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Exploring the Suppressed Territory of the Third Reich Art World: Judith in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

Although there is a rich amount of scholarly research about Judith, ties between the Hebrew Bible story of Judith and Holofernes (an Assyrian general) and the art of Nazi Germany remain unclear. Artistically, Judith begins resurfacing within Western culture's fascinations as early as the fourteenth century. Since then, Judith's journey as a woman, victor, virtuous widow, and Jewish symbol has been examined through various lenses. As a subject of manipulation throughout centuries and across disciplines, Judith's reputation is adapted from a virtuous widow to justified murderer to sexualized protagonist. The conversions that Judith's character underwent during the Italian Renaissance, most notably by Donatello, and throughout the nineteenth century, ultimately set the stage for her transformation in the twentieth century. Artists such as Gustav Klimt and Franz von Stuck re-interpreted Judith for her religious heritage, daunting eroticism, and racial purity, all of which became more complex when exposed to Nazi ideology.

A trail through the early Middle Ages, and resurfacing in today's art world, documents the subject of Judith and Holofernes. Throughout this time, Judith's character has developed conceptually and consequently has been made manifest through centuries of artistic representations. Studies of imagery confirm how artists have adapted Judith within the framework of a specific time and culture. European societal patterns demonstrate manipulations of Judith's narrative to communicate various forms of influence to a wider audience, even into Nazi Germany and World War II. Writings of Freudian theory, psychological devotion to religious icons, Renaissance politics, and the art world's diverse fate during Nazi rule are woven together to create twentieth-century artistic perceptions of the Jewish heroine, whose relevance and placement within the Third Reich's

artistic program proves most complex. The contexts of Judith's biblical narrative and Nazi anti-Semitism are contradictory, especially since Judith, an archetypal Hebrew woman, eventually becomes a prevalent character for twentieth-century German and Austrian artists.

From her archaic beginnings, Judith is best defined as the Hebrew archetype of her city. The first pictorial productions of Judith derive from the Middle Ages where her virtue over vice was graciously pronounced. During the mid-fifteenth century, Judith's story was reborn into an exemplification of Italian Early Renaissance politics. The Baroque period continued the conceptual trend of heroism and feminism, transforming her stylistically by enhancing the conceptual drama. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution led Judith to star on Parisian stages. Her story was utilized as a symbol to justify uprisings.[1] Judith then became the embodiment of the *femme fatale* established at the end of the nineteenth century and translated into an erotic symbol.

In the ancient world, women were the primary educators of children. Women taught the building blocks of knowledge, religious and otherwise. However, the first misogynist statement in the Hebrew Bible can be traced back to the introduction of Hellenism (ca. 323 B.C.E. – 31 B.C.E.). This Greek influence ushered in some of the first concerns about gender and sexuality, which spread into writings in the Bible.[2] The Roman Empire was largely born out of Greek inspirations, which eventually led Italy's culture and society before the Renaissance to be led by Roman ideals. History can be seen to act cyclically, including aesthetic and political forces, especially in this case, since Adolf Hitler is known to have taken inspiration from his times spent touring Italy.

The era of Nazi Germany is not the first time Judith's role as a prevailing militant hero is feared and criticized. The Book of Judith's first translations from the original Septuagint took place during the Reformation.[3] These translated variations, particularly Martin Luther's, complicate perceptions of her character. In 1533, Martin Luther infamously alluded to his rendition of the Book of Judith, stating "Girls begin to talk and to stand on their feet sooner than boys because weeds grow more quickly than good crops."[4] These translations omit verses that enhance Judith's stature as a woman and become the common reference for German audiences. [5]

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1 Margarita Stocker, Judith Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 112.

2 Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, Reading the Women of the Bible (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 339.

3 The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the ancient Hebrew Bible manuscripts. It was completed during the Greek Period (c. 3rd century BCE). From there St Jerome used the Septuagint for his Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate (c. 400 CE). Judith is one of the three books within the Septuagint that was named after a woman.

4 Originally published by Martin Luther in 1533, Theodore G. Tappert, ed./trans., "Luther's Works", vol. 54 in *Table Talk* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1967), 187.

5 Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, "Judith: Asking the Big Questions" in *Beauty or Beast? The Woman*

Several influential and creative minds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contributed to these last transformations. This includes German play-wright Friedrich Hebbel (1813 – 1863), Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger (1880 – 1903), as well as artists Gustav Klimt (1862 – 1918), and Franz von Stuck (1863 – 1928). Hebbel composed his first controversial play, *Judith*, in 1840, a presentation mocking her female attributes. Among them, in his *The Taboo of Virginity* (1913), Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) famously interpreted Hebbel's *Judith* in the act of decapitating Holofernes as equivalent to castration. Meanwhile, Otto Weininger also produced influential material against the eman-cipation of women, primarily in his *Sex and Character* published in 1904, in which he ties together themes of anti-Semitism and misogyny.[6] Sexualized per-ceptions, such as those by Hebbel and Freud, reappear in paintings like Klimt's *Judith I* (1901) and von Stuck's *Judith und Holofernes* (1927). Establishments to marginalize women as well as the Jewish people were already in place and de-veloping. Highly regarded female figures such as Judith were exploited in order to strengthen the ability to ostracize Jews. Representations of Judith continued, most notably detached from her virtuous attributes, with the idealized Aryan figure manifested by Nazi ideology.

