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Understanding Judith in a Misogynistic World: Female Representations in 16th Century Florence

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UNDERSTANDING JUDITH IN A MISOGYNISTIC WORLD:
FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS IN 16TH CENTURY FLORENCE

by

Annissa M. Conditt

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Art History
at
Lindenwood University

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UNDERSTANDING JUDITH IN A MISOGYNISTIC WORLD:
FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS IN 16TH CENTURY FLORENCE

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master in Fine Arts
at
Lindenwood University

By

Annissa Mae Conditt

Saint Charles, Missouri

[December 16, 2019]

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Understanding Judith in a Misogynistic World: Female Representations in 16th Century Florence

Annissa M. Conditt, Master of Fine Art, 2019

Thesis Directed by: Dr. James Hutson, Ph.D

Judith is a brave female biblical heroine that performs the courageous act of decapitating Holofernes to save the town of Bethulia. Many artworks of Judith provide a different perception of her, as artists portray Judith as weak, feeble, and indifferent; thus, stripping her of the courageous and heroic portrayal that she deserves. The action of a female dominating and overpowering a man is unusual for the time; however, Judith was considered a very significant symbol for Florence and the Medici family, as she represented liberty, virtue, and victory over the strong. Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was commissioned and created for the Medici family in 1456. This thesis will focus on Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, as this artwork starts the beginning of showing Judith as a strong female biblical heroine and demonstrates the significance of Judith as a symbol of Florence and the Medici. By analyzing and discussing how and why this strong female biblical figure is extensively used, it creates an understanding as to why Judith was a significant symbol in a patriarchal society; therefore, making it essential to understand Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*. This thesis will also be analyzing and comparing various artworks to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and discussing how Judith is portrayed as a character. This demonstrates how the depiction of Judith has changed throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period by demonstrating how she went from weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, and strong-willed. Many scholars that discuss Judith, focus on the "true form" of Judith, how she is perceived, the political significance of the sculpture, and the meaning behind her becoming a symbol for the Medici. Although these are significant in understanding Donatello's Judith, many of the other scholars fail to focus on how she is portrayed and how her image has evolved. This thesis will contribute to other articles by providing a thorough analysis of Donatello's Judith and focusing on how she is portrayed to create an understanding of how Judith has evolved from being portrayed as weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, dedicated, and strong-willed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for their endless support during the completion of this work. I would especially like to thank my parents for inspiring me to work hard to fulfill my dreams and telling me to never give up on my dreams. Without them, I wouldn't have had the perseverance to make it this far. I would also like to thank my committee chair, Dr. James Hutson, for his guidance and support in completing this work. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Melissa Elmes and Dr. Erin Sutherland, for their roles in guiding and helping me with this work.

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Introduction/ Background Information

Throughout time, there has been a multitude of religious artworks that depict many biblical scenes. One of the most popular and familiar biblical scenes was the myth of Judith. Artists such as Donatello, Sandro Botticelli, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi, provide different perceptions on Judith and how she is portrayed. Out of these many portrayals of Judith, only a few of these artists depict Judith as a lively, vivid, dedicated, and strong-willed heroine. Although Judith is a well-known biblical figure and is shown in many artworks, it is conflicting to have such a familiar figure as a strong female heroine in a patriarchal culture. Not only is having a strong female heroine contradictory, but she is also shown either beheading or holding the head of a male general named Holofernes. Holding the head of Holofernes displays female dominance over a male, as she holds the dismembered head over the limp body of Holofernes. Although the action of a female dominating and overpowering a man is unusual for the time, Judith was a very significant symbol for Florence and the Medici family, as she represented liberty, virtue, and victory over the strong. Not only did Judith symbolize the city of Florence, she was also used as a symbol for the Medici family, as Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was commissioned by Piero de' Medici in 1456, and then displayed in the Medici's palace courtyard.

The many different depictions and portrayals of Judith provide an interesting interpretation on 16th and 17th century Italy. This paper will be focusing on Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, as this artwork displays a strong female biblical heroine and demonstrates the significance of Judith as a symbol of Florence and the Medici; therefore, analyzing and discussing how and why this strong female biblical figure is extensively used as a significant symbol in a patriarchal society is essential to understanding Donatello's artwork. Donatello's

Judith and Holofernes demonstrates how Judith was perceived and portrayed in Renaissance Florence; therefore, analyzing and comparing various artworks to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and discussing how Judith is portrayed as a character demonstrates how the depiction of Judith has changed through the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period. Some of the many artworks portray Judith in a delicate, innocent, seductive, and unworthy manner, thus making it unbelievable that she did such a malicious and life-threatening deed. Judith has also been given more masculine features to take away from the identity of the powerful figure making it more about the act rather than being about Judith as a heroic figure. As time moves on, the depiction of Judith seems to become less virtuous seductress and more of a violent, strong, and a heroic female figure. The depictions of Judith also take a more gruesome approach and depict a different moment of the story, while Judith is very strong-willed, courageous, and a confident woman. By looking at these different artworks and comparing to Donatello's Judith, it creates an understanding of the evolution of the depiction of Judith, as we go from conservative and seductive to a strong-willed and courageous heroic figure.

There are many articles that discuss various artworks of Judith, however they all lack in the sense of understanding her as a heroic female figure. Throughout these many different approaches to Judith, especially Donatello's, it provides an idea of what has been said about the subject until now. Many of the articles that are going to be discussed take a very interesting approach, as several focus on the "true form" of Judith and how Judith is being accurately portrayed according to the story of Judith. Other articles mainly focus on creating a deeper interpretation of certain artworks that depict Judith, such as Botticelli's and Michelangelo's Judith; however, many of the articles that focus on Donatello's Judith look at how she is perceived, the political significance of the sculpture, and the meaning behind her becoming a

symbol for the Medici. Although the symbolism, meaning, and political context of Donatello's Judith is significant, many of the other scholars fail to focus on how Donatello's Judith is portrayed and how her image has changed and evolved throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque. This thesis will contribute to other articles by providing a thorough analysis of Donatello's Judith, by considering the political significance and symbolism, but also focusing on how she is portrayed will be essential to the analysis as well. By focusing on these significant concepts, it would create an understanding of how Judith has evolved from being portrayed as weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, dedicated, and strong-willed.

To fully understand Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, the focus of this thesis will be a feminist approach to this topic, while also incorporating Semiotics. In using a feminist approach, I would consider the female and male gaze to emphasize and help one understand the patriarchal culture of the time and why it was so odd to have such a powerful female biblical character that had such a significant role. A semiotics approach would consider the symbolism behind the various artworks that Judith is depicted in, thus creating a better understanding of the work itself. By using these methodologies, it would create a better understanding of Donatello's Judith, as well as, understand the evolution of the depiction of Judith in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period. It is essential to look at how the depictions of Judith have evolved throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period, as it would bring a better understanding as to why Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was such a significant symbol to Florence and the Medici. Also, this would establish a thorough understanding of how Donatello's Judith was above her time period with her domination over a man and strong demeanor, however still lacking the heroic features that Judith deserved. This thesis will contribute to other articles by creating a thorough analysis of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* that considers the political significance,

symbolism, and portrayal of Judith. By looking at other artworks throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period, it establishes how Judith has evolved from being perceived as weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, dedicated, and strong-willed.

