp. 315–370.

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Hero/Heroine in Sixtus Birck's Judith *(1539)*

Sixteenth-century Lutheran school drama dutifully heroises Judith as God's instrument, as in Sixtus Birck's *Judith* (1539).[28] Under the fear and stress of religious wars and the Turkish invasions, the author Birck modernises the exemplarity of his heroine: "Fraw Judith mag uns lernen wol / Wie man den Türcken schlagen sol. / Mit bet schlecht man den Gottes feind." (Lady Judith can teach us how to conquer the Turks; with prayer we conquer the enemy).[29]

The author has to dress up his typological figures with some references to contemporary notions of masculinity/femininity in line with contemporary gender sensibilities. Birck has Judith describe to her maid how she was able to overcome the warrior in his drunken stupor, for the beheading of Holofernes by a female hand was not appropriate for a staging; Judith later shows the head to the citizen's assembly: "Here I have Holofern's head / so that it is more believable / I also have the linen / that in his drunkenness / he had spread over his bed / with it the female hands / have killed him with God' help."[30] Birck does not imbue his female character with any emotions or subjective feelings or actions, it is Holofernes' fate that 'teaches' the audience. Judith serves as an exemplary, humble Christian figure. Holofernes is to evoke pity and fear and the audience should learn from the fallen villain's mistakes. Holofernes had been warned of women's treachery by his servant: "Herold: [...] jr kennend noch nicht recht, / Herr Hauptmann mein, das weiblich geschlecht, / Ir vntrew seind all Bücher voll" (Servant: […] you don't really know, / My Captain, the female sex, / Their infidelity fills books).[31]

In terms of gendered virtue, the author admonishes the audience to 'masculine' courage: "Seid mannlich für ewr vatterland!" (Be manly for your fatherland).[32] Birck modifies his heroine's valour that is apparently inappropriate for a woman with a reference to her weak sex, as he has Judith explain modestly to be a mere instrument of God: "Ich bin ein armes Instrument, / Durch das die sach

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28 Birck's *Judith* was performed first in Basle at Carnival time in 1534, then in Birck's hometown Augsburg, after he became rector of the St. Anna Latin School in Augsburg, most likely in the school's courtyard. The German text was printed in 1539. Birck wrote the Latin version after the German one. I am using the German version, all quotes by verse number from Manfred Brauneck / Manfred Wacht (Ed.), Sixtus Birck. Sämtliche Dramen, vol. 2, Berlin/New York 1976, pp. 55–165. I am referring here to my earlier work on Judith dramas: Gewalt und Leidenschaft: Zu Sixtus Bircks und Martin Opitz' "Judith", in: Anselm Steiger [et al.] (Ed.), Passion, Affekt und Leidenschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit (Wolfenbütteler Arbeiten zur Barockforschung; 43), Wiesbaden 2005, pp. 719–739.

29 Birck, Judith (Fn. 28), p. 60, v. 37–39.

30 "hie hab ich Holofernis haupt / Darmit der glaub deß grösser sey / das leylach hab ich auch darbey / Das er in seiner trunckenhait / an seinem bett hat under gsprait / Darmit in [ihn] die weyblichen hend / durch Gottes hilff erschlagen hend", ibid., p. 143, v. 2122–2128.

31 Ibid., p. 137, v. 2005–2007.

32 Ibid., p. 147, v. 2229.

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Gott hat volendt" (I am a poor instrument / through which God has completed the affair). [33]

With the beleaguered urban Protestants fighting for survival in the 1530s, the dramatic hero as heroine is cast as a warrior in God's (the young Church's) service; in this typology, individual character traits and feelings are suppressed in favour of telling a heroic, exemplary story to fit the time and its gender expectations: a mighty, braggart warrior is conquered by a courageous and cunning underdog, a woman. Birck has somewhat humanised the male hero who variously exhibits ambition, hatred, anger, pain, hope and fear, but he left the heroine (and her female companion Abra) a mere instrument devoid of feelings and allegorised her. As a dramatic heroine, Judith may today appear strangely ambivalent,[34] but within the play other women clearly acknowledge Judith's model heroic character: "Anhydria: Thus we do not have to thank any man / Men are weaker than a woman / Lady Judith has a heroic body / Through her virility she has / bestowed great honour upon us women."[35] The character Ozias likewise acknowledges that Judith's 'chivalrous' (heroic) action ("Ritterschaft")[36] should be acknowledged because she "mehr hat geschafft dann yederman" (has achieved more than any man)[37], she risked her life and her 'chastity' (Judith is a "raine witwe", a pure widow,[38] and God selected her as an instrument because of her "keuschhait" (chastity).[39] Birck heroised his figure in accordance with the audience's perception of gender dichotomy and expectation of heroism that is to be a man's, not a woman's attribute: "Fraw Judith soll ain vortail han, / sy ist kain fraw, sy ist ain man" (Lady Judith has an advantage / she is not a woman, she is a man)[40], Birck fashioned his heroine into a man. In one of the final scenes of the drama, Judith receives, as is the victor's privilege, the spoils of war: "Der schilt und helem und das schwert / darmit sond ir von uns gehrt" (The shield and helmet and the sword / with these we honour you).[41]