The Book of Judith

Judith's original narrative stems from the Hebrew Old Testament, which was composed during the Graeco-Roman period in the early first century B.C.E. The author of the Book of Judith remains anonymous; however, based on assumptions from the story, scholars propose that a Palestinian Jew wrote it.[7] Today, it has been removed from the Old Testament, placed as a chap-ter in the Apocrypha, and is widely embraced as historical fiction.[8] Nonetheless, Judith's story remains highly regarded by the Jewish people and is clearly influ-ential in numerous societies.

Judith resided in the predominately Hebrew town of Bethulia, which is believed to be north of Jerusalem.[9] Her Bethulian peers knew her as an allur-ing and wise widow. After learning that the Assyrian general, Holofernes, had been ordered by the foreign king Nebuchadnezzar to rule over her city, Judith assertively decided to take matters into her own hands by calling upon God in prayer.[10] Judith acted upon the calling of divine justice and quickly devised a deceitful scheme to stop Holofernes and his army. She assumed the role of a po-

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Warrior in the German Imagination from the Renaissance to the Present (Oxford, 2010), 115.
6 Stocker, *Judith*, 129.
7 Toni Craven "Judith" in *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 1313.
8 The Hebrew Bible is comprised of various types of literature including: Chronicles, law, wisdom, poetry, folklore, myth, parables, biography as well as historical narrative. Among these is also histor-ical fiction under which The Book of Judith is widely considered.
9 Craven,"Judith," 1314.
10 Ibid., 1324.

litical instigator after the Assyrian army cut off the water supply to her city. The evening before the pending attack, Judith and her maid, who is often credited as an accomplice, slipped into the enemy camp. Before leaving Bethulia, Judith adorned herself in her finest jewels and dress to catch the unquestioning eye of any man in her path, although she only had one man in mind. The unknown author of the Book of Judith noted how Judith's sensuality was central to her will to succeed. Holofernes was under a misguided impression that Judith would bestow help in the defeat of Bethulia. The epitomized visual climax of Judith beheading Holofernes reveals that this is clearly not the case. The elaborate presentation Judith strategized and created for the General allowed her to win over his vulnerability. Judith utilized wine and her feminine charm to deceive Holofernes. She decapitated him while he was drunk, defenseless, and alone in his tent. Judith states, "The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman."[11] Thereafter she retreated with his head, preventing any danger to the Jewish people and Bethulia. Judith is celebrated in song upon her return to her city. Collectively, these details in the religious literature communicate to readers her place and importance in the bible.

Akin to its protagonist, this invincible allegory continues to shadow Western culture throughout the rest of history. It is a story about choice. The choice Judith makes is the underlying factor to the morality of her story. Under the influence of God, Judith chose to take initiative to attain God's deliverance and revelation for her people. In contrast, the Bethulians are fearful and set a time limit for God to deliver them. The story repeatedly reminds the reader of Judith's celibacy. Her asserted statements when speaking to God and the author's details are clarified to enhance the morality of her story. Ultimately, the book reminded readers to make the right choice of maintaining hope in God's plan. This is highlighted by a contrast of behaviors between the Bethulians, who lose trust and faith in God, and Judith who directly counteracts their approach. Judith clearly established her religious beliefs and participated in various Hebrew traditions throughout the narrative, particularly during preparation before entering the Assyrian camp. When Judith is introduced the author reveals her genealogy, which communicates her place in the line of Israel's patriarchs. She is also given the longest genealogy of any woman in the Bible.[12] Together these literary clues assist in defining Judith as liberator of the Jewish people and explain why "for the rest of her life she was honored throughout the whole country."[13]

It is also important to clarify how Judith's narrative begins with oppression. In *Judith: Sexual Warrior*, Margarita Stocker suggests that the Book of Judith was likely written to address concerns of the Jewish people.[14] Through

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11 Ibid., 1315.
12 Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 9.
13 Craven, "Judith," 1621.
14 Stocker, *Judith*, 5.

multiple vehicles of media, Judith and Holofernes resurfaced at key moments of political and social upheaval. Morals of virtue, power, justice, courage, and the prevalence of people against all odds are pronounced through Judith's personification and the act of God. Judith was a ruthlessly confident Jewish leader, aware of her power in the middle of a social crisis, yet she exemplified hope and virtue for the future. Artists recognized this and in turn utilized her to transform their social and political reality into a message of empowerment. However, Judith can only be presented a single way during an era with the additional acknowledgement of public protest. Naturally, the translations of an artist's interpretation into societal judgments, her power exposed and looming with messages of oppression, always left the public to decide if her character was justified or inappropriate.

Judith has been translated through every century because of her paladin character's framework and flexibility to represent many potential humanities. Since she epitomized the virtues of being a Jewish widow, artists have molded her into an icon to be continuously re-understood. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, primarily male luminaries twisted Judith's narrative into a romanticized fiction, thus confining her as a secular *femme fatale* as opposed to a virtuous role model. Regaining this perception of the original "Judith" proved challenging in the face of these artistic portrayals. Regardless of her sexual or non-sexual attributes, Judith's narrative had specific and constant popularity in German culture. She remained a revered symbol of female heroism but began to be ominously manipulated into a dangerous presence when power is in the hands of a woman.

