

Joakim, Uzziah, and Bagoas: A Literary Analysis of Selected Secondary Characters in the Book of Judith

ROBIN GALLAHER BRANCH
(NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY, POTCHEFSTROOM)

ABSTRACT

Secondary characters in any literary work play supporting roles. In their cameo appearances, they reinforce the importance of the primary characters, the stars. While not given top billing, they nonetheless remain crucial to the plot and contribute to its twists and turns. When a secondary character interacts with a primary character, additional traits of the primary character emerge. However in this interaction, often distinct personality traits of the secondary character likewise appear. This article looks at selected secondary characters in the Book of Judith: Joakim, the high priest and leader of the council in Jerusalem; Uzziah, the magistrate of Bethulia, the city besieged by Holofernes and the Assyrian army; and the Bagoas, Holofernes' aide de camp. Via a literary approach which sees Judith as a fictional short story, this article examines the contributions of selected characters who play supporting roles to Judith, the beautiful Bethulian, and Holofernes, the Assyrian general who ignominiously dies by her hand.

A INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

This article continues my work on secondary characters in *Judith*.¹ *Judith* is a narrative text in which a very skilled writer tells a compelling rescue story. *Judith* as such merges two strong biblical traditions: how God again saves his chosen people and again does it in an unexpected way, this time "by the hand of a woman," (Jdt 16:5).² Judith herself is clever, devious, heroic and a murder-

¹ Pierre Jordaan and I presented a paper entitled "The Significance of Secondary Characters in Susanna, Judith, and the Additions to Esther in the Septuagint" at a conference on the Septuagint in Stellenbosch in June 2009. It was published in *Acta Patristica* 20 (2009): 389-416; I was the principal writer (Robin G. Branch and Pierre Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters in Susanna, Judith, and the Additions to Esther in the Septuagint," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 [2009]: 389-416). The first paper's length and time factors were the reasons why it omitted the characters Joakim, Uzziah, and Bagoas; that article investigated the Assyrian army, the Children of Esau, and Judith's maid.

² This article uses the translation of Carey A. Moore, *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985). Other women who save Israel are Jael and Deborah (Judg 4-5) who killed the Canaanite

ess.³ Probably set in Maccabean times,⁴ the book divides neatly into two sections (chs. 1-7 and 8-16). The first section details the world-conquering plans and impressive triumphs of Nebuchadnezzar king of Assyria, his general Holofernes, and the Assyrian army.⁵ The second section details the resistance of one community, Bethulia, and the amazing way Holofernes is slain, the Assyrian army routed, and Nebuchadnezzar humiliated by a widow named Judith dressed in a tiara and anklets and armed only with beauty, wisdom, and desirability.⁶

B METHODOLOGY

This article applies a literary methodology to *Judith*. It sees *Judith* as a short historical novel carrying a strong religious message.⁷ The tale presents the idea that the Jews—if brave, obedient, and faithful—will be saved from their enemies by a God who answers prayers in a timely, if unusual, way.⁸

Judith tells a story that has a beginning (chs. 1-6 in which the might of Nebuchadnezzar and as such the victories of Holofernes are established); a middle (chs. 6-9 in which the battle comes to the gates of Bethulia, and Judith is introduced, presents a plan to Bethulia's leaders, and prays); and an end (chs. 10-16 in which Judith and her maid arrive at the Assyrian camp, and her plan

general Sisera and led the Israelites against the Canaanites respectively; and the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah (2 Sam 20) whose wise counsel stopped a civil war. See Robin G. Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife: The Enduring Contributions of the Old Testament's Least-Known Women* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 63-82.

³ See Benedikt Otzen, *Tobit and Judith* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 68-69.

⁴ *Judith* carries on the OT theme that we are God's people and he is our God; see John C. Dancy, ed., *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha: The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 69. Notice as well the arrogance of the enemy; the certainty that the enemies of God's people are also the enemies of God himself (Judg 5:31); and the concern for the humble and poor (Dancy, *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha*, 69-70).

⁵ However, an ironic note signaling inevitable defeat comes early in the text. On the twenty-second day of the first month (2:1) Nebuchadnezzar decides to seek revenge on the world that, he thinks, scorned him. Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 79, points out that this is the day after Passover when another great enemy of the Jews, Pharaoh and his army, "found their death in the Red Sea." Evidently Nebuchadnezzar did not read, heed, or know Israelite history!

⁶ Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 70-72, breaks down the structure this way: chs. 1-3: Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates that he is God; chs. 4-7: Who is God, Nebuchadnezzar or Yahweh?; and chs. 8-16: Yahweh demonstrates that he is God.

⁷ Dancy, *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha*, 67.

⁸ *Judith* is used in the Roman Catholic Church in liturgy describing the Virgin Mary; the French particularly like the woman Judith because of their own military heroine, Joan of Arc (see Dancy, *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha*, 67-68, 71).

for saving her people unfolds). Narratology, a canonical approach,⁹ and some elements of a folktale augment this literary analysis.¹⁰

Standard literary elements are central idea or plot, characterization,¹¹ conflict, point of view, setting, and diction.¹² As I have written elsewhere,¹³ "biblical narratives are told from the perspective of someone scholars call the narrator, usually a single observer, a person who watches the action from the corner of the stage or from a vantage point off stage."¹⁴

This article deals mainly with characterization and specifically with secondary characters.¹⁵ Sasson points out that secondary characters come in,

⁹ See "Westminster Confession of Faith," in *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (ed. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 2175-2189, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" (I:6).

Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 76, rightly observes that since the events in *Judith* are placed in the time of Assyrian dominance, then it is natural to see some parallels in the biblical text (the books of Kings and Chronicles) with some stories of the Assyrian army. The rout of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18-19; Isa 36-37) presents one example. However, a significant difference occurs in *Judith*: no angelic intervention or slaughter takes place; this time panic comes to the Assyrian army, it scatters, and its individual soldiers become easy pickings and targets for the suddenly confident Israelites.

¹⁰ However, while *Judith* contains some elements of a folktale or even a fairy tale, it properly cannot be described as either because it contains no magic, supernatural knowledge, or supernatural adversary, see Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 10. In *Judith*, the task of defeating a formidable army falls on a chaste, beautiful widow who prays to a supernatural helper (to use Propp's term) for strength but does the murderous deed herself.

¹¹ Helen Efthimiadis-Keith points out that without question Judith herself is the character who has over the years attracted the most attention in the book that bears her name, be it derision or praise. Judith's stunning contributions to this story and her strong character come to play in this article in how the secondary characters relate to her. Cf. Helen Efthimiadis-Keith, "Judith, Feminist Ethics and Feminist Biblical/Old Testament Interpretation," *JTSA* 138 (2010): 92. Cited 8 February 2012. Online: http://ukzn.academia.edu/HellenEfthimiadisKeith/Papers/879528/Judith_Feminist_Ethicsand_Feminist_Biblical_Old_Testament_Interpretation91-111.

¹² See the excellent book by Joseph Lostracco and George J. Wilkerson, *Analyzing Short Stories* (7th ed.; Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 2008).

¹³ See Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 9-17, for my earlier work on literary analysis, and Robin G. Branch, "'Your Humble Servant': Well, Maybe: Overlooked Onlookers in Deuteronomistic History," *OTE* 17/2 (2004): 168-189, for a detailed examination of selected secondary characters in OT narration.

¹⁴ Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 12.

¹⁵ A character's function helps provide a tale's stability and believability and is necessary even foundational to a story, cf. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 21.

"carry the plot forward, and leave it without unduly burdening the audience's memory."¹⁶ A story's characters can be flat or round, dynamic or static.¹⁷ Though secondary, Uzziah and Bagoas are developed, round characters.¹⁸ They undergo change as the plot progresses; they express emotions—anger, lust, fear, joy, and the like. Because they respond to conflict, they grow throughout the story and emerge at its conclusion with discernable personalities. Secondary characters such as these help propel the plot.¹⁹ Joakim, a much less developed character, is, I conclude, flat and static.

