Metaphors Connecting Jeremiah and Jezebel: The Case of *domen*¹

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ABSTRACT

domen [Dung] symbolizes utter destruction, reduction, and flattening of nations, rulers, and populations to an excreted substance, cast out of the body as a symbol of revulsion. But, if seen from the point of view of an association with God’s will, it may be seen as a powerful metaphor of God’s rejection and condemnation of evil-doers. What can be worse than dogs devouring the flesh of a former Queen, Jezebel, and her carcass turned into a thing, excrement! Dung as a metaphor is part of the plant imagery used by the prophet to condemn the nation. Metaphor Theory helps to understand the four direct references to dung in Jeremiah (8:2; 9:21; 16:4; 25:33) and in II Kings (9:37). Since dung can be used as fertilizer (zevel) one could posit that Jeremiah prophesizes a similar fate for King Jehoiakim of Judah whose line also will end and whose corpse be exposed (Jer. 36:30), dragged out and left lying outside the gates (22:19). This will be the fate of the nation, depicted often as female, with the earth strewn with slain bodies, turned into dung (Jer. 25:33). By using the metaphor of dung, which alludes to Jezebel, associated with Jezreel, the prophet makes clear that “female” sinners deserve their fate for having betrayed the male god. The biblical Jezebel is depicted as utterly evil, however, her image has changed today, and she has been “recomposed” with a positive after-life.

INTRODUCTION:

To end up like dung (*domen* in Hebrew) represents the utter destruction, annihilation, blotting out of existence, devastation, laying waste to and flattening of nations, rulers and populations. Dung is an excreted substance, cast out of the body, and is a metaphor representing revulsion, disgust, horror, and loathing. Since dung is associated with God’s will, it is a powerful metaphor. The dung in the sources in this paper symbolizes God’s rejection and condemnation of evildoers. What can be worse than dogs devouring the flesh of a former powerful queen, such as Jezebel, and her carcass turned into excrement! This image reoccurs when Jeremiah writes that “the people of Israel shall die gruesome deaths, not be lamented or buried; and will be like dung on the surface of the ground with their corpses as fodder for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth” (Jer. 16:4), because their fathers followed other gods, deserting Him (vs.11-12). And in Psalm 83:11 and Isaiah 25:10 the image of dung ends up as God’s revenge on Israel’s enemy. The refrain throughout many chapters in Jeremiah is of how God eviscerates people and kings, reducing them to dung, as retribution for Israel’s sins.
Since Israel is very often referred to as a sinning woman,² this paper suggests that Jezebel/Israel’s queen/female monarch/Israel as sinning woman/King Jehoiakim are all conflated in the dung imagery. In fact, Jezebel is not mentioned, nor alluded to in the book of Jeremiah. Although one could argue a connection, since according to Rabbinic tradition, Jeremiah is the author, not only of his own prophecy, but of the Book of Kings as well.³ By the time, Jeremiah is writing, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms are conflated as Israel (even though strictly speaking only Judah is left). Yet, one can argue that Jezebel (who, with her corrupt and Baal worshipping husband Ahab, represent the Northern Kingdom) can still be turned into dung as a metonym for the sinning and soon to be exiled Israel.⁴

This paper uses many tools. First of all, it reads the biblical text against the grain of the usual historical-contextual diachronic reading. It is a synchronic type of reading in which texts are read together, often reaching across the historical divide. This type of intertextual reading is often referred to as Midrash. Thus it is possible to ask whether the sixth century B.C.E. Judean prophet Jeremiah hates the ninth century Queen from the exiled Kingdom of Northern Israel, Jezebel—even though she has been dead for many years before his prophecies. If it is not Jezebel that he hates, is it what she represents, or is there implicit misogyny in his choice of metaphors?

In addition to inner biblical allusions and rabbinic references to the relationship of Jezebel and dung, this paper will look at how recent authors and online sites use her as a symbol of modernity and rebellion. In doing so, they have rescued her from the dung that the biblical author left her in. This paper also attempts to humanize Jezebel by highlighting positive aspects of her life and the implications of her death. From the standpoint of the Bible, Jezebel is absolutely evil, but reading intertextually and midrashically can show that there is definitely more to her than meets the eye. In the process of reading against the grain of what is called historical/contextual reading (the so-called peshat) new meanings can come to the surface.

THE FOUR PASSAGES FROM JEREMIAH CONTAINING DUNG
There are four passages from Jeremiah, which have the word domen or dung in them.
1. The bones of the kings of Judah, of its officers, of the priests, of the prophets, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be taken out of their graves and exposed to the sun, the moon, and all the host of heaven which they loved and served and followed, to which they turned and bowed down. They shall not be gathered for reburial; they shall become dung upon the face of the earth (Jer. 8:2).

2. Speak thus—says the Lord: The carcasses of men shall lie like dung upon the fields, Like sheaves behind the reaper, With none to pick them up (Jer. 9:21).

3. They shall die gruesome deaths. They shall not be lamented or buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth (Jer. 16:4).

4. In that day, the earth shall be strewn with the slain of the Lord from one end to the other. They shall not be mourned, or gathered and buried; they shall become dung upon the face of the earth (Jer. 25:33).

**THE USE OF METAPHOR THEORY IN UNDERSTANDING THE TERM “DUNG”**

The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. Metaphor Theory helps to understand the four direct references to dung in Jeremiah. Nicole Tilford writes that “metaphors are more than just literary devices; they are insights into the ways human beings develop and communicate abstract meaning.”

She adds that these “metaphors developed out of common concrete experiences and only gradually developed into the complex metaphors that one finds within biblical texts.”

Metaphors are used to creatively re-frame subject matter in ways that help to think in new ways. Biblical metaphors in particular are created to reflect the perspectives of their writers. The cognitive framework of many of these writers is that there is a relationship between a human-like Israel and an omnipotent God. These metaphors convey messages, which imply human responsibility for evil and thus justify God’s terrifying punishment for these sinners. When visualizing one thing (e.g dung) as/like something else, the reader enters into the world of metaphor. Israel and her kings’ sin, starting from Jeroboam, continuing through Jehoiakim until the destruction. And because this behavior persists, it explains why the kingdoms have to be destroyed and turned into dung. When Jeremiah talks of sin in terms of defilement and Israel’s inability to cleanse itself, the nation’s downfall is inevitable. Jezebel (turned into dung), who is responsible for introducing the Baal, is like Israel, the idol worshipper and they are both so mired in the muck that they have to be scattered over the face of the earth. The metaphor of dung...
emphasizes God and his agents’ power to trample the sinner—who is totally debased and effaced.

The metaphor helps to understand how this is also the fate of the nation, depicted often as female, with its land strewn with slain bodies, turned into dung (Jer. 25:33). Jeremiah uses metaphors, which refer to Israel/Judah as a woman who will be flattened, like Jezebel, as punishment for worshipping other gods/lovers (Jer. 22). Jeremiah conflates the sinning temptress/woman with the fate of Jehoiakim, the Israelites, and their land.

