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A Reconsideration of the Madonna and the Whore: Portrayals of Judith and Holofernes from the Renaissance to Contemporaneity

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyze and support the sociohistorical notion of the biblical icon Judith as a deliverer of justice. Her biblical origin details her triumphs as a warrior for God against the lustful Holofernes, whom she slays to free her fellow Israelites from their Assyrian enemy. Representations of Judith from the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods often portray her as pious, in a manner similar to the Virgin Mary, whereas Modern and Contemporary depictions show her as strong, without proximity to Holofernes. Therefore, a reconsideration of the Madonna-Whore Complex will be implemented in the visual analysis of the works of Donatello, Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi, Gustav Klimt, and Kehinde Wiley. Although Freud's work can be considered dated and sexist, this specific idea is relevant to the featured representations of Judith as they either conform to modestia, a Catholic set of moral rules, or push against it. This limited categorization of women can often be seen in depictions of Judith as either a pious servant of God or as a sexualized temptress. Even though this binary of Judith is outdated, it can be applied to Medieval and Renaissance images. In contrast, Modern and Contemporary works show Judith breaking these barriers. The Madonna-Whore Complex can be applied to Medieval Christian art with Judith as a servant of God; Renaissance images of Judith as a pious warrior against tyranny; Baroque representations of Judith as both virgin and strumpet; Modern depictions of Judith maintaining the strength of a warrior for God in the wake of Nazism; and the Contemporary image of Judith as a deliverer of justice against racial inequality in art history and American history, politics, economic structures, and social spheres.

1. Introduction

Since its artistic conception, the image of Judith beheading Holofernes has been used as a sociopolitical statement. Judith's biblical origins show her as a symbol of piety. The Renaissance, Baroque, Modern, and Contemporary depictions of Judith show her with various ornamentation that shifts her iconography to that of a warrior. Through the struggle between Judith's biblical origins, accepted iconography and the artistic interpretations can be seen related to the concepts of the Madonna and the whore. The Madonna-Whore Complex was coined by Sigmund Freud and states that women fit in one of two categories: the maternal saint or the lustful sinner.[1]

According to Freud, women's desirability and moral purity are mutually exclusive. These two categories, however, are dependent upon a woman's performance of and conformation to gender roles. The Madonna-Whore Complex is directly linked to Catholicism and a traditional set of moral rules called *modestia* which placed expectations of obedience, decorum, and restraint upon women. *Modestia* was used by the Church and its members to restrict women to the domestic, or private, sphere without freedom of mind nor body. The consequence for defying *modestia* was being branded a whore and potentially being excommunicated from the Church.[2] Although Freud's work can be considered dated and sexist, this specific idea is relevant to the featured representations of Judith as they either conform to *modestia* or push against it.

The Madonna-Whore Complex states that women who are sexually and morally pure are respected but not desired, whereas women who are sexually promiscuous are desired but not respected. The Complex originated in reference to male sexual dysfunction regarding their wives, whom they respected but did not desire.[3] This limited categorization of women can often be seen in depictions of Judith as either a pious servant of God or as a sexualized temptress especially in the eras prior to the development of feminist philosophy and women's civil rights movements. While this binary view of Judith seems to us today to be outdated, Modern and Contemporary works show Judith breaking these barriers. The Madonna-Whore complex can be applied to Medieval Christian art with Judith as servant of God; Renaissance images of Judith as a pious warrior; Baroque representations of Judith as both virgin and strumpet; Modern depictions of Judith maintaining the strength of a warrior for God; and the Contemporary images of Judith as a deliverer of justice.

The first work discussed in depth in this paper will be Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes,* 1457-1464, of the Renaissance period. Judith's pose of strength in this bronze sculpture is not accidental; it is a purposeful portrayal of victory over tyranny, originally created in fifteenth-century Italy to align the Medici family with the ideals of Florentine Republic. This statue was later co-opted by the Florentine Republic with its meaning inverted to serve as a symbol of victory and a warning to the Medici family. The second work critically analyzed will be Caravaggio's oil on canvas painting *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1598-1599, of the Baroque period. The third work, also Baroque, to be analyzed is Artemisia Gentileschi's oil on canvas *Judith Slaying Holofernes,* 1620-1621. The fourth work to be spotlighted is Gustav Klimt's modernist *Judith I,* 1901. Kehinde Wiley's *Judith and Holofernes*, 2012, is the fifth work to be explored in detail.

While the works of Caravaggio and Gentileschi may seem to be parallel stylistically, Judith's depiction in each work is incredibly distinct. Caravaggio's Judith has an innocent demeanor, as if unsure of her plan to slay Holofernes. Gentileschi's Judith is more confident, with an expression of conviction, visible cleavage, and her maid portrayed as a similar age. These works are separated only by twenty years, yet there is a polarity between the pieces, which the British art history scholar Marcia Pointon argues is due to the gender of the artists.[4] Caravaggio's depiction is reminiscent of how she is portrayed in the Bible, as a pious virgin. Gentileschi's depiction foreshadows later portrayals of Judith, such as Klimt's *Judith I,* and shows Holofernes' decapitated head partially in the composition and Judith nude, not in a sexualized manner, but in an expression of victory and pride. This emphasis of victory is represented by Judith being the focus of this piece, with Holofernes not equally sharing this space. Through her partially nude presentation, Klimt's Judith breaks the barriers of *modestia;* this theme continues through Modernism and into Contemporary depictions. Wiley's contemporary *Judith and Holofernes* portrays a reclamation of Black women's place in art history. This controversial artwork serves as commentary on racial inequality not only in the arts, but also in historical and present-day American politics, economic structures, and social spheres. By shattering binary stereotypes of Black women and portraying a Black woman's strength in the absence of pain and trauma, Wiley pushes past the barriers of *modestia* and re-contextualizes them in a way that considers intersectionality. Through visual analyses, the sociohistorical notion of Judith as an icon of power will be supported.

