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REMEMBERING JEZEBEL:
READING AND REWRITING A BIBLICAL CHARACTER

by

CHRISTINE MITCHELL, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Religion

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

March 1, 1995.

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**REMEMBERING JEZEBEL:
READING AND REWRITING A BIBLICAL CHARACTER**

**submitted by Christine Mitchell, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

Robert Polzin, Thesis Supervisor

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7 April 1995
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ABSTRACT

Jezebel is usually depicted by scholars as a wicked foreign woman, who dominates her husband and who tries to seduce her killer Jehu. Drawing on theories of characterization from contemporary literary theory, this thesis attempts to read Jezebel in a different way. The dialogic possibilities of the biblical text are used in order to characterize Jezebel in two contexts: first in the literary context of 1-2 Kings, and then in the context of the other women of the Deuteronomic History. In this way, Jezebel may be seen as a dangerous political woman, whose voice is quelled by the prophetic voices. Finally, the means by which denigrating readings of Jezebel are perpetuated are explored through the medium of biblical retellings for children. These retellings work in order to build up a simplistic characterization of the wicked foreign queen Jezebel.

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I would like to acknowledge the guidance of my advisor, Robert Polzin, in the preparation of this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge something which Mieke Bal said to me, which was probably very minor to her, but which helped me immensely: "Never look for the easy solution." This thesis is an effort to avoid the easy solution to Jezebel. Finally, I would like to thank my husband Kevin, who indefatigably plowed through each chapter as it was ready, and whose perceptive questions helped me clarify my own thoughts on that "wicked woman" Jezebel.

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INTRODUCTION

JEZEBEL, CHARACTERIZATION AND READING

Time has folded in upon itself, the prophecy has come true. But there are no dogs. Then it comes to her. *We are the dogs, licking her blood. In the courtyard, the Jezebel blood.*

- Margaret Atwood, The Robber Bride.

Since the appearance of Mieke Bal's Lethal Love in 1987, there have been a number of literary-feminist studies of biblical women, especially of women in the Hebrew Bible. It is curious, therefore, that there has been very little work done on one of the most notorious of all biblical women: Jezebel. It is curious for a number of reasons: 1) the sheer notoriety of Jezebel would seem to make her an attractive subject for study; 2) there is a good deal of material in the Hebrew Bible which concerns her; and 3) the material is relatively uncomplicated. However, Jezebel has not been studied from a literary-feminist viewpoint, nor has she been studied extensively from any theoretical viewpoint. This becomes apparent when a search for bibliographic material is made. In this thesis, therefore, I would like to make a beginning towards filling the gap in the study of Jezebel.

Jezebel's story is relatively simple. It is laid out in the Hebrew Bible in four episodes: 1 Kings 16:29-34, 1

Kings 18:1-19:3, 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kings 9. Briefly, Jezebel is introduced as a Sidonian princess who marries Ahab, King of Israel. She kills off the prophets of Yhwh, and threatens to kill Yhwh's prophet Elijah after his victory over the prophets of Baal whom she sponsored. She manoeuvres to acquire a vineyard for Ahab by arranging the death of its owner Naboth. Finally, she is killed by her own eunuchs during Jehu's revolt against her son Joram, king after Ahab's death. This is Jezebel's story, full of violence and death.

In order to study Jezebel, I have chosen to study Jezebel's characterization in biblical scholarship, in my own readings, and in children's stories, thus using a three-pronged approach. In Chapter One, depictions of Jezebel in biblical scholarship are described and briefly analyzed. Chapter Two contains a brief description of theories of characterization which have been developed in contemporary literary theory. These theories will include those developed for a broad literary base as well as those developed specifically for the study of biblical literature. The first two chapters are essentially background, the tools needed in order to derive my own analysis of Jezebel.

The core of the thesis is found in Chapter Three, in which I develop a characterization of Jezebel from a reading of the biblical text. This first characterization is derived from the story of Jezebel as told in chronological

order in 1 and 2 Kings. The tools of literary characterization and Bakhtinian dialogism are used in order to expose the tensions and contradictions of the biblical text which can be used either to ensnare Jezebel in or to liberate her from the dominant biblical ideology. Working from an explicitly feminist point of view, the story of Jezebel is read with the intention of filling the gaps in her story in a different way from most commentators. From this reading, Jezebel may be seen as a political woman, killed off by many commentators because she possesses power in the text.

Complementing Chapter Three in many ways, Chapter Four offers a reading of Jezebel against the background of the other women of the Deuteronomic History. Through an exploration of two motifs, the woman-at-the-window and the foreign woman motifs, Jezebel may be seen as the culmination of the judgement of women by the dominant ideology of the Deuteronomic History. Just as the Deuteronomic History comes to its crashing conclusion at the end of 2 Kings, so too does the story of the women of the History with the gruesome death and dismemberment of Jezebel in 2 Kings 9.¹ Placing Jezebel both in the context of 1 and 2 Kings and the context of the women of the Deuteronomic History allows for Jezebel's story to be read from different positions, positions which are in dialogue with each other, but which can also stand alone.

The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter Five, examines the contemporary relevance of characterizations of Jezebel through the medium of modern children's bibles. Children's bibles were selected because of their potential to shape the attitudes of young readers, attitudes which can continue through to adulthood and which can potentially inform the adult's reading of both the biblical text and the Jezebel metaphor in western culture. Here we can examine what happens when the reader becomes the author: ideological frameworks which the reader of a text uses to inform the text carry forward into the new text. Here the thesis has come full circle: the interpretations or readings of Jezebel created by biblical scholars for an academic audience have been exchanged for readings created by children's authors for an audience of children.

The impetus both for an analysis of Jezebel and for the use of children's bibles came from Bal's analysis of the Delilah and Samson story in Lethal Love (1987:37-67). Although I do not find a Freudian framework useful, as she does in her analysis, the idea of rereading a notorious biblical woman, and doing so through the lens of popular retellings, was very appealing. Jezebel has much in common with Delilah, which will become especially clear in Chapter Four of this thesis. Jezebel has not received the same attention as Delilah, however, and by choosing Jezebel I hope to make a small step in correcting this imbalance.

At this point, I should outline the type of feminist criticism which I find most helpful. I agree with Pardes' analysis of streams of biblical feminist writing: there are essentially two different streams, one which "depatriarchalizes" the biblical text (e.g. Tribble), and a second which emphasizes the patriarchal presuppositions of biblical women (e.g. Fuchs) (Pardes 1992:2-3). She states her own goal as "explor[ing] the tense dialogue between the dominant patriarchal discourses of the Bible and counter female voices which attempt to put forward other truths." (1992:4). This is an approach which will be emphasized primarily in Chapter Three, in my analysis of Jezebel in the literary context of 1-2 Kings. Chapter Four will also use this approach, but here I will show that through the dialogic possibilities of the biblical text, antithetical voices are created, but then are silenced when their presence becomes too blatant.

Finally, to return to the quote at the beginning of this introduction, I hope to expose the biases of the dogs who lick up Jezebel's blood, those scholars and authors who find it necessary to entirely dismember Jezebel in order to elevate Ahab or Elijah or the Israelites for whatever reason. It is not necessary for her to take the fall for the preconceived notions of her readers. Instead, we can remember Jezebel in a different way.

CHAPTER ONE
SCHOLARSHIP ON JEZEBEL: READING JEZEBEL

Introducing Jezebel

As explained in the Introduction to this thesis, I will attempt to deal with the reading of Jezebel through an examination of three different types of readings of Jezebel. As such, I will begin by first examining readings of Jezebel in biblical scholarship. In biblical scholarship, there is a good deal of material for analysis with respect to many other biblical women, even those who might be considered minor characters. This is not the case with Jezebel. The lack of material dealing with Jezebel can, in part, be attributed to a lack of scholarly treatments of 1 and 2 Kings generally. Within traditional scholarship, emphasis has been placed upon the redactional history of 1 and 2 Kings: this consists of the minute dissection of the text in order to determine the age and context of production of each hypothetical strand of the story. Since 1 and 2 Kings present themselves as history, a history spanning about four hundred years, the urge to determine which fragments are contemporary with the events which they describe, and which are later is understandable. This approach, however, completely obscures the other aspect of 1 and 2 Kings: the literary appeal.

Even within the context of interpreting the text through the method of redaction analysis, Jezebel and the political events (as opposed to the prophetic events) of the Omride dynasty are rarely dealt with. More often, the prophetic Elijah-Elisha material is more closely examined. This leads to an obvious tendency of traditional scholarship: to see the political events and characters solely as they relate to the Elijah-Elisha material.

Leaving aside traditional scholarship, within the last fifteen years, beginning with Alter's The Art of Biblical Literature (1981), many studies of biblical texts as literature have appeared. These studies, more often than not, have borrowed heavily from contemporary literary theory for their methodological grounding. Although there have been many such studies, there are very few which deal with 1 and 2 Kings, and those that do, deal almost exclusively with the Elijah-Elisha prophetic and miracle stories.¹

There have been, as well, many studies dealing with biblical women from a literary-feminist perspective. Again, there are very few dealing with the women in 1 and 2 Kings, and only one that I am aware of which deals with Jezebel in any significant way (Trible 1994). So while there are studies which deal with what might be termed "strong" women in the Hebrew Bible (such as Deborah), and studies which deal with women who have been victimized (such as the Levite's concubine of Judges 19), and studies which deal

with ambiguous women (such as Michal and Delilah), there is a lack of feminist-literary studies dealing with one of the most ambiguous and troublesome women in the Hebrew Bible: Jezebel.

This first chapter will, therefore, examine the existing scholarship dealing with Jezebel, with an eye to determining the characterization of Jezebel implicit in these scholarly readings. Such readings usually appear in one of two forms: commentaries and short studies. The commentaries either combine 1 and 2 Kings and treat them together, or keep the two parts separate, dealing with 1 Kings in one volume and 2 Kings in a second. Because of the nature of the commentaries, they can place a characterization of Jezebel within a larger context. The shorter studies generally deal with one specific chapter within 1 or 2 Kings, and do not necessarily deal with a larger context. I will, therefore, treat the commentaries and shorter studies separately before coming to some general conclusions about the depiction of Jezebel in existing scholarship.

Commentaries

The earliest commentary that I have selected is Gray's I & II Kings (1963). This commentary, like most others of the period, is marked by a strong attempt to read 1 and 2 Kings as historical books, and attempts also to deduce

motivations and historical background to the events in 1 and 2 Kings through an intensive analysis of the text as well as comparison with other Near Eastern texts of the time. There are, however, important insights to be gained into the technical aspects of the text from this commentary.

According to Gray, the probable meaning of the name Jezebel was "Where is the Prince", a cultic lament found in the written evidence of Ugarit, and originally pointed *ʾē-zēbûl*. The massoretic pointing of *ʾî-zebel* is an "obvious parody", a corruption meaning "no nobility", with the added connotation of "dung" (Gray 1963:332-333). Gray sees Jezebel as being a patron of the foreign god Baal, whose worship came into sharp conflict with the worship of Yahweh during Jezebel's reign. He also portrays Jezebel's husband, King Ahab, as being torn between Elijah and Jezebel; and in fact, he portrays Elijah and Jezebel as adversaries, though they never meet face to face in the story, something which Gray does not acknowledge (1963:350, 360-361).

The necessity for Gray of devaluing Ahab in order to elevate Jezebel's importance may be seen further in his analysis of the episode of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). Gray almost completely removes Ahab from the action by removing him geographically from Jezebel during her activities to secure the vineyard (1963:394). However, he also feels it necessary to suggest that Ahab may have been personally influential with the elders of Jezreel, since

Jezebel was able to use them for her plan (1963:390). Further, Gray also suggests that the oracle delivered against Jezebel in v. 23 was a deliberate harmonization with her death as depicted in 2 Kings 9 (1963:393). It seems clear, therefore, that Gray is torn between the desire to make Jezebel the dominant force behind Ahab's actions (opposed by Elijah), and the necessity of dealing with the overwhelming presence of Ahab in the text as compared to Jezebel.

Gray's treatment of Jezebel's death in 2 Kings 9 is equally troublesome. He manages to link Naboth's death with Jehu's accusation of Jezebel's harlotries and sorceries (*zēnūnīm* and *kēšāpīm*) by claiming that it was "that a-moral cult of Canaan and the Phoenician ideology of absolute monarchy" which led to "such social abuses as the Naboth incident" (1963:493). Thus the blame for everything wrong with Israel lands squarely on Jezebel's shoulders. The actual deaths of Jezebel and her son Joram were made to fit the prophecy of 1 Kings 21 "particularly in detail", according to Gray (1963:495), although this is not the case (cf. White 1994). Finally, when Jehu refers to "this cursed one", he is referring to Jezebel's loss of divine blessing, and her placement under a divine curse (1963:497). Jezebel, according to Gray's interpretation, is clearly at the root of everything that is wrong with Israel.

The second commentary is in two volumes, Long's 1 Kings, with an introduction to Historical Literature (1984) and 2 Kings (1991). These two volumes approach the material through the method of form-criticism: that is, a division of the text into units, and a determination of genre for each unit, and the relationship between these units. In many ways, this approach is similar to methods used by literary critics. However, the principles of redactional and historical methods of inquiry form an integral part of this analysis, and are not found in literary criticism.

Perhaps the most telling comment on Long's work as it relates to Jezebel is that he does not name her when she is introduced. He gives an etymology for the zebel part of her name, and emphasizes her Phoenician (foreign) origins, but does not give her name. He states right at the start that "the foreign queen and devotion to Baal will serve as leitmotifs in subsequent chapters" (1984:173), clearly indicating how Jezebel (though we do not know her name) will be characterized.

Like Gray, Long seems torn between the desire to tear down Ahab's importance in order to build up Jezebel's and the desire to have Ahab as a key character in the story. He resolves this in a curious way: he states that Ahab's presence in 1 Kings 18-19 is merely a symbol of "Baalistic devotion or at least benign support", and that his non-importance as a character is what "corroborate[s] the

editor's condemnation, first expressed in 16:30" (1984:196). Having reduced Ahab's presence to a cipher, Long is then free to express the other characterizations in the story (Elijah, Jezebel) in a way that makes them larger-than-life.

In his discussion of 1 Kings 21, Long quite rightly emphasizes Jezebel's importance. He characterizes her as acting in her own right, and describes her as having "the unscrupled strength that Ahab lacks", as well as being "devious and purposeful, intent on her design, methodical in its execution" (1984:226). However, he goes on to say that "Jezebel was the consummate expression of Ahab's misguided ways" (1984:226, emphasis mine). Even though she is acting in her own right, for Long, Ahab must bear ultimate responsibility. This ambiguity is shown when Long provides what he calls the last editor's assessment of Ahab and Jezebel:

"For this last editor, it was probably not as important to see Ahab as a weak king, dominated by Jezebel and divine word, as it was to single him out as culpable and worthy of punishment... [The story] justifies again the summary evaluation given us by the editor in 16:30." (1984:230).

Ultimately, the importance of Jezebel is downplayed, and her characterization is implicitly unimportant as well.

