

Anna Ryska-Komarnicka
Uniwersytet Warszawski

‘... and therefore the Lord increased this her beauty ...’ (Judith 10:4) – the beauty of Judith in Italian oratorios of the Baroque¹

Baroque oratorios about biblical Judith are usually regarded as *oratori erotici*. However, our research, covering the whole of the Italian Baroque oratorio repertoire on this subject, has revealed that such works did not dominated that repertoire to such a significant degree. For around one-third of the librettists, Judith’s similarity to the *donne forti* of 17th-century Venetian operas was a true religious-moral and artistic challenge, accompanied by the conviction that thanks to music one could see with the ears what the lack of scenic action rendered invisible. The article cites several solutions for ‘mirror scenes’ in oratorios about Judith: both the openly secular (e.g. by A. Ottoboni and Vajani de Borge) and those whose librettists endeavoured to include a commentary accentuating Judith’s spiritual virtues or divine inspiration (Gigli, Silvani). Others (including Metastasio) eschewed that which was sensual in Judith. That strategy may be compared to *dissimulazione onesta*, the honest concealment of the facts, which was popular in those times, particularly in Italy.

Key words: Book of Judith, Baroque music, Italian oratorio; *dramma per musica*, woman’s beauty, mirror scene.

The deuterocanonical Book of Judith tells of the killing of the Assyrian leader Holofernes by the beautiful and pious widow

¹ The present article is based on source material collected as part of the project ‘Księga Judyty w oratoriach włoskich epoki baroku’ [The Book of Judith in Italian oratorios of the Baroque] (2011/01/B/HS2/04723), financed by the Narodowe Centrum Nauki in Cracow and realised in the years 2011–2013.

Judith, who left the besieged Bethulia for the enemy camp under the pretence of indicating to the foe – supposedly in accordance with the will of God, offended by the sins of the Jews – a propitious moment to attack the city. As a Jewish literary document of the Hellenistic period, displaying superior artistic qualities, this tale, written during the second century BCE, includes a great deal of ambiguous content, some of it erotically tinged (Otzen, 109). The suggestive material probably worried St Jerome of Stridon, when he translated the Aramaic source of the book into Latin to include it in the Vulgate. As one of the fathers of Mariology, he saw in Judith an Old Testament prefiguration of Mary (Ciletti, 364–365). Hence he probably sought to counterbalance the presence of the erotic elements in the tale of this biblical heroine by placing greater emphasis on her religious virtues of purity, piety and humility in prayer and on the presence of divine inspiration in her actions. Such accents are difficult to find to such an extent in the better known version of the book from the Septuagint.² It was those virtues, first and foremost, that contributed to Judith's triumph, and not – as it may seem at first glance – her beauty and her devious words, with which she inveigled the enemy. God listened to the entreaties of the virtuous woman and gave her the attributes needed for the realisation of her salutary mission. Thus the full version of our titular quotation concerning Judith's beauty, as included in the Vulgate, reads as follows (Judith 10:4):

And the Lord also gave her more beauty: because all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality, but from virtue: and therefore the Lord increased this her beauty, so that she appeared to all men's eyes incomparably lovely.³

In the long term, however, St Jerome's efforts failed to prevent interpretations of the Book of Judith and its heroine that were inappropriate from a religious point of view. That process began in earnest during the fifteenth century and flourished during the sixteenth century, when

² It is difficult to ascertain today whether these elements were present in the Aramaic text and its likely Hebrew original, because neither of them has come down to us. However, many scholars find them to be very 'Jeromian' (Baksik, 16).

³ The quotations from and references to the Book of Judith concern its version from the Douay-Rheims Bible, translated from the Latin Vulgate, dating from 1582 (NT) and 1609 (OT) (see *The Holy Bible ...*).

the ambiguity of Judith's attitude was noticed: not only her virtues, but also her cunning and cruelty and her sexual and intellectual appeal, as well as the dangerous independence in her actions, which exceeded the place and role assigned to a woman in the patriarchal society (Brine, 9). Thus the heroic Jewess became a personification of all the perils to which a man exposes himself when losing his head for a beautiful woman. At the same time, Holofernes was transformed from a menacing tyrant into an innocent victim of love and male artlessness.

This 'overshadowing' of Judith (Misiak, 47) usually occurred when commentators were not seeking allegorical readings of the woman's actions from the perspective of religion (as a prefiguration of Mary or of the Church Militant), morality (as the victory of purity over covetousness or humility over pride) or patriotism (as an example of a person chosen by God to defend his or her people), which so strongly determined interpretations of this biblical story during the early Christian era and the Middle Ages (Lähnemann, 239). During the Renaissance, in the countless artistic realisations of this theme, interpreters even began playing with the ambiguities that could be gleaned from the story of Judith. And only occasionally did that serve to emphasise the divine inspiration behind the heroine's deeds (Lähnemann, 252).