Literature Review

Throughout the Italian Renaissance, there are many different depictions that reflect the story of Judith; however, Jane Davidson Reid in "The True Judith" (1969) analyzes the truth in John Ruskin's argument that there is only one true depiction of Judith. Reid analyzes and challenges Ruskin's argument by discussing the depiction of Judith in Sandro Botticelli's *The Return of Judith to Bethulia* (Figure 3), created in 1472. While comparing other artists' depiction of Judith to Botticelli's. Reid states that John Ruskin claims that Botticelli's depiction of Judith is the only representation that is true to her and protested that the other million depictions were vile.¹ In John Ruskin's book *Mornings in Florence*, he states, "that there is more to be thought of and pictured in Judith than painters have mostly found in them to show you".² Ruskin continues to argue that reading the verses from Judith's book, she is supposed to be swift and in peaceful motion with sweet solemnity of dreaming thought.³ With this being the true form of how Judith is supposed to be depicted, he argues that Botticelli's artwork is the only depiction of Judith that is true to her. With this conclusion, Reid discusses and analyzes the many different depictions of Judith by other artists to see if Ruskin's argument is still true. The analysis of these depictions and the comparison of them to Ruskin's arguments, provides a better understanding of Botticelli's *The Return of Judith to Bethulia*, and other artworks with a depiction of Judith.

¹ Jane Davidson Reid. "The True Judith." (*Art Journal*, 1969), 376.

² John Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence*. (Good Press, 2019), 61.

³ *Ibid*, 62.

While Reid mainly focuses on a different argument by proving John Ruskin's argument of Botticelli's *The Return of Judith to Bethulia*, Yael Even discusses and focuses on the controversy of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*. Even discusses how it was very controversial for the time, considering Judith started as a strong political symbol for the Medici, as it was displayed in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, and eventually moved and replaced continuously for centuries. Even argues in her article, "The Loggia Dei Lanzi: A Showcase of Female Subjugation" (1991), that the continuous displacement of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was uncommon and obsessive. The relentless attempt to all but dispose of *Judith and Holofernes* was a manifestation of misogynous attitudes, thus, resentment arose as soon as the sculpture was displayed in public.⁴ Although Judith remained the symbol of Florence for a significant amount of time, the idea of a strong female figure was strongly looked down upon. Overall, Donatello's sculpture was placed in the heart of Florence, thus being a public symbol and statement; however, the depiction of a woman killing and demonstrating dominance of a man, and doing a job that men weren't able to do, was intimidating and obscene for the misogynistic community of that time. This article discusses Donatello's sculpture and the history of the constant displacement of this sculpture. It also provides information of the Loggia dei Lanzi, which is significant in understanding Donatello's Judith, as well as the political symbolism of this marvelous sculpture.

Although Reid and Even have a more focused approach on certain artworks, Peter J. Lucas', "'Judith' and the Woman Hero" (1992), discusses how Judith is interpreted in three different ways. She is interpreted as a seductress, who uses her feminine charm; a virgin beauty,

⁴ Yael Even, "The Loggia Dei Lanzi: A Showcase of Female Subjugation." (*Woman's Art Journal*, 1991), 10.

symbolic of chastity overcoming lust; or a figure of the Church, conquering evil. Lucas argues that Judith does not conform to any of these, but transcends them, as her ambiguous role as seductress is eliminated, but rather, imbued with moral strength and wisdom.⁵ Lucas' argument isn't focusing much on specific artworks, but is focusing on Judith herself and how she is interpreted. This provides a completely different approach than the other scholars, considering Lucas looks at the story and character of Judith and makes an interpretation based on what her character is like.

In contrast to Lucas, Christine Sperling's, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and the Demands of Medici Politics" (1992), Sperling discusses Donatello's bronze statue *David* (Figure 4) created around 1440. Within this article, she discusses how the bronze statue was displayed in the Medici's palace and how recently found documents reveal the history of the sculpture. Although Donatello's *David* is not a focus, this discovery brings some historical background of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*. Originally, there wasn't any proof that Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was found in the Medici garden until 1495, however the documents that were found revealed that Judith was in the garden of the Medici palace on the Via Larga as early as 1466 to 1469.⁶ This provides a historical background on Donatello's Judith that helps bring more context to the artwork. Sperling also discusses Medici politics, thus providing more of an understanding of the Medici and how they became a significant part of Donatello's sculptures like *Judith and Holofernes*.

Athalya Brenner analyzes the biblical characters of Esther, Judith, and Susanna in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna* (1995) to find a deeper meaning in each

⁵ Peter J. Lucas, "'Judith' and the Woman Hero." (*The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1992), 17.

⁶ Christine M Sperling, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and the Demands of Medici Politics". (*The Burlington Magazine*, 1992), 219.

biblical character. Brenner analyzes the story of Judith, from the beginning to the end, to give Judith a deeper meaning than what she is perceived as. Brenner instantly states that all women during the Renaissance were considered secondary to men and were defined or differentiated with reference to man, as man is the subject and the absolute.⁷ This is essential to understanding Judith, considering this period believed that men are superior to women. While analyzing the story of Judith, Brenner also considers her character in a very thorough manner, thus providing a detailed understanding of how Judith was perceived, and how her strong character was managed in a patriarchal society. Brenner's focus provides a great understanding for how Judith became a significant symbol during the Italian Renaissance, while also understanding how a strong female biblical character like Judith is perceived in a patriarchal society. Compared to Lucas' approach, Brenner provides a completely different way of interpreting Judith. Brenner isn't just looking at Judith's story, but also the patriarchal society of the time to understand how Judith is interpreted in the patriarchal society.

In Keith Christiansen's, "Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition" (2004), he discusses the artworks that were shown during the Artemisia Gentileschi exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. In taking a biographical approach, it brings a better understanding of Orazio and Artemisia, and how involved Artemisia's father was involved in her work. Christiansen discussed the artworks that both Orazio and Artemisia worked on together and distinguishes the technique and characteristics of each artist. While looking at pieces that they worked on together, Christiansen states that Orazio's methods of composition is with the use of color and light, as he liked the challenge of capturing the sunlight of the outdoors;

⁷ Athalya Brenner. *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 209.

however, Artemisia would capture the light with the interest in using light for a dramatic effect.⁸ Christiansen continues by looking at the lives of Artemisia and Orazio, as it allows an understanding of their artwork and what was accomplished by each one. This creates an understanding of the characteristics and distinguishes the style and technique used for each artist. Although I will not be using Orazio in my thesis, the breakdown to Artemisia's artistic style and technique creates a better understanding of her interests and why she uses a specific style in her work. Overall, this article is completely different than the other scholars that have been discussed previously, but it brings in the understanding of the Baroque period style, as well as an understanding of Gentileschi's artworks that will be discussed in this paper.

Compared to Christiansen's discussion of Gentileschi's work, in Nanette Salomon's "Judging Artemisia: A Baroque Woman in Modern Art History" (2006), she also discusses Gentileschi's work, but takes a very feminist approach in her article. She argues that the discovery of Gentileschi was during an era of feminist revisionism; therefore, becoming a popular feminist figure. Salomon argues that the documentation on Gentileschi was deeply problematic because they were tied to her life through mythological stories of women and sexuality; therefore, Salomon looks through these to discuss and analytically look through Gentileschi's artworks, without scandalizing and sensationalist prefiguration. By doing this, she also discusses the many artworks that Gentileschi has painted, arguing that her style is clearly in the Baroque style. This provides a thorough analysis of each of her artworks, while also giving a thorough look through all the documentations about Gentileschi. Considering Salomon analyzes all the documentation that exists on Gentileschi and her art, she provides a deep analytical and feminist understanding of Gentileschi's work. Salomon's approach is a completely different

⁸ Keith Christiansen, "Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition." (*Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 2004), 103.

viewpoint of Gentileschi's work compared to Christiansen's approach to Gentileschi and her technique in her artwork.