Literary Permutations into the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

A multitude of discrepancies exist between the Book of Judith's context and the play *Judith* (1840) by Friedrich Hebbel. Hebbel introduces Judith's character in Act II with a conversation between Judith and her maid during which Judith reveals that she and her husband could not consummate their marriage on their wedding night. A lengthy discussion with her maid about their inability to have intercourse prompts readers to imminently sexualize Hebbel's vision of Judith. Hebbel causes Judith to doubt her "only purpose" as a woman by saying, "A woman is nothing; through man only can she become something; through him can she become a mother. The child that she bears is the only thanks she can offer nature for her existence."[15] She then alludes to the fact that she is unblessed for her inability to bear a child and have a husband. In fact, later in Act V after being defiled by Holofernes, which never occurred in the original biblical account, Judith admits to being distracted from her original mission of delivering her city from danger by her sexual desires for Holofernes. Finally, Hebbel concludes *Judith* by exposing her as a "deflowered" woman who declares a

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15 Friedrich Hebbel, *Judith: A Tragedy in Five Acts*, trans. Carl van Doren (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1914), 269.

reward of death be given to her if she carries the child of Holofernes. Hebbel's representation of Judith maintains her consistent internal struggle of pride and personal emotion rather than divinity. This conflict led her personal motives to replace religious and community-oriented motives.[16]

Regarding the factor of anti-Semitic dialogue in both the original story and the play, Hebbel's characters remark upon and emphasize their harsh feelings toward Jewish beliefs. For example, when Holofernes asks a Mesopotamian ambassador who the Hebrews were, the ambassador responds, "Lord, they are a race of madmen. . . . They pray to a god whom they cannot see or hear. . . . Lord, these people are reserved and suspicious."[17] These discriminatory statements were softened in the Apocryphal book, just enough to convey the theme of oppression. Initially Hebbel's play was censored for the implied references of rape. However, when the original text was restored almost fifty years later, *Judith* regained popularity to a great extent, embellishments and all.

Hebbel likely found his inspiration for the tragedy from a painting he encountered in Munich.[18] Also, his 1841 diary entries included bitter reflections about women's emancipation taking place in Germany at the time.[19] Hebbel believed that a man and woman should be kept in separate functional spheres of life. Additionally, Hebbel, according to Thomas Campbell, "held a poor opinion of [women's] creative powers," and it was in the same spirit that the 1840 tragedy was written.[20]

German audiences under the Weimar Republic and Nazi Party revered Hebbel and his work. Between 1918 and 1935 over 6,000 performances of his plays were held across the country.[21] Eight hundred fifty of these performances were of *Judith*.[22] A famous theater named after Hebbel was established in Berlin's center in 1907 and still hosts performances today. Beginning in 1931, the Cultural Union of German Jews (*Jüdischer Kulturbund Berlin*) was established to help preserve Jewish culture during the Nazi rise in power. One of the main missions of the organization was to create work for Jews within the musical and performing arts. Ironically, one of the plays the Cultural Union promoted was Hebbel's *Judith* (1935).[23] After the devastating attack of *Kristallnacht* in

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16 Ibid., 52.
17 Ibid., 263 - 264.
18 We know this from personal notes Hebbel wrote in his diary, which was a primary resource for Campbell's writing. Thomas Moody Campbell. *The Life and Works of Friedrich Hebbel* (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1919), 48.
19 Ibid., 54.
20 Ibid., 55.
21 Stocker, *Judith*, 196.
22 John London, *Theatre Under the Nazis* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 29.
23 The director of this production was Fritz Jessner (German, 1889 – 1946) who was eventually exiled from Germany for his contrast in political beliefs from the Nazi Party. Jessner had to report pre-production ideas to Nazi officials for approval. This process distorted Hebbel's plays with anti-Jewish racism even more so than they already were. Ibid., 29.

1938, Jewish programs such as the Union were consumed and abolished by Nazi power.

Stocker discusses the concern of irrationality that the Nazis specifically perceived in Hebbel's *Judith*. His Judith is intimate with a German and thus raises the additional issue of representing a Jewish archetype story that intersects with Christianity as well. Therefore, although Hebbel's pride in the Germanic race got him carried into the Reich's favor, *Judith* was simultaneously viewed skeptically and as unaligned with Nazi morals.[24]

During the resurgence of Judith's popularity, almost three-quarters of a century after Hebbel's publication, twentieth-century writers like Sigmund Freud continued to discuss Hebbel's *Judith*. In *The Taboo of Virginity*, a contribution to his *Psychology of Love III*, Freud responded to Hebbel's character. In 1938, Freud's fate as a psychoanalyst of Jewish decent was threatened as his work was attacked by the spreading supremacy of Nazism. The frequent concepts of sexuality in Freud's psychoanalytic writings coincided with Gustav Klimt's visual expressions. Like Freud, Klimt resided in Vienna at that time and for the last part of his career was supported by primarily Jewish patronage.

Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles* also discusses many of the controversial matters that engulfed Europe at the turn of the century. After its 1904 publication, *Sex and Character* was widely circulated throughout Austria and Germany. Its release coincided with Hitler's adolescence, a time when he was embracing ideas of the superiority of the Aryan race. Weininger's discussions of women and Judaism contain useful reference points for understanding Hitler's contemporaries' opinions of Judith.[25] Among the many pages of misogyny, Weininger ultimately states, "What both Woman and the Jew completely lack is greatness. . . ."[26] Weininger's ideas reinforced Hitler's already-developing ideologies about anti-Semitism. For this reason, Weininger posthumously became highly regarded by Nazi party members. The philosopher had long struggled with his Jewish origins. He attempted to reject his Jewish associations by converting to Protestantism, but the fact of his origins continued to disturb him. The young Weininger took his own life at twenty-three, the year of his publication. Third Reich followers apparently regarded the suicide as an "'honorable' way for a Jew to cleanse the world of his existence."[27]

Considering that these scholarly, visual, and literary interpretations

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24 Stocker, *Judith*, 196.
25 Refer to the chapter 11, "The Nature of Woman and her Relation to the Universe", and chapter 13, "Judaism", in Weininger's *Sex and Character* to see his perspectives on these subjects.
26 Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 279.
27 Sarah Honig, "Another Tack: The Otto Weininger Syndrome," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 4, 2010, http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Another-Tack-The-Otto-Weininger-syndrome.

of Judith extended over a period of about six centuries, one may wonder how many artists remained true to Judith's original story and, furthermore, which of the artists with a "Judith" in their repertoire had also read the deuterocanonical Book of Judith.

The Devotional Mediums of Art

For centuries, religious icons and architectural spaces of prayer have strengthened people's beliefs and metaphysical connections to a divine power. Historically, Western societies developed a habitual relationship with art in this way, as an instrument of faith. During the late fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance, icons of the Virgin Mary became so prevalent in daily Christian rituals that portable versions of the Madonna and Child were crafted. This was certainly not the first time or place the concept of portability was used; indeed, the Renaissance's re-flourishing of the tradition developed from Byzantine Iconography. Since Medieval times, Judith has acquired associations with the Christian virtues of wisdom, faith, chastity, and justice.[28] Her virtue famously trumped Holofernes' sinful lust and pride, and this relationship parallels the stories of both Judith and the Virgin Mary. Moreover, Judith is one of the women in the Old Testament who is a progenitor of Mary's divinity.

Judith's sensibility to act as an intercessor between God and the Bethulians similarly parallels Mary's purpose. Judith maintains and proves the presence of God and acts as the deliverer of her people. The Virgin Mary, as a divine figure on earth, became known as the powerful intercessor between Jesus Christ and the people. Both Judith and Mary remain virgins and preserve virtue. There are visual cases that draw these parallels closer within devotional imagery.

Rebuilt by the Germans in 1910, the Dormition Abbey stands at the highest point of Jerusalem at Mount Zion. In this religious space, Mary and Judith are depicted in a proximity that creates a sacred relationship. *Judith* is rendered in colored mosaics grasping the hair of Holofernes in her hands. The detailed mosaic emphasizes her vitality by the discrepancy of the skin hues. Judith flaunts her colorful vivacity, while Holofernes appears with a cold, blue, deadened face. She is depicted in a golden dome along with the five other women in the Old Testament: Eve, Miriam, Yael, Ruth, and Esther. The image of Judith hovers above the crypt's center, a wooden sculpture of the *Virgin Mary* (c. 1910) lying in eternal sleep. The location has long been dedicated to commemorating the site where the Virgin Mary died.

In Christian tradition, Judith and Mary share unions within their typologies. One example is the pairing of Judith's act of decapitation and Mary's chastity.[29] Christian scholar Jerome (345 – 420) conceptualized this parallel. His

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28 Sarah Blake McHam, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and 'Judith' as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 1 (2001): 35.
29 Brine, Ciletti, and Lähnemann, *Sword of Judith*, 14.

Latin translations were vital to Christian receptions of Judith and furthermore influential to Marian theology.[30] The decapitation of Holofernes emphasizes Judith's chastity, because her act of murder defeats any questions about sexual motives. Judith's sensuality supplied her with an advantageous position, but she was able to succeed without sacrificing her purity. Ultimately, God's authority is spoken through the death of the general, clarifying Judith's role as a type of intercessory with the virtue of purity, which lasted the rest of her life. This example signifies Judith's adoption into Christianity and emphasizes her relevance as revered female figure.

In later religious depictions of the Early Renaissance, artists like Bernardo Daddi (ca. 1280 – 1348) produced significant devotional imagery of Mary that would influence twentieth-century interpretations of Judith. Daddi completed a gilded painting of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned* (1334). The intricate frame refers to a tabernacle, which was intended to encourage private devotion. This painting's construction is less elaborate than his later creation of an enthroned *Madonna delle Grazie* (1347) at Orsanmichele in Florence, produced in collaboration with Andrea di Cione. This was a masterpiece for a public space of worship. On the contrary, the earlier rendition by Daddi suggests the personal and intimate moments a viewer would participate in during prayer.

These examples of art for devotional purposes correlate with the strategy of Nazi ideology that utilized artwork to mesmerize the German public with the mission for a pure race.

