

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

Martina Häcker, 'The Original Length of the Old English Judith. More Doubt(s) on the "Missing Text"', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 27 (1996), 1-18

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=123742&silos_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

The Original Length of the Old English *Judith*. More Doubt(s) on the 'Missing Text'¹

Martina Häcker

The original length of the Old English poem *Judith* has been one of the most disputed aspects of the work. The length of the poem is of considerable importance for its interpretation: should it be regarded as a fairly broad translation of the Apocryphal book of *Judith* or a much more independent work that makes a more selective use of its source to convey a different message? *Judith* survived only in one codex dating from the Anglo-Saxon period. This codex, the so-called Nowell codex, which is now generally assigned to the late tenth or early eleventh century, is the second of two originally separate codices bound together in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv.² The first codex, which takes its name Southwick codex from its thirteenth century provenance, dates from the twelfth century.³

The Nowell codex comprises three Old English prose texts (*Life of St Christopher*, ff. 94r-98r, *Marvels of the East*, the only illustrated text in the collection, which is also referred to as *Wonders of the East*, ff. 98v-106v, and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, ff. 107r-131v) and two poems (*Beowulf*, ff. 132r-201v, and *Judith*, ff. 202r-209v). The texts are written in two hands. Scribe A wrote the three prose texts and a large part of *Beowulf*, up to f. 175v line 3, where scribe B took over from line 4. As the change of scribe occurs in the middle of *Beowulf* the texts must in all probability all originate from the same scriptorium. The early history of their transmission is unrecorded and the linguistic evidence is controversial. *Judith* has been described as a Northern (Anglian or Mercian) poem, as a West Saxon poem, and as a West Saxon copy of an Anglian original.⁴

The first owner of the codex that can be identified with any certainty is the antiquary Laurence Nowell, from whom it takes its name. As Nowell signed his name with the date 1563 on the first page of the fragmentary *Life of St Christopher*, it seems probable that the texts were in their present order in a separate volume when they were in his possession.⁵ This was certainly no longer the case in 1705, when the

codex was first described by Humphrey Wanley.⁶ A list entitled 'Elenchus contentorum in hoc codice' on a prefixed leaf in Cotton Vitellius A. xv in a hand identified by Kiernan as that of Richard James, Cotton's librarian, points to the years between 1628 and 1638 as a likely time for the rebinding of the Southwick and the Nowell codices into one volume.⁷

Two of the texts of the Nowell codex are definitely incomplete: the *Life of St Christopher* at the beginning, and *Judith* at the beginning and at the end, although the final surviving folio (209v) contains an additional six lines which have been transcribed in the bottom margin in an early modern hand and are assumed to be the closing part of *Judith*. This suggests that the last page of the manuscript may have been discarded rather than lost.⁸ For the loss of the opening of *Judith*, which begins in mid-sentence 'tweode gifena in ðys ginnan grunde', only a *terminus ad quem* can be given, the date of Franciscus Junius's transcription of the poem, as he entitled it 'Fragmentum historiae Judith' (now MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 105). A similar title was chosen by Thwaites in his 1698 edition of *Judith*.⁹

In a recent paper Lucas draws attention to the potential ambiguity of the term 'fragment', which may refer to the codicological state of a manuscript or to the literary incompleteness of a text.¹⁰ While in theory the two meanings of 'fragment' may easily be kept apart, in practice the notion of codicological incompleteness tends to have some impact on the question of literary incompleteness and vice versa.

Discussion of the length of *Judith* has concentrated primarily on the section numbers occurring in the manuscript and on a comparison with the Apocryphal source of the Old English poem. Calculations of the entire length of the poem were first made by Förster¹¹ and were taken over by later scholars. On the basis of the section numbers beginning with section X at line 15 of the poem as it is conventionally printed and an average of 112 lines in sections X, XI, and XII, the entire length of the poem would amount to 1344 lines. Such calculations presuppose that the beginning of *Judith* was actually numbered as section I and that the sections were of equal length. Förster's calculations, based on a comparison with the Apocryphal source, are argued as follows: the beginning of the fragment corresponds to the beginning of chapter 12 of the Apocryphal *Judith*, which comprises a total of 16 chapters. Therefore three-quarters of the poem are lost, which according to Förster amount to some 950 to 1000 lines. This corresponds nicely with the calculations based on the sections and has satisfied such eminent scholars as Dobbie and Timmer.¹² Dobbie takes over Förster's statement that the length corresponds to the 1320 lines of the Old English *Elene*, a religious epic, which like *Judith* has a female protagonist. However, he modifies the calculations based on the Apocryphal source, as the content of chapter 16 of the

Apocryphal *Judith* is not taken over in the Old English poem and should therefore be left out of the calculation.¹³ According to Dobbie the entire length of the Old English *Judith*, based on a comparison with the Apocryphal *Judith*, comes to about 1200 lines, a figure still fairly close to that calculated on the basis of the section numbers.

