

War past,” but also that “future adaptation—to terrorism or any other threat—is unlikely.” Her pessimism is rooted in both the military’s understandable desire to focus intelligence resources on short-term tactical needs, rather than long-term strategic analysis, and the Pentagon’s political stranglehold on reform efforts.

The 2004 law that created the so-called intelligence czar, Zegart explains, “triggered a scramble for turf that has left the secretary of defense with greater power, the director of national intelligence with little, and the intelligence community even more disjointed” than it was before 9/11. The new position simply adds one more bureaucratic layer to the existing multiplicity of separate entities. The government’s continuing inability to impose centralized management on the entire intelligence community, she believes, is “disastrous.”

Zegart deplores the consensus view that lays the failures of September 11 at the feet of individuals in both the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. If success and failure hung on individual leaders, she says, fixing intelligence agencies would be easy. The real causes of failure are organizational. For example, Zegart credits the FBI with realizing, before 9/11, that its internal information sharing and case coordination needed dramatic improvement. But, as she cogently recapitulates, the Bureau failed to act on clues

various agents had identified that pointed to the impending attacks.

Neither *Spying Blind* nor *Legacy of Ashes* devotes as much attention as it might to what, currently, is perhaps the most pressing and widely overlooked intelligence policy issue: the increasingly common outsourcing of thousands of traditional government jobs to private companies headed by recent retirees from the CIA and other agencies. (The *Spy Who Billed Me*, a blog by political scientist R. J. Hillhouse, is a most instructive source on this trend.) Weiner does remark that “patriotism for profit” has become such a growth industry that the CIA in effect has “two workforces,” and corporate employees are far better paid than public ones. “Jumping ship in the middle of a war to make a killing” is so appealing, he asserts, that the CIA faces “an ever-accelerating brain drain.”

If the privatization of government intelligence work is so grave a problem, congressional inquiry and prompt policy change appear imperative. Yet though *Legacy of Ashes* and *Spying Blind* demonstrate that the U.S. intelligence community remains embarrassingly substandard, both books also make plain that the chances for meaningful improvement are virtually nil.

DAVID J. GARROW is a senior fellow at Homerton College, Cambridge University, and the author of *The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr.* (1981), among other books.

## Was the Lady a Tramp?

Reviewed by Sarah L. Courteau

IT’S THE BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE WE REMEMBER best: the deceitful Eve, the perfidious Delilah, the ex-sinner Mary Magdalene. But it may be that none has lodged more firmly in the imaginations of Good Book readers than Jezebel, the idolatrous foreign queen who led the king of Israel astray and then got hers when she was thrown from her palace balcony by double-crossing eunuchs, trampled by

horses, and finally devoured by dogs.

Since this memorable cameo in the ninth century BC, Jezebel’s name has become synonymous with wickedness and promiscuity, right down to the present day, when it attaches to a line of mid-priced lingerie and a recently launched blog that

### JEZEBEL:

The Untold Story of the Bible’s Harlot Queen.

By Lesley Hazleton.  
Doubleday.  
258 pp. \$24.95

flogs “Celebrity, Sex, Fashion. Without Airbrushing.” But the ignominy that trails the woman is undeserved, insists Lesley Hazleton. Rather, it’s the product of a smear by the ancient authors who told her story in the books of Kings. Hazleton, a one-time Middle East journalist and former psychologist, seeks not merely to rinse the mud off the old girl but to elevate her as a paragon of enlightenment and tolerance for the 21st century.

Jezebel’s story appears in 1 and 2 Kings, which tell the saga of the Israelite monarchy from its creation under David, through its division into Israel and Judah, to the eventual dissolution of those two kingdoms at the hands of mighty neighbors. The books of Kings—except for the postscript about Judah’s destruction—were likely written in the sixth century B.C., after Israel had recently fallen to the Assyrians and its southern neighbor, Judah, feared a similar fate at the hands of the Babylonians.

