

Gender and leadership in Judith: A Greimassian contribution

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The structuring of the narrative with characters assigned to fulfil particular roles is often indicative of an author's possible intent. Thus, characterisation, in a story, is not neutral about its rhetorical intent; it generally reveals cultural values that the author or editor desires to either promote or reject, within a community. Judith seems to support this claim, in relation to the issue of Jewish leadership within the narrative. In more recent years, Judith has attracted the attention of many scholars and accordingly, a number of intuitive contributions have already been made to this particular area of research. However, the story is still capable of yielding far more detail concerning, *inter alia*, the blunders made within the Jewish religious leadership at the time. In this regard, this article attempts to uncover the real concern about the nature of Jewish leadership as encapsulated in the narrative of Judith using a Greimassian semiotic approach. Following the results from the analysis, the article contends that in the context of the narrative, Judaism not only suffered adversity from external forces but also from within, because of the deficiency of its own leadership. For this reason, an alternative leadership personified by Judith, rooted in spiritual values, was desired.

Introduction and problem statement

This article investigates the story of *Judith*, using the Greimassian approach to narratives. In this story, the survival of Judaism and/or people depends on a woman's knowledge and fear of God resulting from her absolute commitment to the law. On the contrary, however, though the elders appear prominently in the story, their ability to efficiently defend the Jewish people and their religion is represented as being lacklustre.

Judith is a story of 16 chapters. The Greek text of Theodotion from the *Septuaginta* edited by Ziegler (1999) will be used in this article. *Judith* is also a fictional story that describes how a God-fearing Jewish heroine paves the way for her people's victory over an invading Assyrian army (Moore 1992:61–71). Esler (2002:107–143) describes Judith as the woman who achieved victory for her people by deceiving and then decapitating the leader of the enemy host, whom she seductively reduced to drunken unconsciousness (White 1992:5–16). Various scholars have debated the issue of *Judith's* date of authorship, but the position of this article is summed up in Esler's (2002) assertion, which says:

There are a number of features of the text which indicate a provenance in the Maccabean/Hasmonean period, around 167–63 BCE. (pp. 107–143)

The story consists of two parts; these two parts are traditionally called Part I (1–7) and Part II (8–16). Nickelsburg (2005:97) indicates that Part I is a story about the crisis facing Israel. Part II, however, presents a sad ending with reference to Nebuchadnezzar, Holofernes and the rest of the Assyrian army, as Judith and the Israelite army destroy them (Harrington 1999:27).

This article acknowledges that a considerable amount of research has been conducted on the story. However, a Greimassian perspective on the possible decay and compromising attitude within the religious leadership of the Second Temple Period remains wide open for exploration. This study emphasises that the issue of Jewish leadership in this article is restricted to the context and universe of the fictitious *Judith* narrative. It is a contention here that this story is still capable of yielding far more detail concerning the blunders made within the Jewish religious leadership at the time. In this regard, this article attempts to expose the nature of the Jewish religio-political leadership as encapsulated in the narrative of *Judith*. This will be informed by the Greimassian semiotic approach. As a consequence, it is revealed that Judaism in the Second Temple Period, as portrayed by this narrative, not only suffered adversity from external forces but also from within its own elders.

Note: In this study, *Judith* (italicised) refers to the Book of Judith, while Judith (non-italicised) refers to its female protagonist or character.

The Greimassian approach to the story will be undertaken following the three steps as studied in the following.

Synopsis of the approach of analysis

The investigation of gender and leadership here is text centred, that is, the close reading and analysis of the Greek text of *Judith* is the main focus of the study. This means that this fictitious text of *Judith* is accepted and appreciated as it is, without emphasising its historical background and/or religious or canonical prejudice. The exploration of flaws in leadership as depicted in the story of *Judith* will be undertaken by employing a Greimassian semiotic approach to narrative texts, as mentioned. To stress the importance of the method, Taylor and Van Every (2000) contend that this analytical approach has proven to be the most fully elaborated and subtle of any they have encountered.

For the sake of clarity, the Greimassian approach to narrative texts is briefly discussed below. The approach consists of three levels of analysis, namely figurative, narrative and thematic analysis (Hobyane 2015:638–656). The investigation in this article focuses on figurative and thematic analysis. The three levels of analysis can be briefly defined as follows.

The figurative level of analysis

According to Everaert-Desmedt (2007) figurative analysis focuses on characterisation (the construction of figures or characters) in the story. It is at this level where characters are created and assigned their role in the story. This process is called *figurativisation*. Figurativisation of a discourse means constructing abstract ideas or values (viz. love, freedom, joy) with figures of the natural world (viz. things or people) to make them concrete (Hénault 1983:136).

The narrative level of analysis

The second level of analysis is called *narrative analysis*. The investigation here focuses on the organisation of a text as discourse. It helps the reader to reveal different functions of actants and track the course of the subject across the narrative (Hobyane 2012:13).