Prior to visual and historical analysis, a summary of the biblical story of Judith and Holofernes will provide context for each artwork's significance. This paper will critically examine and contextualize the sociopolitical and historical implications of a select number of artworks depicting Judith beheading Holofernes, providing a visual analysis of each work including its relation to its intended message. It will also provide evidence that Judith's image has been adapted to portray women in the time periods represented and support the notion that Judith serves as a catalyst for socio-historical progress and justice. Within these representations, examples are found of Judith as a symbol of Florentine unity, Judith as a symbol of Jewish strength in the advent of Nazism, and Judith as a warrior over structural and direct racist violence.

2. The Book of Judith

The Book of Judith is a book in Old Testament canon, specifically that of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity.[5] Although Judith was Jewish, the Book of Judith was excluded from the Hebrew Bible, known as the Tanakh. Italian Renaissance and Baroque scholar Elena Ciletti and Medieval scholar Henrike Lähnemann suggest this exclusion is due to Judith's sexuality in relation to the gaze of Holofernes, despite being praised for her virtue and chastity later during the Renaissance and Reformation in Europe.[6] Judith's status as a seductress who has been gifted beauty and wisdom by God is central to her story since it is the method in which she was able to defeat the Assyrians by decapitating the lustful Holofernes in his tent. Judith's image as a femme fatale is considered the reason for the exclusion of the Book of Judith from the Bible, since Judith's beauty and desirability threatened orthodox ideas of

sanctity. The conventional view of a woman of Judith's unapologetic eroticism is that of Eve, the enchantress who corrupts the world by introducing sin. However, in the Book of Judith, Judith's sensuality saves Israel, the city of God. Art historian Margarita Stocker observes that the stories of Adam and Eve oppose Judith and Holofernes since the roles of sinful woman versus holy man are reversed. In this way, the story of Judith and Holofernes threatened the conciseness of the parables.[7]

The Book of Judith identifies Judith as a Jewish widow who is upset with her fellow Israelites for not trusting that God will save them from the oppression of their Assyrian enemies who seek to conquer their homeland. Judith, in the company of her maid, travel to the enemy Assyrian camp of General Holofernes. Holofernes is struck by Judith's beauty and invites her to his tent to seduce her. Upon arriving at his tent, Holofernes falls asleep in a drunken episode and Judith decapitates him, which leaves the Assyrian army without a leader, thus saving the Israelites from Assyrian conquest.[8] The Book of Judith refers to Judith as being blessed above all other women on the earth, indicating that Judith was held in high regard for her actions. The Book of Judith 13:12-13:20 details the return of Judith and her maid to Israel stating:

> When the people of her town heard her voice, they hurried down to the town gate and summoned the elders of the town. They all ran together, both small and great, for it seemed unbelievable that she had returned. They opened the gate and welcomed them. Then they lit a fire to give light and gathered around them. Then she said to them with a loud voice, "Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!"
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> Then she pulled the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, "See here, the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction, and that he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me." All the people were greatly astonished. They bowed down and worshiped God, and said with one accord, "Blessed are you our God, who have this day humiliated the enemies of your people." Then Uzziah said to her, "O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all other women on earth; and blessed be the Lord God, who created the heavens and the earth, who has guided you to cut off the head of the leader of our enemies. Your praise will never depart from the hearts of those who remember the power of God. May God grant this to be a perpetual honor to you, and may he reward you with blessings, because you risked your own life when our nation was brought low, and you averted our ruin, walking in the straight path before our God." And all the people said, "Amen. Amen."[9]

This passage from the Book of Judith details Judith's celebrated return, but most importantly it asserts her importance and directly places her above all other women on earth. It is important to note that Uzziah's statement could be considered reminiscent to the Hail Mary prayer due to its lifting of Judith above all other women on earth; the Hail Mary prayer also lifts the Virgin as the most important woman on earth. This statement to Judith affirms her biblical significance as a servant of God.

3. Servant of God: Judith in Medieval Christian Art and Literature

The Book of Judith as well as Medieval Christian writings often paint Judith as a victor over sin and a champion of chastity, likening her to the Virgin Mary. After the Protestant Reformation in Europe, the Catholic Counter-Reformation embraced Judith as a virgin figure to maintain its religious stronghold. The image of the Virgin Mary crushing the serpent's head became symbolically similar to Judith decapitating Holofernes. The fifteenth-century painting *Annunciation of Holofernes Virgin Mary* (Fig. 1) by Giovanni Caroto serves as evidence for this alignment between Judith and the Virgin Mary, with the Virgin looking down upon Judith with an expression of grace while Judith is shown as a warrior holding the head of Holofernes. Since *Annunciation of Holofernes Virgin Mary* shows Judith as a Madonna, it traditionally conforms to *modestia* and reinforces the idea of a pious woman being chaste.

Figure 1 - Giovanni Caroto, *Annunciation of Holofernes Virgin Mary*, 15th Century. Oil on canvas, 280 cm x 142 cm (110 in x 55.9 in), Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy.
https://jstor.org/stable/community.13593035

Genesis 3:15 states, *Ipsa conteret caput tuum*, which translates to, "She shall crush thy head."[10] This biblical prophecy served as confirmation of her religious importance as an agent of God, in a similar way that the Virgin Mary was, to deliver Christians from the devil.[11] Several saints wrote about Judith being a savior of Christianity during this time, with Saint Jerome rejoicing, "The chain of the curse is broken. Death came through Eve, but life came through Mary… Then chaste Judith once more cut off the head of Holofernes."[12] This quote from Saint Jerome is crucial to Judith's biblical iconography since it places her as the curse breaker of original sin by being victorious over lust.

