My Lover is Mine and I am His–The Grazer in the Lilies: A Philosophical-Literary Reading of the Song of Songs

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MY LOVER IS MINE AND I AM HIS—THE GRAZER IN THE LILIES:

A PHILOSOPHICAL-LITERARY READING

OF THE SONG OF SONGS

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MY LOVER IS MINE AND I AM HIS—THE GRAZER IN THE LILIES:

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This dissertation examines the thesis that the Song of Songs is love poetry that portrays two lovers who are entirely dependent upon each other in constructing their self-identity. Examining the Song in this way illuminates the centrality of their relationship and the specific ways in which it contributes to the self-construction of each lover. The literary methodology of poetics with particular attention to dialogue serves as the backbone of the project. To this are added philosophical developments, primarily from Kenneth Gergen and Judith Butler, concerning the interpersonal construction of the self to further explore the intertwined lovers. The interpersonal characteristics of the self demonstrate that one individual person depends upon relationship with others in understanding oneself. In particular, the dissertation examines the Song in light of three components of interpersonal self-construction: performance, dialogue, and unboundedness.

Chapter 1 presents common ways of presenting characterization in biblical texts and argues that these are insufficient for dealing with the Song based upon previous Song scholarship. It then puts forward a framework for interpersonality that draws on the broader history of the philosophy of the self as a way to examine the lovers in the Song. Chapter 2 addresses the lovers in terms of this framework of dialogue, performance, and unboundedness in
Song 1:1-2:14, establishing several patterns of interaction between the two lovers that are repeated and developed. Chapter 3 focuses on the two night scenes and the following descriptions in 3:1-11 and 5:2-6:3. These sections, which differ significantly from the rest of the Song by including more narrative aspects, provide an alternative source of characterization for the two lovers and incorporate a palpable sense of danger threatening to separate them. Chapter 4 applies the framework to 4:1-5:1 and 6:4-7:14, which primarily present the woman through her lover’s eyes as part of a larger dialogue between the two of them. Just as their relationship continues to develop and is therefore always incomplete, the fragmented nature of the description emphasizes that partiality. Chapter 5 discusses the features of Song 8 as a means to conclude the findings of the entire project. The Song functions as a window onto an interpersonal relationship between two lovers that begins before the text and continues after its last verse; the reader follows its development from the outside. The poetry presents a relationship that creates two lovers who exist entirely in terms of the relationship between them. Ultimately, the Song of Songs provides a case study in how interpersonal relationships invaluably contribute to identity and selfhood.
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This is dedicated to my parents.
CHAPTER 1
WHAT IS YOUR LOVER IN COMPARISON TO ANOTHER? TWO LOVERS AND A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPERSONALITY

The Song of Songs is love poetry that portraits an extended conversation between and about a female and a male lover. They have no particular names or identities. Little back story and historical context provide meager information about them. Readers have only the words of and about the two lovers presented in the Song. This lack of particular information about the two lovers has led to a vast expanse of possible readings. Early interpreters ignore the text’s plain erotic meaning in order to spiritualize the Song. The two lovers are often allegorized as representations of the relationship between YHWH and Israel, Christ and the church, or the mystical divine and the human soul/intellect. The trend in more recent scholarship is to read the Song as secular love poetry. Later interpreters often focus on the plain meaning to reveal the

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depths of a positive view of female sexuality or the uniqueness of the female voice. Not wanting to look at the lovers as embodying an allegorical relationship, these scholars forget the primacy of the relationship itself. The relationship depicted in the poetry involves two active agents, so attention is due to both characters.

Nothing of the main characters is known apart from this one literary setting. The Song contains the words of two primary active agents, and their interaction shapes everything known about them. Their words just as often obfuscate as clarify their physical characteristics. More often than not, the two describe the effect the other has on him or her rather than objective qualities that could distinguish one individual from another in a lineup. How would one identify a man who is “like an apple tree among the trees of the forest” (2:3)? Or who would recognize a woman based upon her cheeks being “like rounds of a pomegranate” (6:7)? These are words in praise of the physical world, but they say more about the relationship between the two of them than about the individuals themselves. Many of the phrases have sexual connotations, but they also indicate a deeper connection between them than a primarily sexual union. Very little can be said about them apart from their subjective statements about one another.

Even the Daughters of Jerusalem who serve as a chorus in the poem interacting with the woman refer to each of the lovers in relational language instead of using more independent descriptors. The epitome of this phenomenon is Song 5:9 when the daughters of Jerusalem ask,

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6 Fiona Black would go so far as to argue that the depictions are grotesque and combat the traditional “hermeneutic of compliment” that causes interpreters to perform backflips to read the comparisons in favorable ways. See Fiona C. Black, *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies in the Song of Songs* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 4.

7 Biblical translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
“What is your lover in comparison to another, most beautiful of women? What is your lover more than another that thus you put us under oath?” They too use the superlative language that characterizes the lovers’ words to one another and specifically request a comparison of the male lover to another. The Daughters provide an outside voice which reinforces the depth of the relationship, but this voice still provides no objective representations of either of the lovers.

The Song of Songs is a poetic dialogue, but little work has been done on the development of the two characters in relationship with one another. To read the Song as a view of relationship and that relationship’s deep contribution to the development of the self is the project to be undertaken here. The assertion of the primacy of the relationship to identity as presented in the Song does not limit the nature of the interpersonal self to being formed through erotic, heterosexual, monogamous relationships. Instead, this reading of the Song provides one example of a relationship that helps to illuminate this aspect of self-construction. If these characters were real people, they would certainly have other relationships that shape who they are. The woman has brothers and a mother (1:6, 8:2). The association with Solomon (1:1) and the reference to maidens loving him (1:3) leaves open the possibility of other lovers. There is even some dialogue between the woman and the Daughters of Jerusalem, but the most detailed relationship of the Song (and its primary focus) is the one between the two lovers. The Song provides a view of just one pairing from the matrix of relationships that shape the interpersonal self. This extracted view shows the impact of one relationship, simplifying the complex web of human relationships by focusing on one example. This chapter will first treat biblical characterization broadly and then focus on how scholars have treated the Song’s characters in particular. Finally, it will introduce the philosophical understanding of the interpersonal construction of the self to enable further examination of the characters of the Song and their relationship in a new way.
1.1 Biblical Characterization

Interpretation of literary characters is different from how humans interact with one another and interpret each other in real life. Readers must rely on the limited words on the page to learn about them, instead of also being able to rely on facial expressions, intonation, gestures, interactions with others, etc., which aid the interpretation of others in real life. As Michael Fox writes, “we have a bunch of pieces, which we must join together into a person who never existed apart from those pieces.”\(^8\) Unlike contemporary literature that frequently provides many details on both physical appearance and thought processes, biblical literature leaves much more room for the interpretation of motives, concerns, and commitments. The fuller characters usually occur within extended narratives through a combination of direct and indirect characterization. Direct characterization comes from the perspective of the narrator naming particular qualities, while indirect characterization requires inference based upon a character’s appearance or conduct. According to Robert Alter, along the scale of indirect to more direct, “Character can be revealed through the report of actions; through appearance, gestures, posture, costume; through one character’s comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanations.”\(^9\) However, the Song of Songs has no external, omniscient narrator, so this most reliable form of direct characterization is absent. The Song instead relies upon direct indirect, and inward speech as its primary form of characterization.

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\(^8\) Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 7.

Whereas a narrator typically relates past events, a character’s dialogue is concerned primarily with the present.\textsuperscript{10} The lovers in the Song concern themselves only with the present and the immediate future, leaving readers without substantial access to their pasts. Nor do the characters appear in other biblical stories in order to provide more background information. The Song opens and closes as a window in the midst of the relationship between the two lovers. In some ways, it reads like the text of a play with no stage directions and with all the possibilities and problems that may arise for interpretation of such a text.\textsuperscript{11} The number of speakers, the speaker of any given line, and the interpretation overall is often uncertain and thus fluid.

Usually biblical characters and relationships are used as tools in developing plot elements with few physical descriptions beyond those necessary.\textsuperscript{12} For example, readers only need to know Ehud was left handed because of the way Eglon’s assassination happens or that Esau was hairy because of its challenge to Jacob’s scheme (Judg 3:12-30; Gen 25:25). Their portrayal is mentioned only as a means to advance the plot of a larger narrative. However, in the Song of Songs, there is no real plot and most of the dialogue is metaphorical description. The relationship itself is the story. By removing most plot-like elements, the Song frees the two lovers to deepen their characterization through description and interaction apart from typical narrative development. The setting changes without explanation, there is no clear sense of planned or completed actions, and time itself seems to be a fluid concept for the two lovers. The relationship


\textsuperscript{11} Roy L. Heller brought to my attention the play by Caryl Churchill, “Love and Information,” which presents continuous dialogue with no indication as to who should speak any given line beyond the words spoken themselves. Critics argue about the minimum number of characters involved (much like interpreters of the Song do).

\textsuperscript{12} Hermann Gunkel was among the first to note the minimal character development in biblical narrative; see Gunkel, \textit{Genesis}, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), xxxiv.
deepens through the course of the Song, but it does so primarily through extensive description of themselves rather than exterior obstacles or objectives. Therefore, discussion of the characters in the Song requires a different framework than may be appropriate for other biblical texts.

1.2 Characterization of the Lovers

Many scholars find multiple love poems contained within the Song of Songs, but the reoccurrence of particular phrases and images ties the whole Song together. Thus, to examine the characters whose voices lie within the Song will be to assume the singularity of the Song in its final form. Even if originally composed as a compilation of different poems, the Song now holds together the voices of two lovers and the Daughters of Jerusalem. This reading thereby asserts that the same male and female lover appear throughout the Song.

The two lovers of the Song confuse the line between particular characters and generic types. André LaCocque posits that all the characters in the Song are simply types (including Solomon), in part due to the “supratemporality” of the Song. He notes the Song’s lack of particularly Israelite themes or style, making it easy to set the lovers into a variety of times and places. J. Cheryl Exum writes, “The Song’s lovers are archetypal lovers—composite figures, types of lovers rather than any specific lovers.” They take on different roles in different parts of the poem, making them more easily relatable to all lovers. However, she then goes on to discuss

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how the two lovers do take on “distinct personalities.””16 Discussion of the self-development of the two lovers requires attributing to them clear identities, but this does not cause them to be less relatable. Many lovers see themselves in Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy having never set foot in England or in Odysseus and Penelope centuries after the conclusion of the Trojan War. Fox notes the benefit of reading the little bits of characterization as creating full characters: “There are several reasons why literary characters are in some ways more knowable than real ones. For the former, the facts are complete. Insofar as the text is intact and we understand its language, we readers have all the data that can and ever will exist, and they will not change.”17 The Song presents the pieces of the lovers from which they can be known as characters.

Some contemporary scholarship privileges the woman, even to the extent that the male lover is considered to be an imaginary creation of the woman. Chana and Ariel Bloch’s discussion of the characters of the Song begins with the woman who “often seems more than his equal,” noting her bold initiations and pronouncements, and then presents the qualities of the lovers as one unit.18 They then note the chorus-like characteristics of the Daughters of Jerusalem and the friction introduced by the watchmen and brothers, but they do not include a paragraph dedicated to the male lover. Carey Ellen Walsh goes so far as to say that the woman undergoes “a self-transforming love” so that at the end of the book the woman claims her desire as her own, separate from its object, her male lover. At the end she stands alone.19 However, the identity of the woman as her lover’s beloved is so integral to her entire identity it is impossible to celebrate

17 Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 8.
18 Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 4-5.
her without him. Without the other, each of the two lovers loses their primary locus of identity, making the male lover indispensable to the female. Though hers may be the primary voice, he is an active contributor to the development of their relationship through the dialogue.

Interpreters often explore how the Song presents gender in general terms as well. David Carr clearly notes a problem: modern readers “presuppose that the thing that makes men and women different from one another is different bodies.” He follows the work of Thomas Laqueur, who asserts that this identification based upon the body only recently replaced a more fluid conceptualization in which male and female differed primarily in their status on the cosmic hierarchy. Sex could change to better reflect an individual’s status. The Song has attracted literary and biblical critics who are closely attuned to portrayals of gender independent of biology. However, most of them approach the Song as a kind of battlefield, deciphering whether the male or female lover’s perspective is central or how the two undercut one another or whether they adhere to or subvert expected gender roles. By pitting the feminine against the masculine (even if the two somehow emerge as equals), these scholars promulgate a problematic binary that overlooks the blurring between the two lovers and the dependence upon one another that occurs repeatedly throughout the Song. The scholars neglect the extent to which the Song is concerned primarily with the expression of the relationship between the two, not the creation of independent characters.


Donna Haraway emphasizes the need to add a relational aspect to the definition of gender, stating:

Gender is always a relationship, not a performed category of being or a possession that one can have. Gender does not pertain more to women than to men. Gender is the relation between variously constituted categories of men and women (and variously arrayed tropes), differentiated by nation, generation, class, lineage, color, and much else.²²

Gender identity is also fundamentally relational. It is not a simple description one can reach through isolated self-reflection. Masculine and feminine are socially constructed categories. This need for relational language for describing gender and, more broadly, what it means to be a self leads to the problem to be undertaken in this project.