If, however, the poet did not take over the content of the last chapter of his Apocryphal source, how can we be so sure that he faithfully followed it at the beginning of his work? It is surprising that this question has not been raised more often, as Albert S. Cook stated at the beginning of this century that 'the poem seems virtually complete as it now is'.¹⁴ This is the more surprising as both Timmer and Dobbie comment in the introductions to their respective editions on the reduction in the number of characters in the poem. Timmer states:

With regard to the source . . . , the Apocryphal Book of Judith chapters xii. 10 to xvi. 1, it may be remarked that the poet has reduced the number of characters, for the eunuch Vagao is not mentioned by name, nor are Nebuchadnezzar, Achior and Ozias.¹⁵

Dobbie additionally notes a reduction in the number of speeches:

Besides simplifying the cast of characters, the poet has achieved greater economy in the narrative by reducing the numerous speeches of the Latin original to four . . .¹⁶

This would suggest that the evidence for a long poem based on Apocryphal evidence is rather doubtful and that the evidence of the section numbers was the decisive factor in forming scholarly opinion on the length of *Judith*. There may even be a tendency to accept that judgements based on numerical evidence are more objective than those based on other evidence. Thus Dobbie dismisses Cook's opinion, which is based on internal evidence, as 'unduly subjective' and 'hardly sufficient to outweigh the conclusions reached above [i.e. the calculations first advanced by Förster]'.¹⁷

Any serious challenge to the predominant view that *Judith* was a poem of some 1300 lines therefore had to offer an explanation for the section numbers. Such an explanation was provided in Woolf's article 'The Lost Opening to the *Judith*'.¹⁸ Here she points out that there is no positive evidence that the section numbers were inserted by the poet himself. Two alternative explanations for the section numbers are possible, neither of which would require the original *Judith* to have been much longer

than that which has survived. Firstly, the scribe of the Cotton manuscript may have made calculations based on the Apocryphal *Judith* similar to Förster's and inserted section numbers accordingly, in which case the numbers would represent the scribe's guess at the amount lost at the beginning of *Judith* rather than an actual loss. Secondly, it is equally possible that the section numbers in *Judith* run on from a preceding text now lost. Woolf points to the evidence of the Junius manuscript, where *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Daniel* are numbered consecutively.

Woolf argues that the reduction of the story line is not without precedent either, as Aldhelm in his *De Virginitate*, prose version, chapter LVII¹⁹ begins with *Judith* rather than with Nebuchadnezzar's conquests and the Old English *Exodus* likewise only corresponds in part to chapters 13-15 of the biblical book of *Exodus*. Her arguments were taken over by Greenfield, Huppé and Doubleday,²⁰ but more recently Chamberlain has expressed the opinion that none of the shorter Latin treatments of the story of *Judith* contain so many details from the Apocryphal text, which leads him to the conclusion that 'we can easily visualise a highly selective but long poem'.²¹ Enzensberger, apparently unaware of Woolf's article, argued independently for a short poem on the basis of a stylistic analysis of *Judith*: 'Wahrscheinlich ist, daß nur wenig, vielleicht nur der Anfang des ersten Satzes fehlt'. (Probably very little, and perhaps only the beginning of the first sentence is missing.)²²

An intermediate position between those who argue for a short poem with only a few lines preceding what has survived of *Judith* and those who argue for a poem of more than 1000 lines is taken by Lucas:

The opening 14 lines were presumably the end of a sectional division that would have been numbered IX. The average length of the surviving three sections is 112 lines. It follows that c. 98 lines are missing from section IX and these lines would certainly have belonged to *Judith*. If these lines are all that is missing from the poem then what survives constitutes approx. 78 per cent of the whole poem.²³

Lucas's calculations are based on the assumption that the section numbers were inserted by the scribe and that the beginning of *Judith* coincided with the beginning of section IX. These assumptions are part of a larger argument which suggests that *Judith* originally preceded the prose *Life of St Christopher*, which is the first text of the Nowell codex.²⁴ While the length of the Latin original²⁵ would indeed allow for the appropriate length of 15 pages for the Old English *Life of St Christopher*, this

hypothesis would raise yet other questions: are we to assume that scribe B left scribe A to transcribe the last few lines of *Judith* or, as Lucas suggests, that B transcribed the part of the *Life of St Christopher* now lost and that A took over when B had roughly completed two-thirds of the transcription? In both cases the change of scribes would seem rather unmotivated, as the section left for the second scribe would be extremely (*Judith*) or relatively (*Life of St Christopher*) short. Another problematic point in connection with this hypothesis is the suggestion that the person copying the last lines of *Judith* onto the previous page in the sixteenth or seventeenth century probably not only discarded what was originally the last page of *Judith*, but also the following pages without realizing that these belonged to the *Life of St Christopher*, the first text of the same manuscript collection. In the fragment of the Old English *Life of St Christopher* the name of the king, Dagnus, first occurs in line 8 and St Christopher's name in line 13.²⁶ In the Latin original Dagnus is mentioned in the second sentence, as is the characteristic feature of St Christopher, i.e. that he is of *genere Canineorum* (the dog-headed race). Therefore, even if St Christopher's name is not found in the opening passage, it seems improbable that the relationship between the original opening and the opening of the surviving text should have escaped unnoticed, if we assume that the Old English text corresponded as closely to its Latin source in its first part as it does in the part that survived.²⁷

