Gender in Solomon's Song of Songs

**discourse analytical abduction
to a gynocentric hypothesis**

**Alastair Ian Haines
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Abstract

As part of a major project, this essay introduces a primary research question regarding Solomon's Song of Songs: What is the Song's illocutionary force? *i.e.* How did its author intend us to take it? The essay first establishes how this question arises naturally, being implicit in two of the best-known, high-level literary questions found in the Song's history of interpretation: Is the Song allegorical or literal? and Is it anthology or unity?

A broad outline of contemporary discourse analytical methodology, as applied to the Song, is then provided, taking John Callow as exemplar. Both Callow's methodology and his conclusions are compared and contrasted with two further representative examples of modern interpretors, Daphna Arbel and David Clines, whose work is particularly pertinent to analysis of gender and sexuality in the Song.

Consideration of issues related to methodology is extended into a penultimate section, which introduces both some additional linguistic methods available to discourse analysis, and some elements of the philosophy of language that bear on the current project. The essay ultimately concludes with an informal, literary-style argument in support of the gynocentric hypothesis: *Solomon's Song of Songs intends to win its audience to a specifically feminine perspective on romantic intimacy*, largely through the "implied authorship" of the Shulammite.

Contents

Recitative

Dich will ich auf mein Herz, auf mei- nen Arm gleich

wie ein Sie- gel set- zen, ...

auf mei- ner Lin- ken sollst du ruh'n, und mei- ne

Rech- te soll dich küs- sen.

Johann Sebastian Bach, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme!*
Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis (BWV) 140: no. 5, Dichter unbekannt.
Thomaskirche, Leipzig: 25 November, 1731.

כי שנא שלח אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל

ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν εκκλησίαν

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<div dir="rtl">

שימני כחותם על־לבך   כחותם על־זרועך

כי־עזה כמות אהבה   קשה כשאול קנאה

רשפיה רשפי אש   שלהבתיה:

</div>

Stamp me like a seal on your heart	like a seal around your biceps
for love is strong like death	jealousy stubborn like Sheol
her arrows flaming arrows	the very flame of Yahweh.

§1 **Allegorical or Literal?**

> "If the *hapax legomenon šalhebetyâ* in 8:6 refers to the 'flame of Yah'—*yah* being a shortened form of the divine name—that no more makes Israel's god the subject of the poem than 'strong as death [*māwet*]' or 'flames [*rešep*] of fire' makes the Canaanite gods Mot or Resheph its subjects".[1] Cheryl Exum (2005)

The traditional, allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs is well known.[2] Despite variations in details of how the allegory is seen to work, traditional readings were united by offering broadly the same answer to the most significant question that can be posed regarding the Song:[3] what impact is it supposed to have on those who hear it?[4] Almost two millennia of documented reflection on the Song have considered its import to lie in stimulating its audience's appreciation of a Creator's love for his particular redeemed people:[5] Israel, or Israel proleptic of her perfection in the Church. What more noble theme could the Song address? What else could be its subject?

We will return to the earlier history of interpretation at a later point in this study, because of its value in establishing the ease with which traditional characterisations of femininity were found

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1   J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs*, Old Testament Library, (WJK, 2005), p. 64.

2   "Interpretations of the Song of Songs fall first of all into either allegorical or literal mode." Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, Anchor Bible, (Doubleday, 1977), p. 89.

3   "It was the unanimous answer of Jewish and Christian premodern exegesis". Robert W. Jenson, *Song of Songs*, Interpretation, (WJK, 2005), p. 5.

4   "The question of effects on readers, … it is about time we regarded such study as part of our scholarly discipline and task." David Clines, 'Why is there a Song of Songs and What does it do to you if you read it?' *Jian Dao: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 1 (1994): 3–27.

5   "Theologians prevailed: for twenty centuries, the Song was almost universally read as a religious or historical allegory." Ariel and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, (University of California Press, 1998), p. 30.

within the Song,[6] and the similar ease with which these were seen to be analogous to aspects of the relationship of creatures to their Creator.[7] However, this study—in line with much writing on the Song over the last century or so—is sceptical regarding any directly theological motivation for its poetic vision.[8] To borrow from the terminology of pragmatics, a case will be made that the *topic* of the Song is not God but man,[9] indeed not merely man but woman.

This is the "gynocentric hypothesis."[10] It is not a new proposal;[11] nor yet is it out of fashion. For example, in an essay contributed for *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (1994), John Callow asserts: "The Prologue makes it clear from the start that this Song is written from the perspective of the woman, not that of the man."[12] In addition to being written *from* the woman's perspective, this study will argue that it is precisely her perspective that is the deliberate *focus* of the Song.[13] This too is not a new proposal, though what is concluded from it, say by Ginsburg (1857) or by Clines (1994), differs markedly.

The methodology of this study, like Callow's, employs standard discourse linguistic techniques in analysing the text of the Song of Songs. In particular, it follows more recent work, like Nicholas Lunn's (2006) application of information theory to biblical Hebrew poetry. In the fifth of Lunn's

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6   *E.g.* Origen's "perfecta sponsa" (in Rufinus' Latin translation).

7   *E.g.* "… her humility and loveliness, and his majesty and beauty. The believer is as …;—Jesus is as …" George Burrowes, *A commentary on the Song of Solomon*, (Martien, 1853), p. 110.

8   "Literal modes of interpretation … have … gained wide acceptance in the last century." Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

9   The traditional English-language *man–God* opposition is used here to anticipate the quote from Alexander Pope.

10 *Cf.* Marvin Pope's terminology in summarising views attributed to the "Women's Liberation Movement": "the modern Movement has had little use for the Bible except as a provocation for protest, to be indicted as the primary document of patriarchalism. The *androcentric* Creation myth of Genesis 2-3 has been understood…" [emphasis added].

11 "Let it not be said, then, that a Book which celebrates the ascendency of a virtuous woman in humble life over all the blandishments of wealth and royalty, is unworthy of a place in Holy Writ." Christian David Ginsburg, 'The Song of Songs: translated from the original Hebrew, with a commentary, historical and critical', (Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857): p. 19.

12 John Callow, 'Units and flow in the Song of Songs', in Robert D. Bergen (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, (SIL, 1994), p. 479. For the same conclusion from different evidence see Chaim Menachem Rabin, 'The Song of Songs and Tamil love poetry', *Studies in Religion* 3 (1973): 205–19.

13 "One way to approach the multi-level complexity of this work is to read the whole text as a woman's inner and personal discourse." Daphna Vita Arbel, 'My vineyard, my very own, is for myself', in Brenner and Fontaine (eds), *The Song of Songs*, A Feminist Companion to the Bible (second series) 6, (Sheffield Academic, 2000): 90–101.

suggestions for further study—dating poetic passages and "ascribing a certain style to individual authors"—the Song gets special mention because it "has only a single instance of a defamiliar verbal clause."[14] Perhaps such further study will assist with as-yet-unresolved questions regarding the provenance of the Song: is its linguistic distinctiveness evidence of the idiosyncrasies of a specific author, era, or dialect?[15] Those, rather exacting, questions are not, however, central to this study.

The methodology adopted is ultimately aimed at discovering objective evidence, in the received text of the Song, regarding a range of discourse features which, when taken together, suggest a specific most plausible explanation for the surface form of its language. As such, they contribute to an abductive—in Pierce's sense,[16] as opposed to being deductive or inductive— argument to an authorial intention to winningly present a distinctively feminine perspective on romantic intimacy.

This brings us back to the most significant question that can be posed regarding the Song: what impact is it supposed to have on those who hear it? Alexander Pope might sympathise with the answers that will be offered in what follows.

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
> The proper study of mankind is Man.[17]

Indeed, Pope himself published *Characters of Women* (1735) only three years after the heroic couplet above. Whether or not Pope, or even the Song, can be accepted as authorities on the

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14 Nicholas P. Lunn, *Word-order variation in biblical Hebrew poetry*, (Paternoster, 2006), p. 279.
15 *Vide* Robyn Vern, *The relevance of linguistic evidence to the early dating of the archaic poetry of the Hebrew Bible*, PhD thesis, (University of Sydney, 2008) for dialectic variation as an alternative explanation of linguistic variation; and Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg, *Solomon's Vineyard: Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs*, (Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) for an argument to the Song attesting a *circa* 900 BC northern dialect.
16 Charles Sanders Pierce. *Vide* Sami Paavola, 'Abduction through grammar, critic, and methodeutic', *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 40 (2004): 245–270; and Talmy Givón, *Context as other minds: the pragmatics of sociality, cognition, and communication*, (Benjamins, 2005), pp. 206–208.
17 Alexander Pope, *An essay on Man*, Epistle 2:1, (1732). "Principles, maxims, or precepts, so written [in poetry], both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterward." Pope, 'The design', preface to *op. cit.*

character of women, this study naturally abstains from attempting to be such a thing. The Song, though, does appear to presume to instruct the daughters of Jerusalem, at least in how to behave in matters of the heart—do not anticipate love! Quite plausibly, if we take the Shulammite's man as any generic masculine lover, she also presumes to instruct men—seal your heart! If such readings are correct, the Song explicitly, if a little enigmatically, offers romantic advice addressed *both* to women and to men,[18] as women and men, in distinction to one another.[19] The Song sings of gender and sexuality.[20] However, whatever the Song may or may not be urging on men or women, this study presents linguistic evidence suggesting that whatever it says, it says on the basis of how a *woman* feels.

Whether the Song's advice is sound is another matter that goes beyond the scope of this study; as is the question of whether or not the Song is even accurate in its portrayal of "a woman in love".[21] Rather, the study simply proceeds on the assumption that there is a *prima facie* case that the surface form of much love poetry can be sufficiently explained by authorial intention to represent or elucidate personal and gender-specific romantic sentiments. For example, it will be argued that the Song explores the same emotions as "I met him on a Monday and my heart went 'boom'", just explicating them somewhat more fully than "da doo ron ron ron, da doo ron ron" (1963).[22] Yet the emotions in the Song will still be seen to be more straight-forward than, say, those explored by Sylvia Plath's poem in three "decades" (*Daddy*, 1962),[23] which attempted (and perhaps failed) to resolve a suicidal love–hate Electra complex.

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18 "For [the Song] to be wisdom teaching… It must contain insights beneficial for right living, insights that will enhance human life." Diane Bergant, *Song of Songs*, Berit Olam, (2001): p. 5.
19 "A feminist interpretation might investigate how the Song makes different claims upon female and male readers." Exum, *op. cit.*, (2005), p. 82.
20 "The Song … provides the chief biblical resource for a believing understanding of human sexuality, of the lived meaning of 'Male and female he created them.'" Jenson, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
21 *Cf.* Barry, Maurice and Robin Gibb, *A woman in love*, performed by Barbara Streisand, (Columbia Records, 1980).
22 Phil Spector, Jeff Barry and Eleanor Greenwich, *Da doo ron ron*, (Philles Records, 1963).
23 Sylvia Plath, *Daddy*, 12 October 1962. Published posthumously in *Ariel* (Faber, 1965).

Plath herself told us her poem was an "allegory" and about "a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God." Plath's word-associations extrapolate from childhood memories, painted in black and white (and red), phonetically unified by assonance on /uː/, and playing with I–thou pronouns in two tongues ('you' and *du* and 'do').

> You do not do, you do not do
> …
> I never could talk to you.
> The tongue stuck in my jaw.
>
> It stuck in a barb wire snare.
> Ich, ich, ich, ich,
> I could hardly speak.
> I thought every German was you.
> And the language obscene
>
> An engine, an engine
> Chuffing me off like a Jew.
> A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
> I began to talk like a Jew.
> I think I may well be a Jew.
>
> The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
> Are not very pure or true.
> With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck
> And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
> I may be a bit of a Jew.
>
> I have always been scared of *you*,[24]
> With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
> And your neat mustache
> And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
> Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—
>
> Not God but a swastika
> So black no sky could squeak through.
> Every woman adores a Fascist,
> The boot in the face, the brute
> Brute heart of a brute like you.
>
> You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
> In the picture I have of you,
> A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
> But no less a devil for that, no not
> Any less the black man who

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24 Plath's italics.