Francis Landy presents the most detailed discussion of the characters in the Song. He writes that, for this text, traditional means of understanding characterization are fruitless. Landy proposes instead that “an investigation of the Song is an exploration of the [Jungian] archetypes out of which the self is constituted, not as a single entity, but as a constellation of personae.”²³ These personae appear in fragments that nevertheless are “luminous, frequently naturalistic, allowing a reconstruction of the personality behind them.”²⁴ Landy contrasts the two lovers with the woman personifying enclosed spaces like gardens and homes and the man embodying freedom. The female lover is more self-reflective and assertive while the male seems to love only the idea of love. Landy does note the ambiguity and loss of definition of the individual bodies


²³ Francis Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1983), 61, 63.

²⁴ Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise, 68.
but attributes this primarily to the tendency for projection. Introducing the philosophy of the self into the conversation allows me to expand upon the work done by Landy and pay more attention to the agency of the relationship between the two lovers.

1.3 History of the Philosophy of the Self

Discussions about the philosophy of the self trace their roots back to such classical thinkers Aristotle and the Stoics. These ancient philosophers approached the question of individual selves directly in relation to the problem of death. What were individual selves and what purpose did they serve if each one died? Many philosophers have since taken up the question of what it means to be (or have) a self. The idea of a self is tied to a sense of self-awareness and search for authenticity. Thus, philosophers often discuss what is required for a self, as well as contemplating all the components that make up a whole self.

In The Idea of the Self, Jerrold Siegel argues that the common components attributed to the self can be classified into three categories: bodily/material, relational, and reflective.\(^{25}\) All three components of the construction of the self relate to insights into the human gained through biology, psychology, sociology, etc. The bodily/material is perhaps the easiest to understand and most closely aligns with the relatively independent biological system that is one human being. The relational self requires others and can further divide into two aspects: the social (one’s place in society as a whole) and the interpersonal (relationships between individuals). The reflective self is the intellectual self-examining component that is activated to mediate between material and external forces acting on a person. Philosophers and theorists have focused differing amounts of attention to these three categories in various combinations.

Scholars often present either a one-dimensional or a multi-dimensional account of the self. Multi-dimensional accounts attempt to give a full description of selfhood through a cataloging of various components. This is an effective way of showing the variability of a self, but it can be difficult to balance many different parts in a meaningful way, and a comprehensive account may well be impossible. One-dimensional accounts are often theoretical (as most scholars recognize other influences even when focusing on only one), but they can be helpful in drawing attention to one vital aspect of self-understanding. A one-dimensional reading of the self-construction of the two characters of the lovers in the Song will best illuminate the interpersonal aspect.

Discussions of the self usually rely on René Descartes. Descartes is one of the earliest thinkers to isolate the reflective aspect of the self. Through a process of doubt, he ends up with the cogito.26 He can assert his own existence as one who thinks. He writes, “But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and that also imagines and senses.”27 However, this foundational assertion has the result of creating an insurmountable gap between his conception of himself and everything else. Only asserting the existence of God allows Descartes to assure himself of the existence of anything other than his mind, for he asserts the perception of God to be the only thing prior to his conception of himself.28 The disembodied I does not escape this circularity of self-reflective solitude on its own.


27 Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations, 66.

28 Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations, 77.
Paul Ricoeur clearly states the difference between the study of the I of Descartes and attention to the self, which will be the focus of the rest of the discussion to follow. He argues, “To say self is not to say I. The I is posited—or it is deposed. The self is implied reflexively in the operations, the analysis of which precedes the return toward this self.”

To identify the I as a subject, everything else can and must be excluded from it. The self originates as an objective recipient of attention. Whereas the cogito was mired in disconnection, the self fundamentally depends upon connection. Ricoeur states “that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other.” This self has three features: “the detour of reflection by way of analysis, the dialectic of selfhood and sameness, and finally the dialectic of selfhood and otherness.” These interconnected and inseparable features help to bring shape to the fullness of the self as dependent upon relationship to others whether those others are more comparable or contrasting. The reflective analysis of the self requires aspects of both sameness and difference.

1.4 Interpersonal Construction of the Self

As noted above, the relational aspect of the self has two components—the first is as a part of a whole society and the second is in encounter with another self. Society acts upon and shapes the self, and many different selves form society. Theorists who emphasize the social self, such as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, or Charles Taylor, often focus on the interplay between the one


31 Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 16.
individual and the whole of society. Their primary foci are the individual and the entire society. The other part of self-understanding comes about through the realization that to other subjects, I am an object. Part of one’s self-perception is tied to how others might view it. This assumes the division between inner and outer (in relation to the self) as explored by Descartes and discussed above. How is one to access anything that is outside itself? This further develops into the problem of other minds. It becomes a very lonely understanding of existence if even the relational aspect of the self only relates to society as a whole or other minds that are totally unknowable due to the distance between individuals.

None of these social conceptions take into consideration two independent agents acting upon one another in mutual co-action. This is the interpersonal construction of the self. Here the other does not serve simply as a mirror to reveal a hidden or unknown, but already present, part of the self. Instead, two (or more) people are involved in the co-creation of themselves. Though earlier thinkers sometimes included an interpersonal aspect of self-construction, it was ultimately peripheral to the true identity of the self. However, as Clifford Geertz was one of the first to point out, “the conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole” is unique to post-Enlightenment Western culture.

Such individualism often leads to a profound sense of isolation and alienation, which can also lead to an inflated sense of self superiority. George Herbert Mead, one of the most influential


philosophers to assert the primacy of the social self, argues that “the origin and foundation of the self, like those of thinking, are social.”³⁴ Kenneth Gergen further asserts that there are no individual, independent minds but that all are a byproduct of relationship. In the way that a word has no meaning without context, so a self is nothing without its relationship to others.³⁵ Charles Taylor also states, “One is a self only among other selves.”³⁶ It is impossible to develop a sense of self without others—humans are fundamentally social beings.

There are many different ways of conceptualizing the effects of interactions with others in self-development. Each conceptualization, however, stresses the importance of relationship and understanding oneself as tied up in the existence of others. Some more recent philosophers and theorists combat the individualism assumed by prior conceptions of the self by foregrounding the importance of relationship, dialogue, and others in self construction. For the purpose of this study, I highlight three general characteristics of interpersonality that recur in the work of these scholars: dialogue, performance, and unboundedness. These three characteristics will shape the closer reading of the Song of Songs I present in the following chapters.

1.4.1 Dialogue

The category of dialogue grounds all other aspects. Two individuals shape one another through conversation with one another. Not only the relationship is shaped but the two

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individuals are as well. G. H. Mead explains this simply, writing, “In the conversation of gestures what we say calls out a certain response in another that in turn changes our own action, so that we shift from what we started to do because of the reply the other makes.”\textsuperscript{37} The simple engagement in conversation shapes actions and thereby identity. Furthermore, dialogue is embodied. It requires two distinct persons. Based upon the collected work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael Holquist explains, “Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies).”\textsuperscript{38} There is a measure of both sameness and difference that allows for the exchange to take place. Partners in dialogue share space and a medium for exchange (often language) but do so from different perspectives.

When a person interacts with another, Gergen says, the expression of one’s feelings anticipates a particular response. In this way, actions and relationships are not causative but rather predictive.\textsuperscript{39} They open a logical pathway for response; many responses may be appropriate but not just anything would make sense. If one character says to another, “You look nice today,” there are a multitude of sensible responses, but “Neptune is the seventh planet from the sun” is not one of them. In this way the conversation builds in cooperation. Charles Taylor expresses the same sentiment in somewhat different language, paying attention to the common rhythm of relationship as being like that of dancing or of a two-person saw.\textsuperscript{40} The motions are

\textsuperscript{37} Mead, \textit{Mind, Self & Society}, 140-41.


\textsuperscript{39} Gergen, \textit{Relational Being}, 50.

not predetermined as such, but require a common understanding of the pattern and a shared agency. “Human beings are constituted in conversation; and hence what gets internalized in the mature subject is not the reaction of the other, but the whole conversation, with the interanimation of its voices.”41 Dialogue constructs interpersonal selves through their rhythmic engagement with one another.

Another component of this dialogic aspect is the naming or calling of one person by another. Such naming automatically puts one into an understandable relationship with another. Gergen notes, “Others call us into being as a suspect, a customer, a husband, a mother, and so on. Would we be any of these without such callings?”42 Individuals do not develop independently and then enter into relationship; instead, interpersonal relationships form the individuals. A child is first addressed by her or his parents and begins engaging in dialogue even before being able to talk. The psychological work of Hubert J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen supports this as well. They write, “The I is not supposed as something that has an existence prior to discourse, but is called into being as one who is addressed by others.”43 Self-construction depends upon this dialogical naming by others.

Even all mental discourses stem from relationships.44 Once framed into words, internal thoughts reflect the understanding of oneself in relationship to others. Our language itself is a product of relationship. One can look at and pick up an object without knowing what it is or its

42 Gergen, Relational Being, 38.
44 Gergen, Relational Being, 70-74.
use. Only with language produced socially do we know what a cup is called and its purpose. So, too, is self-referential language produced. According to Judith Butler, “Where there is an ‘I’ who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus there is no ‘I’ who stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse…the ‘I’ only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated…”45 There is no self that exists outside of the constructs of language and society. Instead, individuals find their way in co-action with others and the greater society.

1.4.2 Performance

Performance calls attention to the processes of repetition, rehearsal, and adjustment. These are the practices by which a dialogue coheres into consistent, interrelated identities. A person may engage in one dialogue and say something once, but it is repeated positions and perspectives that truly shape and reveal character. These need not be utterances repeated verbatim (though they sometimes are) but recurring ideas that may shift slightly demonstrating development and deepening of position. Performance is never completed. Rather, performance continues to point toward further replication and iteration.

Judith Butler primarily discusses performance in relation to gender. She does so in order to examine the question: “To what extent is ‘identity’ a normative ideal rather than a descriptive

45 Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (New York: Routledge, 1993), 225. Mead presents arguments along the same lines: “Our contention is that mind can never find expression, and could never have come into existence at all, except in terms of a social environment; that an organized set or pattern of social relations and interactions (especially those of communication by means of gestures functioning as significant symbols and thus creating a universe of discourse) is necessarily presupposed by it and involved in its nature” in Mind, Self and Society, 223.
As gender is performed, so is identity. There is no prior person who develops a gender, so gender performativity is not simply an aspect of an individual. Thus, the self can be discussed as being performed as well as gender can.

Butler explains performance thus:

Performativity cannot be understood outside a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, yet the force of prohibition and taboo with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.

Performance includes both mimetic repetition and iteration to fully construct the self. Some actions/statements are repeated verbatim (mimetic) while others are adapted and adjusted (iterated). Repetitions broadly reinforce characteristics. Furthermore, “that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.” Identity is not something predetermined or definitively constructed but a process of becoming. One is what one does.

Performance is not determined entirely by either the individual or the society but involves both. Gergen writes, “To name my intentions is to name the performance in which I am engaged.”

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outlines for what is to take place in that time and place. It is the correlation of the societally agreed upon expectations along with individual intentions that allow for the performance to take place. All performance is an interplay between the social contract and individual agency.

Finally, performance is never completed. “Through co-action we come into being as individual identities, but the process remains forever incomplete. At any moment there are multiple options, and self-identity remains in motion,” explains Gergen.\textsuperscript{50} Performance remains somewhat open, just as dialogue is predictive rather than determinative. This also means that identity does not exist independent of actions. Butler writes, “What is signified as an identity is not signified at a given point of time after which it is simply there as an inter piece of entitative language.”\textsuperscript{51} That is, the self is not finalized in a particular instance and then just exists. The performance must constantly continue in order to maintain the existence of the self.

1.4.3 Unboundedness

The final component of the interpersonal self and the one that is most distinctive is unboundedness. Relationship blurs the distinctions between the individuals: consider how one person can pick up the mannerisms of another after spending a significant amount of time together. The more significant a relationship, the more bonding and interdependence develop. One person is not always easily distinguished from the another, but neither have they collapsed into one identity.

\textsuperscript{50} Gergen, \textit{Relational Being}, 44.

\textsuperscript{51} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 197.
Robert Howell focuses on how a relationship between individuals can develop into a kind of extension of the self.\(^{52}\) He posits that some relationships change who a person is in terms of what virtue she or he demonstrates. Howell uses the example of the virtue of honesty. He contends that his relationship with his wife has caused him to become more honest. Perhaps at first this was a function of her physical presence. When she was around, he wanted to be his best self around her, so he was more honest. However, as time went on, this tendency towards honesty continued to develop regardless of her physical position. His relationship with her extended his self to cause him to be more honest all the time. This honesty as a result of the relationship is part of his self.

Kenneth Gergen identifies multi-layered problems with the conception of bounded individuals. On an individual level, the conception of self as primarily independent of others leads to isolation and narcissism. Considering the self in relation to other, bounded selves lead to distrust and derogation in the suppositions that relationship is not a fundamental characteristic of being human, but something to be selectively entered into if it serves some benefitting purpose.\(^{53}\) Relationships become transactional. On a societal level, “the ideology of bounded beings lends itself to a marketing of selves and a break-down in moral deliberation.”\(^{54}\) Thus, consideration of the self as a relational (and thereby unbounded) being counteracts these pitfalls.