In his second volume, published several years after the first, Long seems to have changed his assessment of Jezebel. Instead of Jezebel as the epitome of Ahab's erroneous ways, the House of Ahab becomes guilty and worthy of destruction

by its association with Jezebel (1991:121). A complete reversal, indeed! Long is now the second commentator to have difficulty with the characterization of Jezebel, torn in his characterization because for him the characterization of Jezebel has more to do with the characterization of Ahab, or Elijah, or Jehu, than with Jezebel herself.

The third commentary, that of Cogan and Tadmor (1988), at least avoids talking about Jezebel only in relationship to Ahab or Jehu. However, since this volume deals only with 2 Kings, the material dealing with Jezebel is limited to the one chapter dealing with her death (2 Kings 9). The only part of Jezebel's rather considerable role in the chapter on which Cogan and Tadmor feel it necessary to comment is the woman-at-the-window motif found in verse 30. To Cogan and Tadmor, the woman-at-the-window motif is purely about sexuality, and they consider that Jezebel did not think that her "womanly charms" would help her at this point. They therefore concede that "self-assurance and courage" are the qualities which Jezebel is displaying (1988:112). Since they consider the "woman-at-the-window" motif to have a purely cultic meaning, having to do with the goddess Astarte, they feel that the motif as such does not exist in this verse (1988:111). The possible political aspects of the display of courage, which Long at least considers (1991:127, 129) are completely ignored.

Shorter Studies: General Studies

Turning to the shorter studies, there are four which deal with Jezebel in her entirety, rather than focusing on one specific episode. The first is that of Frost (1964), a work which is unique in its focus, as far as I can tell. This study, published in a theological journal, and drawing heavily on historical-critical studies of Kings and on Canaanite religion, tries to show that Jezebel was playing a role similar to other biblical women whose actions were praised. As Frost puts it:

"It appears that seduction, treason, and murder are virtuous and praiseworthy when done to Israel's advantage, but are deserving of the utmost censure when used by Israel's enemies.... Clearly, then, a woman like Jezebel who was opposed to Israel has no chance of a fair trial in any biblical court." (1964:505)

Jezebel's fault lay in not recognizing Israel's election and its unique nature, and in trying instead to "canaanitize" Israel (1964:515-516).

Frost does not deal with Jezebel on her own terms in the Bible, but rather as merely a foil for Elijah, Elisha and Jehu. However, he also states that the unique husband and wife combination of Ahab and Jezebel is a statement about Jezebel's strength of character (1964:506-507). The attempt by Frost to deal with Jezebel was an interesting exercise, but one that was not picked up by any contemporary commentators.

The next two studies deal with Jezebel within a larger context. The first, that of Christensen (1984) places Jezebel among the other women in the Deuteronomic History. For him, the Deuteronomic History focuses on four women: Deborah and Jezebel, Huldah and Athaliah, who illustrate the tension between prophet and king. The structure of the History, placing Jezebel between the prophets Deborah and Huldah who form a frame, invites comparison of Jezebel with these prophets (1984:401-404). Christensen also points out that death enters through the window for Jezebel, reminiscent of the end of the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 (1984:402). This is a theme to which we will return in Chapter Four of this thesis, when the woman-at-the-window motif is explored.

In contrast to Christensen, Savran (1987) examines Jezebel in the context of 1 and 2 Kings. For him, the central location of the story of the Omride dynasty in 1 and 2 Kings displays a model for the defeat of the monarchy by prophetic forces: the succession of Elisha to Elijah parallels monarchic succession (1987:149). Savran is, however, more interested in these two types of succession than in depicting any of the women in 1 and 2 Kings. His assessment of Ahab shows Ahab as inconsistent and easily dominated by Elijah, God or Jezebel (1987:151-152). His assessment of Jezebel rests on his depiction of her as being used by the narrator to criticize Jehu; she identifies him

with previous kings who gained power through revolt (1987:154-155). In effect, Savran is content to lean on the accepted model of interpretation of 1 and 2 Kings, by leaning on Elijah and Elisha as being the only real characters.

Finally, there is a fourth general study of Jezebel, that of Tribble (1994). Even though Tribble presents herself as a feminist writer on the Bible, she does not deal with Jezebel on her own, but instead places Jezebel in her traditional role as opposite to or foil for Elijah. She does note that Jezebel and Elijah never meet (1994:178); however, she proceeds to link Jezebel and Elijah through a whole series of comparisons and contrasts. These comparisons deal with the introduction of both Jezebel and Elijah, their respective roles in the drought of 1 Kings 17-18, the incident of Naboth's vineyard, and their respective deaths (1994:170-178). Perhaps the most interesting insight of the article is the section on the death of Jezebel and Elijah. Tribble points out the series of opposites between the two deaths: the primary ones are the uplifting of Elijah by horses and the downtrodding of Jezebel by horses. As well, both leave no bodily trace (1994:178).

Although the analysis of Tribble is interesting, there is no attempt to deal with Jezebel herself, or in her other relationships. As will be seen, I prefer to step outside

the traditional readings of Jezebel as foil for Elijah in order to let other voices be heard.

Shorter Studies: 1 Kings 21

Besides the general studies concerning Jezebel, there are many studies which focus on one particular episode of her story. The majority focus on the two long episodes: 1 Kings 21, the story of Naboth's vineyard, and 2 Kings 9, Jehu's revolt and the death of Jezebel. Studies of 1 Kings 21 have been concerned primarily with the layers of textual traditions supposedly contained within the episode. Studies of 2 Kings 9 have focussed much more on Jezebel herself.

The longest and most interesting of the studies of 1 Kings 21 is contained in a book with the subtitle of "The Method of Total Interpretation" (Zakovitch 1984). In Zakovitch's interpretation, Ahab is submissive before Jezebel. So, the change in the wording of the exchange between Ahab and Naboth when Ahab reports the exchange to Jezebel is to "portray the weak king's self-effacement before his domineering wife" by the narrator (1984:384-386). Jezebel herself is not depicted by Zakovitch as the foil for Elijah in this episode. Instead, she is shown in her own right. However, Zakovitch falls into a traditional pattern by placing all of the blame for Naboth's death on Jezebel: he says that the narrator has made Ahab absent from the death of Naboth in order to emphasize that he had nothing to

do with his death (1984:393). In order to do this, Zakovitch has to find a reason for God's apparent disregard of Jezebel's role in the crime in Elijah's speech to Ahab in 21:18-24. That reason, according to Zakovitch, is that a crime committed in Ahab's name was still Ahab's crime, even if he had nothing to do with it (1984:397-398). There is a desire in this interpretation to whitewash Ahab of wrongdoing (probably because he is an Israelite male), a theme common to other interpretations of this chapter.

A second work dealing with 1 Kings 21 is much less satisfying. This is Walsh's study using three forms of analysis (1992). He does a stylistic, syntagmatic and paradigmatic (actantial) study of the episode, and claims that they are incompatible because each has a different result for the question of the protagonist of the episode (1992:211). One of Walsh's conclusions is that Jezebel's role in the death of Naboth is a symbol for her role in the downfall and death of Ahab's house, a downfall which was based on more than one incident, but for which this incident can serve as a symbol (1992:201). I would use this study to show not that different readings give incompatible results, but rather that no one reading exhausts all of the possibilities in the dialogue between text and reader.

Finally, there is a work which sums up much of the French and German scholarship on 1 Kings 21 (Martin-Achard 1991). After summarizing the various studies, Martin-Achard

comes to the conclusion concerning Ahab and Jezebel that while most studies try to denounce one and whitewash the other, this is not possible. However, he then goes on to state that the image of Jezebel as the foreign woman with all of the connotations of deceit and trickery that go with this image cannot be ignored (1991:13-14). This, then, is the primary image derived from this study: Jezebel as the deceitful foreign woman.

Shorter Studies: 2 Kings 9

Turning to the studies dealing with Jezebel's death, one of the most influential is Parker's (1978), which promotes as its primary hypothesis that Jezebel was trying to seduce Jehu in her confrontation with him. This is contrary to many interpretations showing Jezebel's death as regal and defiant (1978:67-69, cf. Cogan & Tadmor 1988:112). This hypothesis has been repeated by many since, including Long (1991:130). By seducing Jehu, Jezebel was hoping to continue her political career through an alliance of power similar to that of Adonijah and Abishag in 1 Kings 2 (Parker 1978:74).

One of the more useful studies for the rest of this thesis is that of Olyan's (1984), which in its second part deals extensively with the root *šlm*, meaning peace, wellness, wholeness, health, and so on. For Olyan, the question *h^ašālôm*, which can have varying meanings (such as

"is all well?", "is there peace?", or even "how are you?"), ties the entire chapter together. The restoration of *šālôm* by Jehu through the death of Jezebel (who represents unbalance) is the key to the chapter (1984:660-668). This article will be more closely examined in Chapter Three.

Finally, there are two articles which depict the House of Ahab as the antithesis to the House of David. Garcia-Treto mentions this idea briefly (1990:47), as well as noting the importance of *bēt*, or "house" in the chapter, and the alternation of indoor and outdoor scenes in the chapter (1990:48). White (1994) is more interested in tying together 1 Kings 21 with 2 Kings 9 and tying both to the Davidic dynasty. The central hypothesis about Jezebel is presented in a footnote: Ahab's inability to control his foreign wife implies a judgement on his ability to be king (1994:69). White hypothesizes that the version of Naboth's death in 1 Kings 21 is a retelling of the original in 2 Kings 9:25-26; the version in 1 Kings 21 is retold as an analog to the David and Bathsheba story in 2 Samuel 11-12 (1994:67-69).

Conclusions on Traditional Scholarship

As a whole, traditional scholarship dealing with Jezebel has centered around several common themes. The primary one of these is the foreignness of Jezebel. Jezebel's foreignness is given as one of the reasons for her

wickedness: she is judged before she acts because of her origins. As Frost points out, because her actions do not benefit Israel, she is judged again.

The second theme of most of the studies is Jezebel as a foil for Elijah. This is exemplified by Tribble's study, in which Jezebel and Elijah cannot be separated and in which Jezebel is not examined on her own, or in her relationships to all of the characters. Because she is linked with Elijah so often, the third theme follows out of the second: her dominance over a weak husband. Ahab is often depicted as being in the middle between Jezebel and Elijah as they struggle.

When Jezebel is examined outside of her connection to Elijah (which is rare), the common themes include her will to hold on to political power and her presence as symbolic of unbalance. These themes are expressed in Parker and Olyan respectively. An idea picked up from Parker and made increasingly popular is that Jezebel tried to hold on to power through a seduction of Jehu, a seduction which failed.

A theme less central to Jezebel herself, but important in placing Jezebel in her context in the Deuteronomic History is the centrality of the Omrides and Ahab to 1 and 2 Kings, as expressed by Savran. Implicitly picking up this theme, White's study shows the antithesis between Ahab's house (the Omrides) and the Davidic House.

We will return to these elements in Chapter Three and Chapter Four when I attempt to develop a characterization of Jezebel outside many of the themes outlined in traditional scholarship. For the moment, we will turn to the topic of characterization.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORIES OF CHARACTERIZATION

Towards a Theory of Characterization

In the first chapter, a variety of works involving Jezebel were examined with the purpose of determining how Jezebel is generally read. In this chapter, theories of characterization will be examined. No attempt will be made to derive a new theory of character and characterization; rather, existing theoretical reflections will be examined in order to obtain elements useful for deriving a characterization of Jezebel in 1 and 2 Kings.

Characterization is usually approached from one of two angles: the formalist definitions of character, and the location of character between text and reader. I will examine both of these angles, using elements of each in order to find a niche in which I feel comfortable in order to characterize Jezebel in chapter 3.

There has been work done both on characterization in literature generally and on characterization in biblical literature. Works dealing with characterization in literature in general use both the formalist and the reader-oriented approach; however, most works dealing with biblical characterization work from the formalist point of view. A

few recent works, however, have approached the question from a reader-oriented angle.

In this chapter, therefore, I will discuss general theories of characterization as well as theories developed for biblical characters, grouping both under one of the two basic approaches to characterization. In this way, works on biblical characterization can be discussed as specific applications of one of the two basic approaches.

Formalist Definitions of Character

Perhaps the best place to start is with Alter's description of biblical characters: he states that the biblical conception of character is similar to modern notions in that character is "often unpredictable, in some ways impenetrable, constantly emerging from and slipping back into a penumbra of ambiguity...." (1981:129). Despite impressions given to the contrary by the typology and classification of character in formalist schemes, this is the primary assumption behind all complex schemes for the description of character.

Another basic concept of literary character is stated by Margolin: a character is a "nonactual individual", and is different from a real human being in that it is a construct. As a construct, therefore, the literary character is incomplete, and it may not be possible to decide the truth about some of the statements made about it

(1987:108). Further, it is necessary to point out that all information about characters is mediated through the narrator. This information is then selected for relevance or homogeneity (1987:109).

From these preliminary statements, it is possible to proceed to a working definition of characterization; characterization may be defined as the association of individual properties to a narrative agent, according to Margolin (1983:4). Rimmon-Kenan's description of characterization is slightly more complex: character-indicators are used to infer traits, which then form the character construct (1983:59). Both of these definitions, however, rely on the same idea: indicators found in the text form the basis for defining the character. In the formalist conception of character, it is these indicators which must be defined and classified.

Descriptions of character are usually divided into two types: direct and indirect means of characterization. Direct characterization is usually defined as being found in the speeches of characters and the narrator. It consists largely of such things as descriptions of social background and the direct naming of character traits (Berendsen 1991:41, Rimmon-Kenan 1983:59-60). There may be a hierarchy of reliability: some characters may give accurate representations of others while some may not. As well, a description of a character given by the character him or

herself may not be accurate (Berendsen 1991:44-45). As Rimmon-Kenan points out, relying solely on this type of characterization leads to the impression of static characters (1983:60-61). In the Hebrew Bible, direct characterization is rare, especially when it is through the direct naming of traits (Bar-Efrat 1989:53).

Much more complex than direct characterization are the techniques used for indirect characterization. One technique used is the physical description of a character. In modern literature, there is often a relationship between the external appearance of a character and his or her character traits (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:65-66). This type of relationship does not exist in biblical literature, in that handsome does not mean good, nor does ugly mean bad. In fact, physical descriptions are very rare in biblical literature. Usually, information about the external appearance of characters is given only to advance the plot. Similarly, clothing is usually not described, rather, only what happens to the clothing is described (Bar-Efrat 1989:48-51, Berlin 1983:34-35).¹

Another means of characterization is through epithets, place of residence or title. These may be direct characterizations, but may also have an associative function (Berendsen 1991:52-54). However, both Berlin and Bar-Efrat consider biblical narrative to avoid characterization through these means. Epithets usually serve as an

identification, not characterization. However, a description of class or profession may serve as a characterization, although such a description usually situates the character within its place in society (Berlin 1983:35-36, Bar-Efrat 1989:90).²

The most important forms of indirect characterization are through speech and action. Speech can define character traits through its style and its content. Speech may be defined as the words of the character, as opposed to narrative action which is found in the words of the narrator; but the words of the character are also those of the narrator, as all information about characters is mediated through the narrator. However, speech-acts, the performance of action in conversation, can define character traits (Berendsen 1991:59, Rimmon-Kenan 1983:63-65, Margolin 1987:109). In biblical literature, the common literary technique of using the style of speech to characterize is largely avoided, although "wise" characters may use highly figurative language, while a "polite" style may be used in addressing the king. Speech-acts are more important in biblical literature than style of speech (Bar-Efrat 1989:65-76).

