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THE PERFORMATIVE FUNCTION/POWER OF LITERARY DEVICES IN *JUDITH*: A SPEECH ACT CONTRIBUTION¹

ABSTRACT

The compositional brilliance of the book Judith has, in research on it, been overshadowed by debates on its fictional nature, historical inconsistencies, canonical debate, gender and moral/ethical issues. While Judith scholars have made significant contributions on historical, ethical and gender matters, this article contends that the composition of Judith is a topic still wide open for exploration. The article suggests that the compositional nature of Judith is an intentional literary strategy of the implied author² and has a performative function

1 This article was finalised after a presentation at an international colloquium of the German, Dutch, French and South African Study Group of the Septuagint organised by Prof. Willem van Henten at the University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands), 1-2 October 2019. All the comments and suggestions from the scholars present were considered in the finalisation of this article.

2 The *implied author* can be broadly described as an inner-textual construction (personified) that knows everything that happens and is supposed to happen in the narrative. The author is the planner of the narrative, and systematically unfolds the different events of the narrative, implying that all the tensions, rhetorical strategies, the movement of the narrative, and so on are consciously planned. By gradually leading the implied reader through the narrative to the point he wants to make, the author provides the implied reader with the necessary information, creating tension, systematically and strategically making information available, and so on. In



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with respect to the reader. In composing the story, the implied author uses literary devices to invite the reader's participation in the story. The article uses a speech act interpretive angle to explore the identified literary devices in *Judith* and to demonstrate their performative function to the implied reader.³ Instead of propagating the story's fictional nature, ethical issues and historical inconsistencies, this study acknowledges the story's compositional brilliance, particularly its performative nature with respect to the reader. The article thus asserts that *Judith* was intentionally composed with innate performative purpose towards the reader.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

This article forms part of a series of articles that focus on exploring the performative nature of various literary aspects in ancient narratives from a speech act interpretive angle. This particular contribution focuses on the exploration of performative function of the literary devices in the book of *Judith*.⁴ The overarching claim of this article is that texts (fiction or real historical events) are written not only to be informative to the reader, but also to be performative⁵ in their intent. The authors employ various literary techniques in the process of formulating, compiling and presenting the text, in order to achieve the performative function of the text. The apocryphal book of *Judith* seems to be fertile ground for investigating or exploring the validity of this claim.

suggesting such a conscious force of construction behind the narrative, it allows the interpreter to assume that what is presented should have some rationale and strategy behind it (Van der Watt 2009:88).

- 3 In this article, the term "reader" is used to mean or to refer to an "implied reader". The *implied reader* is the inner-textual (personified) construction that systematically discovers what the implied author presents. The implied reader as inner-textual construct knows nothing at the beginning of the narrative, but he is indeed constructed as the narrative develops. As the narrative unfolds, the implied reader is informed by everything the narrative has to offer, and the knowledge of the implied reader increases proportionally. Within the framework of the growing knowledge, the implied reader will have to make sense of every piece of new evidence and integrate it into the existing body of knowledge this reader already has. New information will constantly be considered and interpreted in light of existing information up to that point in the narrative. Stylistic issues such as creating or easing tensions, redefining, and expanding existing definitions of concepts, interrelating information, and so on will in this way be developed and enriched within the construct of the implied reader (Van der Watt 2009:88).
- 4 The book *Judith* will be referred to in italics (*Judith*), and the character Judith in normal font (Judith).
- 5 The term is understood to mean that the text is formulated and presented in such a way that it invites the implied reader to participate in it, by persuading or forcing the reader to make a decision when reading it, for example. This entails that the text's primary aim and intention is to achieve something in the life of an implied reader (Briggs 2001:3; Van der Watt 2010:145).

Judith is the story of the survival of Judaism and the people of Israel from the impending onslaught by Nebuchadnezzar, who was the king of Assyria (1:1). In this story, the survival of Israel depends on a woman's (Judith) knowledge and her fear of God, due to her absolute commitment to the law (Hobyane *et al.* 2018:1). *Judith* can also be summarised as the story of how a Jewish woman paves the way for her people's victory over an invading Assyrian army (Moore 1992:61-71). Esler (2002:107) explains that Judith gains victory for her people by first deceiving and then decapitating the leader of the enemy host, whom she seductively reduced to drunken unconsciousness (see also White 1992:5-16; Hobyane 2016:191). Scholars have debated the issue of *Judith's* date of authorship, but the position taken in this article is that of Esler (2002:107-143):

There are a number of features of the text which indicate a provenance in the Maccabean/Hasmonean period, around 167-63 BCE.