The central idea or plot of *Judith* is Nebuchadnezzar's plan to conquer the known world through an army led by Holofernes; Holofernes is ignominiously defeated (and Nebuchadnezzar shamed) by the actions of a stunningly beautiful Israelite widow and her countrymen.²⁰

Conflict, defined as the collision of opposing forces,²¹ comes when Holofernes and his Assyrian army encamp near the base of Bethulia, secure its water supply, wait for the city to succumb, and are blindsided by the enemy invasion when it comes: the arrival of Judith and her maid (Jdt 10:11). Conflict drives a story and moves it toward a conclusion.²²

The primary settings, the "where" and "when" in which the events and conflict take place,²³ are Bethulia and the Assyrian camp. A setting enhances the elements of a story.²⁴

The narrative's point of view, the narrator's position in telling a story, can be favorable or unfavorable.²⁵ When reading biblical texts, the narrative's tone can be a general impression left on the reader, for often the biblical text remains devoid of adjectives and adverbs that convey tone. The one telling the story writes in the third person.²⁶ The narrator refrains from using first person

¹⁶ See Jack M. Sasson, "Esther," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; London: Collins, 2002), 336.

¹⁷ Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 15; X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 68.

¹⁸ Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 15.

¹⁹ Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 13.

²⁰ A folktale element in the plot, however, that applies to *Judith* is the contrast between prosperity and misfortune (Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 27). In *Judith*, Bethulia's tranquility before the Assyrian onslaught is contrasted with the effects of water rationing on the community.

²¹ Lostracco and Wilkerson, *Analyzing Short Stories*, 19.

²² Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 16.

²³ Lostracco and Wilkerson, *Analyzing Short Stories*, 31.

²⁴ Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 15.

²⁵ Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 16; Lostracco and Wilkerson, *Analyzing Short Stories*, 50.

²⁶ Lostracco and Wilkerson, *Analyzing Short Stories*, 25.

pronouns, *I* and *me*.²⁷ The narrator's tone is favorable toward Judith and her countrymen, and toward Achior who truthfully advises Holofernes regarding how to deal with the Israelites (Jdt 5), and unfavorable toward the Assyrians who seek to do them harm.

The biblical text rarely divulges a character's thoughts, as is the case in omniscient narration. Instead a biblical narrator uses dramatic or objective narration. Actions and speech predominate. The story's narrator presents a character's actions and words and lets them stand; words and actions (of the deity and an individual) portray character traits.

As Bal points out,²⁸ it is important to remember when reading a short story such as *Judith* that the narrator is not the author; the narrator is a character in the sense of being a storyteller, for it is through the narrator's eyes that readers and hearers see the story. Bal adds that actors can be subdivided into classes.²⁹ Functions are important. Joakim *functions* as high priest and also as leader of Judah, newly brought back from exile. Uzziah *functions* as the acknowledged leader of Bethulia. Bagoas *functions* as the eunuch in charge of Holofernes' personal belongings.

C JUDITH AS FICTION

A key to reading and enjoying *Judith* is remembering it is not meant to be taken as fact.³⁰ It is a moral tale, one reinforcing basic themes of Deuteronomistic Theology³¹ like the reward of strictly observing God's law; however, it contains aspects of a folktale.³² The book heralds from its opening verse that it is

²⁷ Lostracco and Wilkerson, *Analyzing Short Stories*, 25.

²⁸ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 119.

²⁹ Bal, *Narratology*, 26.

³⁰ *Judith* is a short historical novel carrying a strong religious (rather than romantic) message (Dancy, *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha*, 67).

³¹ See David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 85.

³² A folktale is a complex tale that spreads over cultures and generations; a legend is folk history and a folktale is a short story of oral literature; a folktale is fictional, cf. Jan H. Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968), 103, 79. Arguably, *Judith* became a local legend (see Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore*, 87).

Robert B. Coote and Mary P. Coote, *Power, Politics, and the Making of the Bible: An Introduction*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 95, call *Judith* a patriarchal fairy tale showcasing the extraordinary power of the weak, as exemplified by a woman, to overthrow the strong.

Steven S. Jones, *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 8-9, defines folktales as quotidian narratives employing ordinary protagonists; extraordinary heroes in a folktale are the em-

not a historical account, for *Nebuchadnezzar of Assyria* rules from *Nineveh* (Jdt 1:1), and the historical, real, and powerful *Nebuchadnezzar* was *Babylonian* and ruled from *Babylon* (italics added).³³ Scholars identify *Judith's* writer as a Jew in Palestine who writes in Hebrew during the Hasmonean era; suggested dates range from c. 160 to the early first century B.C.E.³⁴

In comparison to *Tobit*, *Judith* is a popular drama while *Tobit* is a popular romance. *Judith* has conflict, a reversal of fortunes, and a happy ending. Sometimes a literary theme is a quest or love. But *Judith's* theme is a military conflict, one between two gods: Nebuchadnezzar of Assyria and the God of Israel.³⁵

Locations in *Judith* also reinforce its myth and fabrication.³⁶ For instance, Holofernes marches his men an impossible distance of 300 miles in three days (Jdt 2:21); furthermore, he marches through Put (Libya) and then *westward* into Mesopotamia, also an impossibility.³⁷ The location of Bethulia is

bodiments of their culture and larger-than-life; an extraordinary hero or heroine can exemplify a society's aspirations and sociopolitical conflicts. A folktale addresses problems that confront its hearers (Jones, *The Fairy Tale*, 19). Indeed, *Judith* may have been written as an example of how to respond as a covenant nation to encroachments from the secular world.

³³ Perhaps the model or the real Assyrian king behind the figure of Nebuchadnezzar was Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.E.) (Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 84). In other words, *Nebuchadnezzar* is a front name heralding a jolly good tale climaxing in an international humiliation of an international bully.

³⁴ See Donald E. Gowan, *Bridge Between the Testaments: The Reappraisal of Judaism from the Exile to the Birth of Christianity* (Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1976), 355. Although it is impossible to say whether or not the story drew from a historical basis or was the concoction of a writer, it is possible to see that in contrast to *Esther*, *Judith* presents a religious drama that perhaps was written during the time of Jonathan. See W. Stewart McCullough, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews from Cyrus to Herod, 550 BC to 4 BC* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 180, 182-183.

³⁵ See Dancy, *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha*, 127. It would seem as well that *Judith* views God as demanding a strict observance of the law. Consider Bar 4:1: "This is the book of the commandments of God, and the law endureth for ever. All they that hold it fast are destined for life, but such as leave it shall die," see David S. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1960), 83.

³⁶ Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 90, tackles the reasons for Judith's geographical and historical irregularities in a way which I find quite creative: he posits that both are purposeful inflations. "This is done intentionally," he continues. "History becomes universal history, and geography becomes total geography covering, more or less, the whole of the then-known world. By this artifice *Judith* obtains a cosmic dimension, and the conflicts in the book are raised to a level where they represent the eternal struggle between God and Evil. History and geography are taken into the service of ideology!"

³⁷ See DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 93.

unknown, as is the narrow pass to Jerusalem which can support only two people walking abreast (4:7). These details hint at this: *Judith* contains humor.³⁸

D OVERVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

Cornelius calls *Judith* "pure fiction, not historically true, (and) meant to be humorous."³⁹ I agree. The narrator paints the story and its characters with a wide brush of exaggeration.⁴⁰

For Efthimiadis-Keith *Judith* "represents an unconscious communication of the national Jewish psyche (or a fraction thereof) at its time of composition."⁴¹ Certainly, *Judith* shows a way the underdog, the Israelites in Bethulia, soundly defeat the Assyrians, clearly the bully commanding the center of the world stage.⁴²

Eckhardt sees *Judith* as a work of fictional narration written during the Hasmonean period; it creates a fictitious space and by so doing does not openly oppose existing authorities.⁴³

Reinforcing the canonicity of *Judith*, Adkin notes that Raban Maur saw texts like Dan 3:19 in Jdt 2:2 and that Jdt 1:27 may have affinity to Mark

³⁸ Philip F. Esler evidently agrees, as the title of his article would indicate: see Philip F. Esler, "Ludic History in the Book of Judith: The Reinvention of Israelite Identity?" *BibInt* 10/2 (2002): 107-143.

³⁹ Elma Cornelius, "An Interpretation of the Rhetorical Power of the Genre of *Judith*," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 (2009): 417.