Thus while Lucas's hypothesis that *Judith* may originally have preceded the surviving texts of the manuscript is plausible, his arguments for a position immediately preceding the *Life of St Christopher* are more problematic. There is no proof that other biblical poems were part of the same collection as *Judith*, although this is not unlikely, nor is there any indication that, if this were the case, these poems would have preceded *Judith*. Such an assumption is but another attempt to account for the section numbers by suggesting possible material that would fill nine sections. Like Förster's and Dobbie's, Lucas's hypothesis assumes that the scribe copied nine sections of text, inserting or copying from his source the section numbers I to IX. Where Lucas differs from earlier scholars is that he takes over one of the explanations offered by Woolf, suggesting that several poems may have been numbered consecutively and that the missing text of *Judith* may only have corresponded to the last of these nine sections rather than to all nine. While this is a possible interpretation of the evidence of the section numbers, it does not eliminate the alternative explanation advanced by Woolf that the section numbers may merely indicate the scribe's guess at how much of the beginning of *Judith* is lost.

The strongest point in favour of Lucas's hypothesis is the fact that more than thirteen verses of the poem precede the first section number, which is inserted at the

end of line 18 of the manuscript. If the scribe used the section numbers to indicate the amount of text he believed to be missing, how can we explain why he did not insert the first number at the beginning of his transcription? An answer, albeit perhaps not a fully satisfactory one, may be given by the fact that the first sentence of the poem is obviously incomplete. The person inserting the section numbers may have been reluctant to place a number at what he knew to be the middle of a sentence and he might therefore have looked for a natural break in the narrative. Such a natural break occurs between lines 14 and 15, as the poet begins his extensive description of Holofernes's banquet at line 15. It may, therefore, be argued that the insertion of the section number at exactly this place would not be unmotivated, even if the number reflects only a guess at the lost text.

In his study of the Nowell codex Kiernan points out that the ductus of the numeral X of the section numbers differs both from that of the section numbers in the preceding texts by scribes A and B and that of the letter 'x' in the text of *Judith* itself:

The scribe's X is well attested in the text of *Judith*, in the text of *Beowulf* (after line 1939b), and most notably in the thirty examples in the fitt numbers from *Beowulf* (XXVIII-XLIII). his X is consistently formed of three separate strokes: the main stroke is a heavy diagonal from upper left to lower right: usually the cross is made with two additional strokes – a heavy hook in the upper right of the main stroke, and a long, thin tail, extending well below the minim line at the lower left. Sometimes the cross is made with a single stroke, but the style is unchanged, particularly with respect to the long, thin tail. This feature unequivocally distinguishes the scribe's X from the fitt numbers in *Judith* . . . The manifest difference is in the cross-stroke, which does not descend below the minim line, and making a slanting S-like stroke across the main stroke.²⁸

Kiernan's description is precise and his conclusion that neither A nor B can have inserted the section numbers follows necessarily from the paleographical evidence. Like Lucas, Kiernan argues for consecutive numbering, but in his view the texts originally preceding *Judith* were not those of the Nowell codex. He suggests that *Judith* may have been removed from its original codex in the years of the Reformation, when the book of *Judith* was no longer regarded as canonical. The person who had

done this, would then have erased all traces of the text to save the remaining texts of the collection.²⁹

Kiernan's hypothesis raises two questions: at what date the section numbers were inserted and why the person removing *Judith* from its original codex should have transcribed the ending of the poem, but not its beginning. Kiernan seems to assume an early date for the insertion of the section numbers, attributing them to either an 'overseer of the collection' or 'another scribe who finished copying the codex to which *Judith* originally belonged'.³⁰ The three section numbers consist of only two Roman numbers (X and I) and provide little evidence for the dating of the hand. Nevertheless, two observations can be made: i) the hand dates from later than those of A and B; ii) the ductus of the numbers definitely shows no resemblance to Gothic script. This suggests that the hand is either a Carolingian miniscule using a two-stroke *x* or that it is a fifteenth or sixteenth century humanistic script. On the basis of palaeographical evidence alone neither possibility can be excluded. If other factors are taken into account, such as historical conditions favouring changes of ownership and loss of parts of manuscripts, the later period seems more probable.