The thematic level of analysis

Finally, the thematic level 'is the abstract or conceptual syntax where the fundamental values which generate a text are articulated' (Martin & Ringham 2000:12). Kanonge (2009:57) points out that these values are thereafter investigated syntagmatically and paradigmatically by means of a semiotic square. This main tool for investigation at this level is firstly used to sort out opposing values in a narrative and then to trace their thematic itinerary across the text.

When opposing values are conceived in terms of *être* [being] and *paraître* [seeming], we have a semiotic square of veridiction also known as a *veridictory square* (cf. Figure 4). Martin and Ringham (2000:12) indicate that the semiotic

square of veridiction is a visual presentation of the elementary structure of meaning. It articulates the relationships of opposition, contradiction and implication in the story. Veridictory analysis is not part of this study.

In summary, the thematic step comprises three tools of investigation: opposition of values, the thematic itinerary and the veridictory square. A detailed explanation of the concepts and terminology will be dealt with in the analysis of the story.

It must be noted that the overall focus of the Greimassian analysis is broader than what this article aims to achieve. Therefore, as indicated, only issues related to leadership will be considered here.

Leadership figurativised in JUDITH

The task in this section is based on the claim that at the figurative level, actors are created with an intention to convey the message through them. They are viewed as an intentional creation of the author to impact the target community and other readers thereafter. Therefore, the study will draw its conclusions from the analysis of the role played by the elders on one side and Judith on the other, in the community of Judith. In the Greimassian jargon, the purpose here is to show how elders and Judith are each *figurativised*, regarding leadership.

Judith

Judith is the undisputed main character (protagonist) in the story. She is the principal and the most influential character in the story. The main traits in her figurativisation in relation with leadership include her name, her genealogy and special leading qualities she is portrayed with. All these three are essential to her action in the narrative.

Judith's name

Her name, *Ιουδιθ*, only means 'Jewess' (Jordaan 2009:180). In the Greimassian approach personal names, also known as anthroponyms (Greimas & Courtés 1982:187), 'contribute to the creation of an illusion or simulacrum of the real. They are, therefore, a key component of the process of figurativisation' (Martin & Ringham 2000:25). Grotius (in Kay 1913:243), explaining the story allegorically, views the name 'Judith' to represent the Jewish people. Kay (1913:242) argues that apart from the fact that this method of interpretation is forced and unconvincing, there is no need to suppose that the name suggested this meaning. She signifies the Jewish nation under threat of extinction.

Therefore, the name Judith should be taken to mean 'Jewess', and in the context of *Judith* it most probably represents the Jewish people and religion. Because, as Levine (1992:18) observes, she is the only named female character in the text and thus the only woman recognised in its male-defined world, there is no way to think this was chosen by chance. According to Windt-Val (2012:282), '[A]uthors often make use

of the strong connection between names and the feeling of personal identity as an element in their thematic structures'. It is our view that the name Judith is an inclusive depiction of the nation, including men and women. She not only represents the nation but also women as part and parcel of Jewish identity.

The name must have been chosen and used in the story to mean that where men fail to represent the nation adequately, a woman, a Jewess, can take the lead. This interpretation can be supported by intertextual studies linking Judith to heroes and heroines of the past, in the Jewish traditions and history. In addition, the name Judith sounds like blame or a challenge to the leading class of Bethulia. This is remarkable in Judith's speech (8:11ff.) and in the statement that:

But the Almighty Lord hath disappointed them by the hand of a woman. For the mighty one did not fall by the young men, neither did the sons of the Titans smite him, nor high giants set upon him: but Judith the daughter of Merari weakened him with the beauty of her countenance. (16:6-7)

In other words, depending on circumstances, the deliverance of Jews can depend on men or women.

Judith's genealogy

Judith is introduced in the story by the link to her predecessors. She is:

the daughter of Merari, the son of Ox, the son of Joseph, the son of Ozel, the son of Elcia, the son of Ananias, the son of Gedeon, the son of Raphaim, the son of Acitho, the son of Eliu, the son of Eliab, the son of Nathanael, the son of Samael, the son of Sarasadai, the son of Israel. (8:1)

In some biblical traditions, many heroes' achievements are sanctioned by a reference to genealogies as it appears here. Genealogy is therefore an important part of Judith's message. Genealogies serve to fulfil many purposes. It can serve 'to demonstrate the legitimacy of an individual in his office or to give an individual a pedigree worthy of his rank' (Levin 2001:16). Here then, genealogy is an intended insert, to uplift Judith to the heroic traditions of the nation. However, genealogy is also used to give meaning and new direction to a community (Loubser 2005:134). In other words, because Judith's genealogy is firmly anchored in the history of Israel, her intervention is to be situated as a form of continuity and not a rupture with the past. Albeit she is a woman, Judith is legitimately related to the heroes of the Jewish past, and thus can lead her people to victory through the intervention of God. According to Loubser (2005:135), mentioning ancestral names in genealogy vividly recalls a multiplicity of stories associated with them and helps to set the mood for what is to follow. In other words, the genealogy of Judith is meant to convince people to accept a feminine leadership. So, Judith's genealogy had an important role to play in her figurativisation regarding leadership in the Jewish community.

