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Abstract

The article analyzes two representations of the biblical Jael by the early 20th century newspaper illustrator Dan Smith. Smith's renderings of Jael show how the shifting tides in American popular culture and the advent of yellow journalism by Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* made risqué illustrations like Smith's Jael possible. At the same time, Smith's illustrated series of famous women shares elements with much earlier illustrations of biblical women by Dutch artists. In both the 16th century and 20th centuries new technologies made it possible for artists who drew biblical women to profit through greater distribution. In Smith's case, this meant his illustrations were seen by thousands, if not millions of viewers. My study of Smith's work raises questions about the cultural-historical construction of "Bible" for a mass audience, the relationship between biblical text and image in mass media and the eroticizing of Jael and other biblical women to generate profits.

Imagine if you will, that you are living in the United States in, say, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. You return from a church service on Sunday, anticipating a relaxing afternoon of reading the Sunday edition of the Philadelphia Record. As you turn eagerly to the Sunday supplement magazine, you are greeted with a full color, scantily clad figure of a woman. A label indicates that her name is Jael and that she is a famous heroine. Small print under the label tells her story in brief, though not that the story is from the Bible (Fig. 1).[1] The date is March 4, 1928. Six years and five months later on August 4th, 1934, your local newspaper offers another encounter with Jael. This time, her story appears on the religion page in a comic strip titled *Told in Pictures* (Fig. 2).[2] In both cases, you would be viewing the work of Dan Smith, a highly successful newspaper illustrator.

Beginning in the 1890s and continuing until his death in 1934, Smith worked for several major newspapers and media companies in the United States. His illustrations of Jael, along with other biblical women, are the focus of this article. In my

[1] Fig.1 shows Dan Smith's syndicated cover illustration of Jael as it appeared in the *Philadelphia Record*, March 4, 1928.

[2] The first chapter of Dan Smith's syndicated Story of Jael appearing here in the *Syracuse Journal* in 1934.

Fig. 1: Smith's syndicated cover illustration of Jael, *Philadelphia Record* 1928.

Fig. 2: Smith's syndicated cover Story of Jael, *Syracuse Journal* 1934.

book *Sex and Slaughter in the Tent of Jael*, I explored a broad sweep of the cultural history of Jael, focusing on literary and artistic representations from the ancient world to the 21st century.[3] I showed how the story of Jael and Sisera reflected shifting cultural views and debates about gender performance. In this article, I add to that cultural history by considering the effects of one artist's syndicated renderings of Jael. According to Smith's obituary, by the time of his death his "work was known to millions of readers in the United States."[4] What did his illustrations of Jael, and biblical women more generally, communicate to such a mass audience? And what does a syndicated Jael teach us about the mass production of "Bible" in the United States in the early 20th century?

Theoretically, the article follows Timothy Beal's argument regarding cultural-historical criticism in biblical studies:

> The proper focus of cultural-historical criticism in biblical studies is not the Bible, but Bible. We omit the definite article because "Bible" is, from the perspective of cultural history, indefinite. It is not a singular thing or a self-evident object of our intellectual analysis; it is not eternal; it has never been fixed or unchangeable; its form, content, and meaning change within different cultural networks of knowledge and power. Particular concepts of "the Bible" are produced through particular cultural practices, including collective and individual ritual, education, publishing, media technology, and so on.[5]

Smith's illustrations provide insight into the power of media companies and the artists they employed to offer some version of Bible to large and relatively uned-

3 Conway, Sex and Slaughter.
4 *The New York Times*, Wednesday, December 12, 1934, p. 23.
5 Beal, Cultural-Historical Criticism of Bible, 4.

ucated audiences in the early 20th century. It is a version of Bible populated by erotic and often exotic women, and one that no doubt made money for the media companies that printed them. As we will see, advances in media technology that made newspaper illustrations possible are part of this profitable enterprise. Such advances were available to Smith because of his employment at the *New York World*. Further, as I will argue, it was Smith's work at the *World* that contributed to the success of his cover series featuring famous women. Smith's eroticizing of Jael and other biblical women for a popular audience is in striking contrast to earlier magazine cover illustrations of so-called American girls. As such, his illustrations represent not only shifting cultural norms, but also how the illustration of biblical women enabled artists to populate the covers of newspapers around the country with depictions of nearly naked women. On the surface, Smith's later *Told in Pictures* series may have done more to introduce biblical narratives to a broad public. Nevertheless, what Smith offers is his own creative production of Bible, through text and often evocative illustrations of female figures.

1. The Artist Dan Smith

I begin with a brief introduction of Smith, who although famous in his day is now largely unknown. According to biographer Alex Bialy, Smith was born Daniel Frederik Schmidt on March 29, 1865 to Danish parents living in Greenland.[6] When Smith was four years old, his family emigrated to the United States, living as pioneers in the frontier state of Nebraska. After four years, they relocated to Philadelphia and from there, at age 14, Smith went to Copenhagen to train as an artist. He later returned to the United States to continue his training at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts. Smith's first job as an illustrator was with an American newspaper called *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*. His work for *Leslie's* included coverage of the Spanish American War. He also illustrated scenes from the horrific massacre at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, where hundreds of Lakota people were killed by the US army. The newspaper copy that accompanied Smith's work boasted that their illustrator's picture of a fallen Sioux medicine man was "one of the most striking pictures of the Indian difficulty."[7] Another poignant cover by Smith depicts the discovery of a live baby among the dead several days after the battle (Fig. 3).[8] After his time with *Leslie's*, Smith went on to work for a short time for the Hearst Organization, covering the Spanish American War. All of

[6] See https://www.illustrationhistory.org/artists/dan-smith for a brief biography of Smith, written by Alex Bialy in consultation with Jo-Ellen Smith Greene, grandniece to Dan Smith.

