

## Perverse Delight

### Some Observations on an Unpleasant Theme in the Old Testament

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## Introduction

Perverse delight – the words say it – is usually regarded as something most objectionable. It is something you sometimes may be tempted to, but when you are well educated and possess some self-control you won't give in to it. It is something one usually blames others for, like in the Old Testament the people of Edom. In this article some remarks shall be made about the description of perverse delight, about the literary context, about its evaluation, and about the question whether it makes a difference if Israel is the subject or the object.

## The description of perverse delight

A classic statement about perverse delight can be found with the prophet Obadiah who blames Edom for taking malicious pleasure in the suffering of Judah:

You should not have looked down on (רָאָה ב) your brother on the day of his misfortune;  
 you should not have rejoiced (שָׂמַח) over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin;  
 you should not have boasted on the day of distress.  
 you should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity;  
 you should not have looked down (רָאָה ב), you too, on Judah's disaster on the day of his calamity;  
 you should not have looted his goods on the day of his calamity.  
 you should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives;  
 you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress. (Ob. 12-14)

In this eightfold accusation the verb רָאָה plays a central role, as it is placed at both the beginning of the first and of the second half. Perverse delight appears to be all about looking at the events and the way one reacts to the things one sees. The joy over the misery of the other is usually indicated with the verb שָׂמַח.<sup>1</sup> The verb רָאָה is constructed here with ב, which can give it the meaning 'to see (with emotion)'.<sup>2</sup> We find the same combination of verbs in Micah 7:8 and 10:

Do not rejoice over me, my enemy.  
 Though I fall I will rise;  
 though I dwell in darkness, YHWH is a light for me.  
 ...  
 Then my enemy will see and shame will cover her  
 who said to me, 'Where is YHWH your God?'  
 My eyes will look down on her  
 at the time she will be trampled down,  
 like mire of the streets.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Vanoni, *ThWAT*, VII, 817-818; see also Amos 6:13; Micah 7:8 and Psalm 38:17.

<sup>2</sup> *HAL*, 1080; cf. also H.-F. Fuhs, *ThWAT*, VII, 240.

Here the roles are reversed. First it is the enemy rejoicing over the downfall of Sion, but after YHWH's intervention she looks (ראה) again to find herself in a shameful situation. Now it is Sion's turn to look down (ראה ב) with scorn on the misery of the other. It is interesting to note that in some modern translations a difference is made between the rendering of ראה ב in Obadiah 12-13 and Micah 7:10. Whereas the Revised Standard Version consistently translates with 'gloat over', the New Revised Standard Version has 'gloat over' in Obadiah, but 'see her downfall' in Micah 7:10. Something similar is found in the Dutch translation of 1951: 'zie niet met leedvermaak' (Ob. 12-13) and 'zullen op haar neerzien' (Mic. 7:10). Some translations are more reluctant in qualifying the verb. For instance, the New International Version, translates with 'look down' (Ob. 12-13) and 'see her downfall' (Mic. 7:10). The translations making a difference between Obadiah 12-13 and Micah 7:10 suggest that it is possible to distinguish between rightfully taking pleasure in the downfall of someone who deserves this, and misplaced joy over unjust suffering. The question is whether this can be done so easily and whether only the enemy can be accused of perverse delight.

In many cases there can indeed hardly be any doubt about the reprehensibility of other peoples enjoying the misery of Judah. Especially in the book of Ezekiel it is a recurring theme. He prophesies against Ammon for having said 'aha!' when the temple of Jerusalem was desecrated and the people of Judah went in exile (Ezek. 25:3), for rejoicing on that occasion by clapping the hands and stamping the feet and 'with all the malice of your soul' (בכל־שאתך בנפש, 25:6). Something similar is said to the Philistines (25:15). Ezekiel also reproaches the Edomites with the same words (35:15; 36:5).

In Lamentations 1:7 we hear of unnamed enemies looking at Jerusalem's misery and laughing (שחק) at it. They are not condemned for it, however. In 2:17 their joy (שמח) is even interpreted as the work of YHWH:

YHWH has done what he purposed,  
he has carried out his threat;  
as he ordained long ago,  
he has demolished without pity;  
he has made the enemy rejoice over you,  
and exalted the might of your foes.