The Counter-Reformation popularity of Judith led to the Book of Judith being declared dogmatic during the Council of Trent. Since Judith was a widow, she was expected to live chastely for the rest of her life. Her victory over Holofernes emphasizes the importance of not succumbing to lust and remaining abstinent for unmarried and widowed women. Although Judith weaponized Holofernes' lust to her advantage, she remained virtuous and God's will was enacted via Holofernes' death, affirming the divine importance of Judith's actions.[13]

Scholar of religious art Diane Apostolos-Cappadona observes how the image of Judith as the female warrior archetype differs from her portrayal in early Christian art. Judith's original image was chaste, with modest dress, representative of her status as a Jewish widow.[14] Medieval representations of Judith relied on *modestia* to communicate ideas of women and piety within the Catholic Church and European society. This can be seen in various representations of Judith in stained glass and illuminated manuscripts as both a virgin figure and a warrior, which can be attributed to her Renaissance popularity. The illuminated manuscript *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Fig. 2) (1287-1300) shows Judith in the act of decapitating Holofernes, with ornamental gold and vine illustration surrounding the scene.

Figure 2 - Unknown (Italian), *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1287-1300. Gold and pigment on unknown surface, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York City, New York.
https://jstor.org/stable/community.14732324

This manuscript, like *Annunciation of Holofernes Virgin Mary,* portrays Judith in a traditionally pious way: in a long gown with no skin exposed beyond her hands, forearms, and face. Illuminated manuscripts tended to be ornamented, and this manuscript does not break tradition with its gold leaf decoration around the scene. Apostolos-Cappadona

asserts that Judith's calm nature in such illuminated manuscripts shows that she is the servant of God. This divine guidance established Judith's iconography as being similar to the Virgin Mary, who was also a servant of God.[15]

4. Renaissance Reinvention: Judith, the Medici, and the Republic of Florence

Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bard, known as Donatello (1386-1466), was an Italian sculptor during the Renaissance. The Renaissance, spanning the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, was a period of social, political, and cultural change which began in Italy and intended to revive classical Greek philosophy, art, and architecture.[16] This revival of classical themes is evident in the work of Donatello. Donatello was born and died in Florence, Italy, where he was trained in bronze casting, with much of his most significant work being commissioned and currently on display within the region. His first works were a few sculptures in the Cathedral of Florence, also known as the Duomo due to its self-supporting dome structure. Largely, Donatello's works were religious in subject matter, with most of his works being commissioned for cathedrals throughout Florence. Finnish-Swedish art historian Osvald Sirén argues that Donatello not only adopted Classical aesthetics, but his works also show a spiritual relationship between new and old masters. Despite his Classical influences, Donatello invented a new form of sculpture called *schiacciato*, a technique of flattened relief sculpture that appears two-dimensional to the viewer but is in fact three-dimensional. *Schiacciato* reliefs are often shallowly carved in order to give the effect of flatness.[17] Features such as free movement of form and clothing, naturalistic facial features, and a composition inspired by Classical Roman sculpture helped elevate Donatello above his peers.[18]

Italian Renaissance scholar Christopher Fulton argues that Donatello also shaped the art of the Renaissance due to the political charge of his works.[19] Donatello is most known for his sculptures *David*, 1408-1409, and *Judith and Holofernes*, 1457-1464, in Florence. Both sculptures were commissioned by Florence's ruling Medici family and used as political propaganda during the early sixteenth century, which largely contributed to Donatello's popularity during the remainder of the Renaissance period.[20]

Figure 3 - Donatello, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1457-1464. Sculpture. Bronze, 236 cm (93 in), Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, Italy.
https://jstor.org/stable/community.14505729

Judith's image during Renaissance Europe was generally used as a political tactic. Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* (Fig. 3) was commissioned by the Medici family to co-opt and manipulate themes of the Florentine Republic. This bronze sculpture stands over seven and a half feet tall, its size indicating its significance. The Medici family rose to power in Florence through commerce, establishing the Medici Bank in 1397 and becoming official Papal bankers in 1412. The family ruled as elite from 1434 until 1494 and as crowned monarchs of Florence for almost two centuries from 1532 until 1737 when the last of the Medici Grand Ducal line Anna Maria Luisa de'Medici (1667-1743) died.

A series of unsuccessful military conquests as well as power struggles with the Florentine Republic weakened the family's position as Florentine elite. During their reign, the Medicis were exiled once in the late fourteenth century as well as the early fifteenth century. During the lifespan of Cosimo de'Medici (1389-1464), the Florentine Republic was experiencing an increase in an opposing political force, mostly rival elite families seeking to weaken Medici influence.[21] The first Medici exile was due to Cosimo's failure to conquer the nearby Republic of Lucca. This failed military conquest weakened Florence's political power, resulting in Cosimo's exile. In 1478, the regency saw an

attempt to be thrown out of power through the Pazzi conspiracy, organized by rival Pazzi and Salviati families. The Pazzi conspirators were later publicly hung by the Medici family. Cosimo's great-grandson Piero di Lorenzo de'Medici (1472-1503) came into power following his father's death and was ousted by a coup d'état two years into his reign. Once the crown had fled Florence, the Republic publicly executed five men who were attempting to put Piero de'Medici back into power. After his secession, he was exiled in 1494 until his death nine years later. The family was exiled the second time for a total of sixteen years before regaining control from the Florentine Republic in 1512.

In the sixteenth century, the monarchs saw just as much resistance to their rule as they did during the fifteenth century. The family was signed into official power of Florence with the constitution of 1532 which named Alessandro de'Medici (1510-1537) Duke of the Florentine Republic. Five years later, Alessandro was assassinated at the hands of anti-Medici factions taking power of Florence. The sovereigns were out of power for three years until regaining control of Florence in 1540.[22]

Despite their political failures in the late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries, the House of Medici were prominent in artistic sponsorship during the Renaissance. The family used *Judith and Holofernes* to align themselves with the Florentine Republic to manipulate the public's perceptions of them as oligarchic tyrants into egalitarian officeholders. Members of the Medici family held various positions in public office from 1434 until 1487 so that their power within the state would be concealed.[23] *Judith and Holofernes* shows Judith as the virtuous servant of justice.