[7] Quoted in William E. Huntzicker, The 'Sioux Outbreak', 317–318.

[8] This illustration of Smith appeared in of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, January 31, 1891. The caption reads: "The Relief Corps Searching for the Dead and Wounded after the Fight with the Hostile Sioux at Wounded Knee—Discovery of a Live Papoose."

this is to say that Smith was a trained and talented artist whose early career dealt with serious subjects.

Fig. 3: *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* 1891.

However, it was when Smith was hired away from the Hearst organization to join the *New York World* that his fame grew. The *World* had grown enormously successful under the leadership of Joseph Pulitzer. It was published in three forms: the *Morning World*, the *Evening World*, and the *Great Sunday World*. According to Nicolson Baker, who helped to preserve some of the newspaper's graphic art, "together these three *Worlds* were, in their days of triumph, seen by more people than any other publication, with the possible exception of the Bible."[9] These "days of triumph" were the result of Pulitzer's penchant for sensational and flamboyant journalism. The *New York World* became a leader in "yellow journalism" during the late 19th century, so named after the Yellow Kid, a popular comic strip that appeared in the *World*. Eschewing factual reporting, Pulitzer's paper relied on eye-catching headlines, exaggeration and lurid illustrations to drive up sales. According to Robert Seidman, the paper was considered so transgressive that it was banned by the Young Men's Christian Association.[10] Yet, as Seidman also notes, Pulitzer saw his illustrations as a bridge to literacy for lower class people. In trying to increase circulation by means of pictures, Pulitzer's newspapers became "one of the many popular publications that inadvertently spurred the breakdown of the long-held distinction between 'high' and 'low' art."[11] In this sense, Smith's full cover biblical Jael, when she eventually appears, will also participate in this challenging of class distinctions in the United States. To understand how this is the case, and the degree to which Smith's 1928 "pin-up" Jael deviated from earlier American cover illustrations of women, I turn to a discussion of illustrated "girls" at the turn of the century.

9 Baker / Brentano, *The World on Sunday*, vii.

10 Seidman, Pulitzer's Pictures.

11 Ibid. Seidman goes on to observe, "To create striking visual material, Pulitzer hired caricaturists, illustrators, and painters …Although photographs increasingly appeared in the *World* and other newspapers during this period, the somber prints could not, given the cumbersome technology of the day, match the fluidity and flair—to say nothing of the color—of imaginative hand-drawn renderings."

2. The New American Woman, the Christy and Gibson 'Girls' and Smith

By the late 19th century, the idea of the New Woman was attracting women from the upper classes of European and American culture. The New Woman was to be independent, free-spirited, educated, and a voter. Yet in the hands of famous American illustrators like Howard Christy and Charles Gibson, the New Woman became a beautiful, high-fashioned, outdoorsy "girl." Yes, she was independent—right up until the time of her marriage. Christy dedicated a book length effort to the redefinition project. Published in 1906, *The American Girl as Seen and Portrayed by Howard Chandler Christy* might be more aptly titled *Promoting an Alternative to the New American Woman*. Christy's book offers an illustrated overview of the life events of the so-called American Girl: the "sweet girl graduate," the debutante, the American girl in the country, in the city, in society, and finally, the bride.[12] Christy's work is pitched to an upper class young white female audience as well as to the aspiring middle class that was emerging in the United States at the turn of the century. To be sure, Christy acknowledges that "neither goodness nor beauty are entirely dependent on the amount of money a girl can command."[13] Overall, however, the chapters showcase a breezy, leisurely lifestyle that builds to the marriage commitment. As Christy puts it, with help from the apostle Paul:

> The American Girl with all her vivacity and brightness, is yet serious. She does not shirk the duties of life, and having once resolved to exchange the independence of her girlhood for the more dignified if less free state, she loyally carries out her bargain, submits to the necessity of the case, and with ready adaptability 'puts aside childish things.'[14]

Meanwhile, Charles Dana Gibson's illustrations of the *Gibson Girl* are even more explicit in their efforts to shape the New Woman.[15] For all her free-spirited athleticism, ultimately, she is regularly featured within the bounds of marriage and family obligations and outside the voting booth (Fig. 4 and 5[16]).
Gibson and Christy were enormously popular among the print media companies. Their respective "girls" were regular features on the covers of mainstream American magazines, attesting to the "American girl's" ability to drive up sales.

At the same time that Christy and Gibson were busy diverting the attention of young American women from the voting booth to the marriage aisle, Dan Smith was drawing covers for the *New York World*. Smith's subject matter varied during this period insofar as it was keyed to stories in the *World*. Still, one illustration

12 Christy, The American Girl, 1906.
13 Christy, The American Girl, 129.
14 Christy, The American Girl, 153–154.
15 See Patterson, Beyond the Gibson Girl, 27–49.
16 Gibson's 1909 illustration for a Collier's magazine cover suggesting that motherhood and voting are incompatible.

Fig. 4: *The Marriage Proposal by Gibson*.