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

…
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

The Shulammite's brothers and the abusive watchmen, in the Song, are treated strikingly less scathingly than Plath's father, Otto, is here in her recollections; but the two works are alike in that the first person pronoun is not only indicative of a specifically *feminine perspective*,[25] it is also suggestive that it is the *evolution in this perspective*, over the course of each poem, that is intended to elicit the reader's response. This kind of analysis is well documented in the case of Plath, but is also found regarding the Song. To take a recent example, in *Flashes of fire: a literary analysis of the Song of Songs* (2009), Elie Assis at first cautiously suggests "the possibility of an emotional and inner development in the psyche of the lovers and in the relationship between them."[26] After considerable, sober evaluation of the text, he does indeed conclude that precisely this kind of development provides the Song with a "beginning, middle and an end".[27]

Plath told us her allegory likened her father to God, she didn't liken God to her father. Likewise, Song 8:6 explicitly likens the passionate jealousy of sexual love to the fire of Yahweh's zeal, not *vice versa*. In Richard's terminology,[28] the metaphors elevate their *referents*, without debasing their *vehicle*.[29]

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25 As will be treated in detail later, the first person pronoun in the Song, excepting a few vocative suffixes, almost uniformly marks reactivation of a specific and feminine discourse participant—the Shulammite. The handful of exceptions are themselves significant in establishing the Song's stereotypical conception of gender-roles.
26 Elie Assis, *Flashes of fire*, (T&T Clark, 2009), p. 25.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
28 Ivor Armstrong Richards, *The philosophy of rhetoric*, (OUP, 1936).
29 *Cf.* Phyllis Trible, regarding the Song generally: "At times, the standard, the figurative and the euphemistic converge so compellingly that one cannot discern where vehicle ends and tenor begins." *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 145.

It should be no surprise to find the name Yahweh (יהוה) in parallel with fire, as we do in the

final colon of Song 8:6. In the context of the Hebrew Bible, fire (אש) is a conventional metaphor for

God's jealousy (*e.g.* Deuteronomy 4:24).

<div dir="rtl">

כי יהוה אלהיך אש אכלה הוא אל קנא
</div>

for Yahweh your God (אלהיך) is a devouring fire
he is a jealous god (אל)

But invocation of the divine name at this particular point of the Song is even less surprising given

Exodus 34:14.

<div dir="rtl">

כי יהוה קנא שמו אל קנא הוא
</div>

for Yahweh's very name is "Jealousy"
a jealous god is he

Not only do the two cola, plausibly epexegetical of "sealing the heart", provide us with one

lexical parallel conventionally associated with the divine name, but two, that are also typically

associated with each other. Metaphors, particularly conventional metaphors, imperfectly map a

limited number of invariant conceptions from one conceptual domain to another (as widely

discussed regarding the proposed invariance principle of metaphor).[30] They cannot be presumed to

be anything close to reversible—metaphor does not establish an isomorphism.[31] So this verse

utilises conceptions of the divine to elucidate love, rather than conceptions of love to elucidate the

divine.

In fact, in this case, we are given *contrasting* images: the first passive, the second active. Sheol

will not release what has fallen into its grasp—it is an immovable object (קשה). Yahweh, on the

30 "George Lakoff and I first presented the Invariance Hypothesis implicitly in *More than Cool Reason* (1989)." Mark Turner, 'Aspects of the Invariance Hypothesis', *Cognitive Linguistics* 1 (1990): 247–256.

31 "Moreover, isomorphism differs from symbiosis, the image of the communication–discourse relationship in the constitutive metaphor. Symbiosis highlights the interconnectedness of two distinct constructs while isomorphism treats them as identical." Linda L. Putnam, 'Images of the communication–discourse relationship', *Discourse & Communication* 2 (2008): 339–345.

other hand, like an arrow (רשף),[32] seeks out and obtains what he wants—he is an irresistible force. The tenor of the second metaphor remains the same even if its vehicle, *resheph*, is to be understood as the consuming fire of coals (*AV*), as flames (Exum) or sparks, or as flashes (Assis), say of lightning.[33] The poetry both lays out and overlays metaphor on metaphor. The referent, love, is being described as definitive and final in character. It is not *merely* "strong"—like a strong man or strong drink—it is strong-like-death. It is definitive and final. So love is something that can be "sealed", as with an oath.

What is intended by the tightly overlapping parallel similes in this verse seems clear enough: love is a big deal (like a covenant). However, it is extremely important to note that this comment on the topic of love is not changed, even if we read *-yah* as an intensifying affix, rather than an abbreviation of the divine name. It is true, as Exum points out, that even if the divine name *is* intended, it still does not imply the Song of Songs is about Yahweh: but it is also true that if the divine name is *not* intended, *that* does not imply the Song cannot still be read as being about him, allegorically. This verse is *at least* a comment on the topic of love. It does not preclude allegorical extrapolation, but neither does it demand such extrapolation. The verse is not decisive in establishing whether the Song is allegorical or not, but *neither are literal or allegorical frameworks of interpretation material to establishing the immediate sense of this verse.*

Although the following study is sceptical regarding divine allegory as the ultimate framework for interpreting the Song, it must be conceded that such readings can never be completely ruled out *a priori*. Hebrew—not only Biblical Hebrew, but also its modern counterpart—is sprinkled with lexemes with potentially theological implications: famously, in Modern Hebrew, the name of

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32 *Cf.* Marvin Pope, "darts", *op. cit.*, p. 12.
33 Marcia Falk, who did not feel bound to an impossible literalism, captures the tenor of the metaphor particularly nicely, playing on English associations, while cognizant of the Hebrew ones, and rendering *resheph* as "tongues". Marcia Lee Falk, *The Song of Songs: Love lyrics from the Bible*, (Harper Collins, 1973).

contemporary Israel's parliamentary "campus"*, Mishkan haKnesset.*[34] Little words like *mishkan* carry big stories.[35] Indeed, as indicated above, theological allusion guides the rendering of Song 8:6 presented here. Yet it is one thing to recognise the possibility of poetic play on extensional theological meanings (which might be the safest reading of *-yah*), but it is another to insist on a specific intentional theological meaning for the whole of the Song of Songs. A divine allegory is not an extraordinary claim, but it is still a claim that must accept a burden of proof not currently adequately borne by anything found in the literature to this date, at least not to the satisfaction of many modern scholars.

So the study below starts with an agnostic position regarding any putative divine allegory. However, allegories are not constructed *ex nihilo* anyway, rather they work off at least a scaffold of more-or-less literal discourse. For example, in his famous allegory *Vor dem Gesetz* (1915,[36] also known as the *Türhüterparabel*), Franz Kafka first activates key discourse participants, placing them within a simple narrative context.

> Vor dem Gesetz steht ein Türhüter. Zu diesem Türhüter kommt ein Mann vom Lande und bittet um Eintritt in das Gesetz.

In the case of this particularly short allegory, Kafka declines to offer the reader any key for decoding his short tale, instead he relentlessly develops its literal and stark components. Only in delivering the final sentence does he offer an enigmatic anti-climax. Just like the man of the story, the reader who progresses to the end, seeking admission to meaning via the doorkeeper, is denied his goal—the door is shut in his face.

> Der Türhüter erkennt, daß der Mann schon an seinem Ende ist und, um sein vergehendes Gehör noch zu erreichen, brüllt er ihn an: „Hier konnte niemand

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34 "Let us not use the term *mishkan*. There are names in the history of the Jews that should be left untouched, because of their sanctity, or the sanctity of their uniqueness." Menachem Begin, *Knesset Record* 46, (August 31, 1966), p. 2505.

35 "It is absolutely impossible to empty out words filled to bursting, unless one does so at the expense of language itself." Gershom Sholem, letter to Franz Rosenzweig, 26 December 1926.

36 Franz Kafka, "Vor dem Gesetz", *Selbstwehr* 9/34 (1915): 2–3.

sonst Einlaß erhalten, denn dieser Eingang war nur für dich bestimmt. Ich gehe jetzt und schließe ihn.“

By contrast, the Song, despite being poetry, and even in our earliest records,[37] is known to have struck its *lay* audience as much more lively and forthcoming than an, admittedly dark, allegory like Kafka's. The Song offers so much at a literal level that this alone sufficed for that lay audience; but, for the sake of argument, let us allow the Song to be an allegory, understanding that allegory will still first require attention to the literal level of its discourse.[38] If the following analysis is sound, then, it will be seen that any divine allegory readings would be better described as about "his people's response to God's love," rather than about "God's love for his people."[39] The Song of Songs appears to be the "Song of the Beloved," not the "Lover's Song." It will be argued that, in at least two significant—and objectively discernable—ways, the Song is not a song of pure mutuality, so it is not the "Lovers' Song" either.

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37 Tosefta, Sanhedrin 12:10; Mishnah, Taʿanith 4:8.

38 In *The Structure of Allegorical Desire*, Joel Fineman would have us pay more careful attention to Quintilianus' terminology regarding allegory and metaphor. Allegoria, quam inversionem interpretantur, aut aliud verbis, aliud sensu ostendit, aut etiam interim contrarium. Prius fit genus plerumque continuatis translationibus. Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.6.44. "Qunitilian's definition … makes allegory a trope rather than a genre. What we know generically as allegory appears within these constraints allegorical by synecdoche: called allegory for the serial metaphor, the part most characteristic of the whole, which by metonymic extension opens itself out into a literary form in its own right." Roger Travis, *Allegory and the tragic chorus in Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 5.

39 "When we read the Song for the love between Israel and the Lord, its account of that love does not begin with the Lord's initiative, but with Israel's longing and the Lord's desirability." Jenson, *op. cit.*, p. 16. For an exposition of Origen's contrary view, *vide* J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the spirit of scripture*, (OUP, 2005): "Origen presents the Song as nothing less than *the spirit of Scripture itself*, revealed in its essential nature as Christ the Word's eschatological song of nuptial love." *Op. cit.*, p. 269.

§2 **Anthology or Unity?**

> "It is not to be doubted, that the fire of the poem is what a translator should principally regard, as it is most likely to expire in his managing: however, it is his safest way to be content with preserving this to his utmost *in the whole*, without endeavouring to be more than he finds his author is, *in any particular place*. It is a great secret in writing, to know when to be plain, and when poetical and figurative."[40] Alexander Pope (1715)

Allegorical readings of the Song propose a unifying principle: its diverse voices sing in harmony as they establish with concord the various themes of a spiritually resonating opus. However, with the advent of literal readings—if these additionally deny the traditional unifying principle—has come the search for some alternative to it. The Song comes to us as though it were a single work, if we abandon the allegorical tradition, how can this form of the text be explained?

Elie Assis begins his commentary with the observation that, "To understand the Song of Songs, the question of whether the book is a collection of separate poems or a cohesive composition with significant continuity between the poems must first be determined."[41] He adds, "In addition to this question, the delimitation of the poems within the book is by no means an easy task."[42] Indeed, scholarly opinion on delimitation of units within the Song remains as described in Abraham Mariaselvam's dissertation (1987, published the following year): "there is no unanimity at all as to the determination of the extent of individual poetic units." Mariaselvam provides a list of 21 scholars offering a spectrum of counts of subunits ranging from 5 or 6 (Robert and Tourney, Exum, Shea)[43] through to 31, 32 and 52 (Falk, Gerleman and Krinetzki).[44] Exum, in her more concise, but recent (2005), synoptic presentation of the views of various commentators,[45] additionally notes that

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40 Alexander Pope, 'Preface', in *The Iliad of Homer*, vol. 1, (W. Bowyer for Bernard Lintott, 1715). Emphasis added.
41 *Op. cit.*, p. 9.
42 *Ibid*.
43 A. Robert and R. Tourney. *Le Cantique des Cantiques* (Paris, J. Gabalda et Cie, 1963); Exum, 'A literary and structural analysis of the Song of Songs', *Zeitschrift für die alttestimentliche Wissenschaft* 85 (1973): 77; WH Shea, 'The chiastic structure of the Song of Songs', *Zeitschrift für die alttestimentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980): 378.
44 Marcia Falk, *Love lyrics from the Bible: A translation and literary study of the Song of Songs*, Bible and Literature Series 4, (Sheffield: Almond, 1982); Gillis Gerleman, *Ruth/Das Hohelied*, BKAT 18, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1963); L. Krinetzki, *Das Hohe Lied*, (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1964).
45 Exum, *op. cit.*, (2005), p. 39.