⁴⁰ Cornelius, "An Interpretation," 417, picks up on the use of hyperbole in *Judith*. For instance, the heroine fasts more than three years (Jdt 8:4-6) yet has strength to "whack off Holofernes' head with no difficulty!"; Nebuchadnezzar scales without difficulty (Jdt 1) the extreme fortifications around Ecbatana; Judith daintily sips and dines while Holofernes becomes (fatally) inebriated (12:17-20). Cornelius, "Judith," 423, concludes that "these examples of exaggeration create humour in comedy." She's right.

⁴¹ Efthimiadis-Keith, "Judith, Feminist Ethics," 93.

⁴² Efthimiadis-Keith, "Judith, Feminist Ethics," 106, encourages readers to allow themselves to be challenged by reading *Judith*. She advises readers against smoothing over its parts that irritate and instead to honor the text by reading it with a system of ethics that includes "justice care, autonomy, and the self." See Efthimiadis-Keith, "Judith, Feminist Ethics," 110.

⁴³ Benedikt Eckhardt. "Reclaiming Tradition: The Book of Judith and Hasmonean Politics," *JSP* 18/4 (2009): 243, 260.

13:22.⁴⁴ Nolte and Jordaan see ties between Jdt 16 and Exod 15 and Ps 46, all texts of war, victory, and cessation of hostilities.⁴⁵

DeSilva regards *Judith* as a moral tale and not as actual history; it is not a historiography but rather a tale written both to entertain and instruct.⁴⁶ I would add that it probably encouraged its initial readers and allowed them to laugh at any current oppressors.

Seeing the significance of *Judith* in Catholic theology, Ciletti writes that in Marian typology, no praise of Judith is more relevant than that rendered by Uzziah (Jdt 13:32).⁴⁷ In this significant verse, Bethulia's leader, using the endearment *daughter* and evoking the authority of the Lord Most High, blesses Judith and decrees her above all women of the earth.

Schmitz regards Judith's beheading of Holofernes as forming the central theme on how to understand the story itself.⁴⁸ The fact that a man is killed by a woman indicates that the story was (and may still be) considered scandalous; the action and the context in which it took place certainly have sexual connotations, she observes.⁴⁹

Gera notes that shame as a motif occurs repeatedly in *Judith*.⁵⁰ One instance is during this conversation when Holofernes confides in Bagoas that he will be shamed if he does not seduce Judith. Presumably, camp talk will

⁴⁴ Neil Adkin, "Unidentified Echoes of the Bible and the Fathers in Raban Maur's Commentary on Judith," *SacEr* 19/2 (2010): 249-260.

⁴⁵ S. Philip Nolte & Pierre J. Jordaan. "Ideology and Intertextuality: Intertextual Allusions in Judith 16," *HTS* 67/3 (2011), Art. #966: 5-8. Cited 8 February 2012. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i3.966>.

⁴⁶ DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 85, 92-95.

⁴⁷ Elena Ciletti, "Judith Imagery as Catholic Orthodoxy in Counter-Reformation Italy," in *The Sword of Judith: Studies Across the Disciplines* (ed. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti and Henrike Lahnemann; Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 362.

⁴⁸ Barbara Schmitz, "Holofernes's Canopy in the Septuagint," in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (ed. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti and Henrike Lahnemann; Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 71.

⁴⁹ Schmitz, "Holofernes's Canopy in the Septuagint," 71.

⁵⁰ Debora L. Gera, "Shorter Medieval Hebrew Tales of Judith," in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*. (ed. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti and Henrike Lahnemann; Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 89.

Remember that it's possible to read *Judith* as presenting challenges to honor, as depicting the high cost of shame, and as advocating deception when employed to preserve the honor of the covenant people (see DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 99).

shame and even effeminate him by equating a lack of a successful seduction with weakness.⁵¹

Dahbany-Miraglia believes Holofernes saw "Judith's pious actions as exquisite foreplay." Undoubtedly she and her maid were the talk of the entire camp.⁵²

Czarniawska writes that narratology offers insights on political statements.⁵³ *Judith* certainly can be viewed as a story about war and two different political viewpoints.

Finally, Jordaan⁵⁴ offers this keen insight: Judith's action of killing Holofernes parallels that of David against Goliath. As far as I know, Jordaan is the only one so far to make this declaration. I agree with him and would go so far as to assert that it is textually as significant.⁵⁵

E JOAKIM: HIGH PRIEST AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL IN JERUSALEM

Joakim, high priest and leader of the Council in Jerusalem,⁵⁶ acts as the figure-head of a nation lately returned from exile. Although not the military general which Israel desperately seems to need at this point, his activities are leader-like: he issues orders and expects them to be followed. He urges the people of Bethulia and other villages to fortify their towns, withstand the onslaught of the Assyrians, and prepare, if necessary, to sacrifice themselves for a higher cause: God, temple, and country.

Joakim appears twice (4:6-8; 15:8-10). A flat character and remote leader, he leads via letter from Jerusalem.⁵⁷ He orders those in Bethulia and

⁵¹ Absalom, for example, after successfully taking Jerusalem, showed sexual prowess and (presumably) kingly strength by bedding his father's concubines on a rooftop under a tent "in the sight of all Israel" (2 Sam 16:21-22).

⁵² Dina Dahbany-Miraglia, "Was Judith an *Esheth Chayil*?" *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 6/2 (2009): 3.

⁵³ Barbara Czarniawska, "The Uses of Narratology in Social and Policy Studies," *Critical Policy Studies* 2010. Cited 10 February 2012. Online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19460171003715002>.

⁵⁴ Pierre J. Jordaan, "The Pendulum is Never Static: Jesus Sira to Jesus Christ on Women in the Light of Judith, Susanna, and the LXX Esther," *HTS* 65/1 (2009), Art. #167: 3. Cited 8 February 2012. Online: DOI:10.4102/hts.v65i1.167

⁵⁵ The biblical text tends to balance itself. *Job* counters the notion that the righteous never suffer; *Ruth* shows that a Moabite can enter the covenant. *Judith* follows the tradition of women political saviors like Deborah and the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah (Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 63-81).

⁵⁶ Joakim's name indicates a post-exilic setting for the story (Moore, *Judith*, 149).

⁵⁷ Joakim's letter addresses the astounding successes of Nebuchadnezzar's army led by Holofernes and the immediate threat this swath of victories presents to the newly

Bethomesthiam to occupy the passes that give access to the hill country. The text adds this strategic information: the approach to Jerusalem through the passes is only wide enough for two men at the same time (4:6-7). Even the mighty Assyrian army would be decimated, for the Israelites are known to rely not on their spears but on the height of their mountains for their defense (7:10). In other words, strategically, Bethulia and Bethomesthaim are to make sure that Jerusalem remains safe.

The people of Bethulia, where much of the story occurs, readily fortify and speedily obey.⁵⁸ Evidently the Jerusalemites and Bethulians respect Joakim, for the text mentions no murmuring against him. Probably distance helps, for the Bethulians malign their on-site magistrate, Uzziah (8:9, 7:23-28).

As a character, Joakim arguably leads by example. He and others wear sackcloth around their loins, put ashes on their turbans, and cry out "to the Lord with all their might to look favorably on the whole House of Israel" (4:14-15). His activities dominate ch. 4. Joakim's example as a figurehead is to lead an already religious people into national penitence and supplication. The people of Jerusalem spread sackcloth in front of the temple and their children prostrate themselves there (4:11).⁵⁹

Yet only when the coast is clear and the Assyrians are routed and slain do Joakim and the Israelite Council visit Bethulia (15:8). The text makes it plain they come to see for "themselves the wonderful things the Lord had done for Israel and to see Judith as well" (15:8). Significantly, Joakim and his delegation are the first men to see her who are not struck by her beauty (8:7; 10:4, 7, 14, 19, 23). Instead, Joakim lauds Judith with accolades reserved for Israel's heroes—and for God.⁶⁰

returned exiles, Jerusalem, and the Temple (4:1-8). Bal, *Narratology*, 100, observes that narration presents a point of view, a certain way of seeing, an angle, if you will, on events as they are presented—whether historical, factual, or fictitious. Here, Joakim's letter presents a point of view of alarm, haste, fear, and worship. The people direct their energies in two ways. First, they fortify their communities as much as possible, storing supplies in readiness for a siege. Second, they cry fervently to the Lord, fast, humble themselves, and don sackcloth (even putting it on their animals and requiring their resident aliens to wear it) (4:8-12). The people of Israel, in contrast to earlier decimated communities, are serious indeed about opposing the encroaching Assyrian army.