Fig. 5: Gibson, *No Time for Politics*.

provides a useful comparison to the carefree "girls" of Christy and Gibson. The corseted young woman that Smith drew for a 1908 cover for the New York World is a long way from the high society events illustrated by Christy and Gibson (Fig. 6). As indicated by the title, Smith's woman is undergoing "the ordeal of the black path." The article explains that this "strange medieval scene" takes place every morning in police headquarters where some two hundred masked male detectives scrutinize possible criminals who are paraded before them. The article stresses more than once that "guilty or innocent" no one is spared the black path. Still, one might wonder how the illustrated woman came to be under the scrutiny of these masked men. One would hardly expect a Christy or Gibson girl to find themselves in such a situation. Smith's "black path" woman points to a difference in the target audience for the *New York World* compared to the intended audience for the *American girl* covers. Indeed, Smith *illustrates* his audience—anonymous men who can gaze on a woman's body with impunity. The salacious story includes the titillating detail that the parading women must remove their hats on demand. Baker notes that this

Fig. 6: Smith's 1906 *New York World* cover illustration.

Smith illustration is one of the more erotic covers of the *Sunday World*. Admittedly, the fully clothed woman walking the black path seems a rather tame precursor to Smith's later syndicated illustrations of famous women. Nevertheless, the male gaze so blatantly depicted in the illustration anticipates the intended audience for Smith's later syndicated series. A decade or so after drawing the woman on the "black path," Smith will begin a weekly parade of cover women, including Jael, before millions of newspaper consumers.

I suggest that Smith's employment history at the sensationalist *New York World* gave him years of practice keying his images to working class audiences. It also helped pave the way for his provocative depictions of famous biblical women. Working at the successful newspaper meant that, by the time Smith drew the "Black Path" cover in 1908, he was among the famous illustrators discussed in an article by Amos Stote in *Success Magazine*. Stote details the salaries of several leading artists including Christy and Gibson. He describes Smith as "the crack newspaper illustrator, [who] receives $65 dollars a day from the *New York World*."[17] At this point in his career, Smith was working four days a week and earning a yearly income of $13,520 (equal to roughly $390,000 in 2021 US dollars).[18] The famous and now wealthy Smith was in a position where he could easily sell his drawings of "famous women" to newspapers across the United States.

3. Dan Smith's Syndicated Pin-Up Jael

By 1928, the year Smith published his pin-up Jael, he was working for King Features Syndicate, a print syndication company that produced and sold content to newspapers across the US and Canada. As mentioned earlier, the full cover Jael is part of a series of "famous women" that Smith drew from 1926-1928 for King Features.[19] The long series included a wide range of women from the Bible and Greek mythology as well as historical, often royal, figures. Smith is not the first to introduce Jael as part of a series of women. In *Sex and Slaughter*, I analyzed the inclusion of Jael in print series designed by Dutch artists in the 15th and 16th centuries.[20] Despite the significant time gap between Smith and 16th century Dutch artists such as Lucas van Leyden, there are interesting overlaps between these artistic impulses to draw biblical women in a series for popular audiences. In both the 16th and 20th centuries, contemporary technological advances made it possible for artists' work to become accessible to a larger and thus more lucrative market. Advances in printmaking in techniques allowed 16th century Dutch artists

17 Stote, The Illustrator and his Income, 23.
18 Stote, The Illustrator and his Income, 23.
19 Though apparently the series also appeared under the title *Famous Heroines* as the example of Jael from the *Philadelphia Record* shows.
20 See Conway, The Malleability of Jael, and Conway, Sex and Slaughter, 47–61.

to disseminate engraved illustrations in multiple print runs. Likewise, the invention of the halftone printing process in the late 19th century made the production of illustrations possible for newspapers. The invention of the color printing press in the 1890s, of which Pulitzer was an earlier adopter, brought full-page color prints to the American public. According to Baker, Pulitzer told his editors "to impress this novelty on the public mind as the greatest progress in Sunday journalism." His editors responded with ads that announced, "the most marvelous mechanism of the age," a machine that produced rainbow "hews that splash and pour from its lightening cylinders."[21] This color print technology only improved by the time Smith was illustrating his famous women some twenty years later. Local newspapers enthusiastically promoted the new color covers by Dan Smith. Note for example, the double emphasis on color in the Cumberland Evening Times advertisement for an upcoming Sunday cover: "from a water color painting by Dan Smith, famous artist, reproduced as a magazine color drawing in color."[22]

The production of Bible on silent film was another technological and cultural innovation from this period that likely effected Smith's work. Scholars have long noted how biblical film epics pushed the edge of acceptable portrayals of female nudity and eroticism.[23] If showing biblical women in scanty clothes on screen was turning a profit, why not draw them for magazine covers? Illustrators contributed to the film project by drawing advertising posters. One such poster featuring Betty Blythe as the Queen of Sheba matches the actor's own assessment of her costumes (Fig. 7[24]): "I wear twenty-eight costumes as the Queen of Sheba and if I put them on all at once I couldn't keep warm."[25] Smith's rendering of the Queen of Sheba for his cover series suggests that he was no more concerned about the queen's comfort than were Blyth's costume designers (Fig. 8). Both Smith's famous biblical women and the biblical women of the silent film era offered the general public exotic, nearly

Fig. 7: Betty Blythe in "The Queen of Sheba" 1927.