Elliot (1989) and Bergant (Berit Olam, 2001) identify the same six basic units within the Song, yet Bergant asserts Song-as-anthology,[46] where Elliot argues for Song-as-unity.[47]

Of course, were the Song anthology rather than unity, it could be argued that there is not, properly speaking, any original, author-intended meaning—other than a disjunction of idiosyncratic comments on the topic of love. Rather than seeking something as precise as author's intention, there would need to be hypotheses regarding editorial motives in selection, ordering and possible reworkings of the component parts: either more-or-less passively, to present those parts in a felicitous manner; or more-or-less actively, for the editor to suggest something through the whole, not available in any of the individual parts alone. On the face of it, were the Song to prove to be an anthology, it could severely restrict the possibility of a satisfactorily complete answer to that most significant question regarding the Song, What impact is it supposed to have on its readers?

The distinction between original authorial or later editorial intentions, however, can be so fine as to vanish under close scrutiny: for instance, a hypothesis that proposed evidence of a great deal of deliberate editorial activity across the whole Song, especially if this were argued on the more substantial basis of semantics, rather than solely on surface features of the text. The more certainly we believe we can discern the hand of an editor, the more such an editor resembles an author utilising sources. We know *Daddy* was written by a sole author on the 12th of December 1962, only later being incorporated into an anthology. The similarly posthumously published *Der Prozeß*, however, incorporated *Vor dem Gesetz* (narrated and interpreted by a priest in a cathedral), which we know the Prague Jewish weekly, *Selbstwehr*, had previously published as an independent work, during Kafka's lifetime. We also know Alexander Pope published *An Essay on Man* in instalments, and fell short of his original intentions regarding a more complete treatise. However, it seems a little

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46 Dianne Bergant, *Song of Songs*, Berit Olam, (Liturgical, 2001); see also Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, (KTAV, 1974) and Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, NICOT, (Eerdmans, 2001).
47 M. Timothea Elliot, *The literary unity of the Canticle*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989).

ambitious to hope to recover with certainty any such publication details in regard to the Song. Without loss of generality, then, this study will simply speak, for convenience, of a sole author,[48] though it recognises other historically divergent, but logically convergent, possibilities.

We should also note that there are two quite different paths to the conclusion that the Song is anthological. The gold-standard methodology would provide objective features in the surface form of the text which delineate, beyond reasonable doubt, fairly precisely where individual constituents of the anthology begin and end, concurrently demonstrating substantial semantic *independence* between those constituents. The second possible approach, however, simply devolves to proposing an anthology, when no satisfactory unifying principle has been found.[49] Were the Song an anthology, that *would* explain the absence of any apparent unity; but in this second case, the conclusion arises by default rather than demonstration. Likewise, however, the conclusion that the Song is a *unity* can either: be presented via demonstration of a satisfactory unifying principle; or alternatively, be offered as an explanation for why decisive delineation of constituent portions of the Song remains elusive. Again, the former *affirmative* argument for unity is clearly much more satisfactory, and it is this that the present study attempts.

The logic that motivates the current study and shapes its questions and methodology should now be clear: Why is the Song in the canon? Does it have anything *in particular* to say? If so, what? and How does the text succeed in communicating this? Despite considerable diversity of scholarly conclusions regarding the Song, particularly regarding arguably tangential specifics (in the case of the Song) like authorship and date of composition,[50] there is actually broad agreement about interpretative methodology. Whether or not scholars are inclined towards reading the Song as

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48 *Cf.* "The Song's great consistency of matter and tone does suggest that one poet or closely knit group of poets is responsible for all or most of it, and the commentary will refer simply to 'the poet.'" Jenson, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
49 "Many scholars claim that the book is an anthology of poems because they were unable to find an overall structure. However, as we have said, the lack of an overall structure in the book does not constitute proof that the book is not a single integrated work." Assis, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.
50 "Would knowing when it was written help us understand the poem? Probably not very much." Exum, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

unity or anthology, almost all attempt to identify subsections and reflect on possible connections between these. Whether named by them as discourse analysis or not,[51] understood broadly, this is a fair appellation for a good number of the approaches.[52] Biblical Hebrew poetry lends itself to such treatment: even at lower levels like cola, it is precisely the semantic associations between units that provide the artistic appeal. Lexical play on overlapping or contrasting semantic domains is a hallmark of biblical Hebrew poetry. In a very direct way, its medium is its message.[53]

Where current and future scholarship on the Song have an advantage, however, is in analysis at higher levels than bicola. Although the larger the units being compared, the more abstract the kinds of connections between them, several decades of discourse linguists have been studying the way various languages mark such relationships. For example, Biblical Hebrew is typical of a large class of languages that mark the relationship of a new clause to its prior context syntactically, via word order variation.[54] Also, although some details are still a matter of debate, it appears that languages mark "topicality" or "continuity of participant reference" according to a universal hierarchy, including null, inflectional, lexical and syntactical devices.[55] These are empirical findings of recent times, still "finding their way" into analysis of biblical literature, but well attested none the less.

At the theoretical level, Kamp's Discourse Representation Theory (DRT) has given logical formalists a framework for articulating the semantics of texts, explicitly accounting for their

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51 For example, Jenson conceives of his work as identifying *genre*; Assis presents his analysis in terms of form criticism.
52 "Going beyond the sentence level in discourse analysis and giving close attention to movements such as New Criticism, we find that the respective spheres intermingle. Terminology describing identical phenomena needs to be made compatible." Bo-Krister Ljungberg, 'Genre and form criticism in Old Testament exegesis', in Bergen (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 415.
53 *Cf.* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding media: The extensions of man*, (McGraw Hill, 1964).
54 For modern language examples—Cayuga, Ngandi and Coos—see Marianne Mithun: "constituents appear in descending order of newsworthiness" 'Is basic word order universal?', in Tomlin (ed.), *Coherence and grounding in discourse*, (Benjamins, 1987), p. 325. For Akkadian as an ancient semitic language example, see Agustinus Gianto: "there is a tendency to assign the first position to the information which is meant to be important." *Word order variation in the Akkadian of Byblos*, Studia Pohl 15, (Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1990), p. 34.
55 *Vide* Talmy Givón, *Topic continuity in discourse*, Typological Studies in Language (TSL) 3, (Benjamins, 1983).

dynamic interaction with context.[56] Of particular note is Asher and Lascarides' refinement of DRT,[57] which provides formal logical mapping of the semantics-pragmatics interface by focussing on "rhetorical relations". It might be argued that Asher and Lascarides express, in formal generalisations, the intuitions expressed *ad hoc* by generations of scholars of the Song: recovering its meaning requires identifying how the segments of its discourse are related to one another.

It is interesting to note that the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) appears to have anticipated, in a broad sense, some of the recent linguistic work, having already advocated, for some decades, on the basis of practical translation issues, a best-practice for language analysis that easily maps to several of the newer formal theoretical advances.[58] That SIL have applied their methods to biblical literature hardly needs to be said.

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56 Hans Kamp, 'A theory of truth and semantic representation', in JAG Groenendijk, TMV Janssen, and MBJ Stokhof (eds.), *Formal Methods in the Study of Language*, Mathematical Centre Tracts 135, (Amsterdam, 1981), pp. 277–322.

57 *Vide* Nicholas Asher, *Reference to abstract objects in discourse*, Studies in linguistics and philosophy 50, (Kluwer Academic, 1993); and N. Asher and Alex Lascarides, *Logics of Conversation*, (CUP, 2001).

58 *Vide e.g.* Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic concepts: an introduction to tagmemics*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1982); John Beekman, John Callow and Michael Kopesec, *The semantic structure of written communication*, 5th revision, (SIL, 1981); and Robert A. Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Analyzing discourse*, (SIL, 2001).

§3 **John Callow**

John Callow's essay "Units and Flow in the Song of Songs", in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (SIL, 1994), serves well to illustrate how an explicitly discourse analytical methodology approaches the Song.

> Having established the major units of the text (and inevitably some minor ones as well), I use these major units as a basis for discussing the 'flow' of thought in the Cycle. Inherent in this order of presentation is the assumption that the progression of the author's thought is best seen in the light of his own grouping of the material. … Hence the importance of seeking to elucidate the major semantic units first. Not until after that do we study how the units relate to each other.[59]

Callow observes that the term *discourse analysis* may denote any of "a variety of different theoretical positions all of which operate with different assumptions and procedures."[60] He identifies his own analysis as following the "semantically or cognitively oriented theory of meaning"[61] introduced by John Beekman.[62] One key feature of that theory is repeatedly stressed in Callow's essay: "This is a fundamental principle of the text-analysis approach that I am using … the author of the Song wrote *to communicate*; he had a purpose which he sought to achieve by writing."[63] The principle is articulated, in the source-work cited, thus: "If it is assumed, complex though the mental processes may be, that a speaker or writer starts from the meaning which he wishes to convey and then expresses that meaning in the surface forms of the language he is using, then the semantic structure is, in some sense, more fundamental."[64]

Differences of opinion between proponents of discourse analysis relevant to the current study will be discussed in more detail later, but it is interesting to note, even at this point, *similarities* between writers with different conclusions and methodology. Although differing with Mariaselvam,

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59 Callow, *op. cit.*, p. 464.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 462.
61 *Ibid.*
62 Callow cites chapters 17–19 in Beekman and Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, (Zondervan, 1974), pp. 267–326.
63 Callow, *op. cit.*, (1994), p. 473. Emphasis original.
64 Beekman and Callow, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

for example, who considered that "the SS is an anthology containing twenty-eight small poems",[65]

Callow's criteria for identifying "semantic units" are remarkably similar to Mariaselvam's criteria

for "delimitation of individual poems".[66]

Mariaselvam (1987)
    a) Change of speaker(s)
    b) Change of listener(s)
    c) Change of concrete setting or place: e.g. landscape, etc.
    d) Change of moods or sentiments
    e) Change of imagery or groups of images
    f) Certain insights into the life-setting revealed in the poem itself.[67]

Callow (1994)
    1. Continuity of speaker and addressee
    2. Unity of topic
    3. Stimulus and response
    4. Uniformity of "conceptual domain"
    5. Parallelism (but not always)
    6. "Ascensiveness" (monotonicity)
    7. "Tail head" linkage
    8. Chiasmus[68]

Mariaselvam *tends* towards literary, Callow towards linguistic analysis, as might be expected,

given their respective research questions—comparative literature and discourse linguistics—

however, it seems prudent to be diligent in observing their similarities, not just their differences, lest

we become inclined to drive a wedge between what are, in most cases, interdependent, rather than

competing, approaches. The current study opts to present its case essentially within a

methodological framework aligned with SIL and DRT, but these guidelines are compatible with (in

some cases explicitly incorporating) a wide range of other linguistic results and insights. Asher and

Lascarides, for example, make a point of utilising elements of Kripke Semantics[69] and Grice's

maxims of conversational implicature,[70] both of which have their place in analysing the text of the

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65 Mariaselvam, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
66 *Ibid.*
67 *Ibid.*
68 Paraphrased from Callow, *op. cit.*, (1994), pp. 463–64.
69 Saul Kripke, 'Semantic considerations on modal logic', *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 16 (1963): 83–94.
70 H. Paul Grice, 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review* 66 (1957): 377–88 and *Studies in the way of words*, (Harvard University Press, 1989); also Stephen C. Levinson, *Presumptive meanings: the theory of generalized conversational implicature*. (Bradford Books, 2000).

