

## METAPHOR'S FORGOTTEN BROTHER: A SURVEY OF METONYMY IN BIBLICAL HEBREW POETRY<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Metaphor has long been a subject of interest for biblical scholarship; however metonymy, which is closely related to metaphor, has received far less attention. Metaphor and metonymy are distinct in their conceptual processes, metaphor juxtaposes two conceptually distinct domains and metonymy creates relationships within one conceptual domain, but they share many similarities and often function in concert in poetry. Although metaphor has received the lion's share of our attention, further study of metonymy will enrich our knowledge of metaphor and the poetics behind biblical poetry (i.e., the mechanisms and principles that govern poetry). This article introduces the two main forms of metonymy: taxonomic and partonomic. Taxonomic metonymy is based upon relationships between a more comprehensive and less comprehensive category (e.g., SPECIFIC FOR GENERAL), and partonomic metonymy is based upon contiguous relationships (e.g., PART FOR WHOLE). It surveys the various poetic functions of partonomic metonymy (semantic compaction, oblique reference, and semantic multivalency), and concludes by illustrating how accounting for metonymy can aid in solving the interpretive difficulties in the poetic passage of Jr 5:15-16.

### INTRODUCTION

Metaphor has long been a subject of interest in biblical poetry; however metonymy, which is closely related to metaphor, has received far less attention. This discrepancy is quite understandable. For example, the metaphor of God as a woman in labour in Is 42:14 generates numerous theological and exegetical discussions, but the metonymy of "house" (בַּיִת) for household members in 1 Sm 2:3 just does not elicit the same

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excitement and vigorous research. Although the following is by no means scientific or exhaustive, a survey of the indices of a few prominent, literary studies on biblical poetry illustrates: *The art of biblical poetry* (Alter 1985:223) has four listings for metonymy and 28 for metaphor; *Classical Hebrew poetry* (Watson 1995:397) has three for metonymy and 40 for metaphor; *The literary guide to the Bible* (Alter and Kermode 1987:675) has four for metonymy and subsumes metaphor under imagery with over 50 listings. To use a metaphor, metonymy is metaphor's forgotten brother.<sup>2</sup>

Metaphor and metonymy are distinct in their conceptual processes, metaphor juxtaposes two conceptually distinct domains and metonymy creates relationships within one conceptual domain, but they share many similarities and often function in concert in poetry.<sup>3</sup> Poetry in the Hebrew Bible (HB) is filled with metaphors, but it also contains a fair share of metonymies. Although metaphor has received the lion's share of our attention, further study of metonymy will enrich our knowledge of metaphor and the poetics behind biblical poetry (i.e., the mechanisms and principles that govern poetry). This article introduces (1) the two main forms of metonymy, taxonomic and partonomic, (2) surveys the various poetic functions of partonomic metonymy (semantic compaction, oblique reference, and semantic multivalency), and (3) concludes by illustrating how accounting for metonymy can aid in interpreting difficult poetic passages.

## UNDERSTANDING METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Because both metaphor and metonymy employ mappings between two semantic domains to create their meanings, they are easily confused. They are both conceptual processes, but each functions differently in their conceptual mappings. The most noticeable difference is that the source and target domains of a metaphor come from two distinct, incongruous domains, but with metonymy, the source and target domains

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<sup>2</sup> Sajé (2009:47-50) also notes this comparable lack of attention in English literature and argues for metonymy as a central component of poetry.

<sup>3</sup> Lakoff and Turner (1989:104-106) provide an excellent analysis of the intertwining of metaphors and metonymies in a Norse poem.

are both contained within one conceptual domain. Note the following contrastive examples:

- (1a) John is the **head** of the company. (INSITUATION IS A PERSON)
- (1b) It costs the company ten thousand dollars per **head** to insure against accidents. (PART FOR WHOLE)

In example (1a), “head” is used metaphorically because the concept of a company and its employees are conceptualised as a person and its many parts. The relationships that organise how a person is understood are also applied to how the company is understood. As a result, the head of the company is understood, for example, as a CEO or president and not as a janitor. In example (1b), a person is not re-conceptualised as a head, but rather, the concept of the head serves as a subdomain within the greater conceptual domain, PERSON, for referencing a person. Because the mental link between a person and their head is so prominent, the head can conceptually represent the person within the conceptual domain of PERSON.