Several scholars⁶ have made insightful contributions to the interpretation of *Judith*, using various methodologies and approaches of analysis, ranging from historical critical analysis to feminist biblical interpretations.⁷ This article falls under the category of literary approaches to the story of *Judith*. The current contribution is unique in the sense that none of the studies done on *Judith* have comprehensively focused on the performative function of the literary features in the story. The exploration of the performative nature of *Judith's* literary artistry from a speech act interpretive angle is a lacuna that calls for further investigations. Within the historical critical approaches, many scholars have pointed out what could be termed the "frailties" of the book such as, for example, its fictional nature, historical inaccuracies, ethical debates, and canonical prejudices. While this article acknowledges the presence of these elements in the story, the contention is that this compositional nature of *Judith* is a possible intentional literary strategy of the implied author and is performative in nature; in other words, it appeals to the reader to participate in the story.

This article contends that the implied author of *Judith* did not intend to give a true historical account when writing the story, but rather to convey a particular message in a unique style to raise awareness of the challenges facing the Jewish religion of the second-temple period. The implied author, therefore, uses necessary literary devices in the composition of the story to convey the message.

6 To mention a few: Enslin (1972); Craven (1977); Moore (1985); Milne (1993); Harrington (1999); De Silva (2002); Esler (2002); Efthimiadis-Keith (2004); Bal (2004); Nickelsburg (2005); Jordaan (2009b), and Hobyane (2012).

7 For a summary of these analyses, see Hobyane (2014:896-897).

The article investigates the performative nature of identified literary devices in *Judith*, by employing speech-act theory as an interpretive angle. The elements mentioned above in the composition of the story cannot be viewed only as frailties in the story, but also as literary techniques employed by the implied author with a performative intent for the reader.

2. METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

2.1 Speech-act theory – A synopsis

Speech-act theory⁸ is a theory of language use and its effects on the reader (Botha 2009:486). Botha indicates that speech-act theory developed and found its niche in the field of pragmatics. Biblical scholars, who were exploring a variety of literary theories to supplement their exegetical programmes, also turned their attention to speech-act theory. Botha continues to assert that, in the arena of pragmatics, speech-act theory is a useful tool to enable interpreters to focus on the performative aspects of a language. Briggs (2001:3) further clarifies that

at heart, speech act theory concerns itself with the performative nature of language: with the topic of how language ‘utterances’ are operative and have effects whether they occur in face-to-face personal conversation or in any communicative action.

Following Briggs’ assertion, this article argues that *Judith* is a story crafted with the intent to make the reader (real and implied) do something about what s/he experiences in the text, for example Judaism in crisis and how God conquers the enemy by the hand of Judith. This article does not intend to apply the whole theory of speech-act⁹ in analysing *Judith*. But it uses basic aspects thereof, particularly the study of utterances and their possible effects on the reader. In some cases, where necessary, the study provides a cursory comment on the rules of communication, as guided by speech-act theory.

Botha (2009:487-488) points out that any utterance involves three acts:¹⁰

8 When defining this approach of analysis, Briggs (2001:3) states: “Speech act theory is the name given to a type of inquiry brought into focus by the work of J.L. Austin in his 1955 William James Lectures at Harvard, and later published as *How to do things with Words*.” See also Tovey (1997:70).