Art as Politics: Italian Renaissance

In the fifteenth century Judith reappears with vast artistic attention as an icon of Italian Renaissance politics. The Medici family, whose power in Florence lasted from the thirteenth until the eighteenth century, played a dominant role in the art market. At a pivotal time of their re-emergence as political rulers, the Medici commissioned two bronze sculptures by the renowned artist Donatello: *David* (c. 1430) and *Judith and Holofernes* (1460).[31] Sarah Blake McHam discusses these commissioned works as metaphors for supporting the Medici Republic rule and anti-tyrannical themes. She states they had "the purpose of creating a visual rhetoric insinuating that the Medici were defenders of Florentine liberty."[32] As McHam further notes, Donatello stands "unprecedented" in producing a rendition of the iconic pair as a grandeur sculpture, towering over audiences at seven feet, nine inches.[33] Political evocations are visibly displayed to the masses through the Medicis' patronage of these works as well as the personalized inscription on the statue bases. The inscription stated: "The salvation

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30 Ibid., 14.
31 Donatello's *Judith* is located in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Image references can be found on website of Piazza della Signoria: The historical center of the Florentine government.
32 McHam, *Donatello's Bronze 'David'*, 32.
33 Ibid., 35.

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." Indeed, the display of the sculptures worked to sway the Florentines to Medici favor.

Centuries later, but similar to the Medici family, Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists further developed visual propaganda to communicate the politics of Nazi ideology. By the late 1930s, Germany and Italy formed an alliance in arms. Hitler was charmed by Italy and its national museums, whose art and architecture derived from the Italian Renaissance, a heritage largely inspired by systematic Roman art hierarchy. In other words, Renaissance art continued to foster hierarchical political ideas into the mid-1900s.

Coinciding with her political purpose in the Renaissance, Judith was also a popular subject for painted commissions for wealthy female patrons since she embodied the epitome of virtue. Stocker's chapter, "Worshipping Women," focuses on gender interpretations during the Reformation, which correlate with a reappearance of Judiths in the arts. Earlier and new representations of Judith could be utilized as a contradiction against the spreading beliefs that women were the inferior sex.[34] Judith was a symbol that argued for women's potential in spirituality and governance. Judith was gaining feminist implications, and patrons were taking advantage of the opportunity to buy one of their own. The Renaissance positioned Judith as a *femme forte.* It embraced her as an icon of the strong woman. Judith's nineteenth- and twentieth-century portrayal as a *femme fatale* contrasts greatly with this view. This widely adopted view of the biblical Judith does not at all ring true without additional acknowledgment of the select public sphere that feared her and all women's power. There were many episodes, such as the European syphilis epidemic in the 1500s, which caused women to be seen as the "curse of Eve".[35] However, during the twentieth century and under the Nazi campaign, artists changed Judith into a woman of purely sexual meaning, which demeaned her both as a Jew and as a woman.

Femmes Fatales: Judith and Salomé

With the contemporary progression of women's rights, audiences today perceive depictions of Judith and Salomé as strong, authoritative women in a relevant or positive light. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, Germany viewed them as a threat. The patriarchy feared for its stature and took advantage of the literary and visual arts in an attempt to address this fear. Oscar Wilde's tragedy and paintings by artists such as Gustav Moreau and Franz von Stuck are examples of Salomé representations. Using powerful female icons like Judith and Salomé as a vehicle to manipulate the masses, such men played the victim and resisted female emancipation.

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34 Stocker, *Judith*, 48 – 49.
35 Ibid., 53.

The alluring *femmes fatales* male artists invented at the end of the nineteenth century were not meant to support the movement for gender equality but instead elicited notions of concern and danger. The mold of the *femme fatale* was in part to demean the idea of a woman. These were desperate attempts to preserve control. In order to regain its power, the patriarchy implemented portrayals of women in a "traditional" sphere of purpose, which included stressing her sexual immorality. In the cases of Judith and Salomé, their acts of irrationality are compounded by their lack of emotional control. The alterations of both characters went so far that, for a time, audiences and even scholars had difficulty distinguishing between the two.[36] Although their stories are within different Testaments, this convergence still took place during the nineteenth century. Painters often highlighted a *femme fatale* for her daring beauty, but the occasional grotesque portrayal was not uncommon. Once these transformations took place, though, the sacred connections vanished and the new negative connotations further influenced Jewish reputations. Thus, Jewish women at this time not only dealt with obstacles of sexism but anti-Semitism as well.

Gustav Klimt's *Judith I*

Numerous artists, including Gustav Klimt, presented intersections between early twentieth-century imagery of Judith and impending Nazi fascism. Klimt went from relishing his popularity and fame across Europe to being a ridiculed exile from Vienna's public art world. A select number of his public artworks were considered controversial for their sensual content. For instance, when Klimt unveiled his extended project, *Medicine* (1900 – 1907), intended as a reflection of respect for education, to a faculty of Vienna's University, it immediately endured grave disappointment and criticism for its provocative nature. After the Austrian state and Viennese public rejected this work, commissioned for the University of Vienna, Klimt focused on private commissions.[37] The anti-Semitic socialite and Austrian writer Karl Kraus (1874 – 1936) was a particularly harsh critic, accusing Klimt of "*gout juif*" (Jewish taste) and blaming the artist's supporters, "'the despicable ones,'" for Klimt's dilemmas.[38] Of course, neither Klimt nor his loyal patrons took these responses seriously. Several prominent Jewish art collectors continued supporting Klimt throughout the rest of his career, such as the Bloch-Bauer and Lederer families, many of whom went into exile during the Nazi reign.