⁵⁸ Bal, *Narratology*, 40, notes that a crisis presents of the characters and their relationships; in other words, Joakim's role as leader is recognized by the people of Bethulia.

⁵⁹ Moore, *Judith*, 152.

⁶⁰ Moore, *Judith*, 246, says the author of *Judith* never loses sight of the fact that God has won the victory through the hand of a woman (Jdt 8:34; 13:18). Both God and Judith are praised.

Yet when all is said and done, is Joakim a coward? There is no evidence the people of Bethulia asked him to join them; furthermore, there is no evidence that he made any attempt to come to Bethulia until the Assyrians were defeated. He did not send water from Jerusalem to Bethulia; maybe that was impossible because of the presence of enemies: the Assyrians, the people of Esau, and the people of Moab (7:8). However, it would seem that the Bethulians controlled some sort of access to the passes. Joakim's gift seems to be the ability to pontificate, write orders, and make pronouncements.

Joakim, although a secondary character, propels the plot forward. The text clearly validates his gift of pronouncements for they validate Judith. In one voice he and the members of the Israelite Council bless and laud Judith. *Significantly, they come to the conqueror; a woman, and the conqueror, a woman, does not journey to Jerusalem at that point.*⁶¹ Theirs is a public blessing.⁶² They give Judith accolades surpassing virtually any other person in scripture, accolades that touch on ones reserved for God: "*You are the glory of Jerusalem! You are the great pride of Israel! You are the great boast of our nation! For by your own hand you have accomplished all this*" (15:9-10a) (italics added).

F UZZIAH: MAGISTRATE OF BETHULIA

Uzziah, leader of Bethulia,⁶³ receives more textual space than does Joakim, the high priest in Jerusalem, and is a more developed character.⁶⁴ His name means *God is my defense*.⁶⁵ Uzziah, a member of the tribe of Simeon (as is Judith), is introduced without a genealogy.⁶⁶ Uzziah's primary characteristics are listening and pragmatism. For example, after listening to Judith, he allows her and her maid to leave Bethulia. After all, what does he (and they) have to lose? She comes up with a plan (which she refuses to divulge) to save Bethulia. Bethulia already is doomed, he must think, so why not let her go to the Assyrians (see ch. 8)?

The text displays his weaknesses and strengths. Uzziah is graciously hospitable to Achior (6:20-21). But whining wears him down (7:29-30)—as when the people complain and command him to turn the city over to the Assyrians. Perhaps a mark of courage for him as a leader and a covenant person

⁶¹ In the regime change between the House of Saul and the House of David, 2 Sam 1-5, dignitaries and common folk come to David.

⁶² Their blessing and pronouncements render Judith the highest and longest praise of any woman in the biblical text.

⁶³ Perhaps the name *Bethulia* is a Greek translation of *bet loah*, house of God, Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 94, writes and then exclaims, "Bethulia is a symbol of Jerusalem!"

⁶⁴ In a midrash, Uzziah takes over Joakim's function and Joakim, the high priest, is not mentioned at all. Uzziah is called a "prince of Israel," see Moore, *Judith*, 107.

⁶⁵ Moore, *Judith*, 81.

⁶⁶ Judith, clearly the dominant character, boasts a genealogy of 15 generations, one of the longest in the biblical record (6:15; 8:1-2)!

is to compromise with the people by holding out for five more days. Uzziah joins the Bethulian populace in believing God has abandoned them. In contrast, Judith believes God is testing them—and has every right so to do (8:11-17)!

1 Uzziah Listens

As a leader and as a round, developed character, Uzziah listens. First, he listens to Achior the Ammonite. Second, he listens to his constituents, the people of Bethulia. Third, he listens to Judith's assessment of the situation from her theological perspective.⁶⁷ Fourth, he listens to her reprimand.⁶⁸

Part of listening is evaluation. He evaluates Achior's speech, judges it sound, organizes a banquet for him, and invites him to stay in his house (6:21)! That Uzziah offers hospitality to a Gentile and a traditional enemy of Israel is indeed remarkable. He evaluates Judith's reprimand,⁶⁹ without anger or self-justification, and presents reasons for his actions (8:28). He talks with Judith in a way indicating his respect for her wisdom, style of leadership, and piety. The text presents the possibility that he may even be acknowledging her as his superior in intellect, leadership ability, wisdom, and raw courage. If this is so, then his leadership traits exceed personal glory and personal recognition.

He truthfully explains actions of setting five more days for God to act before he, Uzziah, surrenders Bethulia.⁷⁰ What Uzziah's speech lacks (Jdt 7:30-31) is a theophany, a serious defence of God's seeming silence and inactivity on behalf of the Bethulians. Uzziah briefly mentions a hope for God's mercy and a statement that God will not utterly forsake his people. Clearly after thirty-

⁶⁷ Judith's theology contains several elements prevalent in wisdom literature. First, there is an appointed time for every event. Second, everything has been created for a purpose. Third, the absolutes of two sides are mentioned: those on the side of God and those who choose to make themselves God's enemies. See John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 85-89, for how this relates to Ben Sirach's writings.

⁶⁸ Scripture includes a number of human and divine reprimands. Consider God's reprimand to Eliphaz the Temanite and his two friends, Job 42:7-9; Joab's stunning rebuke to David, 2 Sam 19:1-8; and Abimelech's anger over Abraham and Sarah's deception, Gen 20:8-10.

⁶⁹ Judith reminds the Bethulians of their disobedience; likewise in Judg 4-5, the prophetess Deborah is the first to remind some of the tribes of their disobedience (see David M. Gunn, "Joshua and Judges," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; London: Collins, 2002), 102-121 (116).

⁷⁰ The interaction of Judith and Uzziah shows the ongoing relationship of these two people of Bethulia; certainly a new phase of their relationship takes place because of Judith's decision to go to the camp of Holofernes (see Bal, *Narratology*, 40).

four days of siege (7:20), Uzziah needs help; he needs reinforcements! Stepping in, Judith tells Uzziah what to do (8:17).⁷¹

Significantly, the text finds nothing unusual in that Uzziah listens to a woman. He commends Judith as one known for wisdom. He asks for prayer (8:31). He recognizes her as devout. Uzziah finds himself agreeing with Judith. Actually, all men in the story agree with Judith! Five days is the time limit for God and for Judith. The people set the limit and Uzziah agrees. Judith and her maid prepare their strategy around this fixed time. God performs his mighty deed within the limit the people mandate. Clearly, a time limit increases the story's suspense.⁷²

Usually, God receives the credit for battle, and this does happen in 15:8. However, elsewhere as in the Song of Moses and Miriam and in Deborah's Song, all credit for the victory goes to God (Exod 15:1-21; Jdg 5:4-5). For her action of beheading Holofernes, saving Jerusalem, and saving her people, Uzziah says this to Judith: "My daughter, more blessed are you by God Most High than all other women on earth! Blessed also is the Lord God, who created the heavens and the earth, who guided you in crushing the head of the leader of our enemies" (13:18).⁷³

2 The Text Compares and Contrasts Uzziah and Judith in Terms of Faith

The text invites a comparison between Judith and Uzziah. For example, their respective levels of faith differentiate them. Uzziah believes for a downpour to replenish the cisterns—and therefore the ability to continue the siege. Judith believes for even more: an end to the siege and a vanquishing of the foes of

⁷¹ Another who listens to a woman and heeds her wise advice is David. David listens to Abigail; she convinces him not to seek revenge on her household for her husband Nabal's public insult. David blesses her for her good judgment and praises her for keeping him from avenging himself (1 Sam 25:33) (Branch, "Your Humble Servant, Well, Maybe," 182-187).

⁷² Uzziah naturally has questions about how Judith will accomplish her promise "to do something that will go down among the children of our people for endless generations" (8:32). The questions, answered in the course of the next chapters, add to the story's suspense (Bal, *Narratology*, 114).