9 For example, see the work of Ito (2015) “The speech act reading of John 9”.

10 When providing a summary of Austin’s assertion on these acts, Briggs (2001:40) also states: “*Locutionary act* is the normal sense of ‘saying something’; and the term *illocutionary act* is the performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something and the *perlocutionary act* is an act performed in such a way that it has

- The locutionary act – This is basically a production of an intelligible and recognisable combination of words that usually constitute a sentence. Briggs (2001:40) also mentions that the “*locutionary act* is the normal sense of ‘saying something’”.
- The illocutionary act¹¹ – This is an act the speaker performs when making a specific utterance. For example, by making a specific kind of utterance, a speaker can be stating, warning, requesting, commanding, representing, threatening, and so on. In short, the illocutionary force of an utterance is “the impact which an illocutionary act is intended to have on its hearers”.¹² Some of the types of illocutions include informatives,¹³ assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.¹⁴
- The perlocution or perlocutionary act – This is the intended effect inherent in an utterance. But this intended effect can be vastly different from the actual effect. The speaker has no control over the actual effect of an utterance. The hearer reacts to the utterance in his/her own way. Briggs (2001:40) describes a *perlocutionary act* as an act performed in such a way that it has consequential effects for the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker or other person.

In order to successfully investigate the performative nature of *Judith's* literary devices, this article approaches the story by:

- identifying and demarcating sections, where a particular literary device occurs. The article acknowledges that not all the occurrences can be examined in this work. For the sake of textual space, the article is limited to a few occurrences;
- discussing the illocutionary force of a particular utterance and how it contributes to the literary brilliance. The discussion also pays attention to the text, semantically; the focus, in this instance, is on the meaning of the passage. On this level of analysis, attention is also paid to the contextual meaning of key words in the story, and
- discussing the perlocutionary force¹⁵ or the performative nature of such a literary device (generated from a particular utterance). In this section, the

consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker or other person.” For a similar discussion, see also Tovey (1997:70-71) and Austin (1975).

11 Briggs (2001:31) calls it “a major analytical tool of speech act theory”.

12 For a similar elaboration, see also Tovey (1997:71) and Thiselton (1992:21-298).

13 See Ito (2015:141).

14 For a detailed discussion on the complete schema of these utterances, see Botha (2009:488); Bach & Harnish (1979:42).

15 Van der Watt (2010:148) indicates that it is obviously not possible to predict how a reader would respond to any specific text. However, by reading the text closely, it becomes possible

article focuses on the possible intended effects of these devices to the reader.

3. ANALYSIS OF *JUDITH*: EXPLORATION OF (POSSIBLE) LITERARY DEVICES

3.1 Historical inconsistency and its performative function

Judith begins with a time indicator that introduces Nebuchadnezzar as the king of Nineveh (the great city) in his twelfth year of reign (1:1). Chapter one continues with a report on his successful war campaigns against Arphaxad (1:1-16), regardless of Arphaxad's military strength as reported in 1:2-4. Scholars have noted and critically commented on this time indicator in *Judith* as problematic. Efthimiadis-Keith (2004:7) points out that it is well-known that Nebuchadnezzar was a Babylonian king and not an Assyrian king. This is only one of a number of anachronisms. She is further of the opinion that there is no secular or biblical record of a Median king named Arphaxad. Efthimiadis-Keith's observation highlights one of the key points raised by those who criticise the historicity of the book of *Judith*. Is this historical inaccuracy a deliberate literary technique or a basic lack of knowledge on the part of the author? What does this do in the reader who is familiar with both the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian history as s/he reads the text?

The current study views this time indicator and the introduction of Nebuchadnezzar as a mere literary technique employed by the implied author for a specific function. As noted earlier, what could be the function of such a historical inconsistency in the text of *Judith*? What could have been the reaction of the first reader(s) or even the implied reader in hearing this?

From the speech act interpretive angle, it is noteworthy that the story begins with the voice of the narrator saying the following:

Ἐτους δωδεκάτου τῆς βασιλείας Ναβουχοδονοσορ, ὃς ἐβασίλευσεν Ἀσσυρίων ἐν Νινευῆ τῇ πόλει τῇ μεγάλῃ, ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀρφαξαδ, ὃς ἐβασίλευσεν Μήδων ἐν Ἐκβατάνοις – *In the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh. In those days Arphaxad ruled over the Medes in Ecbatana.*

to at least gain a clear idea of the direction the text encourages the reader to take. The broad ideological thrust as well as the smaller linguistic features of the text will work together in determining the "encouragement" of the text. In this instance, the article aims to determine how the text tries to nudge the reader to make a particular decision.