As pointed out by Butler, the terms “inner” and “outer” and ultimately “self” and “other” indicate boundaries that sometimes remain rigid but other times become porous. The body is not

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impermeable. Thereby “the body” defies easy delineation without resorting to socially constructed norms and assumptions. Butler also upends the gender binary. “Female” and “woman” are both unstable terms with too many possible definitions and no consensus. If the terms do not clearly classify, then it is impossible to identify an opposite. Instead, there are many possibilities for gender identification. If this fundamental binary does not hold between masculine and feminine, it calls into question other binaries including that of self and other. This introduces a fluidity of identity and relationality.

1.5 Looking Forward

The Song of Songs is a useful addition to the conversation on the self for a number of reasons. First, the Song focuses on the interpersonal construction of the self. As a text without clear history or referent, the Song presents two people without any stable identity beyond the words of the poem. This allows for a demonstration of how the relationship creates the two lovers as the poetry moves along. The individuality of the lovers and the particularity of their relationship seem to matter. If they were in relationship with someone different, they would not be the same people. The agency of the individuals matters. Their actions and words influence one another, continuing to build in relationship. At the same time, these are not overly particularized individuals. We do not know their families or their histories, what happened to them before the Song began, or what will happen to them afterwards. In this way, it allows for the theoretical nature of the construction to remain open. It is not an isolated story of two

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particular people but a demonstration of how relationships change and shape the participants along the way.

The interplay between the female and male lovers in the Song generates a constant fluctuation between one and two, near and far, same and different, self and other. Desire compels the two lovers to want to become one, foregoing their boundaries and forging their oneness. They are defining one another, not only in terms of their gendered differences but also in terms of their relationship to one another. Each is special to the other in a way that nobody else is. To replace one of them with another would create an entirely different relationship and result in different self-development. Every relationship contributes uniquely to one’s self.

Throughout the course of the Song, the two lovers consistently explore the tension between blending together and losing one another. Perhaps this is the natural consequence of a love poem. Gillian Rose describes this compromise:

*L’amour se révèle en se retirer.* If the Lover retires too far, the light of love is extinguished and the Beloved dies; if the Lover approaches too near the Beloved, she is effaced by the love and ceases to have an independent existence. The Lovers must leave a distance, a boundary, for love: then they approach and retire so that love may suspire.

The lovers of the biblical text allow the boundary for love in the constant coming and going, calling and sending. What may appear to be a mixed message actually maintains their delicate interrelationship.

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CHAPTER 2
MY LOVER IS MINE AND I AM HIS: SONG 1:1-2:17

1 The Song of Songs, that is Solomon’s

1:1 שִׁירֵי הָשִׁירִים לִשְׁלֹמֹה׃

2 פִּיהוּ מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיוSUPER

3 מִיָּקִנִי מִיָּהְדִיךָ כִּי־טוֹבִים שְׁמָנֶיךָ לְרֵיחַ אֲהֵבֽוּךָ;

4 נָרִזָה אַחֲרֶיךָ מָשְׁכֵ֖נִי חֲדָרָ֗יו הַמֶּ֜לֶךְ הֱבִיאַנִ֙י וְנִשְׂמָ֔ה נְגִילָ֖ה מִיַּ֔יִן דֹּדֶ֙יךָ נַזְכִּ֤ירָה בָּ֔ךְ חָה סָ֑אֲהֵבֽוּךָ׃

5 יְרוּשָׁלָ֔י בְּנ֖וֹת וְנָאוָ֑ה אֲנִי שְׁלֹמֹֽה׃

2 He will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth
   For your love play is better than wine

3 Your oils have a good smell
   Your name is clarified oil; therefore maidens love you

4 Pull me after you—let’s run—
   the king brought me to his inner room
   Let’s shout with joy and rejoice in you; let’s celebrate your love more than wine
   Rightly they love you

5 Black am I and beautiful, Daughters of Jerusalem

57 This and all following Hebrew Text is from the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

58 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
Like the tents of Kedar, like the tents of Solomon

Do not look at me for I am dark because the sun gazed at me

The sons of my mother are angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards

My vineyard, the one that is mine, I have not kept

Tell me, one whom my heart loves, where you shepherd
where you rest at noon
Why must I be like one who wanders beside the flocks of your companions?

If you do not know, beautiful one among women,
   Go out to the end of the flock and feed your goats
   Beside the tents of the shepherds

Like my mare among the chariots of Pharaoh I compare you, my friend

Lovely are your cheeks with turtledoves, your neck with necklaces of shells
   ornaments of gold we will make for you with spots of silver

While the king is in his couch (round thing), my nard gave its fragrance

A pouch of myrrh is my lover to me between my breasts he spends the night

A cluster of henna is my lover to me in the vineyards of En-Gedi

Look at you; you are beautiful, my friend; look, you are beautiful—your eyes are doves

Look at you, you are beautiful, my lover, and so pleasant is our green bed

The beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine

I am an asphodel of Sharon, a lily of the valleys

Like a lily among the thorns are you, my friend, among the daughters

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest are you, my lover, among the sons
   In your shadow I delight and sit, and your fruit is sweet to my mouth

He brought me to the house of wine, and his banner over me is love

Refresh me with raisin cakes; spread me with apples
   For I am sick with love

His left hand is under my head and his right embraces me
I urgently beg you, Daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the deer of the field
Do not stir up or awaken love until it desires

8 The voice of my lover—look he is coming
jumping over the mountains, leaping over the hills

9 My lover is like a gazelle or one of the young deer
Look there—he is standing behind our wall
Gazing from the windows, looking from the lattices

10 My lover answered and said to me:
Get up, my friend, my beautiful one, and come

11 For look! the rainy season has passed; the rain is over and gone

12 The blossoms are seen in the land; the time of singing has arrived
And the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land

13 The fig tree ripened her figs and the vines; blossom gives scent
Arise, go my friend, my beautiful one and come

14 My dove in the hiding place of the rock in the refuge of the cliff
Let me see your face, let me hear your voice
For your voice is pleasant and your face is lovely
Catch for us the foxes—the little foxes—destroyers of vineyards, but our vineyards blossom

My lover is mine, and I am his—the grazer in the lilies

Until the day breathes and the shadows flee
linger, my lover, be like a gazelle or a young deer
upon the divided mountains

Following the superscription linking the Song to Solomon, the woman speaks the first words of the dialogue, willing her lover to kiss her. As Bloch and Bloch write, “the Song doesn’t begin at the beginning, and it doesn’t have a ‘proper’ ending.” 59 There is no introduction or explanation of the characters, setting, or circumstance. The initial connection to Solomon leads to an association with the royal house of Israel but little more. It may say more about the prominence of Solomon and his association with poetry and amorous relationships than it does about the Song itself. 60 The first unit of the Song (1:1-2:17) jumps directly into intimate speech without an immediately identified speaker or direct audience.


60 In a similar vein, “Davidic attribution is not a piece of religious dogma that asserts the literal authorship of the book of Psalms, but an aesthetic, poetic, and honorific act that celebrates an ancient hero and lets him inhabit new literary homes…Linking texts to figures is not merely a way of filling in a bibliographic gap in unattributed texts; rather it is an opportunity to enrich stories about the characters—who come to inhabit more and more textual
The first section of the Song of Songs introduces readers to two lovers already in relationship with one another. The section has five major parts.

- 1:2-6: the woman addresses her lover and then the Daughters of Jerusalem. She pronounces her desire to be with her lover and provides some self-description.
- 1:7-2:4: the lovers engage in a dialogue, with a predictive, playful exchange of images for one another.
- 2:5-7: the woman, addressing the Daughters of Jerusalem again, is overcome with love.
- 2:8-14: the woman anticipates her lover’s arrival and then attributes speech to him in which he invites her to come away.
- Finally, 2:15-17 explicitly define each of the lovers in terms of the relationship.

The reader does not know the identity of either of the two lovers; however, the first two chapters establish several patterns of interaction between the two lovers that will be repeated and developed throughout the rest of the Song. As Meredith states, “one loves in the Song by means of wordsmithing, and one is loved by means of receiving words.”61 The two use a variety of poetic devices for this wordsmithing, including similes, metaphors, and other comparisons. Floral and faunal images abound as do mentions of expensive substances and materials. They explore the boundaries of open spaces and private enclosures. Each is named primarily in terms of their relationship.

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61 Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape, 61.
This chapter discusses the five parts of this section of the Song, following the framework for interpersonality set out in the previous chapter: dialogue, performance, and unboundedness. Dialogue is the predictive exchange between at least two voices and often includes the naming or calling of one another. Performance reflects the repetition of interactions that slowly forms practices and thereby identities. Relationship ultimately begins to blur the distinctions between two individuals, thus making them unbounded. They have not collapsed into one identity, but it is not always clear where one ends and the other begins. These three characteristics of interpersonality take root from the very beginning of the Song.

2.1 Dialogue

The first provision for dialogue is that it requires two embodied voices sharing “simultaneous but different space.” These conditions develop slowly at the beginning of the Song. At first there is only the voice of the woman, referring to an unknown “him” in the third person. The third person pronoun of the first line quickly slips to the second person in the second line, showing the woman’s exclusive focus on him: “He will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth/For your love play is better than wine” (1:2). What may have been wishful thinking at the first jussive verb (יִשָּׁקֵנִי) expands from one desired kiss to multiple kisses to the assertion of the quality of his love play. The woman and man are not independent individuals but lovers (those who require an other to assert this identity). Her experience of the relationship is in full

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63 Bloch and Bloch argue that this shift from third to second person occurs in direct address to someone of a higher social standing as in Gen 44:7. This esteem for her lover would correspond with her comparing him to a king (1:4). See Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 137.
swing from the first couplet, but the reader does not yet know if he is truly present or if this is a continued wishful state for the woman.

Introducing the recurrent theme of seeking and finding one another, the first section of the Song (1:2-8) plays between presence and absence. The male’s participation in the dialogue does not begin right away, so his location is ambiguous. The woman begins positioning herself figuratively close to him through his kisses and his smell (vv. 2, 3). The apparent distance between them grows as she wants to be pulled after him, running off together to a private place (v. 4). He then temporarily disappears altogether as she shifts to speaking to the Daughters of Jerusalem (v. 5). By the end of her speech, she turns to trying to find him again: “Tell me, one whom my heart loves, where you shepherd/where you rest at noon” (v. 7). Their positions relative to one another remain constantly in flux.64

A second voice enters the dialogue in v. 8, confirming the woman to be in dialogue, but exactly who replies to her is uncertain. It is possible that it is her lover, because she seems to be addressing him directly in v. 7, asking “where you shepherd.”65 If v. 8 is the man’s words, the two lovers seem to be currently in the same place while trying to plan to meet in the future. But what does his response indicate? Does “the end of the flock…beside the tents of the shepherds” refer to a specific place (v. 8)? Is that where he will be or is that simply where he wants her to go? Another option for the speaker of v.8 is the Daughters of Jerusalem, the only speakers to

64 The theme of seeking and finding will arise again in 2:14. The woman is compared to a dove “in the hiding place of the rock,” and he beckons her to let him see and hear her.

65 E.g. Dianne Bergant, The Song of Songs, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001), 18; Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 134; Carey Allen Walsh, Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 138.
address the woman as “beautiful one among women” elsewhere in the Song (5:9; 6:1). As elsewhere, their conversation begins concerning the location of her lover without a straightforward answer (see 5:8-9). This is the only reference in the Song to her playing the role of a shepherdess. Perhaps this entire response is teasing her by suggesting she go out amongst all the other shepherds, playing off her concern about being “like one who wanders beside the flocks of your companions” (v.7). The ambiguity regarding the nature of this response continues the alternation between presence and absence. The words of verse 9, however, clearly belong to the male lover as he claims her as “my friend.” At this point, the full dialogue between lovers is established.

The first unit of the Song (1:1-2:17) also introduces strong emphasis on the embodied physicality of the lovers and the world around them. All five senses awaken at the beginning the first chapter. The connection between kissing and wine in v. 2 introduces both touch and taste. Verse three highlights the smell of his oil that connects to the sound of his name. The woman introduces her appearance two verses later as black and beautiful (1:5). The activation of the senses is so strong that they often blend together with one sense leading directly to the next. His name smells good in 1:3. In 2:8 the female hears his voice and immediately sees him. The connection between seeing and hearing occurs again in 2:12 with the association between seeing

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67 The translation of this section of v. 7 is difficult due to the obscure form of the verb. One possibility (as in Septuagint, Peshitta, Symmachus, Vulgate, Targum) is to follow the logic put forward by Bloch and Bloch that highlights the thematic connection between shepherding and getting lost (e.g. Gen 37:12-17; Jer 50:6). They read the verb as “lose my way” (to’iyah), arguing that verbs meaning “to wrap” (’atata) occur only in connection to what is being covered or with what material; see Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 142-43. Keel also supports this translation, arguing that elsewhere in the Song, the woman wanders the whole city looking for him; Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 52.