In this work, Donatello presents Judith as fully clothed, wearing a veil which covers her entire body, whereas Holofernes is presented partially nude.[24] Donatello's placement of the figures of Judith and Holofernes is not accidental; Judith is seen standing, holding a sword overtop Holofernes' head, while Holofernes is sitting below her on a cushion. Their positions are significant, since they both affirm Judith's biblical iconography as a chaste warrior and Holofernes as a personification of lust, representing good and evil.[25] Judith's representation as a chaste warrior resisting lust is indicative of early Renaissance society conforming to ideas of *modestia*, and the Medici family's acknowledgement of traditional portrayals of piety.

Scholar of Italian art Sarah Blake McHam suggests that the inscriptions on the base of *Judith and Holofernes* are essential to understanding the sculpture's original message. The statue stood in the Medici palace courtyard and garden until 1495 when the Medicis were expelled from Florence the first time. The original base inscription reads: "Kingdoms fall through luxury; cities rise through virtues. Behold the neck of pride severed by the hand of humility."[26] This inscription served to contextualize the original decapitation. The statue features a second base inscription reading, "The salvation of the state. Piero de'Medici son of Cosimo dedicated this statue of a woman both to liberty and to fortitude, whereby the citizens with unvanquished and constant heart might return to the republic."[27] McHam argues that the additional inscriptions on the statue's base were propaganda to appeal to the Florentine Republic and remain in power.

When the statue was removed from the Medici courtyard and garden in 1495, the Florentine Republic installed *Judith and Holofernes* in front of its central house of government, the Palazzo della Signoria. The republic's success in 1494 at exiling the Medicis was widely celebrated, and they sought to embrace the true meaning of the symbolism originally associated with Donatello's statue. The base inscription was changed by the Republic to read, "An exemplar of the public good. The citizens installed it here in 1495."[28] This new inscription signaled the Republic's victory over Medici reign. The Republic aligned themselves with Judith's image as a warrior of justice, which they saw reflected in their political ambitions.

As previously mentioned, the Medici family officially regained power from the republic in 1530. The Medicis once again, in 1545, co-opted a heroic image over a monster for their own gain, but this time with the genders reversed. Cosimo I de'Medici (1519-1574) commissioned *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, 1545, (Fig. 4) a bronze sculpture by Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571).

Figure 4 - Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, 1545. Bronze, 71.5 cm x 24.5 cm (28 in x 9.6 in), Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence, Italy.
https://jstor.org/stable/community.14732324

The statue was situated on the Piazza della Signoria at the Loggia dei Lanzi, where Perseus stands today on Medusa's body, forever representing the defeat of the Florentine Republic. This statue is not as large as *Judith and Holofernes* since it stands only a little bit over two feet tall. McHam states that the reversal of gender in the victor from Judith to Perseus is significant because it represents Judith's power being taken from her by a man.[29] It is important to note that Perseus' appearance in this sculpture greatly differs Judith's appearance by Donatello, since Perseus' nudity directly contrasts Judith's pious dress. Medusa, however, is shown with exposed breasts, which suggests she is lustful in a similar way as Holofernes or Eve, therefore contributing to the notion of women being responsible for original sin.[30] This is arguably representative of sexist double standards for men and women regarding ideas of chastity during the sixteenth century and throughout history. The reversal of gender roles becomes pronounced in later representations of Judith and Holofernes.

5. Caravaggio versus Gentileschi: Judith in the Baroque Period

Michelangelo de Merisi, known as Caravaggio (1571-1610), born in Milan, Italy and died in Porto Ercole, Italy, rose to fame during the early seventeenth century in Italy.[31] Caravaggio apprenticed under Italian painter Simone Peterzano (1535-1599) from 1584 to 1588. He stayed in Milan until 1592, before fleeing to Rome after multiple brawls and legal troubles. While in Rome, Caravaggio worked for Giuseppe Cesari (1568-1640), a Roman painter who had a workshop there. After leaving Cesari's workshop in 1594, Caravaggio's work experienced a shift from arguable homoerotic paintings into strong themes of spirituality, exhibited by paintings of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, Judith and Holofernes, Mary Magdalene, and other icons. In 1606, Caravaggio left Rome for Naples, reportedly having murdered a man in Rome and fleeing the scene. While in Naples, an attempt was taken on his life; despite reports of his death, he appeared soon after with his face severely disfigured. This disfigurement arguably contributed to a shift in subject matter for Caravaggio, with his focus now being on the meek, exposing the vulnerability of the human condition. In 1610, traveling by boat to receive a pardon from Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1577-1633) for his crimes in Rome, Caravaggio died mysteriously.[32]

Art historian Pamela Jones credits Caravaggio as one of the originators of the Baroque style.[33] The Baroque period lasted from the early seventeenth century into the nineteenth century. Baroque art can be identified by its dramatic nature, such as intense contrast in value, movement, richness of color, and theatricality. Baroque art differs from art of the Renaissance in its ornamentation and grandeur, whereas Renaissance art was attempting to create more naturalistic art in the pursuit of fusing Christianity with science.[34]

Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin suggests that signifiers of the Renaissance artistic style are linearity, with all parts coordinated equally to constitute the whole, the scenes are closed off from the observer, and artworks are clear from all points of view. Wölfflin suggests the Baroque design follows Renaissance style but he clarifies that it is set in depth, meaning that the artwork itself does not appear flat and uses light and contrast to create such depth, so the eye follows the work by the subordinated parts that add up to constitute the whole, and works are clear from a restricted point of view.[35]

Caravaggio's influence on Italian art of the Baroque period is referred to as *caravaggesque*, referring to several critical visual aspects of Baroque art such as the techniques *chiaroscuro* which uses brightly contrasted light as a

spotlight to bring figures into the foreground and *tenebrism* which uses severe shadowing to bring figures forward from dark backgrounds. Other conventions of *caravaggism* include painting figures and compositions directly onto the canvas without drawn outlines, and replacing idealized, grand representations of nobility with saints and devout Christians.[36]

Caravaggio brings Judith to life in the painting *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (Fig. 5) (1598-1599), inspired by a century of rule by women in Europe. This oil on canvas painting measures roughly a little over four and a half feet in height and over six feet in width. With figures smaller than life-size, Caravaggio's piece arguably disconnects itself from reality in the eyes of the viewer. Since it is smaller than other artworks of Judith and Holofernes, it does not carry the same implications of power. Although gender began to play less of a role in Judith's image due to the shifting public sphere of the Renaissance, Caravaggio depicts her in her original biblical piety.[37] In this work, Judith is separated from Holofernes by the oil painting's central verticality.[38] Judith is not only set apart from Holofernes by composition, but also by the artist's use of light and darkness, by the division of gender on either side of the composition, and by body language.