## **PARTONOMIC AND TAXONOMIC METONYMY**

Metonymy is also different from metaphor in that metonymy has two distinct forms, partonomic and taxonomic. Consider the following example with the previous PART FOR WHOLE example (1b):

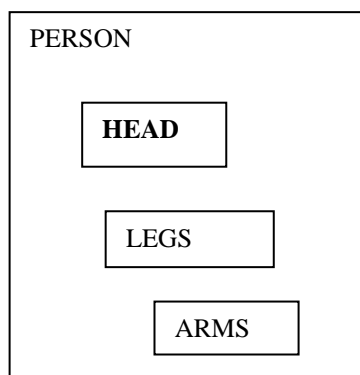
- (2) Dad bought oreos at the store, but they were not real Oreos.

In example 2, “oreo” is a metonymy in which the name brand Oreo represents any type of crème filled chocolate sandwich cookie. Although examples (1b) and (2) are similar and seem to fall under the general conceptual metonymy, PART FOR WHOLE, they are fundamentally different in conceptual categorisation. Ken-ichi Seto (1999:91) provides the following definitions:

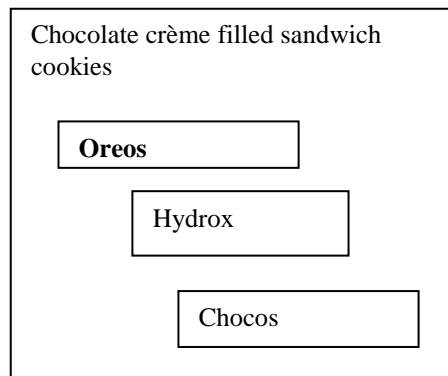
Partonomic Metonymy: the referential transfer phenomenon based upon the spatio-temporal contiguity as conceived by the speaker between an entity and another in the world.

Taxonomic Metonymy: conceptual transfer phenomenon based on the semantic inclusion between a more comprehensive and a less comprehensive category.

### Contiguous Categorisation



### Taxonomic Categorisation



**Fig. 1** Categorisation types for metonymy

As a result, example (1b) is a partonomic transfer because HEAD and PERSON are contiguous entities; that is, they are related but dissimilar entities.<sup>4</sup> Example (2) is taxonomic transfer because Oreo is a specific type of chocolate, crème filled, sandwich cookie. Oreo is not contiguous with other chocolate, crème filled, sandwich cookies, but rather, it is a member of the category of chocolate, crème filled, sandwich cookies.

Another way to view metonymy is through its conventional and unconventional usages (Gibbs 1999:64). Examples (1b) and (2) are conventional usages of metonymy in that they are automatically understood and pedestrian idioms. A person hearing or reading these expressions does not have to stop and think what the metonymy denotes: the terms “oreo” and “head” are among the commonly used words to denote crème filled chocolate cookies and a person. In short, they are conventional forms of language despite the fact that they are metonymies. A humorous example of an

<sup>4</sup> Kövecses (2003:143-162) provides a catalogue and survey of the many different types of partonomic metonymy.

unconventional partonomic metonymy comes from the comedy-film, *The Devil Wears Prada*, in which one character exclaims:

- (3) I'm just one stomach flu away from my goal weight.

The humour stems from the unconventional relationship in which the stomach flu denotes desired weight-loss (SOURCE FOR RESULT). Normally the stomach flu is associated with pain and unpleasantness; however in this example, the unpredictable and sudden onset of a stomach flu is metonymically conceptualised as easy, serendipitous weight-loss. For an unconventional taxonomic metonymy, imagine a scenario in which two sports announcers are commenting upon a basketball game with LeBron James (considered to be the most dominant basketball player of the current decade):

- (4) Announcer 1: LeBron James is the Michael Jordan of our era.  
Announcer 2: If he is lucky, he can also be the next Michael Strahan.  
Announcer 1: What do you mean?  
Announcer 2: He may become a successful morning, television news host on account of his similar charisma.

The metonymy of Michael Jordan is a conventional taxonomic metonymy for the category of great basketball players. In contrast, the second announcer uses an unconventional metonymy, Michael Strahan (a retired American-style football player), in order to achieve a poetic effect through the repetition of dominant athletes with the first name Michael. The name "Michael Strahan" does not automatically reference successful athletes that transitioned into television news (since there are no paragons for this category) and it is only selected from the numerous members of this category in order to craft a rejoinder with poetic flourish.

## **TAXONOMIC METONYMY IN THE HB**

The following survey of taxonomic metonymy in the HB provides two contrastive examples of taxonomic metonymy, a conventional, SPECIFIC FOR GENERIC vs. an

unconventional, GENERIC FOR SPECIFIC.