At the same time, around the turn of the seventeenth century, in a Catholic world that was dominated, in response to the Reformation, by a movement of religious renewal, interest was rekindled in the Book of Judith in its most traditional, religious, moral reading (Ciletti). Many biblical commentators strove to justify those of Judith's deeds that had been subject to such ambivalent appraisals. From our present-day perspective, it is interesting – although understandable within the context of the religious wars that wracked Europe at the time – that the devious murder of the enemy in itself did not arouse as many objections as the corruption by beauty and the deceitful words. The ultimate argument absolving Judith always proved to be her divine inspiration, and her beauty was always an outward manifestation of her virtues.⁴

Whilst biblical commentators typically showed piety and gravity in their approach to the Book of Judith, many Italian preachers of the Baroque took the path of an artistic game with the dark side of the Jewess, since they themselves were not infrequently active men of letters and treated their sermons as literary works. So they employed artistic devices typical of Baroque art: the use of contrast, a deliberate combining of contradictory ideas and notions, a multitude of

⁴ For more on Catholic commentaries from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Birnbaum, chapter 3: 'Judith in der Exegese'.

paradoxes, and recourse to representations that shocked the beholder, before demonstrating all the more forcibly that human understanding can prove lacking when it comes to comprehending God's plans. Hence they sometimes numbered Judith among the Amazons and other famous female protagonists of the Pagan era (occasionally of a shady reputation) or placed highly ambiguous images before the observer, possibly inspired by current literary or artistic output, including a representation of Judith as an ageing procuress accompanying, by night, a beautiful and provocatively dressed young woman (De Nobili, 118). The actual beauty of Judith was eulogised by Giovanni Azzolini, a Marinist poet-preacher from Naples, in the characteristic introduction to one of several descriptions of her beauty in the sermon *La Cometa*, justifying the appealing style of his homily:

I would be certain, Gentlemen, of securing more favourable attention on your part if I adorned my sermon with as many rhetorical ornaments as the beautiful devices with which our Judith knew how to bedeck herself. In an aromatic bath, she washes away all the blemishes which her harsh life has impressed upon her graceful body. With precious oils, she mollifies her limbs, which have suffered so much through fasting and flagellation. To her features, she restores the joy that enduring cares have stolen from them. She reveals to public gaze the golden locks which she has hitherto closely concealed beneath a black veil. She ignites in her eyes the bright light of two stars, which has hitherto been obscured by dark sorrow. [...] She turns the colour of her modest lips to vermilion, whereas hitherto they had seemed wilted by care. She blanches in her gracious face the pearls which had lost their fairness from living in penitence. She does not hide from curious eyes the alabaster of her breasts, which she has hitherto kept covered by her robe. With beautiful rings, she adorns hands accustomed to holding whips to lash herself with.⁵

⁵ 'Sarei sicuro, Signori, di meritar da voi più cortese attenzione se con tanti retorici ornamenti comparisse la mia oratorione abbellita, con quante artificiose bellezze seppe la nostra Giuditta farsi scorgere ornata. Lascia in un'odorifero bagno d'acqua artificiosa tutte le macchie, che per l'asprezza della vita havea nel suo gentil corpo contratte. Ammorbidisce con pregiato unguento le membra, che sotto i rigorosi digiuni, e sanguinosi flagelli erano con duri trattamenti incallite. Restituisce quel bel sereno alla fronte, che da una lunga astinenza l'era stato rubato. Spiega al publico vagheggiamento quella dorata chioma, che nell'angustia d'un nero velo era stata ristretta. Rischiara negli occhi il lume di due lucidissime stelle, che infino all'ora un nero turbine di mestitia havea tenuto oscurato. [...] Imprime nelle tumidette labbra il cinabro, che per macerationi continue si miravano smorte. Imbianca nella gratiosa bocca le perle, che per la vita di penitenza havean già perduto il candore. Scuopre a gli sguardi di curiosi il candido alabastro del seno, che per l'addietro con tumido manto havea tenuto celato. Adorna di risplendenti anella le mani, da cui pendevan le sfere

Further into his text, he unexpectedly ends another sensual description of Judith’s beauty with the conclusion that her beauty is a reflection of her womanly virtues:

Her mouth is a conch, her teeth like pearls, her lips like coral, serene her appearance and calm is her face, frizzled her hair, her speech like a Siren, her pupils azure and her dress full of treasures [...] and if Venus was born of salty sea waves, as the Ancients imagined, we can truly conclude that pure Modesty, fairer than Venus, was born of the same inspiration.⁶