JEZEBEL

The biblical reader knows Jezebel from 1 Kings. She is already notorious before her famous demise in 2 Kings. Janet Gaines writes that

From the Deuteronomist’s viewpoint, Jezebel embodies everything that must be eliminated from Israel so that the purity of the cult of Yahweh will not be further contaminated…. Her father is Ethbaal of Tyre, …. [who served as a priest of Astarte, the primary Phoenician goddess. Jezebel, as the king’s daughter, may have served as a priestess as she was growing up. In any case, she was certainly raised to honor the deities of her native land…. This is why she is vilified by the Deuteronomist; whose goal is to stamp out polytheism.°

She has made an enemy of Elijah and possibly alienated the Israelites for her initiative in getting the Vineyards of Naboth for her husband Ahab. She is a foreigner, a Baal worshipper and a strong wife and partner to the King. Elijah cursed both her and her husband:

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: “Go down and confront King Ahab of Israel who [resides] in Samaria. He is now in Naboth’s vineyard; he has gone down there to take possession of it. Say to him, ‘Thus said the Lord: Would you murder and take possession? Thus said the Lord: In the very place where the dogs lapped up Naboth’s blood, the dogs will lap up your blood too.’” Ahab said to Elijah, “So you have found me, my enemy?“ “Yes, I have found you,” he replied. “Because you have committed yourself to doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord, I will bring disaster upon you. I will make a clean sweep of you, I will cut off from Israel every male belonging to Ahab, bond and free… And the Lord has also spoken concerning Jezebel: ‘The dogs shall devour Jezebel in the field of Jezreel. All of Ahab’s line who die in the town shall be devoured by dogs, and all who die in the open country shall be devoured by the birds of the sky.’”

Indeed, there never was anyone like Ahab, who committed himself to doing what was displeasing to the Lord, at the instigation of his wife Jezebel. He acted most abominably… When Ahab heard these words, he rent his clothes and put sackcloth on his body. He fasted and lay in sackcloth and walked about subdued. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the disaster in his lifetime; I will bring the disaster upon his house in his son’s time” (1 Kings 21:17-29).
It is important to note that Ahab ends up dying honorably on the battlefield, whereas Jezebel lives on for a long while and only during the lifetime of her son is she to be murdered. The curse is postponed for Ahab because he repents. Presumably Jezebel is too evil to repent, especially since the biblical text makes it clear that she was the instigator of it all. Also Elijah’s curse is changed since dogs do not devour Jezebel in the field of Jezreel. But these places will re-appear in the prophetic verses.

It is important to note in Jezebel’s favor that she was looking after her husband’s interests. They just happened to conflict with the prophet’s and God’s interests. But there is no hint of her acting improperly as a loyal wife to Ahab—except for giving him, in hindsight and from the Deuteronomist’s point of view, bad advice.

THE DEFERRED EXECUTION OF AHAB’S SONS AND QUEEN JEZEBEL

When Joram saw Jehu, he asked, “Is all well, Jehu?” But Jehu replied, “How can all be well as long as your mother Jezebel carries on her countless harlotries and sorceries?” Thereupon Joram turned his horses around and fled, crying out to Ahaziah, “Treason, Ahaziah!” But Jehu drew his bow and hit Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart; and he collapsed in his chariot. Jehu thereupon ordered his officer Bidkar, “Pick him up and throw him into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember how you and I were riding side by side behind his father Ahab, when the Lord made this pronouncement about him: ‘I swear, I have taken note of the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons yesterday—declares the Lord. And I will requite you in this plot—declares the Lord.’ So pick him up and throw him unto the plot in accordance with the word of the Lord” (2 Kings 9:22-26).

Jehu went on to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard of it, she painted her eyes with kohl and dressed her hair, and she looked out of the window. As Jehu entered the gate, she called out, “Is all well, Zimri, murderer of your master?” He looked up toward the window and said, “Who is on my side, who?” And two or three eunuchs leaned out toward him. “Throw her down,” he said. They threw her down; and her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and he [Jehu] trampled her. Then he went inside and ate and drank. And he said, “Look to this cursed creature and bury her, for she is the daughter of a king.” So they went to bury her; but all they found of her were the skull, the feet, and the hands. They came back and reported to him; and he said, “It is just as the Lord spoke through His servant Elijah the Tishbite: The dogs shall devour the flesh of Jezebel in the field of Jezreel; and the carcass of Jezebel shall be like dung on the ground, in the field of Jezreel, so that none will be able to say: ‘This was Jezebel [zot iZevel]’” (2 Kings 9:30-37).

The irony as has been mentioned earlier is that Jezebel now is herself embodying zevel, or dung.

As can be seen from the two texts, there is a long history here, dating back to 1 Kings, to the days of Elijah. Jehu, is the avenging instrument of God, whose function is to eradicate the remaining house of Ahab and to erase all memory of Jezebel.
According to Steven McKenzie, the story climaxes in vs. 35 with the missing body. He writes that verses 36-37 are the “fulfillment notice for the prediction against Jezebel in 1 Kgs 21:23” and “secondarily attached to the story of Jezebel’s death” and “anticlimactic.” Furthermore “The scatological image in v. 37 ‘like dung upon the surface of the ground’ is Deuteronomistic,” and only occurs in the Deuteronomistic portions of Jeremiah. He writes that

This verse accords both with the curse of non-burial leveled by Dtr against the house of Ahab and with the account of Jezebel’s death in vv. 33-35. ‘These animals crushed Jezebel’s corpse until it became unidentifiable, thus fulfilling the prophecy’ (Rofe 1988a:84).

He makes an important point when he adds that the addition in 9:36b

forms a late, ‘anti-Jezebel’ retouching to these stories. The addition in 2 Kgs 9:36b is the strongest expression of this anti-Jezebel sentiment. It gives a grotesque change of meaning to Dtr’s scatological image in 9:37. Because her corpse is eaten by dogs, what is left of Jezebel is not simply like dung on the ground but actually is dung.11 [italics in original]

McKenzie is neither interested in how the metaphor works in Jeremiah, nor its danger. But one can build on his comment to show how the metaphor has left the realm of threats, to the actual, because the metaphor is now reality. It is dangerous to have a metaphor where God is likened to a wife beater bashing Israel.12 To say that a carcass of any queen, no matter how evil, will be like dung, and completely annihilated, so that no one will be able to worship her -- and keep in mind that this is the threat to the Israelites as well via the prophet--will certainly be effective in keeping them in line or at least, in terrifying them.

Mark O’Brien writes about 2 Kings 9:36b:

In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel. The reversal of the order of the earlier occurrences of the saying and the addition of “flesh” was done to link it more closely with the narrative context (cf. vv 30-35). Both changes suggest a redactor carefully integrating a traditional saying into the context. 2 Kgs 9:37 is a hapax … and is probably a traditional saying. In Jeremiah we find the saying “they shall become dung over the face of the ground” (Jer. 8:2; 9:21 [uncertain text]; 16:4; 25:33). As Hentschel points out however (Elijaerzählungen, 42, n. 131), one cannot argue that 2 Kgs 9:37 is dependent on these. It states “the corpse of Jezebel will be as dung on the face of the field”13 [both as and field are the original italics; bold is mine].