The literal translation is “one who covers oneself,” but Murphy acknowledges that “the meaning is not obvious in context,” Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 131. He suggests that the woman is disguised in order to avoid recognition by the other shepherds, but her reason for doing so is unclear.
blossoms and the time of singing. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp points out the word “voice” (קֹל) itself occurs four times at the end of this chapter; combined with attention to his voice (2:8) and her voice (2:14), “these ‘voicings,’ then, join in with the other ‘voices’/‘sounds’ of spring (v. 12) to form a virtual chorus.” Sounds, sights, tastes, textures, and smells celebrate the physical world captured within the poetic dialogue of the Song.

Dialogue is predictive in nature. For example, the male lover professes, “Look at you, you are beautiful, my friend; look, you are beautiful.” The female lover takes up the developing refrain and combines it with a statement about their intimate setting, showing that their love and compliments of one another overflow into the landscape (1:15-16). The predictive quality continues in the quick repartee between the two at the very beginning of the second chapter. The woman opens the exchange with a self-identification as a simple flower, “I am an asphodel of Sharon, a lily of the valleys” (v. 1). She seems to acknowledge that she is pretty enough, but in a relatively common way. The man hears her statement and uses the same general image but elevates her status. “Like a lily among the thorns are you, my friend, among the daughters” (v. 2). She is not simply pretty; she makes all the other girls look like weeds in comparison. The thorns surrounding the lily make her not only much more attractive in comparison to the surroundings but also adds an element of danger in reaching her. The woman responds in kind, “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest are you, my lover, among the sons” (v. 3). He, too, stands out among his peers and further offers refreshment, as she enjoys at the end of the verse. The words offered from one to the other quickly build. The initial comparison does not cause the particular response but opens a logical path for it.

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Neither lover has a given name in the Song. Instead, they call one another by a variety of pet names and relative descriptors. There is a reference to the man having a name in 1:3, but it is never stated. Instead, the two refer to one another with a series of more general nouns. The male is most frequently called “lover” (דּוֹדִי). This Hebrew root occurs as a personal noun thirty-one times in the Song, always in a masculine form and with a singular possessive suffix, most often “my” though sometimes “your” or “her” (when he is being discussed by the daughters of Jerusalem). She also calls him the “one whom my heart loves” (1:7; 3:1-4). The force of this verse is somewhat lost in English translation. The Hebrew conception of the term (נַפְשִׁי) is as the center of life, as the source of breath or soul. It is the seat of desire and longing. Robert Alter renders this phrase “whom I love so” as an intensifier of the first-person pronoun. Dianne Bergant notes that the Hebrew has a more physical connotation than the more spiritual psyche (as in the LXX); she writes that the woman “is conscious of this love with every breath that she draws.” Carey Ellen Walsh argues that this phrase reveals that the woman’s love for this man “characterizes the whole of her existence.” All of these pet names rely on the relationship itself.

The male also uses possessive language in referring to her. The female is “my friend” nine times (רַﬠְיָתִי), and the male is “my friend” only once (רֵﬠִי) (5:16). She is identified as

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69 Song 1:13, 14, 16; 2:3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17; 4:16; 5:2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 16; 6:1, 2, 3; 7:10, 11, 12, 14; 8:5, 14. In other books of the Hebrew Bible, this word is most often applied to uncles, for examples see Lev 20:20; 25:49; 1 Sam 10:16; Jer 32:7, 8, 9; Esth 2:7. However, it does seem to have a romantic connotation also in Is 5:1, which interestingly also ties this lover to his possession of a vineyard.


71 Bergant, Song of Songs, 17.

72 Walsh, Exquisite Desire, 78.

73 Song 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4. These are the only occurrences of the female form of “friend” (rayati) in the Hebrew Bible other than Judg 11:37 where the qere suggests it should be plural instead.
“beautiful” twelve times (יָפֶה), and he is called “beautiful” from the same root only once (יָפֶה) (1:16). These phrases could easily be rendered in either masculine or feminine forms, so the apparent clarity of differentiation between the two lovers is remarkable and allows their identities to remain distinguishable.

The two use a range of nominal referents to describe one another. In this first section of the Song (1:1-2:17), there is not much overlap between the imagery used for the male and the female lover. The nouns that the woman uses in this section to describe or address the man are king (1:4, 12), pouch of myrrh (1:13), cluster of henna (1:14), and gazelle or young deer (2:9, 17). King obviously has royal, expensive, superlative connotations. The myrrh and henna are also expensive but primarily point to scent. The gazelle and young deer point to the untamed natural world and those animals that graze (as in 2:16). In addition to the descriptors named above, the man calls the woman “my mare” (1:9) and “my dove” (2:14); her eyes are also compared to doves in 1:15. The mare is a domesticated animal, and the dove is a typically demure one. At this point their imagery for one another is fairly different. There is some overlap in floral imagery discussed earlier in this chapter in the predictive dialogue that moves from her self description as a lily to comparing him to an apple tree, but these are still different sorts of plants with one being small and delicate and the other tall, woody, and fruit producing.

This first section of the Song also provides an example of internal dialogue that results from relationship. This internal discourse demonstrates how the woman views herself in terms of her lover’s point of view. Song 2:10-14 presents the man’s words coming from the woman’s

74 Song 1:8, 15; 2:10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:9; 6:1, 4, 10.

75 I recognize that it is possible the image of the dove originates in the woman’s voice rather than in the man’s as will be posited below. However, his previous comparison of her eyes to a dove is a close enough link to give him credit for the image.
mouth. Meredith asks if she is constructing the dialogue, “do we ultimately read these words as male voiced or female voiced?” In some ways, they are both. They demonstrate how the female is constructing herself, but they also reveal how she interprets the male’s gaze that so intimately defines her self-construction. He has used the phrase “my friend” previously and called her beautiful, but he did not use the substantive form (יָפָתִי) nor does it appear in the rest of the Song as it does in 2:10, 13. She is presenting his words but not exactly as he uses them. Whether these words represent her memory of the past, her narrating of the present, or her imagination of a possible interaction, they create an additional layer of self-understanding from the perspective of the relationship.

Previously in the Song, she has asked after his location (1:7), followed him (e.g. 2:4), been in his presence (e.g. 2:6), and awaited his approach (2:8), but here for the first time he summons her (2:10, 13). This speech flips the previous paradigm of her searching for him to one in which she is a “dove in the hiding place of the rock in the refuge of the cliff” (2:14) that he calls to come out. Has the change of the season and the newly blossoming foliage inspired a change in him, or is she wishing for such a change? Where earlier their positions in relation to one another were ambiguous, here the very speaker is in question. The request in v. 14 to let him hear her voice “provokes an awareness that the entire poem [2:8-17] is voiced by her, suffused in her voice, and thus achieves a kind of vocal unity. As it turns out no part of the poem is untouched by voice, literal (qôl) or figured.” This creates the emergence of the relationship as the agent rather than either of the two individuals, for in some way it does not matter who

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76 Christopher Meredith, *Journeys in the Songscape: Space and the Song of Songs* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 127.

originates the words because they are captured in this poetic dialogue as a function of the relationship.

2.2 Performance

Performance requires repetition and iteration. In this small section of the Song, the amount of repetition is limited. The repetition of their names for one another and the predictive development of the vegetal imagery of the lily and apple tree have already been discussed. Two additional examples of repetition demonstrate the interpersonal aspect of the self in the two lovers.

The first example arises in the male’s speech recounted by the female at the end of the second chapter in which he calls her to come with him (2:10-14). The second line of v. 10 and the second line of v. 13 are almost identical with only a small variant in the second word (ךְלָֽכִי/לָֽכִי), and the qere suggests the second occurrence should be the same as the first. This repeated call creates a small refrain within this recounted address. The repetition reinforces the importance of this first beckoning of the female by the male instead of the other way around.

Secondly, the imagery of the man as a gazelle or young deer repeats. The first appearance is not explicitly a direct reference to the male lover but to the animals functioning as guarantors of the oath that the woman wants from the Daughters of Jerusalem (2:7). Exum asserts, “Gazelles and does of the open field belong to the world of nature that participates in the love of the lovers” and to the larger world of poetic imagery for love in ancient Near East iconography.

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78 This adjuration formula itself will be repeated at 3:5 and 8:4 and will be discussed in a later chapter.

79 Exum, Song of Songs, 119.
Then the woman hears his voice and sees him coming “jumping over the mountains, leaping over the hills” (2:8). Here she directly compares her lover to a gazelle or young deer using the verb “to liken” (דּוֹמֶה), pointing to him standing behind the wall “gazing from the windows, looking from the lattices” (2:9). The wild animals both frolic freely in nature and quietly peer at her. This range of action carries over into the next appearance of this pairing of gazelle and young deer at the close of the chapter (2:17). Her command to him is ambiguous. The root of the verb (סֹבָ) has a wide range of meaning, all related to something round or circuitous. Following the two kinds of actions previously associated with the gazelle and deer—jumping/leaping (2:8) and standing/gazing (2:9)—this verb has two layers of meaning. In 2:17 she could be telling him to turn around or reverse, to go leaping through the natural topography of the “divided mountains,” and she could be telling him to turn in place or linger (my preferred translation) to spend time upon her divided mountains (perhaps a euphemism for her breasts). The repeated image allows for a developing performance of how the male lover compares to these wild animals.

The concept of performance further relates to one’s participation in expected societal roles. The female’s first self-description is directed to the Daughters of Jerusalem (1:5-6). In this instance, the Daughters stand in for the expectations of society as a whole. The woman is placing herself in her intended performance. This first description is as close as the Song gets to an objective physical characteristic. She says, “Black am I and beautiful,” and compares herself (using the preposition כ for the first time in the Song) to “the tents of Kedar, like the tents of Solomon” (1:5). She then instructs them not to look at her for she is dark (1:6). The reference to the sun darkening her skin and the mention of tents may place her in the social location of those

who work in the fields. The tents of Kedar and Solomon likely expand upon the qualities of both dark and beautiful.\textsuperscript{81} As Bloch and Bloch suggest, the comparison used here is “because Kedar is proverbial in the Bible for opulence (Isa 21:16; 60:7; Jer 49:28-29; Ezek 27:21), and because the name Kedar involves a wordplay on the root qdr ‘to be dark, black.’"\textsuperscript{82} Likewise Solomon carries the association of extravagance, wealth, and beauty.

There is much scholarly discussion on the implications of her statements. Are they not to look at her due to their assumed contempt or envy? Landy asserts “her dark beauty is threatening because it is seductive, despised and worshipped for the same reason.”\textsuperscript{83} Bloch and Bloch note the ambiguity inherent in the Hebrew conjunction of v. 5 (\(וְֽ\)), which can mean both “and” and less frequently “but.” They summarize the arguments, stating, “the Shulamite’s need to account for her dark skin sounds apologetic; on the other hand, since her dark skin may have contributed to her singularity and attractiveness, she may be boasting, not apologizing.”\textsuperscript{84}

The female lover then goes on to state that her brothers were angry and made her “the keeper of the vineyards,” but she has not kept her own (1:6). This continues the pastoral language established in the previous verse. She cares for the vineyards, working outside in the sun which darkens her skin. Vineyards are providers of sustenance and wealth, and her brothers

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Exum, \textit{Song of Songs}, 105.
\item Bloch and Bloch, \textit{The Song of Songs}, 140; see also Bergant, \textit{The Song of Songs}, 14. Adversely, Keel asserts the tents of Kedar to represent a side of her that is “poor, exotic, and terrifying” due to Kedar’s isolation and distance from Jerusalem; see Keel, \textit{The Song of Songs}, 47.
\item Francis Landy, \textit{Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs} (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1983), 145.
\item Bloch and Bloch, \textit{The Song of Songs}, 140. Sarah Zhang writes, “In spite of her confident tone, the fact that she defends herself at the very beginning of her self introduction betrays a sense of insecurity,” Zhang, \textit{I, You, and the Word “God”} (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 37; see also discussions in Exum, \textit{Song of Songs}, 103-04; Landy, \textit{Paradoxes of Paradise}, 142-47.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
have responsibility for them. The reason for their anger toward her is unclear—is it due to her darkness in the previous line or her lack of care for her vineyard in the next line? The emphatic possessive in the last line of the verse (שֶׁלִ֖י) indicates that she is no longer addressing only literal vineyards. Vineyards emerge as sensuous locations throughout the Song (e.g. 1:14; 2:15) and represent her whole person by the end (8:12). The lack of attention to her own vineyard could indicate either “loss of chastity or neglect of her beauty because of work outdoors.” Either way, the brothers claim possession of her, placing her in a particular kind of relationship with them. Renita Weems ties the images of the vineyards to her previous self-description, noting that the woman “doesn’t apologize for her dark complexion so much as she uses the occasion to protest her brothers’ power over her.”