Action is probably the most important means of characterization in biblical literature. In modern literature, action may imply traits in the manner of its description. Minor characters' actions are largely

iterative, that is, many similar actions described once; while main characters' actions tend to be unique. These actions usually signify some turning point for the character (Berendsen 1991:56, Rimmon-Kenan 1983:61). In biblical literature, actions of daily life are rarely depicted, and when they are, they are usually one-time descriptions of such actions indicating their importance for the advancement of the plot. Lack of action is also important in biblical literature, as in modern literature: omissions (acts which are contemplated but not performed) may indicate passivity (Bar-Efrat 1989:77-83, Rimmon-Kenan 1983:61-62).

Finally, comparisons are very important for determining character traits. Berlin names three types of comparisons: contrast with another character, contrast with the earlier action of the same character, and contrast with the expected norm (1983:40). Bar-Efrat notes that minor characters are important for forming these contrasts, although it is not always possible to distinguish between main and minor characters in biblical literature (1989:86).

While traits are being established, they are evaluated for reliability and classified. The evaluation of traits may be described as follows: traits through action or appearance are largely inferential; traits through direct speech must be determined through the weighing of claims; traits through the reporting of inner speech are largely certain; and the explicit statements about traits by a

reliable narrator are virtually certain (Margolin 1983:4, Alter 1981:117). The type of character which is depicted by these traits may then be described.

Character classification is a difficult problem, one which has as many solutions as there are writers about character. A simple scheme such as that put forward by Berlin uses three categories of character: *Full-fledged Character* or round; *Type* or flat; and *Agent* or performer of a function. These three categories may be described as points on a continuum with *Character* at one end and *Agent* at the other. A *Character* has a broad range of traits while a *Type* is a stereotyped class of people with similar traits and an *Agent* performs a function of the plot or setting (1983:23-24, 32).

A more complex classifications system is described in Rimmon-Kenan. In this system, there are three continua: complexity, development, and penetration into inner life. The complexity axis runs from a character with one dominant trait to one having several traits. The development axis runs from stasis to dynamism. The penetration into inner life axis runs from characters seen only from the outside to characters seen from within (1983:40-42).

Finally, an extremely complex classification system has been developed by Hochman. In this system there are eight continua represented as follows (1985:89-139):

Stylization <--> *Naturalism*: how well the character conforms to the norm of resemblance to real people.

Coherence <--> *Incoherence*: how well the character traits are integrated.

Wholeness <--> *Fragmentariness*: how well the character presents a range of experiences.

Literalness <--> *Symbolism*: the character is literal to itself or symbolic of a type.

Complexity <--> *Simplicity*: whether there is inner tension and self-contradiction.

Transparency <--> *Opacity*: access to the character's inner perceptions.

Dynamism <--> *Staticism*: whether the character changes or develops.

Closure <--> *Openness*: is the depiction of the character left open or closed?

One of Hochman's conclusions is that central characters in texts with highly unified action tend to be complex and dynamic. If the character is not "foregrounded" within the text, or if the action is not unified, then the character will be more simple (1985:143).

There seems to be a common theme between these three systems of classification: the growth or potential for growth in a character seems to be one of the most desirable aspects for a sustainable, interesting character. Formalist definitions of character seem to be oriented towards finding these sustainable, interesting characters through textual features which show their emerging character traits.

Reading Character

Reading character should properly be considered a derivation of reader-response theory. That is, reading character is part of the same process as reading the text, in which the text is created by a dialogue between text and reader. Cohen argues that "character is readable when the text and its reader work together to promote the representational figure's transformation into a virtual existent." (1983:5), meaning that character is located between the two. This creation of character at least partially by the reader is the common thread of all studies of reading character.

McCracken's article on biblical character draws heavily upon Bakhtin's work on the dialogic. He claims that a Bakhtinian model of character is uniquely able to describe biblical characters (both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament). According to McCracken, there are five qualities of character which may be drawn from Bakhtinian theory. First, character is free and independent, rather than closed. Second, character exists in a dialogic relationship with other characters. Third, character exists in the present, in a dialogic relationship with the reader, rather than in the past. Fourth, he agrees especially with Bakhtin's assertion that character is something to speak with, not speak about: dialogue is more important in biblical narrative than narratorial description. Finally,

character exists in the discourse, in the dialogue with the author (1993:35-36).

McCracken sees this Bakhtinian model of character as especially applicable to biblical character: he sees biblical character as "...existing in the boundary between themselves and another." (1993:32); that is, what happens to characters, how they interrelate, is more important than defining character traits. He also points out that many characters are left in the moment of crisis, and their stories are never resolved (1993:32-33). This dialogic conception of character is a good place from which to start in discussing reading character: the concept of the dialogue between text and reader and between character and reader helps to create a flexibility in characterization somewhat lacking in completely text-based schemes.

Todorov's article on reading contains a short passage on characterization. Character is a result of the reader's construction; however, the construction is limited by how the text teaches the reader to read and by the cultural context. The cultural context can change, which indicates how readings can differ between one interpreter and another (1980:75-76). The construction of the character, however, is done by the reader according to the accumulation of traits (1980:76), in much the same procedure undertaken by the text according to formalist interpretations described above. Todorov delimits two types of characters: those

functioning as agents of the action and those which show "psychological determinism", the latter being the only true type of character (1980:77). Character is thus constructed by the cooperation of the text and the reader according to formalist characteristics.

Cohan's work on reading character proclaims itself as radical and different from other works on character. He sees other works on character as all emphasizing the mimetic aspects of character, by "equat[ing] the figure with the material reality it seems programmed to represent" (1983:8). He claims that his theory of reading character requires no such mimesis, but that the gaps in the reading (following Iser) pull the reader into active participation in creating the character (1983:9-11). Instead, he postulates the character as what he terms a "virtual existent", by which the fragmentation of the character may be centralized through the reader's understanding of the virtual world in which the character exists (1983:19). The non-mimetic character can in effect be made mimetic by the reader's participation; the reader creates a whole character from fragments, completing the text (1983:23). Although Cohan postulates his theory of characterization as different, I find that his theory actually echoes many of the themes found in works inspired by Bakhtin. Certainly the location of character between text and reader is not unique to Cohan's work.

Taking on features of some of the above work, Frow's notes on character are essentially refinements of the concept of character as created by text and reader. Frow considers character to be both the subject and object of speech. Characters speak in discourse and are also represented in discourse: character can thus be made up of a complex layering of traits (1986:245-246). A character is also both fixed and motile: character is fixed in the unity between body and name, and motile in the possible fluctuation between grammatical position (1st, 2nd or 3rd person) and point of view (1986:240-244). Finally, character is an effect of the recognition of the reader in a relationship between the construction of the character and the construction of the reader (1986:238-239).

The flexibility of point of view pointed out by Frow may also be seen in Docherty's work on reading character. Although Docherty's work deals essentially with the post-modern novel, some of his observations can, I believe, be applied to other literary works as well, especially since he spends a good deal of time describing the modern or "realist" novel.³ For Docherty, the meaning of a character is located in the reader: as the character develops, the reader changes and the new evaluations within the reader are conferred on the character. The reader and character thus shape each other. As well, meaning is not static, but dynamic and produced through the interrelationships of the

character and the reader (1983:10-11). Docherty argues that post-modern fiction gives an alternative to the traditional Cartesian dialectic between the inner and outer character: the characters have become voices through which the reader can speak as an authoritative subject. In the modern novel, in contrast, the author (or what I would term the narrator) asserts his or her own sole authority (1983:119, 92). I would argue that this is not necessarily the case, but rather that there are two forms of interpretation: one in which the narrator is permitted to have sole authority, and another in which the reader is permitted to share authority with the narrator/text.

This latter form of interpretation is what Bach advocates in her article (1993). For her, shifting from the narrator to the reader in the construction of the character allows the privileged role of the (biblical) narrator to be challenged. There is also a tension between the reader's desire to construct character and the narrator's attempt to control the construction of the character. She recommends a shift from the usual "ideal reader" to a "suspicious narratee", in order to make the narrator and his agenda visible. Reading with suspicion allows voices which are normally silenced by the biblical narrator to appear (1993:62-67). This is a reading strategy with which I agree, especially when dealing with a character such as Jezebel who has been so one-dimensionally depicted by

traditional interpreters. This reading strategy of suspicion will be used in order to build up a characterization of Jezebel by examining traits which often go unnoticed.

Point of View, Character and Reading

A reading which allows different voices to be heard also depends on an analysis of point of view. One indication of the overlap between characterization and point of view analysis may be seen in Berlin's work: some of the textual indicators of character traits are also described as indicators of point of view. These are: names, depiction of "inner life", and speech (1983:59-64). An analysis of character does also depend on the point of view of the speaker which gives information about the character in question.

In dealing with the theory of point-of-view, I am leaning heavily on the system of *focalization* best expressed by Bal (1991). In her narrative scheme, there can be, and often is, a difference between who speaks and who sees. The speaker does not have to be the subject of the focalization (i.e. the focalizer). The question of who sees and who does not see, or whose viewpoint is never given, can also be very significant (Bal 1991:160-162).

Textual indicators for the determination of point-of-view in biblical literature have been concisely laid out by

Berlin. These textual indicators include: the use of names, phrases which indicate inner reflection, the use of the particle *hinnê* ("look!" or "behold!"), the use of circumstantial clauses which show from whose angle the action is seen, direct discourse and narration, and different use of language in describing the same action (1983:59-72). Careful analysis can use these features to show the presence of competing ideologies, or dialogism often missed in the readings of biblical narratives (Polzin 1980:124-126). The analysis of point of view moves from the choice of language and phrasing to the level of ideology.

The use of point-of-view in determining ideologies inevitably brings us back to Bakhtin. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel", he shows how a variety of voices come together in discourse, displaying a variety of ideological schemes. This is best demonstrated by his analysis of the speech in "comic novels", in which he demonstrates that the speech of the author can have embedded in it the speech of others (1981:303). The ideology of the speaker can have other embedded ideologies within it, expressed in what Bakhtin terms "double-voiced discourse": speech in which two speakers and two ideologies are expressed; two voices in constant dialogue (1981:324).

In beginning with formalist definitions of character and progressing through theories of readable character and concluding with character and point-of-view, all of the

tools needed in order to produce a characterization of Jezebel have been assembled. The three theoretical frameworks are built on each other. The theories of readable character implicitly accept the formalist definition of character-building from a series of traits. The use of point-of-view to determine ideological commentaries require the use of both formal characteristics and the reader's own interrelationship with the text in order to operate.

Character, then, is located between the text and the reader, in that the formal characteristics of the text combine with the reader's own social milieu to form the character construct (cf. Todorov above). The character and the reader remain in a dialogic relationship, informing each other throughout the story. This is the theoretical background from which I shall work to form a characterization of Jezebel.

Jezebel is, however, what many commentators would no doubt term a minor character in the sweep of 1 and 2 Kings. As such, her story is broken up and told in small fragments in the larger whole. We do not have a continuous stretch of narrative with which to form our character construct. Characters such as David, Samuel, Jacob and Abraham are allowed a larger narrative scope from which we can form their characterizations.⁴ Although Jezebel's story is told in small pieces, this does not mean that a characterization

cannot be formed that is more than a minor, "flat" character. In fact, the fragmentariness of Jezebel's story could be used as a means of characterization itself.

What I will be doing then in Chapter Three is building up a characterization of Jezebel from the fragments of narrative concerning her in 1 and 2 Kings. To do this, I will be examining various textual features, especially indicators of ideological point of view, which inform on Jezebel. I will also be doing this with the "suspicion" which Bach advocates: I will be reading in order to subvert traditional readings of Jezebel, readings which I believe to ignore facets of the text and the reading process which do not lead to the single-minded characterization which the authors of these readings require.

In order to produce this characterization of Jezebel, I will begin with the assumption that all characters have the ability to be interesting and sustainable. What I will be examining is how a characterization of Jezebel can be coherent and sustainable. I will also be examining the textual features and reading strategy which will allow this coherent, sustainable characterization to emerge.

Finally, it is necessary to make a note on the inexhaustibility of the reading process. What I will propose is one reading of Jezebel. However, with the constant dialogue of text and reader, there is no way to develop a complete reading of her character. There are ways

to read Jezebel which would produce a completely different character construct. The reading which I will produce will necessarily enter into a dialogic relationship with these other character constructs. In Chapter Four, I will be producing other readings of Jezebel, ones which may agree with the reading produced in Chapter Three, but which also work in dialogue with the reading of Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE
JEZEBEL: AN ALTERNATE READING

Locating Jezebel

One way to begin a characterization of Jezebel is by locating Jezebel within her literary context in 1 and 2 Kings. Jezebel is mentioned or acts in four episodes in 1 and 2 Kings: 1 Kings 16:29-34, 1 Kings 18:1-19:3, 1 Kings 21, and 2 Kings 9. The first episode is Jezebel's introduction into the narrative as the Sidonian princess who is married to Ahab, King of Israel. The second episode is the confrontation of Elijah with the prophets of Baal, with Ahab as an onlooker. Jezebel is mentioned at the beginning of the episode as the sponsor of the Baalist prophets, and acts at the end in threatening Elijah with retribution for the deaths of said prophets. The third and fourth episodes are the ones in which Jezebel's involvement is more sustained. The third episode (1 Kings 21), the episode of Naboth's vineyard, involves Jezebel as a conspirator in gaining for Ahab the vineyard of his neighbour Naboth. Finally, the fourth episode (2 Kings 9), deals with the death of Jezebel in Jehu's revolt against her son Joram.

Jezebel's story, therefore, takes place against a backdrop of the story of the Omride dynasty (Omri was Ahab's father). As well, her entrance into the story in 1 Kings

16:31 coincides with the entrance of the prophet Elijah into the story in 1 Kings 17:1. Jezebel's death in 2 Kings 9:33-37 also coincides with the last mention of Elijah's successor Elisha in 2 Kings 9:1-3. It seems fairly clear, therefore, that Jezebel and the Omrides play a mirroring role to the Elijah and Elisha prophetic miracle stories, as pointed out by Savran (1987:149). The Elijah-Elisha cycle, however, is normally taken by commentators to be the main story. In this reading, I will do the opposite: I will take Jezebel's story as central to the narrative.