Remarkable qualities

The reader also learns that Judith is a pious, beautiful, rich, wise, courageously daring and brave widow of unassailable

character (Efthimiadis-Keith 2004:212; Milne 1993:37). Through this brief introduction of Judith and her qualities, the author makes his or her intention clear regarding the role she plays in the narrative. In fact, Moore (1985:62) also acknowledges that Judith, like many heroes of the past and present, had a goodly share of desirable qualities. In view of the nature of this study, it is not possible to focus on each of them deeply.

Judith as a pious Jewess: *Judith* 8:8 and 11:17 reveal that Judith is a God-fearing woman (θεοσεβής). Efthimiadis-Keith (2004:215) observes that Judith is pious beyond the required norm. Throughout the narrative, the author consistently reminds the reader about Judith's pious character. Moore (1985:62) also asserts that her piety makes her a unique woman amongst biblical heroines. This quality seems to be the main ingredient of her figurativisation. In fact, from her prayer (9:1ff), it is evident that all her strategy depended on her relationship with God. This study strongly suggests that the pious character of Judith reflects the main concern of the narrative, which is a religious one. Lack of this quality is meant to be the main weakness of the leadership of the elders, in the process of defending their people and their religion in this time of crisis.

Judith as a widow: According to *Judith* 8:4, Judith has been a widow for 3 years and 4 months. Her widowed status is significant. Efthimiadis-Keith (2004:213) asserts that Judith's widowhood illustrates that she is a ruler over her own household and over her life, having no man over her, be he husband, son, father, brother or male relative.¹ Judith is an independent woman who can move around without being limited by her husband, brother, son or any man. In summary, Judith's widowhood allows her to move from place to place without any man dictating or restricting her mobility, enabling her to fulfil her destiny and/or duty as heroine. She depends on God alone.

Judith's beauty: One of the most instrumental and influential qualities in the figure of Judith is her beauty. The author states in 8:7 that (Judith) καὶ ἦν καλὴ τῷ εἶδει καὶ ὥραία τῇ ὄψει σφόδρα [she was also of goodly countenance and very beautiful to behold]. Judith's beauty is referred to about 13 times after her introduction in Chapter 8. Judith's beauty thus enables her to enter the very heart of the Assyrian offensive, Holofernes's tent. The purpose of her beauty is thus to entrap the enemy (13:16) and destroy him (them) (Branch 2011:2). However, the story seems to suggest that God was behind the beauty of Judith. She does not win because of her beauty but because of her piety. Beauty depended on piety because it was intensified by God to trap the enemy. The present study observes that the driving force behind Judith's bravery is also her faith in and zeal for God, an aspect of her piety (Jordaan & Hobyane 2010:340).

Judith as an affluent and resourceful character: The author mentions that Judith is a rich woman (8:7). Her husband had left her gold and silver, male servants and maid servants,

1. The only men who were near her were her male servants, as mentioned in 8:7.

cattle and lands (Hobyane 2012:39). According to Achtemeier et al. (1985:1123), in the early period of Middle Eastern culture, wealth consisted of the possession of large and small cattle and slaves, as well as silver and gold (Gn 24:35), and it is attributed to the patriarchs (Gen 13:2), godly kings (2 Chr 32:27–29) and Job (Job 42:10–17). The reader must, however, be warned that Judith's wealth is not to be confused with one of the Jewish categories of poverty: widows and orphans. The narrative clearly informs the reader that Judith is a wealthy widow.

Judith as a wise character: One of the qualities that Judith is well known for in the narrative is her wisdom (Hobyane 2012:41). Just after she is introduced (8:1–8), Judith addresses the elders and the people of Bethulia. Her words of wisdom are evident in 8:11. The phrase *Ἀκούσατε δὴ μου* is a common expression in the wisdom literature (LXX Proverbs 4:1, 4:10, 19:20 and 23:22). The story also depicts Judith as a wisdom teacher. Judith's wisdom is well acknowledged by the elders and all the people of Bethulia (8:29). Judith's wisdom is also recognised by the Assyrians (11:20). Wisdom is exactly what men and leaders lack to be more effective. However, wisdom is not an ordinary quality; it is rooted in her piety.

In summary, the figurativisation of Judith includes her name, her genealogy and her special qualities, essentially piety as the substance of her strength.

Elders of Bethulia

Uzziah and the Bethulian elders are a group of characters that deserve attention, regarding leadership. They are introduced in 6:14–15 as governors of the city of Bethulia. Efthimiadis-Keith (2004:254) observes that they are the last group of characters to be introduced in Section 1 and the first group of 'old' characters to make their way back into Section 2 (13:12). However, there is only one that stands out and represents the group, Uzziah (Efthimiadis-Keith 2004:254–255). His name also means 'God is my defence' (Moore 1985:81).

Though it could be argued otherwise, this study observes that his ability as a spiritual leader is put to test when the people demand that he should surrender the city and make peace with the Assyrians (7:26–27). The text depicts him as a man of compromise (Moore 1985:33). For this reason, he is admonished by Judith (8:9–27). He later blesses Judith when she leaves Bethulia (10:6). Uzziah's accolade to Judith in 13:18–20 concedes that Judith is an outstanding woman of faith (Moore 1985:36).