(5) Isaiah 1:9-10 (CONVENTIONAL; SPECIFIC FOR GENERIC)

לְוִלֵי יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת 9a  
הוֹתִיר לְנוּ שְׂרִיד כְּמַעַט b  
כְּסֹדֶם הַיְיִנוּ c  
לְעִמְרָה דְמִינֵנוּ: d  
שְׁמַעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה קְצִינֵי סֹדֶם 10a  
הֲאֲזִינוּ תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִם עִמְרָה: b

9a If the LORD of hosts  
b had not left us a remnant,  
c we would have been like Sodom.  
d We would have resembled Gomorrah.  
10a Hear the word of the LORD, O leaders of Sodom!  
b Give ear to the law of our God, O people of Gomorrah!

Through the vocatives of “leaders of Sodom” and “people of Gomorrah,” the prophet employs SPECIFIC FOR GENERIC taxonomic metonymies in order to label Jerusalem as belonging to the general category of utterly corrupt and destined-for-destruction cities. The metonymies are conventional since Gomorrah and Sodom are paragons (exemplars) for the category of utterly corrupt and destined-for-destruction cities.<sup>5</sup>

By building on the people’s belief of the dissimilarity between Zion’s survival (during the siege of 701 B.C.E.) and the well-known tradition of Sodom and Gomorrah’s utter destruction (v. 9), the prophet reverses the people’s positive assessment of Jerusalem by metonymically labelling them as “leaders of Sodom” and “people of Gomorrah” (v. 10).<sup>6</sup> By calling the “people of Gomorrah” and the “leaders of Sodom” to hear God’s word and instruction, the prophet declares the people’s utter wickedness despite all of their plentiful sacrifices and festivals (vv. 11-17). The prophet’s use of these metonymies also serves as an implicit call to repentance

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the metonymic model of the paragon, Lakoff (1990:86-89) explains other models (typical, salient, and ideal).

<sup>6</sup> Williamson (2006:81-83, 87) explains that the compiler composed verse 10 as a transition for verse 9 and as an introduction to a new section that functions as a call to repentance (vv. 10-17).

because Sodom and Gomorrah are also exemplars for the category of cities that were utterly devastated by God for their wickedness (e.g., Is 13:19; Jr 49:18, 50:40; Amos 4:11 and Zp 2:9).<sup>7</sup> Although, Jerusalem never becomes devastated like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, by labelling them as such, the prophet envisages for the people a powerful and potentially disastrous fate in order to convince the people of their desperate need to repent.

In the following example (6), the mock call to worship to the northern kingdom cult sites employs an unconventional taxonomic metonymy in which the general category of transgressing denotes the specific activity of cultic offerings.

(6) Amos 4:4-5 (UNCONVENTIONAL; GENERIC FOR SPECIFIC)

	באו בֵּית־אֵל וּפְשְׁעוּ	4a
	הַגִּלְגָּל הַרְבּוּ לְפִשְׁעַי	b
	וְהִבִּיאוּ לְבֹקֶר זִבְחֵיכֶם	c
	לְשִׁלְשֵׁת יָמִים מִעֲשֻׂרְתֵיכֶם:	d
	וְקָטַר מִחֶמֶץ תּוֹדָה	5a
	וְקִרְאוּ נְדָבוֹת הַשְּׁמִיעוּ	b
	כִּי כֹן אֶהְבְּתֶם	c
	בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:	d
4a	Come to Bethel and transgress.	
b	[Come to] Gilgal, make your transgressions abundant.	
c	And bring in the morning your slain offerings,	
d	[bring] every three days your tithes.	
5a	And make a smoke offering of thanks from leavened bread.	
b	And proclaim your freewill offerings, make them known,	
c	for you love thus,	
d	O children of Israel, the oracle of the LORD.	

The unconventionality of this taxonomic metonymy creates a seemingly contradictory set of parallelisms. At the lexical level, the verb “to transgress” and the nouns for the many offering types (modes of worship and obedience) form an antithetical parallelism. But at the semantic level through the use of the unconventional taxonomic metonymy, making an offering is conceptualised as a transgression, a synonymous

<sup>7</sup> While they do not describe this in terms of taxonomic metonymy, Williamson (2006:87) and Wildberger (1991:39) come to similar conclusions.