It is fascinating that O’Brien considers Jeremiah 9:21, the one place in Jeremiah where there is a clear metaphor, the only text, besides 2 Kgs 9:37 to say “ka-domen” “like
dung” **to be uncertain.** This paper challenges his suggestion that 2 Kgs 9:37, *ka-domên* should be changed. In fact, the opposite seems to be true and perhaps the other Jeremiah verses should be amended to read *ka-domên*, as indicated in the translations above. Whether or not O’Brien and McKenzie do refer to *similes*, they both refer to actual dung that has turned into terrifying reality. To use I.A. Richards original and technical terms, Jezebel, the “tenor,” is no longer *like* or *as* dung but the “vehicle” which expresses how she has become a new substance.\(^{14}\) Thus Jehu refers to her as “*zot*” an accursed thing, and now she is worse than nothing. One can argue that by saying, “she will be as dung” rather than saying, “she will **be** dung” the metaphor can take life and be expanded to include something new and potentially dangerous. She will **be** dung, closes the issue, whereas will be **as** dung opens up the possibilities.\(^{15}\)

**WHAT’S IN A NAME?**

The horror begins already with the negative connotation implied by the name of the queen. Moshe Garsiel writes that Jezebel’s name is understood negatively. This condemnation is reflected in the spelling and vocalization of her name. It would appear the name is a shortening of the name from *Avi-zevel* or *Ahi-zevel*. The “zevel” part of the word is a mark of distinction with the meaning of a head of state, as found in the Ugaritic and Phoenician texts. However, in biblical texts, *Izvel* is just *zevel*, (or in modern Hebrew, “trash”), that is, the fertilizer spread out over the fields.\(^{16}\) This usage is found in the language of the sages as well as in Akkadian and Ugaritic. This pejorative midrashic meaning is demonstrated in the bible with the aforementioned prophecy of Elijah, “The dogs shall devour Jezebel in the field of Jezreel” (1 Kings 21:23) and referenced here as well, “the carcass of Jezebel shall be like dung on the ground” (2 Kgs 9: 37). Scripture is being midrashic/metaphoric/intertextual when it connects the word, *zevel* with *domên*, fertilizer or *deshen* that is used in the fields, in that it connects the meaning of the name *zevel* with the fate of *Izvel* who bears the name.\(^{17}\) Mordecai Cogan adds that “Targum translates *zebel*, ‘manure,’… thus creating a pun on the name Jezebel.”\(^{18}\) Although both Garsiel and Cogan have pointed out the connection/pun between *domên* and *zevel*, there is an added dimension to dung. Dung can also be viewed as being neutral, non-defiling,
and even positive when it takes on the nature of manure/fertilizer. This positive aspect of dung will be dealt with towards the end of the paper.

**WHY DUNG?**

Deuteronomy 23 deals with the question whether dung defiles,

When you go out as a troop against your enemies, be on your guard against anything untoward. If anyone among you has been rendered unclean by a nocturnal emission, he must leave the camp, and he must not reenter the camp. Toward evening he shall bathe in water, and at sundown he may reenter the camp. Further, there shall be an area for you outside the camp, where you may relieve yourself. With your gear you shall have a spike, and when you have squatted you shall dig a hole with it and cover up your excrement [Heb. *tze-at-echa*, literally what comes out of you]. Since the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you, let your camp be holy; let Him not find anything unseemly among you and turn away from you (Deut. 23: 10-15).

Tikva Frymer-Kensky disagrees:

Despite the fact that food (entry into the body) was carefully regulated, the excreta involved in the digestive process—saliva, urine, feces—are not mentioned as polluting. Defecation is supposed to take place outside the ideal camp (Deut. 23:13–15) but individuals excreting or even touching feces are not considered defiled until evening, nor is it prescribed that they must bathe.\(^{19}\)

So, even though it is unseemly, one can still re-enter the camp afterwards; and don’t even have to wash his/her hands! The irony is that a corpse (*ne-vey-la*) does defile, but once Jezebel has been turned into dung, the substance she now is, no longer defiles. In fact, in ancient times dung sometimes was used as a cleansing agent!\(^{20}\)

What is the nature of dung? (It is organic, it is compost, it is fertilizer.) According to *BDB*, *domen*, the noun is masculine for dung and is always in this form and always of corpses, lying on ground as offal.\(^{21}\) The Hebrew word, *domen* is like the Hebrew *zevel* or *tzo-ah* (what is evacuated from the body) –the word denotes what happens when bodies are left unburied, untended, to rot in an open field.

Manure is also fertilizer, thus it is part of the cycle of life. The medieval Spanish exegete, Rabbenu Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda (c. 1060) uses the root of this word to describe this process in his work *Guide to the Duties of the Heart*:

There was a parable (*mashal*) of a man who planted trees, and dug up their roots and cleared the soil from thorns and weeds, and watered them when necessary and fertilized them (*dimen*), and afterwards hoped that God would allow him to benefit from their fruits."\(^{22}\)
Recently, Katrina Spade has started a movement called “The Urban Death Movement” to recompose bodies, to turn them into compost instead of being embalmed, put into coffins or burn into ash and put into urns. According to the group, it is the foundation for an environmentally sustainable death care system. The group’s website states that “Death is momentous, miraculous, and mysterious. The cycles of nature help us grieve and heal. Our bodies are full of life-giving potential.”

Thus, metaphorically, dung is like the Israelites, trampled into nothing, but then recomposed, restored, risen again by being fertilized with its own remains.

It should be noted, however, that the word deshen is the usual choice when scripture relates to the positive aspects of fertilizer. Examples of this abound. One might argue that even in 2 Kgs. 9:37 there is a hint of this “positive” association with dung. And for this interpretation, one can look at the Midrash (see below), which gives Jezebel a positive after-life through her clapping hands and dancing feet. And so if one wishes to hint at some sort of redemption/regeneration/recomposition one can look to Jeremiah who after turning Israel into dung, restores her as well in the future.

JEZREEL/YISRA-EL AND JEZEBEL/IZEVEL

Jeremiah uses the metaphor of dung, which eludes to Jezebel’s name, in Hebrew Izevel, and which sounds like Jezreel, Yizra-el. This conflation makes clear that these sinners deserve their fate for having betrayed the male god. That is the reason why they are to be rejected/ejected as dung is from a body. The ancients no doubt noticed the irony of Yizra-el, a God who will plant seed, in connection with Izevel’s fate, turning into dung. For it is in the fruitful Jezreel valley in Northern Israel that all of this takes place. It starts with the original sin of the takeover of Naboth, the Jezreelite’s fertile fields. Jezreel, the name and the place, are associated with fertility. Jehu makes an overt reference when he says: “Pick him up and throw him into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite.” And there is even a sort of inclusio which has Jezreel mentioned prominently at the beginning of the episode and the end. In 2 Kgs 9:30 it stays that “Jehu went on to Jezreel.” And at the end of the episode in vs. 37 it concludes with “The dogs shall devour the flesh of Jezebel in the field of Jezreel; and the carcass of Jezebel shall be like dung on the ground, in the field of
**Jezreel**, so that none will be able to say: ‘This was Jezebel.’” Although there is no direct mention of Jezebel in Hosea, the double entendre, of the association of Yehu, Izevel and Yizrael is clearer in Hosea:

> Name him Jezreel; for, I will soon punish the House of Jehu for the bloody deeds at Jezreel and put an end to the monarchy of the House of Israel. In that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel (Hosea 1:4-5).

*Izevel* and *Yi-rael* illustrate an example of sound play, or paronomasia, which is a technique used by the biblical writer as a technique in biblical allusion. It is one of the tools of inner-biblical exegesis.

