

*Representing Judith in Early Modern French Literature*. Kathleen M. Llewellyn. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014. 150 pp. \$104.95.

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Kathleen Llewellyn's recent offering, *Representing Judith in Early Modern French Literature*, is one of the latest additions to Ashgate's prolific series Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. The long descriptive title of the book fails to stress the impressive scope and the variety of texts to be explored in this first full-length study dedicated to the exploitation of the biblical figure of Judith in French texts of the late fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries.

As presented in the introduction, the objective of the study is to reveal attitudes toward women in France during the early modern period through the modalities of representation of the biblical heroine mostly based on the text of the Latin Vulgate, the most accessible form of the Bible in France during the sixteenth-century. The author offers a short but useful abstract of the book of Judith as a prologue to her study. Throughout the entire book the author is very meticulous at providing the original French text of the works being analyzed as well as their English translations, the only exception being the text of the Vulgate, for which the French translation is systematically provided, but the original Latin version remains absent.

In her study, Llewellyn proceeds chronologically, beginning with an exploration of *Le mystère de Judith et Holofernés*, a mystery play of the late fifteenth century attributed to the *Grand rhétoriqueur* Jean Molinet. In this first analysis, Llewellyn successfully argues, examining the play through the lens of metadrama, that Molinet neutralizes the problematic aspect of the representation of Judith as a strong, subversive female character, legitimizing her aberrant behavior in representing it as "staged," thus definitely not offering the widow of Bethulia as an exemplar of feminine behavior. The following chapter examines the role of vision and the use of narrative framing in Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas's epic poem entitled *La Judit*. Llewellyn makes the case that Judith is used by the Huguenot Du Bartas as a symbol for the Reformed church. It is Llewellyn's contention that to render its representation more effective, Du Bartas alternates the perspective adopted in the narrative framing between Judith and Holofernes, making them subsequently observer and observed, spectator and spectacle. Although the author's demonstration is convincing, one can only wonder why the motif of vision, or the gaze, strongly associated with the heritage of Petrarchan poetry and so profoundly influential in French poetic production throughout the sixteenth century, is never mentioned in the analysis, especially considering that Judith is presented as inverting the traditional dynamic of objectification between male and female subjects.

The fourth chapter explores a text not intended for publication, *Imitation de la victoire de Judich*, by the very little known female poet Gabrielle de Coignard. Llewellyn chooses to explore the devotional poem through the perspective of the creation of communities: first the community formed by Judith and the city of Bethulia, then the

feminine community established by Judith and her servant Abra, and finally the community formed by Judith and Gabrielle de Coignard herself. Llewellyn eloquently demonstrates that Coignard is indeed presenting Judith as a model, or as an exemplum of feminine chastity, devotion, and humility, offering the widowed author a much desired sense of belonging. The fifth chapter deals with the theatrical exploitation of the biblical character in Pierre Heyn's *Le miroir des veuves: Tragédie sacrée d'Holoferne & Judith*. Heyn's highly allegorical and didactic play openly proposes the character of Judith as an exemplar, simultaneously and paradoxically of vices, occurring offstage and only to be heard of, and virtues, seen and heard on the stage for the greater edification of the spectators.

The sixth and final chapter explores the exploitation of Judith in French written sermons by preachers from the sixteenth to the early seventeenth century. The variety of written sermons solicited in this part of the study include many examples illustrating the rich complexity and the great variations in the interpretation of the book of Judith and its main character, sometimes presented as an exemplar worthy of imitation, and often as a counterexample, or at the very least as a figure of ambiguous merit.

In *Representing Judith*, Llewellyn displays great familiarity and grasp of the scholarship dedicated to gender studies in French literature of the early modern period. On the other hand, the author has made the choice to leave aside more traditional and perhaps less exciting but nevertheless important questions such as the influence of the poetics of imitation and the production of biblical paraphrase, which were in flux and at the center of authorial preoccupations during the time period examined in the study. Nonetheless, this book has great merit and should be part of the library of all readers interested in questions of gender representation and/or biblical influence in early modern French literature.

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