parallelism. As a result of the semantic parallelism among verses 4b-d, the verbal phrase “make your transgressions abundant” portrays how the very act of making an offering is categorised as making a transgression. Thus, the main interpretive crux in this passage concerns how the very act of making an offering can be categorised as a transgression. Wolff (1977:219) and Stuart (1987:338) both propose that the transgressions stem from the substitution of cultic offerings for ethical living. However, if this is the case, it does not explain how the increase of offerings directly translates into an increase in transgressions because presumably, it is the improper attitude of substitution that translates into transgression regardless of how often or how much one offers. Mays (1969:75-76) believes the transgressions are based upon the people’s mechanical attempts to gain atonement and blessing and the “love of religiosity” over the love for God’s ethical demands. But the offerings in this passage are not for atonement or for securing blessing. The burnt offering (עֹלָה) are for atonement as opposed to the slain offering (זָבַח), the tithe is for supporting the priesthood and the socio-economically disadvantaged, and the slain, freewill and thank offerings are used to thank God for material blessings or deliverance (Miller 2000:112-113, 119). Sweeney (2000:228) argues that Amos (a Judean prophet) targets Bethel (the northern royal sanctuary) and Gilgal (where the northern kingdom’s monarchy emerged through Saul) because they are the seats of power that represent Israel’s dominance and oppression over Judah. While Sweeney’s argument for Bethel and Gilgal as symbolic of Israelite hegemony is legitimate, it does not explain why offerings at these locales are transgressions since the offerings are for God and not the nation. These locations may be considered sinful on account of their governing bodies’ decisions, but the connection between cultic offerings and transgression is not clear.

The simplest solution to this passage’s interpretive crux is to return to the concept of taxonomic metonymy. In the category of transgressions, there are numerous conventional members: killing, stealing, giving false testimony, etc. In this particular example, by including cultic offerings in the category of transgression, the prophet creates an unconventional taxonomic metonymy in order to show how these very acts



of offering are real transgressions. Specifically, the prophet uses the unconventionality of this metonymy to create the poetic flourish that is necessary to show how the rich (who can afford to tithe and make offerings frequently and abundantly) are actually blaspheming God and violating his requirements for justice and righteousness. Because socioeconomic oppression and injustice is a major theme in the book of Amos (3:10, 4:1, 5:11-12, 8:4-6), when the rich bring tithes every few days, many are probably doing so through the economic prosperity that comes from their unjust economic actions and policies. Similarly, the unjust rich can offer their numerous slain, thank, and freewill offerings (all of which are used for thanksgiving and celebration and not atonement) on account of their economic exploitation. They love to make offerings often since it affords them a chance to feast, especially upon meat, and they love to proclaim their thanksgiving offerings in order to broadcast their perceived favour before God. However, with each of these offerings, the unjust condemn themselves and blaspheme God by thanking God with the very riches that come through their injustices and at the expense of God's widows and orphans.<sup>8</sup> Amos satirises the cultic activities by revealing the incongruity of their offerings. He uses the (re)categorising ability of an unconventional taxonomic metonymy in order to expose the hidden darkness of these seemingly good activities and good people.

## DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS OF PARTONOMIC METONYMY

This following survey of partonomic metonymy in the HB focuses on different ways in which (conventional) partonomic metonymy may be used.

### Semantic compaction

Some partonomic metonymies, such as LOCATION FOR EVENT or DATE FOR EVENT, by nature are more amenable for compacting complex ideas because the

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<sup>8</sup> Andersen and Freedman (1989:434) argue similarly in that the people erroneously understand their economic and military success as markers of God's approval and blessing. But they diverge from this analysis by centering upon this idea as the people's source of sin.

subdomain references a richer and more complex domain (Gibbs 1999:61-62). These semantically compact metonymies are often used to convey relatively large amounts of information through a relatively small number of words. A well-known example from American English is the phrase “Remember the Alamo”, in which the location of the Alamo references the famous battle that American Texans lost in 1836. A comparable LOCATION FOR EVENT metonymy comes from Is 28:21.

(7) Isa 28.21 (LOCATION FOR EVENT)

		כִּי כְהֵרָפְרָצִים יָקוּם יְהוָה	21a
		כַּעֲמֹק בְּגִבְעוֹן יִרְגֵז	b
		לַעֲשׂוֹת מַעֲשָׂהוּ יָרַ מַעֲשָׂהוּ	c
		וְלַעֲבֹד עֲבֹדָתוֹ נִכְרְיָה עֲבֹדָתוֹ:	d
21a	For the LORD will rise like (during the events of) Mount Perazim,		
b	like (during the events of) the Valley in Gibeon, he will rage,		
c	in order to do his deed, strange is his deed,		
d	and to work his work, bizarre is work.		