Looking down on believers from the walls of churches, meanwhile, were likenesses of Judith more modest than her portraits painted with the words of those homilies. During the seventeenth century, she was often portrayed in connection with the spread of the Marian cult, although today that strand of Judith iconography is much less significant (see Uppenkamp, chapter 9, ‘Die triumphirende Judith’; Ciletti). All art lovers tend to remember the sensuous beauties painted by the Italians Giorgione and Cristofano Allori, to say nothing of the naked Judiths painted more frequently on the other side of the Alps. The ‘ecclesiastic’ vanquisher of Holofernes is distinguished by a classical beauty, not particularly appealing to the eye, adorned in multi-layered robes, often with no ornaments or jewels, and in her hand she is usually holding her enemy’s head, raised in a gesture of triumph. So according to the Catholic reformers’ recommendations concerning art in places of worship, these representations contain nothing that might disturb the conscience of the beholder. There may have been fears that, without the possibility of hearing a suitable commentary, overly sensual depictions of Judith might have turned people’s thoughts in an undesirable direction.⁷ One characteristic example of such a ‘church’ Judith is a portrayal of our heroine painted towards the end of the seventeenth century by Daniel Seiter, in the Oratorian church of Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome – a church that played a key role during the seventeenth century in developing the oratorio as a new genre of

Theology
of beauty

per tormentare se stessa.’ (Azzolini, 364–365). All Italian texts in this article rendered in English from Anna Ryszka-Komarnicka’s Polish translations.

⁶ ‘Ella ha nella bocca la conca, ne’ denti le perle, nelle labbra i coralli, la tranquillità nell’aspetto, nella faccia la calma, l’increspamento ne’ crini, nel parlar le Sirene, nelle pupille l’azzurro, nell’abbigliamento i tesori [...] e se dall’onde salse del mare, favoleggiaron gli Antichi, che fussero originati i natali di Venere; così possiamo veramente concludere, che dal nostro Mare spirante fusse partorita, più di Venere bella, la Pudicitia stessa.’ (Azzolini, 365–366).

⁷ For more on recommendations concerning art on religious subjects, see e.g. Paleotti, book 2, chapter 1.

non-liturgical, dramatic religious music not performed on the stage. In the eyes of many clerics, oratorios were preferable to religious theatre, which – excessively stimulating the sense of sight – was ripe for manipulation by Satan (Segneri, 300–301).

The Book of Judith became one of the most popular Baroque themes of that repertoire. From the period 1621–1734,⁸ we have as many as fifty-four dialogues and oratorios in *lingua volgare* and *latina* (some of them were repeatedly performed or disseminated in the form of printed librettos, including adaptations), against only nine works of opera, which could be perceived as a regressive genre, perpetuating the dying theatrical Judith tradition that flourished around the turn of the seventeenth century.

So how was the question of Judith's beauty treated in oratorio, which, after all, is regarded as a kind of affected sermon with music (Bianconi, 128)? At the very birth of that genre, during the 1630s, an episode about Judith as a prefiguration of Mary appeared in two Marian oratorios performed in the church of the Roman Oratorians. And at once two strategies emerged with regard to the question of her bodily charms.

In *Oratorio per la Santissima Vergine*, with music by Giacomo Carissimi (1605–1674) and words by Francesco Balducci (1579–1642), attention is drawn to the heroism of Judith, who defeated her enemy with a sword, and of Mary, who wielded a different weapon against Satan: her chastity. No such weapon was seen on the ancient island of Delos or in Colchis. This poetic mention of ancient lands famed for their beautiful landscapes and riches could be seen as alluding to the beauty of both Judith and Mary; in such a take, however, it is clear that beauty did not play a crucial role in their victories.⁹ Hence Carissimi decided to accompany this episode by music in a recitative style, restrained, calm, rarely adorned with melismata.¹⁰

In *Coro di Profeti per la festa dell'Annunziata*, with music by Domenico Mazzocchi (1592–1665) and words by Giovanni Ciampoli

⁸ This is the year of the premiere of *La Betulia liberata* by Pietro Metastasio (with music by Georg von Reutter jr), which opens a new chapter in the history of the use of the Book of Judith in Italian oratorios in Classical era.

⁹ Delos was famed for its Temple of Apollo, regarded as one of the wonders of the ancient world. Colchis was a mythical land full of riches, where Jason and the Argonauts travelled in search of the Golden Fleece. Both locations were also associated with beautiful women: on Delos, Leto gave birth to Apollo and Artemis; Colchis, meanwhile, was home to the sorceress Medea.