Figure 5 - Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1598-1599. Oil on canvas, 145 cm × 195 cm (57 in × 77 in), National Gallery of Ancient Art, Rome, Italy.
https://jstor.org/stable/community.13888990

As noted by Stocker, Holofernes is presented in awkward pain and Judith is shown as unsure, with a furrowed brow signifying confusion. In this way, Caravaggio's Judith is shown as a literal representation of virtue and piety; she is young, innocent, and the only figure dressed in white. The portrayal of age plays a critical role in the painting: Judith's youth is directly related to her divinity and her maid is shown as a stereotypical crone, corrupting Judith's innocence in a sinister manner. By preserving Judith's innocence, Caravaggio has compromised her strength. This is arguably due to gender inequality during the Renaissance period.[39] Art historian Marcia Pointon suggests that there is a connection between piety and beauty in Caravaggio's work, which is arguably an effect of *modestia*; piety is more beautiful than grotesque sexuality. Caravaggio's Judith could also be seen as similar to Eve and the snake, easily tempted and lead astray by her handmaid. As seen in Caravaggio's depiction of Judith, the gender of the artist plays a significant role in Judith's image.

Like Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) was an Italian Baroque painter.[40] Gentileschi was born in Rome and died in Naples, by which time she was arguably considered one of the most significant Baroque painters. At the age of seventeen, Gentileschi was sexually assaulted which some scholars suggest explains the dramatic nature and subject matter of her art.[41] Scholar of European art Judith Mann, however, does not agree and asserts that the reason for this theory is sexist in nature, since it implies that a woman could not be as successful as a male painter without tragedy as motivation. Mann argues that Gentileschi's technique and reputation as one of the greats of the seventeenth century is due to her intellect, not by chance, tragedy, nor luck.[42] Although Gentileschi painted in a comparable style to Caravaggio at the beginning of her career, Mann asserts that this does not mean their objective is similar.[43]

Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Fig. 6) (1620-1621) differs significantly from Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* aided by their twenty-year difference in creation. Gentileschi's painting is also oil on canvas, and it measures just over five feet tall by four feet wide, making it more life-like for the viewer, therefore communicating a more believable scene.

Figure 6 - Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1620-1621. Oil on canvas, 158.8 cm × 125.5 cm (78.33 in × 64.13 in), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Artemisia_Gentileschi_-_Judith_Beheading_Holofernes_-_WGA8563.jpg

Gentileschi's Judith is representative of the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, given that the Reformation's leadership encouraged the inclusion of women in positions of authority. Opposing the masculinity of Catholicism, Judith represented the femininity of Protestantism.[44] The specific masculine structure of Catholicism that Protestants wanted to deconstruct was the Papacy.[45] The Papacy's strong patriarchal foothold in European religion directly opposed the rise of powerful queens such as Elizabeth I (1533-1603). Elizabeth I's triumphs in promoting and instating Protestantism resulted in the Church of England, an official Protestant church within Europe. Elizabeth's successes in instating the religion are reflective of its large following of women who sought to change the status quo of Catholic Europe. Stocker argues that the Papacy was representative of Holofernes for the Protestants, since it was an authoritarian structure that relied on hierarchy, worldliness, and pride.[46]

According to Pointon, the visual shift in Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* is significant because it shows Judith in control, as opposed to Caravaggio's Judith who lacks confidence and whose facial expressions suggest that she would otherwise be too weak to hold the sword if it had not been for the help of God.[47] Gentileschi shows Judith and her maid both taking action in the scene, in contrast to Caravaggio's Judith who acted alone. This nature of co-conspiracy is important in the analysis of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* since it illustrates the main difference between the works of Gentileschi and Caravaggio. Gentileschi shows Judith and her maid of the same age, similar appearance, and with an expression of conviction. Judith, her maid, and Holofernes are all directly interacting within Gentileschi's scene, differing from Caravaggio's sense of separation. Gentileschi's Judith has reclaimed her autonomy and power within the scene, like that of the Protestant, for which she became an icon of radicalism.[48]

Stocker argues that as women's lives began to be more confined to the private sphere, biblical artwork of women became more consumed and celebrated within the home, since religion was women's outlet to the public sphere. The prominence of artworks featuring Judith within the home strengthened the link between the public political sphere and the private domestic sphere for women who were eager to have a role model who transgressed the limitations of being confined to domesticity. If women had control of their private lives and found inspiration in the strength and iconography of Judith as a transgressor of a private versus public divide, women would gain a stronger sense of identity.[49] Women's control of their religious lives also had significant implications for their lives in general. Within Europe, the Protestant Judith became an icon of feminism, directly dismantling the Christian notion of the woman being a source of male lust, or "the devil's gate."[50] In the same way that Donatello's Judith is a symbol of strength of Medici tyranny, Gentileschi's Judith served as a symbol of strength for both women and Protestants in the face of Catholicism.

Caravaggio's Judith serves as a final push for *modestia*, showing her as young, innocent, beautiful, and therefore easily corruptible. Gentileschi's Judith serves as a precursor for later representations that break the barriers of *modestia*, unreliant upon historical notions of piety and how women are visually presented in art and society. Judith's exposed cleavage and camaraderie with her handmaid set a new tone in how she is seen and can be understood, not as one dimensional, but as a multifaceted woman. This version of Judith not only empowered women but lead the Protestant Reformation and a rethinking of women's roles in society.