Also in the Psalms the different references to rejoicing over the misery of the other cannot be simply put in a scheme of right and wrong. In some Psalms we hear complaints about evildoers making fun of the suffering of the psalmist, for instance, in Psalm 22:18: 'they stare and look down (ראה ב) upon me', and Psalm 35:15: 'in my stumbling they rejoiced (שמח)' (cf. also verses 19 and 24; and 38:17). On the other hand the expression 'to look down' (ראה ב) is also found in the situation of Israel 'looking down' upon the 'destruction of the wicked' (37:34) and more generally indicating Israel's superiority over the enemy (54:9; 112:8; 118:7). Again, it is interesting to note that in some translations ראה ב is rendered differently, depending on who is the subject. For instance in the New International Version it is said of the enemy: 'people stare and gloat over me' (22:18), but of the psalmist 'my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes' (54:9; similarly in 112:8 and 118:7).

Finally, a short look at the wisdom literature reveals the conviction that 'he who rejoices in calamity will not go unpunished' (Prov. 17:5; cf. also 24:17 and Job 31:29). It may have become clear that according to a number of texts of the prophets and in the psalms there are some exceptions to this rule. Sometimes this joy can be justified, for instance, in reaction to God executing justice over evildoers and bringing down those thought they could position themselves beyond good and evil. At two examples of this we now take a closer look, trying to understand them rightly in their historical and literary context, and also taking seriously modern hesitations in accepting these text as authoritative.

#### Isaiah 14

In this part of the prophecy against Babylon the downfall of the king of Babylon is celebrated with so much bitter irony that it is justified to speak here of perverse delight. In the middle of this song in the form of a lament the prophet rejoices:

All your pomp has been brought down to the grave,  
 along with the noise of your harps;  
 maggots are spread out beneath you  
 and worms cover you.  
 How you have fallen from heaven,  
 O morning star, son of the dawn!  
 You have been cast down to the earth,  
 you who once laid low the nations! (11-12)

Within modern commentaries the problem is usually solved by putting the text within a wider framework. A good and convincing example can be found in the recently published commentary by Wim Beuken:

Auf den ersten Blick erweckt diese Komposition den Eindruck, als sei sie ganz und gar aus Rachsucht und Schadenfreude entstanden. Tatsächlich bedient man sich aller sprachlichen Register von Hass und Spott, aber es gibt auch einige Hinweise, die das Tor zu einer anderen Interpretation aufstoßen, für die sich die Augen der Fachexegese erst langsam öffnen. Diese neue Sichtweise verlässt das Niveau kriegerischer Rachsucht und Schadenfreude über den Tod und die Verwesung der Gegner und begibt sich auf das Niveau des Vertrauens auf JHWHs Macht, die er in den Dienst der Befreiung seines Volkes stellt. Als ein erster hermeneutischer Schlüssel gilt Kap. 13: Babels Verwüstung ist Teil des Gerichts »am Tag JHWHs« gegen alle Sünder der Welt (13,9.11). (...) Der Feldzug gegen Babel weitet sich zu einem Strafgericht über das Böse in all seinen Erscheinungsformen aus, die vom Hochmut gegen Menschen und von der Verachtung gegenüber Gott geprägt sind. Die Prophetie über den Fall Babels wird so zu einer Vision, in der jedes Zentrum arroganten Machtmissbrauchs zu tödlicher Ode verfällt. Als zweiter hermeneutischer Schlüssel gilt Kap. 14: Der König von Babel ist der Prototyp des Tyrannen, der seine (scheinbare) Unüberwindbarkeit aus göttlichem Recht ableitet, ja, der sich sogar Gott gleich wähnt. In seinem Untergang wird deutlich, dass jede Macht, die sich gegen JHWH erhebt, unweigerlich zugrunde geht.<sup>3</sup>

When we look at the literary context it can be noted with Beuken and others that the mocking song (14:4-23) is built up concentric. To mention only a few connections: the beginning about YHWH making an end to the oppressor is paralleled by the ending in verses 22-23 about YHWH cutting off the name and offspring of Babel. It is important to note that the name of YHWH is mentioned only in the beginning (5a) and at the end of the poem (22-23).

There is also a close connection between the verses 9 and 16. Both describe the reaction of 'all the kings of the nations' (9b, 16b) to the downfall of the king of Babylon. The contrast between his former and his present state is indicated by the repetition of the verb רגז: the world of the dead is stirred up (9a) by the coming into the netherworld of the one 'who made the world tremble' (16b). The reference to the world of the dead in verse 11 has its parallel in verse 15, just as the exclamation 'how (איך) did you fall from heaven' in verse 12 introduces the similarly remark in verse 15 'but (אך) you are brought down to the grave'. The beginning of verse 13 referring to heaven corresponds with verse 14 referring to a place above the clouds.