¹⁰ See Giacomo Carissimi, *Oratorio della SS.^{ma} Vergine*, part 2, recitative 'Taccia Bettulia', mm. 1–17 (modern-day edition of the score: Carissimi, 30–31).

(1590–1643), the recitative account of Judith is longer and focusses on the heroine herself (the Marian allegory is only explained at the end of this episode, in choral-ensemble parts). Here, heroism and lyricism appear on an equal footing. The beautiful woman’s gaze, as in a Marinist poem, is like a sharp, deadly arrow; in his music, Mazzocchi rendered this motif in the form of a sung *mezz’aria* (semi-aria) – a kind of musical utterance which he had elaborated earlier in his operas.¹¹

Oratorios – compared to Italian operas, plays and epic poems (the story of Judith was popular in all those genres at that time¹²) – were not long works. Consisting of two parts, they numbered up to 500 lines of poetry, suggesting, with the construction of the verse, a division into free recitatives and closed musical forms, arranged as arias, ensembles or choruses. So librettists had to select episodes from the biblical tale. Several dramatic situations from the original story could be used to draw attention to the heroine’s beauty:

Theology
of beauty

1. Judith’s prayer, with the wish that God may grant that her beautiful appearance and graceful speech might dull the Assyrian’s vigilance (Judith 9:13). After the operatic fashion, this could be expanded in oratorios into a scene where the heroine resolves to use an amorous ruse to defeat her enemy – a type of scene that was characteristic of *donne forti* in Venetian *drammi per musica*;
2. Judith’s meticulous preparations before leaving the city (Judith 10:2–4), which could be developed into an operatic ‘mirror scene’ (also known as a ‘boudoir scene’);¹³
3. the moment when Judith meets the elders at the city gate, astonished at the transformation of the god-fearing widow into a dazzling beauty (Judith 10:7). Again after the operatic fashion, this could be expanded with comments and flecked with misogynistic accents, creating a vision of Judith the harlot (although such

¹¹ The music of the whole of this oratorio is lost. Fortunately, Mazzocchi published in Rome a lovely fragment about Judith from the first part of this work, under the title ‘Giuditta libera Bettulia dall’assedio’, in the collection *Musiche sacre e morali a una, due, e tre voci* (see Mazzocchi; for a modern-day transcription of the key section of this composition telling of Holofernes’ murder by the beautiful Jewess, see Speck, 104).

¹² For more on the reception of the Book of Judith in Italian literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see e.g. Harness, Cosentino.

¹³ Although the text of the oratorio, as a work not performed on stage, was not divided into scenes, we use this term in its traditional sense to mean a part of a dramatic work distinguished by the presence of a fixed group of characters on the stage. Such units can be identified in the oratorio’s text. In opera, scenes are also described in terms of their distinctive content (e.g. dream scene, madness scene or mirror scene). Analogous scenes occur in oratorios.

strong words are not uttered in oratorios, of course), whose only chance of salvation is to ignite a fiery passion in Holofernes' heart;

4. Judith's encounters with the Assyrians, openly expressing their admiration of her beauty (Judith 10:14, 11–12).

Sometimes, all these dramatic situations occurred in a single work, but more often – for various reasons (including expectations regarding the length of the work) – only a couple of them. From the point of view of the morality of those times, the safest solution seemed to be drawing attention to Judith's beauty through the lips of the Assyrians, since seventeenth-century Europeans perceived yielding to the senses as characteristic of men of the Orient. Occasionally, however, an overly sensuous description of her beauty, even on the part of the Assyrians, was received with anxiety, as is shown by the example of the work *La strage degli Assiri sotto Betulia*, with words and music by canon Cosimo Bani (dates of birth and death not known). In what was probably the version performed in the premiere at the Compagnia dell'Arcangelo Raffaello in Florence, in 1692, an Assyrian Soldier, in an aria, gave the following depiction of Judith to his commander:

Bella bocca d'acceso cinabro,	A beautiful vermilion mouth,
Di tesori ha una conca nel sen,	Her bosom abounding with treasures,
E se il ciglio emular vuol il labro	And if her eyes with her lips will vie
Ogni stilla una perla divien.	Then each one of them shines
	like a pearl.