The question why the beginning of *Judith*, unlike its ending, was not preserved in a transcript if the poem was still complete when it was taken from its collection, is considered by Kiernan. He suggests that the opening may have been too long to be copied into the top margin of the following page.³¹ However, a zealous Reformer who did not destroy a non-canonical poem he had just removed from a collection of biblical texts, as Kiernan assumes, would need to be a lover of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. It would be more in keeping with such a character that he tried to preserve all of the poem by copying its opening onto a separate sheet of paper or old parchment, before erasing the text. The postulated identity of a preserver with a destroyer of manuscripts greatly detracts from the plausibility of Kiernan's hypothesis.

To summarize the discussion so far, neither the section numbers nor the comparison with the Apocryphal book of *Judith* are conclusive evidence for either a long or a short poem, nor do Lucas and Kiernan provide such evidence although their hypotheses offer interesting alternatives to the two extreme positions. At this point it seems appropriate to turn to the Old English poem itself to look for internal evidence for any of these positions. If a substantial part of the beginning of *Judith* were omitted we might expect to find that sections of the narrative require a knowledge about characters or situations that cannot be gained from the existing text. As far as characters are concerned, we can assume that there would be every reason to mention *Judith* herself at the opening of the poem. Apart from her, however, there is no indication of references that would make an earlier mention of characters necessary.

Neither Ozias nor Achior, the two major characters occurring both before the Apocryphal Judith sets out on her mission and after she returns from it, make an unexpected appearance at the end of the poem. It seems therefore improbable that they were part of its opening.

In his argument in favour of a longer poem Chamberlain claims that there are 'strongly implied continuities with a missing part of the poem'.³² Most of these so-called continuities are rather doubtful claims: 'Judith's *trumne geleafan* (firm faith, 6b), for which God aids her, would be much more significant if the audience had experienced her vivid faith in rebuking the leaders of Bethulia (8: 1-27) and in praying to God before leaving the city (9: 2-19)'; 'The poet's continued attention to details of beauty . . . would be even more meaningful if Judith's deliberate cultivation of her beauty and its great effect on the Assyrians had been seen earlier'.³³ These claims presuppose that the Judith of the poem has the same strong faith as the Judith of the Apocrypha, and that like her she takes trouble to make herself attractive. Her firm faith (line 6b) may, however, stand in contrast to her doubts at the opening of the poem, which would allow for a development in Judith's character. The scene in which she beautifies herself is consistent with the Apocryphal Judith's purpose of seducing Holofernes. However, the Old English Judith's beauty seems natural rather than artificial. The term *ælfscinu* applied to her in line 14a suggests a combination of a supernatural quality with radiance or light. Swanton points out that in the Middle Ages elves were believed to be responsible for illnesses and bad dreams and that for the *Beowulf* poet they were evil creatures related to monsters. He states:

So ist also Judith in einer Weise beschrieben, wie sie sonst von der christlichen Gemeinde abgelehnt würde.

(Thus Judith is described in a manner which would normally be rejected by the Christian community.)³⁴

The difficulty of an appropriate interpretation of *ælfscinu* was recognized by Cook, who commented that, apart from two instances of *mæg ælfscieno* (*Genesis A*, 1827, 2730), the term does not occur elsewhere:

Otherwise neither Old nor Modern English seems to afford us much help in determining just what is meant . . . The Old Norse is more suggestive. Thus the Edda has its *ljósálfar*, 'elves of light', whose king is the god Frey (the god of light) . . .³⁵

I should like to suggest that the term *ælf* may have undergone Christian reinterpretation in the tenth century, a development facilitated by features common to the pre-Christian *ljósálfar* and the Christian angels. The messengers of the Christian God, the king of heaven, are likewise associated with light, as can be seen from the appearance of the angel to the shepherds at the Nativity:

þa stod drihtnes engel wiþ hyg and godes beorhtnes him
ymbescean ('And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the
glory of the Lord shone round about them) [Luke 2. 9].³⁶

The notion of light is much stronger in the Old English *beorhtnes*, which translates Latin *claritas*, than in the Authorised Version's glory.

The hypothesis that *ælf* may have come to mean *angel* is supported by a recent study of genealogical and Christian elements in medieval personal names by Michael Mitterauer.³⁷ He points out that the Anglo-Saxons not only translated Greek Christian names, such as Theodora and Theophilus, which became Godgiftu and Godwin, but also reinterpreted pre-Christian religious terms and names. He gives the examples of the elements *Ealh* and *Os*, which occur in Alcuin and Osfrith. Mitterauer notes a sudden increase in names with the first element *Ælf* in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This coincides with an increase of names containing the element *Engel* on the continent, an element which is conspicuously absent from the Anglo-Saxon onomastic repertoire. Mitterauer concludes that the combinations with *Ælf* may have been preferred to those with *Engel* or *Angel* to avoid potential ambiguity, as this element could also be interpreted as ethnic (i.e. Anglic) rather than Christian. *Ælfscinu* may then describe Judith as angelic, i.e. 'beautiful and holy', rather than 'beautiful as an elf', which would be much more consistent with the character assigned to her by the Old English poet.