In the process of adapting, annotating, developing, and emending ideas and themes from earlier texts, as a way of reinterpreting those texts, biblical authors frequently allude to those texts by the use of paronomasia. This is a kind of tacit literary allusion because it is implicit (does not note the act of referencing) and deliberate (intentional on the part of the one referencing). The allusion is meant to highlight how the later texts differ from the earlier and are a development from it. Biblical allusion, then, is continuity within a biblical tradition in which a text draws out incipient meanings from a source text in relation to newer (later) circumstances.

Thus, one can certainly argue that the bloody deeds alluded to be the killing of Jezebel and the bloody annihilation of Ahab’s entire family. And the bow to be broken (and later to be restored) is that of Israel in Jezreel. Therefore, when the remnants of Jezebel’s body are thrust and buried in the fertile valley (along with her sons) they will eventually have an after-life.

**DUNG AND PLANT IMAGERY**

Dung as a metaphor is part of the plant imagery used by the prophet to condemn the nation: “Human carcasses shall fall Like dung upon the fields, Like sheaves (alumot) behind the reaper, With none to pick them up” (Jer. 9:21). The destruction is seen in the metaphor of ingathering, which makes the point that there will be no one to gather the produce. Job Jindo points out that the irony of the reaper who leaves the sheaves in the field, which viewed metaphorically, refers to “God, who is supposed to “gather in” the Israelites to protect them from the enemy, [and who] instead allows the people to be ’reaped’ and left to die in the ‘field.’” There is an additional irony if one contrasts Jeremiah’s abandoned sheaves with the beautiful “Song of Ascents” of Psalm 126 when God restores Zion’s fortunes. In the Psalm those “who sow in tears shall reap with songs
of joy…carrying his sheaves [alumot]” (Ps. 5-6). However, in Joseph’s dream, where alumot (sheaves) are mentioned four times, all of his brothers are present and they hate him even more when he tells them: “There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf” (Gen. 37:7). This is a foreshadowing of what will happen to Joseph, the people of Israel and ultimately of the restoration. However, here in Jeremiah, it is not clear if they are reaped first and forgotten lying on the earth, or passed by and left standing. Either way, there is no one there for them.

In Jeremiah 16 the prophet is told:

The word of the Lord came to me: You are not to marry and not to have sons and daughters in this place. For thus said the Lord concerning any sons and daughters that may be born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bear them, and concerning the fathers who beget them in this land: They shall die gruesome deaths. They shall not be lamented or buried; they shall be like dung on the surface of the ground. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth (Jer. 16:1-4).

What is the rhetorical purpose of using such gruesome and traumatic images?

Amy Kalmanofsky writes:

Disturbing images of exposed, mutilated, and dead bodies appear throughout the prophetic books. The prophets describe dead bodies strewn across the earth, piled into heaps, torn apart by birds and beasts, and even cooked into a bloody stew, as well as naked bodies that are subject to scrutiny and shame (Hosea 2; Ezek. 16:22). These bodies comprise a corporeal prophetic rhetoric that, as Yvonne M. Sherwood observes, ‘refuses to pander to the eyes’ and ‘produces unbearable visions and unseeable spectacles,’ which are part of a ‘highly disturbing discourse, traumatized by diseased and dying bodies, fraught with leaking wails against abjection.’

And this audience has in common traditions, perspectives, and beliefs. What is gained by exposing the audience to such images? Is it traumatic, or does the visualization help the audience to cope?

Kathleen O’Connor often writes about how the “repetitive retelling of catastrophe” helps trauma victims to assert control by reducing the events to a “standard narrative.” By giving coherent explanations of what has happened to them, they can “turn frightening chaos into a contained and predictable event.”

Julia Claassens argues that by speaking of the trauma and recovery of the people in terms of the formulated account of breaking/building; uprooting/planting and scattering/gathering that occurs throughout the book of

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Jeremiah, the chaos of war and its effects is captured into a standardized narrative that bestows some kind of order upon the chaotic events caused by the Babylonian invasion.  

Although it is not pleasant to constantly dwell on death and how bodies have the potential of turning into compost, it is a fact of life and the Deuteronomist does not try to spare its audience.  

THE REPRESENTATION OF JEZEBEL  
Does Jezebel represent something other than herself? She appears in three related contexts, one, in the Jehu Coup and conspiracy, second, in the framework of the curse first delivered to Jeroboam via his wife and third in the context of the Elijah/Elisha prophecy. This paper argues that she is much more than a hated Queen, who was formerly a pampered princess that introduced her husband, King Ahab, to Baal worship. Sinning Jezebel is a metonym for “Sinning Female Israel.”  

This paper has been arguing that the fate of Jezebel as dung also alludes to Israel/Judah’s fate as dung. And for that reason it does not see a final ending to Jezebel, just as there is no final destruction of Israel. The remnants (skull, hands and feet) of Jezebel parallel the remnants of Israel that (via the fertile Jezreel valley) will be reborn. This is not directly stated, but the paper argues that Jeremiah, who traditionally is the author of Kings, alludes to this. In Jeremiah, divine judgment is expressed by God’s intention to destroy Israel, then later by having another nation be God’s agent of destruction and finally having Israel’s oppressor being destroyed by God. Hence, there is irony and mystery in divine judgment.  

One can use Louis Stulman’s reflections on war in Jeremiah to illustrate how Jezebel’s being turned metaphorically and actually into dung is similar to Jeremiah’s use of dung. Like Jezebel, “Judah does not escape unscathed.” They both “participate in a frightful narrative.” Both Jezebel’s and “Judah’s sense of equilibrium, longstanding institutions, and belief system suffer a massive assault. Its time-honored images and well-tested workings crumble in plain view.” For Jezebel and Judah “it felt as if the world were ending.” For both hope is forfeited, there is a “cosmic crumbling, the end of life as it had long been lived.” By connecting Jezebel’s fate of being turned into dung with
that of the fate of crumbling Judah, the metaphor creates new connections. In this case, the new connection will be the new life, the recomposition that comes out of the devastation. And the rebirth will presumably come when Israel redeems herself by returning to God and stops misbehaving. For when Israel has sinned in the past, she has been cursed.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CURSE

One can argue that the curse first appears in Deuteronomy:

The Lord will put you to rout before your enemies; you shall march out against them by a single road, but flee from them by many roads; and you shall become a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses shall become food for all the birds of the sky and all the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off (Deut. 28: 25-26).

The context here is that of the blessings bestowed upon Israel when she behaves herself and faithfully observes all the commandments (vs. 1-14) and the list of curses which God will inflict on the nation if it does not faithfully obey the commandments (vs. 15-68). This is at the core of the retributive divine system of justice and requital throughout the Deuteronomic history books. The allusion to this curse is quite clear in its connection with Jeroboam in 1 Kings:

Therefore I will bring disaster upon the House of Jeroboam and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, bond and free, in Israel. I will sweep away the House of Jeroboam utterly, as dung [Heb. is galal] is swept away. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the town shall be devoured by dogs; and anyone who dies in the open country shall be eaten by the birds of the air; for the Lord has spoken (1 Kgs 14:10-11).