An identifiably female figure can only serve as a 'hero' when she is imbued with male-coded heroic attributes like weapons and when her traditional female characteristics are subdued. The biblical story of Judith and Holofernes is anchored in sex difference; a sex role change of Judith and Holofernes would be inappropriate, ludicrous for a sixteenth-century school theatre: imagine for a moment Holofernes

33 Ibid., p. 164, v. 2561.
34 Lähnemann, Hystoria Judith (Fn. 27), p. 351.
35 "Anhydria: Wir hond drumb zdancken kainem man / Die mann seind bleyger dann kain weib / Fraw Judith hatt ain helden leib / Sy hat mit jrer manligkeit / vns weybern grose ehr geleit", Birck, Judith (Fn. 28), p. 154, v. 2358–2362.
36 Ibid., p. 144, v. 2156.
37 Ibid., p. 153, v. 2348.
38 Ibid., p. 159, v. 2492.
39 Ibid., p. 159, v. 2489.
40 Ibid., p. 161, v. 2541–2542.
41 Ibid., p. 161, v. 2549–2550.

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on stage represented as a chaste widower and Judith as a victorious warlord commanding an army – such a sex role reversal would go against all probability and serve, at best, for a slapstick comedy, but not for a tragedy when the narrative of Judith and Holofernes is part of the social imaginary since Medieval times.

Birck's dramatic heroisation of a woman into a hero – she becomes a *miles christianus*, a model Christian in defence of her city and faith – entails gender crossing and gender conflation, it is a thoughtful interpretation of the gendered biblical story for Reformation times, a religious sublimation.[42] But the drama is not a call for rebellion against, nor a criticism of, perceived gender differences and roles. Rather, it serves as an exhortation to the believers to defend their faith; the figure of Judith is a model hero for men (not to be outdone by a woman's courage) and women (to sacrifice themselves for their church). Birck's text entails markers for 'men' and 'women', signalling meanings of gender difference inherent in tradition and alive in the era's social imaginary. The text skilfully navigates and blends heroisation and gender assumptions in the dramatic presentation of Judith and Holofernes appropriately, and considering the lively reception, successfully.

A Baroque Hero/Heroine in Martin Opitz' Judith *(1635)*

Martin Opitz took up the story of Judith a hundred years later in his opera libretto *Judith* (1635).[43] It is a very early example of the reception of Italian Opera in Germany, a new genre different from school drama because it required musicality for the text and accomplished singers, and the content was to be appropriate for court festivities. Opitz' libretto has three concise acts, uses only eight actors, but five choirs (Captive Kings, Watchmen, Hebrews in the City, Hebrew Women, Soldiers) and musical intermezzos adaptable for student performances.[44] In the dedication to Margarethe von Kolowrath,[45] Opitz compared his patroness with Judith, praising her "männliche Hertze in einem weiblichen Leibe" (manly heart in a female

[42] This aspect is fleshed out in Kai Bremer, Religiöse Dimension, Geschlechtlichkeit und Politisches Moment. Zu Sixt Bircks *Judith,* in: Daphnis. Zeitschrift für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur 35 (Issue 1/2), 2006, pp. 321–334.

[43] In 1629, Opitz adapted for the Saxon court conductor Heinrich Schütz the libretto of Florentine court poet Andrea Salvadori *Guiditta* (1626) that originally celebrated the Barberini family. Opitz modified the Italian text considerably, see Anton Mayer, Quelle und Entstehung von Opitzens Judith, in: Euphorion 20, 1919, pp. 39–53. However, Schütz did not use Opitz' libretto, it probably was not suitable enough for the wedding festivities in Copenhagen.