Thus, the character of Uzziah and the other governors serve to elevate Judith's role in the narrative. Uzziah and the elders are foolish, weak and compromising but Judith is pious, strong and brave.

Oppositions in JUDITH: As indicated, for any semiotic study to achieve its goal, there must be a proper analysis of the existing oppositions in the story (Martin & Ringham 2000:7).

This study pays attention to the oppositions between Judith and the elders of Bethulia, regarding leadership.

According to Jordaan (2009:180), in an ironic, sarcastic and hyperbolic style, the author depicts the difference between Judith and the men (the elders of Bethulia). Judith has authority (8:10) while they display distressing weakness (7:19–32). She has knowledge of God (8:12) and the historical traditions of Israel (8:19; 8:26–27), while they are ignorant of God and his hegemony (7:30–32). She has faith and commitment (8:20), embodied in her communion with God by prayer² and observance of the law. The leaders are interested in enjoyment and parties. She has courage, zeal and the determination to defend the case of God even to the cost of her life (8:32–33). The leaders are lax and show an urge to surrender (7:31). She is competent and willing to act in a desperate situation. The leaders are incompetent and unwilling to act in a desperate situation.

From these oppositions, it transpires that Judith embodies true leadership in Israel. Uzziah's accolade to her means that she is the perfect role model in Israel for leadership. Her leadership is rooted in her fear of God. By emphasising piety, the author implies that this quality is meant to be at the foundation of leadership in Israel.

Leadership narrativised

This section concerns the organisation of Judith as discourse. Two main aspects are important here: the configuration of *Judith's* actantial model and the relation between actants and antactants in *Judith*. These two aspects are discussed in the following section. Narrative syntax will not be considered because of the constraint of the study.

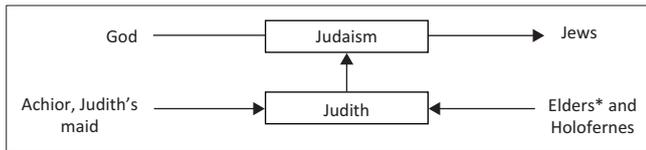
Leadership through the actantial model

According to Martin and Ringham (2000:19), all narratives consist of six key actantial roles or functions, arranged in three sets of binary opposition: addresser–addressee, subject–object and helper–opponent (cf. also Greimas 1987:107–108, 1966:146–147).

Judith has a dual actantial organisation; it has actants and antactants (addresser and anti-addresser, a subject and anti-subject, and an object and anti-object). The first actantial model could therefore focus on God as the addresser, Judaism as the object and Judith as the subject. The actantial organisation of *Judith* focusing on God as the addresser and Judaism as object of quest has the configuration shown in Figure 1.

The actantial organisation of the text reveals that religion, namely the Jewish faith, seems to be the main concern, the central object of value in *Judith*. According to 4:3, Holofernes's threats to the Jewish people and religion come after the children of Israel have just returned from captivity and all the

²For more on prayer, see Boda, Falk and Werline (2006).



Source: Courtés, J., 1991, *Analyse sémiotique du discours: De l'énoncé à l'énonciation*, Hachette, Paris; Courtés, J., 1995, *Du lisible au visible*, De Boeck University, Bruxelles; Hénault, A., 1983, *Narratologie Sémiotique Générale. Les enjeux de la Sémiotique II*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris

FIGURE 1: The actantial model of Judith, focusing on Judith as the subject, God as the addresser and religion as main object of quest in the narrative.

people of Judea were lately gathered together. The temple and the altar were sanctified after the profanation. By proclaiming Nebuchadnezzar as the only God to be worshipped and by threatening to destroy the Jews and their religion (temple and sanctuary), Holofernes adds a spark to the religious contest in the story.

Relations between Actants and Antactants in *JUDITH*

The schematic representation depicted in Figure 1 shows that all six actants of the Greimassian model are identifiable in the story of *Judith*. These six actants – addresser and addressee, subject and object, helper and opponent – are discussed here in detail.

Subject and object: The subject-object relation in *Judith* is twofold: both Judith and Holofernes are opposing subjects, with their central quest object being religion. Holofernes and Judith are thus objects of one another.

While keeping in mind Judith's central object of quest (Judaism), a reader should recognise that Judith's main reason for coming to the Assyrian camp is to kill Holofernes, even if the text does not explicitly state this objective. On the other hand, as soon as Judith arrives in the Assyrian camp, she is a soft target for Holofernes's sexual agenda. Therefore, from Judith's perspective, the main purpose is to defend and to maintain Judaism, by decapitating Holofernes and thereby nullifying the strength of the Assyrian army.

On the other hand, Judith's quest would appear as shown in Figure 2.

The schema in Figure 2 also represents the collective desire of the entire people of Bethulia and Jerusalem. However, Judith takes up a leading role as the main subject in achieving the desired outcome. In summary, the function representing Judith's quest would appear as in Figure 3.