As noted, the above utterance is a report by the narrator, informing the reader about Nebuchadnezzar's credentials as a character in the story. According to the theory of speech act, this utterance can be categorised as *informative* (*informative speech act*). By making this utterance, the narrator intends to inform the reader about Nebuchadnezzar and his role in the story. This information is essential for the reader, since it contains details about the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar and the role he will come to play in the story. However, as noted, the utterance is more than simply a conveyance of information.

First, the perlocutionary force of this *informative speech act* is strong enough to surprise the first reader or the implied reader, who presumably has some knowledge of Babylonian kings. Furthermore, the *informative* has the power to not only surprise, but also prepare the reader to view the text as fictitious. This article views these likely effects as a possible intentional literary strategy of the implied author to draw the reader's attention to the text.

Secondly, although noted as a historical inconsistency, the *informative speech act* has the power to challenge the reader's cognitive attention to the text. Even though Nebuchadnezzar is inaccurately described, his story is presented in such a way that it challenges the reader to pay his/her attention to what he represents or the function he performs in the story. The fictitious character of Nebuchadnezzar is created to cause terror and fear in *Judith*. Nickelsburg (2005:97) correctly observes that the narrative presents Nebuchadnezzar as an epitome of irresistible military might. In his study of characterisation in *Judith*, Hobyane (2012:29) states:

In light of this historical inconsistency around the figure of Nebuchadnezzar, this study argues that the author was not concerned with satisfying historical facts in this narrative. The figure of Nebuchadnezzar, *surprising as it is*, was constructed to be a symbol of terror and religious claims that will evoke God's protective power over the Jews and their religion ... He [Nebuchadnezzar] is a useful character to incite fear and terror to the opposition.

Instead of fruitlessly dwelling on the historical debate on the name of Nebuchadnezzar in the story, this article argues, depending on how the text is read, that the historical inaccuracy in *Judith* can be viewed as a literary device. It has a performative function for the reader, and it is necessary for the understanding of the text.

3.2 Exaggerations (hyperbole) and its performative function

One of the perceptible literary features in *Judith* is exaggeration or hyperbole. These statements or claims are not meant to be taken literally, because if the reader does, they do not make sense. The implied author exaggerates the characters' coverage of certain geographical spaces as they fulfil their role in the story. In Chapter 2:21, it is reported that the army of Holofernes marched from Nineveh to the plain of Bectileth and camped opposite Bectileth near the mountain that is to the north of Upper Cilicia. This report is narrated as follows:

καὶ ἀπῆλθον ἐκ Νινευῆ ὁδὸν τριῶν ἡμερῶν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον τοῦ πεδίου Βεκτιλεθ καὶ ἐπεστρατοπέδευσαν ἀπὸ Βεκτιλεθ πλησίον τοῦ ὄρους τοῦ ἐπ' ἀριστερᾷ τῆς ἄνω Κιλικίας – *They marched for three days from Nineveh to the plain of Bectileth, and camped opposite Bectileth near the mountain that is to the north of Upper Cilicia.*

This report is the information that the narrator provides for the reader concerning the advancements of Holofernes' army, as they continue to destroy the western nations. This means that the utterance can be categorised as an *informative speech act*.

Efthimiadis-Keith (2004:7-8) observes that Holofernes and his army are said to cover a distance of some 300 miles (490 km) in only three days. She adds that, afterwards,

Holofernes' army cut through Libya (Put) in Africa and Lydia (Lud) in Asia Minor, only to find themselves crossing the Euphrates and going west through Mesopotamia to arrive at Cilicia and Japheth facing Arabia.

Adding to this observation, this article also notes that other details such as place names, the immense size of armies and fortifications, and the dating of events cannot be reconciled with the historical record. Supposing that the reader of the text is familiar with the geography of ancient Mesopotamia and all the places mentioned, the text will, no doubt, raise the reader's eyebrows. As suggested earlier, the reader should not read the text as a true historical account, but as fiction.