Another characteristic of the performed interpersonal self is its incompletion and inability to remain static. One way the Song demonstrates this characteristic is through the constant use of shifting comparisons. Figurative poetic devices such as similes and metaphors function by drawing comparisons between two dissimilar entities. The descriptions put forward in the Song are not concrete, absolute ones that try to capture a complete picture of the lovers. Instead, the images fluctuate and morph from one line to the next. The Song is particularly fond of the root “to be like” (דמי). It occurs fewer than thirty times in the Hebrew Bible, and five of those are within the Song. This frequency within the Song makes “the operation of comparison explicit

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85 Exum identifies the brothers’ anger as one of the Song’s “blind motifs, a loose thread that teases and tantalizes the reader to find connections where they are lacking,” since the brothers and their anger never explicitly appear again. See Exum, Song of Songs, 105.

86 Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 141.


88 Num 33:56; Judg 20:5; 2 Sam 21:5; Is 1:9; 10:7; 14:14, 24; 40:18, 25; 46:5; Jer 6:2; Ezek 31:2, 8, 18; 32:2; Hos 12:11; Ps 48:10; 50:21; 89:7; 102:7; 144:4; Song 1:9; 2:9; 2:17; 7:8; 8:14; Lam 2:13; Esth 4:13.
in the poem’s surface structure.” The multitude of comparisons keeps the interpersonal
development in constant motion.

Within the first unit of the Song, “to be like” occurs twice. The first time the man likens
the woman to “my mare among the chariots of pharaoh” (1:9). Commentators suggest several
ways of interpreting this comparison. One draws direct connection to the following verses about
beauty and ornamentation to affirm the appearance and importance of a horse chosen to pull a
chariot of the pharaoh. Perhaps a demure mare in the highly regulated military stable suggests a
submissive image. Another interpretation relies on Marvin Pope’s introduction of the incident
described on an Egyptian soldier’s tomb. An enemy prince sent a very fast mare in heat to cause
a major disruption amongst the stallions of pharaoh’s army, but the soldier Amenemheb averted
disaster by killing the mare. This makes the image much more sexually charged. The other
comparison using “to be like” (דָּם) in this unit occurs in 2:9, which has been discussed above.
Here, too, there are alternative ways of viewing the image. The gazelle/young deer quietly stands
and gazes in v. 9, partially obstructed by the windows and lattices. In the previous verse, he was
jumping and leaping more conspicuously. These two comparisons of the lovers each to a
different hooved animal reveal a variety of qualities, opening possibilities for how they see one
another rather than ever more narrowly trying to define one another. Their characterization is not
static.


90 E.g. Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise, 177; Murphy, Song of Songs, 134. Bloch and Bloch note the frequent
poetic comparison of women to horses due to their beauty and association with being ridden; Bloch and Bloch, The
Song of Songs, 144-45.

91 Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise, 177.

2.3 Unboundedness

The third component of the framework for interpersonal selfhood is unboundedness. This quality is more difficult to identify in the first unit of the Song due to the limited number of verses and the incomplete development of themes that will become clearer later. Nevertheless, a few seeds of unboundedness begin here that will grow in the next units.

First to be considered is the grammatical slippages of person and gender that undermine clear identification of who is speaking and who is present in the text. The complications begin in the first direct address. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” shifts suddenly to “for your love is better than wine” (1:2). It happens again, though less directly, in the next verse: “your name is perfume poured out; therefore the maidens love you” (1:3). The initial female speaker talks of his love, but the maidens (who are not speaking) love “you” now. Scholars propose reasons for such changes, but taken together these shifts right at the beginning destabilize the text, signaling that it will not fit easily into simple structures. Additionally, plural forms appear that necessitate expanding the cast of characters without direct explanation for who is addressed or speaking. Following the mention of the maidens above, the subject becomes a plural “we” before changing back to the third person while maintaining the plural “rightly they love you” (ךָאֲהֵבֽוּ מֵישָׁרִ֖ים). In the next verse, the speaker addresses the Daughters of Jerusalem, but the following imperative “do not look at me” is a masculine plural. This gender confusion in relation to the direct address to the daughters of Jerusalem occurs four

93 As discussed above, it is possible the shift from third to second person in 1:2 signals a degree of respect; see Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 137. Regarding 1:3, Keel suggests it is the woman’s intention to blend back into the group of her friends, having had enough attention in her call for kisses; see Keel, The Song of Songs, 44.
additional times throughout the text (2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4). These plural forms contribute to the overall ambiguity concerning who is present and who is acting in these scenes. In general, the Hebrew language limits the discussion of persons by using gendered language. However, the Song finds ways to subvert the rigid system by altering speakers and addressees by mixing gender and number in a way that disorients its identifications.

Another unexpected plural appears in the next chapter in the imperative: “Catch us the foxes—the little foxes—destroyers of vineyards, but our vineyards blossom” (2:15). Both the subject and the indirect object are plural, but again the speaker is unclear. The verse seems unrelated to what comes before and after it, making it difficult to assign to any one of the three known speakers and thereby rendering them all a possibility. The woman is more closely identified with a vineyard in both 1:6 and 8:12, but here the vineyards are “ours.” As vineyards have previously been established as sites of romantic encounter, the foxes here threaten the lovers. However, they do not seem to be a tremendous threat due to the singsong repetition within the verse and the focus on their littleness. Walsh writes, “A simple, blossoming vineyard is still a miracle of pleasure, even with its forgivable, ruffian foxes, scampering in to get their own mouth-sized stolen treasures of pleasure.”

The dialogue is lost altogether here for a moment with this stray line that could belong to any of them, allowing it to simply contribute to the playful, sensuous scene.

A major component of unboundedness as demonstrated in the Song is the blurring of each of the lovers with their figurative representations. As Robert Alter states, “What makes the Song of Songs unique among the poetic texts of the Bible is that, quite often, imagery is given

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such full and free play there that the lines of semantic subordination blur, and it becomes a little uncertain what is illustration and what is referent."\(^{95}\) He points to the two occurrences of “to be like” (דָּבָר) discussed above as demonstrations of this. In 1:9 the male lover compares the female lover to a mare. The following two verses describing the cheeks, necklaces, and ornaments could continue to extend the description of the mare or could simply describe the woman. Either woman or horse could have lovely cheeks and lavish jewelry. Likewise in 2:8-9, the actions of the man blur with those of a stag. Alter continues, “The effect is the opposite of the sort of optical trick in which a design is perceived at one moment as a rabbit and the next as a duck but never both at once, because through the magic of poetic likening the figure at the lattice is simultaneously stag and lover.”\(^{96}\) In these two examples, the descriptions fit both the individual lover and the animal of comparison, creating a slippage between the two.

There is also mingling of the literal and figurative. One example of this discussed earlier is the woman’s early statement on vineyards in 1:6. When talking about her brothers making her care for the vineyards, she seems to be talking about literal vineyards. In the next line, however, her own vineyard becomes suggestive of something more. Alter posits the same intertwining of literal and figurative scents in 1:12-14. He points to “a delightful confusion between the literal nard with which she has perfumed herself and the figurative myrrh she cradles in her lover. Thus the act and actors of love become intertwined with the fragrant paraphernalia of love.”\(^{97}\) Her smells blend with the smells of the metaphorical myrrh and henna. “The boundaries between figure and referent, inside and outside, human body and accoutrement [sic] or natural setting,


become suggestively fluid.” 98 Verse 1:14 refers to vineyards of En-gedi, identified elsewhere as the oasis where David took refuge from Saul’s pursuit (1 Sam 24:1). In this way, “En-gedi is a real oasis, so the lover is no fantasy, as generic oases threaten to be. He may be absent, but he exists.” 99 In 2:12 there appears another shift from what is seen “in the land” (בָאָרֶץ) to what is heard “in our land” (בְּאַרְצֵנוּ) at the end of the verse. The land is no longer a neutral place but one that belongs substantially to them. Real and metaphorical locations lose their distinctiveness.

The sense of time in the poem is also inconsistent. One example is the season changing in 2:11-13. Verse 11 clearly pronounces the end of the rainy season (winter). The blossoms in verse 12 are consistent with the spring, but the meaning of the verb (הַזָּמִיר) is unclear. It either refers to singing or to pruning. Pruning fits better with the first half of the line’s attention to botanical elements. However, pruning typically happens in the fall, so it does not easily match the spring timeframe. Singing correlates with the voice of the turtledove in the next line, but is not a distinctive marker of time unlike the majority of the surrounding lines. The voice of the turtledove returns the lovers to an unequivocal spring time. 100 The word for the fruit in v. 13 (พวกเรา) is a hapax legomenon. Pope and others suggest it is a young fig (that ripens in spring) in comparison to similar Aramaic and Arabic words. However, the Arabic word can refer to a variety of fruits, including melons. 101 It is thus possible, but not certain, to interpret this whole section as a reference to the beginning of spring.

99 Walsh, Exquisite Desire, 202-3.
100 Pope, Song of Songs, 396.
101 Murphy, The Song of Songs, 139n13; Pope, Song of Songs, 398.
Time is even more ambiguous in 2:17. “Until the day breathes and the shadows flee” seems to be marking time, but is this day or night? The day could breathe at its beginning as the sun rises peacefully or in the evening when the temperature cools. Shadows disappear twice a day, at noon when the sun is high in the sky and at night when the sun is hidden. The preposition (שֶַׁﬠַ֤ד) can be rendered “when,” “until,” “while,” or “before.”102 Furthermore, is the lover present or not? It is possible this is still her recounting his speech as begun in v. 10, so it too could either be a present conversation or memory of the past. Exum writes, “The blurring of boundaries between past and present is also a blurring of the distinction between the woman as narrator and the woman as character in her own narrative. We cannot tell the storyteller from the story.”103 The two lovers are not bound by time or place.

Ultimately the two lovers play with the boundaries between them, calling them into question altogether. Christopher Meredith focuses on the apparent boundedness of the female. She first describes herself as separated from her beloved by a wall, so that he must peer in the windows to see her (2:9). The male voice places her in a different location: the cleft of the rocks (2:14). This is still a location characterized by inaccessibility even though she is now in the wild space affiliated with him instead of her own interior. The threshold both separates them and pulls them together. However, the female controls the entire scene. She puts the words in his mouth, saying, “My lover answered and said to me” (2:10). She is speaking these lines, so she functions both inside and outside of them. Because she portrays his voice, he becomes her. It is impossible to truly separate the two. She cannot be inaccessible to him, because they are one. Therefore, “the lovers are more inter-readings than binary opposites, more of a mutually constituting

102 Exum, Song of Songs, 131.
103 Exum, Song of Songs, 124-25.
reflection than a polarized pair.” Meredith states, “The Song is transgressive, not because it is an erotic text or a proto-feminist one, but because it holds together two contraries, on the one hand the expected gender dichotomy and, on the other, dissolution.” Male and female are both present in the text with different descriptions and spaces, but those differences do not create mutually exclusive categories.

2.4 Summary

The first unit of the Song (1:1-2:17) begins the presentation of the relationship between two lovers already in full swing. They already know one another and celebrate their connection in conversation with one another, in monologue, and in interaction with the Daughters of Jerusalem. The Song presents two lovers coming and going, searching and finding, seeing and being seen. As Walsh writes, “There is a realism about desire throughout this brave Song. It includes the costs and irritabilities of desire, all the pesky annoyances of yearning for another who is nowhere to be found. There is, too, the ever-present possibility that love can be ruined, as this fox phobia illustrates.” The foxes could ruin the vineyard, but the lovers are not overly concerned about the danger.

Dialogue undergirds the entire poem, allowing for interplay between the two lovers and the Daughters of Jerusalem. Their rhythms, images, and names shape who they are. Each line is a performance of the roles they have established in their relationship together and in society more broadly. The exchange seen through dialogue and performance begins to reveal their

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104 Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape, 126.
105 Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape, 128.
106 Walsh, Exquisite Desire, 80.
interdependence upon one another in that they are not independent, bounded individuals but two agents of one relationship. Reflected by the absence of names or particular identifiers, the two lovers within the Song are totally dependent upon their relationship with one another for identification. In 2:16, she summarizes this interdependence between them stating, “My lover is mine and I am his – the grazer in the lilies.” This statement elegantly alludes to their frequent associations—he with grazing animals and she with plants and vineyards. They set out a relationship that continues to be revealed in the remaining units of the Song.
CHAPTER 3
WHERE HAS YOUR LOVER GONE? SONG 3:1-11 AND 5:2-6:3

3:1 Upon my bed nightly I sought the one my heart loves
   I sought him, but I did not find him

2 Now I will rise and go around the city in the streets and the squares
   I will seek the one my heart loves
   I sought him but I did not find him

3 The watchers who go around the city found me
   ‘The one my heart loves, have you seen him?’

4 Just as I passed them, I found the one my heart loves
   I held him and would not let go
   Until I brought him to the house of my mother and to the chamber of the one who bore me

5 I urgently beg you, Daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the deer of the field
   Do not stir up or awaken love until it desires...
6 Who is this rising up from the wilderness like a column of smoke perfumed with myrrh and frankincense from all the powders of the merchants?