As we have seen, the poem begins in mid-sentence:

tweode

gifena in ðys ginnan grunde. Heo ðar ða gearwe funde
mund-byrd æt ðam mæran þeodne, þa heo ahte mæste þearfe,
hylðo þæs hehstan deman, þæt he hie wið þæs hehstan brogan
gefriðode, frymða waldend. Hyre ðæs fæder on roderum
torhtmod tiðe gefremede, þe heo ahte trumne geleafan
a to ðam ælmihtigan. Gefrægen ic ða Holofernus
winhatan wyrcean georne ond eallum wundrum þrymlic

girwan up swæsendo. To ðam het se gumena baldor
ealle ða yldestan ðegnas; hie ðæt ofstum miclum
ræfndon, rondwiggende, comon to ðam rican þeodne
feran, folces ræswan. Pæt wæs þy feorðan dogore
þæs ðe Iudith hyne, gleaw on geðonce,
ides ælfscinu, ærest gesohte.

While many of Chamberlain's 'continuities' may be dismissed, as they are based on the assumption of a close correspondence in the depiction of the protagonists and the story line to that of the Apocryphal book of *Judith*, the following information can be expected to have been originally present at the opening of the poem:

1. the subject of the predicate *tweode* (doubted), which can safely be assumed to be Judith
2. negation of the verb *tweode*
3. a place reference preceding *ðar* in line 2 (there she found protection)
4. a reason for the doubts expressed in line 1 ([Judith] doubted at the gifts on this wide earth)
5. possibly a time reference, which is suggested by the reference to 'on the fourth day' (line 12)
6. possibly an introductory phrase, of the type *gefrægen ic ða* (and then I was told) in line 7b.

I shall now turn to the evidence in favour of a poem which is not much longer than what survives in the manuscript. Apart from the absence of positive evidence for a long poem, such as references to situations and characters assumed as known, the only evidence can be found in the structure of the poem. It was indeed structural evidence that convinced Cook, despite the evidence of the section numbers, of the virtual completeness of the poem:

. . . the lines which here stand first are echoed so significantly at the end that it is difficult to believe that more than a very few lines are missing. Note how *tweode* is repeated in 346b, and 6b-7a in 345b-346a.³⁸

The repetition of *tweode* ('[she] doubted!') is discounted as accidental by Timmer and as irrelevant by Dobbie.³⁹ However, it is highly unlikely that this echoing of line 1b is

coincidence, as it emphasises an important difference from the Apocryphal *Judith*: there Judith thanks God for freeing her people from the enemy, whereas in the poem she thanks God for freeing her from her doubts. Thus the Old English poet deliberately refers back to her expression of doubt in line 1b.

In a similar way *geleafan* (faith) occurs both at the opening and at the close of the poem (lines 6b and 344b). In addition, *geleafan* occurs twice at the climax of the poem, in Judith's prayer before she slays Holofernes. Here it twice marks the end of a half line (lines 89 and 97), while *miltse* (mercy) occurs twice as the first word in the same prayer (lines 85 and 92).⁴⁰ This suggests that all three concepts, doubt, faith and mercy, are used as key words at significant points in the poem, even taking the same morphological form each time. It is not surprising, then, to find that *miltse* is the last word of the poem, ending Judith's praise of God, and that both *tweode* (line 345) and *geleafan* (line 344) likewise recur as the last word of a line in her final prayer.

Geleafan and *tweode* both occur at the opening and at the close of the poem, but in reverse order. *Miltse*, the last word of the poem, does not occur at its beginning. If, however, the order of all three words were reversed, *miltse* would be the first of the three. It might thus be part of the lost opening, and on the basis of the symmetry it might be assumed to be the last word of the opening line (line *0) of the poem. This would suggest the following distribution of key words:

At the opening of the poem:

*0		<i>miltse</i>
1		<i>tweode</i>
6	torhtmod tiðe gefremede, þe heo ahte trumne	<i>geleafan</i>

At the climax of the poem (Judith's prayer):

85	<i>miltse</i> þinre me þearfendre,
89	sigor ond soðne <i>geleafan</i> , þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote
92	<i>miltse</i> þon maran þearfe. Gewrec nu, mihtig dryhten,
97	mid ræde ond mid rihte <i>geleafan</i> . Pa wearð hyre rume on mode,

At the close of the poem:

344	sigorlean in swegles wuldre, þæs þe heo ahte soðne <i>geleafan</i>
345	to ðam ælmihtigan; huru æt þam ende ne <i>tweode</i>
349	ond swegles dreamas, ðurh his sylfes <i>miltse</i> .