While the *informative speech act's* purpose is to inform and empower the implied reader with necessary information, it also, particularly in this instance, has the perlocutionary force to both surprise and amuse the reader. The report is dramatic to say the least. The implied reader is left wondering at such exaggerations. Dramatic reports are not neutral in their persuasive intent, they sensitise the reader's interest to continue reading the story in anticipation of more surprises and dramatic reports. This manner of putting up the text is

performative. In this case, the literary technique of a hyperbole is viewed as a mechanism whereby the reader's interest and participation in the story is invited. As in the case of historical inaccuracies, exaggerations in *Judith* also have certain effects on the reader, as they invite the reader to participate in the story. In this manner, exaggeration can be viewed as a literary device with a performative function in *Judith*. The implied author uses it to surprise and amuse the readers, as they then continue to read the text to get behind the story.

3.3 Misunderstanding and its performative power

One of the intriguing scenes in *Judith* is the scene in which the Assyrian camp, particularly Holofernes and Bagoas, misunderstand Judith when she speaks. Misunderstanding has long been recognised and explored as a literary technique, particularly in research on the New Testament (Culpepper 1983:6,7).

Brown (2003:288) points out that this literary feature has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. Thatcher (2009:357) calls it "riddle", defining it as

an ambiguous statement which could reasonably refer to two or more frames of reference depending on one's interpretation of the term.

Not many studies have been done on exploring literary devices such as misunderstanding in the Septuagint studies, particularly the Deutero-canonical literature.

Nonetheless, one of the distinctive literary features in *Judith* that adds to the brilliance of the story is the occurrence of misunderstanding between characters. The most notable example is the encounter between Judith, Holofernes and Bagoas in Chapter 12. The misunderstanding revolves around the usage of the phrase "*my lord – ó κύριός μου*". As Judith addresses them, making use of the phrase, both Bagoas and Holofernes think or at least assume that the phrase is directed at Holofernes. However, this is not the case. The narrator reports the conversation between Bagoas and Judith as follows:

καὶ ἐξῆλθεν Βαγώας ἀπὸ προσώπου Ολοφέρνηου καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν καὶ εἶπεν Μὴ ὀκνησάτω δὴ ἡ παιδίσκη ἡ καλὴ αὕτη ἔλθοῦσα πρὸς τὸν κύριόν μου δοξασθῆναι κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ καὶ πίεσαι μεθ' ἡμῶν εἰς εὐφροσύνην οἶνον καὶ γεννηθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ ὡς θυγάτηρ μία τῶν υἱῶν Ασσουρ, αἱ παρεστήκασιν ἐν οἴκῳ Ναβουχοδονοσορ.¹⁴ καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ιουδιθ Καὶ τίς εἰμι ἐγὼ ἀντεροῦσα τῷ κυρίῳ μου; ὅτι πᾶν, ὃ ἔσται ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ ἀρεστόν, σπεύσασα ποιήσω, καὶ ἔσται τοῦτό μοι ἀγαλλίαμα ἕως ἡμέρας θανάτου μου. – *So Bagoas left*

the presence of Holofernes, and approached her and said, "Let this pretty girl not hesitate to come to my lord to be honoured in his presence, and to enjoy drinking wine with us, and to become today like one of the Assyrian women who serve in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar." ¹⁴ Judith replied, "Who am I to refuse my lord? Whatever pleases him I will do at once, and it will be a joy to me until the day of my death."

Two speech acts are involved in this interaction, namely a *question and a responsive* speech act. The narrator gives the characters an opportunity to engage and exchange ideas in the story. Bagoas requests Judith to join the party organised by Holofernes, his "lord". Judith responds by indicating that she cannot refuse what her "lord" says, and she will do whatever he says, and she will be happy to perform such duties, and it will be a joy to her until the day of her death. While the utterance is a basic response to the request/invitation made, its perlocutionary force cannot be overlooked. Up to this stage, the reader has known the character of Judith as a pious, God-fearing woman, committed to the Law of Moses. Judith prides herself in doing what pleases the God of Israel, not people such as Holofernes. In 12:18, Judith once again addresses Holofernes as "my lord". At this stage, Holofernes does not seem to be focusing on anything else but her beauty and his desire to have sex with her. On the utterance level, this misunderstanding is implicit to the reader. The reader usually knows the correct answer or at least sees Judith's standpoint. They, therefore, immediately recognise the stupidity of the person who misunderstands. The leaders of the Assyrian camp enjoy the conversation with Judith, and, in their minds, they are content to be addressed as "my lord", not understanding what Judith actually means. The utterance's possible effects on the reader is that of amusement and entertaining. The reader is given an opportunity to cast judgemental shadows on the characters who misunderstand.