The location of Mount Perazim references the events of 2 Samuel 5:17-21 in which God declares that he has given the Philistines into the hand of David, and after the battle, David recounts God’s intervention saying, “The LORD breached through my enemies before me like bursting water” (v. 21). In verse 21b, the location of the valley of Gibeon refers to God’s aid to Joshua and his forces against the Amorites when God defeated the Amorites with a hailstorm (Josh 10). Thus, in verses 21a-b, the prophet is not describing God as rising and raging as mountains and valleys quake and shift. But rather, he is describing how God will rise and rage against his own people similar to how God had supernaturally intervened against Israel’s foes on Mount Perazim and in the Valley of Gibeon. Thus, with the use of these two metonymies, the prophet forms a new narrative of impending judgment for Judah by recalling two well-known narratives of divine deliverance and by replacing Israel’s former foes with God’s own people in order to demonstrate God’s willingness to oppose his own people as enemies.

The following LOCATION FOR EVENT metonymies differ from the previous example in that the metonymies additionally highlight select elements of the event that it denotes.

## (8) Psalm 95.8-11 (LOCATION FOR EVENT)

	אֱלֹהֵי־תִקְשׁוּ לְבַבְכֶם בְּמֵרִיבָה	8a
	כִּי־יִוָּמַד בְּמִדְבָּר:	b
	אֲשֶׁר־נִסּוּנִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	9a
	בְּחִנּוּנֵי גַם־רָאוּ פְעָלִי:	b
	אֲרַבְעִים שָׁנָה אֶקְוֹט בְּדוֹר	10a
	וְאָמַר עַם תִּעֲזֵי לְבַב הֵם	b
	וְהֵם לֹא־יָדְעוּ דְרָכָי:	c
	אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי בְּאַפִּי	11a
	אֲמִי־בֵאוּן אֱלֹהֵי־מְנוּחָתִי:	b
8a	Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,	
b	as on the day of Massah in the wilderness,	
9a	where your ancestors tested me,	
b	tried me even when they saw my work.	
10a	For forty years I loathed that generation.	
b	And I said, “They are a people that are wanderous of heart,	
c	and they have not known my ways.	
11a	Those whom I have sworn against in my anger	
b	will not enter into my rest.”	

The locations denote the general events at Meribah and Massah (Ex 17) in which the Israelites tested and rebelled against God, but as expressed through lines 9a-b, the metonymies are also meant to include the specific circumstances of that testing and rebellion – their lack of faith despite previously experiencing God’s miraculous deliverances. The fact that the metonymies are “unpacked” in the relative clauses of verse 9 further shows how the metonymies are semantically compact. The psalmist unpacks the metonymies since he wishes to specifically highlight the people’s lack of faith despite experiencing God’s previous miracles. The psalmist could have selected any of the other details of that event (God’s faithfulness despite Israel’s unfaithfulness, water from rock, Moses’ punishment), but he selects the aforementioned aspect in order to create a warning against hard heartedness. This semantically plastic nature of metonymy is possible because of its semantically compact nature; that is, it can be plastic because it has numerous elements to choose for highlighting.

## Oblique reference

Because partonomic metonymy allows a person to reference X without stating or writing X,<sup>9</sup> partonomic metonymy is often used to make oblique references when circumstances and contexts dictate that direct, literal speech is undesirable or inappropriate. An excellent example comes from the title of David's lament, "Bow". David composes a lament for the deaths of Jonathan and Saul (2 Sm 1:18-27) that portrays the tension between his private, personal feelings and his public, political posturing. In order not to be viewed as a usurper of the throne or as an accomplice in the death of Saul and Jonathan (Weitzman 1995:353-354), David necessarily offers a lament for their deaths. Because David had a vastly different relationship with each man, David offers different praise for each and simultaneously conceals and conveys his personal feelings for each through a creative use of partonomic metonymy. On account of the seemingly difficult title, "Bow", Hertzberg (1964:238) and McCarter (1984:67-68) take "bow" (v. 18) as an intrusion into the text, and Holladay (1970:63), following Gevirtz (1963:73-76), emends the MT vocalisation. But understanding "bow" as a partonomic metonymy for Jonathan through the conceptual metonymy WIELDED FOR WIELDER enables readers to recognise one of David's subtle, yet effective, poetic devices for displaying his preference for Jonathan and his contempt for Saul.<sup>10</sup>

(9) 2 Samuel 1:18-19, 22, 25, 27 (WIELDED FOR WIELDER)

וַיֹּאמֶר לְלֵמַד בְּנֵי־יְהוּדָה קִשֶׁת הַגִּבּוֹהַ עַל־סֶפֶר הַיָּשָׁר:	18
הַצָּבִי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־בְּמוֹתַיִךְ חֶלֶל	19a
אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים:	b
מִדָּם חֶלְלִים	22a
מִחֶלֶב גִּבּוֹרִים	b
קִשֶׁת יְהוֹנָתָן לֹא נִשּׁוּג אַחֹר	c

<sup>9</sup> Taxonomic metonymy can also function similarly, but it differs in that it is based upon the categorization of members. For example, note how "the pill" in American culture is a taxonomic metonymy (GENERIC FOR SPECIFIC) for birth-control pill, which mentioning too openly may seem socially improper.