Some of the many famous and most discussed depictions of Judith are Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Figure 1) and Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* (Figure 2). Christiansen and Salomon focus their study on Gentileschi artworks; however, Kevin Brine discusses both artworks in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (2010), as he takes an interesting approach to Gentileschi's and Donatello's artworks by analyzing the costuming of Judith and the place of Judith in the Italian Renaissance of Baroque period. He argues that Gentileschi's Judith has multiple personae and iconographies in her afterlife, as she becomes a metaphor, and thereby, also a lightning rod for the cultural perceptions of the independent Jewish woman.⁹ He also states that Donatello's Judith and her derivatives wear symbolic armor, as the frivolous luxury of jewelry is transformed into the armor of chastity, righteousness, and fear of the Lord.¹⁰ Although both artworks come from different time periods, they are both significant for their time, thus defining the image of Judith. Brine also writes various chapters on how Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and Donatello's *David* are two artworks that are part of the same collection, as well as, in the same realm of significance for Renaissance Florence. He states that both biblical figures are the most familiar images of the Italian Renaissance, especially in Renaissance Florence.¹¹ Brine examines Gentileschi's work and identifies the iconography and cultural aspect of her work to create an interpretation, while Salomon seems to focus on the documentation that is found on Gentileschi and analyze her

⁹ Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, *The Sword of Judith : Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, U.K.: Open Book Publishers, 2010).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 343.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 293.

works based off what was written. This creates a different approach and understanding to Gentileschi's work than Solomon's article provides.

In Sarah Blake McHam's, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and 'Judith' as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence"(2010), McHam covers several important political issues that were tied to the iconography of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* sculpture. She discusses the positioning of the sculpture in the garden of the Medici Palace, shortly after the palace was completed in the mid to late 1450s. McHam analyzes Donatello's statue by examining the conjunction of artistic and political events in relation to the theme of pride that is central to the iconography of the Judith narrative. McHam's argument is that Donatello's statue demonstrates the political circumstances of the 1450s, and the memory of the Albizzi-Medici struggle of the 1420s and early 1430s. By finding an informative and political meaning behind Donatello's statue, it creates a thorough understanding of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*. Reid's argument is slightly different than McHam's, considering she really focuses on the misogynistic attitudes and the meaning behind the repeated displacement of Donatello's statue; however, McHam is focusing on the iconography, informational, and political events to create a deeper interpretation of Donatello's statue.

Throughout these many different approaches to Judith, especially Donatello's, it provides an idea of what has been said about the subject until now. Many of the articles that were discussed take a very interesting approach, as several focus on the "true form" of Judith. Similar to how this paper approaches Judith, articles such as Reid are based off of how Judith is being portrayed or depicted in an accurate way according to the story of Judith. Other articles mainly focus on creating a deeper interpretation of certain artworks that depict Judith, such as Botticelli and Michelangelo; however, many of the articles that focus on Donatello's Judith look at how

she is perceived and the political significance of the sculpture. Although the symbolism, meaning, and political context of Donatello's Judith is significant, many of the other scholars fail to focus on how she is portrayed and how Judith's image has changed and evolved throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque. Therefore, this will contribute to other articles by highlighting how Judith has evolved from being portrayed as weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, dedicated, and strong-willed.

Research Methodology

Judith was a very significant symbol for Florence and the Medici family. This chapter of my paper will outline the various methodologies that have been used to research Judith. Many of these scholars that have written about depictions of Judith have taken a similar approach, as they focus on how she is perceived, the political significance of the sculpture, and the meaning behind her becoming a symbol for the Medici. Although these are significant in understanding Donatello's Judith, many of the other scholars fail to focus on how she is portrayed and how her image has evolved. With that being said, the methodologies that were used were mainly taking a feminist approach. Many of the authors were either discussing misogynistic portrayals of Judith, discussing the patriarchal society, and how women were perceived. The next popular methodology was New Historicism, as many scholars were considering the literature of the story of Judith, reevaluating written information of artists, or focusing on the playwrights of Judith and how she was portrayed. The other methodologies that were mentioned were bibliographical, as they would evaluate the artists' life and using that to create meaning to their artworks; however, that usually also considered a formalist approach as they would discuss the characteristics, style, and technique of an artist. There were also several scholars who would take an iconography or semiotics approach, thus looking at the symbolism of an artwork or the political symbolism. For

my thesis, I will use a combination of a Semiotics and Feminist approach, as they are the best methodological approaches to take when examining the significance of symbolism and the use of a female protagonist in a patriarchal society.

Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was very controversial, considering Judith started as a strong political symbol for the Medici's, as it was displayed in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, and eventually moved and replaced continuously for centuries. In 1991, Yael Even argues that the continuous displacement of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was uncommon and obsessive. The relentless attempt to dispose of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was a manifestation of misogynous attitudes; thus, resentment arose as soon as the sculpture was displayed in public.¹² Not only was the attempt to dispose of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* a demonstration of misogynistic attitudes, but the act of replacing Judith by Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* (Figure 7) reinforced the notion of a move towards a patriarchal message in the Loggia dei Lanzi. Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* depicts a male figure, Perseus, overpowering a woman with Medusa's head in hand and Perseus' foot on top of the remaining carcass of Medusa; thus, the replacement of Judith with a male dominating a woman emphasizes a patriarchal message in the Loggia dei Lanzi. Although Judith remained the symbol of Florence for a significant amount of time, the idea of a strong female figure was strongly looked down upon. Donatello's sculpture was placed in the heart of Florence, thus being a public symbol and statement; however, the depiction of a woman killing and demonstrating dominance of a man, and doing a job that men weren't able to do, was intimidating and obscene for the community of that time. The article discussing Donatello's sculpture and the history of the constant

¹² Yael, Even, "The Loggia Dei Lanzi: A Showcase of Female Subjugation." (*Woman's Art Journal*, 1991), 10.

displacement of this sculpture is focusing and taking a feminist approach. Even also focuses a bit on the political symbolism of the artwork, thus also focusing on iconography or semiotics. Yael Even mainly focuses on the female subjugation and misogynistic attitudes towards the statue.

The misogynistic community of the Italian Renaissance is essential in understanding why Judith is perceived in a innocent and feeble way. In 1992, Peter Lucas', "'Judith' and the Woman Hero", Lucas discusses how Judith is interpreted in three different ways: a seductress, who uses her feminine charm as a means to an end; a virgin beauty, who is a type of chastity overcoming lust; or a figure of the Church, who is conquering evil. Lucas then argues that Judith does not conform to any of these, but transcends them. He states that her ambiguous role as seductress is not eliminated, but rather, imbued with moral strength and wisdom.¹³ While Yael Even's focuses on the controversial displacement of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, Lucas takes a more thorough approach by focusing on interpreting the character of Judith as a whole. Lucas does not necessarily focus on a single depiction of Judith but focuses on her character to better understand and effectively interpret Judith. In the process of doing this, Lucas also strips any misogynistic opinions of Judith's character to have a less biased opinion of her. This different interpretation of Judith is useful in my research, considering it takes a different approach to the interpretation of Judith. Although a different interpretation of Judith, Lucas is still using a Feminist approach to the topic, considering he is arguing against misogynistic portrayals of Judith.