This misunderstanding has the potential to increase the reader's anticipation of the climax of the story. In this way, the reader becomes emotionally and cognitively involved in the story. The use of misunderstanding as a literary technique in the story is performative in nature, since it reinforces participation from the side of the reader. Furthermore, the text is presented in such a way that the reader is somehow encouraged to associate her-/himself with a wise character in the story, in this case Judith.

3.4 Irony and its performative function

Irony is also one of the notable literary features in the story of *Judith*. Irony is used in *Judith* as a persuasive communicative strategy. The aim, in this instance, is not to explore or study every single ironic occurrence in the story, but to take a few occurrences and demonstrate their performative function.

Moore (1985:78) acknowledges that the author of *Judith* was an “ironist *extraordinaire*”. He further observes that a number of biblical books, including Esther, make effective use of irony, but few, if any, are as quintessentially ironic as *Judith*. Failure to recognise this fact has been a primary reason for so many misinterpretations of the book, for whatever else the author of *Judith* may have been, s/he was an ironist (see also Hobyane 2012:74). Harrington (1999:28) agrees with Moore when he posits that the key to the book of *Judith* is appreciating its irony.

Nelson (1990:125) indicates that verbal humour generally depends on ambiguity: “on the use of a word, phrase, sentence, or longer unit which can be understood in two different usually conflicting ways” (see also Hobyane 2012:74). Cornelius (2009:422) supports Nelson, stating that this verbal humour is much in line with the figure of speech called “irony”. Van der Watt (2010:150) also makes a critical observation in his definition of irony and how irony works:

Basic to the description of *irony* is the fact that the reader (implicit or real) shares some knowledge with the implicit author. The character who utters these particular words, however, is not aware of this additional knowledge that will shed a different light on what is said. In a certain sense, what is said is true, but not in the sense that it is meant or intended by the speaker.

This seems to be the case in *Judith*. After Judith has explained the reason why she came over to the Assyrian camp (11:5-19), Holofernes responds to her lies as follows in 11:22:

καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὴν Ολοφέρνης Εὖ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς ἀποστείλας σε ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ γενηθῆναι ἐν χερσὶν ἡμῶν κράτος, ἐν δὲ τοῖς φαλίσσαι τὸν κύριόν μου ἀπώλειαν – *Then Holofernes said to her, “God has done well to send you ahead of the people, to strengthen our hands and bring destruction on those who have despised my lord”.*

Holofernes’ utterance is an expression of his thoughts and feelings as he welcomes Judith into the Assyrian camp. The utterance can, therefore, be categorised as an *expressive speech act*. The intention of the speech act is to make Judith feel welcomed in the Assyrian camp. However, there is more to this utterance than merely an expression of thoughts and feelings. The perlocutionary force of the speech act has the power to raise the reader’s eyebrows. It is amusing and surprising to hear Holofernes state that God has done well to send Judith to the Assyrian camp ahead of her people. The reader immediately notices or becomes aware that Judith’s words mean more than Holofernes understands. The reader, in this instance, shares some knowledge with the author. They both know that, indeed, the God of Israel as

the protector of his people has made it possible for Judith to enter the camp of Assyria, and she came for a special assignment, that is, to destroy those who have despised the God of Israel by threatening to kill the people and destroy the temple.

Holofernes is not aware of this truth. What he says is much bigger than what he knows. In this instance, irony has a performative function. It allows the reader to enter into an amusing and entertaining silent communication with the author as the story unfolds. By virtue of irony, the reader is kept closer to the story and entertained by the characters' speeches.