Introducing Jezebel: 1 Kings 16:29-34

Jezebel is introduced as the daughter of the Sidonian king. At this point, the characterization of Jezebel is clear and simple: she is a foreign, specifically Sidonian (Phoenician), princess. The Deuteronomic History has a very clear judgement of Sidonians (along with other foreign peoples): "They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their ancestors by Moses." (Judg 3:4).¹ Elsewhere in the Deuteronomic History, the Sidonians are grouped with other peoples who worship foreign gods (Judg 10:6, 1 Kgs 11:5, 33). Except for a brief reference to the Sidonians as cutters of timber in Lebanon (1 Kgs 5:20), the Sidonians are unremittingly portrayed as foreigners who worship foreign gods, whose presence is a test for Israel.

This aspect of Jezebel's foreignness and the presence of foreign gods is laid out in 1 Kings 16:29-34; although Jezebel's connection with foreign gods, specifically Baal, is not made clear here, the associative power of the wording implies that Jezebel does indeed partake of the worship of foreign gods. We can see that text and reader conspire here to create this reading: the text is coy about making any direct references, but together the text and reader can derive this interpretation of Jezebel as foreign-god-worshipper. The power of the associative function can be exposed.

Following this theme, it may be seen that there is no direct link between Jezebel and Ahab's behaviour. The sins for which Ahab is roundly condemned by the narrator are listed in 1 Kings 16:31-33, and include worshipping Baal, building a temple and altar to Baal in Samaria, making an asherah or sacred tree, and finally, "[doing] more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him." (1 Kgs 16:33). Again, there is no direct causal link between Jezebel and these sins; rather, Jezebel is presented at the head of this list of sins: Jezebel may be seen as one of the many sins of Ahab, though his marriage to her is at the top of the list.

In this introduction to Jezebel, therefore, the narrator gives us the tools to create a simple, integrated

characterization of Jezebel. Jezebel is a foreign princess, therefore, she is a test for Israel as represented by Ahab. Jezebel is Sidonian, therefore, she is a worshipper of foreign gods, opposed to the God of Israel and capable of influencing her husband. However, Ahab married her, therefore, she is also one of his sins, even the first amongst his sins. From this introduction, we can see that a tension is being built up between Jezebel as inherently bad because of her foreignness and influencing her husband to wicked deeds, and Jezebel's marriage as a result of Ahab's wickedness. This tension is expressed in Long's shift in his evaluation of Jezebel as noted in Chapter One (1984:230, 1991:121). The tension and dialogue between these evaluations of Jezebel can carry through the entire story of Jezebel. We do not need to resolve this tension; instead we can exploit it to show how although we wish to construct a completely integrated characterization of Jezebel, the text can be read as opposing this tendency right from the start.

Ahab, Jezebel and Elijah: 1 Kings 18:1-19:3

In this episode, Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, and finishes by killing them all. Jezebel does not act in the story until the very end (1 Kgs 19:1-2). However, three references are made to her by the narrator and other characters (1 Kgs 18:4, 13, 19). These references tell of Jezebel's promotion of the prophets of Baal and the

asherah and her killing off of the prophets of Yahweh. However, the foreignness of Jezebel, emphasized in her introduction, no longer plays any explicit role in this episode.

The first reference to Jezebel in this episode is by the narrator (1 Kgs 18:4). This reference to Jezebel's killing of the prophets of Yahweh and Obadiah's saving of one hundred of them is later retold by Obadiah to Elijah (1 Kgs 18:13). There is, however, a crucial difference between the two descriptions of Jezebel's action. Obadiah calls the action "killing" (*hrg*), but the narrator calls the action "cutting off/ destroying" (*krt hifil*). Obadiah's verb *hrg* is the common Hebrew word for killing, slaying in battle, death by violence (BDB 246-247).² The narrator's verb *krt* in the *hifil* aspect is much more specific, meaning to cut off or destroy (BDB 503-504). This verb is much rarer, and in the Deuteronomic History often has the overtones of covenantal language.³ For example, in Deuteronomy Yahweh promises to cut off (*krt hifil*) the nations so that Israel may dispossess them (Deut 19:1, 12:29). The uses of *krt* in Joshua and Judges are consistent with this national covenantal meaning (Josh 7:9, 11:21, 23:4, Judg 4:24). In 1-2 Samuel, the covenant is usually personal, between David and Jonathan (1 Sam 20:15), between David and Saul (1 Sam 24:22), or between David and Yahweh (2 Sam 9:8), in which the characters involved promise not to cut off (*krt*) the

other. In the context of 1 Kings 18, the narrator is applying language of the covenant to Jezebel's action of killing the prophets. There is also an ironic comment being made on Obadiah, who saved the prophets of Yahweh, but did not realize the significance of what he was saving them from.

Jezebel is working within a covenantal framework, that much seems clear. The obvious conclusion to draw would be that she is in the process of breaking the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Characters such as David and Jonathan promise not to cut off when they make a covenant, and here Jezebel is in the process of cutting off. However, Yahweh is often one who cuts off the enemies of Israel, enemies of the covenant between Yahweh and his people. Jezebel, in her action of cutting off may be working within another covenantal framework, acting in the place of the deity. In this way, it can be argued that she is in the process of covenant-building, by cutting off the enemies of this covenant.⁴

The tension between Jezebel as bringer of sins and Jezebel as exemplar of sins which emerged in 1 Kings 16 continues in a slightly different form in this episode. In this case, there is a tension between Jezebel as covenant-breaker and Jezebel as covenant-builder. Jezebel's characterization becomes more complex, although text and

reader try to keep it simple by conspiring to emphasize the covenant-breaking aspects of Jezebel's action.

Jezebel is often portrayed as a foil or analog for Elijah (e.g. Tribble 1994). It is interesting, therefore, to pursue the above-mentioned covenantal aspects of this episode. When Elijah kills the prophets of Baal (an analogous action to Jezebel's destruction of the prophets of Yahweh), the verb used to describe his action is *shṭ*, an extremely rare term in the Deuteronomic History, which elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible has the connotations of slaughter for sacrifice (BDB 1006). In the Deuteronomic History itself, the term is almost invariably used to describe the slaughter of large numbers of people. Only once, in 1 Samuel 1:25, is the term used in the sacrificial meaning common elsewhere. The six other occurrences of *shṭ* in the Deuteronomic History are 1 Sam 14:32, 34; Judg 12:6; 2 Kgs 10:7, 14; and 2 Kgs 25:7. The references in 1 Samuel describe Saul's slaughter of oxen after a battle. The reference in Judges describes the Gileadites' slaughter of 42 000 Ephraimites. The references in 2 Kings 10 describe first the death of Ahab's seventy sons and then the death of Ahaziah's forty-two relatives at the hand of Jehu. The reference in 2 Kings 25 describes the death of Zedekiah's sons at the hands of the Babylonians. It is significant, therefore, that Elijah does not *krt* the priests: he does not cut them off according to the covenant between Yahweh

and Israel. Elijah is not working within the covenantal relationship in the same way that Jezebel is. Instead, the verb *šḥṭ* seems to imply large-scale slaughter of enemies, enemies in the political sense. Elijah's actions were therefore political, not covenantal as Jezebel's were. Perhaps Elijah and Jezebel do not have to be as analogous as they might seem; perhaps we should reexamine the common model of Ahab as a representative of Israel being disputed by Elijah and Jezebel as representatives of different theological systems.

Jezebel, Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard: 1 Kings 21

One question with which many commentators (as exemplified by Martin-Achard's article (1991)) feel compelled to deal is the question of responsibility for the death of Naboth. There seems to be a compulsion to find the guilty party and then apportion punishment. The text of 1 Kings 21 is extremely complicated in its wording and in its ideological commentary. The question of who sees, who speaks and who speaks through whom is exceedingly important for this chapter. It will be seen that the question of blame is not a simple one, nor does it have a simple answer.

In analyzing the first two episodes in Jezebel's story, I focused on one specific word or group of words in each episode and the implications. In analyzing this episode, I will look at the use of words in speeches of the characters

in the entire episode, beginning with the bargaining over the vineyard and ending with the divine pronouncements on Ahab and Jezebel.

The episode begins with Ahab asking Naboth to trade his vineyard for a better one which Ahab owns, or failing a trade, he offers to buy the vineyard. Naboth refuses, saying, "Far be it from me, by Yahweh, for me to give the inheritance of my fathers to you." (1 Kgs 21:3, my translation). Ahab then goes home, and repeats Naboth's refusal to himself, remembering it as, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." (1 Kgs 21:6, my translation). Already, Ahab has omitted the strong oath taken by Naboth, "Far be it from me, by Yahweh", and has reversed the order of the words, placing emphasis upon "you" (Ahab), and not upon "the inheritance" as Naboth had. Ahab sulks in his room, and when his wife Jezebel comes to ask him about his problem, Ahab reports his conversation to her. However, he reverses the order of the offer, telling her that he first offered to buy, then trade for the vineyard (1 Kgs 21:6). His report of Naboth's reply is most telling, however: "I will not give you my vineyard." (1 Kgs 21:6, my translation). Ahab has shortened Naboth's reply even further, omitting the part about the ancestral inheritance. This shortened version is what Jezebel hears.

What Jezebel hears is a simple matter: Naboth has personally affronted the king of Israel. Her reply is

telling: "You, now, you exercise kingship over Israel. Get up, eat food and be happy: I, I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." (1 Kgs 21:7, my translation). She emphasizes that Ahab is king, but then comments that she will get him the vineyard, perhaps mocking him ever-so-slightly. That she is mocking him soon becomes clear: she acts in the next part of the episode to get him the vineyard, which he was unable to gain through being king.⁵

Jezebel's action consists of writing letters to the notables of Naboth's town. Her message is simple:

"Call a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people. And seat two worthless men near him, and let them bear witness against him, saying, 'You cursed God [^ʔ*elōhīm*] and the king.' Then bring him out and stone him until he dies." (1 Kgs 21:9-10, my translation).⁶

The narrator's description of the notables' actions (1 Kgs 21:12-13) corresponds almost word-for-word to Jezebel's letter. The differences are small, but significant: the worthless men are described twice, they say "Naboth cursed" rather than "you cursed", the specific site of "outside the city" for the stoning is described, and the stoning of Naboth is described as "and they stoned him *with stones* [*bāʔabānīm*] until he died." (1 Kgs 21:13, my translation, emphasis added).⁷ The overall effect is one of intensification: every action dictated by Jezebel is described in emphasized detail. The narrator uses the words of Jezebel, but adds the emphasis as comment. The notables,

however, do not report this intensification of their actions; rather they report back to Jezebel with the simple message: "Naboth has been stoned until he died." (1 Kgs 21:14, my translation). The notables use the pual (passive) of *sql*, "to stone", rather than the qal (active) used by both Jezebel and the narrator: the effect is to distance the notables from Naboth's death, a counterbalance to the narrator's intensification of their actions.⁸

In discussing the variations in the speeches in this episode, Sternberg notes that the reader can make three sets of comparisons: between the narrator and the characters' speech, between the speech of different characters, and between the speech and hearing of a character. He points out that this set of comparisons allows "an insight into two complex figures [Jezebel and Ahab]... and exposes them as partners in crime." (1986:309). The set of repetitions in this episode allow for a subtle and indirect form of characterization (cf. Sternberg 1986:309-310).

When Jezebel hears the report of the notables, she says to Ahab to get up and possess the vineyard which he could not buy with money, "because Naboth is not alive, but dead." (1 Kgs 21:15, my translation). She very deliberately omits the crucial fact of the stoning: Ahab does not know how he has come to possess the vineyard, but he does not question it. Rather, he goes out to possess it. Jezebel's omission of the stoning is usually taken to mean that she is

concerned about her husband's reaction to the means by which he has gained the vineyard (cf. Sternberg 1986:309). This is certainly the easiest reading, but Jezebel's shortening of the speech of the notables might also be read as a mirror of Ahab's shortening of the speech of Naboth: she might be manipulating as she was manipulated.

It is at this point that Elijah and Yahweh enter the picture. The scene begins conventionally enough with "the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite" (1 Kgs 21:17), and Yahweh giving Elijah an oracle to say to Ahab concerning his impending death linked to the death of Naboth (21:18-19). However, Ahab never hears this oracle. Instead, Ahab greets Elijah with "Have you found me, O my enemy?", and Elijah replies with "I have found you." (1 Kgs 21:20). Elijah then continues with an oracle against Ahab, but one which is completely different from the one which Yahweh sent him to say (21:20-24). Elijah's speech contains both his own speech and the speech of Yahweh, speech which fluctuates between Elijah as mouthpiece and Elijah as speaker. In verses 21-22 and 24, Elijah and Yahweh's double-voiced discourse uses the language of Ahijah's oracle against Jeroboam in 1 Kings 14:10-11. However, in verse 23, Elijah specifically states that these are the words of Yahweh against Jezebel: "The dogs will eat Jezebel on the rampart of Jezreel."⁹ (1 Kgs 21:23, my translation). Elijah emphasizes the point that this is Yahweh's fate for Jezebel.

However, Yhwh's command to Elijah concerned only Ahab, not Jezebel. Elijah himself has inserted this oracle against Jezebel, claiming divine sanction.¹⁰

Finally (just before Ahab's repentance and Yahweh's decision to delay the end of the Omride house to Ahab's son's reign), there is a narratorial aside concerning Jezebel's effect on Ahab (1 Kgs 21:25-26); the verb the narrator uses to describe Jezebel's effect is *sût hifil*, the same wording which is used in Deuteronomy 13:7 to describe a family member who instigates an Israelite to worship other gods.¹¹ However, primary blame for Ahab's actions seems placed squarely on his shoulders, both in the wording of 1 Kings 21:25-26 and by implication in the reference to Deuteronomy 13:7-10. Certainly Jezebel disappears from the second half of the episode, except for Elijah's brief oracle against her and the narratorial aside concerning her. These two judgements, one by Elijah and one by the narrator, seem designed to drag the reader back into a simple judgement of Jezebel as instigator of all that was wrong with Israel, when Yhwh seems more interested in showing Ahab as being responsible.

Jezebel's Death: 2 Kings 9

Between the episode of Naboth's vineyard and this episode there are nine chapters of biblical text without a mention of Jezebel. These chapters deal with the death of

Ahab (1 Kgs 22), the disappearance of Elijah and the emergence of his successor Elisha (2 Kgs 1-2), and finally a series of miracles performed by Elisha (2 Kgs 3-8). Interspersed with these stories we note that Ahab's son and successor Ahaziah died and was succeeded by Ahab's next son Joram (2 Kgs 1:17-18). Joram is king in Israel, fighting a war against the king of Aram with his cousin Ahaziah, king of Judah, when the next episode begins (2 Kgs 8:16-28).