6. Shifts in Representation: Judith in Modernity

Four centuries after Gentileschi's Judith, Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) created *Judith I*, 1901, (Fig. 7) to shine as a beacon of Jewish strength in the advent of Nazism. Klimt was born in Vienna and died in Vienna, where he helped found the Vienna Secession. Klimt received formal training at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts. Klimt's reputation as an artist was tarnished when he revealed his commissioned ceiling paintings *Philosophy* (1900), *Medicine* (1901), and *Jurisprudence* (1907) to the University of Vienna. The series of murals was criticized for being pornographic and explicit.

The Vienna Secession is arguably rooted in the creation of Modernism. As a criticism of the conservative institutions in Vienna at the time, the movement challenged existing ideas on philosophy and artistic style. The late nineteenth century saw a shifting European political structure, with the birth of nation-states rising from the ashes of empires. This period was also significant in academic achievements and rapid industrialization. Secessionist artists proposed and created new aesthetics which challenged historical art and pushed for new aesthetics. Klimt served as the first president of the Vienna Secession and is arguably the creator of the Art Nouveau movement as well.[51] The Art Nouveau movement sought to separate itself from the conservatism of Victorian Europe by embracing female sensuality, power, and strength across different mediums such as fashion, art, and architecture.[52] Klimt's *Judith I* should stand as an exemplary Art Nouveau piece, since it asserts Judith's sensuality, power, and strength.

Figure 7 - Gustav Klimt, *Judith I*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 84 cm x 42 cm (33 in x 16.5 in), Austrian Gallery Belvedere, Vienna, Austria.
https://jstor.org/stable/community.18137840

Judith I shows Judith as a virgin figure. In its message, *Judith I* is a religious painting: one of Jewish strength and pride. The goldleaf ornamentation surrounding Judith is reminiscent of the decoration of the illuminated manuscript *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, which contextualizes Klimt's Judith and further emphasizes her religious significance. Art historian Paulette Gayer suggests that the gold accessorizing of Judith's clothing is fashioned after the gold cording of military uniforms, therefore symbolizing armor.[53] Judith's chunky gold necklace also functions as such.[54] Klimt's heavy use of gold and goldleaf in his works was inspired by his visit to the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, where he was inspired by the heavy use of gold in Byzantine Christian art.[55]

Apostolos-Cappadona asserts that Judith's image prior to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was one of modesty which directly reflected her virtue.[56] Donatello's representation of Judith as a warrior began a shift in her iconography through the ornamentation of Judith's exposure of a pedicured foot and the bracelet on her right arm.[57] Apostolos-Cappadona suggests that such ornamentation as jewelry transforms from a luxury item into symbolic armor due to their proximity to Judith.[58] Compared to Donatello's Judith, a shift in iconography through change of clothing, jewelry, and ornamentation is evidenced by her exposed breasts, gold jewelry, and makeup in Klimt's work. This modernization of Judith breaks the barriers of *modestia* shown in past representations, therefore ushering Judith into a new era.

The Book of Judith references Judith's feminine allure as a weapon to be used against Holofernes, which Klimt embraces in *Judith I*'s nudity. The representation of Judith as partially nude, yet still strong, intentionally communicates that Judith's femininity is not shameful, therefore empowering her feminist iconography. Art historian

Savannah Dearhamer claims that the painting's cropped nature, showing Judith only from the waist up, is intended to dominate the viewer.[59] At thirty-three by sixteen-and-a-half inches, however, the painting may intimidate due to Judith's body language, but it is not so large that it would overtake the viewer. Judith's broad shoulders and head held high, both of which are emphasized by a cropped composition, communicate victory and pride, which may not have been successful if her full body was shown. Dearhamer concludes, in agreement with Apostolos-Cappadona, that the gold ornamentation of Judith's sheer gown and chunky necklace are meant to symbolize armor in a way that is both masculine and feminine, to separate the idea of strength from being exclusive to a male victor.[60] This portrayal of victory is important due to the implications *modestia* for this representation, which would categorize Judith as prideful, a cardinal sin, as well as immoral due to her exposed breasts.

The figure of Judith was inspired by Adele Bloch-Bauer, a wealthy Jewish socialite of Vienna, the subject of other Klimt paintings such as *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (fig. 8) (1907), also known as *The Lady in Gold*.

Figure 8 - Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, 1907. Oil, silver, and gold on canvas, 138 cm x 138 cm (54 in x 54 in), Neue Galerie, New York City, New York.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gustav_Klimt_046.jpg

Adele Bloch-Bauer as Judith is intentional since it directly combats anti-Semitic views of Jewish persons in pre-War World I Europe. Not only is Judith's portrayal as Adele significant to its function, the inclusion of the Star of David above Judith's shoulder references the Book of Judith and her Jewish heritage.[61] It's important to note that Klimt was not Jewish, therefore the Jewish iconography portrayed in *Judith I* reflects the pervasiveness of Jewish culture in mainstream society during this time, despite ascending antisemitism. Judith's popularity as a figure during this period directly descends from her Renaissance and Baroque popularity as a Christian icon, which makes Klimt's adaptation of her as a Jewish icon significant to her ability to capture not just Christian strength but human strength.