There are never more than four lines between the lines that contain the keywords, which significantly do not occur outside these three sections. If we accept that these keywords mark the beginning and end of the poem, it would seem likely that no more than five lines are missing at the beginning of the poem and that we have at least one line before the line which ends with *tweode*. While two lines seem rather short to contain an introductory phrase, the key word *miltse*, the negation of the verb *tweode*, and its subject *Judith*, a reason for doubts, and a place reference, this information can easily be supplied within five lines. Thus the recognition of the importance of the three words *doubt*, *faith* and *mercy* would confirm Rosemary Woolf's judgement of forty years ago, that:

apart from some lines relating a few details concerning Judith's identity and her motive for visiting the camp of Holofernes, none of the poem is missing.⁴¹

If, as I have argued, the three words are deliberately placed at important points in the narrative, namely its opening, its climax and its close, they must be central to the poem's message. While the concepts of *doubt* and *faith* are used with reference to Judith, that of *mercy* refers to God. *Misericordia*, which corresponds in meaning to the Anglo-Saxon *miltse* (mercy), is also found in the Apocryphal *Judith*, though not in Judith's central prayer. However, neither *doubt* nor *faith* are mentioned, although Judith's faith seems to be taken for granted. This suggests that the Old English poet has changed Judith's character to convey a different message.

An important part of this change is the omission of any reference to widowhood. Indeed, Judith is depicted more like a young female saint than a widow. In her prayer she does not simply ask for strength as in the Apocrypha, but asks for the strength of the Trinity (line 85a), which she addresses in lines 83a-84a as *frymða god*, *frofre gæst* and *bearn alwaldan* (God of the creation, spirit of comfort, and son of the ruler of all things), and for the true faith (*soðne geleafan*, line 89a). These anachronistic references to the New Testament suggest that the Judith of the Old English poem is no longer an Old Testament character. She has doubts, which she overcomes through her strong faith, and she believes in the God of the New Testament, a God who helps those who seek him in the right faith (lines 96b-97a).

On her return from Holofernes's camp (lines 152b-155a) she addresses her people with words which recall the message of the angel at the Nativity:

Ic eow secgan mæg

þoncwyrðe þing, þæt ge ne þyrfen leng

murnan on mode. Eow ys metod bliðe,

cyninga wuldor;

(I tell you a memorable thing, that you need not mourn in your souls any longer. You have found favour with the god of gods.)

These words echo Luke 1. 30 'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God'.⁴² It seems probable that this change of character and message was suggested by similarities of phrase in chapter 13 of the Apocryphal book of *Judith* and Luke 1. Thus chapter 13. 18, 'et in me ancillam suam adimplevit misericordiam suam quam promisit domui Israhel' (and in me, his handmaid, has been fulfilled his mercy, which he promised the house of Israel) recalls Luke 1. 54-55: 'suscepit Israhel puerum suum memorari misericordiae sicut locutus est ad patres nostros Abraham et semini eius in saecula' (He has holpen Israel his servant, that he might remember mercy (As he spake to our fathers) toward Abraham and his seed for ever). Even more striking is the similarity between chapter 13. 23, where Ozias addresses Judith with the following words: 'benedicta es tu filia a Domino Deo excelso prae mulieribus super terram' (daughter you are blessed from the Lord above all women in the world) and Luke 1. 28, where the angel announces to Mary, 'benedicta tu in mulieribus' and Luke 1. 42, where Elizabeth almost literally repeats these words: 'benedicta tu inter mulieres' (Blessed art thou among women).

The emphasis on faith and doubt may likewise be derived from Luke 1. Zacharias doubts the words of the angel, who promises him a son when his wife is beyond child-bearing age. Mary's reaction to the annunciation of the birth of Jesus Christ is also one of incredulity, although this fact is generally explained away in medieval exegeses of this passage.⁴³ Unlike Zacharias, she is, however, not punished for it, and in Luke 1. 45 Elizabeth praises her for her faith: 'et beata quae creditit quoniam perficientur ea quae dicta sunt ei a Domino' (And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord). This is followed by the 'Magnificat', in which Mary praises God, referring to herself as *ancilla sua*. Her doubts have turned into firm faith, just as those of the Old English Judith. In her final thanksgiving prayer Judith combines the well-known elements of praising God's mercy in creating heaven and earth with thanks for granting her heavenly and earthly rewards for her strong faith and for freeing her from her doubts.

The Old English *Judith* is no longer the deceitful woman who is ready to employ all means in her power to deliver her people. All traces of deceit are removed from her character: she does not beautify herself to seduce Holofernes, and she is taken to him almost against her will. She does not establish a pattern of behaviour for the sole purpose of facilitating her escape after the murder. She does not speak to Holofernes, whereas in the Apocryphal book she does so, even referring to herself as *ancilla tua* (your handmaid), which closely resembles the term *ancilla sua*, which she later uses in her address to the people of Bethulia to describe herself as the 'handmaid of God' (chapters 12. 18 and 12. 20).

