Bueno Alonso, Jorge Luis & Laura Torrado Mariñas 2012: *Judith del Cotton Vitellius A. XV ff. 202r–209v: Texto, estudio y traducción*. Vigo, Servizo de Publicacións da Universidade. pp. 147. ISBN: 978-84-8158-595-7. 12€.

The first edition (to my knowledge), Spanish translation and commentary of the Old English *Judith* has arrived by the hand of Jorge Luis Bueno, a very consistent scholar in the field of Old English literature, particularly translation into Spanish and Galician, this time in collaboration with researcher Laura Torrado. They make a laudable point of presenting the text and translation before the commentary, so that the reader should confront the work and its present translation previous to interpreting it (4).

The edition is not critical or annotated, but based on a careful study of London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius MS A. XV, ff. 202r–209v, and an editorial transcription of this manuscript, collated with the current editions, particularly that by Mark Griffith (1997) and more recent ones included in anthologies. The result is a neat state-of-the-art Old English text, followed by the translation into alliterative Spanish verse bearing Bueno's hallmark. While some might argue that alliteration is somewhat alien to Spanish diction, it does have an occasional presence in old Spanish *romances*, and, rather than distorting the Old English original, Bueno's rendering evokes it in a different tongue. The translation of certain familiar phrases may become a formidable challenge and one wonders whether it is not possible to find a better Castilian phrase for *medobyrig* (167) than "ciudad con sala de bebida" (28), which defines Bethulia as a civilized city in the Anglo-Saxon *Weltanschauung*. As stated on page 21, it is clear that no translation can replace reading the original, but understanding it is only for precious few specialists, so what a translation can do is reproduce the experience of reading the original poetry as closely as possible. On the other hand, that experience would have

been greatly improved, in my opinion, if the original text and the translation had been presented on facing pages and with numbered lines, so that Spanish readers could easily keep the Old English in view. Though a line-to-line translation is not always possible, great translations on facing pages have been successfully produced, for instance, those of *Beowulf* by Roy M. Liuzza and Seamus Heaney.

Concerning the study and commentary, it could hardly be otherwise at the present times of globalization and intercultural assimilation: the poem is approached from the perspective of cultural hybridity, as it embodies the confluence of Christian and Germanic narratives (35). Laura Torrado considers the problematic of an analysis like hers, largely based on cultural syncretism and crossbreeding (40) in a preliminary section (2.1). Next she goes into the historical context (2.2.1), the literary and critical context (2.2.2), the Nowell Codex (2.2.3), and "Interrelaciones bíblicas" (2.2.4), focusing on the interpretations of the story in different Latin and Old English texts. After revising relevant scholarship on all these introductory aspects, she plunges into a formal analysis (2.3), which includes the genre of the poem (2.3.1), its language (2.3.2), metrics (2.3.3), characters (2.3.4), and a concluding remark on "the nature of Anglo-Saxon poetry" (2.3.5). Section 2.4 expands the contextual and cultural issues in two directions: the Germanic heritage (2.4.1) and the Christian syncretism (2.4.2), leading to overall conclusions (2.5). The arguments are generally solid and resting on appropriate references.

What is perhaps missing is an explicit account of *Judith* from the point of view of translation theory, as Lori Ann Garner, for example, has examined it. This would include the context of textual production, where, "prior to the notion of a fixed text, the scribe still worked within a specific performance context, simultaneously fulfilling the roles of performer and scribe," so that an "ideal poetic translation [...] is not a literal retelling, but a text that would resonate for a Germanic audience" (Garner 2001: 171). It would also include an analysis of the augmentations, omissions and rhetorical

ornamentations made by the *Judith* poet, departing from the Latin Vulgate Cycle in order to appeal to the Anglo-Saxon public, for instance, in the description of Holofernes's feast, the descent of his spirit into hell, Judith and her servant's journey back to Bethulia carrying the tyrant's head, and the battle against the Assyrians. Understanding why such passages were incorporated in the translation greatly enhances our sensitivity to the poem's culture. The elucidation of this process of translation might have merited a section of its own, though much of it is implicit in section 2.4.1, when dealing with the Anglo-Saxon themes in the text. A special focus on *Judith* itself as translation, however, would have been appropriate in a volume whose primary purpose is translating the poem into a new cultural context and language.

One can only have minor quibbles: the brief comparison made with *Beowulf* (77) would be more fruitful if it was extended to the Nowell Codex as a whole, and particularly to the inclusion of *The Wonders of the East* in it (this is only mentioned on page 2, along with the other texts in the codex), where descriptions of monsters abound. Thus, as pointed out by R. D. Fulk & Christopher M. Cain, who refer to Holofernes as a "moral monster" (2003: 159), "BL Cotton Vitellius A.XV would appear to be a collection devoted to monsters." Of course a moral monster is something or someone deviating from the moral norm, whether Christian or pagan. Holofernes, whose orgies are depicted in *Judith* as the very antithesis of the heroic banquet, is not a more Christian or pagan monster than Grendel, who loathed heroic banquets. Beheading a monster who defiles the sacred function of the mead-hall in one way or another, and all the values it stands for, Judith, *nergendes þeowen* ("doncella del Salvador," 23), is as heroic as Beowulf in his own masculinity.

By emphasizing the syncretic nature of *Judith*, Torrado's study aims at breaking new ground against an apparent general inclination among critics to believe that "the poem was changed to suit its times" (177), instead of being originally designed (more or less

consciously) to hybridize pagan and Christian values. Thus her work stands up against "a general reticence among critics to categorize *Judith* as a hybrid product, in terms of culture and genre" (178). I do not think there are so many critics who doubt the intercultural richness of the poem. As early as 1960 Chaney mentioned "the Anglo-Saxon Judith" as a prominent example of "a syncretism between pagan culture and Christian cult" (Chaney 1960: 208–209). Whether critics believe that the story was transformed from the Biblical source or conceived from the start as a cultural hybrid, few would question the position of the present study today, which suggests that it is the heroic tradition of the Anglo-Saxons that gives the poem its dramatic appeal and currency, unspoiled by its also present Christian allegory (131–132).

Rather than advancing a thesis of its own, or being comprehensive and exhaustive, the commentary gathers mainstream readings of the poem in a few pages with scholarly pulchritude (its aim is to provide "un enfoque coherente," as summed up in the conclusions, 127), which makes it the more useful for students and for the general Spanish public with literary interests. This Spanish translation should be welcome, not only because it is the first available one, but especially because it is brilliantly executed and contextualized. The front cover, a photographic interpretation of Gustav Klimt's *Judith* by Mari Luz Vidal, is a felicitous choice, as it suggests the enduring validity of the story in various historical and aesthetic contexts, and particularly its provocative power in successive patriarchal cultures.

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References

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Garner, L. A. 2001: The Art of Translation in the Old English *Judith*. *Studia Neophilologica* 73: 171–183.