“It was the perfect time to write a polemical history,” Hazleton suggests, “one that would explain why the north had collapsed, and act as an object lesson for the south.” That lesson? Don’t worship false gods. The fall gal? Jezebel. Once Hazleton establishes this crude motive, she assigns Kings’ “Judean authors” the anonymity of a Greek chorus. Perhaps she is depending on her lengthy bibliography, which includes Richard Elliott Friedman’s landmark book *Who Wrote the Bible?* (1987), to fill in the gaps. (Friedman fingers the prophet Jeremiah and his scribe as Kings’ chauvinistic storytellers; other scholars point only to Mosaic reformers.)

Hazleton pieces together her entertaining version of Jezebel’s story with reportage from biblical locales, close readings of the Hebrew, bits of history, and asides about everything from the myths surrounding sacred prostitution to how dogs have been regarded in the Middle East through time. Interspersed are imagined scenes from Jezebel’s life that rely on considerable invention, but the poverty of Hazleton’s materials doesn’t faze her. She attacks the project with the interpretive certitude necessary to contradict

everything we think we know about the painted lady who spurred Israel’s downfall and was the prototype for the Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation.

The account of Jezebel’s three decades in Israel is related disjointedly in several passages scattered throughout Kings. Married off by her father, a king of the seafaring Phoenicians, to the successful Israelite warrior-king Ahab—likely in order to reinforce a political alliance—Jezebel showed up in the land of Yahweh with a raft of deities. Instead of forcing her to abandon this retinue, her new husband built a temple for Baal (a biblical catchall name for several gods), made a symbol of Asherah (a variation on Jezebel’s fertility goddess, Astarte), and allowed Jezebel to import several hundred priests and priestesses.

Elijah, the Israelite prophet, enraged at this open idolatry, pronounced a curse: no rain. Three years into a devastating drought, he issued a challenge: He and the Baalite priests would prepare



Queen Jezebel met her end when she was thrown to the dogs, but history was hardly through with her.

separate offerings on Mount Carmel, then see whose god struck a match. Elijah triumphed when fire—a bolt of lightning, Hazleton presumes—consumed his altar. He led the slaughter of the loser Baalites, brought rain to Israel, and skipped all the way back to the city in front of Ahab's chariot. Whereupon Jezebel threatened to kill him, and he fled south to Judah.

Hazleton's story, to this point, mostly elaborates on the Bible account. From the Mount Carmel episode onward, she begins to dispute the Kings story, for it reflects badly on her heroine. Jezebel, in her eyes, embodies liberalism, tolerance, and political pragmatism. Hazleton's chief evidence for this characterization appears to be Jezebel's polytheism, though why worshipping more than one god means one plays nice with others Hazleton never explains. The revered prophet Elijah, a wilderness dweller, is the true villain—and nemesis to the cosmopolitan Jezebel, though Kings doesn't indicate that they ever met face to face. For his monotheism, Hazleton labels Elijah a fanatic ideologue, and even his hygiene comes in for a drubbing.

Hazleton has her work cut out for her if she's to thoroughly redeem Jezebel. The queen's sexual depravity, which has been received as gospel, is easy enough to refute. There's no evidence that she seduced anyone—including her own husband—with come-hither glances. Even the Kings writers who had it in for her never hint at promiscuity; her harlotry was idol worship.

But Jezebel did have blood on her hands. According to the Kings account, during those dry years she ordered Yahweh's priests killed. This massacre, oddly, is mentioned almost in passing. But it's there nonetheless. And so Hazleton argues from her own conclusion. When 1 Kings 18:4 says Jezebel "cut off" the priests, it means she merely ended official support, and the line nine verses later that says she slew them outright was a late edit by another agenda-pushing scribe. "Such an act would have been both self-defeating and out of character," Hazleton sniffs. (Apparently, banishing hundreds of priests and severing their livelihoods was not.)

And so it goes. Hazleton dismisses as a fabrication Jezebel's clumsy yet successful scheme to do away with Naboth, the owner of a vineyard Ahab covets. "Jezebel would have been infuriated at the very idea that such ridiculous overplotting could be attributed to her." Nevertheless, according to Kings, it sealed the fate of both Ahab and Jezebel, whose deaths Elijah then predicted in bloody detail.