Within the argument of Beuken the relation between chapters 13 and 14 is important: the at first sight questionable description in chapter 14 of the misery of the Babylonian king can be explained as a rightful reaction to the way the king is pictured in the previous chapter. The coherence of the two chapters can also be based on more literary grounds, because there appear to be many connections. It is especially interesting to note the use of the verb רגז. In 13:13 it is used of YHWH making the heaven tremble, in 14:16 the subject is the king who made the earth tremble, in 14:9 we hear of the netherworld trembling because of the descent of the king. In both 13:13 and 14:16 the verb רגז is paralleled by רעש, 'to shake'. This use of these two verbs denotes the rivalry between YHWH and the

<sup>3</sup> Willem A.M. Beuken, Jesaja 13-27 (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum AT), Freiburg: Herder 2007, 105-106.

king, ending in the king finding his right place not among the gods in heaven, but covered with worms in the netherworld. A similar function seems to have been attributed to the word עברה, 'anger' (of YHWH in 13:9; of the king in 14:6).

Like chapter 14, chapter 13 has a concentric structure: both beginning (verses 1-6) and end (verses 17-22) describe the coming of peoples destroying Babylon (note the repetition of the name of Babylon in the verses 1 and 19, of 'kingdoms' in verses 4 and 19, and the relation between the gathered nations in verse 4 with the names of peoples in the verses 17 and 20). The description of the feebleness and fear (7-8) is paralleled by the attempt to flee for the massacre (13-16; note the repetition of על-כן in 7 and 13). Both verse 9 and verse 12 indicate that mankind shall be decimated. This leaves the verses 10-11 as the central part of the chapter: the heavenly bodies shall be darkened and the proud shall be humiliated.

When we now place these chapters with their concentric structure next to each other, we see that many of their parallels fit within this scheme:

#### Isaiah 13

vss. 1-6

בבל (1)

anger (אף) of YHWH (vs. 3)

כל-הארץ

vss. 7-9

weakness (רפה) (7)

the coming (בוא)

of the day of YHWH

on earth

vss. 10-11

כוכבי of heaven (10)

יהלי (10)

sunrise (שמש בצאתו) (10)

vss. 13-16

רגז / רעש (13)

חרב (15)

בי (16)

vss. 17-22

death of children (18)

wilderness (21-22)

#### Isaiah 14

vss. 4-8

בבל (4)

anger (עברה) of the king (6)

כל-הארץ

vss. 9-11

weakness (חלה) (10)

the coming (בוא)

of the king

into the netherworld

vss. 12-15

כוכבי of El (13)

הילל (12)

dawn (שחר) (12)

vss. 16-20

רגז / רעש (16)

חרב (19)

בי (17)

vss. 21-23

death of children (21-22)

wilderness (23)

This parallel structures underlines that 14:4-23 can be read as a reaction to the fulfilment of what is announced in chapter 13, to which it is related in both content and form. An important consequence is that in the present context Isa. 14:12-15 is related to 13:10-11. The latter verses play a central role. Their last lines give a summary of the two chapters: YHWH shall stop (cf. 14:4b) the arrogance of the proud; He shall make them fall (cf. 14:12).

So the structure of these chapters underlines that the downfall of the tyrant is balanced by his arrogance. He has fallen so deep because he thought so high of himself. One can only be delighted that this happens. This should not be called perverse. It is a way of taking fully seriously the wickedness that is part of our reality.

#### Nahum 2-3

The second example is taken from the book of Nahum which seems to be overloaded with feelings of revenge and therefore more than happy with the devastation of Niniveh. The capitol of the feared Assyrians is conquered and devastated together with all its inhabitants. It is described as a rightful judgment of the avenging God of Israel:

‘Behold, I am against you,’  
pronouncement of YHWH of hosts.  
‘And I shall uncover your private parts up until your face  
and I shall let the nations stare (ראה hif.) at your nakedness  
and kingdoms at your shame.  
And I shall throw filth at you  
and I shall make you contemptible  
and make you a spectacle (כראי).’ (Nah. 3:5-6)

As with Isaiah 14 one can find many examples in modern commentaries of attempts to cope with this unmistakable form of perverse delight. For instance, in the monograph of Gerlinde Baumann on the first part of the book of Nahum. She solves the problem redaction critically. With many others she assumes that the first chapter of the book of Nahum was added as an introduction to the vision of the downfall of Niniveh. By quoting the famous confession of Exodus 34 about God as a merciful God things look differently:

Die Aussage von Nah 1,9-3,19 wird durch die Voranstellung des Psalms verändert. Das zentrale Stichwort נקם wandelt die bloße Gewalttat zur Vergeltung. Damit wird ein greifbarer rechtlicher Rahmen für JHWHs Tun gesetzt. Durch die Anknüpfung an die Gnadenformel aus Ex 34,6f (Nah 1,2.3a) wird sichergestellt, daß das göttliche Vergeltungshandeln zu einem wesentlichen Charakteristikum JHWHs gehört, welches durch die göttliche Gnade und Barmherzigkeit zu komplettieren ist. Die Einordnung des göttlichen Zorns als Theophaniegeschehen (Nah 1,3b-6) enthebt JHWHs Handeln an Ninive dem Vorwurf der Einmaligkeit und Willkür.<sup>4</sup>

Again, it is good to look at the text also from a more formal point of view, before entering into the discussion of its theological message. In Nahum 2-3 we find the description of the downfall of Ninive. A closer look at the text reveals that it is structured according to a chiasmic arrangement emphasizing the oracles spoken in the name of YHWH in 2:14 and 3:5.<sup>5</sup> The connections between the different parts of the chiasmic structure can be described as follows.

- a. There is a fourfold connection between the beginning and the end of the vision. The reference at the outset to the mountains (הנה עליההרים in 2:1a) is taken up at the end (עליההרים in 3:18). We can also note the repetition in beginning and end of the verb שמע. 2:1a speaks of a messenger who lets us hear of peace (שמע שמעך) this message (שמע שלום), draeh ohw lla ot edam si ecnerefer dne eht ta saerehw (שמע שמעך שלום). In both cases it is combined with the notion of feasting: חגי יהודה חגיד, ‘celebrate, Judah, your feasts’ (2:1a) and תקעו כף עליך, ‘they clap their hands over you’ (3:19). This is not a repetition, but the words are clearly related as can be derived from Psalm 81:4, where they form a parallel pair. Finally, it is hardly a coincidence to find the verb עבר describing the violent behaviour of the enemy in 2:1b is repeated at the very end in the message that the evil deeds have stopped (3:19b).
- b. In 2:2a the enemy is called ‘scatterer’ (מפיץ). The parallel with מקבץ, with the opposite meaning ‘someone to gather’, in 3:18 (note the use of the verbs פוז and קבץ next to each other in Deut. 30:3; Ezek. 11:17; 20:34, 41; 28:25; 29:13) can be seen as an indication of the complete reversal of fates: the people of the ‘scatterer’ got scattered so much that it not possible any more to gather them.
- c. The reference to YHWH together with his people Jacob/Israel in 2:3 is balanced by the call to the ‘king of Assyria’ in 3:18. The apparent wish of the poet to make this connection may explain why the

<sup>4</sup> Gerlinde Baumann, *Gottes Gewalt im Wandel: Traditionsgeschichtliche und intertextuelle Studien zu Nahum 1,2-8* (WMANT 108), Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag 2005, 244.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. K. Spronk, *Nahum* (HCOT), Kampen: Kok 1997, 4-5; to the indications listed there some new can now be added.

style is not so fluent here, which led to the suggestion by the editor of the *BHS* and others to delete these words. The Masoretic text, however, also seems to be supported by another acrostic (next to the one in the first chapter), namely the first letters of the four stichae of 3:18 forming the sequence נִינוּ which could very well have been meant as a reference to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.<sup>6</sup>

d. 2:4-5 give a vivid description of the fierce army. This has its parallel in the second part of the poem in the simile of the locusts (3:15b-17), because we also know from other texts that a threatening army can be compared to these devouring insects (see Judg. 6:5; 7:12; Jer. 46:23; and especially Jer. 51:27, which like Nahum mentions horses in this connection).

e. In 2:6 first the attacking army is mentioned, followed by the defenders on the wall (חומה). In the corresponding second part of the poem this order is reversed: before the devastators we hear of the enforcement of the stronghold (מבצר in 3:14). The quoted Hebrew words are parallel (cf. Isa. 25:12; Jer. 1:18) and can therefore be interpreted as indication that these two parts of the poem are linked.