Though Judith does not mention her plan of saving her people explicitly, the reader can deduce from the text in 8:32 that her *modus operandi* is killing for the sake of Judaism. As DeSilva (2002:87) puts it, 'Dressed to kill, she leaves Bethulia ...' The disjunction at the initial step in Figure 3 points to the fact that the Jewish people and religion are still under threat of extinction and will remain under threat if something is not done. Judith leaves Bethulia for the Assyrian camp in an attempt to save her people and their religion.



Source: K Kanonge, D.M., 2009, *The emergence of women in the LXX Apocrypha*, NWU, Potchefstroom

FIGURE 2: The relation between the subject and the object underlying Judith as the subject and Judaism as the object of her quest.



Source: K Kanonge, D.M., 2009, *The emergence of women in the LXX Apocrypha*, NWU, Potchefstroom

FIGURE 3: The relation between Judith and Judaism underlying Judith's success in her quest at the end of the narrative.

This study argues that her beauty and wisdom make her journey look easy, even though it was a dangerous one. By decapitating Holofernes, she saves her people and further proves that the God of Israel is the one and only true God, which is the pivotal claim of Judaism. Therefore, Judith goes from the initial state of disjunction to the final state of conjunction, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Helpers and opponents: Helpers and opponents entertain a subsidiary relationship to the subject, their function being to intervene positively (helpers) or negatively (opponents) in the pursuit of the goal (Martin & Ringham 2000:19).

Opponents

Judith and Holofernes stand as opponents in their objects of quest. Holofernes is the main opponent of Jews in the story. However, it is disappointing to see the elders on the opposing side, on the chart (Figure 1). Because this article is devoted to highlighting flaws in leadership, they are the only subject of study here. Though the elders do not oppose Judith directly, their initiative to surrender to the Assyrians stands in opposition with Judith's plan for preservation of the Jewish people and religion. It is then understandable that they are severely rebuked by Judith (8:11–17). Regarding leadership, and in terms of the specific context of the narrative, the elders constitute a bad example for Jews. They unconsciously serve the purpose of the enemy. Their main deficiency is lack of trust in the Lord, which contrasts sharply with Judith's attitude.

Helpers

As discussed earlier in this chapter the Jewish God is revealed as the chief helper of Judith's course in the narrative. Throughout the narrative, from her introduction, Judith is connected to God through faith and prayer. The reader learns from Judith's introduction, in 8:4, that she makes a tent upon the top of her house, which is most probably her special place of prayer (Hobyane 2012:61). The text explicitly reports, in 9:11, in the prayer of Judith that God is 'the helper of the oppressed'. 'You [God] are the helper of the oppressed' [ἐλαττόνων εἰ βοηθός] and 'the protector of the weak' [ἀντιλήπτωρ ἀσθενούντων]. Thus, Judith identifies herself and her people with the weak and the oppressed. The essence of these expressions in 9:11 illustrates that God is Judith's source of strength and determination. Another remarkable observance is that Judith connects God favourably to

Simeon's vengeance of Dinah's rape (9:2). As God has given Simeon the sword to take vengeance against those who defiled Dinah, so is Judith praying to be strengthened to destroy the Assyrians. This must be accomplished before they defile the temple and the sanctuary. The story of Dinah may serve as a motivation behind Judith's prayer beside the bed of Holofernes just before she decapitates him. She calls on God to strengthen her in executing Holofernes. She says in 13:7: Κραταίωσόν με, κύριε ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ [Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, this day]. God is revealed as the provider of strength, the helper and an inspiration behind Judith's bravery. God has always played this role in the history of Israel.

The story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:45 (LXX) provides a similar scenario to the reader, when David said to Goliath:

Σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ ἐν δόρατι καὶ ἐν ἀσπίδι, κἀγὼ πορεύομαι πρὸς σέ ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου σαβαωθ θεοῦ παρατάξωος Ἰσραὴλ. [You come to me with sword and spear and with shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord God of hosts of the army of Israel].

God, also in this encounter, is the helper and the inspiration behind David's determination and victory over the enemy.

It is, however, worth mentioning that there are other actants in *Judith* who play a role in assisting Judith to succeed in her enterprise. Branch and Jordaan (2009:391) call these actants 'secondary characters'. They are not insignificant in the story. These characters, according to Jordaan (2009:336), are also the voice of the narrator. He speaks through them. These are characters like Achior, Judith's Maid and the elders of Bethulia.³ They too may be listed as helpers in Judith's quest.

Firstly, Achior lays a foundation (5:5–21) upon which Judith later builds the deceitful argument she presents before Holofernes (11:9–10).

Achior is vindicated by Judith. Another role played by Achior as one of Judith's helpers takes place in Bethulia when Judith, after returning with Holofernes's head, commands that Achior be brought before her (14:5). When Achior comes before Judith, he identifies and confirms that the head that Judith brought with her is indeed that of Holofernes. Achior's confirmation strengthens Judith's evidence before the people of Bethulia.