<sup>10</sup> Zapf (1984:117) understands "bow" as a possible indication of David's preference for Jonathan. Anderson (1989:15) proposes "bow" as referring to Jonathan, but he hedges and also considers the possibility that it may refer to Saul or to both Saul and Jonathan.

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|  | וְהָרַב שְׂאוּל לֹא תִשׁוּב רִיקָם:            | d   |
|  | אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים בְּתוֹךְ הַמִּלְחָמָה | 25a |
|  | יְהוֹנָתָן עַל־בְּמוֹתָיִךְ חָלָל:             | b   |
|  | אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים                       | 27a |
|  | וַיֵּאבְדוּ כָּלֵי מִלְחָמָה:                  | b   |
- 18 And he commanded that the “Bow” be taught to the children of Judah.  
Behold it is written upon the book of Jashar.
- 19a The gazelle, O Israel, was slain upon your heights.  
b How the mighty have fallen!
- 22a From the blood of the slain,  
b from the fat of the mighty,  
c the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,  
d and the sword of Saul did not return empty.
- 25a How the mighty have fallen in the midst of battle.  
b Jonathan was slain upon your heights.
- 27a How the mighty have fallen,  
b and the weapons of war have perished.

Although David laments for both Jonathan and Saul, the poetic structure hints that Jonathan is the primary focus (the truly mourned) of the lament. The lament contains three refrains (vv. 19, 25, and 27). In verse 19a, הַצִּבְּרִי (“gazelle” or “glory”) is difficult interpretatively because of its homonymous nature and the ambiguity of its referent(s), but in verse 19b, the assumption is that Jonathan and Saul are “the mighty that have fallen”. By comparing the first two refrains, the parallelism between verses 19a and 25b suggests that only Jonathan is the “gazelle” (הַצִּבְּרִי). However, as noted by Zapf (1984:106-107), the parallelism between verses 19a and 27b (the first and third refrain) portrays Saul and Jonathan (“the weapons of war”; cf. v. 22) as the “glory” (הַצִּבְּרִי).<sup>11</sup> Thus, the structure of the middle (second) refrain serves, perhaps, as a subtle device that hints as to whom David believes to be the truly mourned warrior.<sup>12</sup> At the

<sup>11</sup> Zapf’s poetic-structural analysis is based upon the earlier analyses of O’Connor (1997:468-471) and Freedman (1980:263-274).

<sup>12</sup> In contrast, O’Connor (1997:470-471) proposes that the ambiguity of reference in line 19a is not crucial for determining Jonathan’s prominence in the lament because the lines for Jonathan are more prominent in structure. While he also believes that the parallelism between lines 19a and 25b reveals Jonathan to be the “gazelle”, he does not propose that this element of delayed reference slights Saul. Moreover, he argues that while Jonathan is given prominence in the lament, Saul is not slighted. However, Barrick (1997:34-35) notes

end of the poem (v. 27), when readers can perceive “weapons of war” as a metonymy (WIELDED FOR WIELDER) for David and Saul,<sup>13</sup> the significance of the poem’s title, “bow”, can be easily understood. David employs “bow” as another instantiation of a WIELDED FOR WIELDER metonymy, but one that only refers to Jonathan since the poem tightly associates Jonathan and his bow (v. 22). Thus, David’s use of the lament’s title (“The Bow”) as a partonomic metonymy subtly and cleverly conveys his feelings of admiration and preference for Jonathan while simultaneously calling into doubt Saul’s worth by excluding him from the title.

### Semantic multivalency

On account of the different ways in which certain words can be understood as metonymies, the following proverb is semantically multivalent. Verse 6b can be read with two equally valid options: “violence” can be either the subject or the object of the clause (Fox 2009: 514; Clifford 1999:113).