Song. To these might be added David Lewis' proposed formalism of truth in fiction by analogy with counterfactual propositions,[71] and John Searle's work on both fiction,[72] and speech acts in general.[73]

Callow's linguistic analysis of the text begins with "presentation of the Hebrew data".[74] Even before seeking to identify semantic units, this presentation of the data includes attention to objective and distinctive linguistic features of the text, like the syntactic functions of its words (verbs, nouns and noun phrases are mentioned). As will be elaborated upon in the course of this study also, the significance of vocatives in the text leads Callow to anticipate discussion of this feature, and already offset them in his structured presentation of the text. Likewise, parallel structures and chiasmus are marked by Callow in advance of more detailed discussion. So, Callow's presentation of the data, in keeping with his methodology, lays out surface features of the text, which are available to direct observation, before looking "behind them" for the propositional content (broadly conceived) of the author's intended meaning, which would explain the surface forms.

Callow's attention to "units" and "flow" in the first section of the Song is actually the basis for an extended discussion (pp. 480–85) of a more general theoretical translation issue: "the transfer of the discourse structure of the source language to the discourse structure of the receptor language."[75] Applying this consideration to the Song, Callow argues for the felicity of introducing headings identifying speakers, at least in English and similar languages, in which such devices are typical,

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71 David Lewis, 'Truth in fiction', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978): 37–46. Since the time of my pure mathematics honours thesis, *The subjunctive conditional* (University of Sydney, 1987), a "mathematical translation" of the modal logic in Lewis' *Counterfactuals* (Blackwell, 1973), interdisciplinary work between linguists, philosophers, mathematicians and computer scientists, already emergent then, has now become routine, on a wide range of both theoretical and empirical questions, notably in formal semantics, but not restricted to it.

72 For example, Searle notes "… the crucial role, usually underestimated, that imagination plays in human life, and the equally crucial role that shared products of the imagination play in human social life. And one aspect of the role that such products play derives from the fact that serious (i.e., nonfictional) speech acts can be conveyed by fictional texts, even though the conveyed speech act is not represented in the text. Almost any important work of fiction conveys a 'message' or 'messages' which are conveyed *by* the text but are not *in* the text." 'The logical status of fictional discourse', *New Literary History* 6 (1974): 332.

73 John Searle, *Speech acts*, (CUP, 1969).

74 Callow, *op. cit.*, (1994), p. 464.

75 *Ibid.*, pp. 483–84.

and which additionally lack the gender and other discourse markings available in the original Hebrew.

This context is important for understanding why Callow picks out "units" and "flow" for attention. By demonstrating that the text is "semantically quantised," with identifiable semantic units, he establishes, in principle, that subsections can be well defined, *and* that there is semantic content available to "fill" headings for those subsections. The "units" are therefore critical to establishing that Callow's proposal for printed translations of the Song is theoretically *possible* (and on objective grounds). The "flow", on the other hand, is critical to establishing the *necessity* for some proposal like Callow's. In other words, Callow attempts to demonstrate that the discourse structure of the early part of the Song *as a whole*, communicates something not available from its parts alone, or its parts in any other order, or its parts unmarked for their relationship to discourse participants.[76] Indeed, in Callow's estimation (and this study agrees with it), this first section of the Song establishes a context for comprehension of the sequel—it is a prologue (at least with a small *p*). Yet how is a reader to comprehend this, if the Hebrew-specific discourse cues are absent in her receptor language translation? It is a point very well made.

Callow's proposed "major" units are as follows.

(a) 1:1–4 (31 words)
(b) 1:5–6 (26 words)
(c) 1:7–8 (31 words)
(d) 1:9–17 (57 words)
(e) 2:1–6 (46 words)

Like Mariaselvam and Exum, Callow also provides a synoptic table of alternative views;[77] in his case, as befits an SIL article and the practical question it addresses, it is drawn from the work of

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76 *Cf.* Assis, *op. cit.*, p. 266. "The Song of Songs is a unitary literary work, which has a beginning, a middle and an end. The book is a single organism, and if any of the individual poems were lacking, it would be incomplete. The order of the poems is also essential to its understanding."
77 Callow, *op. cit.*, (1994), p. 485.

Bible translators rather than literary commentators. The divisions indicated in the various translations support some of Callow's proposed "semantic units"; but what he is more interested in is those that appear to have either escaped the notice of translators, or been lost for want of a mandate to supply headings in lieu of source language discourse markings. Callow concludes his article, having demonstrated that there is discourse structure in the Hebrew of the Song which lacks any consistent rendition in major English translations, content to ask the question, What is to be done?

This study will largely accept Callow's detailed treatment of semantic units, extending that style of analysis to the full text of the Song. However, what is actually most pertinent to the current thesis is his discussion of a posited *flow* for the text. Callow stresses, and it is worth reiterating, that flow entails authorial (or editorial) intent. It suffices for Callow's argument to present authorial intent as an *assumption* of his methodology. In this current study, however, with the additional data of the whole Song to draw upon—like Clines, Arbel, Jenson, Exum, Assis, Noegel and Rendsburg, and other recently published scholars of the Song—it will be argued that the evidence is sufficient to establish the existence of an identifiable progression of thought, from which authorial intent follows *a posteriori*.

In citing the work of recent scholars, which—just maybe—might reflect an emergent consensus towards the Song-as-unity position, it seems all the more important to post a significant *caveat*: scholars agreeing on unity, *but for different reasons*, are not really speaking with one voice. For example, traditional allegorical readings see the Song as a unity, but for reasons this study will not accept. It would be nonsense to cite Origen in support of the current thesis, irrespective of agreement on unity of composition.[78] However, the caution is not as urgent in the case of the

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78 Origen does not support the rationale this thesis will provide for discourse coherence; however, he will be offered as a voice in support of the significance for interpretation of scrutinising the discernible engagements between the Song's drama-like, distinct and distinctive voices.

modern commentators: there is considerably more "common ground" (and shared scepticism, for that matter). In fact, given the typically multivalent nature of poetry, were the Song like this, with a range of related ideas to communicate, it would be unremarkable to find commentators identifying several of those ideas, while disagreeing about which were primary or "core." So be it; let the reader decide! Strictly speaking, the thesis of this study is that a woman's perspective on romantic intimacy is markedly prominent in the Song, and provides a sufficient and parsimonious explanation for why the Song might have been written and canonised, as well as for how it "hangs together." It is *not* argued that the gynocentric hypothesis exhaustively explains every last feature of the received text, *e.g.* it does not preclude the Song *additionally* serving to "encode" a political,[79] or even a theological allegory.

So, Callow is important to the current thesis, not only for typifying the methodology, but also because the conclusions he draws via that methodology anticipate essentially the same conclusions drawn here, just based here on the data provided by the whole Song. In his analysis of "flow", Callow claims:

> It does not need to be argued that the Song is presented almost entirely as either dialogue between the Hero and Heroine (first and second person exchanges) or descriptions spoken by one of them about the other (third person material). It thus seems reasonable to assume that the author's purpose is being achieved by these exchanges. It also seems reasonable, since the Hero and the Heroine often address each other in terms of endearment, to work with the further assumption that the writer is presenting a *relationship* between these two people, the Hero and the Heroine.[80]

The detailed analysis to follow in the current study includes examination of the clearly marked distinction between first and second person discourse, as opposed to third person material, which will be seen to provide a strong line of evidence for the gynocentric hypothesis in and of itself. However, the central project is analysing a somewhat broader range of more-or-less objective

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79 For arguments to political rather than theological allegory, *vide* Johann Leonhard von Hug (1813 and 1816); Luis Stadelmann, *Love and politics: a new commentary on the Song of Songs*, (Paulist, 1992); Noegel and Rensburg, *op. cit.*; perhaps also Roland Boer, 'Keeping it literal: The economy of the Song of Songs', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 7/6 (2007): 1–14.

80 Callow, *op. cit.*, (1994), p. 473. Emphasis original.

discourse linguistic features that bear on the question of just how the Song characterises the "relationship" between Hero and Heroine (to take Callow's terms). *That* the Song provides such a characterisation is not questioned in the literature, but *how* it characterises the "relationship" remains a matter of discussion to this date. A suitable example of a scholar who recognises the feminine perspective of the text, and views characterisation of that perspective only slightly differently to what will be argued here is (Vita) Daphna Arbel.

§4 **Daphna Arbel**

Arbel goes a step further than Callow, by making an identification between the feminine *perspective*, apparent in the text, and the author's own perspective, hence an *actual* female author, rather than merely an "implied" one. Arbel does not argue for this position explicitly, it is advanced as a hypothesis, and indicated via consistent use of the feminine pronoun, throughout the essay, when referring to the author. The introduction of the feminine pronoun for the author does not cause surprise for the reader, because there is a seamless shift in the essay's third paragraph from "The woman in the Song of Songs … she" to "The writer …. She …".[81] In other words, Arbel views the Song as autobiographical—psychologically, if not historically. In fact, if a reader follows the footnote to Arbel's first statement of her proposed unifying principle for the Song—a central feminine *perspective*—that note introduces the possibility of female authorship via citing writers (LaCoque and Brenner)[82] who posit this on the basis of quite *specific* passages with observably feminine perspectives, rather than sharing Arbel's broader recognition of the gendered nature of the *overall* perspective of the Song. Thus Arbel concisely and gently, almost imperceptibly, guides the diligent reader to entertain her hypothesis, prior to elaborating on the considerable textual evidence there is to support its main claim—the centrality of the feminine perspective.

Arbel is making another stronger claim than that of those she cites,[83] however, by *identifying* the woman *in* the Song with the woman she proposes *wrote* the Song. In a minor way, this might strengthen the assumed songstress's voice; but in a major way, it weakens it. What we say about ourselves alone we can assert authoritatively; but if we speak about ourselves alone we may not

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81 Arbel, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
82 André LaCoque, *Romance she wrote*, (Trinity International, 1998), pp. 39–53, and Athalya Brenner, 'Women poets and authors', in Brenner (ed.), *A feminist companion to the Song of Songs*, (Sheffield Academic, 1993), pp. 87–91.
83 *E.g.* "Such an identification (although hypothetical) would explain why a relatively large proportion of the SoS deals with feminine emotions while the male is relegated to a secondary position. Unfortunately this last assumption, which can be based on quantitative considerations, has no further evidence to support it. … To summarize: after having aired the above considerations, we still are in no position to determine with confidence which portions of the SoS express typical female attitudes with such fidelity that they can be regarded as original compositions by women." Brenner, *op. cit.*, p. 89–90.

engage our audience with any shared reality. So Arbel's view of the Song as "the poetic expression of the inner dreams, emotions and thoughts of one individual woman" accords with the thesis of this current study,[84] except in regard to its two posited historical reconstructions: a solipsistic woman author, writing specifically about herself. Clearly, neither of these reconstructions is actually necessary to establishing that a feminine perspective arises from the text, nor that this perspective co-ordinates the sense of the diverse components of the Song. In fact, even Arbel's implicit (and abductive) argument flows the other way around: the observably feminine perspective *might* be best explained by a woman poet, even one reflecting on her own specific inner world.[85]

It is probably trivial to note that most commentators consider Jane Austen, for example, to have been an astute observer of men, as well as of women, despite never having married.[86] So there should be no need to provide a long list of expert criticism of celebrated writers who have produced authentic characters of the opposite sex. More substantially, though, it should be noted that the Song, although elaborating on feminine perspectives, does include representations of masculine perspectives also.[87] So much is this the case, that many commentators have viewed the Song as antiphonal or as dialogue (including rubrics in Codex Sinaiticus),[88] not to mention Origen's view that the Song is the nuptial song of Christ himself to his bride. So to argue from the authenticity of the Song's feminine perspective to a female poet, however tempting, is tantamount to arguing to the *inauthenticity* of the *masculine* perspective(s), also expressed in the Song. That falls foul of a good deal of serious commentary, which may indeed be mistaken in various ways, but at least provides some support for the authenticity of the masculine perspectives in the Song, even if we consider such perspectives to be less *significant* than those commentators supposed. Ultimately, as will be

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84 Arbel, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
85 *Vide* Brenner *loc. cit.* for explicit consideration of precisely the sort of evidence needed to support such an argument.
86 "Jane Austen was an astute observer of human nature." Richard Almond, 'Psychological change in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*', *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 44 (1989): 307–324.
87 *N.b.* Brenner's *proportional* argument quoted in the earlier note.
88 *Vide* Jay Treat, *Lost Keys: Text and Interpretation in Old Greek Song of Songs and its Earliest Manuscript Witnesses*, Ph.D. thesis, (University of Pennsylvania, 1996).

explained later, it is the disappointing, but *authentic*, portrayal of *men* in the Song that proved decisive, during the course of the current study, to the present writer, in leading to the conclusion that the Song expresses a feminine perspective, and quite possibly with didactic purpose. In what ways are the Song's men disappointing? Men appear to be disappointing in ways in which a woman *specifically* might expect better of them.