Delle guance ove il riso ha ricetta,	April has no more beautiful bloom
Fior più bello un'Aprile non ha,	Than her cheeks, where her smile
	is born,
Ne la candida neve del petto	And the pure snowy white of her chest
Col suo gelo languire gli fa.	Makes one yearn with its icy veneer.
	(Bani 1692, [12])

In a performance of the work in Lucca, however, during a cycle of Christmas oratorios held at the church of Santa Maria Corteorlandini around the turn of 1694, the same character spoke entirely differently about Judith, drawing attention to her virtues as a true warring Amazon, such as *magnanimitas* and *constantia*:

Alma forte in un severo seno	A strong spirit in a stern breast
Di stupori portento si fà:	Arouses prodigious amazement:
La costanza, che mai non vien meno,	Steadfastness that never deceives
Più bel pregio è di quel di beltà.	Is more precious than beauty itself.
	(Bani 1693, 45–46)

Reading the above text, it is hard to imagine why the lustful Holofernes, as he was portrayed in the Book of Judith, would take any interest in Judith at all. Yet those words must have sounded much less disturbing for the organisers of the Christmas cycle of oratorio performances in Lucca (24 December 1693 – 6 January 1694), and that was most important for them.

There was another possible strategy as well. Without relinquishing certain elements of the description of Judith’s beauty, some librettists filled their text with suitable comments, the purpose of which was to indicate the proper context for the transformation in her appearance. So they adhered to the spirit of Jerome’s Book, not exposing their librettos to possible objections from either the censors passing their text for publication or the more god-fearing patrons who were funding the oratorio performances. The playwright and comedy writer Girolamo Gigli (1660–1722), well known in his day, in his oratorio *La Giuditta*, furnished with a Marian *licenza* and first published in Siena in 1693, gave the following description of Judith to her maid, who sang this aria as she helped her lady to alter her appearance:

Theology
of beauty

Lacci dorati	Golden locks
Del vago crin,	Of beautiful hair
Ordite a noi	Secure for us
La libertà.	Our freedom.
Begli occhi armati.	Beautiful eyes
Di stral Divin,	With divine arrows armed,
In mezzo à voi	Through you
Dio pugnerà. Lacci, &c.	God will fight. Golden locks, &c.
	(Gigli, 13)

Despite the maid’s lowly social standing, Gigli used her to introduce a religious commentary. Of an entirely different resonance is a similar scene in the oratorio *Bettulia liberata* by Elia Vajani de Borghi (1647–1737), theologian to the Duke of Mantua. Although divine inspiration is mentioned here too, it is only in the recitative. There is no such reference in the maid’s actual aria, when, with the satisfaction befitting a character of this type, and not without a thrill of excitement, Abra sings that her lady’s beauty will prove fatal to the enemy:

Questi lacci, che vado forzando	These locks of hair which
	I now arrange
Saran lacci ad infido Amator:	Will be chains for the faithless Lover:
Queste spille, che vado intrecciando	And these pins which I now insert
Saran dardi mortali al suo cor.	Will be fatal barbs for his heart.
	(Vajani de Borghi, 11)

So the aria from Gigli's work could only have appeared in an oratorio, but the number from de Borghi's work would have been equally at home in an opera, in some other scene in front of a mirror where the maid decked out her lady as she prepared to fight adversity with the womanly weapon of her beauty. It is striking that both these oratorios possessed Marian overtones, highlighted at the end by a special *licenza*. In addition, de Borghi's *Bettulia liberata*, with music by the now little-known composer Francesco Maria Stiava (1640–1702), had an utterly religious performance context, documented by a suitable edition of the libretto. It was dedicated to the archbishop of Bologna and played there in 1703, in the intention of the souls of deceased parishioners of the church of San Martino Maggiore and the Carmelite friars who looked after it; like the Bethulians to Judith, the friars had recourse to the intercession of the Mother of the Saviour.¹⁴ So this was by no means a work presented in a palace for the enjoyment of quasi operatic entertainment at a time when the theatres were closed.

A similar strategy to that of Gigli was adopted in the oratorio *La Giuditta* by Francesco Silvani (b. c.1660; d. 1728–1744). He entrusted the florid description of the process of transforming Judith's appearance to a Narrator, ending it with an aria featuring the heroine's resolution, referring in poetical style, yet directly and openly, to words from the Book: '... since the whole of this adornment derived not from harlotry, but from virtue ...':

Testo [recitativo].

Disse à pena, che tolse
Il cilicio da Lombi, e al seno il velo;

E con l'eburneo rastro
Solca le belle chiome; altre ne scioglie

Su la candida Fronte; altre gastiga

Co l'infocato ferro; indi le addata
A confini del ciglio:

Parte poi n'avilisce

Co' lacci d'aureo nastro; indi il bel collo

Narrator [recitative].

That said, she removed
The hair-shirt from her hips
and the robe from her breast;

With an ivory comb
She combs her lovely locks
and others lets loose

So they fall on her white forehead;
others she treats

With a red-hot iron, so they fall
Just above her eyes:

Then she ties some of them

With knots of gold ribbon,
and then coils

¹⁴ During the first part of this oratorio, the elders and residents of Bethulia asked Judith to save them from their tragic situation. This is a very interesting embellishment of a biblical story with a fictional motif which does not appear in the Book of Judith (there, the heroine herself, at no one's request, opposed the widespread doubting in God's protection) and was introduced in order to reinforce the Marian message of the work, set out in the closing *licenza*.