Lucas and Even provide a thorough analysis of Judith by focusing on Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and providing an unbiased interpretation of Judith's character; however, in 1995, Athalya Brenner wrote *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna* that extensively

¹³ Peter J. Lucas, "'Judith' and the Woman Hero" (*The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1992), 17.

analyzed the biblical characters of Esther, Judith, and Susanna. She analyzes and discusses Judith's story to find a deeper meaning in her character; however, she has a feminist approach to it. Throughout the book, Brenner carefully analyzes the story of Judith, from the beginning to the end, to give Judith a deeper meaning. Brenner begins the chapter of Judith by instantly stating that all women are other and are defined or differentiated with reference to man, as man is the subject, the absolute, and women are the other.¹⁴ Although the Renaissance period believed that men are superior to women, Brenner argues that Judith becomes a metaphorical symbol in the beginning. Judith appears to be a classical metaphor for the nation and all women, as her name means the "Jewess"; therefore, Judith becomes a representation of all women in Bethulia, in that each is a "Jewess".¹⁵ While supporting this accusation, Brenner quickly states that Judith's widowhood conforms the idea of being a classical metaphor of Israel. Judith's widowhood conforms the traditional representation of Israel by her status, rhetoric, wealth, beauty, and genealogy.¹⁶ Brenner continues her argument by stating that Judith is the only speaking female character in her story. Although Judith's slave is a big part in the story, she is not an actively speaking character. Brenner argues that this is due to the patriarchal culture being able to deal with only one woman who speaks and acts because adding another speaking or acting woman would severely compromise the status quo.¹⁷ Therefore, unless Judith dies, there cannot be another outspoken or active woman in the story. Brenner also begins to mention that the powerful role and sacrifice of Judith beheading Holofernes is toned down by having Judith

¹⁴ Athalya Brenner. *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 209.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 210.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 212.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 219.

sacrifice her belongings and takes a traditional role as a wife. Judith saving Bethulia is considered a masculine trait and action; thus, the story attempts to disarm her presence from the public to return to her normal traditional role as a woman. This is done by having Judith sacrifice her only two possessions: her property and her life; therefore, giving up her slave and is buried in the same cave as her husband. This puts Judith back into her traditional role as a wife, thus becoming a controlled public memory. Although it is seen as controlled, Brenner argues that Judith's story reinforces and challenges Bethulia's gender-determined ideology.¹⁸

After making this statement, Brenner breaks into another section of the chapter to interrelate the story of Judith with biblical traditions, considering focusing on only one perspective would not do it justice.¹⁹ This will add to the intertextual relations between Judith and biblical writing; thus, looking at readings with traditions of the Massah and Meribah episode that correspond well to the setting of Judith would give a better explanation as to why Judith was so successful. These readings would also investigate the connection of Judith's necessary leadership, while also considering if these chapters could be read in a male or female voice.²⁰ In doing this, Brenner creates a thorough understanding of Judith's story, and how she was portrayed.

In Brenner's last section of Judith, she discussed the idea of beheading, and how that symbolizes castration. In this discussion, she brings up Perseus and Medusa compared to Judith and Holofernes, creating the idea of castration confusion. Thus, she also discusses how the fear

¹⁸ Ibid, 223.

¹⁹ Ibid, 224.

²⁰ Ibid, 225.

of castration could also equal a confusion of genders, supporting this idea with Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, with the confused facial expression of Judith. Brenner suggests that, instead of taking Judith as a female figure, whose heroism is opposed to her wickedly seductive act in a binary struggle for gendered allegiance, she would like to take her as a figure who is at the cutting edge of knowledge and represents a challenge to our assumptions.²¹

Overall, Brenner analyzes the story of Judith, while considering her character in a very thorough manner. This provides a detailed understanding of how Judith was perceived and how her strong character was managed in a patriarchal society. While observing these issues, Brenner uses a feminist approach to this topic. Although she does not take too much of an aggressive feminist approach, she identifies the ways Judith's strong character was unusual for a patriarchal culture. She also discusses how Judith's story became controlled, acceptable for a traditional biblical story, and the possibility of castration confusion. While also taking a feminist approach, Brenner discusses and considers the patriarchal culture, the roles of women, and how women were perceived during that time, while also considering the literature of the story; therefore, Brenner also considered New Historicism. By looking at culture, literature, and human production, New Historicism provides a more complete picture and understanding of the society. Brenner's focus on feminism and New Historicism creates an understanding of how a strong female biblical character like Judith is perceived in a patriarchal society.

While the previous articles analyzed certain artworks and analyzed Judith's biblical character, Nanette Salomon's, 2006 book, *Judging Artemisia: A Baroque Woman in Modern Art History*, focuses on Gentileschi. Salomon argues that Gentileschi was discovered and became

²¹ Ibid, 263.

popular during an era of feminist revisionism. She argues that the documentation that has been written on her was deeply problematic, as it tied to her life through mythological stories of women and sexuality. Throughout Salomon's book, these files are discussed to analytically look through Gentileschi's artworks, without scandals and sensationalist prefiguration. Salomon also analyzes and deeply discusses the many artworks that Gentileschi has painted, while stating why it her art style is Baroque. This provides a thorough analysis of each of her artworks, while also giving a thorough look through all the documentation about Gentileschi. While still fighting the feminist views from the feminist revisionism, Salomon still takes a feminist standpoint. Although slightly feminist, she is mainly taking a New Historicism standpoint, considering she is reevaluating what has been written about Gentileschi's artworks. Also, looking through Gentileschi's life and artworks could also be considered a biographical approach. The combination of Feminism, New Historicism, and Biography creates a thorough examination of Gentileschi and her artworks; thus, providing an understanding of Gentileschi's artworks and what has been written on her. This will help when looking at Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* artwork and being able to understand her style, her background, and having the knowledge of past writings about her from other scholars.

There are many different versions of the story of Judith, however in Giraudoux's play he creates a dark and unique version of the story. In this play, Judith is portrayed in a very contradicting way. Mary Douglas Dirks', "The Problem of Judith", made in 1959, discusses and analyzes Giraudoux's tragic muse in *Judith*, and how Giraudoux uses the word "tragedy" for the play *Judith*. She mentions that Giraudoux uses "tragic" to describe this play, but does not use it again for other dark dramas that are equally as tragic. Dirks questions if Judith, in Giraudoux's play, is a heroine or, "fortune's plaything whose fate moves us to pity or horror: or is she quite a

bit less than that, a *femme a histories*, caught up in a web spun from her own folly?"²²

Therefore, she examines and analyzes the play, focusing heavily on the role of Judith. It also discusses the interpretation of Judith and who she is seen as, thus providing an understanding of the play *Judith* and her character, and her role in the plays setting. By focusing on the way Judith is portrayed in Giraudoux's play, the methodology that Dirks is focused on is New Historicism, as he looks at the playwright and how the culture portrays Judith during this time period.

Looking at the play version of Judith's story provides a different understanding compared to the other articles or books that were discussed. Not only is it helpful to analyze the play version of Judith's story, but it provides a completely different interpretation of the biblical figure. Due to this, it provides a different approach than Lucas' and Brenner's interpretation to Judith's biblical figure. For the methodology that I will be using, this will be a great addition to understanding the story of Judith, which is essential in understanding Judith artworks and why she is portrayed in a certain way.