The epicenter of the Vienna Seccession was in its exhibition pavilion the Secession Building in Vienna. German art history scholar Reinhold Heller argues that the Secession stands as the antithesis of Nazism since it recognized and created art as authoritative, which threatened Hitler's expectation of art as subservient to the fascist state. Heller declares Hitler as antagonistic towards the Secession, so much so that Nazis removed the inscription, "To each time its art, to art its freedom," from the Secession Building when Austria fell to the Nazis in 1938.[62] The Nazi party believed that the state should be responsible for the creation of art, therefore controlling culture. Klimt's Judith would have threatened the version of Judith that the Nazi party desired as iconography in popular culture, not only because she is so proudly Jewish, but because Adele Bloch-Bauer was a progressive socialite who rejected societal notions about the roles of women. Bloch-Bauer did not wish to live within the private sphere of domesticity and instead was an intellectual and a socialite, which Dearhamer notes was uncommon and not socially accepted during the turn of the nineteenth century.[63]

During the early nineteenth-century, European society was beginning to breed and embrace antisemitism, as well as long-standing sexism, which made Bloch-Bauer a radical since she rejected conventional notions about a woman's place in society.[64] Dearhamer suggests that Bloch-Bauer perfectly represented Judith in her original context in this way since she was wealthy, wise, and sought a life of leadership. This type of woman was regarded as a "degenerate" by the Nazi party in an attempt to demonize and brutalize women's ambition. Degeneracy would later be used to categorize Modern art as a whole in the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* (1937) once the idea evolved past gender roles and into ideas of racial purity.[65]

Klimt's Judith served as a warrior for the Jewish world during a period of rising antisemitism in Europe prior to World War I. Bloch-Bauer posing as Judith is integral to her strength and iconography, since Bloch-Bauer rejected the societal role that was expected of her and instead blazed her own trail beyond the private (domestic) sphere. Klimt's Judith also importantly rejects ideas of *modestia*, shattering the constraints of how piety should look for women by having exposed breasts and an air of pride. This demolition of *modestia* set Judith free, not confined to solely symbolize strength against lust, tyranny, but also against prejudice.

7. Expressions of Empowerment: Judith in Contemporaneity

Judith's biblical symbolism as a warrior against injustice remains in *Judith and Holofernes* (fig. 9) (2012) by Kehinde Wiley (1977-) despite its differences in representation. Wiley was born in Los Angeles, California, where he took painting classes at the age of eleven at California State University.[66] Wiley is a classically trained artist with an extensive art education, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1999, finally receiving a Master of Fine Arts from Yale University in 2001. Wiley's works draw inspiration in color and grandeur from the aesthetics of illuminated manuscripts and Islamic, Baroque, and Rococo art. His first renowned works are from his series *Passing/Posing* (2001-2004) in which Wiley replaced White royalty, nobility, and saints with young Black men, a trend of narrative/role reversal which has become his trademark.[67] In part, this role reversal is due to Wiley's rejection of the elitism of fine art; it also stems out of a necessity to showcase Blackness without abjection.[68]

Figure 9. Kehinde Wiley, *Judith and Holofernes*, 2012. Oil on linen, 304.8 x 228.6 cm (120 x 90 in), North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina.
https://ncartmuseum.org/object/judith-and-holofernes/

Wiley's works frequently use street-casted Black models posing as royalty and classical heroes and heroines, which asserts a narrative about the representation, or lack thereof, of Blackness throughout art history. This process of street-casting was also used by Caravaggio, which aligns with the Baroque movement's desire to portray real people instead of only the elite. Arguably, Wiley and Caravaggio approach this process with the same intention, which is to showcase the natural beauty and strength of their models. Wiley's works differ from Caravaggio's, however, since he does not dress his models in period-specific garb, but rather, makes a statement with including contemporary fashions in his old master recreations.[69] Although this specific piece has been heavily criticized as being violent and inappropriate, Wiley asserts that *Judith and Holofernes* is an attempted reconciliation to honor the strength and presence of Black women within the arts.[70] This contemporary Judith stands in contrapposto, with her weight resting on her right leg while her left leg and foot point gracefully towards the bottom right corner of the canvas. This sense of grace communicated by Judith's weightless leg is complemented by a vibrant, lush floral background.

Art historian Christina Hayes advocates that Wiley's Judith intentionally stands alone amongst this floral scene to communicate her strength separate from a maidservant and the body of Holofernes.[71] This floral background is centered to Judith's torso, with vines appearing to sprout out from behind her in a very natural way, as if she is the source of their life. The background makes the painting striking, but also removes it from a sense of realism. Wiley used this dreamscape of a background to portray this reversal of historical roles, White and Black, to contextualize the story of Judith and Holofernes in a way that makes it directly related to American history. The vines behind Judith

jump into the foreground in front of her legs, in a shape reminiscent of the fleur-de-lis, a symbol rooted in medieval Christianity and used to brand enslaved people on French colonial plantations as a punishment for fleeing.[72]

Unlike Judiths of the Medieval and Renaissance periods, her contemporary image shows her finding lifeforce within herself, not dependent upon a specific location nor proximity to Holofernes. Yet, similar to other representations of Judith, Wiley's figure is costumed in a way that represents her strength; wearing a deep navy gown designed by then-creative director of the French couturier Givenchy, a crown of hair, and a gold sword at her waist. This manner of dress directly reflects Judith's footing in contemporaneity, since Wiley makes it a point of his old master recreations to include contemporary fashion, as it directly places historical figures in present day society, as well as how Black and White consumers interact differently with luxury.[73]

Although Judith is shown wearing a couture gown, her main identifier of strength is her hair crown. British art historian Kobena Mercer argues that hair has historically been used to create a polarizing system of worth associated with race. European, or White, hair has often been used as aspirational, clean, and healthy, whereas African, or Black, hair has had negative connotations of dirtiness, poverty, and inappropriateness attached to its symbolism.[74] The American class structure is heavily reliant on these ideals of hair and race as they are historically rooted in the colonial social structure of plantations.[75] According to Mercer, plantations relied on pigmentocracy, a system which defined enslaved people by the level of pigmentation in their skin, to divide labor. Historically, this put darker enslaved people in the fields and lighter enslaved people doing housework.[76] Mercer asserts that ideologies around European hair being a marker for beauty is still prevalent in contemporary popular culture and class structures, despite growing resistance to Eurocentric beauty standards.[77] Given the historic polarity of Black hair, Judith's hair crown directly fights against Eurocentric ideals of beauty being synonymous with whiteness.[78]

Another marker of how whiteness has been historically deemed superior to blackness can be seen in the myth of the "angry Black woman". This myth has often been used to invalidate and suppress the emotions and experiences of the Black woman in a colonial social structure that benefits from the oppression of the Black woman.[79] Historically, Black women have been categorized as either a maternal "mammy" figure or as the promiscuous whore, with the latter often being used to justify sexual violence against Black woman by White men on plantations.[80] Psychology scholar J.C. Walley-Jean argues that the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" serves to dismiss the emotional responses of Black women toward economic and class structures that oppress them as unreasonable and invalid.[81] This categorization of Black women can be argued to be an adaptation of the Madonna-Whore complex.