f. In 2:7 and 3:13 the link is even more clear, because like in 2:1-2 // 3:18-19 some of the words are repeated. שַׁעֲרֵי הַנְּהָרוֹת נִפְתָּחוּ, 'The gates of the rivers are opened' (2:7a), is taken up in 3:13: וְהַנְּפִתָּחוּ פֶתְשַׁעֲרֵי אֶרֶץ, 'the gates of your land are opened wide'.

g. The next parallel is less obvious, but within the present context hardly coincidental. The difficult verse 2:8 is much debated, but it is certain that we are dealing here with women (אמהתיה, 'her maidens') and this has a parallel in the comparison of the soldiers in 3:13 with women.

h. Things are more clear again in the obvious combination of 2:9 and 3:8 mentioning respectively the cities of Nineveh and No-Amon, both associated with water, the latter even thrice. Just like this association with water was worked out in more detail in 3:8 so the short indications in 2:9b about the inhabitants fleeing from Nineveh are elaborated in 3:9-12 comparing what had happened to No-Amon to what is awaiting Nineveh. This expansion breaks the regular rhythm within the chiasmic structure and can be explained as a way the poet emphasizes this comparison of Nineveh with No-Amon. It is very well possible – and this literary analysis supports this – that the Assyrian boasting after taking of the Egyptian capital was the immediate occasion for the prophecy of Nahum.

i. The centre of the chiasmic structure is indicated by the repeated phrase הַנְּנִי אֵלֶיךָ נָא יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת (2:14; 3:5). The first announcement (2:14-3:4) takes up elements from the first part of the poem, when it refers to horses and chariots (2:14; 3:2-3; cf. 2:4-5) and lions (2:14; cf. 2:12-13). The second announcement (3:5-8) can be read as a prelude to the second part of the poem. The reference to nations mentioned in 3:5 can be connected to the enumerations of different peoples in 3:9. The remarkable questions in 3:7 have their counterpart in 3:19, both describing the reaction to the destruction of city, first by all those who see it (כָּל־רֹאִי) and then by those who heard about it (כָּל שֹׁמְעֵי שְׁמֶךָ). The rhetoric question: 'Who (מִי) will grieve for her?' is related to another question: 'Upon whom (עַל־מִי) has not come your evil continually?'

The chiasmic structure of Nahum 2:1-3:19 can now be summarized as follows:

- a. עבר / חגי יהודה חגיך / משמיע שלום / הנה עליההרים 2:1
- b. מפּיץ 2:2a
- c. ישראל / יעקב / יהוה 2:3
- d. 2:4-5 the fierce army
- e. חומה 2:6
- f. שַׁעֲרֵי הַנְּהָרוֹת נִפְתָּחוּ 2:7
- g. אמהתיה 2:8
- h. מים / נינוה 2:9
- \* 2:14-3:4      הַנְּנִי אֵלֶיךָ נָא יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
- \* 3:5-8        הַנְּנִי אֵלֶיךָ נָא יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
- h'. מים / נא אֶמֶן 3:8
- g'. נשים 3:13

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Spronk, *Nahum*, 141, and L.F. Bliese, 'A Cryptic Chiasmic Acrostic: Finding Meaning From Structure in the Poetry of Nahum', *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 7 (1995), 48-81; esp. 70, who notes a 'patterning of initial letters' in this verse with two times a נ at the beginning of verselines in 3:18 and two times a כ at the beginning of the final two verselines of 3:19. According to Bliese they point respectively to Nineveh and to the king.

- f'. 3:13 פתוח נפתחו שערי ארצך  
 e'. 3:14 רצבם  
 d'. 3:15b-17 the simile of the locusts  
 c'. 3:18a מלך אשור  
 b'. 3:18b מקבץ  
 a'. 3:18-19 עבר / תקעו כף עליך / לכ יעמש דעמש / על-ההרים

It may have become clear that from a literary point of view Nahum 3:5-6 is part of the center of the prophetic vision. The present context underlines that the cruel downfall of Nineveh is in the first place due to the unquestionable judgment of YHWH, mentioned precisely in the middle of the vision. The structure of the text also emphasizes that this fate of Nineveh is something to be welcomed by the spectators, because the chiasmic structure begins and ends with their happiness. So what is described in Nahum 2-3 more than, as it called by Baumann, 'bloße Gewalttat'. It is a well considered response to the Assyrian abuse of power, inspired by the trust that YHWH shall not leave its evil go unpunished. As with Isaiah 14 the harsh verdict upon the foreign king and his people should be interpreted as something he called forth upon himself. The prophetic visions should be read in the light of Genesis 9:6 ('Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed') or Matthew 26:52 ('all who draw the sword will die by the sword').