It is during the war against Aram that Elisha sends a young prophet to Joram's commander Jehu to anoint him king over Israel. This marks the last appearance of Elisha in 1-2 Kings. Elisha sends the prophet with specific instructions to anoint Jehu secretly and quickly, with only the words "Thus says the LORD: I anoint you king over Israel." (2 Kgs 9:3). However, when the young prophet arrives, he pronounces a long speech over Jehu (2 Kgs 9:6-10), seemingly disobeying Elisha's mission, just as Elijah seemingly disobeyed God's mission in 1 Kings 21. Part of the speech (2 Kgs 9:8-9) echoes Elijah's speech to Ahab in 1 Kings 21:21-22, which in itself recalled Ahijah's pronouncement against Jeroboam in 1 Kings 14:10. The last verse of the speech (2 Kgs 9:10) reprises Yahweh's pronouncement against Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:23, but with differences in word order and with an added clause. The pronouncement in 1 Kings 21:23 said, "The dogs will eat Jezebel on the rampart of Jezreel." (my translation); while

in 2 Kings 9:10, the prophet says, "And Jezebel the dogs will eat on the territory of Jezreel, and no-one buries her." (my translation). The emphasis in 2 Kings 9 is placed upon Jezebel, with the added condition that no-one will bury Jezebel. However, as was pointed out above, Yhwh himself has not shown any concern with Jezebel: his concern is with the destruction of Ahab and his descendants.

The first part of the young prophet's pronouncement is the only place where there are no echoes of previous pronouncements. Significantly, it also concerns Jezebel:

"You shall strike down the house of your master Ahab, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD. For the whole house of Ahab will perish..." (2 Kgs 9:7-8a).

This would seem to be a reference to Jezebel's destruction of the prophets in 1 Kings 18:4. The entire pronouncement, placed in the mouth of the young prophet, and double-voiced with Yahweh, manages to link all of Jezebel's textual actions together with a prophecy of her death. The text gives the reader a convenient peg on which to hang a justification for Jezebel's death, one which is thoroughly based on previous events in the text. This pronouncement, however, also lets the reader recall the dialectic between the readings of these previous episodes: is Jezebel the cause of sins or exemplar of sins; is Jezebel covenant-breaker or covenant-maker; and how do the text and reader conspire to make Jezebel responsible for Naboth's death?

This is enough to raise some doubts as to the real reasons for the prophecy of Jezebel's death.

Jehu has his own ideas about the reasons for Jezebel's death. When confronting Joram, he says, "What peace (*šālôm*), as long as the harlotries (*z^enûnîm*) of your mother Jezebel and her many sorceries (*k^ešāpîm*) continue?" (2 Kgs 9:22, my translation). It is difficult to determine where this particular accusation comes from. The terms *z^enûnîm* and *k^ešāpîm* do not occur elsewhere in the Deuteronomic History. They are, however, present in prophetic language. The term *z^enûnîm* occurs twice in Ezekiel (23:11,29), six times in Hosea (1:2,2, 2:4,6, 4:12, 5:4) and twice in Nahum (3:4,4); in almost all of these occurrences, the term refers to the people turning away from Yahweh to the worship of other gods.¹² The term *k^ešāpîm* occurs twice in Isaiah (47:9,12), once in Micah (5:11), and twice in Nahum (3:4,4). The verse in Nahum (3:4) also contains two occurrences of *z^enûnîm*: this is the only other place in the Hebrew Bible in which these two terms are juxtaposed, and it refers not to the Israelite people turning away from Yahweh, but rather to the reasons for the destruction of the Assyrian capital Nineveh. This could be an intertextual reference: in both cases, the object of the pronouncement (Jezebel, Nineveh) is destroyed. Jehu's language, therefore, carries heavy overtones of Jezebel's foreignness and as such, reasons for destruction.

It is interesting that this verse contains the only reference to Jezebel being a mother. Until this point, we may assume, but we do not know, that Joram was Jezebel's son. Fuchs notes that children are consistently shown in the Hebrew Bible as the greatest desire of a woman, and that women are not depicted as not wanting to be mothers (1985a:131-133). Jezebel would seem to be the exception to this rule, as she is never depicted as wanting children. This would be, of course, characterization by the absence rather than the presence of a trait; thus, another reason why Jezebel should be condemned could be because she showed no interest in children, but rather focused her energies in the political sphere by acting with her husband.

It has been pointed out previously that one of the key words in this episode is *šālôm* (Olyan 1984:653); words from this root occur ten times in this chapter: three occurrences of *šālôm* alone (2 Kgs 9:18, 19, 22), six occurrences of the question *h^ašālôm* (2 Kgs 9:11, 17, 18, 19, 22, 31), and one occurrence of the verb from the root *šlm* (2 Kgs 9:26). The term *šālôm* can have a variety of meanings, which gives each occurrence of the term a polyvalence which can lead to a multiplicity of interpretations. The term can mean "peace" as an end to war or as peaceful relations between people or between the people and Yahweh, "completeness" or "wholeness", "soundness" or "safety", as well as "health" (BDB 1022-1023, Olyan 1984:660). In his

excellent article on *šālôm* in 2 Kings 9, Olyan points out that all of these translations cluster around the general concept of "order", and that the other words related to the same root also cluster around the same concept of "order". For example, the verb *šlm* (usually translated "requite") has the idea of the restoration of order, especially when order has been broken (1984:660-661). It is Olyan's argument that the prevalence of *šālôm*-terms in this chapter indicates the disorder in Israel caused by Ahab and Jezebel (exemplified by the death of Naboth), and that Jehu has been divinely chosen to restore order (1984:661-662).

Six times, someone asks *h^ašālôm* (is all well?/is there peace?/is all in order?) of Jehu, and all six times, there is an absence of the expected reply *šālôm* (all is well, there is peace, there is order; cf. Olyan 1984:666). Twice, in fact, Jehu answers *mā-l^ekā ūlšālôm* (what do you have to do with *šālôm*?), and once he answers *mā-haššālôm* (what *šālôm*?), emphasizing the absence of *šālôm*. Four of the *h^ašālôm* questions occur in quick succession, as Joram sends messengers to Jehu as Jehu approaches Joram's base at Jezreel. The fifth *h^ašālôm* of this series is asked directly by Joram of Jehu, and is answered with the reference to Jezebel's harlotries and sorceries (2 Kgs 9:22). It would be expected, I think, in a coup attempt that the death of the king would be the climactic event of the narrative, however, this is not the case in this episode. Jehu does

not stop with the death of Joram and his cousin Ahaziah, but rather continues into Jezreel and forces the death of Jezebel. That Jezebel is the focus of Jehu's revolt is indicated both by his accusation of "harlotries and sorceries", and by the textual feature of *h^aššālôm*. The sixth and last *h^aššālôm* asked of Jehu is by Jezebel herself, and the consequences of that question end with her death (2 Kgs 9:31-33). After Jezebel's death, the sequence of *ššālôm*-terms ends.

Olyan points out that the sequence of four *h^aššālôm* questions as Joram sends out messengers to Jehu, culminating with Joram's hasty exit from the city to meet Jehu, highlights Joram's ignorance of the consequences of his questions: Joram does not know that Jehu is leading a coup, and probably means, "Is all well with the war against Aram?" when he asks *h^aššālôm*. Jezebel, on the other hand, phrases her question in such a way that the reader can conclude that she is not as ignorant as her son. Jezebel says: "*h^aššālôm*, Zimri, murderer of his master?" (2 Kgs 9:31, my translation), which alludes to Zimri's seizure of the kingdom in 1 Kings 16:9-15. Zimri was also a chariot commander, and his rule lasted only seven days because the people would not accept him. Jezebel's question seems to be more of a taunt (Olyan 1984:665, 667-668). While Parker's reading of Jezebel as seductress in this scene is certainly possible (1978), it would not be as consistent with her

characterization in 1 Kings 18-19 and 21 in which her actions are political, not sexual. We will also see in Chapter Four that the woman-at-the-window motif on which Parker leans for his interpretation is also open to a variety of other interpretations.

Finally, we come to Jezebel's death. It is described as follows:

So they threw her down; some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, which trampled on her... But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. (2 Kgs 9:33, 35)

The prophecy of 2 Kings 9:10 has come true, in that no-one is able to bury Jezebel's body. However, the fulfillment of the prophecy that the dogs would eat her is not explicitly stated by the narrator. Jehu, on the other hand, has bought into the prophetic ideology: when his servants come to tell him that they cannot find Jezebel's body, he says:

"This is the word of the LORD, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.'" (2 Kgs 9:36-37)

The prophecy of 1 Kings 21:23 said merely that the dogs would eat her, which was elaborated on by the young prophet in 2 Kings 9:10, when he added that no-one would bury her. Jehu's speech, appropriating the authoritative voices of both Yahweh and Elijah, condones the complete and utter destruction of Jezebel. Each prophetic description of her

death becomes more graphic, as if to more graphically describe her death is to more completely eliminate her. Why is it necessary to disintegrate Jezebel both bodily and literarily?

Reintegrating Jezebel

Jezebel is such a troubling presence that the text and reader seek to eliminate her as thoroughly as possible. She is both the cause of and the result of Ahab's sins. She both breaks and makes covenants. She acts decisively against those who have affronted royal power. She does not act to gain children, nor does she ever express the wish for any. Finally, she comments ironically on Yahweh's anointed king. Her speech to Jehu, mixing both the second and third persons in the address (not indicated in the NRSV translation), indicates perhaps that her speech is double-voiced with the narrator's, allowing the narrator to comment on Jehu through her (Savran 1987:154-155). Once the narrator has used her, she must be disposed of as thoroughly as possible so that she does not gain any more power in the text. We will further examine this situation in Chapter Four.

Although the text and reader work hard to make the "deceptive, instigating foreign woman" characterization effective, there are dialectic, ambiguous aspects to Jezebel's characterization which are often not explored.

There are other reasons to condemn Jezebel, even within the dominant biblical ideology, such as her lack of motherly behaviour. Even these reasons are not often pointed out.

Jezebel is trapped between text and reader when judgements are made. In order to resist the easy characterization of Jezebel as dangerous foreign woman, I think that she can be read as a dangerous *political* woman. She acts to preserve political power, and when it is obvious that her political power has ended, she taunts her opponent with the knowledge that his power too will come to an end.

Now that we have reordered the elements of Jezebel's characterization to indicate the politicization of her actions, it would be possible to read a negative evaluation of her in line with the biblical evaluation of royalty. This would be an interesting line to pursue, but one which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, we must consider the fact that Jezebel is a woman, and apparently does not act like a woman should in the dominant biblical ideology. We will thus turn from the characterization of Jezebel within 1-2 Kings, to an exploration of the characterization of Jezebel within the context of women in the Deuteronomic History.

CHAPTER FOUR
JEZEBEL AND OTHER BIBLICAL WOMEN

Jezebel Among the Women

In Chapter Three, I examined the characterization of Jezebel in the context of 1 and 2 Kings. In this chapter, I intend to examine Jezebel within a broader context: the context of the women of the Deuteronomic History. This examination will give a reading of Jezebel which overlaps with the characterization developed in Chapter Three, but this reading will also develop themes not fully explored in the previous chapter.

There is a good deal of secondary material which can be used in this context, as many of the women of the Deuteronomic History have been examined in some detail. Jezebel is perhaps the only major female figure in the Deuteronomic History not to be examined in such detail, as pointed out in Chapter One. There are many themes which emerge from these studies as central to the examination of women in the Deuteronomic History, such as motherhood (Fuchs 1985a), women as tricksters (Fuchs 1985b), and so on. I have selected two motifs for study in this chapter: the motif of the woman-at-the-window, and the motif of the foreign woman. The motif of the woman-at-the-window occurs during the episode of Jezebel's death, in 2 Kings 9, when

she faces Jehu from her window. The foreign woman motif is more protracted, and as has been shown in Chapter Three, may be seen here and there throughout Jezebel's story. Its most obvious expression is probably in 1 Kings 16, when Jezebel is described as a Sidonian princess.

Woman-at-the-Window:

When Jehu came to Jezreel, and Jezebel heard of it, then she put kohl on her eyes, and she adorned her head, and she looked down through the window. Then Jehu came in the gate and she said, "*h^ašālôm*, Zimri, murderer of his master?" (2 Kgs 9:30-31, my translation)

The motif of the woman who looks through the window is quite common in the art of the Ancient Near East. It is found on ivory, stone and bronze artifacts, especially those of Iron Age Phoenician origins (1000-500 B.C.E.). The motif consists of a woman's head, usually wearing an Egyptian-style wig, looking out of a recessed window supported by a balustrade with columns underneath (King 1988:146). This motif is usually associated with "sacred prostitution" by scholars, in that it may represent Astarte or a similar fertility goddess as a sacred prostitute (King 1988:100).

The woman-at-the-window motif is also found in biblical literature. It is difficult for most scholars to interpret the motif when it occurs in the Hebrew Bible, since they are trapped by the interpretation usually given to the artistic motif. Thus, King acknowledges that the motif is found in

biblical literature, but denies that it has anything to do with sacred prostitution (1988:146-148). In their commentary Cogan and Tadmor consider the Astarte or sacred prostitution motif to be cultic, and thus not pertinent to the situation in 2 Kings 9. To them, Jezebel is displaying courage, not engaging in sacred prostitution. However, they do consider this sexual motif to be retained in Proverbs 7:6 (1988:111-112). Parker does consider the motif in 2 Kings 9 to echo the artistic motif of Astarte, and then leans on this interpretation in order to claim the Jezebel is attempting to seduce Jehu (1978:69-70). Only Exum leaves the Astarte interpretation alone: instead, she considers the woman-at-the-window motif to show how women look out at what men have accomplished (1993:47). I believe that it is not necessary to attempt to postulate two meanings for the motif (as King and Cogan & Tadmor attempt to do); nor is it necessary to read the motif as only being sexual; rather, it is possible to read one meaning for both the artistic and literary motif, but a completely different meaning from those described above.

First, I would like to postulate that there is indeed a clear reference to the artistic woman-at-the-window motif in 2 Kings 9:30. When we examine Jezebel's preparations for her confrontation with Jehu, we notice that first she "put kohl on her eyes" (*wattāšēm bappûk 'éneyhā*) and then she "made her head beautiful" or "adorned her head" (*wattêṭeb*

’et-rôšāh). In the artistic depictions, the woman's head is decorated with a wig, headpiece and earrings, and her eyes are outlined with kohl (e.g. Weiss 1985:fig.172). This physical description of Jezebel as a woman at the window, unique in the Hebrew Bible, I believe points clearly to a link with the artistic motif. This link is made all the more clear by 2 Kings 9:32, in which Jezebel's eunuchs look down at Jehu (described by the same verb šqp as Jezebel's action), but the notice of the window is omitted.

During Jezebel's confrontation with Jehu, "she looked down through the window" (wattašqēp bē‘ad haḥallôn). These three Hebrew words are extremely significant. The first, wattašqēp, "and she looked down", comes from the root šqp, "to look out and down" (BDB 1054). This rare root occurs seven times in the Deuteronomic History, three times in combination with the two words, bē‘ad haḥallôn, "through the window" (Judg 5:28, 2 Sam 6:16, 2 Kgs 9:30). The two words bē‘ad haḥallôn occur in combination five times in the Deuteronomic History, three times with šqp, as mentioned above, and twice with yrd hifil, "to lower" (Josh 2:15, 1 Sam 19:12). In all of these cases, it is a woman who is doing the action through the window: Rahab lowering the Israelite spies in Joshua, Sisera's mother watching for Sisera in Judges, Michal lowering David in 1 Samuel and looking on David's dance in 2 Samuel, and Jezebel's confrontation with Jehu in 2 Kings. Since the Jezebel

occurrence would seem to be a clear reference to the artistic motif, the other occurrences, so similar in construction, gain significance when the artistic motif is assumed to be part of their literary context. The meaning of the artistic motif and subsequently the literary motif will be discussed below.