In summary, this section was devoted to discussing the actantial model of *Judith*. It shows from the distribution of actantial roles that *Judith* has a dual actantial configuration. The first actantial configuration consists of Judith's main quest, that is, to save her people and Judaism. The second actantial configuration is illustrated by Holofernes's pursuit of seeking to destroy the Jews, their cities and sanctuary and eventually proclaim Nebuchadnezzar as god alone. In this

³The elders are mentioned as helpers because they eventually cooperate with Judith in her plan to save Judaism. Their initial state of doubt and being visionless leaders is not ignored but is not considered here, because Judith had already reprimanded them.

second actantial configuration, Judith is herself an object of Holofernes's sexual desire. Holofernes, as an anti-subject, is the forerunner in this quest.

The discussion on the role of Κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ has shown that he is the addresser and appears in the story as a *subject adjudicator*, a *subject manipulator* and a *subject of state*. He is the initiator of Judith's quest (see also Kanonge 2009:151 on *Susanna*). Unfortunately, however, the elders find themselves on the opposing side because of lack of faith in the God of Israel.

In conclusion, this section constituted the second of the three steps of Greimassian semiotic analysis: the narrative analysis. From the narrative analysis, it has become clear that the structure, the actantial configuration and the canonical narrative schema of *Judith* were purposely designed to address the religious crisis facing the Jewish people of Judith's community.

The object of value, which is the preservation of Judaism, is achieved by Judith. The actantial model and the relation between actants and antactants further reveal that Judith is the subject in the story. Unfortunately, the elders are opponents.

From all the mechanisms of investigation of the narrative analysis, it can be deduced that the story of *Judith* (with a woman protagonist) does challenge the male dominance within Judaism. The story shows that women can also do honourable work and prove that they, too, can be true Jewish religious patriots. Women (Judith), slaves (the maid and helper of Judith) and foreigners (Achior) are revealed as reliable Jewish religious carriers in the time of crisis. In this respect see Jordaan (2009:312). Therefore, it is appropriate to conclude that God uses men and women alike. Judith is here again singled out as a role model, in the Jewish community, regarding leadership.

Leadership thematised in *JUDITH*

Introduction

Thematisation contrasts with figurativisation. Figurativisation is concerned with figures, while thematisation is concerned with the core values in the redaction of the story of *Judith* by the author or editor. These values can be presented on a semiotic square, which is the main tool of analysis at this level. This mechanism serves first to classify values related to leadership in *Judith*, in terms of good versus bad or acceptable versus unacceptable, in a community; and secondly, to track their trajectory. For the sake of this article, these qualities are embodied by Judith on one side and the elders on the other. *Judith* is the description of a deep crisis facing Jews and the ensuing victory by the hand of a woman, after a lamentable failure of men to provide an adequate solution. This article does not focus on oppositions between Jews and Assyrians but Judith and the elders, around leadership. According to the story the question may be asked as follows: 'When the Jews are faced with a crisis, which leadership is needed to

provide an adequate solution?’ According to Jewish tradition, God uses someone to save his people. Does he use only established leaders or is it possible for him to use anyone, women included? Allusion to the past in Judith’s prayer (Chapter 9) and the modelling of the story in the David–Goliath confrontation are meant to answer the following: What did the Jews do when facing crises in the past? The answer is that they depended on God. How did God solve the crisis? He chose someone amongst the Jews to enable the people to achieve victory. Was the chosen one a professional official? Not always. Gideon, Deborah and David were not. Does God work only through a Jewish man or can he also use a female? In the unfolding of the story these questions are answered by contrasting Judith and the elders, as will be revealed shortly.

The opposition of core values in *JUDITH*

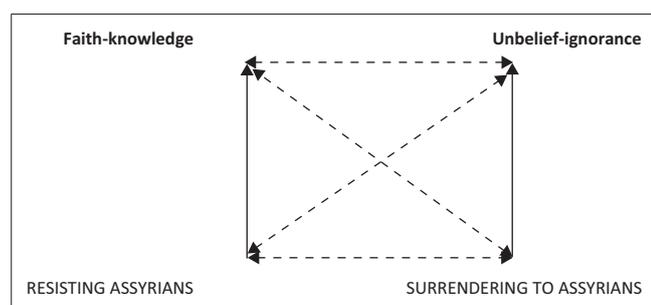
Semiotics postulates that oppositions give rise to the meaning or meaning stems from oppositions between Judith and the elders (between actants and antactants, that is, object-anti-object, subject-anti-subject and addresser-anti-addresser).

Opposition of core values in terms of leadership

The major oppositions between the Jewish leaders (the elders) and Judith are based on faith in God and knowledge of Jewish historical traditions. They can stand on the semiotic square as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 summarises the concern of the story. The elders are not able to confront God because they lack faith in God. They are not sure whether he will intervene or not. This attitude is based on their own relationship with him. In contrast to Judith, who fasts and prays, they are not involved in those activities. Moreover, they are not interested in Jewish historical traditions. They can’t ask themselves the question: what did God do when our ancestors were faced with a crisis like this one?

However, Judith knows God and his interest in Jewish history. She uses this in favour of her people and Judaism. Therefore, faith and knowledge on one side and unbelief and ignorance on the other are the main oppositions in *Judith*.