⁷³ Jael (Judg 5:24), Judith (Jdt 13:18), and Mary (Luke 1:42) are all called most blessed, see Brittany E. Wilson "Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 436-456 (436). Jael and Judith are praised for violent deeds that, arguably, spare many Israelite lives; Mary, in contrast, is praised for her faithful response to the word of the Lord (Wilson, "Pugnacious Precursors," 449). In Deborah's Song, Jael is praised for her action of putting a tent peg through the head of Sisera (Judg 4:17-24; 5:24-31), and Judith's song (Jdt 16:1-17) also connects victory and violence (Wilson, "Pugnacious Precursors," 446).

Israel. Consequently, her faith is arguably much greater than his.⁷⁴ Judith believes that God can accomplish a stunning victory through her.⁷⁵

Uzziah's words and actions validate Judith. Speaking for himself and the other town elders, Chambris and Charmis, he says that "no one can take issue with you" (8:28). He commends her for her wisdom and acknowledges other instances where her wisdom was recognized (8:29).⁷⁶ His acknowledgement of her wisdom shows that Uzziah willingly shares responsibility for governing the town. In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar and Holofernes, he is not a pompous, know-it-all leader. Uzziah and his fellow town leaders display humility, for they willingly obey Judith's summons to come to her house. (Jdt 8:10). After listening to her, Uzziah not only praises her wisdom but also asks for her prayers (vv. 28, 31).

However, even as a man of faith, he shows his limitations. He asks Judith to pray for rain (8:31b). Indeed, rain will fill the cisterns and alleviate the thirst that is killing the people of Bethulia. But rain represents only a temporary salvation. Judith's faith envisions a salvation far more dramatic, and one that gives glory to God and demolishes the uncircumcised enemy of Israel. Judith's faith is this: "The Lord will deliver Israel by my hand" (8:33).⁷⁷ Judith's faith leads to Judith's astonishing actions; arguably, both the faith and actions of Judith make the faith of Uzziah grow. Upon her safe return and a presentation of the trophy head her maid carries, all around are completely astonished and immediately worship and bless God for defeating the enemies of his people (13:17). Uzziah and the townspeople see that her deed is God's deliverance that enables the Bethulians to rout the Assyrians.

3 Pragmatic Uzziah Praises Judith and Allows her to Lead

Upon the return of Judith and her maid to Bethulia and Judith's exclamation that "God our God is with us" (13:11), Judith again takes the lead. Uzziah lets her. Judith outlines her strategy for the Israelites' success. It is not enough to have Holofernes' head. The Israelites must thoroughly defeat the Assyrians. In this she resembles Esther, the heroine queen, who knows that her safety and the safety of her people depend upon their ability to defend themselves (Esth 8:11). Judith tells the men of Bethulia to hang Holofernes' head on the battlements so

⁷⁴ Actually, some may claim Uzziah has no faith (Moore, *Judith*, 186).

⁷⁵ Although Judith rebukes the leaders of Bethulia for their lack of faith (see McCullough, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews*, 181), she then reassures them of the Lord's upcoming deliverance through her.

⁷⁶ Like the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah (2 Sam 20:16), Judith is wise.

⁷⁷ Toni Craven, "Tradition and Convention in the Book of Judith," *Semeia* 28 (1983): 60, points out that Judith's actions and faith show her people that "they must serve only one God, turn to this God for an easing of their plight, and trust God to free them from bondage."

it can be well seen in daylight. She realizes his death needs confirmation; a head without a corpse effectively does that. Then every able-bodied man is to arm himself and descend upon the plain where the Assyrians are encamped (14:1-5).

Judith knows this about the Assyrians: they will rush for their weapons, seek to rouse Holofernes, find him dead, and "panic and retreat at your advance" (14:1-4). What she prophesies occurs. Suddenly the men of Israel know they can conquer this world class but uncircumcised enemy!

In contrast to Bagoas' cheekiness (12:13), Uzziah honors Judith. Publicly, he acknowledges her courage for risking her life for her people, and by walking a straight line (in other words, by not allowing herself to be seduced). She crushed the head of the leader of the enemy of her people (13:18). People will remember her and the power of God simultaneously (13:19). God himself will make her deed resound to her everlasting honor (13:20). The nation of Israel was brought to its knees; Judith saved it (13:20).

Uzziah blesses her and prays that God will grant her every blessing (13:18, 20). Uzziah recognizes the heroism of Judith and tangentially that of her accompanying maid. Uzziah's action, like that of Deborah concerning Jael (Judg 5:24-31), validates Judith's version of the story and affirms her chastity. All this is done openly; the people agree wholeheartedly with a double "Amen! Amen!" (13:20). Because of Judith and her maid, Uzziah's ultimate goal has been realized in a most unusual way: by the hand of a woman. The Assyrians are gone and dead, their booty confiscated, and the Bethulians are safe and wealthy.

G BAGOAS: A EUNUCH AND CHAMBERLAIN TO GENERAL HOLOFERNES

Bagoas, the eunuch in charge of the belongings of Holofernes, is a most significant secondary character in the book of Judith. Arguably, his status, power, and influence depend on that of Holofernes, and the worldwide status of Holofernes is quite high.⁷⁸ The text introduces Holofernes as the general in command of the armies of Nebuchadnezzar and second in command to Nebu-

⁷⁸ Holofernes is characterized by his actions (Schmitz, "Holofernes's Canopy in the Septuagint," 71-72), and these actions show him as loyal and speedily obedient to his king in terms of mobilizing all that's necessary to embark on a conquest of vengeance against Nebuchadnezzar's enemies. Schmitz, "Holofernes's Canopy in the Septuagint," 72, calls Holofernes "highly effective," and indeed he is. He is the kind of general that one would like on one's side. The narrative introduces Holofernes as an extremely competent military leader and a quintessential male hero (Schmitz, "Holofernes's Canopy in the Septuagint," 73), howbeit one who brutalizes all peoples before him and destroys their crops, livelihoods, places of worship, and lives.

chadnezzar in Assyria (2:4).⁷⁹ Both are portrayed as villainous men full of pride. First by association with Holofernes, Bagoas likewise is Israel's enemy; later Bagoas' own deeds and words establish that the text considers him as such.

Bagoas' textual introduction is probably intended for humour and emphasis. His name in Persian means *eunuch*.⁸⁰ So a translation would be "He said to Eunuch the eunuch in charge of his personal affairs, 'Go...'" (12:11). Bagoas' livelihood and life depend on Holofernes' success.⁸¹ As Holofernes' *aide de camp*, Bagoas holds a gatekeeper position; he controls access to the great general. The status, fortunes, and lives of the two entwine throughout the narrative and military campaign.⁸² The text recounts Holofernes' death specifically (12:8) and possibly indicates Bagoas' death as among those of the scattered army (14:5).

Bagoas displays the following characteristics: arrogance, pride, power, condescension, and anger. Like Holofernes, he is beguiled by Judith.⁸³ Bagoas is a villain,⁸⁴ trickster,⁸⁵ and traitor.⁸⁶ As a secondary character, he not only

⁷⁹ *Judith* opens with Nebuchadnezzar's action of sending out an invitation to many rulers to join him in attacking Arphaxad, ruler of the Medes from Ecbatana; some accept and some ignore him (Jdt 1:1, 6, 7-11) This opening corresponds to Propp's observation that a folktale usually begins with some sort of initial situation that is out of the ordinary. See Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 25.

⁸⁰ *Eunuch* is a Latin word that comes from the Greek word meaning *guarding* or *keeping the couch*. See Henry S. Gehman and John D. Davis, eds., *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 281.

⁸¹ Nebuchadnezzar king of Assyria is portrayed as an oriental despot. He sets himself up to conquer the world, to punish those who refuse his rulership, and to be the god over the world (6:2-4). The biblical text and outside texts give portraits of oriental despots. One such portrait appears in *The Persian Wars* by Herodotus. There, Amestris, the wife and queen consort of Xerxes, shows her power and her cruelty. Twice she buries alive seven children of prominent Persian noblemen. Herodotus writes, "I am informed that Amestris, the wife of Xerxes, when she had grown old, made return for her own life to the god who is said to be beneath the earth by burying twice seven children of Persians who were men of renown." See Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* (trans. George Rawlinson; New York: The Modern Library, 1942), 7.114.