21 Baker / Brentano, The World on Sunday, xi.
22 *Cumberland Evening Times*, Cumberland, Maryland, July 10, 1926, p. 3.
23 See, for example, Shephard, The Bible on Silent Film.
24 Betty Blythe starring in the 1921 film *The Queen of Sheba*, directed by J. Gordon Edwards.
25 Quoted in Brownlow, Hollywood, 120.

naked women from distant, foreign times and places. Indeed, Smith's magazine covers show that one did not have to go to the cinema to view erotic biblical women--one could simply buy a Sunday newspaper.

One difference between Smith's illustrated series and earlier series of biblical women is the relative absence of moral messaging, whether positive or negative. Earlier print series of biblical women from the Netherlands, Germany and France were didactic in their presentation. Illustrated series of biblical heroines were lifted up as figures to emulate while the popular "Power of Woman" series depicted biblical women in order to warn male audiences of women's potential to deceive and emasculate.[26] In contrast, Smith's series of famous women are not obviously presented as women to imitate or as *femme fatales*. Indeed, the illustrator perhaps made a deliberate shift as he completed one cover series labelled *American Heroines* one week and began his *Famous Women* series the next.[27] The lack of content or context for the covers, meant that when newspaper audiences came face to face with Smith's biblical women, they were often left on their own to figure out why the woman on the cover was famous.

Fig. 8: Smith's cover illustration of the Queen of Sheba, April 24, 1927.

Consider the first biblical woman to appear in Smith's series. Figure 9 shows Smith's Judith cover as it appeared in the Indianapolis Sunday Star on December 5, 1926. No explanatory text accompanies her image. The small print to the right of her name reads: "From a watercolor painting designed especially for this page by Dan Smith" a tag which appears with all of Smith's covers.

[26] See Conway, Sex and Slaughter, 43–67.

[27] Smith's series of *American Heroines* ran from June 27, 1926 until Nov. 7, 1926. The next week, on Nov. 14th, Smith began his *Famous Women* series with an illustration of Joan of Arc. Apparently, however, subjects in this series could also appear under the title *Famous Heroines* as the example of Jael in the Philadelphia Record shows. This was perhaps an editorial decision. For an index of Smith's syndicated covers while working for Hearst, see the work of Allan Holtz who has combed through newspaper archives to track Smith's cover illustrations beginning in 1921. http://strippersguide.blogspot.com/2019/01/the-hearst-sunday-newspaper-magazine.html

Following past artistic representations of biblical women, Smith includes Judith's identifying attribute; she clasps a sword. He also loads her arms with bracelets and gives her a decorative headdress, perhaps having consulted the biblical story (Judith 10:3-4). Not mentioned in the book of Judith is the armored bra and otherwise bare midriff. Does Smith imagine that such would be the festive clothes that Judith wore for her husband before her widowhood? Meanwhile, a body in the background lies chest down in the shadows, arm outstretched. A helmet in the foreground hints at the task that Judith has undertaken with her sword. That is all a viewer sees of Judith's story. Smith may have assumed that the audience knew the biblical tale, or, if not, that the Sunday cover might move them to learn about it. Also notable is that Smith begins his series with a woman who commits an act of violence. Several of the biblical and historical women who appear in Smith's series are also associated with violence, whether as perpetrators or as victims.[28] Smith's series suggests that key traits that make women famous (or infamous) are sex, violence, or both.

Fig. 9: Smith "Judith", Dec. 5, 1926.

Nearly two years later, Smith returned to the category of female biblical assassin with his illustration of Jael (Fig. 1).[29] Unlike his cover of Judith, the audience is given Jael's story in brief. Perhaps Smith provides a few lines for Jael because he thinks his audience may not know this supposedly famous woman. Or perhaps, because she wears even less than Judith, Smith must make clear that she is a *biblical* woman, and therefore can appear on the cover as illustrated. In any case, the caption included with the image reads as follows:

> In Old Testament history she was the wife of Heber the Kenite, and slayer of Sisera, commander in chief of the army of Jabin, King of Canaan. When his army was routed by Barak, Sisera fled and sought refuge in Jael's tent where she covered him with a mantle and slew him.

[28] Some examples include: Delilah, Salome, Phryne, the Christian Martyr, Joan of Arc, Charlotte of Corday, Madame du Barry.

[29] Other biblical women that have been identified to date in the series include Salome, Hagar (with Ishmael), Delilah, the daughter of Pharoah, the Queen of Sheba, and Jael. Of the illustrations that I have able to find, Hagar is the only one fully clothed. Most of the surviving images are in black and white newspaper archives making it difficult to access whether Smith varied the skin tone of his female subjects, but the images that I have seen suggest he drew most, if not all, of his female subjects with light skin tone.

While this brief summary is more than the figure of Judith was given, it does not include details about how Jael killed Sisera. Nor is Jael shown holding a tent peg and hammer, as in many other artist's renditions.

Fig. 10: Smith's Sisera appears to have a wound on his back.