Klimt portrayed *Judith I* (1901) as a Madonna, surrounded by and adorned in gold leaf.[39] With its gilded frame, the painting resembles a religious

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36 Nadine Sine, "Cases of Mistaken Identity: Salomé and Judith at the Turn of the Century," *German Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (1988): 14.

37 Frank Whitford, *Artists in Context: Gustav Klimt* (New Jersey: Crescent Books, 1994), 67.

38 Anne-Marie O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 37 – 39.

39 Today, Klimt's *Judith I* hangs in Vienna's Galerie Belvedere along with twenty-four of his other

icon. When comparing her visage with Klimt's two later portraits of Adele Bloch-Bauer (1881 – 1925), stark resemblances can be found. Klimt never painted a female subject more than once except for Adele, who perhaps modeled for at least four of Klimt's paintings.[40] In fact, *Judith I* and Klimt's first portrait of Adele, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), were both greatly influenced by his "artistic pilgrimage," as O'Connor puts it, to the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna Italy.[41] There he viewed Byzantine mosaics from the sixteenth century, which led to the inspiration for his Golden Period.[42]

In his *Judith I* painting, as in the biblical account, Klimt painted the woman in fine jewels, especially her necklace. It appears to be the same necklace that also adorns Adele's neck in both of his portraits of her.[43] In fact, Adele's husband Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer (1864 – 1945) gave her the golden diamond choker, which was obviously an admired object since it is featured in all her portraits.[44] If it were the case that Klimt used Adele as a muse for both *Judith I* and the figure of Hygeia from *Medicine* (1900 – 1907), then it is clear how Adele's necklace was adapted or personified within each portrait. In 1919, after *Medicine* was rejected by the state, Ferdinand financed the acquisition of the work for the Belvedere's Moderne Galerie.[45] If Adele had indeed modeled for Klimt as Hygeia, Ferdinand's inspiration for the investment likely stemmed from this involvement of his beloved wife. The provenance of *Medicine* ultimately has an unfortunate fate. *Medicine* was among the thirteen works that were seized by German forces during the 1938 takeover of Austria. In 1945, their final fate was destruction by arson at the Schloss Immendorf Castle in Southern Austria.

Adele believed, "Self-satisfied individuals are incapable of development."[46] Müller notes how Adele was a woman "always looking for intellectual stimulation." Adele wished to be out of the house and studying, which was unconventional for women at the time.[47] Women like Adele were not only battling anti-Semitism at this time, but sexism as well. O'Connor recounts a discussion about "degenerate women," which stigmatizes women of ambitious nature,

works.

40 Melissa Müller and Monika Tatzkow *Lost Lives, Lost Art: Jewish Collectors, Nazi Art Theft, and the Quest for Justice* (New York: Vendome Press, 2010), 159.

41 O'Connor, *Lady in* Gold, 45. The first portrait Klimt rendered of Adele is now located at Neue Galerie in New York City. An image reference can be found under the Neue Galerie's online, Austrian collections.

42 To further personalize the portrait, Klimt included his model's initials in the intricate mosaic scheme that drapes Adele. Whitford, *Klimt*, 83.

43 Klimt did another rendition of Adele in 1912, now in a private collection.

44 After Adele's untimely death, Ferdinand bestowed the necklace on Adele's niece, Maria Altmann (1916-2011), but it was seized by the Gestapo and given to lead Nazi official Hermann Göring, for his wife.

45 Müller, *Lost Lives*, 160 - 161.

46 O'Connor, *Lady in Gold*, 47.

47 Müller, *Lost Lives*, 157.

pursuing their education and political rights.[48] This correlates directly to what Judith stood for in her original religious context. It strengthens the argument that Judith, as a wise, wealthy Jewish woman who pursues a militant path of leadership, would have qualified for this "degenerate" label. Similar to our classic Jewish heroine, Adele became an avid socialist and studied disciplines across the board, a modern day Renaissance woman or Judith.

Unlike other depictions, Klimt's *Judith I* is not equipped with a sword. Her sensuous beauty is her primary weapon. Her beauty is not spoken through complete nudity, which was a common method for Klimt's renditions of women in other paintings and drawings. Judith's shoulders are broad and emphasized by the gold leaf, as if she stands like a guardian adorned in armor. Notably above *Judith I*'s left shoulder, Klimt rendered what appears to be a symbol resembling the Star of David.[49] The star would have subtlety connected Judith's and Adele's Jewish heritage as well as how they were women of autonomous nature. Furthermore, Klimt's Judith is not shy about exposing her power of femininity through her sheer and open dress.

The Book of Judith alludes to Judith's sexual appeal, making her the quintessential muse for Klimt. However, he also challenges the visual approach to Judith that was frequently being produced during the decades before him. By pairing her sensual physical elements with textual attributes of a confident honorable woman, he introduced a Symbolist demonstration that maintained partial contextual truth. Yet it insinuates that either Klimt knew the details written in The Book of Judith or was referencing his predecessors, such as Donatello, whose representation of the scene depicts the dramatic moment before Holofernes' murder. In contrast, Donatello covers *Judith* in refined drapery that preserves her virtue while Klimt does not. However, Klimt does not attempt to strip away her biblical virtue as Hebbel did. Instead, Klimt's *Judith I* refutes Hebbel's Judith portrayal with a discrepancy of power between the two. *Judith I* is confident in her deed; she does not question her actions. Klimt draws attention to her Jewish heritage as something to be proud of while Hebbel's Judith gets distracted by the consequences of intercourse.