Although Jeroboam was originally elected by God to be King of Israel, when he worshipped idols, he misbehaved and was cursed. In the future history of the Books of Kings, the measure of evil will always be Jeroboam. It is ironic that his wife is the one to deliver the curse:

At that time, Abijah, a son of Jeroboam, fell sick. Jeroboam said to his wife, “Go and disguise yourself, so that you will not be recognized as Jeroboam’s wife, and go to Shiloh. The prophet Ahijah lives there, the one who predicted that I would be king over this people. Take with you ten leaves, some wafers, and a jug of honey, and go to him; he will tell you what will happen to the boy.” Jeroboam’s wife did so; she left and went to Shiloh and came to the house of Ahijah… Ahijah heard the sound of her feet as she came through the door, and he said, “Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why are you disguised? I have a harsh message for you. Go tell Jeroboam: Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: I raised you up from among the people and made you a ruler over My people Israel; I tore away the kingdom from the House of David and gave it to you. But you have
not been like My servant David, who kept My commandments and followed Me with all his heart, doing only what was right in My sight. You have acted worse than all those who preceded you; you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to vex Me; and Me you have cast behind your back (1 Kgs 1-9).

Is it a curious coincidence that both Jeroboam and Ahab have two faithful wives? Jeroboam’s wife, who is not dignified with a name, follows both her husband’s and the prophet’s orders and is the one who is the harbinger of the curse which will be applied to Jezebel. Although the same curse language is invoked, it is not the same prophecy. However, the language is very similar. Jezebel too is totally committed to Ahab, she is a supportive wife, looking out for his welfare, although the Deuteronomist disagrees. Jezebel is not like Jeroboam’s wife, who passively crosses the threshold of her house to deliver the curse, which results in the tragic death of her son and then leaves the stage and is forgotten. As Carey Walsh points out, Jezebel is a different case.

Jezebel was apportioned distinctive canonical memory. She was foregrounded rather than forgotten in the archive, because her memory was culturally useful. For the Deuteronomistic History, Jezebel’s notoriety damns her, but it also memorializes her.³²

As Ahab’s widow, Jezebel assertively engages in being the recipient of the curse. She applies makeup with pride and self-respect, preparing for the moment in a truly regal manner!³³ She goes out to the window (halon), which is a visible public space.³⁴ She wants to be seen. She is in control of the moment.

This according to Gaines is Jezebel’s finest hour as she calmly prepares for Jehu’s arrival.

Jezebel is donning the female version of armor as she prepares to do battle. She is a woman warrior, waging war in the only way a woman can. Whatever fear she may have of Jehu is camouflaged by her war paint…. When she dies, she wants to look her queenly best. She is in control here, choosing the manner in which her attacker will last see and remember her….³⁵

It is not only her attacker that she is trying to impress. Jezebel the woman seated or standing at the main window of the palace knows that the Deuteronomist’s audience would recognize her painstaking preparations. Although some might construe this as an attempted seduction of Jehu, it appears that those who do so, are missing the point.³⁶ She is not fighting for her life, she is fighting for her future
reputation and any attempt at seduction would be viewed as pathetic and a sign of weakness. Walsh makes it clear that the beautifying was not for Je hu's benefit. It was a demonstration of her power to leave on her terms. At her end, Jezebel draws attention to the excessive use of force on the woman as Other. She resists by exposing the system's use of male dominance as overkill. There is a fair amount of gender play in this account of her death. The insecurity of male dominance is then reinforced when the guards who manfully throw the Jezebel out the window are themselves eunuchs, men without testosterone. Yet, the Deuteronomist reduces her to dung. Whatever stateliness she attempts, the toss out of the window and the trampling scenes are the pictures that are meant to remain in the minds of the audience. In three famous paintings, which are painstakingly true to the Biblical text, Jezebel is tossed out of the window by eunuchs, trampled by horses and left outside, eaten by dogs with only her hands, feet and head remaining. 

Athalya Brenner writes how “Jezebel is made animalistic by the text,” and how by reading emphatically, the readers become “animals by contagion”. Koosed writes:

Consumed by animals, Jezebel becomes an animal; her dehumanization is complete. She is a foreign woman, a powerful queen, and a worshiper of deities other than Yahweh. She is ethnically and religiously different, transgresses proper gender roles, and is therefore a danger. The death and destruction of Jezebel eradicates the Other in order to protect and preserve the proper Israelite community.

These portraits are meant to horrify the reader because this is how the tradition regards her. Her death is depicted with all of its gory details, with her blood splattered on the walls. This gratuitous violence has no precedent in other royal coups in the Bible. The prophet Hosea hints at this when he writes that the house of Jehu is punished:

Name him Jezreel; for, I will soon punish the House of Jehu for the bloody deeds at Jezreel and put an end to the monarchy of the House of Israel. In that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel (Hosea 1:4-5).

There are those who would argue that it is not the worship of idolatry that led to Jehu’s punishment, but his overkill, his bloody deeds against Jezebel and what she represents lead to his punishment. According to Carolyn J. Sharp:

A consensus among interpreters would have it that Hos 1 simply condemns the “blood of Jezreel” as metonym for politically motivated violence, understood with reference to the dynasty of Jehu a century earlier. But consider where else we read “blood” and “Jezreel” together: 1 Kgs 21. Jezebel’s plan to secure the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite is the beginning of the bloodshed....The blood of Jezreel runs faster and deeper with the coup of Jehu, who murders Joram, has Jezebel killed, has
the seventy sons of Ahab butchered, and executes “all of [Ahab’s] leaders, close friends and priests” in Jezreel (2 Kgs 10: 1-11).41

Sharp asks if this means that God will repay for Jezreel’s blood. She points out that the reference is to Ahab’s and Jezebel’s misuse of power and that it ends in a bloodbath. According to her, desire, eating, and dismemberment appear in one source. It begins with Ahab’s desire for someone else’s property, continues with an oracle of how Ahab and Jezebel will be punished by having animals licking their blood, and ends with the prophecy being fulfilled. For after Jezebel is thrown to death and Jehu goes in to eat, he finds that she is indeed “gorged on by the dogs” and thus “[i]llegal desire rends the body of Israel as a people, leaving it dismembered in pools of blood.”42

Jezebel is depicted as a villain who worshipped Baal, introduced her husband to idolatry and like Eve, is responsible for Ahab’s sin of taking over Nabot’s fertile land. This paper argues that the intention of the text is to demonize Jezebel, starting with Elijah and his curse. There are others in the Bible who behave as poorly, who are responsible for mass murder and worse, yet she is signaled out. Is it because she is a woman? It is hard to say. There are other women in the bible who look out for their husband’s greater good who are not demonized, like Rebecca.

There is animus against her from the very beginning for she is responsible for bringing Baal worship to Israel; she kills those who worship God; she encourages her husband to behave immorally and has to be punished. She is an existential threat to the established religion. In 1 Kings 18 there is a major spiritual battle between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal which resulted in their being seized and slaughtered in the Wadi Kishon. Because of this victory, Elijah has to run for his life:

When Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had put all the prophets to the sword, Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “Thus and more may the gods do if by this time tomorrow I have not made you like one of them.” Frightened, he fled at once for his life. He came to Beer-sheba, which is in Judah, and left his servant there; he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush and sat down under it, and prayed that he might die. “Enough!” he cried. “Now, O Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers” (1 Kgs 19: 1-4).
Had she actually succeeded in the contest between Baal and Elijah, it would have been the end of monotheism. Elijah is desperate and in despair. Fortunately for him, God is on his side. However, Jezebel has to be literally stamped out; ground to dust/dung. As Amy Kalmanofsky writes

The gods of order defeat the monster gods and dismember their bodies, thereby turning the monstrous bodies into sites of inscription that communicate a threefold message of the sovereignty of the patron god, the weakness of chaos, and the consequences inflicted on those who rebel against the established order (112).^43

**MIDRASHIC EXCURSUS**

This paper has looked at the inter-textuality of the texts where dung is mentioned, in particular in 2 Kings 9 and the four Jeremiah texts. Although intertextuality is a two-way street (i.e. the texts inter-relate with each other synchronically), this paper posits that Jeremiah, who often uses misogynist metaphors, may have some experience in his history that makes him point to Jezebel as being personally dangerous. There is a Midrash, which is about Isaac having intercourse with Rebecca in broad daylight, something that the sages frowned upon, and which results in Abimelech seeing them and thus saving the day for Rebecca.

Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth and the day of his conception, as it says, “Cursed be the day wherein I was born, etc.” (Jer. 20:4). “Cursed be the day wherein I was born” refers to the day of birth; while, the day wherein my mother bore me (ib.) refers to the day of conception. Is it possible that Hilqiah [Jeremiah’s father], a righteous man, would do such a thing? The fact is that since Jezebel was massacring the prophets, he came, cohabited by day, and fled (Genesis Rabbah 64:5).

According to Jacob Neusner, “Jeremiah was conceived by day, the danger posed by Jezebel [who was massacring the prophets], explaining why his father Hilqiah ignored the prohibition against sexual relations by day.”^44 The mention of Jezebel in this connection is an anachronism, but Midrash, which takes a synchronic approach to text, uses Jezebel as an example of how life is always dangerous for prophets. This Midrash directly connects Jeremiah’s life history with his animus towards Jezebel. Like Elijah, his father had to flee—it is part of the family lore. His conception is associated with the cursed day when his father fled. This leads him to demonize Jezebel, who is now responsible for all of his life’s tragedies and encourages him to use the dung metaphor
(associated with Jezebel) in his own prophetic writings when writing about Israel’s tragedy.

By using the Midrash from Genesis Rabbah one can justify blending the language of 2 Kings 9:37 with the language of Jeremiah 16. The original text reads:

They shall die gruesome deaths. They shall not be lamented or buried; they shall be like dung on the surface of the ground…and their corpses shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth (Jer. 16: 4).

The slight emendation is as follows:

Jezebel shall die a gruesome death. She will not be lamented or buried; She shall be like Dung on the surface of the ground…and her corpse shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

The original text has been slightly emended by this author to make it appear as if this was Jeremiah’s intent. It is a form of exegesis that just substitutes Jezebel’s name for Israel, and its justification (or prooftext) is the Midrash that associated Jeremiah’s conception with Jezebel’s punishment.

CORPSES AND DUNG

The dead body lives on: the corpse is food for the birds and beasts and is both fertilizer and an agent of fertilization. A dead body in Hebrew is a ne-vey-la. N-V-L is also the root of naval, a dastardly person who has crossed from one state to another, who commits a nevala, an outrage. Like the naval, the ne-vey-la, the corpse which is impure, is a body which has crossed the border from life to death.

Often readers see the body of a woman as a sort of boundary. One can treat her as belonging to someone with a soul or see her as a totality. However, often her body is broken up, depicted in its parts, with the male gaze focused on the breasts or crotch or eyes or lips, legs, or whatever else turns it on. Once the wandering eye has crossed the border, there is no return and the living woman turns into a dead one, a ne-vey-la.

Jezebel and the Concubine of Gibeah (Judges 19) are examples of dismembered women that are dehumanized with men who are indoors, safely sitting down to eat, while the men outside perform the nevala action on the women. Jehu's henchmen chop up
Jezebel and turn her not only into a ne-vey-la (dead meat) but to domen, something which will feed/ fertilize the earth. “The carcass (nivlat) of Jezebel shall be like dung on the ground, in the field of Jezreel, so that none will be able to say: ‘This was Jezebel.’”

Jezebel, who more than anyone symbolized the woman who had crossed the boundary into evil, who was irremediable, the living embodiment of navlut, was turned into a ne-vey-la, a carcass and then was totally obliterated. Whereas the Concubine’s end leads to anarchy and more rape -- and it is unclear what exactly happens to the 12 parts of her body that are distributed to the tribes--Jezebel’s five body parts have a destination. They will be like dung; and since they are buried in the fertile valley of Jezreel, they will lose their original distinct forms (skull, 2 hands, 2 feet), but will have a future as fertilizer.

Julia Kristeva’s words, slightly amended here, express a similar point more precisely:

The corpse… is cesspool, and death… this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. … Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains [and the] entire body falls beyond the limit…. If dung signifies the other side of the border, … [dung], the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, —I is expelled. The border has become an object.46

So, Jezebel is now a liminal figure whose reincarnation into dung can serve as an ecological metaphor for she now has the potential to turn herself (or be turned) into compost for plants etc. Keeping this in mind, it is possible to view both dung and Jezebel from a different perspective.

CAN JEZEBEL BE VIEWED POSITIVELY?

The irony of this might be behind this sympathetic Midrash about Jezebel:

Where do we learn about acts of kindness towards mourners? From Jezebel, whose home was close to the marketplace and whenever a funeral procession passed by, she would come forth from her house, strike with her hands, lament with her mouth, and walk ten paces. And when a bridegroom passed through the marketplace, she would come out, clap her hands, call out with her mouth, and walk ten steps after him. When Elijah of blessed memory, prophesied that “the dogs shall devour Jezebel in the field of Jezreel,” the prophecy was only partially fulfilled, for when her body is eaten by the dogs they leave her feet and hands (kapei yadeha) because these limbs performed acts of kindness (Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 17).47

This peculiar Midrash refers to her presence at weddings and as a mourner at funerals to show that “Jezebel had executed good deeds toward those in joy and sorrow.”48 The
intention of the Midrash is not to praise her, but serves as a homiletical Midrash, to show that *gemillut hasadim* (good deeds) towards both mourners and celebrants are so important, that even evil people, like Jezebel are capable of engaging in them. And it also engages in exegesis to explain why some parts of her remain. This Midrash sees some good in her and that possibly conjures up the famous lines in *Eshet Hayil* (Proverbs 31): “She conspires (*zammamah sadeh*) to get a field and takes it, she plants a vineyard by her own hands (*kapeha.*)” Jezebel engaged in “*zimah*” conspiracy with her own hands, to condemn Naboth to death so that her husband Ahab could get his vineyard. Jezebel is undone by Jehu’s conspiracy and all that remains of her are her conspiring hands and other limbs. Whether there is an intertextual reference to Jezebel or not, at this point in her life, she is undone by forces too great for her to withstand. Yet there are some remains, her body parts serve as a remnant. If something is left, there is still life, something to tap into for future use. And it is a reminder to the reader that good is possible even from egregious acts. Kathleen O’Connor’s remarks about Jeremiah’s metaphor of a woman in labor can illustrate another positive outcome from tragedy and weakness:

The survivors returning to Zion will form a procession of the forgotten, the disabled, and the vulnerable. Although they are the lowest in the society, they will be the beating heart of the restored community. The blind and the lame are physically different, weak, deemed deficient in the ancient world, stigmatized and perhaps despised. Pregnant women are of low public stature and holders of little political power, but together these people have the capacity to give birth to new life. The vulnerable and broken themselves will become the promised bearers of its future, a future of unimaginable reversals.