One must look closely to find what may be a hint of weapons lying beside Sisera's back. Also intriguing is the shading at the center of Sisera's back that suggests a wound (Fig. 10). While Smith may not have intended to render Jael as a treacherous backstabber, his viewers might have seen her this way. If so, they would be in line with many other past interpreters who questioned Jael's method and motive.[30]

All of this assumes that viewers studied the image of closely, which seems unlikely for most Sunday newspaper viewers. More likely, they focused on the stunning figure of Jael who gazes demurely out from the page with a coy almost-smile. She was an eye-catching and no doubt profitable figure. As for what she communicates about "Bible" in the 1920s US context, Smith's Jael signals seductive vamp more than the most blessed of "woman in the tent" (Judg 5:24 KJV). In this way, this female figure from "Old Testament History" as Smith calls it, offers similar entertainment value to the exotic biblical women projected on the screen in silent "biblical" films.

4. Told in Pictures: Smith's Comic Strip Jael

I turn now to the second rendering of Jael that Dan Smith drew for syndication. This alternate version of Jael offers another parallel with Dutch artists who drew Jael in the 16th century. In an earlier study I showed how the same artist could draw Jael for very different audiences.[31] This is also true of Dan Smith. His pin-up Jael belongs to the decadent years of the 1920s, when the portrayal of Jael as a scantily clad, provocative beauty was in keeping with cultural trends that had largely given up on promoting an ideal "American girl." Less than a decade later, Smith drew a different type of Jael, one that, at least on the surface, was intended for a different audience.

Following the United States stock market crash of 1928, the year 1933 is recognized as the worst year of the Great Depression. It was also in 1933 that Dan

[30] Some interpreters are troubled by Jael's breach of the code of hospitality. She reassuringly invites Sisera into her tent, offers him drink and then murders him. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, remarks, "The deception and cruelty practiced on Sisera by Jael under the guise of hospitality is revolting under our code of morality." She concludes that Jael's actions are "more the work of a fiend than of a woman" (Stanton, The Woman's Bible, 20).

[31] Conway, Malleability of Jael.

Smith began to draw a comic strip series that ran until his death in 1935. Perhaps this project was more personally suited to Smith if one of his co-workers statements about him is accurate. Cartoonist Walter McDougall offers this description of Smith in his autobiography:

> The only man to whom the gift was given to draw accurately a scene merely glimpsed was Dan Smith, who came later upon the World to enormously raise the prestige and the status of the downtrodden but patient toilers, not only by his piety and sobriety, the same being the son of a pastor, but by his marvelous technique. He did not need to make sketches, this wizard of pen and brush, one swift squint at the scene was enough. He is going strong still but I wonder that our envy did not poison him in early life."[32]

McDougall's description of Smith's contribution at the *World* showcases his talent and suggests that Smith's work at the newspaper somehow elevated the labor class. One would need to do a more thorough study of his cover images to understand whether this was the case. Still, perhaps it was Smith's piety and sobriety referenced by MacDougall that inspired Smith to produce a second body of biblically related work.[33] Unlike the Famous Women cover images, Smith's later *Told in Pictures* strip situates Jael and other biblical women in a narrative context. The comic strip also differs from Smith's Sunday covers in that he alternates stories of biblical women and men.[34] Moreover, the strip appeared on the religion page of local newspapers.[35] Thus, the presenting purpose for this series to be a contribution to biblical literacy of the broader public.

Even so, Smith continued to draw erotic scenes of biblical women. Along this line, the comic historian Kjell Knudde observes that Smith "didn't sugarcoat the nudity, sexual imagery and brutal violence of the original tales. Given that these comics could be read by a wide audience of young and old: it was quite a daring decision."[36] While I would not lift up the "original" tales as Smith's starting point, Knudde's point about Smith's daring is on target. Consider his illustration of Ruth and Boaz that appeared in the Pittsburg Sun Telegraph (Oct 21, 1933). The narration under the center frame suggests that Ruth watched Boaz while he slept. The illustration shows the opposite, as Boaz gazes down at her suggestively

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32 McDougall, This is the Life, 163.

33 I could not corroborate McDougall's description of Smith as "the son of a pastor" with any other source.

34 The comic strip was distributed by Kings Features and appeared on Saturdays in local newspapers in the following sequence from 1933 to 1935: Esther, Joseph, Ruth, David, Jezebel, Solomon, Salome, Elijah, Jael, Abraham, Cain, the Holy Child, Moses. The story of Moses was unfinished at the time of Smith's death but completed by another illustrator. Smith's *Told in Pictures* series continue to appear in syndication at least until the 1950s. See John Adock, Told in Pictures, Dan Smith's Old Testament (Sept. 25, 2012) [Blog post] http://john-adcock.blogspot.com/2012/09/told-in-pictures-dan-smiths-old.html .

35 At least, this was the case in all of the examples that I researched in newspaper archives.

36 Knudde, Dan Smith.

prone body directly under the headline announcing the youth evangelism meeting (Fig. 11). Similarly, the text accompanying the next frame describes Boaz measuring out "six measures of barley into her veil."

Fig. 11: Ruth and Boaz in Smith's "The Story of Ruth". *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*, Oct 21, 1933.

However, Smith draws Ruth without a veil and the barley is piled in a container of some sort. The lack of agreement between word and image points to Smith's ongoing interest in offering erotic images of biblical woman. He seems unconcerned that the story "told in pictures" does not match the story told in words.

Even Smith's story of biblical men include viewing opportunities for the male gaze. For example, in *The Story of David* (Feb. 24, 1934), Smith draws David and his servant in the distance looking down on the bathing woman, while the newspaper viewer gets a close-up side angle view (Fig. 12).

