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Kathleen M. Llewellyn, *Representing Judith in Early Modern French Literature*. Farnham, England and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2014. ix + 150 pp. Figures, bibliography, and index. \$104.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4724-3533-0; \$104.95 (pdf). ISBN 978-1-4724-3534-7.

Review by Katherine S. Maynard, Washington College.

The figure of Judith, the valiant widow who beheaded Nebuchadnezzar's general Holofernes in the deuterocanonical book that bears her name, was a favorite subject for artists of the early modern era, as is evidenced by the numerous depictions of Judith that appeared in this period throughout Europe. Lesser known, however, are the literary manifestations of Judith. A number of critical works have attempted to bring these manifestations to light, including a recent collection of multidisciplinary essays on Judith edited by Kevin Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemman. [1] Kathleen Llewellyn's new book, *Representing Judith in Early Modern French Literature*, distinguishes itself from its predecessors by focusing specifically on representations of Judith in French writing in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In choosing this focus, Llewellyn responds to a gap in current scholarship on early modern France and her book is thus a welcome contribution to studies on Judith.

The book begins with a helpful recapitulation of the events in the original Judith story from the Vulgate. This earlier version stands as the initial point of comparison for the analyses to come. In the introduction, illustrated with six iconic depictions of Judith from the art of the time period (although none from France), Llewellyn announces that the goals of her study will be to "recapture imaginative frameworks of the Renaissance" and to "explore interests and concerns of early modern writers, readers, and spectators" (p. 1). She pursues these goals through an analysis of specific works in which Judith serves as the protagonist, selecting a range a lesser-known texts, all of which deserve more scholarly attention than they have heretofore received. Chapter two considers *Le Mystère de Judith et Holofernès* (ca. 1500), a mystery play attributed to Jean Molinet. Originally published as part of the larger *Mystère du Vieil Testament*, the plays stands on its own as an affirmation of the popularity of Judith at the turn of the century. Chapters three and four consider two epic poems on Judith, first, Guillaume Du Bartas' *La Judit* (1574), and, subsequently, Gabrielle de Coignard's *Imitation de la victoire de Judith* (1594). The author then turns to Pierre Heyns' didactic play *Le Miroir des veuves: Tragédie sacrée d'Holoferne & Judith* (1596). A final body chapter analyzes the role of Judith in early modern sermons, notably those of the Jesuit Jean Lejeune (1592-1672).

Llewellyn's approach to the topic has much to recommend it. First, her study includes a range of depictions of Judith, each of which attests to the variety and versatility of the figure in France in this time period. The chronological organization of the book makes sense for a study whose focus is a limited time frame. In addition, *Representing Judith* largely succeeds at avoiding the pitfalls that the comparative structure of the book might pose, and in particular the challenge of how to approach the same story that is retold multiple times and avoid redundancy. Throughout the book, the author refers back to the Vulgate version of the Judith story to sustain her arguments, and this approach yields fruitful insights without undue repetition. That said, at times, a specific element of Judith's story will be given particular focus in one chapter, but will be ignored in another; the rationale for these choices is not always clear. As a case in point, in chapter two, the author argues that Judith's return to a life of pious widowhood

serves as evidence that Judith's previously subversive behavior was merely a performance in the mystery play by Molinet. Yet, Judith's return to widowhood does not appear to be more prominent in Molinet's play than in the other works studied. (Indeed, the ending of Molinet's play does not make mention of Judith's return to her life as a pious widow.) In passages like this one, more dialogic analysis between the works studied would have helped to clarify the rationale for such choices. Nevertheless, Llewellyn's close readings of the textual variations between the original Book of Judith and the early modern versions offer insights into the authors' motivations that have gone previously unobserved, and her use of the texts that she has selected generally supports her conclusions well.