#### The book Judges – the roles reversed

Sometimes delight over the misery of the other may be justified and should not be called perverse. From the book of Judges we can learn that one should be careful with making an all too sharp and simple distinction here between good and bad, attributing the latter to the enemy.

Again, our thematic approach is combined with a literary analysis of the text. There is a growing number of synchronic studies of the book of Judges.<sup>7</sup> Although the results are very diverse and for this reason sometimes severely criticized by those advocating the diachronic approach,<sup>8</sup> it cannot be denied that the different stories of the book of Judges are linked in many ways. One of these links is the way in which the misfortune of the characters is described and evaluated.

In the beginning of the book of Judges all things seem to be clear when it comes to the question who is good and who is bad. People are treated, punished or killed accordingly. A first, telling example of a negative, disrespectful image of the enemy is found in 1:6. The captured Canaanite king Adonibezek is mutilated by cutting off his thumbs and toes. Apparently he had done the same with his captives. So this fits in with the image from the prophetic texts cited above of violence evoked by violence.

According to 3:12-26 the Moabite king Eglon is a despicable figure. He is fat and dumb. His servant appear to not very smart either, because they do not realize that some people are left-handed, even when they are from Benjamin ('son of the right hand') like Ehud. So Ehud can take his sword with him when he comes before the king. After Ehud killed the king, losing his sword in the layers of the king's belly, the servant do not dare to enter assuming that the king is in the toilet. So again the reader is confronted with a pitiful sight of the enemy, who is made a laughing-stock.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., among others, the recent studies of Y. Amit, *The Art of Editing* (Biblical Interpretation Series 38), Leiden: Brill 1999; E. Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives* (Judg 6-12) (SVT 106), Leiden: Brill 2005; and G.T.K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study*, (SVT 111), Leiden: Brill 2006.

<sup>8</sup> According to G. Andersson, *The Book and Its Narratives: A Critical Examination of Some Synchronic Studies of the Book of Judges*. Örebro: Universitetsbibliothek 2001, obvious tensions and ambiguities are by too simply resolved by classifying them as literary devices. A. Scherer, *Überlieferungen von Religion und Krieg: Exegetische und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Richter 3-8 und verwandten Texten*. WMANT 105. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 2005, 18, remarks: 'Der Wunsch, den Texten möglichst hohen Respekt zu zollen, führt so, wenn auch ungewollt, zu einem Resultat, das auf das Gegenteil hinausläuft. Statt Exegese zu betreiben, die dem Facettenreichtum der mehrstufigen entstandenen Texte Rechnung trägt, wird, bedingt durch den Zwang, alles auf ein und derselben Ebene zu betrachten, Eisegese kultiviert'. See now also the reaction to this kind of criticism against the synchronic approach by G.T.K. Wong, 'Narratives and Their Contexts: A Critique of Greger Andersson with Respect to Narrative Autonomy', *SJOT* 20 (2006), 216-230.

In chapters 4 we hear of the mighty Canaanite commander Sisera who is killed by a woman, Jael. She offered him refuge, treated him like a mother her child by giving him milk to drink and covering him up. Then she kills him with a strange weapon: a tent peg. The song in chapter 5 celebrating the victory over Sisera describes how his real mother waits for him in vain. This certainly is malicious.

At a certain point in the book of Judges the roles are reversed. Some Israelites experience now themselves the unworthy fate that seemed reserved for the enemy. According to chapter 9 Abimelek is also killed by a woman, using an equally strange weapon as Jael before. This time it is a grinding stone.

In the next story, about Jephthah and his daughter, we find a rehearsal of the sad theme of a parent confronted with the death of his child. Compared to what we read about Sisera and his mother, things have become even worse. This time the father should blame himself for having caused the death of his daughter.

The mutilation of the body of the enemy in chapter 1 has a dreadful parallel in the far more worse mutilation of the body of the raped concubine of chapter 10. She is cut into twelve pieces. Moreover, this is the introduction to a bloody battle between the tribes of Israel. Whereas in chapter 1 they were still trying to fight the Canaanite enemy, they now have become their own enemies. The Canaanites must have been very happy with that.

As a conclusion it can be noted that according to the Old Testament delight in the suffering of the other is not always perverse and sometimes even justified. This is especially so when it can be demonstrated that someone receives the same blows as he had given others. He who is laughing at the other's misery should be careful, however, because he can be made into the object of ridicule himself.