Klimt completed his first representation of Judith four years after his establishment of the Viennese Succession in 1897. Judith was an ideal subject for the artist, as she embodied a fearless Jewish woman, suitable for his alluring female portrayals. The painting also corresponds to his tendencies to interpret morbid subjectivity. Klimt's paintings often embrace allegories of life's cyclical nature, regularly emphasizing the contrast of life and death through the female

48 O'Connor, *Lady in Gold*, 46 - 50.
49 The Star or Shield of David was adopted as a symbol of the Jewish people after it began to be placed in Synagogues in the seventeenth century. Klimt's symbol is likely a stylistic rendition of the Star of David considering the physical attributes of his model whose eyebrows, lips, and nose, are similar to those of Adele Bloch-Bauer. "Jewish Virtual Library" Judaism: The Star of David, last modified 2015, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/star.html

form. Judith's deed is symbolized by Holofernes' head, which is graciously
tucked to her left side, as she stands proud. Her tilted head and narrow eyes peer
down as if the viewer stands below her, giving an impression of dominance. Her
cheeks are flushed and bring a sense of life to her appearance. The green patch
beside her right elbow helps bring her forward even more so by pushing the
warm colors towards the viewer, accentuating the cool tones painted under-
neath Judith's skin, a technique derived from the Renaissance Florentines. This
demonstrates Klimt's classical training and artistic ability to render realism.

Klimt's decision to position the composition vertically likely derives
from the Art Nouveau Movement, whose artists favored this orientation. The
choice of prominently vertical designs became increasingly popular at the *fin
de siècle* when Art Nouveau was on the rise. The verticality seemingly com-
plements the female subject in elongating her figure with intricate designs. The
height also creates a regal persona that is particularly present in *Judith I*. Klimt
creates a new iconic example of Judith about twenty years before the rise of the
National Socialist party. Nazi ideology and political strife before the outbreak of
World War II further influenced artists to capture Judith in a different manner.

Degeneracy versus the Fetishized Aryan Figure

Adolf Hitler (1889 – 1945) began as an aspiring Austrian artist but
was rejected by Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts in 1907.[50] Nonetheless, his
passion for art was anything but defeated. After being elected chancellor, Hitler
continued to view art primarily as a tool for dominance and control. Beginning
in 1933, he implemented laws to seize Jewish families' art investments in an
attempt to strip them of both their assets and culture.[51] According to historian
Eric Michaud, Hitler believed "art, since it forms the most uncorrupted, the most
immediate reflection of the life of the people's soul, exercises unconsciously by
far the greatest direct influence on the masses of the people."[52] Thus, a parallel
exists between Hitler's use of art and the nature of religious artworks for devo-
tional purposes.

In 1933, Nazi Germany organized an elaborate art ideology that
consisted of three principle goals: stripping Jews of their property; censoring
galleries and museums; and promoting works that directly reflected the idealized
Aryan culture and race. By 1937 Richard Klein (1890 – 1967), an artist highly
regarded by Hitler, organized an exhibition of propagandistic "Great German
Art" in Munich. That same year, derisively contrasting this ideal German art,
the grand collective exhibition of "Degenerate Art" was staged and opened to

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50 O'Connor, Lady in Gold, 55.

51 Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford
University Press, 2000), 27.

52 Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 36.

the public.[53] At least one hundred and seven artists were in the catalogue of this show. Following his death, Otto Müller was one of the artists whose artworks of nude females would be selected for inclusion in the Degenerate Art Exhibition.

Otto Müller (1874 – 1930), during his career as an Expressionist, contributed his works to radical German journals including *Die Kunst* (The Arts), *Der Anbruch* (The Beginning)*,* and *Die rote Erde* (The Red Earth).[54] Müller produced a sculpture of *Judith* (1908 – 09) that was published in *Die Kunst*, an arts magazine highly circulated throughout Germany. The figure slightly references the stance of Donatello's *David.* In the eyes of the Reich's art laws, his Judith was certainly degenerate. Judith is nude with a falling drape across her legs, comparable to that of *Venus de Milo* (ca. 100 B.C.E.). Still, she likely lacked the Roman Olympian physique for which the Nazi aesthetic strove.

Michaud notes that the theory of "degeneration" was not only applied to art but also to conceptions of "racial purity."[55] Art was the primary method of communicating the "correct" German identity and culture. Art also categorized the so-called wrongly associated and un-pure human, which resulted in the Holocaust purge. Michaud also supplies examples of Judaic stereotypes propagated by a comparison of Jews' facial features with avant-garde portraits. This visual strategy engaged audiences to stereotype Jews physically and conceptually, specifically by re-defining "deformities" of their race.

Unlike Müller and other modern artists, Hitler admired the work of German symbolist painter Franz von Stuck.[56] Von Stuck draws many parallels with Klimt in regard to their inspirations, depictions of allegorical subjects, their success as Succession founders, and their decisions to render two versions of Judith and Holofernes. However, they lived in different countries and were supported by very distinct audiences and patrons. Von Stuck found his greatest success with the public in Germany and America, while in Vienna, Jewish art collectors primarily patronized Klimt.