[44] Very little is known about the performance history, except for a documented performance in 1651. Andreas Tscherning reworked Opitz' text in 1646 for student performances. See Mara Wade, The Reception of Opitz's "Judith" During the Baroque, in: Daphnis 16, Issue 1/2, 1987, pp. 147–165, here pp. 154–157.

[45] Margarethe von Kolowrath, née Baroness von Redern, belonged to two influential Silesian noble families, specifics about this dedication are not available. Opitz wrote dedications in hope of remuneration, usually the recipient had to give approval beforehand.

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body) and stating his intention a "keusche vngeschmückte Judith auff den Schauplatz führen und in solcher Tracht wie es die Deutsche Sauberkeit mit sich bringt" (to present a chaste, unadorned Judith on the stage and in a way as required by German purity).[46] The moral didactic tone, civic-oriented content and patriotic connotations must have appeared relevant to the beleaguered citizenry in the war-torn country at the time of the Thirty Years' War.

Opitz outfitted his heroine with feminine attributes (beauty and passion) suitable for an aristocratic and patrician audience. He portrayed Judith as an individual clearly coded female. Mythological references emphatically underpin this binary coding when Holofernes is likened to Mars and Judith to Venus: "Wie blicken doch ausß ihrerr Luft herfür / Der Mars und Venus Stern! Die Judith gleicht der Venus selbst an Zier / Vnd Mars ist Holofern" (How do gaze from on high / Mars and the star of Venus! / Judith resembles Venus herself / and Holofern is Mars) (II,4), observes one of the soldiers.[47] Opitz foregrounds the conflict between war and violence and passionate feelings in the opening scene and transforms the heroic warrior Holofernes into a mighty Baroque ruler exhibiting anxious masculinity that is "already its own worst enemy":[48] "Holofern: Many a king felt my power / Now I cannot govern myself / You have won, you Hebrews / You conquer my senses / As high as I might stand / A woman from your city stands higher."[49] The entire second act elaborates Holofernes' passion, the paradox of a mighty ruler and victorious conqueror being conquered by a humble woman, as Holofernes responds to Judith's (feigned) consent: "O Edel Fraw, du Außbund aller Zier, / Du findest jetzt nicht Mayestät allhier, / Nicht Waffen sondern Liebesflammen" (Noble Lady, pinnacle of all beauty / You do not find a ruler here / Not arms, but flaming love).[50] Opitz enhances the exceptionality of his hero Holofernes with Baroque rhetoric by exploiting gender difference to the fullest in order to motivate his hero's tragic fall. This flaw is the hero's inability to control his passion for a woman. Judith is cast in the role of the temptress Eve, though for a good cause that also justifies Judith's murderous action.

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46 Sommerfeld, Judith-Dramen (Fn. 24), here p. 116–117. All quotes are taken from this edition noting act and scene in the text. This text is the basis for the digital version: http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Opitz,+Martin/Drama/Judith, 7 June 2018.

47 Elaborate references to classical mythology became fashionable in the seventeenth century, the mix of Christian themes with 'heathen' gods and heroes was the bone of contention in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. Opitz championed the *modernes* for German literature; his other three dramatic works, all adaptations of Italian or French dramas, feature female protagonists from classical antiquity: *Die Trojanerinnen* (1625), *Dafne* (1627), and *Antigone* (1636).

48 Cf. Mark Breitenbach, Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England, Cambridge 1996, p. 128.

49 "Holofern: Es muste mein Geboth so mancher König spüren, / Jetzt aber kan ich selbst mich nicht regieren. / Du hast gewonnen, du Hebreer; / Du zwingest meinen Sinn: / Wie hoch ich bin, / So ist ein Weib aus deiner Stadt doch höher", Opitz, Judith (Fn. 46), p. 118 (I,1).