7 Look! his bed is that of Solomon
   Sixty warriors surround him of the men of Israel
7 Look! his bed is that of Solomon
   Sixty warriors surround him of the men of Israel

8 All of them tied to a sword, experts in war
   Each with his sword upon his thigh from terror in the night
8 All of them tied to a sword, experts in war
   Each with his sword upon his thigh from terror in the night

9 King Solomon made for him a carriage from the wood of Lebanon
   Its posts he made of silver, its back gold
   its seat purple, its interior inlaid leather
   from the Daughters of Jerusalem
9 King Solomon made for him a carriage from the wood of Lebanon
   Its posts he made of silver, its back gold
   its seat purple, its interior inlaid leather
   from the Daughters of Jerusalem

10 Go out and see, Daughters of Zion,
   King Solomon in the crown with which his mother crowned him
   On the day of his wedding and on the day of the gladness of his heart
10 Go out and see, Daughters of Zion,
   King Solomon in the crown with which his mother crowned him
   On the day of his wedding and on the day of the gladness of his heart
I am sleeping but my heart is awake;  
listen! my lover is knocking/pounding

‘Open for me my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one  
For my head is filled with dew, my locks with drips of night’

I took off my garment; how do I wear it?  
I bathed my feet; how do I soil them?

My lover put his hand in the hole,  
and my insides roared for/upon/over him

I rose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped myrrh  
and myrrh passed over my fingers onto the hollow of the bolt

I opened to my lover, but my lover turned and left  
My heart went out as he spoke  
I searched for him, but I did not find him.  
I called for him, but he did not answer me.

The watchmen found me, the ones who go around the city  
They struck me, bruised me  
They took away my veil-wrap from upon me, the watchers of the walls

I beg you, Daughters of Jerusalem,  
If you find my lover, tell him  
I am sick of love.
What is your lover in comparison to another, most beautiful of women?

What is your lover more than another that thus you put us under oath?

9 My lover is glowing and red, regarded from ten thousand
10 His head is refined gold
   His locks are wavy, black like the raven
11 His eyes are like doves upon rivers of water
   washed in milk, sitting in a pool
12 His cheeks are like the beds of spices,
   towers of perfumes
His lips are lilies dripping myrrh
13 His hands are cylinders of gold filled with jewels
His body/belly is plated ivory covered in sapphires
14 His thighs are pillars of alabaster founded upon refined bases
His appearance is like Lebanon, chosen like cedars
His mouth is sweet and all of him is desirable
This is my lover and this is my friend, Daughters of Jerusalem

Where has your lover gone, beautiful among women?
Where has your lover turned so that we may seek him with you?

My lover has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spice,
to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies
I belong to my lover and my lover belongs to me, the shepherd among the lilies.

This chapter addresses parts of the Song from two non-consecutive chapters (3:1-11; 5:2-6:3). Because of the similar themes and the consistency of the female’s voice in these chapters, I have decided to treat them together rather than continuing serially.\textsuperscript{107} Chapter 3 unfolds in two parts. It begins with a nighttime depiction of the woman searching the city for her lover (3:1-5). Once she finds him, the poetry shifts away from the lovers to describe a royal procession approaching in the wilderness (3:6-11). Similarly, chapter 5 begins with an exchange between lovers before the woman goes out to search the city at night for him again (5:2-8). This time, however, the Daughters of Jerusalem get involved in the search, which leads to a rich description of the male lover (5:9-6:3).

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the majority of the characterization of the lovers depends upon metaphorical comparisons and pronouncements of love. Their primary self-development comes in terms of their relationship to one another through dialogue. However, the lyric poetry incorporates two significant sections of narrative\textsuperscript{108} and descriptive elements that

\textsuperscript{107} The next chapter will examine Song 4, 6, and 7 which share a different primary theme and present primarily the male’s voice.

\textsuperscript{108} In recognition that the Song is primarily lyric poetry even in sections that seem to have a narrative arc, Tod Linafelt argues these sections should be considered pseudonarrative. He notes they have “plot without context and without consequences” in “Lyrical Theology: The Song of Songs and the Advantage of Poetry,” in Toward a Theology of Eros, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 293, 299. As my primary concern is the nature of the self as it develops in relationship rather than genre classifications, I will simply use narration as shorthand throughout this chapter.
serve to present a different kind of material for characterizing the two lovers in Song 3:1-11 and 5:2-6:3. Instead of metaphorical dialogue, here there are sustained reports of actions before the poetry gets swept up in detailed descriptions as emotion takes over. Dobbs-Allsopp writes, “There is a certain immediacy and urgency to lyric discourse, an all-pervasive ‘nowness.’”¹⁰⁹ The function of the narrative sections is to reveal the deep connections between the two lovers in a way that seems more lifelike than the primary mode of metaphorical description.¹¹⁰

Each of these sections begins with the woman missing her lover and searching the city for him before addressing the Daughters of Jerusalem (3:1-6; 5:2-8). The first search is followed by a lavish description of an approaching military procession (3:7-11), while the second leads into an exchange of questions and answers with the Daughters of Jerusalem and includes the only sustained description of the man by the woman (5:9-6:3). The two narrated night scenes and the two detailed descriptions serve to further characterize the two lovers despite the fact that the two of them rarely occupy the same space at the same time in these sections of the poetry.

This chapter will examine these two sections of the Song in the same three-fold framework as previously developed. The interactive dialogic component is a much smaller contributor to characterization in this chapter. The two lovers are rarely together and speak to one another even less. However, this allows for the expansion of the other two facets of interpersonal development. Here the portrayal of the lovers’ actions and the succumbing to emotion contribute to the performance of their identities in addition to their words. Their interdependence as unboundedness is particularly striking in this section of text in which they are

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¹¹⁰ “Whereas arguments are intended to convince someone of their truth, stories are construed to convince someone of their lifelikeness.” Hubert J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen, *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), 17.
mostly separated from one another but show that the two selves are intertwined as they flow over
boundaries that separate and distinguish them.

3.1 Dialogue

The amount of dialogue in this section of the Song is very limited. This is primarily because the two lovers rarely occupy any proximate space simultaneously. Instead, the two night
scenes primarily focus on separation and absence. In chapter 3, the two only appear together
explicitly in one verse (v. 4); the rest of the chapter is the search and the description of the parade
in the wilderness. The only line in the first night scene that may be spoken dialogue is when the
woman asks the watchmen about her lover (v. 3). However, there is no reply from the watchers.
They do not hold up their end of the conversation. This failed dialogue contrasts with the
exchanges presented in the previous chapter in which the two lovers named one another and
demonstrated predictive interactions.

There is more interchange between the two lovers in the second night scene of chapter 5,
but it not much of a sustained dialogue either. Verse 2 begins with a paradoxical statement by the
woman—“I am sleeping but my heart is awake” (אני ישנה ולבי שומע) —signaling from the outset
that these lines operate on a variety of levels. The woman somehow narrates her own sleep. She
hears her lover, his voice pounding (5:2). His calls to her include a string of sobriquets: my
sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one, explaining that his “head is filled with dew, [his]
locks with the drips of night” (ראשי מלאים ברなくて שרטות לילה). But she hesitates. She responds
with rhetorical questions about having already prepared for sleep by taking off her clothes and
bathing her feet; how could she get up to open to him (v. 3)? Here, the man attempts to cross the
space between them on his own, putting “his hand in the hole” (יִרְדָּן מִן־הָרוֹצָה) (v. 4). ¹¹¹ She finally gets up to open to him, as her hands “dripped myrrh/and myrrh passed over [her] fingers onto the hollow of the bolt” (וְאֶצְבְּעֹתַיּוּ נָטְפוּ מַנְﬠוּל עַל מַפַּת הַמַּנְﬠוּל) (v. 5). But once she opens, he is no longer there. They take turns acting, but it results in their separation rather than union.

This exchange shows the predictive nature of the dialogic relationship, but it does so in a way that demonstrates some disunion between them rather than easy synchronicity. Rather than a two-person saw, this seems more like a break dance battle where the actions of one lead to the other’s but they are not well coordinated—neither seems to understand what the other will do next. He calls out to her (v. 2), but then she delays action with some rhetorical questions (v. 3). She seems to think it is all part of the buildup to reunion (v. 4), but he disappears (v. 5). ¹¹² They seem a bit out of sync here in contrast to the easily rhythmic back and forth about lilies and thorns and apple trees of chapter 2 (vv. 1-3).

The naming and calling of one another is also significantly simplified in these two chapters. The woman calls him only “the one my heart loves” (אֲשֶׁר שָׂאָהֲבָה אֵת)¹¹³ in chapter 3 and “my lover” (דּוֹדִי)¹¹⁴ in chapter 5, both of which have occurred several times throughout the previous portion of the Song. As before, these names speak only of their relationship, not of any particular character traits.

¹¹¹ Here I am intentionally reading the text as if there is a separation (though the text does not say there is a door) between them to show how their actions can be read as somewhat out of sync. In a later section I will explore the multilayered readings of the text that emphasize the haziness of the boundary and the importance of thresholds that both unite and separate.

¹¹² Note this entire section of the poetry can also be read as an euphemistic sexual encounter as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

¹¹³ Song 3:1, 2, 3, 4.

¹¹⁴ Song 5:2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 16; 6:1.
In the second night scene, the man calls the woman “my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one” (אחותי, רעייתי, יונתית,تمלת) (v. 3). The first two are indicative of relationship, while the latter two are slightly more descriptive. Friend and dove arose as images for her in the first two chapters (e.g. 1:15; 2:2, 14). The man uses “my sister” to describe her in chapter 4 (vv. 9, 10, 12). “My perfect one” has not previously named her. He does say that there is “no flaw in her” (ךב אין וום) (4:7), which is similar, but the vocabulary of perfection occurs again in 6:9.

Previous usage is of note here, because it is possible that the woman is putting the names in the man’s mouth as this calling occurs in the middle of her self-narration. If they are his words that she is applying to herself (as in 2:10-14), it enables the reader to see her self-construction in process. Friend and dove appeared in her first presentation of his words (2:10, 14), but she adds sister and perfect one here. Her self-understanding is more positive as she is claiming perfection in his eyes and a closer, familial relationship.

A significant portion of these two chapters takes the form of a mental discourse as the woman narrates her actions. The two narrations reveal a fundamental sense of connection between the two instead of an independent, isolated mental discourse that is assumed in the Cartesian view of self. Gergen argues, “virtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationship. From this standpoint, there is no isolated self or fully private experience. Rather we exist in a world of co-constitution.”

The woman’s narration thus reveals the centrality of relationship in her interior thoughts.

The first scene is primarily concerned with the relationship in face of his absence. The verbs in these four verses (3:1-4) nearly all emphasize her relationship to him: she seeks him, she


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loves him, she finds (or does not find) him, she seizes him, she does not leave him alone, and she brings him to the house of her mother. The only verb not requiring an external object or person is her getting up, which occurs in the cohortative mood (πορεύομαι) (v. 2). She wills herself to get up and go around the city. The ultimate purpose is of course to find her lover, but her first step is one that she takes alone of her own initiative. Presenting these actions as a first-person narration maintains a delicate balance of her own agency with her intense focus on regaining his company. Rather than a sustained, predictive dialogue, here her mental discourse is constructing a different facet of their relationship. The relationship is just as much the center of identity as before, but in these lines the danger of separation is the central concern.

For a second time the woman narrates going about the city in search of her lover, this time in more of a panic in response to his unexpected disappearance (5:6-7). As Francis Landy writes, “the city at night is eery [sic], unfamiliar, desolate…above all, it is the place of loss, where the Lover cannot be found.” The watchers find her again but this time they wound her before taking her garment (v. 7). The text provides no explanation for why the watchers behave this way. Is their violent escalation a reflection on the intensification of the sexual imagery at the beginning of the scene? Has she been found wandering on her own one too many times? Perhaps the entire second scene reveals an intensification of the risks of deepening love and the watchers are external manifestations of that risk. Linafelt writes, “If desire depends on separation, then the watchmen serve as emblems of that separation, and thus as emblems of desire itself.” The watchmen present an obstacle that must be overcome. Incorporating the watchers into her mental discourse on her relationship shows its inherent dangers. The risk of absence previously

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presented is intensified into the potential injury caused by relationship. As Sarah Zhang writes in reference to this encounter with the watchers, “Violence, when reported without consequence, expresses not so much the desire for justice as the volume of the agony.”

The woman is in a full panic trying to find her lover. Near the end of the second search, she speaks him into being. The woman’s description of her lover begins with a few clear physical descriptions before diving into much more figurative language. In v. 10, she describes him as “glowing and red” (וְאָד֔וֹם צַח֙), and then tells him “locks are wavy, black like the raven” (כָּעוֹרֵֽב שְׁחֹר֖וֹת תַּלְתַּלִּים קְוּצּוֹתָיו֙) in v. 11—he has a healthy complexion and black hair. She likens his eyes to doves (v. 12), continuing the comparisons to birds before shifting to spices and perfumes in v. 13. No longer is she describing his physical appearance as much as relating his extravagance on a multi-sensory level. The images associated with her lover shift again to hard, precious materials—gold, jewels, ivory, sapphires, alabaster, and cedars. In contrast with earlier comparisons to a gazelle or young deer (2:9), a king (1:12), and a shepherd (1:7) who roam freely where they please, these images of the male lover are solidly rooted and stable. For example, “His thighs are pillars of alabaster founded upon refined bases” (5:15). Even though she is currently searching for him, she does not describe him as absent or fleeting but as established. This sense of permanence and stability is new.