The historical analysis of Black women's relationship with anger and emotion is imperative to understanding Wiley's Judith, as well as why White audiences may feel offended by the piece. Wiley's intention was to take a timid model and turn her into her own savior. At ten feet tall, this oil on linen painting towers over the viewer and emits an air of power and strength toward the viewer. Hayes noted in her dissertation that the model who sat for Judith appeared more confident, standing with much more power as exhibited by her change in posture, after seeing *Judith and Holofernes* at Wiley's opening of the series *An Economy of Grace* (2012). It is also pointed out by Hayes that Judith's defiance, overcoming the institutional powers that have historically kept Black people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, is less about the violence of her holding the head of a White woman and more about a Black woman's reclamation of autonomy over her image in art history and the social sphere.[82] Wiley's intention behind his representation of Judith is to shift the original symbolism of victory over lust, as well as Judith's perceived feminist iconography, into one of victory over racial inequality.[83]

Wiley's Judith not only transcends race but also the restrictions *modestia* placed upon her Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque iconography. Wiley does this by challenging historical stereotypes of Black women's sexuality, and the dualistic nature of the "mammy" and the whore. There is arguable influence in Wiley's Judith from a few notable depictions of her; she stands in strength similarly to Donatello's depiction; she is determined like how Gentileschi painted her; she holds her head up with pride like how she is showcased by Klimt. The contemporary Judith stands strong in her power, paying homage to past representations while shifting her iconography to be more inclusive.

8. Conclusion

Although the Madonna-Whore Complex may be considered dated, it is relevant to perceptions of Judith, since Judith is often categorized as either piously resisting lust personified as Holofernes, or as the sinful temptress prior to her Renaissance and Reformation revival. Regardless of the Book of Judith's exclusion prior to the declaration from the Christian canon as dogma, Judith's significance as a warrior for God became exemplified in the frequency of her iconography being used in the public sphere. Themes of justice, wisdom, and courage became critical to Judith's public image.

Donatello's Judith showcases her power as not only a religious icon but also as a political tool; despite the Medici's power struggles with the Florentine Republic, Judith's iconography became such a strong force of power that they eventually had to counter with the commission of Perseus with the Head of Medusa. Despite restrictions of women's roles in society during the early Renaissance due to *modestia*, *Judith and Holofernes* began a shift in the representation of piety, since it subtly deviates from her Medieval representations. Even though the imagery in Perseus with the Head of Medusa challenges that of Judith and Holofernes, it makes a strong case that weakens *modestia*, since it indicates that political authority figures were aware of the impact of the imagery of a woman placed in a position of power. Although the Medici family sought to corrupt Judith's image by switching gender roles in *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, themes of political power continue in later representations.

Judith's prevalence as a Christian icon placed her in a position of power during the Protestant Reformation and the coinciding Counter Reformation. Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* arguably represents the Catholic Church's views of this period, since it not only separates Judith from Holofernes within the composition, but it also elevates Judith as innocent, therefore pious. It presents Judith in a way that is not representative of the strength seen in her Biblical origins as well as other artistic depictions throughout history. Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* can be argued to represent the new spirit of the Protestant Reformation, since she shows Judith with cleavage, fully interacting with the scene, in control of her and the Israelites' fates, and not bound by *modestia*.

As the Protestant Reformation sought to free Europe from the bureaucracy of the Catholic Church, Protestant leadership saw this freedom reflected in the women who supported their movement. Strong leadership from Elizabeth I of England and her creation of the Protestant Church of England reflected women's desires to be included and have a stake in ownership of their religious lives. Judith's iconography rose to popularity during this period since she represents women in strength as well as in taking control of their lives.

Following the iconographic breakthrough of Judith Slaying Holofernes, Klimt's *Judith I* completely shattered the restraints *modestia* place on imagery of Judith. Klimt's Judith does not only possess the strength and warrior presence of Donatello and Gentileschi's paintings, but she does so partially exposed. *Judith I* spotlights the prominence and significance of Jewish culture in modern Europe, as well as Judith's femininity and sensuality not compromising her warrior strength. The gold ornamentation of this modern Judith connects her to Byzantine iconography, but it also shifts Judith's significance beyond the scope of Christianity. Her sudden popularity as a Jewish icon reflects the strength of the Jewish people during rising antisemitism in Europe.

The contemporary *Judith and Holofernes* draws inspiration from old master paintings of European nobility, royalty, and saints and shifts an art historical narrative of exclusion. Wiley's setting, models, and costuming in his paintings all work towards a common goal: to speak to how Black people have been excluded from art history, politics, religious autonomy, and consumer culture. Just as men sought to oppress women from society by way of *modestia*, Wiley switches out the role of a man for a White woman as Holofernes, representative of White women's role in the oppression of Black women. This oppression generally dates to women's roles in plantation life, such as silently supporting and encouraging the torture and mistreatment of enslaved peoples. By conquering Holofernes, the contemporary Judith collects a historical debt. She also further breaks the barriers of *modestia*, by not conforming to dualistic racist stereotypes and asserting her place in society, but also by shifting Judith's iconography beyond whiteness to that of a savior.

Judith's biblical and artistic iconography shifts as society's views on women evolve. This is evident in each work, from their respective periods, since Judith represents the social change desired within that time. Breaking the barriers that *modestia* placed upon women is representative of society's grappling with gender equality throughout time. Whereas Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes altered how pious women could look and be represented in art and society, Wiley's Judith and Holofernes now seeks to challenge how we see Black women in a globalized society. Despite her shifting image, her strength remains constant. Since her biblical origin, Judith's iconography evolves as social structures progress, and her iconography remains a driving force in the pursuit of justice and equality.

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