On the one hand, this woman is the weakest person; on the other hand, her pregnancy in the context of the return is one of future hope.

Both the Midrash and O’Connor refer to the idea that the dung to which Israel/Judah/Jezebel/ has been reduced will be the source of its future, a new beginning, in the form of fertilizer.

Like the weakest link, the laboring woman offers hope. *Izevel*, in the form of *zevul* is restored to her proper place, ironically with Israel, which has also been scattered on the land. Their mutual suffering will be the clue to its future. The pejorative
association of her name will also be overlooked and its more stately allusion will prevail.51

From the perspective of the Israelites, *domen* appears again in a positive form, albeit not from the perspective of Israel’s enemies. The root *domen* resurfaces in Psalms and in the book of Isaiah this time as a metaphor in the form of *madmenah*, a dunghill, where the dunghill this time is not Israel, but Israel’s enemies and it is in the context of God’s looking out for His people and making the enemy into a dung like substance:

Deal with them as You did with Midian, with Sisera, with Jabin, at the brook Kishon — who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the field (Ps 83:10-11).

For the hand of the Lord shall descend upon this mount, and Moab shall be trampled under Him, as straw is threshed to bits at Madmenah [the dunghill] (Isa. 25:10).

God has the last word; the enemies of Israel will end up in the dung heap, because THEY are truly evil according to the perspective of the biblical writer. And the reward, the future promise that comes out of the dung heaps will be the resurrection of the people of Israel.

O’Connor suggests “that the book of Jeremiah’s wide-ranging collection of poems, metaphors and stories seek to find language to name this world undone by trauma. The book of Jeremiah is thus a quest for meaning, an ongoing attempt to help the people of Judah survive as a people.”52 Louis Stulman too, argues that as part of the rebuilding process, the prophet is seeking to sculpt new theological formulations out of “the rubble of devastation” that may assist the survival of the people.53 One can draw conclusions from O’Connor and Stulman, who interpret Jeremiah to say that destruction is necessary in order for there to be a future revival. Perhaps this accords with Jeremiah’s original mission statement in chapter one, when he writes:

See, I appoint you this day
Over nations and kingdoms:
To uproot and to pull down,
To destroy and to overthrow,
To build and to plant (Jer. 1:10).
In an agriculturist society like ancient Israel, the metaphor of dung would be totally understood. Dung is a concrete metaphor that reinforces and strengthens the idea of rebuilding out of the rubble of devastation.

This paper has attempted to show that Jezebel’s body via the metaphor of dung is a stand in for the remaining nation in the land via Jeremiah’s use of the same metaphor. As was pointed out in the beginning, the people of Israel are referred to as a sinning woman and it was suggested that Jezebel/Israel’s queen/ and Israel as sinning woman are metonyms connotated in the dung imagery.

There is no way of knowing whether Jeremiah regards Jezebel as an arch-villainess, since there is no mention of her in his prophecies. The Deuteronomist certainly despises what she represents and has metaphorically preached against her throughout the two books of Kings. Both Israel and Jezebel will be turned into domen because of their sins. However, in this form, they will have a role in the restoration of Israel, who will come to her senses and abandon idolatry. Thus, the fertilizer (domen) of the past destruction will provide sustenance for a national revival.

THE AFTERLIFE OF JEZEBEL IN MODERN TIMES

Jezebel has an afterlife as can be seen in the two sources below, neither of which have any religious connection. One is a literary reference and the other a contemporary on-line source.

In his ribald and possibly anti-Semitic54 “Song for the Clatter Bones,” F.R. Higgins (1896-1941), a contemporary of Yeats wrote “a bitter and whimsical equation … of Queen Jezebel with Ireland”:

God rest that Jewy woman, Queen Jezebel, the bitch [Yeats substituted this for witch] Who peeled the clothes from her shoulder-bones Down to her spent teats As she stretched out of the window Among the geraniums, where She chaffed and laughed like one half daft Titivating her painted hair—

King Jehu he drove to her, She tipped him a fancy beck; But he from his knacky side-car spoke, "Who'll break that dewlapped neck?" And so she was thrown from the window; Like Lucifer she fell Beneath the feet of the horses and they beat The light out of Jezebel. That corpse wasn't planted in clover; Ah, nothing of her was found Save those grey bones that Hare-foot Mike Gave me for their lovely sound; And as once her dancing body Made star-lit princes sweat, So I'll just clack: though her ghost lacks a back There's music in the old bones yet.55
The poem is a grotesque depiction of the ending of Jezebel’s life. One can almost imagine that Higgins was aware of the Midrash from *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*. As has been demonstrated throughout this paper, Jezebel’s body via the metaphor of dung is a stand in for Israel via Jeremiah’s use of the same metaphor. Higgins’s morbidly funny “Song for the Clatter Bones” equates Queen Jezebel with Ireland. Jezebel is equated with the people and with Israel. Both the poet and this paper relate to Jezebel’s tragic end in a similar way. As Gaines writes in the introduction to her book about Jezebel Through the Ages “‘There’s music in the old bones yet.’ In listening to that dissonant music, perhaps we can hear new chords and expand the inharmonious melody that is Jezebel’s life.”

The fact remains is that Jezebel lives on in the “after-life.”

*Jezebel.com*’s existence is a fascinating enterprise. It is an online magazine focused on celebrities, sex, feminism, and issues relating to women’s empowerment. It was launched as a blog in 2007 under the tagline "Celebrity, Sex, Fashion for Women. Without Airbrushing." The Jezebel manifesto states that the site will attempt to take all the essentially meaningless but sweet stuff directed our way and give it a little more meaning, while taking more the serious stuff and making it more fun, or more personal, or at the very least the subject of our highly sophisticated brand of sex joke. Basically, we wanted to make the sort of women's magazine we'd want to read.

There seems to be no reference to the biblical source on this on-line blog. Needless to say, there is critique of this blog and there are those who oppose Jezebel.com on religious grounds. Charlie Osewalt’s opposition is based on who Jezebel actually was, that is, a biblical character. He calls Jezebel, “an ugly steward:”

Think about bad stewards in the Bible and it won’t be long before you get to Jezebel. The wickedest of the wicked, the lowest of the low, the persecutor of the prophets, Jezebel’s name has become synonymous with evil deceit.

Today, over 5.6 million visitors visit Jezebel.com - a hugely popular blog that aims its sights at "Celebrity, Fashion. Without Airbrushing".

So what happened to Jezebel? Are her crimes no longer severe enough to shock? Has the protagonist in this cautionary tale finally become a heroine of sorts? Is she really such a bad steward after all? The truth is that Jezebel’s list of sins is quite long. She:

- Promoted idol worship. (1Kings 18:19)
- Practiced witchcraft (2Kings 9:22)
- Sought to exterminate prophets of God (1Kings 18:4-13)
- Designed idol worship that had sexual immorality at its core (1Kings 16:29-33)
Yet these are small fry compared to her gravest of sins. Writing in his book ‘The Bloody Tenent of Persecution’, Roger Williams reminds us of the time that Jezebel signed a death warrant of an innocent man so that her husband could expand his property portfolio…..We still live in her shadow today.58

In contrast to the male critic cited above, the feminist Bible scholar Athalya Brenner-Idan is ecstatic about this website and writes:

Though Jezebel has been dragged through history and text reception as an icon of evil, she’s recently been commemorated on the Internet as something else. The Jezebel.com blog/website/magazine, launched in 2008, defines itself as a feminist blog that mixes a salad of news, politics, fashion, sex, gossip, and many other topics that would appeal to female readers. The site’s popularity and its huge readership may be attributed to its combination of seriousness and lightness, gravitas and fun, lowbrow and highbrow. I doubt whether many of its readers spare a thought for its biblical eponym or even make the connection with her. It gives me pleasure, however, that Jezebel the queen, princess, mother has been so morphed into a commercial mast of sorts for contemporary woman readers.