There is one occurrence outside the Deuteronomic History of *šqp* with *b^e'ad haḥallôn*: Genesis 26:8, in which a man (Abimelech) looks out. It would be interesting to explore this occurrence further: perhaps it is a misunderstanding of the motif, or a subtle play of role reversal on the motif. There is as well one reference outside the Deuteronomic History to *šqp* with *baḥallôn* ("through the window" by another construction): Proverbs 7:6. This is an interesting case, since in the Hebrew it is a man (the sage) who looks out; however, in the Septuagint, it is a woman (the prostitute) who looks out.

For through the window (*baḥallôn*) of my house,
Through my lattice I look out (*šqp*). (MT: my
translation)

For through the window of her house,
Through the lattice she looks out. (LXX)

All of the above occurrences are grouped together by O'Connell as occasions when "a potential for sexual attraction is frustrated by menacing circumstances." (1991:236). This can certainly be the case if we accept the reading of the artistic motif as Astarte or a prostitute.

If, however, we look for other readings, the sexual overtones can become much less obvious. For example, it has been pointed out by Christensen that in Canaanite mythology Mot, the god of death, enters a house through the window (1984:402). We can also see, with O'Connell (1991:236), that there is danger to the woman in all of the occurrences in the Deuteronomic History. It would be possible, therefore, to read this motif not as one of the harlot, but rather as one of an impending death related to the woman.

Reading through the occurrences of the motif in the Deuteronomic History, in order, it may be seen that there is an escalating threat of death correlated to a higher status for the woman. In Joshua 2:15, Rahab is a prostitute (*zōnā*). She saves the Israelite spies and then lowers them through the window so that they might escape. The spies have told her of the impending destruction of her town Jericho, but she bargains with them so that she and her family might be saved. In Judges 5:28, Sisera's mother is a general's mother. She looks out the window for her son, in vain: he is dead. Although she survives, her son/family does not.

The next two occurrences both concern Michal. In the first, 1 Samuel 19:12, she is the daughter of the king (Saul) and wife of the king's enemy (David). She lowers David out of the window to save him from Saul. When questioned by Saul, she says that she did it under threat of

death (1 Sam 19:17). Whether she was so threatened or whether she did it of her own will does not matter for our analysis, there is the threat of death mentioned in the passage. She does survive the threat, but loses her husband. In the second occurrence, in 2 Samuel 6:16, she is the wife of the king. She looks out the window on David's dance (which to her is obscene) before the Ark. As Exum points out, this reference serves to emphasize Michal's limited range of actions: in both 1 Samuel 19:17 and 2 Samuel 6:16, she acts only within the house (1993:47). Although she is not explicitly threatened with death herself in this scene, the end result is that she has no children. As well, both her father and brothers have already been killed: her entire family, both past and future, has died, but she still survives, a point emphasized by David, thereby implicitly threatening her with death. Like Sisera's mother, she loses children, but her loss is much more extensive, with the destruction of her entire family.

Finally we come to Jezebel in 2 Kings 9:30. She is the wife of a king and mother of a king. Not only does she reflect the status of the men of her family, she is herself powerful, as we have seen. Although such a title is not accorded to her at this point in the text, we might term her a *g^ebîrâ*, a "great lady".¹ In fact, in 2 Kings 10:12, she is implicitly given this title, when the sons of Ahaziah say that "we have come to visit the royal princes and the sons

of the queen mother [*g^ebīrā*]." In 2 Kings 9:30, her son is dead, and she is certainly under threat of death herself. Ultimately, of course, she is killed. In 2 Kings 10, the entire family of Ahab (and implicitly of Jezebel) is killed. Jezebel, as well as her entire family, is destroyed.

What we have seen through these occurrences of the woman-at-the-window motif is that the status of the woman increases, from Rahab the *zōnā* to Jezebel the *g^ebīrā*. Rahab is a prostitute. Sisera's mother is the mother of an army general. Michal is first a king's daughter and then a king's wife. Jezebel is not only the king's wife but is the mother of the king's sons. As well, there are increasingly dire consequences to the threat of death as the status of the woman increases, from Rahab who survives with her family intact, to Sisera's mother who loses her son, to Michal who loses first her husband and then the possibility of children, to Jezebel who is completely obliterated along with all her family.² Jezebel, therefore, may be seen as the culmination of women's plight in the Deuteronomic History. Women's plight in the Deuteronomic History is to be consistently under the threat of death; a threat which may be circumvented, but which never disappears.

Foreign Woman, Israelite Man

In the previous section, I dealt with a motif which occurs in the last part of the Jezebel story. Now I wish to

turn to a motif which occurs at the beginning of the Jezebel story, but which then generally appears in the most subtle of ways: the motif of the foreign woman. Jezebel is described as a Sidonian princess in 1 Kings 16:31. I outlined in Chapter Three the general judgement of Sidonians and other foreigners in the Deuteronomic History: they were for the testing of Israel (Judg 3:4). What I wish to explore in this section is the intersection of foreignness and femaleness in the Deuteronomic History.

The foreign woman motif is taken for granted by a number of commentators. Thus when Martin-Achard reviews work done on Jezebel, he declares that in the light of the wisdom tradition (notably in Proverbs), Jezebel is a perfect illustration of a foreign woman (1991:5-6). Long notes that the foreign queen is one of the key motifs for Ahab's story (1984:173). White points out that by being unable to control his "dangerously foreign wife", Ahab is judged unfit to rule Israel (1994:69).

There are a number of foreign women who play prominent roles in the Deuteronomic History: Rahab in Joshua 2 and 6, Jael in Judges 4-5, Delilah in Judges 16, and Jezebel. Rahab and Jael aid the Israelites, and they are praised for their actions. Fuchs, however, states that the deception undertaken by both of these women compromises their characters, even though the result is good (from the point of view of the Israelites) (1985b:140). Delilah and

Jezebel, on the other hand, are usually condemned for their actions, which seem to be against the interests of the Israelites. In her article on the subject of the deceptive woman, Fuchs notes that the deceptiveness of biblical women (both foreign and Israelite) stems from the unbalanced power structure between men and women in the Hebrew Bible. Since women are usually minor characters in the sweep of biblical narrative, only their crucial acts are shown, and these are usually their deceptive acts (1985b:143-144). However, she also argues that Delilah's deception is depicted in Judges 16 as a "lethal and effective weapon", and that it is not linked to her lack of power (1985b:140-141).

Bal argues that Delilah does not in fact deceive Samson at all. Rather, she tells him exactly what she wants from him, and what she intends to do with this information. It is the reader which conspires with the text to construct a reading which blames the woman, since Samson, the man, is supposed to be a hero. The hero must be shown as acting properly, within the ideology of the reader. In order for the reader to elevate Samson, Delilah must be denigrated (1987:51-58). In this argument, Samson is never deceived at all, and Delilah is not a beguiling woman. In fact, it can be argued that Delilah acts in a patriotic or political way, by seeking to help her compatriots win against the Israelites (Bal 1987:50-51).

This reading of Delilah has many similarities with the reading of Jezebel which I produced in Chapter Three. I argued that Jezebel might be read as a dangerous political woman, acting in such a way as to enhance the political power of her family. As well, while she certainly gained Naboth's vineyard for Ahab in a less than savoury manner, she did not deceive anyone about her methods. She did not tell Ahab how she gained the vineyard, but he did not ask; and she may have been manipulating him in the same way as he manipulated her. However, in both the case of Jezebel and that of Delilah, the foreignness of the women is made a part of their characterization: the foreign woman is deceptive.

Fuchs makes an interesting comparison between the episode of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21) and the episode of David and Bathsheba and the death of Uriah (2 Sam 11-12). Jezebel as queen may be compared with David as king: both desire something which is not theirs (the vineyard, Bathsheba), and both effect the death of the person who stands in their way (Naboth, Uriah). However, David survives, and Jezebel is killed. Fuchs takes this to mean that there is a double standard at work in biblical narrative: when they deceive, Israelite men are forgiven, while foreign women are not (1985b:141-143).³

If we accept that Jezebel is a foreign woman, specifically a Sidonian, and that this is one of the primary ways she may be characterized, then we can turn to an

examination of the function of the foreign nations in relationship to Israel. As stated above, the foreign nations exist as a test for Israel in the Deuteronomic History (Judg 2-3). Thus by being foreign, Jezebel serves a narrative function as a tester of Israel. She is, therefore, part of the divine plan, which may explain Yhwh's silence concerning her. She is not judged by Yhwh because she is playing her part. By her actions Israel (as symbolized by Ahab) is tested and found wanting and is then condemned by Yhwh. It is the prophets and their adherents (Elijah, Elisha, the young prophet and finally Jehu) who feel the need to place blame on Jezebel. As each prophet makes a pronouncement, the description of Jezebel's death becomes more graphic (1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:10; 2 Kgs 9:36-37). Switching the blame from Israel to the foreign woman is certainly easier than accepting that Israel was tested and failed.

The above analysis implies a perpetuation of the foreign woman motif. However, what would happen if we decided to challenge the foreign woman motif: does such a motif have to exist? Although the motif of foreignness is an important one in the Deuteronomic History (as pointed out above), I would like to argue that it does not necessarily intersect with the notion of femaleness in a way which creates a "foreign woman" motif. What I would like to argue is that the dominant ideology of the Deuteronomic History

has a problem with strong, assertive, outspoken women characters. Instead of facing this ideology, it is easier for readers and commentators to deflect the problem onto a more familiar interpretation, that of foreignness. The problem then becomes one with foreign women, not all women.

Let us examine some of the assertive women in the Deuteronomic History, starting with Delilah. As Bal points out, Delilah does not have a male relative to whom she is tied in the text (1987:50). She acts more like the hero than the hero does: setting out goals and achieving them. For this, she is eliminated from the text: once her goal has been achieved, she disappears. Comparing her to Deborah, an Israelite woman in Judges (Judg 4-5), similarities emerge. According to some interpretations, Deborah does not have a tie to a male relative (cf. Bal 1988:57-58). She sets out her goals, and spurs her male counterpart Barak to action. For this, she is eliminated from the text. Not only is she eliminated, but her ultimate goal (the death of Sisera) is achieved by another woman: Jael, a (foreign) woman with a male relative, who acts inside her home, not outside of it.

Turning to another example, this one from 1 Samuel, Abigail can be examined in the same way. As Bach points out, Abigail exercises power and speaks prophetically (1 Sam 25). Although she does this to benefit David, and she also acts as God's helper by assuring David's future, she is then

eliminated from the text. Significantly, although Abigail disappears as an active character, she reappears in 2 Samuel 3:3 as the mother of one of David's sons, acting as a traditional wife/mother, unlike her previous incarnation as a powerful woman (Bach 1990:27-33). To Abigail's situation may be added Michal's in 1-2 Samuel: when Michal criticizes David, she is eliminated from the text (Exum 1993:58-59).

Contrasted to these assertive women are those women who act to preserve their family: they are commemorated in one way or another. Some examples are Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11 (who dies to fulfill her father's vow), Hannah in 1 Samuel 1-2 (who dedicates her child to Yhwh) and Rahab in Joshua 2 and 6, who is a foreign woman, no less!⁴

From this brief examination, I think that we can safely agree with Exum's assertion that women who speak with their own voices, and who are powerful and assertive, disappear (1993:199-200). It is not the foreign woman which is a person who must be feared and destroyed; rather, it is the assertive woman who must be feared and silenced. In the cases of Delilah and Jezebel, their assertiveness happens in combination with their foreignness, but it is not that combination which condemns them.

Jezebel, Women and the Deuteronomist

From the examination of the woman-at-the-window motif and the "foreign woman" motif, it is possible to come to

certain conclusions. The first is that the woman-at-the-window motif could have more to do with danger and menace to the woman involved than with the woman seducing someone. The second is that the "foreign woman" motif has several possible interpretations. It may be easier to blame the foreign woman than the Israelite man for the downfall of the Israelite hero, but the foreign woman in the cases of Delilah and Jezebel is fulfilling her function within the story, and as such is not a narrative focus of blame. We can also conclude that the foreign woman does not exist as a motif in the Deuteronomic History at all: what this narrative is most afraid of is an assertive woman, who performs a narrative function but performs beyond that function and then must be silenced so that she does not gain any more power.

Within the interpretations of this chapter, it is possible to see Jezebel as the culmination of the judgement of women in the Deuteronomic History. It is at this point that the woman-at-the-window motif links together with the analysis of the "foreign woman" motif. The consequences for the women who appear at the window in the Deuteronomic History become more dire as the women conform less to the dominant biblical ideology of the woman. Rahab, who helps the Israelite men, is spared destruction. Sisera's mother, who never acts, is spared destruction. Michal, however, who is passed back and forth between Saul and David and who

criticizes both (cf. Exum 1993:44), manages to keep only herself alive. Jezebel, who never acted as a mother, and who used power in the way usually reserved for men, is completely destroyed. Jezebel is the culmination of the motif: she is completely disintegrated in 2 Kings 9 and her family destroyed in 2 Kings 9-11. Jezebel is also the assertive, political woman *par excellence* of the Deuteronomic History. For her assertiveness she is killed and her family destroyed. I believe that the woman-at-the-window motif is the obvious textual feature which indicates the presence of the assertive woman motif. Antithetical women's voices must be eliminated from the text as soon as possible: they cannot be allowed to survive.

Jezebel is obliterated because she has power in the text. She performs a function in the story: showing how Israel is ripe for destruction; however, in order to perform her function she must be given power in the text. Once she has been used, she must be completely destroyed so that she does not gain any more power. She is both literally killed and literarily destroyed; the first is indicated by the graphic description of her death, and the second is indicated by the circumlocution of *g^ebîrâ* in 2 Kings 10:13: when it becomes necessary in the text to refer to her, her name is not used.

Although Jezebel is destroyed, because of the variety of ideological points of view in the biblical text,⁵ she

survives in the text, and she may be given a certain amount of sympathy for the thankless part she plays. In the next chapter, I wish to discuss the homogenization of the ideological points of view of the biblical text in the interpretations or readings created by the authors of modern biblical retellings. In this way, we will see how the variety of readings of Jezebel made possible in the biblical text are narrowed by the reader.

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CHAPTER FIVE
RETELLING JEZEBEL

Reception as Production

Up to this point, I have examined how Jezebel is read in traditional scholarship; as well, I have produced readings of Jezebel which make use of features which are often overlooked by other commentators. In this chapter, I wish to return to how Jezebel is read by others. In this case, I wish to examine how readings of Jezebel are retold in children's bible stories.