Building on the previous section, irony is created when characters misunderstand each other. The same example of the encounter between Judith, Bagoas and Holofernes can be used to demonstrate this, particularly 12:13:

καὶ ἐξῆλθεν Βαγώας ἀπὸ προσώπου Ολοφέρνηου καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν Μὴ ὀκνησάτω δὴ ἡ παιδίσκη ἡ καλὴ αὕτη ἔλθοῦσα πρὸς τὸν κύριόν μου δοξασθῆναι κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ καὶ πίεσαι μεθ' ἡμῶν εἰς εὐφροσύνην οἶνον καὶ γενηθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ ὡς θυγάτηρ μία τῶν υἱῶν Ἀσσοῦρ, αἱ παρεστήκασιν ἐν οἴκῳ Ναβουχοδονοσοῦρ.¹³
 – So Bagoas left the presence of Holofernes, and approached her and said, “Let this pretty girl not hesitate to come to my lord to be honoured in his presence, and to enjoy drinking wine with us, and to become today like one of the Assyrian women who serve in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar.”

As established in the previous section, this utterance is a speech act belonging to the *questions/requestive* category. The intention of the speech act is to request Judith to join the party that Holofernes organised, so that he can get an opportunity to sleep with her. While the intention of the utterance is to invite, the perlocutionary force inherent in the utterance is more than simply an invitation. The content of the invitation is intriguing. Bagoas says things that are true of Judith, but the reader knows that he does not mean it. Very central in the invitation is the notion that Judith will be honoured in the presence of Holofernes. Again, this utterance allows the author/narrator to wink at the reader, as they anticipate the dramatic revelation of how Judith will be honoured. While Bagoas and Holofernes are trapped by her beauty and an opportunity for sexual intercourse with Judith, the narrator and the reader view the invitation as an opportunity for Judith to accomplish her plan of saving her people and the Jewish religion. She will indeed be honoured for that. Irony, in this instance, is understood in its broadest sense as an expression in which the intended meaning of the words is the direct opposite of their usual sense or what might be expected (see also Hobyane 2012:74).

When commenting on Johannine irony, Duke (1985:63) makes a similar observation when he mentions that “typical Johannine irony” happens when non-believers respond to Jesus, particularly when his opponents speak. They are prone to reveal their ignorance. He further highlights that

[t]hey intend to question him, to mock him, to discredit him, and finally to destroy him; but the words they choose and the steps they take inevitably have the reverse effect ... they never know, of course. But the author and readers exchange glances as these respondents speak and move upon the stage.

This observation seems to be true and equally applicable to *Judith*. Non-believers are trapped by beauty and the obsession with sex, and in their pursuit of this, they reveal more than they intend to. The fact that the text allows the narrator/author to exchange glances by virtue of irony, the reader is invited to participate in the story, and this is what performative texts are all about. The reader is kept at the edge of his/her seat and inspired to read the story.

In summarising the role of irony in *Judith*, Hobyane (2012:75) posits that,

[i]n the *Judith* narrative, irony constitutes the main communicational strategy of the author. The scene of Achior’s banishment from the Assyrian camp is ironic (6:1-13). First, Holofernes and his army send Achior to be destroyed together with the rest of the people of Bethulia, but he is actually (*unknowingly*) sending him to live happily there. Secondly, Achior’s truth-speaking before Holofernes gets him expelled from the Assyrian camp, while Judith’s lies are believed and get her into the heart of the Assyrian assault.

The two demonstrations in this analysis and the analysis of Hobyane (2012) cited above help show that irony, as a literary device, has a performative function towards the reader of *Judith*.

3.5 Forensic connotation and its performative function

Chapter 13:11-20 is the story of Judith’s return to Bethulia after beheading Holofernes. Her return is cherished by all the people in the city, including the elders (vv. 12-13). They all welcome her with amazement, since they could not believe that she would make it back alive. However, part of her return has a juridical connotation. After the people welcomed her, made a fire and stood around her and her maid, Judith reports how she eliminated the Assyrian general Holofernes, as follows:

ἡ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς φωνῆ μεγάλη Αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεόν, αἰνεῖτε, αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεόν, ὃς οὐκ ἀπέστησεν τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου Ἰσραηλ, ἀλλ’ ἔθραυσε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν διὰ χειρὸς μου ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ – *Then*

she said to them with a loud voice, "Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel, but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!"