(10) Proverbs 10:6 (X FOR IDEAS/PLANS OF X; SOURCE FOR PRODUCT)

בְּרָכוֹת לְרֹאשׁ צְדִיק 6a  
וּפִי רְשָׁעִים יִכְסֶה תְּהוֹמָה: b

- 6a Blessing are for the head of the righteous,  
b but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

OR

but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

With “violence” as subject, the violence metaphorically covers the mouth as a substance in order to convey (hyperbolically) how the wicked are constantly verbalizing their violent plans and thoughts upon their lips.<sup>14</sup> This reading results

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that the praise for Saul and his sword is “cheapened” in light of Saul’s death narrative in which he turns his own sword against himself. Barrick’s observation is further strengthened by noting the irony of the repetitious phrase (“How the mighty have fallen [נפל!]”) in conjunction with how Saul kills himself by falling [נפל] upon his sword (1 Sam 31:4).

<sup>13</sup> Although “weapons of war” may be taken as a metaphor (PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS), it makes better sense to view this as a metonymy since the bow and sword are their respective weapons of choice with which they are associated (v. 22). See Is 13:18; Jr 24:10, 29:17, 49:37, and Zc 10:4 for other similar weapon-based metonymies of WIELDED FOR WIELDER.

<sup>14</sup> When reading “violence” as grammatical subject, Fox (2009:514) similarly understands this line as metaphorical for violence, and he specifically takes the violence as something

from metonymically understanding “violence” as violent words and thoughts (X FOR PLANS/IDEAS OF X) in conjunction with a metaphor of violence as a substance. When this reading is understood with line 6a, the proverb contrasts how the righteous one receives words of blessings but the wicked constantly spew words of violence. With “violence” as object, the wicked one’s mouth covers (conceals) his violent thoughts and plans (or even possibly his already accomplished deeds of violence). The noun “violence” still serves as a metonymy as with the previous option, but the “mouth of the wicked” denotes speech (SOURCE FOR PRODUCT). When this second reading is related to line 6a, the proverb contrasts the visibility of the righteous with the hiddenness of the wicked. A righteous person is known by all the different people that speak well of him, but a violent, wicked person is far harder to identify since he can hide his violent nature with his own words. While this multivalency can be taken as a happy accident, it is quite reasonable to take it as intentional because the book of Proverbs invites readers to consider its riddles (1:6), an invitation to grow in wisdom. Moreover, a mere five verses away (v. 11), line 6a appears verbatim with a different half verse to form another proverb. Perhaps this repetition is a purposeful invitation for readers to consider a familiar poetic line in a new way, a subtle call for readers to read with wisdom.<sup>15</sup>

## ACCOUNTING FOR METONYMY IN EXEGESIS

In Jr 5:15-16, the prophet provides a seemingly odd figure of speech for describing the advancing Babylonian invaders’ quivers as open tombs.

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akin to filth. However, accounting for the violence as a filthy substance without accounting for it as metonymy yields an ill-formed metaphor: acts of violence (filth) are constantly on the mouth of the wicked. In contrast, Clifford (1999:113) reads it as literal acts of violence that come upon the wicked as punishment. But his reading is less convincing since it does not explain why the violent acts come specifically upon the mouth.

<sup>15</sup> Knut Heim (2013:223) proposes that the repetition between these two verses is an editorial strategy for creating a subunit of proverbs and forms a larger set of repeated proverbs that delimits the beginning of the collection of proverbs for 10:1-22:16.

## (11) Jr 5:15-16 (RESULT FOR SOURCE)

	הַנְּנִי מִבֵּיא עָלֵיכֶם גּוֹי	15a
	מִמְרֹחֶק בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם־יְהוָה	b
	גּוֹי אֵיתָן הוּא	c
	גּוֹי מֵעוֹלָם הוּא	d
	גּוֹי לֹא־תִדְעַ לְשׁוֹנוֹ	e
	וְלֹא תִשְׁמַע מִה־יְדִבֵּר:	f
	אֲשָׁפְתוּ כְּקֶבֶר פְּתוּחַ	16a
	כָּלֵם גְּבוּרִים:	b
15a	Behold I am bringing against you a nation	
b	from a far, O house of Israel, the oracle of the LORD.	
c	It is an eternal nation.	
d	It is an ancient nation,	
e	a nation which you do not know its tongue	
f	or understand what it says.	
16a	Its quiver is like an open tomb.	
b	All of them are mighty.	