Her final statement about him returns to what seems to be her favorite part of him—his mouth (she begins the Song with it and she has already mentioned his lips in this description). It is “sweet and all of him is desirable” (מַחֲמַדִּ֑ים וְכֻלּ֖וֹ מַֽמְתַקִּ֔ים חִכּוֹ֙ (v. 16). She tells the Daughters of Jerusalem that this is her lover and this is her friend. Ultimately what makes him different from

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all others is that he is hers. When the Daughters now ask her where he has gone, she knows.
Perhaps she has actually known all along—he has “gone down to his garden to the beds of spice
to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies.” He is going to her. The garden became an identifier
for the woman in chapter 4 with both the man and the woman using the image for her (4:12, 15,
16). Ever since the male lover left her home at the beginning of chapter 5, she has known where
he will end up—back with her. Her dialogue with the Daughters of Jerusalem further reveals the
depths of the connection between the lovers.

3.2 Performance

Performance takes the forefront in these two chapters. Repetition and iteration of the
night scenes and smaller vocabulary units demonstrate the process of the interpersonal
development. Actions portrayed in these chapters reinforce the descriptions of the lovers and
their relationship that were previously presented exclusively through dialogue. Ultimately, the
performance is never finished as the constant movement between fear in absence and joy in
union demonstrates.

Unlike most of the Song, there is no explicit figurative language in the first night
search—no comparisons, no metaphors, no affective descriptions apart from her calling him “the
one my heart loves.” Instead, the poetry presents a string of active verbs. The scene begins with
the woman in her bed wishing for her lover but not finding him there (3:1). Marked by the plural
form of night (בַּלֵּילוֹת), this wanting but not finding seems to be a nightly occurrence. The second
verse shifts with a cohortative verb (אָקוּמָה) to show her doing something about her longing. Here
the poetry is more narrative than elsewhere, allowing the actions of the two lovers to demonstrate
their interrelated character development. A very simple narrative arc develops, marked by a high
concentration of verbs. She gets up and seeks the one she loves by going around the city, encounters the watchers who go around the city and asks them about him, and ultimately finds him and seizes him to take him to her mother’s house. Occurring four times in the first two verses of the chapter, the verb “to seek” (ḇaṣēq) drives the beginning of the section. At first she does not find him (twice in vv. 1, 2), but with her continued seeking she is found first by the watchers before finally finding him (vv. 3-4). These verses give a narrative setting for the thematic searching and finding that has already appeared in the more metaphorical sections of the Song (e.g. 1:2-8). They not only talk about their desire to be together and difficulties in doing so (as in 2:13-14), but here the absence is palpable in the dark city and occupies all her focus.

This reunion is driven by the woman, showing her determination and boldness.\[119\] Whereas the earlier dialogue hinted at her boldness (as in 1:2 where she states, “He will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth”), here she is very publicly putting herself at risk by searching for him. The boldness of her words is amplified by the boldness of her actions in this scene. The same boldness does not extend to the male lover in this first night scene. The poetry does not describe what he is doing or where he has been throughout this ordeal, focusing only on his absence. Even once the man has been found, he continues to be the object rather than the subject, never speaking or performing his own action. She is the active agent.

Following the determined search and reunion, the poetry yields to the emotion of the reunion of the lovers,\[120\] introducing an entirely different kind of performance within the Song. Just when it seems that the lovers have found one another, the poem flits away to a totally

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\[119\] “Her boldness during these absences is stunning.” Carey Allen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 99.

\[120\] This draws on the idea of the extravagance of lyric as an “utter yielding” to a feeling or idea as described in F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 213.
different time and place. Song 3:6-11 details a royal procession surrounding Solomon’s bed, but its connection to the lovers is initially unclear. Neither lover is explicitly present, but the description provides a deeper glimpse into the lovers’ self-constructed world. It is characterized by anticipation, luxury, and a balance between the promise of protection and the threat of danger. Perhaps it is too much to describe directly the emotion of the lovers’ reunion, so the poetry shifts the physical scene while maintaining the emotional content. Gone is the rapid progression and repetition of verbs that characterized the previous scene; in fact, the only explicit action verbs in verses 6-11 call the Daughters of Jerusalem to come out and see the display (נַעֲרַתְיוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל) (v. 11). The poetry instead lingers over every detail of the approaching cavalcade, emphasizing the all-encompassing nature of their love for one another.

What or who is rising up in v. 6? The feminine participle “rising up” (עֹלָה) could refer to the female lover, love in general, or the bed described shortly thereafter, among other options. Introduced with a question, verse 6 sets the stage with an air of uncertainty and excitement. Smoke clouds vision and strong fragrances fill the air. It reverses the directionality of the previous section. Instead of starting at the center of the bed and expanding to the streets and those who go around the city, here we first see a large military retinue before seeing the post, back, seat, and inside of the litter and ultimately describing the joy of King Solomon.

Christopher Meredith, too, notes the similarities between these two scenes in chapter 3. Both focus on an enclosed center with armed guards encircling it. He says, “The two scenes use the same Hebrew root (סְבַּב) to describe their respective encirclings, underscoring the similarity.”

What is rising up from the wilderness is a whole panorama lending sights, smells, and sounds to coordinate with the emotions of the relationship between the two characters.

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Sixty of the strongest men of Israel surround the litter or Solomon each armed with a sword. The presence of the men is explained because of “terrors in the night” (מפחית בלילה), which can be interpreted several ways. Perhaps there is impending danger to the one in the litter. Perhaps nights in the wilderness invite violence. On the other hand, their swords remain sheathed. At the present moment, peace reigns. The approaching crowd is an army at peace, but the possibility of a threat remains (3:7-8). The lovers frequently experience elsewhere the same uneasy balance between the safety and joy of togetherness and the unspoken threat of being torn apart or the constant search for the other (e.g. 8:1). It is a tension between peace and anxiety.

This portion connects to the rest of the Song through consistent themes and motifs which function to provide further insight into the complex relationship between the lovers. It focuses on an impending approach. What could be a simple object of a bed or chariot is elevated with luxurious materials that appeal to multiple senses. Even with the focus on a protected, enclosed space, there is a hint of possible danger. It expands the emotional language of the Song beyond the two young lovers to encompass a whole fanciful scene. The two episodes in chapter 3 prolong desire while providing more details of what pleasure it brings, reflecting the extravagance of the love between the two primary characters, demonstrating their primary identity as lover of the other.

The second night scene follows another simple narrative arc, which engages the iterative aspect of performance. Some components are repeated, while the overall arc differs from the previous scene. This is particularly acute in the repetition of her searching but not finding (מְצָאתָהוּ וְלֹא בִּקַּשְׁתָּהוּ) with the addition of calling without answer (ﬠָנָֽנִי וְלֹ֥א קְרָאתִ֖יו (v. 6). In this scene, the woman hears her lover call for her to open, which she at first resists; she gets up to open for him but he is gone; and then she is found again by the watchers who this time hurt her.
This time the search is not resolved. She encounters the Daughters of Jerusalem and gets carried away with a description of her lover even after being wounded by the watchers.

Unlike the previous night scene, both lovers act. The male initiates and intensifies the encounter. He is not passive this time. The woman slowly goes to meet him, prolonging their desire. However, by the time she opens, he has turned and gone. The woman punctuates the scene three times with the emphatic use of the pronoun “I” in vv. 2, 5, 6 in connection with her sleeping, standing, and opening. The man initiates, but she emphasizes her own agency. After the extended anticipation through v. 5, the narrative collapses the woman’s search into just v. 6. As in the earlier scene, she seeks but does not find. Here she calls, but he does not answer. The woman’s persistence and boldness demonstrated in the previous scene continue here. However, a new side of the man emerges here as he comes to her door; he is not always absent or passive but here initiates an encounter but then disappears without explanation.

Another instance of repetition and iteration is the interaction with the Daughters of Jerusalem. At the end of both night scenes, the woman draws a third party into what was her mental discourse, making her relationship the focal point for all, not just the two lovers. The woman repeats the enigmatic oath formula that previously appeared in 2:7 following the description of their embrace in the house of wine. She wants the Daughters of Jerusalem to swear “by the gazelles or the deer of the field” (בַּעֲבוֹת אוֹ בַּעֲבָאֹת הָשָּׂדֶה, which is unusual. The poet

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122 Several commentators point out that the names of these animals sound like names for God—hosts (צְבָאֹת) as in 1 King 18:15 and God Almighty (שַדַּי אֵל). E.g., J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 119. Exum states that this formulation “sounds like a more conventional way of swearing an oath in the name of God but lacks that kind of solemnity.”
uses imagery appropriate for love language; gazelles and deer fit the ancient Near East iconography.\textsuperscript{123}

“Do not stir up or awaken love until it desires,” she pleads with the Daughters of Jerusalem (אָמָrı̂ שֶׁתֶּחְפָּֽץ מַעֲרֹר אֱהַ֝וָ֑ה יִֽבְזָ֙ים—2:7; 3:5). The first occurrence in 2:7 follows a peaceful scene in which the two lovers recline together, so her admonition comes across as playful. She is “sick with love” (אָֽנִי אַהֲבָ֖ה שֶׁחוֹלַ֥ת—2:5) seemingly in a good way. She repeats it in chapter 3, but perhaps there is a more developed edge of danger when it is used here. She has just faced one of the disadvantages of love—her lover’s absence. Without him, she is no longer entirely herself as seen by her determined search, so she warns her friends not to stir up love. Alternatively, perhaps she is teasing the others with instructions to do as she says and not as she does.\textsuperscript{124} She has spent the previous four verses seeking out her lover, not waiting or tiptoeing around it. Or, now that she has found her lover, perhaps she does not want them to be disturbed so that her adjuration is not against love in the abstract but telling her friends very specifically not to interrupt. The beauty of the poetry is that all these possibilities layer on top of one another and co-exist.

As with the first night scene, the second ends with an address to the Daughters of Jerusalem in v. 8, but it is not a verbatim repetition of the earlier oath. It is not general advice for them to appropriate.\textsuperscript{125} Following her violent encounter with the sentinels, her request has changed. She wants them to tell her lover that she is “sick of love” (אָֽנִי אַהֲבָ֖ה שֶׁחוֹלַ֥ת—v. 8). Unlike in 2:7, this time her sickness seems more dangerous. Walsh writes, “her adjuration is no


\textsuperscript{124} Walsh, \textit{Exquisite Desire}, 180.

\textsuperscript{125} Walsh, \textit{Exquisite Desire}, 183.
longer for the women’s benefit, but is now a personal errand.” Instead of doing her bidding, they ask more about the lover. What makes him so special? Her response is a seven-verse description that seems to convince them. They join the search for him in 6:1, asking “Where has your lover turned so that we may seek him with you?” Her description and the resulting search prove he is desirable to others as well, not just her. The Daughters of Jerusalem want to help bring them back together, showing the value of the lovers’ relationship.

The repetition of the search and the conversation with the Daughters of Jerusalem demonstrate the incomplete nature of the performance. She finds him after the first search only to have to seek him again. The constant pendulum swing between searching and finding, celebrating love together and fearing being apart, shows the continual shaping and reshaping in the relationship between being one and being two.¹²⁷

3.3 Unboundedness

Despite the lovers’ physical separation throughout most of these two chapters, the blending of boundaries between them is distinctive. As has already been discussed, the first night scene presents the woman on her own, but her determined search for him demonstrates that a vital part of her self is lacking when they are apart. Once she finds him, she takes him to her mother’s house (3:4). Tod Linafelt identifies this as an example of the unification of the two lovers:

The mother’s house, in the second colon of the line a symbol of safety and intimacy in the face of the outside world, is turned in the third colon into an image that is both a

¹²⁶ Walsh, Exquisite Desire, 183.

focused and intensified version of that desire for seclusion (an inner sanctum within the house) and a more explicit metaphor for a return to lost continuity, with the chamber of conception shading into the womb where the two lovers are twins—bone of bone and flesh of flesh—within the single, encompassing body of the mother.\textsuperscript{128}

The first search concludes with this drawing together into the most enclosed and intimate of spaces following the stressful time apart from one another.

The poetry operates on two levels at the beginning of chapter 5. One is the missed encounter between the two lovers resulting in a second nighttime search; the other is the poetic representation of sexual passion through vocabulary, imagery, and double entendre.\textsuperscript{129} Meredith explains that the poetry “places the female in space and makes her body identical with that space.”\textsuperscript{130} On one level the two lovers remain separated by space and obstacles; on the other, the two cross those boundaries that separate them. The movement of the poetry flows from his head to her feet (vv. 2, 3), showing a kind of combination into one whole entity.\textsuperscript{131} Then his hand (v. 4) precedes her fingers (v. 5). All is encompassed in the imagination of wetness. As Meredith writes, it becomes “difficult, even to distinguish male and female sexual organs amid all the fluidity.”\textsuperscript{132} By now, there is a significant buildup of anticipation, and the distinction between figure and referent or narration and metaphor has dissolved. Readers see the lovers both separated by their own actions and space as well as the building sexual energy and exchange between them. They are both together and not. The boundaries between them become unclear, causing one to blend with the other.