First, we must define "retelling". Rabinowitz has produced definitions of several forms of literary borrowing: plagiarism, adaptation, retelling, parody, criticism, revision, and expansion (1980:246-249). Retelling is defined as a work in which the implied reader knows that there is a previous work, but may not have experienced that work; an example is simplification of stories for children (1980:247). This differs from adaptation, in which the implied reader's knowledge of the previous work does not diminish the new work (1980:246). Working from these definitions, we may assume that children's bible stories are meant for an audience which knows that the Bible exists, but are not familiar with anything more than the bare outlines of the stories.

There is, however, a complex interrelationship between the children's bible stories and the original text, the reader, and each other. The relationships are especially complex because the reader of the original text is also the producer of the bible stories, which then also have readers who may or may not know the original text. There is a constant dialogue between readings: at any given time some readings are prominent while others remain in the background (Halley 1989:171-172).

Bal argues that the reader is always responsible for the reading which he or she produces, but that the text itself is not "innocent": the text is a reading itself. She argues that meaning is a product of reading which is based on possibilities in the text (1989:15-17). It is thus possible to argue that every reading is based on some aspect of the text's possibilities. This is exactly the framework within which I worked in Chapters Three and Four, exploring aspects of the text which are often ignored. When examining the readings of children's bible stories, we can look for the patterns which emerge: which aspects of the text are emphasized, and which are not? An analysis of these stories can shed light on how a certain image of Jezebel is perpetuated in modern culture, beginning with ideologies learned in childhood.

Retelling the Bible

What I am leading up to is an issue which is very important for feminist critics: the interpretation of the Bible as a political issue (Shaw 1989:114). As Shaw points out, the Bible is often used as justification for certain social or political realities. For example, those both advocating and opposing feminist points of view often turn to the Bible to find texts which give guidance on proper role models for women and men. Because of their background, biblical interpretations or retellings are often received as truth themselves, and can have a great impact on the reception of the biblical tradition. As well, these popular retellings often deliberately try to influence others, especially by publishing in the popular sphere. They are thus important for the spread of ideologies (1989:114-117).

Shaw uses the example of the story of Deborah in Judges 4-5 in order to explore depictions of proper role models for women. She points out that the way in which metaphors are understood, such as "mother in Israel" (Judg 5:7), depends on the presuppositions of the reader/author. Thus an author who is working in order to find strong women who have not conformed to the usual ideology of a woman's role finds "mother in Israel" to be a term for a national heroine. Another author who is looking for reaffirmations of women's traditional roles interprets "mother in Israel" as a statement about motherhood (1989:118-121). Shaw points out

that a retelling which tries to be coherent often eliminates elements which conflict with the dominant ideology (1989:128); or, the inherent dialogism of the biblical text is made monologic.

In her brief article on children's bible stories, Phy lists some of the most popular biblical stories for children: 1) Moses' nativity, 2) any child-centered narrative, 3) Joseph's story, 4) animal stories such as those about Balaam's ass or David's sheep, 5) adventure stories such as those about Esther, Jonah or the Flood, 6) stories about what she terms flamboyant personalities such as Samson or Goliath, and 7) "sketches of lovable personalities" such as Moses, Samuel, David, and Ruth. The stories which are most often ignored include much of the events of the book of Joshua, which are often considered too bloody for children (Phy 1985:172). She also points out that current trends include stories about women in the Bible; and that although Jezebel is a favourite character with children, she is often omitted while Potiphar's wife and Delilah are included (1985:183).

Phy gives a list of aspects she feels are important to notice when analyzing bible stories. These include the manner of presentation, faithfulness to the biblical text, and the audience (secular, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish etc.) for which they are intended. As well, points to look for can include the treatment of violence, sex, racism and

sexism, evidence of anti-Semitism, and of historicizing (1985:165-166). Obviously, an in-depth analysis of a series of children's bible stories would take all these factors and more into account. However, in this chapter, I intend to look only at a few themes that directly relate to Jezebel: the violence which pervades much of her story, how she is depicted as a woman and a foreigner, and whether her story is embellished or edited. I also will be examining illustrations in the children's books for these same themes.

One important point to determine is whether the reading produced by the reader-as-writer/illustrator is imposed by the reader or whether the reader is exploiting ambiguities or gaps in the text. This is especially important, because as indicated above the authority of the Bible can allow for the reading to be given substantial authority. Does an ambiguous phrase allow a variety of interpretations, or is this phrase merely convenient for stating the preconceived view of the reader (Shaw 1989:122-123). I believe that a combination of the two possibilities is usually at work in the production of children's bible stories: the writer or illustrator begins with certain presuppositions, but the polyvalence of the biblical text also gives many opportunities for a variety of interpretations. I am hypothesizing that the very polyvalence of the biblical text gives problems to writers/illustrators who wish to produce a coherent reading: they must downplay certain aspects of the

text in order to elevate others. What I wish to do, therefore, is examine which aspects of the text are downplayed, and suggest possible reasons for the readings which are then produced. As well, besides aspects of the text which are downplayed in order to produce a coherent reading, there may be aspects of the text which are downplayed specifically for children's bibles (e.g. sexuality).

Readers as Writers/Illustrators

The first set of readings which I would like to examine fall in the loose category of "bible stories", that is, stories based on biblical texts, but not told in the biblical sequence. I examined two such works: K. McLeish's Stories and Legends from the Bible (1988), and A. Bach and C. Exum's Miriam's Well: Stories about Women in the Bible (1991). Both of them are fairly recent; in fact, when I tried to find older works with similar groupings of stories I found that it was difficult to find any which contained any material after Solomon's reign in 1 Kings. This bias towards the omission of post-Solomonic material will be seen in more pronounced form later in this chapter.

McLeish's work is based on events on the biblical text, but with much embellishment of dialogue and description. McLeish adds Jezebel in to each of the confrontations between Elijah and Ahab, giving her a large role in the

decisions which Ahab makes. She is thus given much more responsibility for the drought which precedes the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In his description of the episode of Naboth's vineyard, McLeish omits the dialogue between Ahab and Naboth, and states that "Ahab thought this a perfectly reasonable reply, and would have let the matter drop. But Jezebel took it as an insult...." (1988:116). Ahab is whitewashed of the death of Naboth, while Jezebel is made wholly responsible. Ahab is, however, condemned for continuing to serve Baal in this text, and for this he dies in the war against Ben-Hadad (1988:116-117).

The description in McLeish's text of Jezebel's death is particularly interesting:

"Jezebel survived for thirty-five more years... She sat in the royal palace like a spider in a web, a grim old woman veiled in black, and servants told tales of magic rituals and ceremonies of blood and death at dead of night. Finally, God sent an army commander called Jehu to kill Joram and seize the throne, and the court eunuchs picked Jezebel up like a bolster and threw her out of the palace window. She lay on the ground, flapping like a wounded bat, and wild dogs caught her scent and ran up to tear her to pieces... there was nothing left on the blood-soaked ground but a gnawed skull, the bones of her feet and the palms of her hands." (1988:117)

It is obvious that the sorceries part of Jehu's accusation of 2 Kings 9:22 has been picked up, although the harlotries part has not been. McLeish's reading produces a very simple, integrated characterization: a sorceress, priestess

of Baal (1988:111), who was responsible in large part for the Baal-worship opposed to the God of Israel (although Ahab was also partially to blame). The troubling aspects of the biblical text are completely rewritten in order to produce this reading: which shows an awareness, I believe, that if the text were left as in the biblical original, it would not be so easy to produce this monologic reading of Jezebel.

Bach and Exum are, of course, feminist biblical scholars whose work I have used in the earlier chapters of this thesis. Bach's encouragement to read with suspicion (1993) is one of the primary theoretical bases for my readings of Jezebel. Exum's work on Michal was also helpful in examining Jezebel among the other women of the Deuteronomic History. It was with some interest, therefore, that I approached their book for children about biblical women. They state explicitly in their introduction that they are trying to give women characters a voice which is sometimes lacking in the biblical text (1991:xiv). They also state that they omit stories of rape and brutality against women, preferring more positive stories (1991:xvii-xviii).

At the end of the book, in what they term "A Mosaic for Miriam", Bach and Exum turn to Jezebel's story. This "Mosaic" is meant to deal with women who "are mentioned fleetingly in biblical narrative", as opposed to those women with more sustained roles (1993:145). Jezebel is then

placed with Delilah, Lot's wife and Huldah the Prophet, among others. Michal, however, is given a full chapter of her own earlier in the book; even though, as far as textual presence goes, she is much less visible than Jezebel. I found it interesting that two of the most notorious women of the Hebrew Bible, Delilah and Jezebel, are not given their own chapters in Bach and Exum's work.

As far as their reading of Jezebel goes (1991:151-156), Bach and Exum make good use of the ambiguities and gaps in the biblical text. They read Jezebel as a Phoenician princess lonely for her homeland, bringing in the worship of Baal and other artifacts from her homeland to Israel to make her more at home. Their reading of the episode of Naboth's vineyard is extremely close to the biblical text: they show the shortening of dialogue in the repetitions in the exchanges about the sale of the vineyard and Naboth's death. It is with the death of Jezebel that they have the most trouble: since they are eliminating the violence of the story, none of the prophetic utterances about Jezebel's death are given. Jehu's motivation for killing Jezebel is thus shifted back onto the "foreign woman" justification. The ambiguities which they have exploited throughout their reading of Jezebel to produce a more sympathetic characterization are ultimately defeated by the wrench back to a simplified justification for her death.

Now I would like to turn to what I term "children's bibles". These are works which generally follow a canonical order for their presentation of the narrative. In some cases, they use an abridged version of a translation such as the Revised Standard Version or the Jerusalem Bible; in others, they use paraphrases. These works are usually illustrated lavishly with full colour drawings. These are works meant to introduce the Bible to children. As such, I would argue that they have great influence over the formation of the reading of characters like Jezebel by the attractiveness of their presentation and their easy-to-read text: the image of Jezebel which they create may be one which is hard to eliminate.

Four of the eight children's bibles which I examined deal with very little after Solomon's death in 1 Kings: often Elijah and Elisha's stories were the only ones which are told. These four children's bibles (Turner 1968, Northcott 1967, Horn & Cavanaugh 1980, Wangerin 1981) all tell only of Jezebel's marriage to Ahab and of the episode at Carmel after which Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah. Jezebel is invariably characterized as a Baal-worshipping foreign queen by these readers: Turner says that: "Once she was established as queen she set about promoting the worship of Baal...." (1968:63); Horn & Cavanaugh blame Jezebel for Ahab's worship of Baal, saying "King Ahab was married to a woman named Jezebel who worshipped the false

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god Baal. Ahab also turned to Baal...." (1980:169); Wangerin also blames Jezebel for Ahab and Israel's woes, saying "...as Jezebel was a woman of powerful will, she convinced her husband to build for Baal an altar... Not only the queen but King Ahab himself and the people of Israel worshipped Baal!" (1981:192-193). The powers of association which we saw exposed in the analysis of 1 Kings 16:31-33 are made explicit in these readings: Jezebel is to blame for the altars and the worship of Baal; Ahab was merely a pawn. The interpretation of Ahab as someone fought over by Jezebel and Elijah is alive and well in these works.

Of the other four children's bibles which I examined, one dealt with the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal and the episode of Naboth's vineyard, but did not deal with the episodes of Ahab's death, Jehu's revolt and Jezebel's death (de Sassure 1968). This work, The Taizé Picture Bible, is adapted from the Jerusalem Bible translation. In adapting the translation, blame for Ahab's actions is placed squarely upon his shoulders. The episode of Naboth's vineyard is titled "Ahab arranges the death of Naboth" (1968:148), and the episode is very closely paraphrased, including the prophesies of Ahab and Jezebel's deaths and the destruction of Ahab's family (1968:148-150). Although Jezebel's death is not shown, it is prophesied in the text and thus in effect does happen. This work does incline away from the simple characterization of Jezebel

depicted in the first four works examined in that it stays closer to the original biblical text with its multiplicity of meanings.

Three of the children's bibles I examined showed all of the episodes relating to Jezebel. These three works were also the most comprehensive in their presentation of the Bible as a whole. The first is a recent work, Augsburg Story Bible, which is a condensation of the Revised standard Version. Jezebel's story in this work is hardly altered at all: one major alteration is the omission of Jezebel's sponsorship of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 and Obadiah's saving of the prophets of Yhwh (Aaseng 1992:142-144); another is the omission of the Zimri reference in 2 Kings 9 and Jezebel's body described as dung on the field by Jehu after her death (1992:148-149). To a large extent, therefore, the ambiguities and gaps which allow for multifaceted interpretations in the biblical text are preserved in this work. One of the two clear pictorial representations of Jezebel in any of the eight children's bibles which I examined is also found in this work.¹ It depicts a tall tower with windows on each side, with two hands extending out one window; Jezebel is in mid-air falling head first, dark-faced with black hair, dressed in a red dress and robe with a gold crown (1992:149). The ground is not depicted, and it could be argued that, by being frozen in mid-air out of sight of the ground, she survives,

even though she dies in the text. Her foreignness is not emphasized in this illustration, but her status as queen is: her crown stays on her head even though she is falling head first.

The last two children's bibles are retellings, not adaptations from a translation, although they are comprehensive in scope. The Illustrated Children's Bible (Christie-Murray 1982) places emphasis on Jezebel's power and the fear she could inspire: "The city council was too afraid of Ahab and Jezebel to disobey. They did all that was ordered in the letter and then sent word to Jezebel that Naboth was dead...." (1982:181).² More importantly, this work eliminates the dialogic relationship between the word of Yhwh and the words of his prophets. The description of Jezebel's death and how it fulfilled Elijah's prophecy is placed not in Jehu's mouth, but is related by the narrator (1982:196). This work also leans heavily upon the foreign-god worshipping aspect of Jezebel's characterization, retelling Jehu's charge of "harlotries and sorceries" as "idol-worship and witchcraft" (1982:196). She has led Israel astray as personified by Ahab ("[she] worshipped Baal and persuaded Ahab to worship him also" (1982:175)), and her punishment at the hands of Jehu is justified in the voice of the narrator.

Stoddard's work, The Doubleday Illustrated Children's Bible (1983), emphasizes other aspects of the biblical text:

Ahab is to blame for all that is wrong with Israel, Jezebel being chief among his sins. To make Ahab and Jezebel frightening in children's eyes (presumably) he adds, "During the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, many children were sacrificed to the abominable god Baal." (1983:155). Again, in this work, the final justification for Jezebel's death is placed not in the mouth of Jehu, but in the words of the narrator (1983:165).

Production and Propagation of Readings

From the above outline of the ten works for children which I examined, there are several features which become apparent. One is that those retellings which abridge or slightly adapt an English translation of the biblical text leave more of the possible meanings of the biblical text intact. Those works which retell more freely are also more open to a narrowing of interpretations in order to make characterizations and actions coherent within the ideology of the reader/reteller. This can be seen in many of the works as a narrowing of Jezebel's characterization down to Baal-worshipping queen who led her husband astray. The most graphic illustration of this tendency is in Stoddard's description of the children sacrificed to Baal during Ahab and Jezebel's reign (1983:155), and by implication, by Ahab and Jezebel themselves.