In any case, surely, establishing the authenticity of the Song's characters (or caricatures) does not depend upon first establishing the sex of its author. Wouldn't knowing the poet's sex only be relevant if we wanted to apply gender stereotyping as part of our interpretation?[89] Perhaps gender stereotypes might indeed have something to teach us, but poets of all people, are not generally received as stereotypical personalities—they "speak funny" for a start. All things considered, this study will remain "gender-blind" with regard to the *actual* author (or editor) of the Song, for convenience using the masculine pronoun, but in its generic (or masculine *representative*) sense, as found in contemporary academic publications in formal linguistics,[90] and in Callow *et al.* regarding the Song.[91] However, this study agrees with Callow *et al.* that the *implied* author is female, and attempts to establish that beyond reasonable doubt.

In general, Arbel's elaboration of how the feminine perspective arises from the text is compelling, so compelling in fact, that it seems a pity that she is content to present it as the idiosyncratic perspective of just one *specific* ancient Israelite poetess. Other writers, Exum for example, see the anonymity of the woman (and the man) in the Song as pointing to a *generic*

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89 *Cf*. Tremper Longman III: "The discussions of the gender of the author of the Song reveals more about us as commentators than it does about the Song. It relies on a theory of literature and of gender that believes that women and men are typecast in the way that they write." *op. cit.*, p. 9.

90 Asher and Lascarides, for example, consistently use the generic masculine singular pronoun in the ordinary course of their texts, without explanation, but presumably for precision, and to avoid distraction, while articulating the logic of their analysis of language. However, a broad practice in philosophy, if we can generalise, has for some decades been to utilise generic *she*, alternating from time to time with generic *he*—to be explicitly inclusive, but also to remain clear and concise. This expedient would, however, be confusing or misleading in reference to the author of the Song.

91 *Cf*. Callow, *op. cit.*, (1994): "the author … his or her" (p. 462) and "the author … his" (pp. 464*ff*).

portrayal of a woman's (or girl's) perspective (or both): "They are identified neither by name nor by association…. The Song's lovers are archetypal lovers—composite figures, types of lovers rather than any specific lovers";[92] "the lovers are not to be confused with the poet";[93] and "the Song is not about young love only".[94]

It is worth stressing again that Arbel's reading of the Song does not really depend on establishing the sex of the Song's author, so quibbles regarding this leave its major elements untarnished. First among those elements is Arbel's proposal that the Song is expressed "in the realm of the imagination".

> The writer is not simply the receiver of dreams which she reports later. Nor is she simply a recorder of real events. Instead she is an active author, describing her own experiences that are constructed on an inner level. … It is in the realm of the imagination that the writer presents her descriptions in the SoS.[95]

In support of this, Arbel offers considerable textual evidence, and straightforward historical reconstruction, like: "a search by night is highly unrealistic, considering the norms of the writer's patriarchal society."[96] Whether such a search would be realistic in any *contemporary* society, or whether that would be due to "patriarchal" features of our own societies are questions that need not detain us; certainly, the woman's searches in the Song have something fabulous about them, flagged in various ways in the text, and interacting with an audience's expectations of what is typical in the distinctive behaviour of men and women, pretty much anywhere.

Amongst other literary aspects of the Song that Arbel observes to be consistent with her reading is an apparent stream-of-consciousness progression of related ideas.

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92 Exum, *op. cit.*, (2005): p. 8.
93 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
94 *Ibid.*
95 Arbel, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
96 *Ibid.*

> It appears that each thought stems from a previous one in a series of associations. …
> This attitude, expressed in the opening scene, will color the rest of the text, in which we
> find free expression of the different inner fantasies and conflicting attitudes of a woman
> who is observing and analyzing her own feelings of love.[97]

Arbel's literary sensitivity is refreshingly engaging to read, by contrast with ponderous and clinical apportioning of "semantic units" and classification of "rhetorical relations". However, that kind of work, in the current study, is simply aimed at more formal presentation of intuitions shared with Arbel, whose "thoughts" and "associations" refer to broadly the same phenomena as Callow's "units" and "flow".

Arbel states without proof, and indeed none is needed, that the text presents by turns: "a sensual erotic woman, a hesitant young girl, a protected virgin, an admired lover, a seductive dancer…. It seems that the writer presents the contents of her imagination freely and openly."[98] Though, given that this particular list of *dramatis personae* is drawn from well-known stereotypes of the feminine, it is a struggle to follow Arbel to her conclusion that, "She takes the liberty of avoiding fixed gender roles and attitudes, allowing for multidimensional female characters to surface."[99] It would seem that even stereotypical characterisations of femininity, like those Arbel lists, are actually multivarious anyway.

However, it is the second part of Arbel's conclusion that goes to the heart of the matter—what this study will also argue is engagingly present in the text of the Song: *because* it is expressed in the language of the imagination, a synchronicity of otherwise mutually exclusive roles—"sensual erotic woman" and "protected virgin", or "hesitant young girl" and "seductive dancer"—are possible. More profoundly, entertaining mutually exclusive possibilities in the imagination is the prelude to making a choice. Whether constrained by our desires to retain the approbation of our peers, or

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97 Arbel, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
98 Arbel, *op. cit.*, p. 92–93.
99 Arbel, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

constrained by cherishing our own personal idealistic hopes in regard to romantic intimacy, such abstractions are radically perturbed when confronted by the precipitation of a concrete instance of a real, or even imminent, sexual encounter. If Arbel is right, as what follows hopes to show she is, the Song is effective in evoking the drama of decision making in the course of courtship, *from the perspective of a woman*.

Arbel's reading of the Song is outstanding in capturing the authenticity of passions expressed in the Shulammite's speeches. Arbel's hermeneutical key—that the language is the language of the imagination, specifically a woman's imagination—just as she claims, seems to provide a plausible unifying principle for the Song. The man in Arbel's reading (and more-or-less in this study too), is little more than the Shulammite's *perception* of him—a cameo in a locket, with rose-tinted glass— he (almost) doesn't exist,[100] unless he's present to the senses of her imagination. But he *is* the catalyst for her Song. Well may we ask, Who rouses who in the Song of Songs? This study will agree with Arbel that the Song expresses a female fantasy, but it will also agree with David Clines, that it expresses a male fantasy also.

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100 See below for explanation of the qualifying "almost": the chorus is *essential* to anchoring the man in reality.

§5 David Clines

David Clines' essay, "Why is there a Song of Songs and What does it do to you if you read it?" is a rather challenging paper in many ways, all but unique, and one that demands consideration. Although not originally published in a feminist journal or series, it roundly condemns the Song along moral lines drawn from feminist ethics and in line with feminist theories of gender and culture: "[It] is a dangerous text, not a gross one. A more blatantly sexist text would do less damage than one that beguiles."[101] More precisely, Clines appears to apply some pertinent elements of Althusserian Marxist hermeneutics to the Song,[102] which lead him to a striking, if unsettling, reading.

Clines provides an introduction typical of his distinctive and urbane pedagogical style: laying foundations on the best of authorities, raising original and excellent questions, setting out his methodology plainly, all the while personably dropping gems of insight. In this particular case, Clines first leads his audience (his text was originally delivered as an address) to consider a question of implied authorship: What might we infer from the text of the Song about the psychological motivations of its author? This question is framed with skilful economy, reflecting a sophisticated appreciation of scholarly discussion of related issues—both that which has been unquestionably valuable, and that which many would consider to have been less fruitful, yet sparing his listeners the details of the latter.

In setting out to answer his question, Clines starts by raising another, easily overlooked, but essential question: Why was the Song documented? Why was it committed to written form as text?

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101 David J.A. Clines, *Interested parties: The ideology of writers and readers of the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSS 205: Gender, Culture, Theory 1, (Sheffield Academic, 1995), p. 121. By contrast, Marcia Falk, in the "translator's note" to the gift edition of her translation of the Song of Songs, recollects begging to differ with one of her professors because, "the Song of Songs was not the sexist text that he apparently took it to be." Marcia Lee Falk, *The Song of Songs: A new translation*, (HarperCollins, 1993), p. xi.

102 Clines utilises conceptions drawn from Althusser, Lacan and Jameson, whom he acknowledges in footnotes.

He suggests: "Whatever else the Song of Songs is, it is not a song."[103] He means, of course, that the text we have is not sheet music for a popular ditty, which he then shows is just as significant as it is demonstrably true. Texts have all sorts of characteristics that folk songs (or *Volkdichtung*, Clines quotes Murphy) do not.[104] A text is a rather particular kind of publication, in fact a kind of publication that is typically received (by readers) in private. Clines stands out from the last century or so of biblical scholarship here, in being willing to contemplate a biblical text with relatively little or no history of redaction prior to it coming into the received form in which it has survived. As his argument unfolds, it becomes apparent that such a premise can be at least as helpful to accurate interpretation, if not more helpful, than many more speculative reconstructions.

Of course, we do have evidence that the Song *was*, in fact, performed in public; but the Song as *text* already existed at that point.[105] Furthermore, there seems to be something artificial about performances of the Song as Aqiba describes them, even after accounting for his personal disapproval. Aqiba speaks of the "tremulous" (trilling or sing-song) voice of a singular singer: no duality of lovers, no plurality of chorus. So Clines raises and examines a very significant possibility: that of the Song *originating* as a literary "contrivance" (Clines' term). He also drops one of his gems into a footnote: "The 'tremulous voice', by the way, couldn't be of a male impersonating a female, could it?"[106] If the Song's *implied* author is feminine, as claimed in this current study, Clines' lateral thinking, regarding the evidence from Aqiba, recovers a possible historical source to support the thesis presented here.

Another gem comes while Clines is attempting to reconstruct a social setting for the composition of the Song (or to "historicise" it, *à la* Marxist hermeneutics). Some of the, perhaps

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103 Clines, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
104 Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, (Fortress, 1990).
105 Clines quotes Tosefta, Sanhedrin 12.10 in a footnote.
106 Clines, *op. cit.*, p. 100. n8.

slightly playful, reconstruction might stretch a little too far into stereotypes of *machismo* to remain credible for some readers, but in at least one particular it has the sober backing of the behavioural sciences, and suggests a plausible understanding of the Song's superscription. Stereotyping men as quintessentially competitive may seem like sexism, but both ethology and ethnology have demonstrated that it is accurate sexism: naturally high levels of androgens correlate with female spotted hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*) behaving competitively (and also growing phalluses).[107] *Homo sapiens* with Y chromosomes do not generally escape the potent effects of these androgens either; indeed, they are not male when they don't (*vide* Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome in medical literature). Conceding to Clines that masculine competitiveness may be accepted as a generalisation regarding our species, perhaps the superlative of the Song's superscription is indeed evidence of a masculine hand at work, just as he proposes. In fact, although Clines is satisfied to answer his own question, regarding who judged the Song to be the best of Songs, *generically*—a man—perhaps, even if only in the fiction of the Song, the superscription confirms Clines explicitly and *specifically* —yes, a man, King Solomon. *Shir haShirim asher liShlomo* could be taken in the sense "the greatest of Songs, according to Solomon", which harmonises with the proposal of many other scholars that the superscription reflects a bid, at some stage, to establish the Song's canonicity by association with Solomon.