Con prezioso oltraggio ella incatena	A precious necklace around her lovely neck,
In prigione di perle.	Enclosing it in a prison of pearls.
Veste porpora, e bisso, e'l bisso copre	She dresses in purple and in batiste, and covers the batiste
D'oro, e di gemme; ed à le guancie, al labro	With jewels and gold; to her cheeks and lips
Rende il primo cinabro.	She restores a youthful vermilion flush.
Di lucido Cristallo	In the clear surface
Nel terso sen riflette	Of the shining mirror she beholds
Le Bellezze abbellite, e le consiglia;	Her beauty in full bloom and contemplates it:
Studia i vezzi innocenti, e poi ripiglia.	She practises innocent faces, then learns.

Theology of beauty

Giuditta [aria].

Imparate à consagrarvi
Figlie ree di vanità.
Hoggi viene ad adornarvi
Non il vizio, mà la pietà.

Judith [aria].

Learn self-sacrifice
Sinful daughters of vanity.
Today, you adorn yourselves out of piety
Not debauchery.

(Silvani, 18–19)

In keeping with the suggestiveness of this text, the two composers who set Silvani's libretto to music, Marc'Antonio Ziani (c.1653–1715; premiere in Modena, 1686) and Domenico Freschi (1634–1710; premiere probably in Vicenza, 1680s), struck a singularly sombre tone in their music for the aria that crowns the mirror scene. With that aim in mind, Freschi chose a very slow tempo, *Largo*, more sombre and slower than *Adagio*, almost as heavy as *Grave*. Thus the vocal part of this aria is dominated by an unadorned, syllabic melody, in which longer, elaborate melismata befit only that which is sinful (*figlie ree*) and vain (*vanità*), and which Judith inwardly rejects.¹⁵

A completely different tack was adopted by Antonio Ottoboni (1646–1710) in his oratorio *La Giuditta*, which was performed with music by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725) in the palace of his son, Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, in 1695 or 1697. In this oratorio, there is no narrator, and it is Judith herself who informs us of her every movement in front of the mirror:

Sciolgo il crin, snudo il sen, scatenò il ciglio. Et Oloferne avrà Di quel, ch'oggi a noi dà,	I loosen my hair, uncover my bosom and open wide my eyes And thus Holofernes will find himself In greater peril than that which
--	--

¹⁵ Domenico Freschi, *La Giuditta*, part 2, Judith's aria 'Imparate a consacrarvi', score in the A-Wn, Mus. Hs.16.557, fols 33v–34r.

Maggior periglio./ Sciolgo &c.

He prepared for us today./ I loosen &c.
(Dubowy, 278)

In the music, too, each of the actions was underscored with a melismatic device, illustrating Judith's movements. Scarlatti also conveyed their coquettish character with a capricious, undulating melodic line and a discreet allusion to a dance: a joyous gavotte.¹⁶

Baroque oratorios about Judith have customarily been regarded as *oratori erotici* (erotic oratorios; see Pasquetti, 257–260), corresponding to the predilection among audiences in those times for contemplating a combination of the sensual (*gusto erotico*) and cruel with the ascetic and sacred. However, our research has revealed that works like Antonio Ottoboni's *La Giuditta* by no means dominated this repertoire to such a significant degree as might be expected.¹⁷ Although many among the original audiences of these works already realised that oratorio might constitute a Lenten substitute for opera, enabling them to enjoy wonderful music even after Shrovetide, not everyone accepted the fact that the work's plot and heroine might stand close to the world of opera. For around one-third of the librettists of those fifty-four Italian oratorios and dialogues (and also, no doubt, for the patrons of various sorts for whom they were working), Judith's similarity to the *donne forti* of seventeenth-century Venetian *drammi per musica* who used their beauty to vanquish their foes, as well as the whole baggage of secularised representations of this subject in art, clearly constituted a true religious-moral and artistic challenge. It was accompanied by the just conviction that thanks to music one could even see with the ears what the lack of scenic action rendered invisible (Tcharos, 77–91). So there were librettists who endeavoured to show all the disturbing aspects of the plot of this Book – not just Judith's sensuous beauty – in such a way as to dispel, by means of a suitable commentary, as in a homily, all the doubts of a religious and ethical nature that could have arisen in the hearts and minds of the audience. Others, including the most famous of them all, Pietro Metastasio, author of the oratorio *La Betulia liberata* (1734), eschewed – as did painters working for the Church – everything in Judith's actions that was not only sensual, but also devious or even cruel. So they focussed

¹⁶ Alessandro Scarlatti, *La Giuditta* (words by Antonio Ottoboni), part 1, Judith's aria 'Sciolgo il crin ...', bars 180–194 (modern-day score: see Scarlatti, 23).