One of Llewellyn's central interests lies in the relationship between depictions of Judith and the roles of women in the early modern era. She argues that the authors of Judith stories explored the "possibilities of the feminine" (p. 11) through the figure, and she begins and ends her book by asserting that Judith's popularity might indicate that women's roles were perhaps less limited than other scholars have suggested. In most chapters, she turns to the question of Judith's appropriateness as an exemplar for early modern women. In Molinet's play, Judith's actions, while seemingly a challenge to patriarchal authority, are rendered more appropriate because they appear on stage within the context of a performance, likely enacted by a male actor. Gabrielle de Coignard, in contrast, equates herself with Judith, taking up the pen as Judith takes up the sword, thus inscribing herself in a "small community of brave and courageous women" (p. 94). Pierre Heyns' *Miroir des veuves* mitigates Judith's militant side for the young schoolgirls in the audience through the playwright's choice to conduct Judith's more shocking actions offstage and to emphasize her many female virtues. Llewellyn's exploration of sermons stresses a similar point: whereas preachers refer to Judith as an exemplar, she is an imperfect exemplar, a fact around which they must negotiate even as they promote her virtues.

The discussion surrounding the ways in which early modern readers might have understood Judith's status as a woman is an intriguing one, and in this regard, the book does much to increase our understanding of Judith's exemplarity in sixteenth-century France. There are, however, some missed opportunities that, if given consideration, might have enriched these arguments. Above all, a more thorough exploration of the historical context of the works could have contributed to the author's stated goals to recapture imaginative frameworks and to understand the interests of early modern readers. Whereas the tale of Judith certainly touches upon the role of women in this period, it also touches upon religion and war, two topics that figure only sporadically in *Representing Judith*. As a Jewish woman whose name means "Jewess" (as the author points out on page 12), Judith's religious identity represents an essential part of her character's identity, and this element could have been more integral to the book's analyses. This is particularly true with respect to how the authors' own religious backgrounds influenced their depictions of Judith.

Three of the authors studied--the Protestant Du Bartas, the Catholic Coignard, and the Protestant Heyns--were touched by the events of the Wars of Religion, yet only in Llewellyn's analysis of Coignard does this context receive significant consideration. In that chapter, Llewellyn argues convincingly that Coignard's Bethulia was inspired by contemporary events in the poet's native Toulouse, whereas the importance of geographical and historical context is downplayed in the chapters on Du Bartas and Heyns. In both cases, such analysis would have been welcome. Throughout his career in southwest France, Du Bartas had strong ties to his patrons Jeanne de Navarre and her son Henri IV, both of whom were active in the Wars; Heyns' background as a Protestant who escaped the Spanish siege of Antwerp in 1585 would have been worth exploring given the many passages in the play about Bethulia under siege, and in particular, those passages on the effects of the siege on women. As Donatello's famous bronze sculpture of Judith and Holofernes in Florence illustrates, Judith was often a mutable instrument for propaganda, and this fact is all the more poignant in light of the religious conflicts of this time period.

Finally, the arguments of *Representing Judith* might have been enriched by a consideration of the complex status of the Book of Judith in the sixteenth century. The Book of Judith was considered to be part of the Old Testament for Catholics but was an apocryphal text for Protestants. In addition, while Llewellyn refers exclusively to the Vulgate as the source text, the Septuagint, also available to early modern readers, offers a different version of the Book of Judith. An exploration of these two versions would have been valuable for the kind of close comparative readings contained in *Representing Judith*.

In spite of these lacunae, *Representing Judith* paints a fascinating picture of the ways in which this evocative figure became a popular exemplar and a source of literary inspiration in the sixteenth century. Of special note is the author's treatment of many relatively unknown works, which does a great service both to those works and to scholars of sixteenth-century France. The author demonstrates how this *femme forte* made her way into the hearts and minds of authors of early modern France, and, in so doing, Llewellyn has opened the door for other scholars to follow in her footsteps.

#### NOTES

[1] Kevin Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemman, eds., *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies across the Disciplines* (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2010).

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