⁸² Bal, *Narratology*, 36, notes that relationships between actors in a tale are very important.

⁸³ Deborah L. Gera, "Jewish Textual Traditions," in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (ed. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti and Henrike Lahne-mann; Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 24, writes that the glamorous Judith charms Holofernes "as well as his trusty eunuch Bagoas" by promising to deliver the Israelites to the Assyrians without an Assyrian being lost and through "God's help."

⁸⁴ Like Haman and Gabatha and Tharra in the Additions to Esther, Bagoas fulfills the role of villain because he seeks to disturb the happiness of many nations, Israel included, and seeks to do misfortune, damage, and harm to many (Propp, *Morphology*

speaks (12:13; 14:18) but also proves pivotal in significant plot twists.⁸⁷ For example, he arranges the banquet in which Holofernes entertains Judith; he creates a secluded enclave where his master's seduction can succeed; he finds the headless corpse of Holofernes; and he sets the tone for mourning the fallen leader by yelling, wailing, groaning, and ripping his clothes.

1 Bagoas as Foil to Holofernes

Bagoas proves a foil for two characters: his master Holofernes and Judith's silent, unnamed maid. Let us consider Holofernes first. Perhaps around the camp Bagoas mirrored Holofernes' swagger and misplaced self-confidence. After all, Holofernes successfully "cut his way through Put and Lud and plundered all the Rassisites and Ishmaelites living on the edge of the desert south of Cheleon" (2:23). Holofernes' other victories include setting fire to the tents of the Midianites and plundering their sheepfolds (2:26). The plain of Damascus likewise suffered, and fear and dread of Holofernes swept through the seacoast towns of Sidon and Tyre as well as among those living in Jamnia, Azotus, and Ascalon (2:27-28). By the time Holofernes neared Judea, he was in no mood to hear the warning of Achior the Ammonite against fighting the Israelites (5:5-21) and indeed considered it irrelevant and even treasonous (6:1-10). Arguably, his army and a personal servant like Bagoas follow his tone or even egg him on to more bravado and braggadocious talk (see 5:22-24).⁸⁸ Arguably, the string of

of the Folktale, 27). A hero seeks the good of others and pursues a cause larger than himself; a villain seeks ways to manipulate a situation to benefit himself.

⁸⁵ Watch for varieties of trickster characters in a folktale. Allan B. Chinen, *Beyond the Hero: Classic Stories of Men in Search of Soul* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933), 76, writes that the most common trickster is a good fellow—a mentor, therapist, teacher, or companion. In a sense, Bagoas is that to Holofernes: a trickster who seeks to please his master by arranging an assignation with the lovely Judith. Some tricksters lie, steal, cheat, and murder (Chinen, *Beyond the Hero*, 63). According to this definition, Judith and her maid are tricksters. In a sense because this is war, justification or "rightness" emerges as the one who wins: The text justifies Judith as a trickster, for she wins, while it shames Bagoas, a whining loser.

⁸⁶ Bal, *Narratology*, 35, argues that a traitor in appearance looks like a helper; Bagoas appears to help Judith in the camp by giving her access to the great general himself, Holofernes. He clearly is a theological traitor, for he fails to worship the God of Israel.

⁸⁷ Bagoas, as Holofernes' eunuch and the one in charge of his tent and gear, constantly evaluates his options. Bagoas controls access to Holofernes. Chinen, *Beyond the Hero*, 68, talks about a zero-sum perspective in which stealing is common in a trickster's mentality. Arguably, Bagoas weighs the access to Holofernes demanded by those in the camp daily in terms of costs and benefits to himself and to all the people surrounding Holofernes. Arguably, pleasing Bagoas is the first step in pleasing Holofernes.

⁸⁸ The text introduces the Assyrian army as invincible and concludes by holding it up to ridicule. Nicholas Sparks, *Dear John* (New York: Warner Books, 2006), 18-19,

victories proved the authenticity of Nebuchadnezzar's claim for world kingship and the invincibility of his general.

Next, taking his cue from Holofernes, Bagoas copies the general in his dealings with the people. He mirrors Holofernes' reaction to Judith: delight in her words and in her defection to the camp of the Assyrians (11:20-21).⁸⁹ Bagoas and Holofernes are part of the male acclaim united in responding to Judith's long speech: "In terms of beauty and brains, there is not another woman like this from one end of the earth to another!" (11:21). As males, they agree on Judith's beauty, wisdom, eloquence (11:23). As males they also see immediately what the text refrains from mentioning specifically: Judith's desirability, availability, vulnerability, and her lack of male protection. As a general, Holofernes likes her promise of Assyrian victory without Assyrian deaths (9:13; 11:18-19).

But all too sadly Bagoas mirrors Holofernes in his stupidity. A good subordinate—whether a slave, servant, or paid employee—must at times question the one in charge. This is for the good of the one in charge and for all concerned.⁹⁰ Tragically for his army and himself, Holofernes asks no questions of Judith. He believes her gracious words, a speech filled with double meanings and word plays (11:5-19). Thoroughly taken in by her beauty, brains, wisdom, and eloquence, Holofernes welcomes her into the camp, promising that if things work out as she has promised, then she "shall live in King Nebuchadnezzar's palace and be famous throughout the world" (11:23). If Bagoas really

writes of a crucial bonding and unity in modern military life that the Assyrians lacked. Modern military training makes a recruit grow up, take responsibility, and obey an order. A soldier works as a member of a team and knows that if he slips up, lives may be lost and expensive equipment destroyed. A soldier may not believe in the reasons for an order or in a battle's moral justification, but he does his job, according to Sparks, *Dear John*, 19, "for friendship. Not for country, not for patriotism, not because we're programmed killing machines, but because of the guy next to you. You fight for your friend, to keep him alive, and he fights for you, and everything about the army is built on this simple premise." The Assyrian army, when tested, was composed of 170,000-plus *individuals*. These men had not become a team; they were individuals who looted towns for booty and amassed a great deal of personal wealth (15:6-7).

⁸⁹ Judith's long speech is an example of a speaker's giving information which her listeners want to have (see Bal, *Narratology*, 131). She flatters their ears—if they are hearing anything at all as they gape, for the whole Assyrian camp agrees with the guard detail and is "struck by her beauty" (Jdt 10:14, 19).

⁹⁰ The Bible gives several examples of this. The servants of Naaman reason with their master, encouraging him to obey the simple message of the prophet Elisha to go, wash in the Jordan seven times (2 Kgs 5:13); Naaman obeys both prophet and his servants (and earlier the wish of the little Israelite slave girl) and is gloriously healed (2 Kgs 5:3, 14). An earlier example is Joab's stinging, truthful rebuke of David (2 Sam 19:1-7).

had had his master's best interests at heart, he would have asked questions. He would have been exceedingly suspicious of a beautiful woman in a tiara and her beautiful maid coming so surprisingly to the camp of the enemy at night.⁹¹ Judith, truly a *femme fatale*, soon reduces the conqueror of the world to drunken stupor, and in his vulnerable unconsciousness, beheads him.⁹² Finally, Bagoas mirrors Holofernes' sloppiness. Losing self-control, Holofernes acts without discretion (or suspicion!) toward one who is an enemy Israelite, the beautiful Judith.⁹³ Consequently, the text portrays the general, his army, and his eunuch as ridiculously and fatally blind to their peril from the enemy in their midst.⁹⁴

2 Bagoas as a Foil to Judith's Maid

Bagoas' counterpart is the unnamed, silent maid of Judith. Much can be learned about her from the various Hebrew words associated with her. She is called *abran*, meaning *graceful one* or *favorite slave* in Jdt 8:10, 33; 10:2, 5, 17; 13:9; 16:23. She is called *paidiske*, *maid*, in 10:10 and *doule*, *servant*, in 12:15, 19; 13:3.⁹⁵ As mentioned in our earlier article, in every way except verbosity she is Judith's counterpart, taking part with her mistress in a life-or-death adventure.⁹⁶ The text introduces the maid as someone Judith trusts and has placed "in charge of all her property" (8:10). Granted, Bagoas likewise is a slave and in charge of Holofernes' property. But Judith and her maid share a closeness the men lack: the text indicates the women are covenant believers in Israel's God and arguably pray together, or at least Judith lets her maid observe her and serve her in her chosen lifestyle of prayer, celibacy, fasting, and devotion to God (8:5-8; 10:1-6).⁹⁷

The comparison/contrast between Bagoas and the maid bears more study. Bagoas knows Holofernes likes to party (12:19-20; 13:1). The maid knows Judith enjoys a quiet life of prayer, fasting, seclusion, and restricted

⁹¹ For the possibility that the maid as well is beautiful, consider Jdt 10:19, the comment of the men throughout the camp: "Who can despise these people when they have such *women* among them?" (italics added).