¹⁷ Significantly, Ottoboni's libretto was never printed in Rome (or the print was destroyed); that was probably linked to the strictly private character of all the performances of this work in the Eternal City (Staffieri 1985/1986, 122–123).

more on the heroine’s virtues, passing over her corporeal beauty. They also shortened the moments of her presence in the company of the Assyrians, so that their librettos would not have too much scope for delight in Judith’s beauty, for expressions of *amori profani* (sensual love), for the heroine’s feigned humility and for her ambiguous speech. As for the slaying of the enemy, it was often barely mentioned (with the exception of Metastasio, who – by way of exception – devoted a detailed description to that act). That strategy may be compared to *dissimulazione onesta*, the honest concealment of the facts, which was popular in those times, particularly in Italy,¹⁸ even though those facts came from a sacred source.

Theology
of beauty

„...PRZETO TEŻ PAN TĘ W NIEJ PIĘKNOŚĆ ROZMNOŻYŁ...” (JDT 10, 4) – PIĘKNO JUDYTY W ORATORIACH WŁOSKICH EPOKI BAROKU

Barokowe oratoria o biblijnej Judycie uważa się zwykle za tzw. *oratori erotici*. Jednak nasze badania, obejmujące całość włoskiego repertuaru oratoryjnego na ten temat z epoki baroku, wykazały, że dzieła takie nie zdominowały tego repertuaru w aż tak znaczącym stopniu. Podobieństwo Judyty do *donne forti* weneckich oper XVII wieku okazały się dla około 1/3 librecistów prawdziwym wyzwaniem religijno-moralnym i artystycznym, czemu towarzyszyło też przekonanie, że dzięki muzyce można uchem zobaczyć to, co niewidoczne z powodu braku scenicznej akcji. Artykuł ten przytacza kilka różnych rozwiązań tzw. scen przed lustrem w oratoriach o Judycie: i tych otwarcie świeckich (np. A. Ottoboni, Vajani de Borgia) po te, których libreciści starali się włączyć w nie komentarz akcentujący cnoty duchowe Judyty lub Boską inspirację (Silvani, Gigli). Jeszcze inni, łącznie Metastasiem, uciekali od tego, co w Judycie było zmysłowe. Koncentrowali się więc na cnotach bohaterki, zapominając o jej pięknie cielesnym. Strategię tę można przyrównać do popularnej w epoce, szczególnie w Italii, *dissimulazione onesta*, czyli uczciwego ukrywania faktów.

Słowa kluczowe: Księga Judyty, barokowa muzyka, oratorium włoskie, *dramma per musica*, kobiece piękno, scena przed lustrem.

Bibliography:

1. Azzolini G. (1669), *Orationi sacre composte, e recitate dal P.D. Giovanni Azzolini Chierico Regolare. Parte Prima, e Seconda. Con nuova aggiunta*, Per Gio: Francesco Valvasense, Venezia, 1669

¹⁸ For more on *dissimulazione onesta*, see Snyder.