Von Stuck's rendition of *Judith und Holofernes* in 1927 was among the last of the works he created.[57] Judith holds the sword firmly and with ease although the metal blade is wider than her upper arm. She peers down at Holofernes with an expression of amusement and readiness. There is evident iconography of the dominating female, a concept that von Stuck was fond of fostering. Judith stands against a dark and deep background while being cast

53 Ibid., 92.
54 Stephanie Barron, *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 308.
55 Michaud, *Cult of Art*, 84.
56 After von Stuck's death, though, many of his students such as Klee and Kandinsky, were considered degenerate under Hitler's campaign.
57 Franz von Stuck completed two versions of Judith. The one referred to here is his second version, owned by a private collection.

in an anonymous light as if supplied from God. This contrast highlights her idealized figure; Judith is slender, tall, and strong, all of which were idealized characteristics desired by Nazi eugenics.

The comparisons of Judith's slight contrapposto stance and figural tones to the German artist Georg Römer's (1868 – 1922) reconstruction of *Doryphoros* (1920) originally created by Polyclitus of Argos, emphasizes Judith's power as a more masculine figure. Her strong neck and toned abdomen directly correlate to Römer's *Doryphoros*. In contrast, other idealized female representations at the time were rendered with robust chests and defined curves. Michaud describes the newly desired wave of German art: "Throughout the regime, nudity was considered to be the most effective sign of that eternal character."[58] The eternal character encompasses the genius community that the Führer and National Socialist party strove to reinvent for the future of Germany. However, von Stuck's Judith was physically rendered with a blurred gender. Although the nude Judith is clearly female, von Stuck could have been appropriating figures with characteristics of Aryan heroism. With Judith's dark black hair, which blends into the background and mimics Holoferenes' long hair and beard, she stands in contrast to the Nazi ideal.

Interestingly, the Book of Judith parallels the history of World War II. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Hitler exhibited narcissistic complexes, and they marginalized and persecuted Jews.[59] The Book of Judith discusses Nebuchadnezzar as a character wishing to be referred to and identified as a God-like king. A psychiatric argument could find a parallel to Hitler's narcissistic tendencies within the Nazi party. Michaud analyzes the invisible conspiracy of the German Christ, begun by Hitler as Führer, which spread through Germany.[60]

The biblical story's portrayal of Judith's romantic façade, used as a pretense against Holofernes, made it an appealing subject during the Symbolist period between 1870 and 1910, and during the Third Reich. The sensual demeanor of both Klimt's and von Stuck's Judiths was evident in pre-existing conceptions of her cast first by the German playwright Hebbel and then reinforced by psychologist Freud, paving the way for Judith to be used as a threatening emblem to women. These literary and artistic transformations suggest an inevitable limitation when emotions interfere with personal objectives, and, in Judith's case, a divine mission.

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58 Michaud, *Cult of Art*, 119.

59 To the best of my knowledge, there is no preceding evidence posed by another scholar that makes this connection. However, I find it fascinating that the correlations between these two male militant leaders, although divided by centuries, exhibit similar characteristics and actions of narcissism and persecution of the same race of people.

60 Michaud, *Cult of Art*, 81.

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Conclusion

Over the changing formula of context and time, artists continuously reinterpreted Judith to portray her differently to their receptive audiences. Judith as a protagonist has historically encompassed a moral and military superiority of the Jewish people.[61] She was a subject adopted by many artists during the Italian Renaissance, such as Donatello, who utilized her to embody power of the state as well as female virtue. The Baroque era and Dutch Golden Age continued to develop heroic images of Judith in the seventeenth century. The early nineteenth century, though, brought a new wave of misrepresentation. The established and powerful female figure was rapidly reduced through manipulation by creative, intelligent, prevailing men who capitalized on Judith's story. Their embellishments of eroticism, romanticism, and idealization diminished her original authenticity. Due to reinterpretations of the impending modern era, numerous disciplines, including theatre, poetry, visual arts, and Freudian psychoanalysis, embraced Judith's story yet diminished her Jewish and virtuous character through literary or visual distortion.

Because twentieth-century artists appropriated Judith into a "woman" of their own time, when audiences observed these circulations of Judith, whether through opera or plays, or in literary or visual art, they would see comparisons to all women as a group. The male creators sexualized and promoted the dangers of women to emphasize the erotic over wisdom and virtue, and the underlying attempt to counteract society's movement toward increasing rights for women. Gustav Klimt was the exception, who idolized women through portraiture. He likely had intentions of portraying Judith in keeping with modern times and to strengthen the status of Jewish female figures he knew personally, such as Adele Bloch-Bauer.

The work of these artists and intellectuals influenced perceptions of Judith leading up to the formation of the Nazi Socialist party in Germany. Ultimately, the Third Reich's well-defined artistic program created a new Judith who met the eugenic criteria within Nazi ideology's vision. With the support of collaboration across literary and psychoanalytic disciplines, the artistic vision of the Third Reich suppressed the honorable Jewish woman, Judith, burying her in façades of misogyny and anti-Semitism, during a disturbed and devastating time, in order to conceal the hope and truth of a people in need of a savior.

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61 Rocío García-Romero "Modern and Contemporary Visions of a Female Heroine: Judith in Twentieth-century Poetry." https://www.kent.ac.uk/english/postgraduate/LitteraeMentis/Section 4.pdf.

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