Source: Courtés, J., 1991, *Analyse sémiotique du discours: De l'énoncé à l'énonciation*, Hachette, Paris; Courtés, J., 1995, *Du lisible au visible*, De Boeck University, Bruxelles; Hénault, A., 1983, *Narratologie Sémiotique Générale. Les enjeux de la Sémiotique II*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris

FIGURE 4: Opposition of values in Judith, based on leadership principles.

Because the elders don’t trust in God’s intervention and have seemingly forgotten about his interventions in Jewish history, they have only one solution left: surrender to the Assyrians and let go of their religion. However, this is different from Judith’s perspective. She believes in the God of Israel; she is ready to defend Judaism and its core values. The Jews here are called upon to guard against the extinction of Judaism by foreign cults.

The foreign cult, in this instance, is Assyrian. The latter is viewed as a threat to Jewish identity. In fact, Dor (2011:173) states that the Jewish identity of the post-exilic congregation is one of the central issues in recent research on the late biblical period. The purpose and main message of *Judith* seem to be very much in line with Dor’s findings.

In brief, this section discussed the opposition of values in *Judith*. It has been established that oppositions between Judith and the elders are based on faith–knowledge on one side and unbelief–ignorance on the other. The following section discusses the thematic itinerary of these values in *Judith*.

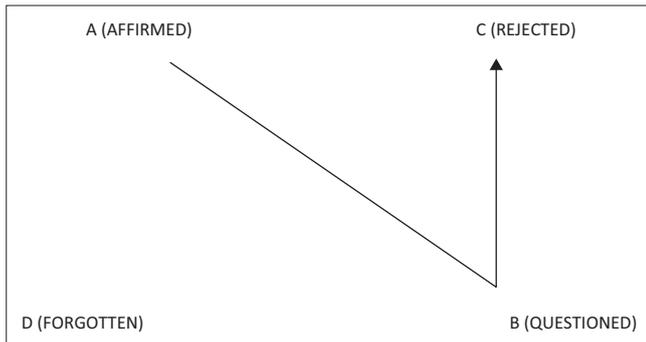
The thematic itinerary

The first dimension of the thematic analysis focused only on the classification of opposing values in the *Judith* narrative, according to the Jewish culture and ideology. The second step is called a syntagmatic perspective. It uses the semiotic square, not to classify values but to track their trajectory in the story from the initial state to the final state (Kanonge 2009:182). In other words, the concern here is to see which values the story seeks to reject and which it seeks to maintain, as essential for the survival of Judaism. According to Kanonge (2009:182) the circulation of values defines the ideology that the narrative seeks to establish or overthrow. He further indicates that the itinerary of commendable values, generally, complete the course and the itinerary of non-commendable values stop halfway.

As already shown, the *Judith* narrative comprises two opposing camps regarding religious leadership. The elders, on the one hand, represent official professional leadership associated with unbelief, ignorance and compromise. They ignore, as Wennel (2007:68) states, that the essence of the Jewish faith lies in the fact that they are the covenantal people of God (4:1).⁴ They are expected to hope in and be faithful to their deity (8:17), call unto him for help (4:9, 12 and 15), keep the Laws of Moses and remain pure before the Lord (12:6–10 and 13:16). It should be noted that the elders of Bethulia would have fallen into the trap of opting for anti-Jewish religious values, had it not been for Judith, who reprimanded them.

The following part of the study is dedicated to briefly discussing the itinerary of these opposing values in *Judith* regarding leadership. In other words, how does leadership based on ignorance and unbelief circulate in Judith?

4.The expression Καὶ ἤκουσαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ [And the children of Israel who dwell in Judaea heard ...] in 4:1 undoubtedly introduces the covenantal people of the Κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ [the Lord God of Israel].



Source: Courtés, J., 1991, *Analyse sémiotique du discours: De l'énoncé à l'énonciation*, Hachette, Paris; Courtés, J., 1995, *Du lisible au visible*, De Boeck University, Bruxelles; Hénault, A., 1983, *Narratologie Sémiotique Générale. Les enjeux de la Sémiotique II*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris

FIGURE 5: Summary of circulation of anti-values on the semiotic square.

Elders' leadership principles in Judith

The narrative proposes the elders' leading principles as the unique way of saving Jewish people and their religion. The circulation of these anti-values is noticeable in the story and can be summarised in Figure 5 as follows on the semiotic square:

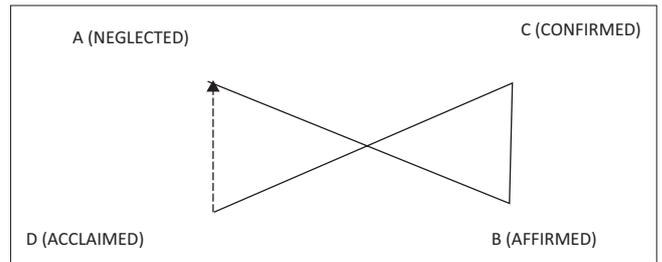
The central concern in *Judith*, as contested throughout this article, is what kind of leadership can protect the Jewish people and their religion (and its core values) from being assaulted by foreign religions such as the Assyrian cult? The first possible answer is to propose the elders of Bethulia's leadership.