There is much that overlaps between social milieu and politics (perhaps the personal has always been political) and this is reflected in Clines' reconstructions of the ancient Israelite setting of the Song as he moves from what he terms the "social matrix" to the "political matrix".

> The social reality in ancient Israel, as in most societies known to us, is [that of] men having power over women, of women as a class having no power to speak of outside the domestic setting, and of a system in which *women are regarded and treated as effectively the property of men*.[108] [Emphasis added.]

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107 "One such extreme example of the role of androgens in the development of masculine phenotypes can be found in the spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*)." Andrew K. Hotchkiss| *et al*., 'Of mice and men (and mosquitofish): antiandrogens and androgens in the environment', *BioScience* 58 (2008): 1037–1050.

108 Clines, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–102.

Indeed, Clines' first proposition—regarding women at best constituting only a minority in representative roles of public responsibility—is generally regarded by cultural anthropology to be a human universal, but is nonetheless particularly well documented in the case of ancient Israel: both in the scrolls of the Hebrew Bible themselves and in contemporary criticism of them. However, it is the second proposition—regarding possession—which is key to the minor premise of the syllogism at the heart of Clines' paper. The major premise of the syllogism is attributed to Jameson,[109] that all texts aim to maintain social equilibrium by obfuscating various forms of injustice.

> **Major**
> All texts obfuscate injustices, doing so in order to maintain the *status quo*.
> **Minor**
> The Song is a text that presents a *mutual* possession refrain
> rather than a faithful picture of the injustice of men possessing women in Israel.
> **Conclusion**
> The Song's function is to pacify by presenting a fantasy of romantic egalitarianism.

In Clines' words, this conclusion reads: "The patriarchal social system not only created the Song of Songs; it needed it."[110]

The syllogism above is, of course, valid; but the important question is whether or not it is sound. That is, is the truth of the premises sufficiently well established that the conclusion must be accepted? Longman takes issue with Clines, on the basis that his argument relies on the "supposition that no woman would [be interested] in the kind of love that the beloved articulates."[111] However, Longman seems to have missed that Clines' argument actually rests on Jameson's theorem, which would *affirm* that women do indeed find beguiling, the kind of love articulated in the Song. In fact, Clines' argument actually relies on *the very supposition* Longman mistakenly believes Clines to deny. The Song, according to Clines' application of Jameson, is constructed by a

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109 Fredric Jameson, *The political unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act*, (Routledge, 1983).
110 Clines, *op. cit.*, p. 100. Again, Marcia Falk provides an explicit voice in contrast: she believes the women of the Song speak "in words that do not seem filtered through the lens of patriarchal consciousness." Falk, *op. cit.*, (1993), p. xv.
111 Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, NICOT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 9.

man (or men) psychologically motivated to reconcile both their own consciences, *and* those of any protestant women, to the gender injustices described in detail in the Hebrew Bible. Although, as quoted by Longman, Clines *does* assert "the need of a male public for erotic literature'",[112] Longman does not quote the subject of Clines' sentence: "The material cause of the Song of Songs is, then, [this] need." Clines quite explicitly, as per Jameson *et al*., wants to look deeper than the material cause to the "political unconscious", the "psychological motivations of [the Song's] author". So, Clines' argument runs deeper than Longman's criticism recognises.

However, looking beyond the author's intention to his (or their) psychological, unconscious and political motivations pushes the boundaries of what this study will be able to demonstrate from objective features of the discourse structure of the Song alone. Communicative intentions, unless hopelessly incompetent, largely make themselves explicit: they are the *raison d'être* of language, the material cause for its surface forms—lexical, syntagmatic and pragmatic. Psychological motivations, though, real enough as they are, can be quite opaque to observation via the medium of text alone, especially highly contrived text like poetry. So, although the current study concurs with Arbel's assessment of the Song as being expressed "in the realm of the imagination"[113] and so accedes to the suitability of Clines' methodology—"My route into this question is to regard the text as a dream, its author's dream"[114]—it will attempt to avoid reading modern gender-stereotyped psychological profiling into the characters of poet, audience and discourse participants,[115] in order to reconstruct any gender stereotypes explicit or implied by *the author of the Song*. Whether any such ancient stereotypes might be more or less appealing than modern ones, is a matter of great contemporary interest; but this paper will only attempt to describe, rather than evaluate, whatever the text of the Song may, or may not, articulate for us regarding gender stereotypes.

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112 Clines, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
113 *Loc. cit.*
114 Clines, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
115 Longman notes an irony that literary and social commentators who argue for new conceptions of gender roles, typically offer very "typecast" pictures of how male and female writers might have been motivated.

So Callow, Arbel and Clines illustrate what appears to have become something of a theme in scholarly analysis of the Song, over the course of several recent decades. However, contemporary interest in gender dynamics may best be considered a new tangent on an old trajectory, making more explicit, and sharpening focus on, the importance for responsibly interpreting the Song of the research question: What is the *character* of this gendered relationship between the Shulammite and her love? Even the traditional allegorical commentators, theocentric and androcentric as their readings were, had their principal concern in this relationship. Recent commentators—both conservative and progressive—have divided (not entirely along "party lines") when offering simple summaries of how Shulammite and lover interact: Brenner, Longman, Noegel and Rendsburg, *et al.* see Shulammite as dominant; Clines sees a deception, Tribble and Falk see a real ideal of gender egalitarianism in the Song; Exum sees plenty of evidence of a hard reality, behind the hype, of the Shulammite ultimately being submissive; Arbel sees independence and autonomy for the Shulammite, at least in her imagination.

Given the luxury the current study has of addressing this question in detail, however, it can attempt to draw its conclusions without being constrained by needing to utilise a simplistic dipolar scale like "relative dominance," which is intuitive and highly evocative, but only rarely objective or even well-defined. Most recently, Assis, but also others before him, have presented more nuanced analyses of the relational dynamics between the Shulammite and her love. Assis and others, it will be argued here, offer a more comprehensive picture of the text of the Song, that does indeed articulate various forms of influence—women upon men, and men upon women—some of which might be termed as dominance, but yet others of which are at best only unnaturally so classified.

The Song depicts interactions that are quite diverse, as well as flowing sometimes one way, sometimes the other, and yet other times being genuinely reciprocal.[116] So, if this understanding is correct, the current thesis will be objecting to little of what other scholars have affirmed, only to what some have denied.[117]

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116 *Cf*. Ronnie Ancona and Ellen Greene (editors), *Gendered dynamics in Latin love poetry*, (Arethusa, 2005) for a number of essays that explore multifaceted perceptions of gender relations in Latin love poetry, including critical reflection on Roman social expectations. "Latin love elegy is a deeply self-conscious literary genre. Not only do elegiac poets constantly allude to the conventions within which they are writing and to their debt to and/or difference from earlier authors, but the subject of their poems (ostensibly, the poet's love for his mistress) often serves a metaphorical function. Elegy is poetry about poetry." Hérica Valladares, 'The lover as a model viewer: gendered dynamics in Propertius 1.3', in *op. cit.*, p. 206.

117 Strictly speaking, of course, *both* affirmations and denials simply express propositions. Often however, and in this case, "affirmations" are quantified existentially— $\exists x \in X . P(x)$ —whereas the corresponding "denials" are universals — $\sim \exists x \in X . P(x) \Leftrightarrow \forall x \in X . \sim P(x)$.

§6 Linguistics and Philosophy

> "What I shall have to say here is neither difficult nor contentious; the only merit I should like to claim for it is that of being true, at least in parts. The phenomenon to be discussed is very widespread and obvious, and it cannot fail to have been already noticed, at least here and there, by others. Yet I have not found attention paid to it specifically".[118] John Austin (1955)

As already noted, advances in linguistics—especially in discourse analysis and pragmatics—have brought fresh insights to literary studies; though it needs to be acknowledged that, in many cases, these advances have simply confirmed or formalised intuitions that had already found various kinds of expression within traditional literary criticism. Discussion above also shows, however, that even literary analyses, informed by—and sensitive to—linguistic advances, nonetheless sometimes differ in the conclusions they draw from the "data" the text of the Song provides.

There is, of course, something naturally preferable about broadly literary rather than narrowly linguistic approaches to textual artefacts, especially in regard to poetry: the full range of readerly skills can be brought to bear by experienced literary critics. Linguistic evidence in isolation can be ambiguous, and linguistic evidence always needs prudent weighting to keep it in line with higher-level literary contextual cues. Some features of communication, advances in pragmatic analysis notwithstanding, operate at subtle levels of abstraction, not crudely marked phonologically, lexically or syntactically. If such features of communication have any accessible explanation, they have it in the rich world of human cognition, and the developing fields of psycholinguistics and cognitive poetics.[119] Indeed, modern linguistics shares many research questions in common with the traditional purview of literary analysis.

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118 John Austin's lecture notes for the 1955 William James Lectures, published as *How to do things with words*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. 1.

119 For cognitive poetics, *vide*: Reuven Tsur and the Routledge guides by Peter Stockwell, and by Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen.

Insights regarding the Song, like those of Arbel and Clines, where they disagree, reflect realities about ambiguities in human communication. Texts are written to be received, as Clines so pointedly reminds us.[120] Texts are, in a sense, most real at the point of their reception, but that is also precisely where there is the most diversity in their character. Readers can and do reconstruct texts to suit their own prejudices. This study, however, attempts to constrain itself to discerning, if possible, the more mundane matter of how the author (or editor) of the Song intended readers to respond, rather than the more challenging issues associated with the many logically possible alternative readings that might have been, or could potentially be, offered. As such, the study is a contribution only to establishing some first principles regarding the text it examines, and so falls at the opposite end of the spectrum to more comprehensive works that can aim to provide the "last word" on interpreting the Song.

There are some simple questions that can be asked of the text of the Song, that might easily be overlooked just because they are simple. Linguistic methodology exists to address a number of such questions. For example, some word order variation appears to be a deliberate feature of biblical Hebrew poetry, gratuitously and artfully introduced by poets in various contexts, to defamiliarise the "cadences" of their purposeful expression. Yet, according to Nicholas Lunn's analysis, this device is utilised but once in the Song (4:8b):

<div dir="rtl">

אתי מלבנון כלה   אתי מלבנון תבאי

</div>

With me from Lebanon, my bride
with me from Lebanon, come!

The text above is particularly interesting because it is an example of retrograde gapping, where "invariably the verb," is absent from the first colon, line or hemistich, only being supplied as the last element of the parallel construction.[121] It is "a much rarer feature of parallelism" (Lunn's data

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120 "A text implies, for its realization, only a reader." Clines, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
121 Lunn, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

contained only five examples).[122] One of the other examples of the structure is Psalm 70:2, the opening verse of the Psalm, leading Lunn to note that Song 4:8 is also frequently read as providing an aperture: after a series of verbless clauses describing the woman, the invitation introduces a new section.[123] Likewise, the opening of Psalm 94 attests the same device; whereas Psalms 92:10 and 94:3—with "marked" word order—are taken by several commentators as *closing* sections.[124] So, Lunn's division of non-canonical word order into variations marked with pragmatic intent, and those marked for poetic defamiliarisation, may be significant in understanding the oppositions appreciated by poet and audience, and how they were utilised to signal transitions in biblical Hebrew poetry.