Not only do the retellings almost invariably cast Jezebel in a bad light, they are often so uncomfortable with her that she is eliminated as soon as possible from these retellings. Perhaps it is not quite accurate to say that it is Jezebel herself that these retellers are uncomfortable with, since the four works which do not show any of her story beyond the episode at Carmel also do not tell of the death of Ahab. In these four works, therefore, it might be more accurate to say that these retellers were interested only in what happened to Elijah and Elisha, not in what happened to their adversaries. Jezebel is cast as Elijah's adversary, while Ahab is shown as being led astray by Jezebel and returned to the proper path by Elijah. Since Elijah is shown as the proper prophet of Yhwh, his adversary Jezebel must be shown as wicked and opposing Yhwh. This stark dichotomy leaves no room for dialogic interpretations.

Those works which do show the episode of Naboth's vineyard and the death of Jezebel also tend to lean on the characterization which is sketched out in the retellings of the episode at Carmel. Thus Jehu's condemnation of Jezebel after her death is taken over by the narrator instead. The voice of the narrator in these works completely identifies with the voices of the prophets and the voice of Yhwh, eliminating the conflict between the voice of Yhwh and the voices of the prophets seen in the biblical text. In simplifying the biblical text for children, everything has

been cast in opposites, with no possibility of an in-between, third position. What this does is propagate the characterization of Jezebel as the foreign Baal-worshipping woman. The reader of these children's bibles is disposed, by the clues provided in the text, to create this simple characterization.

Other aspects of Jezebel's characterization have been preserved in Western culture through other means. The primary means, of course, is found in Revelation 2:20-23:

"But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead...."

Here it seems to be Jehu's accusation of "harlotries and sorceries" of 2 Kings 9:22 which has been picked up, so that the image of Jezebel as adulteress is used as a metaphor for one who leads astray from God. The sexual aspect of Jehu's accusation is never depicted in the children's bibles, but lives on based in part upon these verses in Revelation.³

As I have examined Jezebel in comparison to other biblical women in the biblical text, I would like to finish with some comments on women as a whole in the children's bibles which I examined. Although I found it difficult to locate extensive treatments of Jezebel, it is next to

impossible to find depictions of many other women of the Deuteronomic History. The episode of 2 Kings 11, in which Jezebel's daughter Athaliah becomes queen of Judah, is not depicted in any of the children's bibles I examined, in spite of the fact that the child Joash becomes king. Delilah, on the other hand, is shown in six of the eight children's bibles, as are Rahab, Hannah and Bathsheba. Deborah is shown four times, and Michal is shown six times, although her full story is told only twice. Jephthah's daughter is depicted once, as is Tamar. Abigail, the wise women of Tekoa and Abel, and the Levite's concubine are never shown. One of the children's bibles tells only of Delilah (Turner 1968). It would be interesting to further explore the depictions of biblical women in books produced for children: what images of women are exploited in these works, and which ones are never explored? From the brief survey of the works above, it would seem that Bach & Exum's work (1991), although perhaps lacking in some aspects, is a good deal better in telling the stories about women in the bible than most of the children's bibles. Positive interpretations of women in the bible are otherwise hard to find in works for children.

CONCLUSION

REMEMBERING JEZEBEL

In my introduction to this thesis, I stated that the aim of my study was to fill the gap in the study of Jezebel: to begin to make a study of Jezebel, a character too long neglected by commentators. In doing so, this thesis explored many themes: the description of Jezebel by biblical scholars, characterization of biblical figures, the interplay between reader and text and reader, and the propagation of ideologies through biblical retellings. The main focus, however, has been two readings of Jezebel which are interrelated: Jezebel in 1 and 2 Kings and Jezebel and other women of the Deuteronomic History.

From my readings of biblical scholarship on Jezebel, I concluded that there have been several common themes which run through that body of work. The first is Jezebel's foreignness, foreignness which allows her actions to be judged by the commentators. The second is the role which Jezebel plays as a foil for Elijah, a role which lessens her character while elevating Elijah's. Other themes include her will to hold on to power, her seductiveness, and the antithesis between Ahab's house and the house of David. Jezebel is not studied in the rich context of the entire Deuteronomic History. Instead she is studied only inasmuch

as she relates to the prophets of Yhwh, Elijah and Elisha. By focusing only on the role she plays in relationship to the prophets, her importance as a character is implicitly denigrated.

In Chapter One, I noted that only one study has been done of Jezebel from a literary-feminist point of view, that of Tribble (1994), a study which does not attempt to escape the Jezebel-Elijah opposition. Approaching the text from a feminist point of view in Chapters Three and Four, I found it possible to develop readings which set Jezebel apart from the traditional Elijah-Ahab-Jezebel triangle, readings which allow Jezebel to be studied in other relationships. A characterization of Jezebel can be developed which does not rely on one of the male figures of the text for its realization.

Reading Jezebel in the context of 1 and 2 Kings, there are a number of themes which emerge. First, Jezebel's characterization is in many ways ambiguous and dialectical, best expressed by her description both as the cause of and the result of Ahab's sins. Although usually one or the other of this pair of readings is emphasized, the tools are in the text to develop both readings simultaneously. As well, Jezebel both creates and destroys covenants, as expressed by her destruction of the prophets of Yhwh. One of the most interesting aspects of Jezebel's characterization emerges in 2 Kings 9, when she is described

as Joram's mother. Other than this one reference, Jezebel is never described as a mother, nor does she ever act to gain or safeguard her children in the text. This is counter to the dominant biblical ideology of women as mothers, but interestingly, she is never condemned for this failing by commentators. However, it is a good reason to eliminate Jezebel as completely as possible: women who do not act as mothers cannot be tolerated in the biblical text.

In my reading, Jezebel is given power within the text in order to criticize Jehu, and to show the reasons for the downfall of Ahab's house and Israel. However, she gains more power in the text than merely that of playing a role. A good example of this may be seen in the way she manipulates Ahab in the same way that he manipulated her: by the shortening of reported speech in 1 Kings 21. In this way she is unlike Bathsheba in 1-2 Samuel, who never exceeds the role which she is given. In order to resist the easy characterization of deceptive foreign woman, I prefer to read Jezebel as a dangerous political woman, who acts to gain political power. Because Jezebel has gained the power of independent speech in the text, she is eliminated and completely dismembered by male protagonists in the story so that she is utterly destroyed.

Other reasons for Jezebel's utter destruction emerge when she is studied against the backdrop of the other women of the Deuteronomic History. The woman-at-the-window motif

may be used in order to show an important aspect of the biblical narrative's ideology, that as a woman gains a higher status, she suffers increasingly dire consequences in her showdown with death through the window, culminating with Jezebel's death, dismemberment, and the annihilation of her family in 2 Kings 9-10 (and 11). The consequences also become harsher when the woman acts more assertively within the text. Jezebel, who acts in a political way usually reserved for men, is completely trapped, and suffers destruction. She embodies the culmination of the judgement of assertive women within the dominant biblical ideology in the Deuteronomic History. Although she is accorded somewhat sympathetic treatment by the narrator, who is more concerned with the judgement against Ahab and his house, ultimately her actions are impossible to assimilate into the ideology of the proper woman.

The simple readings of Jezebel which we saw evident in the scholarly works concerning her are propagated in popular culture partially because of the readings which are produced in children's bible stories. These readings are for the most part interested only in Elijah and Elisha, not in what are seen as their adversaries. However, the readers-as-authors lean on a simple characterization of Jezebel as a deceptive foreign woman. The voices of the prophets, which we saw were at odds with the voice of Yhwh and the narrator in the biblical text, are completely normalized. In order

to simplify the story, the dialectical aspects of the biblical text are eliminated.

Although Jezebel, and the other assertive, questioning women of the Deuteronomic History are destroyed, their voices remain behind them. These antithetical voices may be cut off so that they cannot speak further, but what has already been said remains as a testament to these women characters. Delilah's straightforward explanations of what she intends to do to Samson renders him a fool, and mocks his heroism. Michal's criticism of David as "uncovering himself to lay before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow...." (2 Sam 6:20) is eerily prophetic of his actions in 2 Samuel 11 and afterwards. Jezebel's destruction of the prophets of Yhwh, and her use of political power questions the relegation of women to the role of wife and mother. Although she succeeded in continuing her assertiveness (where Abigail had failed), she paid a price more gruesome than almost any other woman in the Deuteronomic History and indeed in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. By undertaking this study of Jezebel, I hope that I have returned her voice to her so that now she can be once again remembered.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION: JEZEBEL, CHARACTERIZATION AND READING

1. Although Ahab's daughter Athaliah plays a major role in 2 Kings 11, and is subsequently killed, her death can be read as an extension of the death of Ahab and Jezebel's family as expressed in 2 Kings 9-10.

CHAPTER ONE: SCHOLARSHIP ON JEZEBEL: READING JEZEBEL

1. For example, R. Gregory, "Irony and the Unmasking of Elijah." (1990).

CHAPTER TWO: THEORIES OF CHARACTERIZATION

1. This view is opposed by Sternberg, who argues that in 1-2 Samuel good characters such as David are in fact good-looking as well. However, through a long example concerning David, Bathsheba and Absalom, he also argues that physical appearance serves as an indicator of the shifts in characterization of various characters over narrative time (1985:355-362). I have difficulty in accepting his arguments, leaning as they do on assumptions about the supporting role of women and the way the women in the life of David "influence" him.
2. Again, Sternberg considers epithets to disclose character, rather than serving as identifiers (1985:338-340).
3. In fact, most of the works on character deal with character in the novel. This poses a problem for dealing with biblical narrative, if one considers the novel a modern invention, and its rules not applicable to other forms of literature. However, if one holds, with Alter (1981:23-24), that biblical literature is prose fiction and thus can be subjected to the same forms of analysis as modern literature, then the works on character in the novel can be used.
4. It is, of course, no accident that the characters with a large narrative scope are male. The female characters in the Hebrew Bible almost always have their stories told in fits and starts within the "larger stories" of their male relatives, larger stories which

are almost always taken as the only stories (Exum 1993:9).

CHAPTER THREE: JEZEBEL: AN ALTERNATE READING

1. All translations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.
2. BDB is the abbreviation which will be used for Brown, Driver and Briggs lexicon (1979 [1906]).
3. In fact, *krt* in the *qal* aspect is used when making a covenant, i.e., "to make a covenant" is expressed as "to cut a covenant" (BDB 503).
4. In Deuteronomy 2-3, Yhwh implies that he has some sort of relationship with peoples other than the Israelites, by allotting land to the other peoples. It is possible that the narrator is describing Jezebel's actions within the framework which would be most familiar: a deity acting in a covenantal relationship with his or her people.
5. Brenner points out that the "comic properties of the king's portrayal as a petulant child are emphasized by the effective intervention of his female partner." Ahab's leadership is undermined, and men who behave in this way in the Hebrew Bible are judged as unfit to govern (1994:47).
6. The ambiguity of the God referred to by Jezebel is interesting: almost invariably in the Jezebel story, the national God is called by his name: Yhwh. Here the generic term "God" is used. Could Jezebel be referring to Baal, her covenantal God?
7. This intensification also has the effect of recalling Deuteronomic law, which says of anyone worshipping foreign gods: "You will stone him with stones until he dies." (*ûs^eqaltô bā'abānīm wāmēt*) (Deut 13:11, cf. 17:5). As well, Deuteronomy 17:2-7 also specifies the gates of the town as the location of the stoning and that more than one witness is needed to give evidence. Jezebel is being portrayed by the narrator as nothing if not thorough.
8. This use of the passive verb to highlight the distancing of the notables from Naboth's death is even more pointed when we consider that a common way of

expressing the passive idea in Hebrew is to use the 3rd person plural active, so that "he was stoned" might also be expressed literally as "they stoned him" (cf. Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley §144f).

9. The word *b^ehāl* means "on the rampart of" (BDB 298), however, most commentators read *b^ehāleq*, "in the territory of" (BDB 524), which then agrees with the wording of 2 Kings 9:36.
10. Gregory argues in his study of irony in 1 Kings 17-19 that Elijah does not act according to the proper model for a prophet (Moses). Instead of pleading with Yhwh for his people, he is set against them. Wishing to be Yhwh's only prophet, he sacrifices the people to his own vanity and indeed takes Yhwh's prerogative of jealousy for himself (1990:144-146). Elijah's behaviour in 1 Kings 21 is entirely consistent with this analysis.
11. The text states: "If anyone secretly entices you [*sūt*] -- even if it is your brother, your father's son or your mother's son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend -- saying 'Let us go worship other gods,' whom neither you nor your ancestors have known... you must not yield to or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of all the people." (Deut 13:7, 9-10).
12. However, the root *znh*, "to be a prostitute", can also carry the literal sexual meaning, and this is the meaning of *z^enūnīm* in Genesis 38:24, when the people tell Judah that Tamar is pregnant because of being a prostitute.

CHAPTER FOUR: JEZEBEL AND OTHER BIBLICAL WOMEN

1. Usually translated as a title: "queen mother" (BDB 150), *g^ebīrā* is a feminine noun form from *gbr*, "to be strong, to be mighty" (BDB 149). Thus, I prefer a translation which shows off the strength of the position described by the term: the adjectival "mighty woman" or "great lady".

2. The contrast with Rahab who survives the threat intact with her family may be made even more strong by the feature of *z^enūnīm* in 2 Kings 9:22. Jezebel is described by a word which has the same root as the word which describes Rahab (*zōnā*).
3. Polzin points out, however, that David is punished, although not right away: his royal house is handed over in stages to the nations around him (1993:128-130).
4. I have avoided a discussion of Bathsheba, perhaps one of the best known of the women of the Deuteronomic History. Bathsheba occurs in two major blocks of text: in the first (2 Sam 11-12), she is the object of action, and never acts or even focalizes: it can be argued that she is not even a character here, but merely a narrative agent (Berlin 1983:26-27; Bal 1987:29). In the second block of text (1 Kings 1-2), she acts as a messenger, first for Nathan and then for Adonijah. Although Berlin considers her to be a character here (1983:27-29), again, she could be categorized as necessary only to forward the plot.
5. We have seen that there is a dialogue between the authoritative voice of Yhwh and the voices of the prophetic group: it is this latter group which seems more concerned with Jezebel's destruction, although the narrator also gives reasons for her destruction in 1 Kings 21:25. Cf. Pardes (1992:2-4), who argues against a homogeneous feminist critique of biblical narrative, arguing for an examination of the variety of "antithetical voices" in the text.

CHAPTER FIVE: RETELLING JEZEBEL

1. The other pictorial representation of Jezebel is found in Wangerin (1981:192), and shows Ahab and Jezebel at the head of a large group of people, in front of a statue of Baal.
2. Ahab seems to be more of an afterthought here: the real power is Jezebel's.
3. Other examples of Jezebel as a harlot in the sexual and not the metaphorical/theological sense in modern culture include the Jezebel motif in Margaret Atwood's The Robber Bride (1993).

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