Through his emphasis on the concepts of *faith*, *doubt* and *mercy* the Old English poet is able to give an Old Testament story a New Testament message. He has created a work differing in content and, as I believe, also in length from its Apocryphal source. While there can be no ultimate proof of the validity of any of the hypotheses concerning the length of the Old English *Judith*, including the one presented here, unless another manuscript containing the whole poem is discovered, the structure of the poem strongly suggests that it is, as Cook said 'virtually complete'.⁴⁴ The evidence of the distribution of the keywords provides a much stronger case than Cook's statement that was only substantiated by the repetition of *tweode* and *geleafan* at the opening and close of the 'fragment'. At the same time it makes it difficult to imagine that a lengthy introduction of some 90 lines could have preceded the narrative, which would be the only way to accommodate the evidence of the keywords with the notion that the beginning of *Judith* coincided with the beginning of section IX (Lucas's hypothesis).⁴⁵ The alternative may be worth considering: that an early reader of an Old English poem whose beginning was obviously missing assumed, like many eminent scholars after him, that the text before him corresponded in length to the Apocryphal book of *Judith* and indicated his guess at the amount of text lost by inserting the section numbers that still puzzle us today. In this case the 'fragment' would amount to 98% of the text and the loss would be irrelevant for our understanding of the poem.

NOTES

¹ This is a revised and expanded version of papers given at the Thirtieth International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 6 May 1995, and the 2nd International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 12 July 1995. It has profited from comments by Peter J. Lucas (University College Dublin) made during the discussion following the paper at Kalamazoo, and by Alan V. Murray (University of Leeds) on a draft version of this paper. Citations from the Old English poem refer to Elliott van Kirk Dobbie's edition: *Beowulf and Judith*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 4 (New York, 1953).

² Max Förster, *Die Beowulf-Handschrift*, Berichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil. hist. Klasse, 71 (Leipzig, 1919), 41-43; Neil R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), p. 281; *The Nowell Codex (British Museum Cotton Vitellius A.xv. Second MS)*, ed. Kemp Malone, *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile*, 12 (Copenhagen, 1963), p. 118; Kevin S. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick, 1981), pp. 13-63, especially pp. 61-63, where, on the basis of the political history of Anglo-Saxon England, he argues for a date after 1016.

³ Förster, *Die Beowulf-Handschrift*, pp. 46-53; Ker, *Catalogue*, p. 279; Kiernan, *Beowulf*, pp. 112-19.

⁴ Franz Wenzsch, 'Judith – eine westsächsische Dichtung?', *Anglia*, 100 (1982), 273-300, and literature discussed there.

⁵ Kiernan, in *Beowulf*, p. 159, and Lucas, in 'The Place of Judith', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 41 (1990), 463-78, here p. 472, point out that Nowell's signature on the first page of the fragmentary *Life of St Christopher* strongly suggests that the Nowell codex was not bound together with the Southwick codex when it was in Nowell's possession.

⁶ Humphrey Wanley, *Librorum Vett. Septentrionalium, qui in Angiae Bibliothecis extant . . . Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, in *Linguarum Vett. Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archaeologicus*, ed. George Hickes, II (Oxford, 1705) [repr. Menston, 1970], pp. 218-19.

⁷ Kiernan, *Beowulf*, pp. 73-75.

⁸ This was first observed by Ker, *Catalogue*, p. 282; see also Kiernan, *Beowulf*, p. 152, and Lucas, 'The Place of Judith', pp. 472-73.

⁹ Edward Thwaites, *Heptateuchus, Liber Job, et Evangelium Nicodemi, Anglosaxonice. Historiae Judith Fragmentum* (Oxford, 1698).

¹⁰ Lucas, 'The Place of Judith', p. 465.

¹¹ Max Förster, *Die Beowulf-Handschrift*, pp. 88-89.

¹² Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, p. lxi; *Judith*, ed. B. J. Timmer (London, 1952), p. 17.

n. 1.

¹³ Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, p. lxi.

¹⁴ *Judith: An Old English Epic Fragment*, ed. Albert S. Cook (Boston/London, 1907),

p. 21 note to line 1b.

¹⁵ Timmer, *Judith*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶ Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, p. lx.

¹⁷ Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, p. lxii.

¹⁸ Rosemary E. Woolf, 'The Lost Opening to the *Judith*', *Modern Language Review*, 50 (1955), 168-72.

¹⁹ *Aldhelmi opera*, ed. Rudolf Ehwald, MGH Auctores Antiquissimi, 15 (Berlin, 1919), pp. 211-323, here pp. 316-17.

²⁰ Stanley B. Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York, 1965), pp. 164-65; Bernard F. Huppé, *The Web of Words* (Albany, 1970), pp. 136-37; J. F. Doubleday, 'The Principle of Contrast in *Judith*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 72 (1971), 436-41.