Once Ahab (in Hazleton's depiction, a peace-loving diplomatist who only fought when he had to) died in battle, two of Jezebel's sons ruled in succession. But a new king, Jehu, was secretly anointed and killed the son then on the throne. When Jezebel heard that Jehu was heading her way next, according to Kings, "She painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked out of the window." This has been portrayed by some as a seduction attempt, but Hazleton steps in and, convincingly, explains the moment in Jezebel's favor: "She will not quaver, will not buckle at the knees, will never dream of pleading for her life. . . . She will exit boldly, every inch a queen." Instead, the dogs get their dinner.

As if Hazleton's attempt to rescue Jezebel from the Kings writers' calumnies weren't ambitious enough, she's also intent on drawing meaningful modern parallels. Fortunately, she confines these to a few short passages. Today's Elijahs are religious hard-liners of all stripes, but "radical Islam" gets the most ink. She compares Elijah's mindset toward errant Israel to that of top Al Qaeda lieutenant Ayman al-Zawahiri, who has advocated "internal jihad," and she insists on calling Elijah's prediction of Jezebel's death by dogs a "fatwa." These tenuous analogies are stretched to breaking when she describes the antithesis of blind zealotry as "the true spirit of Jezebel." Despite Hazleton's earnest attempt to make Jezebel over into a model of tolerance, the phrase is hardly reassuring.

Retellings such as *Jezebel* are the vogue, and Hazleton has made them her specialty. In *Mary: A Flesh-and-Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother* (2004), she did a kind of sinner-to-saint portrait in reverse, conjecturing that Mary could

have conceived Jesus when she was raped by soldiers, and portraying her as a midwife and member of the resistance against King Herod. *Jezebel* is more akin to *Wicked*—the novel by Gregory Maguire adapted into a hugely successful Broadway musical—which presents the *Wizard of Oz*'s Wicked Witch of the West as a sadly misunderstood character, a feisty young feminist born with green skin.

*Jezebel*, too, is best read as a fairy tale—one that riffs on lively historical material. That's not to say that Hazleton's reconsideration isn't valuable. For nearly 3,000 years, conceptions of

Jezebel have fossilized around the bones of her story in Kings. In filling in the blanks, Hazleton reminds us how little we really know of Jezebel, and of so many other biblical characters who have become mere articles of faith. Perhaps Jezebel was just a misunderstood foreigner. Perhaps, when she was bad, she really was horrid. But to imagine her, as Hazleton does, as a teenage bride homesick for the smell of the sea, is to extend to her, for a moment, the grace that history has not.

SARAH L. COURTEAU is literary editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*.

## Music Recital

Reviewed by Jan Swafford

Over the past decade, *New Yorker* music critic Alex Ross has established himself as one of our most talented practitioners of the art of the feuilleton, the popular journal piece. He thereby carries on a great tradition of musical writers including Hector Berlioz, Claude Debussy, and George Bernard Shaw. Now, for the



Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)

first time, Ross has turned his feuilletonist's sensibility to a longer form, the book, and he's made a terrific debut on the big stage.

*The Rest Is Noise* aspires to present "the 20th century heard through its music." The book is a series of sweeping set pieces, held together by recurring characters and themes—such as the promiscuous adventures of a few notes from Richard Strauss's *Salome* that were nicked by several other composers. Each chapter tells the story of a period or train of thought and centers on the main composers of the time. We start with Strauss and the fin de siècle; tour the century's tonalists and atonalists (those who used traditional scales and chords, and those who didn't); are introduced to Americans, from Charles Ives and Aaron Copland through the contemporary music organization Bang on a Can; and observe the fraught careers of composers under Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler. Rather than present composers in biographical blocks, Ross has them come and go in the passing parade, turning up in different chapters and settings: Igor Stravinsky in Paris and later in

### THE REST IS NOISE:

Listening to the Twentieth Century.

By Alex Ross. Farrar, Straus. 640 pp. \$30