50 Ibid., p. 123 (II,3).

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Opitz' hero is destroyed by his lust and passion, doubly shameful because the instrument of his failure is a female generally thought to be inferior to the male; Opitz' hero is vulnerable, he let his senses and intellect submit to the erotic attraction of the female body, to femininity: "[…] these words, this laughter, / The eye's evil deception delights me / The hair ensnares my mind and courage / The mouth hinders my mouth from utering a single word."[51] Opitz constructs his heroine Judith as a powerful woman because of her bodily beauty (not only her chastity). Judith is "mächtig [...], die Götter selbst zu binden / Und durch der Schönheit glantz den Himmel anzuzünden" (powerful […] to overcome even gods / And to set the heavens on fire with her beauty's sparkle) (I,2). Opitz transformed the biblical Judith into a feminised heroine with the modesty appropriate for a servant (*Magd*) who obeys his wishes: "Sein Wollen ist mein Glücke, / Sein Wincken mein Gesetze" (His desires are my fortune / His commands my obedience).[52] Judith' dissimulation and cunning comes in the guise of coy submission as a woman. The following scene continues the theme of feigned submission, with Abra the maid reminding Judith of her chastity. Lamenting their fall from power and fortune, The Choir of Captured Kings prays for the plot's success: "May heaven grant that the eyes / Captivate this insolent mind / May her golden hair / Become chains / And hurl to the ground / The leader of the proud army!"[53] The pathos of prayer and high style (required for choral passages) raises the bar and heightens the expectations of a heroic deed by a woman; the paradoxical use of gender expectations – that one-time powerful male kings now must rely on a female's use of her body and her cunning to bring about a reversal of fortune for them – adds to the dramatic suspense.

Opitz' drama is commonly read as an admonition to constancy and civic-minded virtue in adversity and sacrifice. The heroine Judith serves as a container for this, but she serves also as a vessel of seduction, a significant shift away from God's instrument into the vicinity of the temptress Eve as an allegorical figure. At the same time, the author imbued his hero Holofernes with awe-inspiring grandeur, reminiscent of the powerful generals in the (contemporary) Thirty Years' War. Judith was hardly intended to serve as a model character for contemporary women, nor the drama as a gender-sensitive interpretation of the biblical story, but rather as a lesson and consolation in troubled times for the male public.[54]

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51 " [...] diß Reden, dieses Lachen, / Der Augen Vnstern ists, der mein Gesicht' entzückt, / Das Haar, das mein Gemütt' vnd allen Muth bestrickt, / Der Mund, der meinen Mund kein gantzes Wort leßt machen." Ibid., p. 119 (I,1).

52 Ibid., p. 120 (I,2).

53 "Ach Himmel laß die Augen / Diß Freche Blutt außsaugen! / Gieb daß diß Güldne Haar / Zu Stricken müsse werden, / Vnd stürtzen zu der Erden / Das Haupt der stoltzen Schaar!" Ibid., p. 122 (I,3).

54 Students of the Magdalena Latin School in Breslau performed the drama at the residence of the protestant Duke of Oels in Görlitz in 1677 when the re-catholicising of Silesia started; see Konrad Gajek, Christian Funckes Prosafassung der *Judith* von Martin Opitz. Do-

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Opitz outfitted his heroine Judith, within his era's social imaginary, with "emphasised femininity", a specific form of femininity defined by its orientation around principles of hegemonic masculinity as well as "accommodating the interests and desires of men".[55] This Judith also exhibits "strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance" in a complex form of femininities, "complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and cooperation."[56]

Heroisation and Gender Polarity: Sublimation of Male-Coded Violence into Female-Coded Sexualisation in German Drama

Friedrich Hebbel's *Judith* (1840) transformed Judith into a sexualised *femme fatale* (an aspect Lutheran school drama had carefully suppressed). Hebbel characterised his heroine with the line: "Meine Schönheit ist die der Tollkirsche; ihr Genuß bringt Wahnsinn und Tod" (My beauty is poison, it brings madness and death)[57] and constructed her as a love-crazed woman who lures her victim to his death and seemingly goes mad in the end. The author feminised the heroine indisputably by making her fear to be pregnant, indicating remorse/punishment for a lustful sexual reunion (such a stance would be impossible for a male hero). Hebbel exploited nineteenth-century sensibilities and removed any divine sublimation by having the heroine believe that she did not have the divine calling she pretended, and begs the high priest to kill her – a final self-sacrifice and dismantling of the heroine into a subversive figure undermining female heroism. Hebbel's play shows „an unbridgeable polarity between the sexes and reveals male fears about female sexuality and desire, as well as about female autonomy".[58] Hebbel's *Judith* belongs squarely, as his numerous privately and publicly expressed opinion pieces document, into the social fabric and imaginary of the nineteenth century when the "Frauenfrage" became a moral, medical, political, and social issue. Hebbel opined: "Das Weib und die Sittlichkeit stehen in einem Verhältnis zueinander, wie heutzutage leider die Weiber und die Unsittlichkeit" (Woman and morality are linked together as are today, unfortunately, women and immorality) and "Das Weib muß nach Herrschaft über den Mann streben, weil sie fühlt, daß die Natur sie bestimmt hat, ihm unterwürfig zu sein" (Woman

kumentation einer Aufführung auf dem Görlitzer Schultheater, in: Daphnis. Zeitschrift für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur 18, Issue 3, 1989, pp. 421–466.