While quivers and tombs certainly evoke notions of death, their relationship in line 16a is difficult to comprehend since tombs are not tools for killing whereas quivers and arrows are. As a result, commentators offer different explanations for the problem of this supposed metaphor. McKane (1986:124) identifies it as an infelicitous metaphor and only notes the incongruous relationship as: “the arrows fired out by the enemy deal out death and so their container is described as an open grave.” Bright (1965:40) notes the difficulty and just states that the metaphor implies that the enemy’s arrows are deadly without explanation. Lundbom (1999:396) understands that the empty quiver is an ominous sign of the enemy’s numerous kills and that the quiver is exaggerated as an empty tomb. Holladay (1986:188) recognises the difficulty of the line and offers questions to consider:

A tomb lies open to receive the dead. Where are the dead? Where are the arrows from that quiver? Are they already flying through the air? Why does the quiver have to be so big, how many arrows has it held, how many men will have to die?

These surveyed explanations are fanciful, speculative and fail to explain specifically



how exactly the enemy's quiver is like an open tomb. Most would agree that (1) "it quiver is like an open tomb" involves some mapping of the idea of death, and that (2) there is a problem with the aspect of agency between quivers and tombs. While many may argue that metaphors cannot be consistently logical in all aspects of the metaphor, the mapped elements must be logically consistent. However, the quiver is an agent for death and an open tomb is not; in fact, a tomb is a container for the dead.<sup>16</sup> In other words, this expression cannot be a well-formed metaphor because quivers cannot be deadly like tombs since tombs are not agents for death.

When the figure of an open tomb is understood a partonomic conceptual metonymy (RESULT FOR SOURCE), then it is possible to view line 16a as a metonymy that, as Bright and Allen suggests, conveys the deadliness of the enemy's arrows. Specifically, the quiver's quality of deadliness transfers metonymically (CONTAINER FOR CONTAINED) to the arrows. Whereas the idea of a (closed) tomb is highly linked with the concept of the dead, an open tomb is a result of a recent or imminent death, and, thus, it can be a metonymy for the death event. A comparable, modern example is the icon of the skull and crossbones on poisonous chemicals. The icon does not imply that a bottle's contents are full of bones, but rather, the skulls and bones, a result of death, communicate that the contents are a source/cause of death. Another example is the mythical grim reaper, the bringer of death. The grim reaper, a cloaked skeletal figure, is terrifying because its skeletal frame is metonymic for death. Specifically, the grim reaper's skeletal state metonymically represents its agentive powers of death. Similarly, "its quiver is like an open tomb" implies that these quivers (which contain the deadly arrows) cause open tombs, that is, they are sure as death. By drawing upon the visual similarities between the mouth of an open tomb and the mouth of quiver or the tube like shapes of both tombs and quivers, Jeremiah compares these two items, but he metonymically transfers the salient notion of death from the

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<sup>16</sup> Barcelona (2000b:45-46) explains that these metaphor-mapping constraints are based upon metonymy. Barcelona explains that the metonymic relationships in the mapped elements of the source domain must align with the metonymic relationships that are receiving the mapping.

open tomb to the quiver in order to hyperbolise the deadliness of the invaders.<sup>17</sup> Nahum 1.14 and Job 3.22, 5.26 similarly employ a partonomic metonymy for using קבר (“grave” or “tomb”) to denote death. While quivers and their arrows can cause death, by denoting the quiver as a source of death through the metonymy of an open tomb, the prophet hyperbolises the deadliness of the invaders such that their arrows are certain as death itself. Thus, while the metaphor of a quiver as an open tomb is incongruent, the metonymy of an open tomb as representing death is possible and allows for the hyperbolisation of the invaders’ deadliness that is also carried forth in verse 17 in the enemy’s utter devastation of the land and people.

## CONCLUSION

Metonymy is a powerful aspect of language, and the biblical poets made creative use of it as exemplified through the survey of the poetic functions of metonymy. Thus in order to truly have a greater appreciation of biblical poetry, scholars must have a sophisticated understanding of metonymy, especially in the difference between taxonomic and partonomic forms and how each can be expressed in poetic parallelism. Moreover, many of the examples have demonstrated how accounting for metonymy can solve many of the interpretive problems with which scholars struggle, especially those erroneously taken as metaphor-based. A nuanced understanding of metonymy allows it to be appreciated, like metaphor, as one of the central tropes of biblical Hebrew poetry. To study one without the other is a disservice and handicaps scholars’ ability to better understand the poetics behind biblical Hebrew poetry.

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<sup>17</sup> Verse 16a cannot be a metaphor since it does not meet the requirement that the source and target domains be distinct and unrelated: quivers and arrows are a subdomain that relates to the domain of death in terms of causation.

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