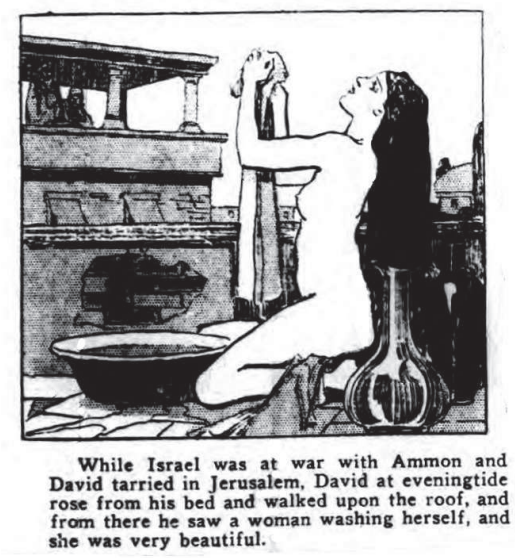

Fig. 12: "The bathing Bathsheba", Feb. 24, 1934.

A detailed look at Smith's *The Story of Jael* reveals the same interest in seductive women and a similar tension between text and image. The first frame of the strip identifies Jael as the central character, as does the title—this is *The Story of Jael*. Deborah and Barak appear in the second frame (see Fig. 2). Deborah is drawn as a young woman, and is veiled, even as she strikes a pose while giving her instructions to Barak. In Smith's single frame that makes up chapter II, he reveals his freedom in crafting the story (Fig. 13).

Like others before him, Smith gives Heber a part in the story. According to Smith's version, Heber had "severed himself from the Kenites," and pitched his tent on a plain where he acts on Sisera's behalf. He shows him "that Barak with

Then Heber, the Kenite, who had severed himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent on the plain of Zaanaim near unto Kedesh, showed Sisera that Barak with his hosts had gone up to Mount Tabor. And Sisera, when he heard this, gathered together his 900 chariots of iron and all the people that were with him at Harosheth and led them forth even unto the river Kishon, which was below Mount Tabor. (Continued Next Week.)

Fig. 13: The single frame illustration makes up Chapter II of Smith's "Story of Jael."

his hosts had gone up to Mount Tabor." This means that Jael's later actions are in direct contradiction to her husband Heber's.

The following week's strip details the fleeing of Sisera and Jael's invitation to the general to seek refuge in her tent. Note how Smith draws Sisera kneeling in supplication before Jael (Fig. 14). Meanwhile, Jael has taken on a rather menacing appearance. Though it is difficult to see in the drawing, Jael holds her weapons in her right hand, discretely tucked near her side. In addition to drawing Sisera in this deprecating position, Smith includes a subtle critique of Sisera's masculinity by including the fleeing general's instructions to Jael. The next frame shows Jael standing at the tent door looking out. Smith modifies the King James Version, the source for his text, so that the narration reads:

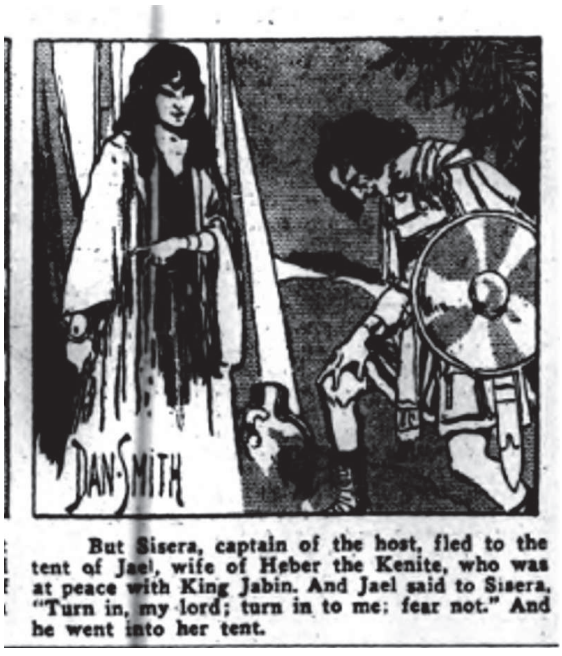

Fig. 14: Sisera seeks refuge.

> Then Sisera bade Jael go stand in the door of her tent, and if any man should come and ask "Is there any man here?" say "No." And Sisera, whose hosts had been put to the sword by Barak, lay there hidden (Judg 4:20).

Nowhere in this part of his illustrated story, does Smith hint at sexual activity between the two.

In following week's edition of the comic strip, Smith relates the killing of Sisera. However, unlike so many earlier renderings of Jael's act, he does not draw her clenching the hammer with arm extended overhead ready to strike.[37] Instead, Jael is depicted with downcast eyes and heavy, almost tired-looking limbs (Fig. 15).

In the background, we see the profile of the sleeping or already dead Sisera. Perhaps Smith surmised that while he could draw nearly naked women for public consumption, a woman killing a man was not fit material for the religion pages in a local newspaper.