⁹² See Esler, "Ludic History in the Book of Judith," 107.

⁹³ See DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 101. Judith refrains from excessive eating and drinking, while Holofernes indulges. Judith honors the God of Israel while Holofernes reinforces the claim that Nebuchadnezzar is god (Jdt 3:8; 6:2).

⁹⁴ Esler, "Ludic History in the Book of Judith," 138, puts it this way: "their mistake in not imagining that a *woman* could spin a web of deceit will prove a fatal one" (italics Esler's).

⁹⁵ See Carol Myers, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer, eds. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 362.

⁹⁶ See Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 405-407.

⁹⁷ See Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 405-407.

eating. Each prepares food.⁹⁸ Bagoas knows Holofernes likes wine and rich food; the maid knows that Judith eats selected food only once a day in the evening (12:19; 12:9). Each is a slave; but the maid receives manumission from Judith (16:23). Significantly, both know the sexual cycles and preferences of their masters. Judith prefers to stay a widow and remain celibate. Bagoas knows Holofernes is off his sexual cycle and needs sex—and enjoys a fresh conquest (8:4-8; 13:16; 16:21-22). Judith and her maid embark together on a daring, high-stakes quest; in this sense they are bonded together in a life-risking enterprise; conversely, the relationship between Holofernes and Bagoas evidences no such dependence or life-or-death commitment.⁹⁹

3 Bagoas and His Duties as Chamberlain

As the chamberlain in charge of Holofernes' military household, Bagoas is used to private conversations with his master. The text recounts one. As host to visitors and the leader of an army of 120,000 infantry and 12,000 mounted bowmen (2:15),¹⁰⁰ Holofernes has multiple duties that include battle strategy sessions, leading an army, and entertaining his highest staff. It also would be appropriate to entertain the beautiful defector who promises to lead his army through the heart of Judea to Jerusalem and assures victory without risking the life or limb of his men (11:19; 10:13).

Holofernes reveals to Bagoas his intention to seduce Judith.¹⁰¹ Holofernes wants her to come to an intimate banquet without his army commanders; he charges Bagoas to arrange all the details and to "persuade" Judith to attend (12:10-12). Holofernes indicates to Bagoas his view that Judith expects to be seduced and indeed will laugh with mockery if Holofernes fails to perform. Holofernes indicates his honour as a warrior in front of his thousands of men

⁹⁸ *Judith* shows kinship to *Daniel* in its observance of dietary laws. Judith's insistence on keeping her diet and eating her own food and abstaining from the rich diet of Holofernes would have a particular relevance to Jews living in the Dispersion "who laid great store by the observance of dietary laws as a distinguishing mark between themselves and the Gentiles" (Russell, *Between the Testaments*, 226). Tobit also refused to eat the food of the Gentiles when he was in Nineveh (Tob 1:10-11).

⁹⁹ See Craven, "Tradition and Convention in the Book of Judith," 60.

¹⁰⁰ The number increases to 170,000 infantrymen and 12,000 cavalry (7:2).

¹⁰¹ An interesting textual comparison emerges here concerning the instructions Holofernes and Judith give their servants. While there is textual evidence that Holofernes discusses his plans with Bagoas, there is none that Judith does the same with her maid. Yet, as discussed in our earlier article, the reader assumes that Judith not only discusses her plans with the maid but also gives the maid the option of going to the Assyrian camp and facing either death or success with her mistress. The maid chooses to accompany Judith and therefore, arguably, is equally a heroine and equally courageous. As stated in our article, arguably the maid "loves Judith and accompanies her voluntarily" (Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 406).

will be disgraced if the camp talk the following morning does not include evidence that the beautiful visitor welcomed his embrace. Holofernes is quite blunt in his instructions to Bagoas: "Go 'persuade' the Hebrew woman who is in your care to join us, and to eat and drink with us. For we will be disgraced if we let such a woman go without having her, because if we do not make her, she will laugh at us" (12:11).

Bagoas goes as commanded to Judith to invite her to dine with the general. He displays a silver tongue. His condescending speech reveals his arrogance. First, Bagoas mirrors his master's intimate chattiness when he says to Judith, "May this lovely maid not hesitate to come before my lord to be honored in his presence and to enjoy drinking wine with us and act today like one of the Assyrian women who serve in Nebuchadnezzar's palace" (12:13). Judith replies, "Who am I that I should refuse *my lord*? I will do whatever *he* desires right away, and it will be something to boast of until my dying day" (12:14) (italics added). Containing a word play on *my lord* and *he*, her response contains much irony, a noted folktale feature.¹⁰² Judith's response, because of her choices of physical chastity and celibacy and of spiritual chastity to the God of Israel, means the opposite of what Bagoas believes she says.¹⁰³

Let us continue looking at this meeting, for it is textually quite rich. Bagoas insults Judith in several ways. First, he insults her by not using the pronoun *you* and talking to her as if she is an object. Second he insults her by his familiarity, by giving her a nickname, *lovely maid*, without her consent. He then reveals his disdain for women, for he views Assyrian women as alive to serve the sexual needs of Assyrian men. He equates Judith with Nineveh courtesans. Third, he insults her by acknowledging her age and yet calling her a *lovely maid*. He knows Judith is not a virgin but a widow—and therefore (presumably) sexually experienced. Yet he seeks to flatter her by slicing years off her age. He calls her a *maid* (12:13).¹⁰⁴ Fourth, he insults her by letting her know that she is expected to be a courtesan like the Assyrian women; in mod-

¹⁰² See DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 89.

¹⁰³ The irony is the double meaning of *my lord*. The gallows humour is that Bagoas has no clue regarding Judith's plans and how he facilitates them! Bagoas takes Judith's reference to *my lord* to mean Holofernes, but Judith probably means the God of Israel. Citing this and other examples, Moore, *Judith*, 78, calls the book of Judith "quintessentially ironic" in its use of opposite meanings.

Bal, *Narratology*, 105, points out that characters in a story view the same facts differently. This certainly is true of the upcoming intimate banquet arranged by Bagoas and about to be attended by Holofernes and the beautiful, available widow, Judith.

¹⁰⁴ In contrast, Judith's own maid remains both anonymous and mute. Simply obeying, she neither flatters nor advises.

ern parlance, the Assyrian court seems to be filled with sex groupies.¹⁰⁵ His condescending manner indicates he views women as men's playthings. However, in a way Judith invites Bagoas' bad manners, for in front of an appreciative audience of men engaged in war, she already praised Holofernes as brave, experienced, and dazzling in the art of war (11:8). Her response to Bagoas seems to give Holofernes the chance to dazzle her in bed. No doubt Bagoas quickly relays her reply to the executive tent!

4 Bagoas as a Fool

Arriving for the intimate banquet, Judith steps upon lambskins spread by her maid and provided by Bagoas (12:15). The evening progresses; Holofernes drinks more than he has ever drunk on any other day of his life; Bagoas closes the tent from the outside and dismisses the weary servants (12:20; 13:1). Judith's maid alone remains nearby (13:9-10). Bagoas fails as a servant, for, in his attempt to be discreet, he leaves Holofernes unprotected. Bagoas' discretion allows Judith to behead Holofernes.

The text humorously depicts Bagoas as waiting patiently past sunrise for his master to emerge from his sexual conquest. Finally, duty demands that Bagoas must interrupt the (presumed) lovers. Notice the verbs; they convey his quick actions (14:14-16). He shakes the tent curtain, draws it aside, goes into the bedroom, and finds his master on top of the bedstool, a headless corpse! Bagoas suddenly acts quickly.¹⁰⁶ It is in his best interests to do so, and his actions show a distinct measure of self-protection. He lets out a yell, and successively adds wailing, groaning, and shouting to it; he rips his clothes. All in all, it's quite a convincing display of his surprise, outrage, and innocence. He immediately goes to Judith's tent, finds her and her maid missing, and rushes into the midst of the *people* (14:17) (*italics added*). *People* is significant: one expects the text to say *army*. However, this textual putdown indicates the disunity of what is trumped up to be the best fighting force in the world. This Assyrian fighting force cannot withstand a change-of-command at the top. The story quickly verifies the veracity of the insult.