This first affirmation of leadership can be summarised from the above semiotic square (Figure 5) as follows: The narrative starts with the *affirmation* (A) of the elders' leadership (*Chapters 6 to 7*). The elders and other religious leaders welcome Achior and even *enjoy* a special meal with him thinking nothing will happen but they have no plan against the Assyrians. However, as the story unfolds the elders' leadership is *questioned* (B) in *Chapter 7*. The elders fall under pressure by people questioning their leadership. The elders had no plan to confront the Assyrians but accept the idea of surrender if God does not intervene in due time (7:30–32). The situation in (C) shows a complete *rejection* of the elders' leadership when Judith appears in the story. She first reprimands them and then takes the lead until victory. Finally, the elders are even forgotten in Judith's victory (D). From then on, the Assyrians no longer attempt to conquer the Jewish people or their religion. It is evident that in *Judith* men's leadership is affirmed, questioned, rejected and totally forgotten.

Now let's examine the alternative leadership that is represented by Judith.

Judaism

In discussing the survival of Judaism, Enslin (1972:1) concedes that the author of *Judith* wanted to instruct the Jewish people and to inflame the Judeans to stand against the assault of Judaism. This is the second value to be discussed in this section. An investigation of the trajectory of this value is also conducted, focusing on both parts of the narrative,



Source: Courtés, J., 1991, *Analyse sémiotique du discours: De l'énoncé à l'énonciation*, Hachette, Paris; Courtés, J., 1995, *Du lisible au visible*, De Boeck University, Bruxelles; Hénault, A., 1983, *Narratologie Sémiotique Générale. Les enjeux de la Sémiotique II*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris

FIGURE 6: Summary of circulation of values on the semiotic square.

which for the sake of clarity is also organised into four sections (not necessarily episodes in the story). This part represents the survival of the Jews and their religion under an alternative leadership, represented by Judith. The semiotic square representing these four sections appears as follows.

The goal of this section is to discuss the affirmation of Judith's leadership in the narrative, as proposed in the semiotic square (Figure 6):

- A. Judith appears in the story in Chapter 8. She first reprimands the elders and then, after her prayer, she asks to be allowed out. In the community no one questions her plan to save her people. Her leadership is just confirmed (10: 7–9).
- B. As Judith starts moving out toward the Assyrians' camp, however, some doubt arises. She meets the soldiers and is taken to Holofernes's tent where she resists all offers in that camp until she fulfils her mission (10–11).
- C. Judith kills Holofernes and brings his head to Bethulia (13). The elders acknowledge her achievement.
- D. In Chapter 15, Judith is acclaimed as a heroine in the same way as David and other heroes of the past.

This section was devoted to the last step of analysis of the Greimassian approach. The semiotic square was used first to sort out opposing values and then to track them in the unfolding of the story. The main oppositions between Judith and the elders consisted of spiritual quality in terms of faith and knowledge versus unbelief and ignorance. Men failed to lead the Jews to victory because their relationship with the Lord was flawed. Moreover, they lacked the knowledge of Jewish historical traditions. Judith, on the contrary, had a close relation with the God of her forefathers and the history of her people. Despite being a woman, she saved her people and religion from destruction.

Conclusion

The author or editor of *Judith* crafted a wonderful story, probably as entertainment. However, for today's reader, the story has been used to address issues that arise in human societies. One of these issues concerns gender and leadership, which was the impetus behind this analysis. The purpose of this article was to investigate how gender and leadership featured in a story where men and a woman stood in a sharp

opposition. The method of analysis was the Greimassian semiotic approach, used first at the figurative level, then at the narrative level, and finally at the thematic level.

The article investigated the opposing values related to leadership firstly and then tracked their course in the unfolding of the story. The main opposing values between Judith and the elders, in the story, arise around leadership between Judith and the elders, between men and a woman. The woman was selected to lead her people to victory when men failed. From these contrasting values, it was established that the story makes a call to the Jewish people in the universe of the story to stand for inclusive leadership focussing on spiritual values, regardless of gender considerations. A Jewess such as Judith, devoted to the law and striving for the survival of her people and religion, stands as a role model of leadership in the Jewish community. However, the attempt to surrender to the Assyrians, proposed by men, is rejected as irreconcilable with the Jewish faith and traditions. The Jewish religious believers must reject the Assyrian cult and its anti-values (destruction, merciless killings, idolatry and sexual immorality).

As for a Jewish religious believer, values like the fear of God, trust in God and observance of the Law of Moses are obligatory and must be defended at all costs, as Judith did. The thematic analysis of *Judith* postulates that the author of the story promotes not only these values but also inclusive leadership in the Jewish community. In other words true leadership has its foundation in spiritual values, regardless of gender.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

R.S.H. conceptualised the article and did the analysis of Judith on gender and leadership. P.J. supervised R.S.H.'s PhD thesis, from which the article is taken. He read and critically assessed the article in the process of finalisation. D.M.K. contributed much in the application of the research methodology (Greimassian semiotic approach). He was also a co-supervisor of R.S.H.'s thesis.

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