Lunn's work is self-consciously an application of information theory to word order variation in Biblical Hebrew. Although this study can only benefit from Lunn's identification of defamiliarisation in a solitary verse of the Song, Lunn also identifies *marked* word order in many other verses. Word order variation is a feature of surface form, and like other surface form features provides objective data for interpreting language. Information theory correlates such surface features with the underlying focus structure of intended communication.[125] The focus structure of communication is a first-order representation of the flow of information from originator to recipient. Information theoretical analysis involves identification of: communicative participants, referents, activation states of referents, topic-comment relationships, degree of prominence or focus, and old–new or presupposed–asserted propositional content. Anaphoric pronouns frequently carry a good deal of this information, all the more so in Biblical Hebrew and in the Song of Songs, because

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122 *Ibid.*
123 Longman, *op. cit.*, p. 148; Murphy, op. cit., pp. 158–159.
124 Lunn, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
125 *Vide* Knud Lambrecht, *Information structure and sentence form: Topic, focus, and the mental representations of discourse referents*, Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 71, (CUP, 1994).

Hebrew marks second person verb forms for gender, and the Song juxtaposes female-to-male and male-to-female speeches.[126]

The current study utilises more than just information theory. A number of the key theoreticians, whose work shapes the methodology, have already been noted in the text or footnotes above. Detailed treatment of how their theoretical understanding is relevant to elucidating the Song is deferred to later chapters, where the value of the theories stands out more sharply in the context provided by concrete examples from the text of the Song. At this point, however, it is worth making the general observation that the theoretical work utilised in the analysis below is, in general, the product of two well-known, late-twentieth-century developments: dynamic semantics and cognitive science. The change from static, truth-functional semantics to the current understanding of meaning as context change potential (CCP) is normally considered to date, approximately, from the publication of Hans Kamp's discourse representation theory in 1981; though the literature shows, unsurprisingly, that Kamp was addressing existing questions, and interacting with the results of other semanticists. The rise of cognitive science as an independent discipline, however, traces the history of an even more eclectic interest across many disciplines in related phenomena that can be broadly termed "cognitive."

Although these general tendencies in current research programs are now widely applied, the methodological grounding for the present study remains conservative, being drawn from only a handful of the most well-accepted results within these large movements in contemporary linguistics and literary studies. It also bears repeating that, although expressed in the terminology of contemporary interdisciplinary academic discussion, the conclusions drawn here are not so very

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126 *Vide* the published version of Katsuomi Shimasaki's PhD thesis, *Focus structure in Biblical Hebrew: A study of word order and information structure*, Bethesda: (CDL Press, 2002).

different from insights already published by distinguished commentators in the history of literary interpretation of the Song, *mutatis mutandis* with regard to the terminology.[127]

The research questions of the present study address high-level abstractions regarding the text of the Song. That is to say, they are more concerned with the pragmatics and semantics of the Song, rather than with its tropes, syntagmatic or phonological.[128] As such, the study takes its lead from theoretical linguists working at or above the semantics–pragmatics interface. A measure of scientific objectivity, in seeking methodical answers to the research questions, is sought by utilising linguistic analyses that have proved to be *repeatable*: typologically (across a range of languages); and by linguists working with a spectrum of *complementary* approaches (*viz*. "functional" linguistics). In particular, these include: Dik,[129] Givón,[130] Halliday,[131] Lakoff,[132] Pike,[133] van Valin,[134] and the Prague and St Petersburg schools.[135] It is a striking feature of the complementary approaches of "linguistic functionalism" that they are marked by strong currents of interdisciplinary investigation, as noted by Givón.

> "The antecedence of functionalism in linguistics should not be sought primarily in the work of linguists, but rather in the work of anthropologists, psychologists, and biologists. And long before them, in the work of philosophers."[136]

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127 *E.g.* the "voices" in the Song, here often termed "discourse participants", Origen calls πρόσωπα. Of course, many commentators, modern and medieval, while recognising the Song's voices, make no usage of any specific technical terms when referring to them.

128 *Q.v.* Adele Berlin, *The dynamics of biblical parallelism*, rev. ed., (Eerdmans, 2008); and extensively applied to the Song by Bergant, *op. cit.*

129 Functional Grammar: *vide* Simon Dik, *Functional grammar,* (North-Holland, 1978).

130 Talmy Givón, *Syntax: An introduction*, Rev. ed. (Benjamins, 2001).

131 Systemic Functional Grammar: *vide* Michael Halliday and Christian Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar,* 3rd edition, (Arnold, 2004).

132 Cognitive Grammar: *vide* George Lakoff, *Women, fire and dangerous things*, (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

133 Tagmemics *per* SIL: *vide* Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic concepts*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

134 Role and Reference Grammar: *vide* Robert D. Van Valin Jr., 'A synopsis of role and reference grammar', in Van Valin (ed.), *Advances in role and reference grammar*, (John Benjamins, 1993).

135 *E.g.* Sgall, Hajicova and Panevova, *The meaning of the sentence in its semantic and pragmatic aspects*, (D. Reidel, 1986).

136 *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

Givón recognises the contribution to theoretical linguistics by philosophers, from as far back as the Greeks, and especially their contribution to the linguistic field of pragmatics. For example, Charles Sanders Pierce, Givón observes, "is generally considered the Godfather of modern pragmatism, with insights ranging all over the pragmatic agenda."[137] First among the contributions Givón attributes to Pierce is his revitalisation of Aristotle's third class of logical argument type, termed ἀπαγωγή ('reduction') by Aristotle,[138] but "rechristened *abduction*" by Pierce.[139] In Givón's estimation, abductive inference is a "pragmatic mode *par excellence*".[140]

The work of theoretical linguists and philosophers of language, however, although of great interest in and of itself, is ultimately aimed at serving practical issues in language comprehension. In this current thesis, language theory is being applied as a means to an end—a literary-critical end.

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137 Givon, *Context as other minds*, (Benjamins, 2005), p. 26.
138 εἰ οὖν ὁμοίως ἢ μᾶλλον πιστὸν τὸ ΒΓ τοῦ ΑΓ ἀπαγωγή ἐστιν· Aristotle, *Prior analytics* 69a (2:25:26–27).
139 Givon, *op. cit.*, (2005), p. 26.
140 *Ibid*.

§7 Literature and Analogies

> "The nationality of a worthwhile writer is of secondary importance. The more distinctive an insect's aspect, the less apt is the taxonomist to glance first of all at the locality label under the pinned specimen in order to decide which of several vaguely described races it should be assigned to. The writer's art is his real passport. His identity should be immediately recognized by a special patter or unique coloration."[141] Vladimir Nabokov (1966)

The formal presentation that follows works "bottom–up," as an abductive argument to a hypothesis: it works from what is best known and understood, towards clarifying what is less clear and debatable. Such a presentation is typically limited in its appeal to rather particular forums, like the current one—of academic papers. Perhaps this is because the cognitive processes responsible for language comprehension may indeed operate in some analogously detailed fashion, but for native speakers at least, the minutiae of discourse features in language normally fall below the threshold of conscious thought. It can be an effort to articulate explicitly what a *therefore* is there for, when language competence in most cases appreciates its significance via something approaching a reflex. Yet when interpretations of a piece of language disagree, we are thrown back on first principles to resolve our differences. The following study is offered as a contribution to such discussion regarding the Song.

However, some more "user friendly" informal arguments may also be presented in support of the gynocentric hypothesis for the Song, "top–down" as "intuitions," more literary than linguistic. For example, on the basis of observable literary characteristics, attempts have been made to classify the Song (or parts of it) as like to other works of similar genre (or form). If the species *Shir hashirim* can be demonstrated to be typical of some identifiable literary genus on the basis of some of its uncontroversial characteristics, then other characteristics of that genus might be inferred to apply to the Song and aid in its interpretation. Clearly the Song is poetry, but is it also reasonably classified as drama? John Milton, seeking "Dramatick conſtitutions … doctrinal and exemplary to a

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141 Alfred Appel, Jr. and Vladimir Nabokov, 'An interview with Vladimir Nabokov', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8 (1967): 127–152.

Nation," considers after Sophocles and Euripides, but before the "Apocalyps of Saint *Iohn*", that "the Scripture alſo affords us a divine paſtoral Drama in the Song of *Salomon* conſiſting of two perſons and a double *Chorus*, as *Origen* rightly judges."[142] Even if the Song is not drama proper, is it sufficiently dramatical that some results from literary analysis of drama might be applicable, at least to the research questions of the current thesis?[143]

An analogy between biological classification and literary classification is, of course, rather approximate only, since literary inheritance has considerably more degrees of freedom than genetic inheritance. "Interbreeding" constrains biological classification to a tree-like structure, whereas "cross-pollination" has accelerated over the course of literary history. Literary genres frequently involve deliberate innovations and departures from any merely simplistic reproduction of "canonical literary forms." So, resisting the temptation to categorise the Song too precisely can leave us free to compare and contrast it with documented human thought and art *one degree of freedom at a time*: as reflection on the topic of love (content); as poetry (form); as a work from the classical era (date); as an opus drawn from the corpus of Afro-Asiatic or Semitic dialects (language);[144] as a Palestinian, Levantine or Oriental work (place, culture);[145] and, not least, as a sacred text—Aqiba's (and Origen's) *most* sacred of sacred texts (religion).[146]

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142 John Milton, *The reason of church-government urg'd against prelaty*, 2 books, (London: February, 1642), preface to book 2.

143 "Even though the Song is not structurally a drama, [the] recapitulated theme of seeking and finding does impart to it a certain dramatic quality." Meredith G. Kline, 'Bible book of the month: The Song of Songs', *Christianity Today* 3 (1959): 22–23, 39.

144 *Vide* Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the ancient Egyptian love songs*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

145 *Vide* Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature*, (Routledge, 1994).

146 Comparisons and contrasts between *independent* literary traditions—which are *unlikely* to have had any historical interaction—are of particular scientific value. Cultures of oral poetry antedate not only classical civic literature, but also literacy itself, cross-culturally. Biology tells us sexual reproduction evolved independently in different branches of the tree of life. Was poetry (and love poetry) integral to the earliest human societies? Did regional differences lead to different trajectories of development, or do we have evidence of independent *origins* for poetry? Sadly, there is a paucity of scholarly treatment of *contrasts* between the Song and the famous Sanskrit love story of mortal man and immortal woman in the Purūravas–Urvaśī tradition. This extends from hymn 95 of the tenth *mandala* of the Ṛg Veda, through the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, on to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (9:14), thence to Kālidāsa's *Vikramōrvaśīyam*.

The Song might also be a maverick among texts, like Alexandre Pushkin's love story *Eugene Onegin*,[147] for example. Just as the Song has often been thought to be an allegory, so many critics have followed Vissarion Belinsky's famous appraisal of Pushkin's "novel in verse" (роман в стихах) as "an encyclopedia of Russian life".[148] Likewise, just as there is a good case for the Song reflecting some familiarity with other ancient near eastern literature, so Pushkin explicitly quotes— and otherwise alludes to—earlier European literature, being considered to have been especially strongly influenced by the writers of seventeenth century France,[149] and by Byron's *Don Juan*. *Eugene Onegin* was composed as a long sequence of sonnet-stanzas, with an unconventional rhyme scheme, which also alternated "masculine" (oxytonic) and "feminine" (paroxytonic) rhymes.[150] While this marks the work as exceedingly deliberately poetic, it is just as evidently couched as a narrative by its author, who describes his creative process in its penultimate stanza. Here, Pushkin describes his unusual opus as a novel, but a "free" one (свободного романа). That *Eugene Onegin* is a multi-genre opus is sufficiently obvious to inspection that such a classification does not even need its author's imprimatur, in title and in text; however, it may well be that the Song of Songs is a somewhat similarly "trans-genred" work. Codex Sinaiticus' version of the Song offers rubrics with "scene-setting stage directions" and specifies the speakers (starting simply with ἡ νύμφη),[151] since the Song's second person verbs, marked for gender in the Hebrew, require some other device to communicate this deictic information in Greek (and English, *q.v.* Callow above). Likewise, Origen did not simply see the Song as merely to be appreciated allegorically, he based this on a primary

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147 *Eugene Onegin* was subtitled *A novel in verse*. Serial instalments (1823–1831) preceded publication of the first full-text edition (1833) and a second and final edition (1837).