²¹ David Chamberlain, '*Judith*: A Fragmentary and Political Poem', in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. L. E. Nicholson and D. W. Frese (Notre Dame, 1975), pp. 135-59.

²² Christian Enzensberger, 'Das Altenglische *Judith*-Gedicht als Stilgebilde', *Anglia*, 82 (1964), 433-57, 443 n. 23.

²³ Lucas, 'The Place of *Judith*', p. 478.

²⁴ Lucas, 'The Place of *Judith*', pp. 472-77.

²⁵ The Latin source of the Old English text is edited in *Acta Sanctorum* (Paris, 1868), vol. VI, 'Die vigesima quinta Julii'. It is divided into two parts: 'De S. Christophoro Martyre' (pp. 146-48) and 'Passio S. Christophori Martyris' (pp. 148-49). The Old English fragment starts at section 10, line 19, i.e. in the middle of the second section of the 'Passio'.

²⁶ *Three Old English Prose Texts in MS. Cotton Vitellius A. xv*, ed. Stanley Rypins, EETS os 161 (London, 1924), pp. 68-76.

²⁷ The recorded *incipit* of a *Life of St Christopher* from Cotton Otho B.x, ff. 69a-76b, a manuscript destroyed by the Ashburnham House fire, which is printed in Wanley's catalogue, p. 191, is in all probability identical with the beginning of the fragmentary *Life of St Christopher* of the Nowell codex. The *explicit* of the same text, also printed by Wanley, p. 191 corresponds to the end of the version of the Nowell codex, but does not include the last six lines, which consist of a prayer also found in the Latin original. The close correspondence of the *incipit* to the beginning of the Latin text is illustrated by Förster, *Die Beowulf-Handschrift*, p. 77, where the opening lines of both texts are printed

side by side.

²⁸ Kiernan, *Beowulf*, p. 165-67.

²⁹ Kiernan, *Beowulf*, pp. 159-61.

³⁰ Kiernan, *Beowulf*, p. 167.

³¹ Kiernan, *Beowulf*, p. 158.

³² Chamberlain, 'Judith', p. 147.

³³ Chamberlain, 'Judith', p. 146.

³⁴ Michael Swanton, 'Die altenglische Judith: Weiblicher Held oder frauliche Heldin', in *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen*, ed. Heinrich Beck (Berlin, 1988), pp. 289-304, p. 297.

³⁵ Cook, *Judith*, p. 22 note to line 14a.

³⁶ *The Old English Version of the Gospels*, ed. Roy M. Liuzza, EETS os 304 (Oxford, 1994). Modern English translations of biblical texts are from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Edition* (Oxford, 1977).

³⁷ Michael Mitterauer, *Ahnen und Heilige: Namensgebung in der europäischen Geschichte* (München, 1993), pp. 220-30.

³⁸ Cook, *Judith*, p. 21, note to line 1b. Cook's line numbers differ from Dobbie's, as he divided what corresponds to lines 287 and 288 in the standard editions into three lines. Therefore the references to the end of the poem correspond to lines 345b and 344b-45a respectively of Dobbie's edition.

³⁹ Timmer, *Judith*, p. 17 n. 1; Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, pp. lxi-lxii.

⁴⁰ Enzensberger, 'Das Altenglische Judith-Gedicht als Stilgebilde', p. 452, recognizes the importance of the keywords *geleafa* and *milts* in Judith's central prayer and their echoing of the opening lines of the poem, but he fails to see the overall symmetry, which extends not only to the skilful distribution of keywords at important points of the narrative, but also at prominent positions within the lines.

⁴¹ Woolf, 'The Lost Opening', p. 171.

⁴² References to biblical texts are to the following edition: *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Robert Weber (Stuttgart, 1983).

⁴³ For example, both Bede and Ambrose see the need to emphasize that Mary did not doubt, but believe, using identical words: 'Vides non dubitasse Mariam sed credidisse'. Bede, 'In Lucam evangelium expositio', in *Bedaе venerabilis opera: opera exegetica*, vol. 3, ed. D. Hurst, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 120/3 (Turnhout, 1960), p. 36, line 689; Ambrose, 'Expositio Evang. Sec. Luc. Lib. II', *Patrologia Latina* 15, col. 1561, § 26.

⁴⁴ Cook, *Judith*, p. 21 note to line 1b.

⁴⁵ This was indeed suggested by Peter Lucas in the discussion following the presentation of my paper at the Kalamazoo congress. Much as I would like to keep

speculation down to a minimum and would therefore prefer not to make any assumptions about the time of the loss of the opening to *Judith*, I find it hard to believe that a poet who had so skilfully placed keywords at prominent positions in the text should have spoiled the effect of this structural pattern by a preceding introduction.