Jezebel (not the biblical Izevel) now has a life of her own. The non-Hebrew speaking world sees her mainly as a temptress, a sexually provocative woman. They have chosen to use Jehu’s words of description about her “When Joram saw Jehu, he asked, “Is all well, Jehu?” But Jehu replied, “How can all be well as long as your mother Jezebel carries on her countless harlotries (zenunei izevel) and sorceries?” (2 Kings 9:22) Non-Hebrew speakers (and some rabbinic sources) have interpreted zenut (harlotry) in its literal and narrow sense; perhaps using Jezebel’s painting of her eyes before her execution as the proof text for this. But except for Jehu’s hyperbolic political statement, Izevel was primarily a faithful wife with her husband’s interests in mind, and the “harlotries” referred to here are those of worshipping Baal, betraying monotheism and being unfaithful to Israel’s God. It would have been difficult to write this paper if one were to accept the Western world’s appropriation of Jezebel, which results in turning her into a sex object. Such readings of her have also “thinged” her, objectified her, just as Jehu did by referring to her as a thing (zot izevel) and turning her into dung (2 Kings 9:37).
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Metaphors Connecting Jeremiah and Jezebel: The Case of domen


NOTES

1. This paper was given at The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in San Antonio, November 2016. It has been extensively revised, for which I would like to thank Deborah Greineman and the various anonymous readers.
2. See Naomi Graetz, "God is to Israel as Husband is to Wife," in Athalya Brenner (editor), A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 126-145 and the bibliography within to see the many references to Israel depicted as a sinning woman.
4. "Female rulers, such as Jezebel of Israel, Athaliah of Judah, and Shamshi of Arabia, who are attested in biblical and extra biblical texts, seem to represent exceptions that highlight the more typical case of male dominance. Interestingly, however, neither biblical nor extra biblical texts attach negative connotations simply to the fact that these leaders are women.” Brad E. Kelle, “Wartime Rhetoric: Prophetic Metaphorization of Cities as Female,” in Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritchel Ames (eds.), Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts. Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 42 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), footnote 48 on p. 111.
6. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980).
8. Tilford, Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors. I thank the anonymous reader for bringing Tilford’s work to my attention.
10. Translation of this is from Robert Alter, Ancient Israel, The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (New York-London: W. W. Norton, 2013) who in his notes to this verse writes “The Hebrew uses merely the feminine indicative ha’arurah hazot (‘this cursed one’) to express contempt.”
12. Naomi Graetz, Silence is Deadly: Judaism Confronts Wifebeating (Jason Aronson, 1998); the article “God is to Israel as Husband is to Wife,” is part of this book.
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14 In L.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936) Richards used the word tenor (Latin for 'connection') to refer to the person, place, or thing being represented in a metaphor, while the metaphor's vehicle is what is representing the tenor. "[V]ehicle and tenor in cooperation... give a meaning of more varied powers than can be ascribed to either." The terms target and source were introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (above note 6). Although the more traditional terms tenor and vehicle are roughly equivalent to target domain and source domain, respectively, the traditional terms fail to emphasize the interaction between the two domains.

15 I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for her query, although I did not include her pun about “making a mountain out of a mole hill, or rather a dung hill” into the body of this article.

16 This is a somewhat tenuous reference, since the root *zevel* in the Bible is most prevalent in people’s names (cf. Izavel, Zevulun, Zevul). In the few cases where it appears as an adjective, it is associated with God’s nobility and elevation in Solomon’s temple (cf. “I have now built for You A stately House (*beit zevul*), A place where You may dwell forever” (1 Kgs 8:13). For Psalm 49:15, Benjamin Segal, in his *A New Psalm: The Psalms as Literature* (Jerusalem: Gofen Publishing House, 2013), p. 223 contradicts JPS’s *Tanakh* translation of *mee-z’vul lo*. The JPS translation is “The upright shall rule over them at daybreak, and their form shall waste away in Sheol till its nobility be gone.” Segal translates vs. 15b as “until sheol rots, its trash heap.” And he adds a footnote that the Hebrew of the last phrase is uncertain and that this is one of the several suggestions of Amos Hacham, *The Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986, 1987).

17 *Midrash Hashemot be-mahzor ha-sippurim al Eliyahu ve-Ahay*


22 Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda, *Sefer Hovot Ha-levavot, Sha’ar 8 Heshbon Hanefesh* 3, part 21. This was first translated from the Arabic to Hebrew by R. Yehuda Ibn Tabun (Naples, 1490) and has since been retranslated in modern times. Although this is the author of the article’s translation, use has been made of the English translation of this book which appears on-line at http://dafyomireview.com/article.php?docid=391


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Thanks to the anonymous reader for alerting me to these additional sources where sheaves are mentioned.


This is a paraphrase from McCresh’s review of Kline’s book on *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible*. He brings an excellent example of sound play from Jeremiah: “Against the background of the repeating phrase in each text, a different object of destruction is mentioned. In 17:27 the gates (š’ryh) of Jerusalem are named, in 21:14 “its forest” (y’ryh), probably a reference to the palace. In the text of judgment against Babylon, 50:32, it is “his cities” (’ryw). The word repetition and the allusive paronomasia of the shifting object of destruction both highlight the ironic twist of judgment involved.”


Ahab’s palace is “identified as a bit hilani, a kind of palace popular in the northern Levant during the Iron Age… A bit hilani consisted of a building that sat on a raised podium… A bit hilani must contain a window (or windows) for its name to make sense… [Rupert] Chapman has another interpretation. He believes that the bit hilani’s window referred to a “Window of Appearances” above the palace’s entrance. From this window, kings and queens would show themselves to the people standing below. This is akin to what the royal family still does from Buckingham Palace’s balcony.” Megan Sauter. “The Palace of the Kings of Israel—in the Bible and Archaeology: Samaria’s Iron Age Palace,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* September/October 2017 issue.

Janet Howe Gaines, “How Bad Was Jezebel?” *Biblical Archaeological Review*

The anonymous reader suggested this as does much of the reception and rabbinic literature. All you have to do is Google Jezebel and temptress and the following comes up: “5 Famous Temptresses of the Bible,” of whom one is Bathsheba and a reference to the 1938 film *Jezebel*, starring Bette Davis as the destructive temptress.


“The Death by Defenestration of Jezebel” (1866) by Gustave Dore, where she is tossed out of the window by the eunuchs and 15th century Dutch painter Evert Zoudenbalch who depicts the scene of bloody trampling by horses under Jehu’s instigation. There is a third picture by Dore, “Jehu’s Companions Finding the Remains of Jezebel”.


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