148 Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky, '*Eugene Onegin*: An encyclopedia of Russian life', in Sona Stephan Hoisington (editor and translator), *Russian views of Pushkin's* Eugene Onegin, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

149 "Pushkin was less interested in the prose which he considered the strength of the French than in the poetry which he considered their weakness. … [He] always insisted that there was no real poetry in France before the seventeenth century." Robert A. Maguire, 'A. S. Pushkin: Notes on French Literature', *American Slavic and East European Review* 17 (1958): 101–109.

150 Douglas Hofstadter, author of Pulitzer prize-winning *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979), later published his own version of *Eugene Onegin* (subtitled *A novel versification*). Prior to publishing his own version of Pushkin's novel, he sounded a striking note of praise for translations which carry rhyme from source text to receptor language, because "at a higher level of abstraction, all the key relationships among sounds are preserved isomorphically." 'What's gained in translation', *New York Times* (December 8, 1996): 47–48.

151 *Vide* CodexSinaiticus.org: the colour of the rubrics stands out clearly.

literary analysis of the Song, in which he makes much of its noticeably dramatised presentation.[152]

To be sure, the Song is dramatic poetry, not drama in verse, as in Indo-European traditions;[153] however, this widely recognised literary feature, of dramatic voices and *personae* in the Song, helps motivate the linguistic analysis of discourse participants in the body of this study.

In its received form, the Song may be analysed as having up to almost a dozen potentially significant discourse participants. It is the purpose of this study: firstly, to establish that the Shulammite is indisputably the central figure among these discourse participants—the gynocentric hypothesis; but also secondly, to examine closely the way gender is portrayed in the relationships between the Song's characters—is it patriarchal, as Exum, Clines *et al*. propose, or does it rescue the Bible from patriarchalism, as Tribble, Falk *et al*. propose? Focussing on the discourse participants of the Song, and their explicit or implied relationships, provides a clear framework within which both these research questions can be addressed. Detailed evidence (predominantly linguistic) occupies the bulk of this current study, but the overall picture may be sketched in outline, in a more literary way, relatively briefly, here.

Whether the Song was written to be performed (or, as per Clines, only ever to be read) and whether or not it was compiled from earlier material, in the form we have it now, *the Song presumes an audience*. For all its celebrated freedom of metaphor and compellingly authentic portrayal of intimate—even private—emotions, and despite some relatively opaque motivations for transitions from speaker to speaker and section to section, the Song retains a distinctive and literary, deliberate and formal character as a text. Such is the stuff of published poetry. Poets may write verses for their own private consumption only: as exercises, as drafts, or for personal reasons. Even

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152 *Vide* Christopher King, *op. cit.*; also, Jerome's praise of Origen's commentary is often quoted: "Origenes, cum in cæteris libris omnes vicerit, in Cantico canticorum ipse se vicit. Nam decem voluminibus explicitis …" Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus (Jerome), 'Prologus', ad *Interpretatio homiliarum duarum Origenis in Cantica Canticorum*, (Roma: AD 383).

153 Perhaps including the "dialogue hymn" Pururavas and Urvashi (RV 10:95), in the Vedic form of the archaic *triṣṭubh* meter—four *pada* (feet) of eleven syllables each, with a caesura and regular cadence.

so, even without any intention to publish, there is still an implied audience, even if this audience may never have been intended to be wider than the poet herself. Plath's *Daddy*, for example, does not easily generalise to just any reader sharing Plath's experiences as described in the poem. In the case of the Song, however, the anonymity of the protagonists, the genericity and plurality of the characters of the chorus and other "extras," and the very subject of romantic love itself, suggest it is likely that the poet (or compiler) so constructed the Song that it would address a wide, general (and gendered) audience. That is not true of all genres of literature, nor of all poetry, not even in the Bible, if we can accept the standard view that poetic passages in apocalyptic are couched in baroque language, at least in part, to communicate that they are intended for an audience of "initiates only."[154]

The Song, in stark contrast to apocalyptic, appears to be a "public domain" work. Not only that, but the Song is also "interactive"—it self-consciously engages with its audience. The Song is no crude morality play,[155] but when the Shulammite calls on her friends to stop glancing at her dark skin, surely we sympathise with her, position ourselves among her friends, and accede—in our imagination—to her request, as we are drawn into the fiction of the poem. When she places her friends on oath not to arouse or awaken love, we ourselves feel challenged. When the Shulammite soliloquises, without response from her love or her friends, we do not conclude she is really talking to herself alone or only to the air. We know, *and the poet knows we know*, that she is talking to us, the audience. Indeed, by the end of the Song, we know the Shulammite sufficiently well to distinguish between the genuine hyperbole of her exulting about the size of her breasts, and her

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154 "Daniel clearly exhibits a mixed genre, with elements of narrative, poetry, and prayers sprinkled among the apocalyptic visions. Whether one wishes to describe these elements as 'genres,' 'sub-genres' or 'forms,' …" Jon Paulien, 'The end of historicism? Reflections on the Adventist approach to biblical apocalyptic—part one', *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14 (2003): 15–43; for a literature review regarding poetry in Daniel 7, see Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition*, (Chico: Scholars, 1983), 190–191.

155 *Cf.* "Only in such children's stories as contain the concluding 'and the moral of the story is …' or in tiresomely didactic authors such as Tolstoy do we get an explicit representation of the serious speech acts which it is the point (or the main point) of the fictional text to convey." Searle, *op. cit.*, (1974), p. 332.

perfectly sincere declaration regarding the life-or-death nature of the ideal of love she (and the poet) are presenting *to the audience*.

Strictly speaking, neither poet nor audience are literal discourse participants (or "voices") *within* the Song, yet the burden of proof must still fall on those who would deny that the Song reflects a deliberate message from poet to audience. Counterintuitively, this is all the more so, since the poet is so deliberate in *refraining* from activating his persona. Shelley offers us a concise and simpler example of the same phenomenon in his sonnet, *Ozymandias*.[156] Although *the very first word* of that short poem is "I", and the second discourse participant is an anonymous "traveller from an antique land", the topic of the discourse is clearly the Ozymandias of its title, and it is only he that is named: "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!" Of course, the irony is that it is not Ozymandias' works we see, but the brilliant work of the remaining, "silent" discourse participant, the royal mason: "its sculptor well those passions read / Which yet survive". Shelley's poem provides a simple linear progression of participants regarding one another: reader looking on Shelley, looking on traveller, looking on sculptor, looking on Ozymandias, looking on the world. By contrast, the Song has the daughters of Jerusalem regarding the Shulammite regarding her love regarding her, and other complexities. Yet, just as with Shelley, the poet of the Song makes his points through the words of the characters he constructs.

We can press the analogy between *Ozymandias* and the Song a little further. The "I" of *Ozymandias* is no more Shelley than Ozymandias, in the poem, is actually Ramses II. They are types, made concrete to suspend reader disbelief, and to avoid confusing, multiple layers of abstraction. Rather nicely, Shelley's opening line orients the reader to the discourse, economically and effectively. At the same time he provides a variant on the "once upon a time" formula, and yet

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156 Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ozymandias', *The Examiner*, (11 January, 1818), p. 24. The autograph, from a leaf of a notebook, is held in the Bodleian Library, with a draft of the poem on the reverse.

—in British empiricist tradition—he also provides an "audit trail" of fictive eyewitnesses. He is saying, "this may not quite be a true story, but it might as well be." The "I" of *Ozymandias* functions like the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song, they confirm or "second" the testimony of the main speaker. In both cases, these participants are provided by the poets to orient readers to the discourse, and to suspend disbelief—they model reader response (*cf.* Umberto Eco's *lettore modello*).[157] Shelley suggests, "I was struck by this, and so shall you be." The poet (or compositor) behind the Song suggests, via the daughters of Jerusalem, "We're listening to you, O Shulammite, we ourselves have seen the truth of what you say."

In the case of *Ozymandias*, the sculptor is held up, if we may phrase it thus, as prophetic, having enduringly carved his understanding of the vanity of ambition in the face of time and space. There is a positive irony here, with the sculptor ultimately being heard "far away" from his "antique land." It is the truth of humility that endures, not the vanity of ambition: those with ears, may they hear.[158] It is interesting to contrast Shelley's poem with Horace Smith's poem of the same name, published in *The Examiner* three weeks later, where Smith speaks directly of Egypt and London. Although Smith uses no first person pronoun, it is Smith's poem, not Shelley's that comes across more directly as poet preaching to reader;[159] it also reveals that Smith is an Englishman, writing for an English audience. Pushkin, even more explicitly, injects himself into *Eugene Onegin*, speaking as a Russian to Russians,[160] and addressing readers directly (о мой читатель), even acknowledging foes (недруг) as well as friends (друг).[161] Among all these sonnets, Shelley's *Ozymandias* is the most elliptic, the main point of his poem is fictively attributed to the sculptor, but in Smith's, it can only be attributed to the poet himself. Shelley's "I" in Ozymandias does not, in fact, introduce the

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157 *Vide* Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula*, (Milano: Bompiani, 1979).
158 "Tyrants will come and go, [Shelley's] poem confidently implies, but civilisation outlasts them. (Shelley was writing only two years after the Battle of Waterloo and the defeat of Napoleon.)" Adrian Barlow, *World and time: Teaching literature in context*, Cambridge Contexts in Literature, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 117.
159 "Shelley doesn't spell out how we should react: he lets the ruined statue dwarfed by the endless desert speak for itself." *Ibid.*, p. 115.
160 "That most Russian of Russian poets" according to Hofstadter, *op. cit.*, (1996), p. 47.
161 Pushkin, *op. cit.*, 8:XLIX.

poet to the reader, but rather invites the reader into the narrative, via *identifying* with the poet: "I can imagine *myself* listening to a traveller's tales, such as these" (*cf.* Eco's *lector in fabula*).[162]

Yet, returning to the Song, it is not the Shulammite's "I" the reader is, at first, invited to identify with—her intimations are too specific, personal and intense for that. At first, the reader identifies most closely with the daughters of Jerusalem.[163] Yet this seems to work as a "hook," as the Shulammite's exhortations to the daughters give way to implications, then assertions of generalities, regarding her vision of love. By the end of the Song, it is impossible to discern just whom the Shulammite is addressing. Quite plausibly, she addresses all: daughters, brothers, Solomon (real or fictive), *and the audience*.

As the sculptor is Shelley's prophet, so the Shulammite is the Song's prophetess.[164]

At least, that is the gynocentric hypothesis this study aims to place on a foundation of objective linguistic evidence: in the first place, in regard to the pragmatic "flow" of the Song, variously activating its discourse participants; and secondly, in regard to the semantic "units," in particular the gendered "macroroles" (and other collocations) apparent in the surface form of the text.[165]

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162 Eco, *op. cit.*

163 "The women's presence is always a reminder that what seems to be a closed dialogue between two perpetually desiring lovers is addressed to us, for our pleasure and possibly our enlightenment." Exum, *op. cit.*, (2005), p.7; this is not just a modern "reader response" literary analysis, Aristotle preferred Sophocles to Euripides on the grounds that "it is necessary the chorus be understood as one of the actors, to be part of the whole, to be participating (συναγωνίζομαι)." Καὶ τὸν χορὸν δὲ ἕνα δεῖ ὑπολαμβάνειν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, καὶ μόριον εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου καὶ συναγωνίζεσθαι μὴ ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδῃ ἀλλ᾽ ὥσπερ Σοφοκλεῖ. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1456a.

164 "The woman audaciously declares, on behalf of the poet …" Exum, *op. cit.*, (2005), p. 253.

165 *Macrorole* is borrowed from the language of Robert van Valin's (*et al.*) Role and Reference Grammar (RRG); and the relevant collocations are language-specific lexical choices identified by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as reinforcing gender typology: *e.g.* "beautiful woman" *vis-à-vis* "handsome man."

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