Judith presents this utterance as a victory report to her people and the elders of the city. The utterance can be categorised as an *assertive speech act*, since, in making it, Judith is representing a state of affairs (see Botha 2009:488). Judith states or claims that God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel, has destroyed the enemies. God used her hand to accomplish this victory. The perlocutionary force of the speech act invites the people, particularly the elders, to take note of this claim and to continue to listen to her report. The reader is also invited to take note of the report and to wait for further details on how the victory was achieved. The speech act has the power to bring excitement and to encourage the faith of the reader (who is, of course, from the Jewish faith).

In her second report (v. 15), Judith produces the evidence of her victory:

Ἰδοὺ ἡ κεφαλὴ Ολοφέρνηου ἀρχιστρατήγου δυνάμεως Ἀσσοῦρ, καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ κωνώπιον, ἐν ᾧ κατέκειτο ἐν ταῖς μέθαις αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος ἐν χειρὶ θηλείας – *See here, the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor.*

Again, the utterance is a speech act belonging to the category of *assertives*, since Judith continues to state or claim that the victory came through God's intervention. Judith now presents the head of Holofernes, whom she beheaded in his drunken state, to the elders. The head of Holofernes serves as the evidence in this hearing. The elders and the people should accept this evidence and continue with the hearing. The reader is also invited to receive the evidence and continue listening to the further details of the victory discourse.

Lastly, in verse 16, Judith concludes her report by saying:

καὶ ζῆ κύριος, ὃς διεφύλαξέν με ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ μου, ἣ ἔπορευόμην, ὅτι ἠπάτησεν αὐτὸν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου εἰς ἀπώλειαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἐποίησεν ἁμάρτημα μετ' ἐμοῦ εἰς μῖασμα καὶ αἰσχύνην – *as the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction, and that he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me.*

Judith swears by the Lord that she accomplished her mission without committing any sin (sexual immorality) with Holofernes. The utterance can be categorised as both an *assertive and a confirmative speech act*, uttered with the intention of claiming innocence and chastity in the hearing. Through

the speech act, Judith confirms that she returns to Bethulia, not with shame and defilement, but with honour and purity. The perlocutionary power of the speech invites the elders and the people of Bethulia to accept this claim or confirmation and to make a decision or a judgement. The reader is also invited to accept this confirmation and make his/her own final judgement on the conduct of Judith.

In verses 17-20, both the people and the elders give their final answer to Judith. They accept her act as a pure and God-honouring act. The supposed juridical procedure closes with the words of Uzziah blessing Judith, to which the people collectively respond saying, “Γένοιτο γένοιτο – Amen. Amen.”

The study of the forensic connotations in *Judith* is fascinating. As noted in this analysis, the forensic report does have the power to invite the reader to participate in the story. It gives the reader an opportunity to participate in the trial as a judge. After gathering the information, as Judith reported, the reader is able to make his/her own judgement regarding Judith's conduct. It is also observed that, in this trial, Judith is her own witness, together with her maid. It can further be suggested that Achior plays a role as Judith's witness in that he is called to confirm that the head is certainly the head of Holofernes (14:6-8). The head of Holofernes and the canopy is the evidence brought forward to the court to demonstrate the fact that she has indeed beheaded Holofernes. The text successfully encourages the reader to acknowledge Judith as the pious heroine of the story.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The article investigated the performative function of literary devices in *Judith* from a speech act interpretive angle. The study contends that some compositional elements in *Judith* cannot be viewed as “frailties”, but as literary devices used by the implied author to achieve something in the life of the reader as s/he reads the text (performative). *Judith* includes literary devices such as exaggerations (hyperbole), irony and misunderstandings. The article also studied the occurrence of historical inconsistencies as a possible literary strategy by the implied author, to draw the reader's attention to the text. By studying both the illocutionary and the perlocutionary force/effects of the utterances that form these literary devices, the article has successfully demonstrated that literary devices in *Judith* have a performative function. Literary devices function to encourage, sensitise, amuse and even allow the reader to pass judgement on characters with bad conduct, while striving to associate or encourage them to emulate characters with good conduct. The reader is also persuaded to make choices as s/he reads the story. In this way, the story is not neutral in its intent, but is able to invite the reader to participate in it as s/he reads it.

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