2. Baksik S. (1963), *Księga Judyty. Wstęp – Przekład z oryginału – Komentarz* [The Book of Judith. Introduction, translation from the original and commentary], Pallotinum, Poznań.
3. Bani C. (1692), *La strage degli Assirj sotto Betulia. Oratorio da cantarsi nella venerabil Compagnia dell'Arcangelo Raffaello detta La Scala [...]*, Vincenzo Vangelisti, Firenze.
4. Bani C. (1693), *La strage degli Assirj sotto Betulia*, w: *Oratorii Sacri da cantarsi nella Chiesa di S. Maria Cortelandini [!] nelle Veglie del Santissimo Natale quest'anno 1693*, Iacinto Paci, Domenico Ciuffetti, Lucca.
5. Bianconi L. (1999), *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, digital printing, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
6. Birnbaum E. (2009), *Das Juditbuch im Wien des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Exegese – Predigt – Musik – Theater – Bildende Kunst*, Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien (Österreichische Biblische Studien, 35).
7. Brine K.R. (2010), 'The Judith Project', in: *The Sword of Judith. Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, eds. K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti, H. Lähnemann, OpenBook Publishers, pp. 3-21.
8. Carissimi G. (1964), *Oratori*, t. VIII: *Oratorio della SS.^{ma} Vergine*, eds. L. Bianchi, Istituto Italiano per la Storia della Musica, Roma (Monumenti, III).
9. Ciletti E. (2010), 'Judith Imagery as Catholic Orthodoxy in Counter-Reformation Italy', in: *The Sword of Judith. Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, eds. K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti, H. Lähnemann, OpenBook Publishers, pp. 345-368.
10. Cosentino P. (2012), *Le virtù di Giuditte[.] Il tema biblico della 'mulier fortis' nella letteratura del '500 e del '600*, Aracne Editrice, Roma (Dulces Musae. Collana di Studi e Testi di Letteratura Italiana, 7).
11. De Nobili V.-M. (1766), *Opere Predicabili del Padre Vincenzo-Maria de' Nobili contenenti Lezioni sacro-morali*, t. 4: *Lezioni sacre sopra i Libri di Sansone, Ruth, Esther, Tobia e Giuditte [...]*, Giacomo Caroboli, e Domenico Pompeati, Venezia.
12. Dubowy N. (2002), 'Le due 'Giuditte' di Alessandro Scarlatti: due diverse concezioni dell'oratorio', in: *L'oratorio musicale italiano e i suoi contesti (Secc. XVII-XVIII). Atti del convegno internazionale. Perugia, Sagra Musicale Umbra, 18-20 settembre 1997*, ed. P. Besutti, Leo S. Olschki Editore, Firenze (Quaderni della RIM, 35), pp. 259-288.
13. Gigli G. (1693), *La Giuditte. Drama sacro di Amaranto Sciaditico Pastore Arcade, Dedicato all'Il^{le}, ed Eccell^{me}. Signore D. Maria Lucrezia, e D. Maria Candida Rospigliosi*, Stamp. del Publ., Siena.
14. Harness K. (2010), 'Judith, Music, and Female Patrons in Early Modern Italy', in: *The Sword of Judith. Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, eds. K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti, H. Lähnemann, OpenBook Publishers, pp. 371-383.
15. *The Holy Bible*, Douay-Rheims version (1609, 1582).
16. Lähnemann H. (2010), 'The Cunning of Judith in Late Medieval German Texts', in: *The Sword of Judith. Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, eds. K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti, H. Lähnemann, OpenBook Publishers, pp. 239-258.

17. Mazzocchi D. (1640/ 1988), *Recitativo Giuditte libera Bettulia dall’assedio* (‘Ecco Bettulia’), in: *Musiche sacre morali a una, due, e tre voci*, Roma, Stamperia di Lodovico Grignani; facs. edn, [foreword] Piero Mioli, Firenze, Studio per Edizioni Scelte, pp. 42-45 (Archivum Musicum, *La cantata barocca*, 26)
18. Misiak A.M. (2004), *Judyta – postać bez granic* [Judith: a character with no limitations], Wydawnictwo słowo/ obraz terytoria, Gdańsk.
19. Otzen B. (2002), *Tobit and Judith*, Sheffield Academic Press, London, New York.
20. Paleotti G. (2012), *Disourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, transl. W. MacCuaid, introduction P. Prodi, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
21. Pasquetti G. (1906), *L’oratorio musicale in Italia*, Successori Le Monnier, Firenze.
22. Scarlatti A. (1966), *La Giuditte di ‘Cambridge’*, ed. L. Bianchi, Edizioni De Santis, Roma (Gli Oratorii di Alessandro Scarlatti, 3).
23. Segneri P. (1712), *Il Cristiano istruito nella sua legge. Ragionamenti morali*, Paolo Baglioni, Venezia, part 3.
24. Snyder J.R. (2012), *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
25. Speck Ch. (2003), *Das Italienische Oratorium 1625-1665[:] Musik und Dichtung*, Brepols, Turnhout (Speculum Musicae, 9).
26. Staffieri G. (1985/86), [master’s thesis] *L’oratorio musicale a Roma (1683-1713): documenti, aspetti e problemi*, Università di Roma „La Sapienza”, Roma, t. I-II
27. Tcharos S. (2011), *Operas Orbit’s. Musical Drama and the Influence of Opera in Arcadian Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
28. Uppenkamp B. (2004), *Judith und Holofernes in der italienischen Malerei des Barock*, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin.
29. Vajani de Borghi E. (1703), *Bettulia liberata. Oratorio per musica consacrato al [...] Signor Cardinale Giacomo Boncompagno Arcivescovo di Bologna, e Principe del S.R.I., composto dal M.R.P. Maestro F. Elia Vajani De Borghi, Dottore Collegiato, Theologo del Serenissimo di Mantova, e Custode dell’Altare di V.M. del Carmine, posto in musica dal Sig. Francesco Maria Stiava da Lucca [...]*, Stamperia delli Peri, Bologna.