¹⁰⁵ Moore, *Judith*, 224, observes that the term maid (*paidiske*) contains a wide range of meanings including maiden, servant, and prostitute. Moore, *Judith*, 224, adds that "Bagoas's request is, at least in the Greek, a very polite but subtle 'request' for Judith to serve Holofernes *as fully* as Nebuchadnezar's palace women serve their king" (*italics Moore's*).

¹⁰⁶ Bagoas' hesitant stand outside the tent of Holofernes smacks of humour. One can see the perplexity on his face. If he intrudes, does he provoke *coitus interruptus*? Would he come upon a lady displaying sexual satisfaction? Yet already the sun is well up! The camp is long bestirred! There is a war to fight! The Israelites at first light already have provoked skirmishes!

H CONCLUSION: JOAKIM, UZZIAH, AND BAGOAS AFFIRM JUDITH AS A REMARKABLE HEROINE

Judith gives a clear presentation of good versus evil and of right and wrong moral choices. Righteousness prevails.¹⁰⁷ The secondary characters offer clearly different world views. Bagoas joins the praise of Holofernes and the worship of Nebuchadnezzar and believes in the dominance of Assyria. Joakim and Uzziah remain steadfastly loyal to the God of Israel. Amazingly, little Bethulia defeats mighty Nineveh.

In divergent ways, Joakim, Uzziah, and Bagoas as secondary characters affirm aspects of Judith's heroism and recognize her as a savior of her nation and Jerusalem. Arguably the three men are middle aged. Each has what may be termed as an "initiation into the feminine."¹⁰⁸

Although Joakim is a one-dimensional flat character and does not grow throughout the story, he displays some strong points and no weak points. His strong point is his function. His credibility rests on others' acknowledgment of his national leadership as high priest.

Furthermore, Joakim's prolific praise of Judith is textually significant for it acknowledges that he and others certainly gain from Judith's heroism (15:8-10). Certainly many people, and probably Joakim himself, owe their lives to her.¹⁰⁹ The temple in Jerusalem is spared. The people are not slaughtered, raped, sold into slavery, or exiled. Indeed, the opposite happens: the siege makes Israel rich because of the booty the Assyrians left. Clearly, Joakim's words acknowledge an established fact: Judith is a heroine, for Jerusalem is saved.¹¹⁰ She is a political savior.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Reading canonically, righteousness also prevails in Elijah's decree of no rain and his plea for the restoration of life of the widow's son (1 Kgs 17); Abraham's intercession for Sodom (Gen 18:16-33); Job's restoration (Job 42 especially vv. 12-17); Jesus' willingness to heal the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13); and the restoration of life of Tabitha/Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42).

¹⁰⁸ Chinen, *Beyond the Hero*, 33-34, points out that many heroes and villains encounter strong women characters in their mid-years.

¹⁰⁹ Judith and her deeds truly are the stuff of legends. It could well be that the beautiful, chaste Judith became such an icon in her own lifetime that much personal lore grew up around her; this lore became told as truth (see Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore*, 92).

¹¹⁰ Lisa S. Cahill, "Christian Character, Biblical Community and Human Values," in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. William P. Brown; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 3-17 (7, 10) a Christian ethicist, notes that communal formation of individual identity takes place in stories in the Bible. The Bible refrains from producing a specific set of moral rules but is nonetheless authoritative. Instead, it offers both its Jewish and Christian communities what Cahill, "Christian Character, Biblical Community, and

Uzziah, the Bethulian magistrate, though swayed by the populace, is more courageous than Joakim. He (somewhat) withstands the people's displeasure and pressure. Actually, his vacillation establishes his humanity. He does not know what to do except to give God a deadline. As it turns out, God works well within a deadline! Most significantly, Uzziah recognizes Judith's leadership and lets her lead. Once again, God works in unusual, creative, and dramatic ways.¹¹²

Well then, is Uzziah a hero or a coward? I would call him a flawed hero. Yes, he agrees to send two women unescorted into harm's way in enemy territory. But he also agrees not to ask Judith questions. Pragmatic, he knows people are expendable in a war. I commend him for his ability to share leadership.¹¹³ Judith and her maid would not have been able to leave Bethulia without his order to open the gates. I commend him for his unabashed, public praise of Judith and his ability to recognize the accomplishments and courage of another.¹¹⁴

Bagoas, the chamberlain/eunuch of Holofernes and by far the most interesting of the book's secondary characters, unknowingly serves an important narrative purpose. Bagoas validates Judith's action in a way that resonates around the known world. He affirms his own supervision of the tent of his master: he knows he left it secured; he knows none entered its confines for hours. The text already has established his credibility and status. Consequently, when he shouts, "The slaves have duped us! A single, Hebrew woman has brought shame on the House of King Nebuchadnezzar. Look! Holofernes is lying on the ground! And his head is missing!" (14:18), he is quickly believed.

Human Values," 10, calls general values, principles and virtues; these reflect, according to their communities, God's self-disclosure of himself based on his character traits in Exod 34:5-6 and his ongoing disclosure of himself in Jesus.

¹¹¹ Branch, *Jeroboam's Wife*, 19-30, 31-62, 63-82, the chapters on Miriam, Rizpah, and the Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah

¹¹² See Joshua A. Berman, *Narrative Analogy in the Hebrew Bible: Battle Stories and Their Equivalent Non-battle Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 88, who notes that God varies his responses in Judges to the people's cries for deliverance from responding quickly to responding but only after a delay. In the story of Judith, deliverance comes, but deliverance is delayed. In *Judges* and *Judith* and indeed throughout the Bible, there is no neat formula for a quick or successful answer to prayer. Instead, the biblical text indicates God handles each situation differently in a way that brings him the most glory.

¹¹³ In this, he resembles Barnabas, a much later figure who although an apostle, prophet, good man, full of the Holy Spirit and leader of the church at Antioch, took a second seat to Paul during what is called the first missionary journey and did not seem to mind at all (Acts 13 ff.) (see Robin G. Branch, "Barnabas: A Model of Ethical Encouragement," *In die Skriflig* 41/2 (2007): 295-322).

¹¹⁴ Saul, in contrast, could not do this. He hated David for David's successes (see 1 Sam 18:8-9, 28-29).

In fact, such is his credibility that the ripple effect of his announcement is astonishing. Officers tear their clothes; enlisted men quiver with fear and on common impulse break rank, desert, and "escape along every path in the plain and the hill country" (14:19-15:1-2).

When he sees the headless corpse, Bagoas immediately realizes Judith and her maid have succeeded on several levels: Judith has humiliated Holofernes and the Assyrian army by killing Holofernes with his own sword, in his own tent, in his own bed, and surrounded by his own Assyrian army. She and her maid have successfully escaped through the camp and carry the missing head as proof. The women, unarmed, duped the mighty Assyrian army; the women came to deceive and succeeded. In short, Judith and her maid successfully shame Holofernes; Bagoas, his chamberlain-eunuch; and the Assyrian army.¹¹⁵ The God of Israel wins over Nebuchadnezzar, the god of the Assyrians. It is a stunning triumph.

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¹¹⁵ *Judith* is told in terms of honour and shame. This philosophy, noted for its winner-take-all stakes, contains no double winners. Judith employed a strategy for keeping honor, won, and in the process shamed those in the political game pitted against her. For a fine description of the shame/honor motif see DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 99. Significantly, *Judith's* writer, probably a Palestinian Jew (DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 90), commends Judith's conduct, methods, and success.

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Robin Gallaher Branch is Extraordinary Associate Professor with the Unit for Reformed Theology and the Development of the South African Society with the Faculty of Theology at North-West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa. She is Professor of Biblical Studies, Victory University, 255 North Highland, Memphis, Tennessee 38111, USA; Email: rgbranch@victory.edu.