In Sandro Botticelli's *The Return of Judith to Bethulia*, he depicts a very innocent and graceful Judith; however, the way she is portrayed takes away from how she should be shown. In Jane Davidson Reid's, "The True Judith", created in 1969, Reid discusses the depiction of Judith in Sandro Botticelli's *The Return of Judith to Bethulia*, created in 1472, while also discussing other artists' depiction of Judith. Reid starts by stating that John Ruskin declares that Botticelli's *Judith* is the only true Judith. Throughout the article, Reid looks at different artworks with depictions of Judith to see if that statement is still true to this time. John Ruskin claims that Botticelli's depiction of Judith is the only representation that is true to her and protested that the

²² Mary Douglas Dirks, "The Problem of Judith" (*The Tulane Drama Review*, 1959), 32.

other million depictions were vile.²³ To better understand John Ruskin's argument, his book *Mornings in Florence*, states on page 61, "that there is more to be thought of and pictured in Judith than painters have mostly found in them to show you".²⁴ Ruskin continues to argue that understanding and reading the verses from Judith's book, provides information on how she is supposed to be portrayed. According to the verses, she is supposed to be swift and in peaceful motion with sweet solemnity of dreaming thought.²⁵ With this being the true form of how Judith is supposed to be depicted, he argues that Botticelli's is the only artwork of Judith that portrays her in this way. These readings by Ruskin and Reid provides an understanding, analysis, and criticism of these depictions. Reid's approach to this topic is completely New Historicism, Formalism, and Analysis, considering she is looking at different artworks to determine if John Ruskin's accusation is an accurate one.

Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was originally to have been in the Medici gardens, however it is unknown how long or when it was displayed there. Sarah Blake McHam's, 2010 article, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and 'Judith' as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence", covers several important political issues that were tied to the iconography of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* sculpture. She discusses the positioning of the sculpture in the garden of the Medici Palace shortly after the palace was completed in the mid to late 1450s. This article examines the conjunction of artistic and political events by analyzing Donatello's statue in relation to the theme of pride that is central to the iconography of the Judith narrative. McHam's argument is that Donatello's statue is clearly informative of political circumstances of the 1450s

²³ Jane Davidson Reid, "The True Judith." (*Art Journal*, 1969), 376.

²⁴ John Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence*. (Good Press, 2019),61.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 62.

and the memory of the Albizzi-Medici struggle of the 1420s and early 1430s. This approach of finding an informative and political meaning behind Donatello's statue is mainly iconographic; however, it is also New Historicism, since it is also considering the cultural and literary texts of the time period to construct meaning. While Even is taking a feminist approach and focusing on the controversial displacement of the artwork, McHam is focusing on the cultural and literary texts to create meaning; thus, bringing two different approaches to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*.

Artemisia Gentileschi is a female artist during the Baroque period that brought upon many great artworks. Unfortunately, it was very unusual to have a female artist during this time, therefore creating difficulty for women to improve their art skills or be an artist. Keith Christiansen's, "Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition", created in 2004, discusses the art works that were shown during the Artemisia Gentileschi exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. Christiansen argument is a biographical approach by discussing Orazio and Artemisia. While doing this, he discusses the artworks that both Orazio and Artemisia both worked on by distinguishing the technique and characteristics of each artist. Although he does this with many of the artworks that were involved in the exhibition, he really analyzes and distinguishes what was done by each artist in Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi's *Susanna and the Elders* (Figure 8), created in 1610. Christiansen states that Orazio's methods of composition is with the use of color and light, as he liked the challenge of capturing the sunlight of the outdoors; however, Artemisia would capture the light with the interest in using light for a dramatic effect.²⁶ Overall, Christiansen uses biography and formalism to understand the meaning

²⁶ Keith Christiansen, "Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition." (*Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 2004), 103.

behind each work. Looking at the life of Artemisia and Orazio allows an understanding of their artwork, and what was accomplished in each piece. By using formalism, it allows the understanding of the characteristics and style used for each artist to understand who created a specific part of an artwork. It also allows one to understand the style and technique that both artists utilized in their artwork.

With there being various versions of Judith's story, it is essential to consider all of them and how Judith is portrayed. In Kevin Brine's *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, created in 2010, he discusses the many different cultural types, stories, and portrayals of Judith. His chapters go by country and the type of religion, considering that each story portrays Judith differently. Looking at the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period section, Brine discusses some of the many famous and most discussed depictions of Judith, such as Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* and Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*. Brine takes an interesting approach to Artemisia's and Donatello's artworks as he analyzes the costuming of Judith. He argues that Gentileschi's Judith has multiple personae and iconographies in her afterlife, as she becomes a metaphor and thereby also a lightning rod for the cultural perceptions of the independent Jewish woman.²⁷ He also states that Donatello's Judith and her derivatives wear symbolic armor, as the frivolous luxury of jewelry is transformed into the armor of chastity, righteousness, and fear of the Lord.²⁸ Although both artworks come from different time periods, they are both significant for their time, thus defining the image of Judith. With the careful examination of how Judith is depicted, Brine takes a more iconographic or semiotic approach, as

²⁷ Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, *The Sword of Judith : Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, U.K.: Open Book Publishers, 2010).

²⁸ *Ibid*, 343.

well as a feminist approach. This creates an understanding of Judith by using symbolism to create a deeper meaning.

Overall, Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* demonstrates how Judith was perceived and portrayed in Renaissance Florence; therefore, analyzing and comparing various artworks to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and discussing how Judith is portrayed as a character demonstrates how the depiction of Judith has changed through the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period. Considering what has been written by other scholars on Judith, the methodologies that will best represent my argument are Semiotics and Feminism. Semiotics identifies the symbols in an artwork to consider and interpret what they mean to create a deeper meaning. Feminism investigates the marginalized position of women and the depiction of women throughout history, while also discussing the misogynistic attitudes in a patriarchal society. Using these methodologies would be the most beneficial because it would deeply explore and analyze the cultural and literature aspect of Donatello's Judith, while also considering the symbolism behind Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, as well as the various artworks that Judith is depicted in. The use of feminism would emphasize and help one understand the patriarchal culture of the time, and why it was so odd to have such a powerful female biblical character that had such a significant role. After analyzing the different methodologies and approaches to this topic, the combination of these methods would be innovative in the way that it investigates something that isn't discussed or focused on by other scholars. While taking a feminist approach to the depictions of Judith is quite popular and extensive, the analyzation of why this strong female protagonist is used is nearly unseen. There are many scholars who have focused on Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, as this artwork has a significant part of Renaissance Florence. They also have an extensive evaluation as to why

Judith is accepted as a female heroine in a patriarchal society, but there isn't much of a focus on how Judith is portrayed, how she has evolved throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period, and why Judith is such a significant symbol during this time; therefore, using the combination of Semiotics and Feminism for my methodology would create a thorough understanding of Donatello's Judith and how the depiction of Judith is identified and changed in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period.

Analysis

In order to better understand the context of the work, this chapter will begin by discussing the biblical story of Judith and analyzing how this story was perceived in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods. Reviewing the biblical story of Judith can give a better understanding of how she is portrayed, while also providing a deeper understanding of the story. Also, reading and analyzing texts like Graham Runnals' *Judith and Holofernes: A Late-Fifteenth-Century French Mystery Play* could provide an understanding of how Judith was portrayed. Discussing and analyzing these types of texts would provide a more accurate analysis of the depictions and portrayal of Judith.