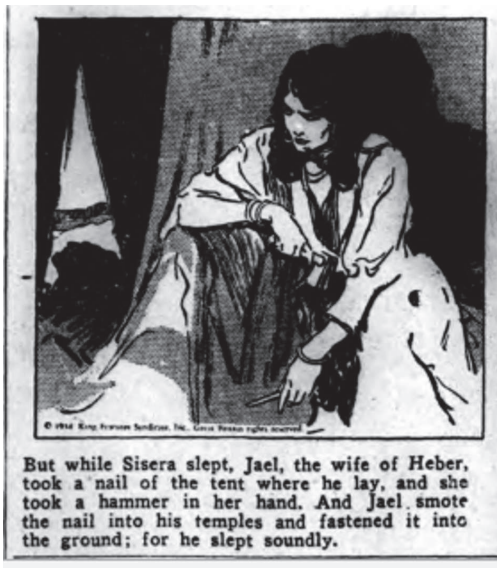

Fig. 15: Jael's downcast look and loosely held weapons do not illustrate the violent action described in the text.

Fig. 16: Both Barak's pose and expression communicate unease.

Most interesting is the second and final frame of chapter IV. Here Jael is pictured addressing Barak, saying, "Come and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest" (Fig. 16). But then Smith expands on the KJV by adding Barak "did not know why she had spoken these words." The additional line distances Barak from Jael's action—he had no part in it, nor could he even conceive of what she meant by this "showing" of a man. The added observation also builds suspense for the reader. How will Barak react to seeing the dead body of Sisera? To find out, the reader will have to wait for the next episode.

In the last chapter of the story of Jael *Told in Pictures*, Smith recounts the killing again, and visually replays the event for his audience. The second time round he draws a more exotic and erotic Jael. Her cloak is now off, and she is bejeweled (Fig. 17). In fact, the series has come full circle so that Jael appears much like the Jael of the first frame, though with longer hair. The caption under the illustration briefly summarizes the killing:

[37] See discussion of the typical "active" pose of Jael in Conway, Sex and Slaughter, 73–76.

Then Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, drew aside the curtain and showed Barak where Sisera lay dead in her tent. And she told Barak, whose hosts had put to the sword all the hosts of Sisera, how Sisera had come to her tent and asked for water and she gave him milk and how, when he slept, she had taken a nail of her tent and a hammer, and had driven the nail into his temples and fastened it to the ground.

Fig. 17: The second narration of Jael's deadly act in the series.

Different from the Sisera in the background of his pin-up Jael, here Smith draws Sisera face upward. He appears to be sleeping, as if Jael is showing Barak and the audience the moment before his death, rather than the aftermath. The weapons are also displayed far more prominently than in Smith's cover image. They sit on a table next to Jael.

The final frame of the series includes another addition to the KJV. The caption reads: "And when he heard this Barak gave his sword to Jael and she smote off the head of Sisera" (Fig. 18). Why did Smith include it? Perhaps he was influenced by the story of Judith's beheading of Holofernes as he told the story of Jael's killing of Sisera. If so, Smith would not be only one to blend the two stories of Judith and Jael. In the first century CE *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (also known as Pseudo-Philo), rewriting of Judges 4-5, when Barak sees the slain body of Sisera, *he* cuts off the general's head and then sends to his mother. But Smith has Barak hand over his sword to Jael, perhaps to reinforce Deborah's prophecy that, as Smith recounted in his first chapter, "the Lord would sell Sisera into the hands of a woman at Mount Tabor."

Fig. 18: Barak is pensive while Jael clasps his sword.

Whatever the reason for this additional text, Smith illustrates only the aftermath of the beheading. He draws Barak with a pensive chin-in-hand pose looking at the head of Sisera resting on the table next to the hammer and tent peg. The pose suggests that the Israelite general is uncertain of what he thinks about Jael's killing of Sisera. In presenting Barak this way, Smith could just as likely be illus-

trating a 20th century poem that was published just two years before he illustrated Jael's story. As I detail in *Sex and Slaughter*, in 1932 Edwin Arlington Robinson published a poem titled *Sisera*.[38] As suggested by this title, Robinson's sympathy lies with the slain Sisera, and his poetic portrayal of Jael confirms this suggestion. Robinson's poem depicts Jael as an increasingly deranged religious fanatic, while Sisera and Barak are more sympathetically portrayed. Indeed, by the end of Robinson's poem, a "scowling and thoughtful" Barak contemplates Jael's killing of Sisera and poses the question: "Is this what women do?" Returning to Smith's last panel, one can easily imagine his Barak asking the same question. Though it is impossible to be sure that Smith knew Robinson's poem, it is possible. Arlington was one of America's most well-known poets, having won three Pulitzer prizes for poetry in the 1920s. The two men were only four years apart in age, and both were successful artists lived in New York City, perhaps socializing in the same circles. According to Bialy, Smith "was a long-standing member, artistic contributor, and officer of The Pleiades Club, a bohemian Greenwich Village association of artists, poets, authors, musicians, and *bon vivants*."[39] Robinson, also, would have been connected to such a group of artists.

Speculation aside, one can at least say that Smith's Barak does not look in an approving way at the head of Sisera. Nevertheless, the next line of the Smith's narration evokes Deborah, the "prophetess" and Barak singing praises of Jael. If the comic strip were to end there, the reading audience might celebrate Jael as well, even as they might resonate with the visual expression of Barak's unease. But Smith also narrates the biblical poem's abrupt shift in perspective to Sisera's mother (Judg 5:28). In Smith's version, Sisera's mother simply cries "Why is the chariot so long in coming?" before the reader arrives at the concluding—"the end." Smith's text does not include the mother's anticipation of the spoils of war, not even by way of the KJV's delicate translation "for every man, a damsel or two" (Judg 5:29 KJV). Omitting this element may leave Smith's reading audience feeling pity for Sisera's mother and uncertainty about Jael's action.