55 Alexandra Howsen, Embodying Gender, London 2005, pp. 183.

56 Ibid., p. 184.

57 Act 3, scene 2: http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/judith-2650/3, 2 January 2018.

58 Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly has recently looked at this fascinating, complex biblical story identifying questions of gender, sex, murder, and terrorism in the Judith story: Beauty or Beast? The Woman Warrior in the German Imagination from the Renaissance to the Present, Oxford 2010, esp. pp. 130–132.

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must seek to dominate man, because she feels that nature has destined her to submit to him).[59]

Hebbel's sexual imaginary assigns blame, guilt, heroism in confusion and anxiety over shifting gender boundaries, shifting concepts of masculinity and femininity, and over real social changes in gender status and roles. The resulting imagined *femme fatale* became a favourite in German authors' literary texts. As Melanie Unseld has shown for the operatic theatre around 1900, such a sexualised, powerful heroine (like Lulu or Salome) who overpowers then kills the lover becomes a fascinating, titillating stage attraction and reverse call for arms: "Man töte dieses Weib!" (Kill this woman!) The battle of the sexes, as perceived by and turned into (unassailable) art by male authors/artists is heroised on the grand stage. High art, it seems, has replaced religion in solidifying traditional gender concepts around 1900.

This appears to be a trajectory for the German stage that is quite different from the English. Ina Schabert summarised her findings thus:

> The physical commitment of the armoured male or female knight, who guards the established order, is countered by the ideal power of a female knight, who drops her armour, who eventually exchanges the realm of combat for a life of love and motherliness and who starts a new human race with her lover.[60]

Such a conciliatory trend in gender relations – as represented on the stage – seems to be absent from dramatic heroisation in nineteenth-century Germany (and its imaginary) but is supplanted by a heroisation of sexuality in the *femme fatale* and a sexual 'battle of the sexes'.

Heroes (in literature, historiography or the real world) are not an absolute entity, need the acceptance and consensus of the society they are viewed in, need a common code or understanding of norms in the social imaginary. They are affected by historical change and changing perceptions of gender roles and interactions. Literature's changeable heroes reflect and mirror social changes and sensibilities, they entail the possibility of being multivalent and a discussion piece. However, the hero (on the German stage) was (and is) first and foremost an author's construct who embodies the author's views and perceptions and who guides viewers who follow, sympathise, empathise or possibly reject the imagined fantasies.

It is important to note that Early Modern literary texts – dramas in my example – reflect and are situated within the social imaginary of the *elite*, the literate public of predominantly male academics, theologians, patricians, aristocrats – the movers and shakers in the Early Modern World (contrary to our notion of

59 Ibid., p. 130.

60 "Dem physischen Einsatz des gepanzerten männlichen oder auch weiblichen Ritters, der die etablierte Ordnung absichert, steht die ideelle Macht einer Ritterin gegenüber, die sich ihrer Rüstung entledigt, die schließlich dem Kriegsgeschäft zugunsten der Liebe und Mütterlichkeit entsagt und mit ihrem Geliebten ein neues Geschlecht gründet." Ina Schabert, Weiblicher Held oder Heldin? Die heroische Frau in der Imagination der Shakespeare-Zeit in: Achim Aurnhammer / Manfred Pfister (Ed.), Heroen und Heroisierungen in der Renaissance, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 27–44.

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equality in our modern social imaginary). Heroisations in these texts were to be exemplary, to teach ethics and politics, to influence and sway the mostly male recipients and to shape the imaginary community they addressed. Heroisation (or demonisation) played to meanings of gender that were historically situated but did not challenge perceived gender perceptions and at best complicated and confused assigned gender roles. The sublimation of male-coded violence into female-coded sexuality as observed in the transformation of the Judith and Holofernes story from Birck to Hebbel echoes the uneasiness over the dismantling of the masculine warrior and the rise of the sexualised, destructive female – it still harkens back to the story of Adam and Eve expelled from paradise – in the gendered imaginary. It does neither fully represent nor adequately reflect the social reality of men and women in these centuries, but it nevertheless touches, perhaps modulates, concepts of gender identity and gender relations of the time.

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