The focus will be on Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* with a discussion on the significance of how Donatello's Judith became a political symbol. It is essential to discuss the Piazza della Signoria and Loggia dei Lanzi, considering it is a significant location that enhanced the identification of Judith as a symbol and understanding Donatello's sculpture of Judith. Also, looking at the Medici commissions would provide a better understanding of Judith as a symbol for Florence and the Medici family. This would also include looking deeper into Donatello's sculpture, as Piero de' Medici commissioned and displayed the sculpture in the palace's

courtyard. Next, comparing other depictions to Donatello's Judith throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods helps elucidate how Judith is portrayed and how the depiction of Judith has changed through time and place. By looking at various artworks, it depicts how Judith is portrayed different and how she is represented; therefore, providing every artists' interpretation on the story of Judith and being able to compare it to Donatello's representation.

Representations of Judith and Holofernes are the most familiar images of the Italian Renaissance, especially in Renaissance Florence.²⁹ Judith became a strong biblical heroine and a significant symbol, as she represented fortitude and justice, while also becoming a symbol of the Virgin's triumph over sin and evil.³⁰ Judith especially became a significant symbol for the city of Florence and the Medici family. What Judith represented became relatable for the city of Florence, as she not only symbolized justice and fortitude, but she also demonstrated how the weak can overcome the strong. Along with this, she was also used as a symbol for the Medici family, as Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was created in 1460 and takes a significant role in Florence during the Italian Renaissance. This artwork quickly became a significant symbol to the city of Florence and the Medici, as it was commissioned by Piero de' Medici in 1456.

Donatello's sculpture was originally displayed in the Medici Palace and eventually moved to the Piazza della Signoria in front of the Palazzo Vecchio in 1495. For centuries, Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was moved and replaced even though Judith started and remained a strong political symbol for the Medici. The continuous attempt to dispose of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was a demonstration of misogynistic attitudes, but the act of replacing Judith by Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* reinforced the notion of a move towards a

²⁹ Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, *The Sword of Judith : Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, U.K.: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 293.

³⁰ Loren Patridge, "Art of Renaissance: Florence 1400-1600" (University of California Press, 2009), 89.

patriarchal message in the Loggia dei Lanzi.³¹ Considering Donatello's sculpture was a public symbol and statement, the depiction of a woman killing and demonstrating dominance of a man was intimidating and obscene for the community of that time. In analyzing Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, this artwork displays a strong female biblical heroine and demonstrates the significance of Judith as a symbol of Florence and the Medici; however, the continuous relocation and portrayal of Judith provides a conflicting message in this patriarchal society. Considering Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* portrayal, significance, symbolism, and patriarchal message, we can better understand how the depiction of Judith is identified and how she has changed by analyzing and comparing various artworks to Donatello's during the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period.

To better understand the depictions of Judith, one needs to understand the various versions of Judith. The most popular and familiar is the biblical tale from the Old testament that is depicted in many artworks throughout time. This story of Judith is about how a King/God of the Assyrians in Nineveh called Nebuchadnezzar was besieging the town of Bethulia. The inhabitants of the town refused to accept Nebuchadnezzar as their god and created an army angering the general, Holofernes. Considering nothing was to be done, Judith decided to take a heroic act and visit Holofernes with her maid beside her. Even though Judith resorts to deceit, she dresses in her most elegant attire. Judith and her maid servant bring wine and kosher to Holofernes' tent with the plan to make him intoxicated. Holofernes' was beside himself with desire for Judith and awaited an opportunity to seduce her; therefore, Holofernes drank an excessive amount of wine while Judith consumed a modest amount. When Holofernes laid prostrate on his bed from excessive drinking, Judith took the general's sword, grabbed his head

³¹ Evens Yael, "The Loggia Dei Lanzi: A Showcase of Female Subjugation", 10.

by his hair, and beheaded Holofernes. She was proclaimed as the savior of the Jewish people for slaying the Philistine general. Although there are different variations of the story of Judith, they all end up the same way with Judith beheading Holofernes; however, the Medieval Hebrew version of Judith is slightly different in the sense that key features are missing providing some new elements to consider. The main things to focus on is how Judith is portrayed in these stories, as she is sometimes shown as a younger, unmarried woman instead of a wealthy, independent widow; thus, making her more vulnerable, less experienced, and less of a dependent female.³² Although this version of the story takes away Judith's strong and independent character, it reflects the era and attitudes of the time; thus, being something to consider when looking at the depictions of Judith from the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period.

Florence is known as the “cradle of the Renaissance” with endless amounts of Renaissance artworks, however much of Florence's architecture is Gothic. Located in the Piazza della Signoria is the Palazzo Vecchio, which is a huge baronial-style palace that became the Medici Palace when Cosimo I de' Medici lived here in 1540. The Piazza Signoria is a significant location, as it was a public square that accommodated civic spectacles of power that citizens were required to witness and verify, such as installations of priors, public executions, and maneuvers of the strong civic militia.³³ In this Piazza, next to the Palazzo Vecchio, is the Prior's Loggia, otherwise known as the Loggia dei Lanzi after the mid-sixteenth century. The Loggia dei Lanzi was developed by the Medici during the 16th century as an artistic stage for political propaganda and a ritual setting for male transcendence.³⁴ The several sculptures that reside in the

³²Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, *The Sword of Judith : Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, U.K.: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 82.

³³ Loren Patridge, “Art of Renaissance: Florence 1400-1600” (University of California Press, 2009), 13.

³⁴ Evens Yael, "The Loggia Dei Lanzi: A Showcase of Female Subjugation", 10.

Loggia suggest certain significant political allegories. Of these various sculptures, Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* is one of the many significant sculptures that resides in the Loggia, as well as Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus Beheading Medusa*. Originally, Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was commissioned by Piero de' Medici in 1456 to be used in the fountain for the Palazzo Medici garden. In 1495, it became the property of the government after the expulsion of the Medici. With the move to the front of the Palazzo Vecchio, Donatello's sculpture was made the symbol of Florence and became a part of the political center of the city. This was the first sculpture to be placed in the Piazza and the only public monument in the city to celebrate the courageous deed of a female biblical heroine.³⁵ Nine years after being placed in the Palazzo Vecchio, Donatello's sculpture was moved again to the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio. Two years after that, it was moved again to the west arch of the Loggia dei Lanzi and became the first sculpture placed in the Loggia. In 1554, Cosimo I commissioned Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* to balance Donatello's sculpture, thus it was placed in the East arch. Continuously, Donatello's sculpture was moved and eventually replaced by figures that displayed male dominance over women. As mentioned before, the continuous attempt to dispose of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* clearly demonstrates the misogynistic attitudes, but the act of replacing Judith by Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* reinforced the notion of a move towards a patriarchal message in the Loggia dei Lanzi.³⁶ Considering Donatello's sculpture was a public symbol and statement, the depiction of a woman killing and demonstrating dominance of a man was intimidating and obscene for the community of that time. Women were expected to legally belong to their husbands, therefore only expected to bear children and stay at home.

³⁵ Ibid, 10.

³⁶ Ibid, 10.

Understanding the culture of the time is significant in understanding Donatello's Judith, considering it displays a deeper interpretation of the constant relocation.

In Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, he depicts the decapitation of Holofernes in a gruesome and demeaning way, as Judith is seemingly transfixed with her sword raised high ready to deliver the second blow to Holofernes' head. Judith stands over the body of Holofernes with one hand gripping the hair of Holofernes and the other hand raised behind her head holding a sword. Holofernes is sitting up on a pillow with Judith holding the remaining of his body upward. His face and eyes are expressionless, enhancing the motionless and deceased body of Holofernes. On the back of Holofernes, there is a medallion that is argued to be a reference to the general's pride. As Judith gets ready to strike again to the neck, she pulls the neck back to display the neck, thus referencing pride.³⁷ Overall, this reference of pride and Judith displaying dominance as she is about to abolish Holofernes, emphasizes the triumph of humility over pride. Judith symbolizes fortitude and justice emphasized by her raised sword, thus also becoming a symbol of the Virgin's triumph over sin and evil; therefore, indicating that the Medici understood Judith and became the virtuous protector of Florence. Judith also became the image of the Medici, as her symbol suggests that the Medici are strong, humble, and loyal protectors of Florentine liberty. Although it was a disturbing concept to have a woman's domination of a man during that time period, Judith was consistently seen as the protector and symbol of Florence. It is also important to consider how Judith is dressed, as it takes away from her strong and significant character. She is shown with robed like clothing that covers her from head to toe. The long puffy sleeves cover her arms and the hood over her head masks her character, thus making her almost unrecognizable as a woman. The hood makes her identity unrecognizable, as the

³⁷ Roger J. Crum, "Severing the Neck of Pride ", 28.

shadows provide an evil cast upon her; however, the slight emphasizing of her breasts and waist are the only features that make her recognizable as a woman. Many artists of the time made many artworks of Judith, however lacked in the sense that it would display a strong female heroine. Although Donatello begins to display the sense of this, artists begin to really enhance these features throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period.

Shortly after Donatello's Judith was completed, Botticelli created *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (Figure 3) in 1470. Although it wasn't the same art form, Botticelli's version creates an interesting comparison to Donatello's Judith. To begin, the moment that is depicted in Botticelli's artwork is completely different compared to Donatello's sculpture. In this scene, it shows Judith and her maid walking away with the severed head of Holofernes. Both Judith and the maid look as though they are scurrying in a panicked, yet also in a strangely calm manner. Judith is shown in a gown looking back at the maid holding a sword in one hand and an olive branch in the other, thus symbolizing peace. The maid is walking beside Judith with Holofernes' head on top of hers, as she looks up to Judith, as if pleased in their accomplishments. Although Botticelli has a completely different art style than Donatello, the way Judith is depicted, as well as the moment, strips away from her glory as the savior of Bethulia. With her toes pointed and graceful hands lightly holding the sword, Judith looks as if she is delicate, innocent, and unworthy of being able to behead Holofernes. Also, with the unphased facial expression of both the maid and Judith, it makes it almost unbelievable that she did such a malicious and life-threatening deed. Although Donatello's Judith masks her femininity, Botticelli almost gives Judith too much femininity that makes it appear as though it is unbelievable that she did such a gruesome deed.

Shortly after Botticelli's depiction, Andrea Mantegna created *Judith and Holofernes* (Figure 9) in 1490. Although Mantegna decided to create a scene that is really close to Botticelli, he takes a different approach with the time and place of Judith. The moment of the scene is very close to Botticelli's, however it takes place moments after Judith decapitates Holofernes. Both the maid and Judith are shown at the general's tent, as Judith is about to put Holofernes' head in the bag that the maid is holding. Inside the dark tent is the remnants of Holofernes, as his feet are the only thing that is depicted in the background. Judith is looking off into the distance, as if she is alert and making sure they aren't caught before escaping; however, her facial expression is showing no concern. Judith is depicted in a very interesting way, as she is almost presented as a goddess with her white and blue tunic-like dress. Not only is her outfit very similar to a Greek goddess, but her look is as well, with a contrapposto stance, tunic, and reddish curly hair with a perfect complexion. Also, the way Judith is depicted is different from any other representation because she also has the complexion of a male, as she can easily be confused as a man. Her facial features and complexion are similar to an ancient Greek sculpture, with the short curly hair that frames her face as she gazes into the distance. She is either too feminine and innocent or too much like a male, thus creating a conflicting image of Judith. In doing this, it again takes away the strong role that Judith deserves by making her either too innocent or stripping away features of her femininity. This is done through the conservative features of Donatello's Judith, the innocence and enhanced femininity of Botticelli's, and now Mantegna's Judith by giving her the features of a male or of a mythical goddess; thus, these features strip away her powerful role by giving her features similar or representative of a mythical goddess.

Giorgione's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (Figure 11) created in 1505, creates another interesting contrast to the other depictions of Judith, as Judith has a very similar

representation to Raphael's style. In this depiction, Giorgione depicts Judith after the act with her foot on top of the decapitated head. She is shown wearing a dress similar to what the Virgin Mary would wear, except the dress has a slit down the side with her bare leg showing through. This creates and suggests seductiveness, however, the similar features to the Virgin Mary also suggests innocence. As she holds the weapon that killed Holofernes to her side, Judith looks down in a proud way with her slight smirk and her bare foot stepping on the decapitated head of Holofernes. With her suggestive attire and features, this make Judith appear as seductive, yet innocent with the devotion and pride that Judith deserves to be portrayed as. Giorgione's depiction also shows a strong female figure; however, her innocence and seductive features somehow strips that away from her. Compared to the others, this is the one that is the closest to Donatello's sculpture; however, Donatello's Judith appears to be more believable considering she is shown as determined, powerful, and ready to take on anything.

Michelangelo created *Judith and Holofernes* (Figure 5) in 1509 as part of the Sistine chapel's ceiling. With this scene, Michelangelo depicts the moment when Judith and the maid are trying to get away with the head of Holofernes in a basket. In this image, it is clear to be able to see the remaining body of Holofernes in the background as Judith is making her way out of the building with the maid in front of her and the decapitated head in a basket. Both figures are looking away, as if distracted by something else. Although the style and features of the painting are exquisite, the lack of being able to see the faces of the figures is disappointing. Although it is very clear that this is Judith, not being able to see the face of Judith takes away from the identity of the powerful figure. This makes it more about the act rather than being about Judith as a heroic figure. Also, many of the other artworks always depict the same or similar moment of the story of Judith. With Donatello's Judith, he decided to depict a similar moment; however, it was

seconds after decapitating Holofernes, thus creating a gruesome depiction. Although gruesome and overwhelming to the viewer, it provides the viewer with the sense of determination, power, and strength. These other artworks seem to lack this feature due to the way Judith is depicted.

Giorgio Vasari created a different depiction of Judith in *Judith and Holofernes* (Figure 10) created in 1554. Vasari decided to create a different moment than the previous artworks, however, is the closest depiction to Donatello's sculpture. In this artwork, Vasari depicts Judith holding Holofernes' head down with one arm and the other arm raised about to fulfill the act. Holofernes is shown laying prone on the bed motionless as Judith is looking down, almost as if she is contemplating fulfilling her duty. She is clearly muscular, thus enhancing the possibility of strain or readiness to decapitate. In the background, the maid is also looking down as if ready to grab the head to escape back to Bethulia. Both Judith and the maid are beautifully and elegantly clothed, thus enhancing the seductive act that Judith had to achieve. This artwork provides a beautiful depiction of Judith, as it is probably the closest artwork compared to Donatello's sculpture; however, the muscular figure, as well as the moment before the act, strips away from the true form of Judith. Overall, the moment and how Judith is depicted tends to determine how Judith is portrayed by viewers. Either way, how Judith is portrayed is essential, considering she is supposed to be a strong female figure. As time moves on, the depiction of Judith seems to enhance the gore and becomes less virtuous seductress and more violent, strong, and heroic female figure; therefore, Caravaggio's and Gentileschi's portrayal of Judith provide an interesting contrast to Donatello's Judith.

Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (Figure 6) created in 1598-1599 represents Judith in a way that many artists depicted her in the past. In this image, he depicts Judith in the act of beheading Holofernes, however, lacks in believability. Holofernes is again recumbent on

the bed while Judith is standing next to him in the act of beheading Holofernes. Although there is blood spewing out of Holofernes' neck, it is in a less gruesome way than Gentileschi's artwork. This artwork lacks in realism due to the way Judith is shown, as she holds the sword in an improper way to his neck, almost as if she is trying to cut through butter. As she stands far away from Holofernes, her facial expression seems to be overwhelmed with concern and disgust. Judith does not have that heroic motive and dedication as she does in Gentileschi's works, but is more concerned about getting blood on her dress. As she holds a sword in one hand and Holofernes' hair in the other, her arms seem to lack the strain and strength needed to hold down a man while decapitating him. Instead of depicting the maid servant involved in the action, she seems to be standing behind Judith holding the bag that will eventually hold Holofernes' head. Although there seems to be that dramatic effect in it and the figures beautifully rendered, the believability of a heroic Judith lacks. Although Caravaggio depicts a more gruesome approach and moment of Judith, Donatello's artwork gives Judith more of a strong role. Although her feminine features appear to be masked, she still has a strong and powerful look to her. Caravaggio's work lacks the confidence and strength that Judith deserves, thus taking away the brave heroic act of Judith.

Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* was created in 1614 and was the first depiction of Judith that was heroic and believable. In this artwork, Gentileschi depicts a recumbent, nude Holofernes laying on the bed nearly decapitated. The viewer can sense the fear and struggle of Holofernes as he tries to fight for his life with his arms in the air. To the side of him is Judith, with her sleeves rolled up, holding a sword, and forcefully cutting through Holofernes' head with a sword. Her facial expression shows aggression, anger, struggle, and dedication as she works her way through the flesh and bones of Holofernes. Behind Judith, her

maid servant is struggling to hold Holofernes down so Judith could finish the heroic act that would save her town. The gruesome details of this painting shocks viewers, as the immense detail of blood splattering out of the neck is very graphic. The exaggeration of the scene is also amplified by the dramatic darkness and lighting of the red curtains in the scene. The moment of the story that Gentileschi decided to choose is unusual considering many artists usually depict Judith before or after she beheaded Holofernes. The moment depicted, exaggeration of the scene, gruesome scene, and features of Judith are very unusual for this time period; however, the way Gentileschi depicted her is in a more heroic, strong-willed, and powerful way. These were features that lacked in all the other depictions of Judith, as she is considered a heroic and courageous woman. Compared to Donatello's artwork, this Judith is very strong willed and courageous, as she gets the job done to save her people. Both artworks tend to have the gory details and confident woman, however Gentileschi's Judith does not spare any detail.

In providing this overview of each artwork, we are better able to understand how the depictions of Judith have evolved throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period. Judith progressed from being perceived as weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, dedicated, and strong-willed. Donatello's Judith masks her identity as a female figure with the loose attire and oversized hood over her face; however, the dominance, confidence, and strong demeanor of Judith was above her time period. Donatello's Judith was able to start crossing the boundary and portraying Judith as a powerful female figure; however, many other artists still portrayed her as innocent and weak in the same way, except for Gentileschi. Also, Donatello's artwork was considered the Medici and Florence symbol by being represented as liberty, virtue, and victory over the strong. Analyzing the story of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, considering the political significance and portrayal of Judith, and looking at other artworks throughout the Italian

Renaissance and Baroque period, establishes how Judith has evolved from being perceived as weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, dedicated, and strong-willed.

Conclusion

Overall, by looking at different depictions of Judith we can see how the depiction of Judith is identified and how she has evolved over time. It is significant to understand the patriarchal culture of the time, as it helps us understand why it was so odd to have such a powerful female biblical character that had such a significant role. By looking at Donatello's depiction of Judith, she is represented as a powerful and strong symbol at the time; however, her conservative clothing and masking her identity as female deprived Judith of her true potential as a vivid, and strong-willed, biblical figure. Although Donatello's Judith became a symbol for the Medici, she still lacked what was needed to show her the way she is meant to be perceived. In late depictions of Judith, Botticelli and Michelangelo depict Judith at a different moment of the story, as she is holding the head of Holofernes after the act was completed; however, they both depict her as if she is fearful as she is making her escape. Although this is understandable to a degree, the expression of concern makes it unbelievable that she committed the courageous act. In Baroque depictions of Judith, Caravaggio and Gentileschi depict her during the act of beheading Holofernes. Although both are gruesome in their own way, they both perceive Judith in a different light. Caravaggio's Judith has a similar expression of concern and angst, as if she does not want to commit the act. She is standing further away and seems to lack the strength and grit that is needed to behead a man with a sword, thus portraying her as a feeble and weak woman. On the contrary, Gentileschi depicts Judith restraining Holofernes as he tries to fight his way out, and the facial expression of Judith portrays a sense of courage, anger, and determination. This portrayal of Judith is lacking in other depictions; however, each image

displays the evolution of how she is depicted. By looking at Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, we were able to understand why Judith became such a significant symbol to Florence and the Medici. By analyzing and comparing various artworks to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and discussing how Judith is portrayed as a character, we were able to demonstrate how the depiction of Judith has changed throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period. This was done by showing how she went from weak, feeble, and indifferent to lively, vivid, and strong-willed. Although there are many writings about certain artworks of Judith, they all seem to be missing the analysis of how Judith has evolved throughout the Italian Renaissance and Baroque. Thus, this thesis will contribute to other articles by highlighting how Judith has started to be portrayed as lively, vivid, and strong-willed.

To conclude, there are many scenes that depict Judith slaying Holofernes that takes place during the Renaissance and Baroque period. Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* depicts a very strong female heroine that was conflicting for the patriarchal society of Renaissance Florence. Although the relocation of Donatello's Judith is controversial, she became a significant symbol to Florence as she symbolized justice and fortitude, but she also demonstrated how the weak can overcome the strong. Although Donatello's Judith shows confidence and strength, Judith being completely covered and masked disguised her femininity. Compared to other artworks, Caravaggio's artworks completely lack the characteristics that Judith deserves and needs; however, Gentileschi's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* depicts a more confident and heroic Judith as she decapitates Holofernes with all her might. Overall, by analyzing and comparing various artworks to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, it provides a better understanding of how the depiction of Judith is identified.

Appendix



Figure 1: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1614-1620



Figure 2: Donatello, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1455-1460



Figure 3: Botticelli, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1469-70



Figure 4: Donatello, *David*, 1440



Figure 5: Michelangelo, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1509



Figure 6: Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1598-99



Figure 7: Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, 1545-1554



Figure 8: Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610



Figure 9: Andrea Mantegna, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1490



Figure 10: Giorgio Vasari, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1554



Figure 11: Giorgione, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1505

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