Overall, Smith's story of Jael that is "told in pictures" says more and less than what is told in words. Smith's rendering of the facial expressions and body language of the biblical characters shapes the viewers' perceptions of the story. Sisera is drawn as a squared jawed, handsome young man. Barak appears as the frowning, disapproving onlooker of Jael's violent actions. Meanwhile, there is no panel that shows Deborah and Barak singing a song of praise (neither is there one of Sisera's mother looking through the lattice window). In the end, the comic strip

[38] See Conway, Sex and Slaughter, 101–109. Arlington's poem appears in Nicodemus, A Book of Poems.

[39] Bialy, https://www.illustrationhistory.org/artists/dan-smith.

narrates a celebration of Jael, but illustrates her action in ways that raise subtle questions about her killing of Sisera.

5. Conclusion: Jael, Bible and Profitable Art for the Masses

This study of two versions of Jael illustrated by Smith for newspaper syndication in the early 20th century offers another example of the way the idea of Bible is culturally produced through artistic representation. Smith's different renderings of Jael offer additional evidence of the malleable use of biblical women for turning a profit. In the case of Smith's color cover of Jael, the "sex sells" element of the artwork is obvious. So, too is the artistic effort to appeal to the popular fascination with the exotic during the early 20th century period. Smith's renderings of Jael in the comic strip offer more connection to the biblical narrative, but the choice to tell her story is a choice to offer sex and violence on the cover of the religion section of local newspapers. As we have seen, Smith uncloaks Jael at a crucial point in the story. Meanwhile, other "Told in Picture" stories like that of David and of Ruth are even more bold in the portrayal of masculine desire.

Dan Smith's work also attests to the complex set of cultural forces at work in producing his offering of Bible to a general public, first by way of a provocative full page cover illustration of Jael, and later through weekly frames of a comic strip. Understanding the cause and effect of such artistic representations involves examining the artist's personal background and interests, the technology and media that make production and distribution of the work possible, the political and economic powers in play behind this production and distribution, the education level and class status of the target audiences, competing or parallel productions of Bible, the broader political climate of the time, and in this case, cultural conceptions of gender, foreignness and sexuality.

With Smith, we find a talented artist producing Bible for millions of viewers. His production of visually arresting drawings of biblical women (as well as other "famous" historical figures) suggests that he had in mind a target audience of primarily male viewers. Unlike the above discussed 16th century Dutch prints and other serial depictions of biblical heroines, this images do not suggest they are drawn for emulation by female viewers. Nor does he suggest that his male viewers be wary of dealings with *femme fatales*. The eye-catching illustrations are designed for sales.

Nevertheless, the images also encourage different ways of thinking about women. Especially following the years of the American ideal of the Christy and Gibson girls, Smith's images reflect the more decadent mood of the 1920's in America. Like the biblical epics offered on silent film, the scantily clad figure of Jael and other biblical women push the edges of public displays of sexuality and

eroticism.[40] While Smith's weekly comic strip offers a more detailed story of Jael than does his cover image, the erotizing of female figures continues, as does the implied male audience, even on the religion page where the strip appeared. That is to say, cultural gender codes are an inherent element in the story told by Smith's illustrations.

What I have shown here is that analyzing the production of Bible in popular art calls for a detailed analysis of broader cultural forces at work in the project. The media outlets who published Smith's representations seem little concerned that he accurately reproduce the KJV translation either in word or image. On the contrary, Smith's works suggest a liberal application of artistic license. His drawings and narration create new versions of Jael's story, and potentially multiple versions of the tradition at once. With respect to the comic strip, Smith's illustrations invite their own story of Jael, while his narration sometimes suggests another. For an early 20th century audience of mixed and often limited levels of education, we should assume that the images often spoke for themselves. And for those who could read well, would Smith's narration be given more weight than his illustrations? In short, would Smith's version(s) of Jael's story, his production of Bible, take precedence over the King James Version?

A full picture of Bible in popular culture in any period would need also to take account of competing constructions of Bible. I contend that, in Smith's hands, Jael and her biblical female cohort, whether on Sunday supplement covers or comic strips on the religion page, were designed primarily for the viewing pleasure of (mostly male) newspaper readerships in the 1920s and 1930s. But apart from Smith's illustrations, what other encounters with Jael or other biblical women might the audience encounter? While Smith was not concerned to make overt moral statements, such moral evaluations, whether positive or negative, may well have been coming from the pulpit. If so, how would the public integrate these varying cultural constructions of Bible and biblical women? In the end, perhaps Smith's biblical women created more interest in the Bible than did Sunday sermons, at least for some.

[40] Here we should note the influence of Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898) who famously produced decadent drawings of female figures well before the 1920s. Beardsley's black and white illustrations of Salome for Oscar Wilde's play of the same name provocatively capture the combination of the grotesque and the erotic at the center of this biblical story (Mk 6:14–29, Matt 4:1–12). Although a highly controversial artist in his time, Beardsley's Salome no doubt contributed to the later public dissemination of erotically drawn biblical women. Still, Smith's own Salome, appearing for example in the El Paso Times, Dec. 12, 1926, features the dance rather than the head of John and is thus a long way from the grotesque drawings of Beardsley. For more on Beardsley's work in context, see Linda Gertner Zatlin, Aubrey Beardsley.

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