\textsuperscript{128} Tod Linafelt, “Arithmetic,” 247.

\textsuperscript{129} Exum, \textit{Song of Songs}, 192.

\textsuperscript{130} Meredith, \textit{Journeys in the Songscape}, 51.

\textsuperscript{131} “That it is the head of the man and the feet of the woman referred to, rather than the head and feet of a single person, only serves to emphasize the unity of the two as lovers,” Linafelt, “Arithmetic,” 255.

\textsuperscript{132} Meredith, \textit{Journeys in the Songscape}, 132.
The preoccupation with thresholds in this section also contributes to the sense of unboundedness. Zhang points to the failure of the male to overcome the obstacle of their separation through his own power, saying, “One never reaches the other by the extension of egoistic interest, which only converts the other into a thing deprived of its otherness.” Instead the threshold calls attention to the porous nature of their being both one and two at the same time. Meredith writes, “If each threshold negates the difference between the lovers without necessarily negating them as two, the narratives themselves also negate a more profound difference, that between desire and fulfillment.” The binaries of him and her; together and apart; and now and not yet are collapsed.

The woman’s description of her lover attributes to him some of the same images that had been previously stated about her. His “eyes are like doves” (כְּיוֹנִיםﬠֵינָיו) in 5:12, which echoes his statement to her in 1:15. She tells the Daughters of Jerusalem that his lips are “lilies dripping myrrh” (עֹבֵֽרֵבּוֹר נְטוֹפָּוּת שֽׁוֹשַׁנִים) (v. 13). She previously self-identified as a lily in 2:1. The use of the lily image here unites them. In the most recent night scene, her hands also drip with myrrh (נָטְפוּ־מֵרְוִיָּהוּ) (5:5). Her hands and his lips drip with the same substance, also blurring the boundaries between them.

Following her unsuccessful search and description for the Daughters of Jerusalem, the section closes with the woman’s statement of their identities: “I belong to my lover and my lover belongs to me” (לִ֔י וְדוֹדִ֣י לְדוֹדִ֥י אֲנִ֤י (6:3). This echoes 2:16 (דוֹדִי וַאֲנִ֣י לִי דּוֹדִ֥י) but reverses their order. Here the emphatic first person pronoun appears first. On one level, the reversal demonstrates that they are interchangeable. The sentiment is true no matter whether the male or female occurs first.

133 Zhang, I, You, and the Word “God,” 82.
134 Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape, 139.
However, naming herself first may also emphasize her agency in fighting for the relationship through her undeterred searches for him. The statement asserts that the identity of the two lovers is interrelated. They belong to one another and exist only in relationship.

3.4 Summary

Interpersonal construction of the self through dialogue, performance, and unboundedness occurs slightly differently in these two chapters. Most of the Song deals primarily in figurative language, which grants access to the inner thoughts of the lovers in terms of how the other makes him or her feel. These two sections of the Song, which differ significantly from the rest of the lyric poetry by including more narrative and descriptive aspects, provide an alternative source of characterization for the two lovers. The narrative sections demonstrate the woman’s persistence, focus, and boldness. Her actions support her words elsewhere in the Song. She faces the city at night and the watchers of the walls to be reunited with him. However, it is the male lover who gains a new facet in these sections. The second night scene shows his initiative, and the woman’s description of him emphasizes his stability. He is not just the free-ranging gazelle or independent king previously described.

Additionally, the two sections examined in this chapter demonstrate the propensity of the relationship that defines them to acquiesce to strong emotion. The joy of their reunion following the first night scene catapults the poetry into a different setting, allowing for the exploration of the intensity and luxury of their love without having to describe it directly. Solomon’s procession provides the emotional, sensual celebration for the reunion. Likewise, the woman surrenders her focus on the search to describe her lover when asked about him. Her pride in and love for him is palpable as she shifts from images of birds to spices to precious materials. Finally, throughout
both sections, the two are pulled between the safety of their relationship and the risks love brings. Zhang points out the emotional pendulum that characterizes these sections: “After reaching the summit of being together, the lyrical movement swings toward the subject’s anxiety of being together ‘but not yet.’” They are in danger of being separated or beaten or attacked by the dangers of the night, but they also continue to find one another and celebrate in small, enclosed spaces of bedrooms and gardens.

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CHAPTER 4
ALL OF YOU IS BEAUTIFUL, MY FRIEND: SONG 4:1-5:1 AND 6:4-7:14

4:1 Your eyes are doves behind your veil
Your hair is like a flock of goats hopping down from the mountain of Gilead

2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ones that have come up from the washing
all of them bearing twins and none of them lost

3 Like the scarlet thread are your lips and your mouth is lovely
like a slice of pomegranate your cheeks from behind your veil

4 Like the tower of David your neck built of stones
a thousand shields are hung upon it,
all the shields of the warriors

5 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle
The shepherd is in the lilies

6 Until the day breathes and the shadows flee

4.1 Look, you are beautiful, my friend; look, you are beautiful
Your eyes are doves behind your veil
Your hair is like a flock of goats hopping down from the mountain of Gilead
I will walk to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.

All of you is beautiful, my friend, and there is no flaw in you.

With me from Lebanon my bride, come with me depart from Lebanon
from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon
from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards

You have ravished me, my sister, bride,
you have ravished me with one of your eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.

How beautiful is your love, my sister, bride!
How much better is your love than wine
and the smell of your oils than all spices!

Your lips drip nectar, bride.
Honey and milk are under your tongue.
The scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.
12 A garden locked is my sister, bride,  
a fountain locked, a spring sealed  
13 Your shoots/branches/canals an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruit,  
henna with nard  
14 Nard and saffron, reed and cinnamon with all the trees of frankincense  
myrrh and aloes with all the best spices  
15 A fountain of gardens, a well of living water, and streams from Lebanon  
16 Awake north and come south! Blow on my garden, let its/his spices flow  
Let my lover come to his garden and eat its/his choice fruit  

5:1 I come to my garden, my sister, bride.  
I gather my myrrh with my spice.  
I eat my honeycomb with my honey.  
I drink my wine with my milk.  
Eat, friends, drink and be drunk in love.
Beautiful are you, my friend, like Tirzah
lovely like Jerusalem, awesome as the banners/sights

Turn your eyes from before me for they alarm/excite/confuse me
Your hair is like a flock of goats that come down from Gilead
Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing
all of them bearing twins and none among them lost
Like a slice of pomegranate your cheeks from behind your veil

There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and maidens without number
Singular is she, my dove, my perfect one
special to her mother, flawless to her that bore her
Daughters saw her and called her fortunate; queens and concubines and they praised her

Who is this who looks down like the dawn,
beautiful as the moon, pure as the sun, awesome as the banners/sights/stars?
To the garden of nuts I went down to see the shoots of the valley
to see the sprouting vines, the sparkling pomegranates
I did not know my heart made me; chariots of Aminadab

6:4 This verse presents a major problem for interpreters, with many asserting that the text is hopelessly corrupted. I have attempted a most literal translation of the MT.
7:1 Turn, turn, Shulamite! Turn, turn so that we might see you
   Why do you see in the Shulamite a dance of the two armies?

2 How beautiful is your stepping in sandals, daughter of nobility!
   Your round thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand

3 Your navel is a round bowl that does not lack wine
   your belly is a heap of wheat fenced with lilies

4 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle

5 Your neck is like an ivory tower
   Your eyes are pools in Heshbon above the gate of Bath-rabbin
   Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon watching for Damascus

6 Your head upon you is like Carmel and the hair of your head is like purple
   a king is bound in the tresses

7 How beautiful and how lovely you are, love with delights

8 This your height is like a palm tree and your breasts are like clusters

9 I said I will climb the palm tree, hold its branches
   Let your breasts be like clusters on the vine and the scent of your nose like apples

10 Your mouth is like the best wine
   It goes to my lover smoothly, gliding over sleeping lips
I belong to my lover and upon me is his desire.

Come, my lover, let’s go out to the field and spend the night in the villages.

Let’s get up early to the vineyards to see if the vine is in bloom.

The mandrakes give out scent and over our doors/openings are all gifts.

This chapter primarily concerns the three long descriptions of the woman presented by the male lover which come from chapters 4, 6, and 7 of the Song.

- The first description divides into three movements. The first (4:1-7) begins and ends with statements of the woman’s beauty surrounding descriptions of her eyes down to her breasts. References to Lebanon form an inclusio for the next section (4:8-11), which primarily deals with her entire effect on him, only mentioning specific parts of lips, tongue, and garments in the last verse. The metaphor for the woman as a garden ties together the third part (4:12-5:1), including a brief statement possibly from her in v. 16.
• The second description is the majority of chapter 6 (vv. 4-12) in which the male repeats a few of the images from the first section and introduces the concept of the singularity of his lover.

• The third description begins with a dancing Shulamite, describing her this time from bottom to top and introduces an image of the woman as a palm tree (7:1-10). Finally, the woman responds and calls for them to go away together (7:11-14).

Significant portions of the poetry here resemble the Arabic wasf genre—“a literary genre of flattering or embellished description.” Generally the description focuses on body parts and moves from top to bottom or bottom to top. Michael Fox identifies four wasfs in the Song: 4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-10; and 7:2-10a. The woman speaks only the one in chapter 5. Of the remaining three that the man speaks, the first two travel top to bottom while the third starts at her feet and ends with her mouth. Sarah Zhang relies on the Arabic etymology, tying the act of describing to that of praising: “The distinctive verbal meanings suggest an intertwined texture: describe to extol, and extol by describing. The goal to extol adds an emotional timbre that description alone would have missed.” Furthermore, these are not merely celebratory descriptions but extravagantly metaphorical ones with little actual depictive content, allowing a heavily descriptive element to remain paradoxically balanced between embodying the one beloved and remaining a neutral type into which any beloved could easily slip.

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This chapter will again explore the concept of interpersonal development through the three components of dialogue, performance, and unboundedness. Dialogue here takes the primary form of a direct address by the male lover describing the female lover with a few possible interjections from her. Nevertheless, the dialogue here presents the attributes common throughout the Song in developing interpersonality—predictive, naming, and internalized. The performance of speaking the woman into being repeats and adjusts throughout the three chapters. Just as their relationship continues to develop and is therefore always incomplete, the fragmented nature of the description emphasizes that partiality. The aspect of unboundedness takes on a somewhat different tone in these sections. Though on the surface extremely laudatory, the descriptions of the woman reveal an inherent danger in overrunning the boundaries between the lovers. Furthermore, additional blending in imagery arises here with new architectural elements added to her portraiture. Though he does most of the speaking in this selection of texts, their interpersonality continues to develop.

4.1 Dialogue

While these sections of the Song that are primarily spoken by him seem to contain less dialogue, they fit into the larger dialogue of the Song as a whole. The Song begins with two chapters of conversation between the lovers with each making relatively short speeches (1:2-2:17). Then the woman makes a longer speech in which she describes her search for him before talking with the Daughters of Jerusalem about the caravan in the wilderness (3:1-11). Chapter 4 begins the first of the man’s longer speeches. The woman (with the Daughters of Jerusalem) again takes the lead (5:2-6:3) before the longest of the man’s speeches that spans chapters 6 and
7. The man’s mostly uninterrupted lines of these three chapters fit within the larger dialogical context by adding multi-layered metaphorical descriptions of his beloved.

Most of this section of the text takes the form of a direct address from the male to the female lover with limited response from her. Her presence is implied through the repeated use of the second person pronoun and the sense that he is taking in her appearance inch by inch. Despite the reduced use of her voice, the sense of her embodiment within the poetry grows as he draws attention to a litany of her body parts.

Attention is due to the names that they call one another throughout these selections of the text. Because the woman’s voice is largely absent from this section of text, it is not surprising that she uses only one name for the male, “my lover” (ָ֚דִוי) (4:16; 7:11, 12, 14), which is her favorite moniker for him throughout the Song. It does not provide additional insight into his identity or their relationship but functions well to call attention to the fact that it is indeed she who is speaking in her few lines. Likewise, in the first part of this section (4:1-7), he only names her “my friend” (ֶﬠֶﬠֶיֿ) (vv. 1, 7), clearly identifying him as the speaker but not developing their interpersonality.

He introduces two new names for her in chapter 4, which then pop up in other sections of the Song. The first is “bride” (ָ֣֔ים) (v. 8). It is then repeated five additional times in the rest of the speech (4:9, 10, 11, 12; 5:1). This is one section often highlighted when identifying poetry that may have been part of wedding celebrations due to its use of “bride.” The second new name for her is “my sister” (ָאֲחֹתִ֥י), which always appears in this part in tandem with bride (4:9, 10, 12; 5:1), creating a term of endearment that reflects common tropes in Mesopotamian and Egyptian love poetry. A sister is a person with whom one shares more sameness than difference. Exum writes, “The combination of sibling and marriage in the epithet ‘my sister, bride’ epitomizes the
desire to achieve oneness with one another.” The epithet combines two of the most intimate relationships demonstrating the increasing closeness between the lovers.

The term “Shulamite” (הַשּׁוּלַמִּית) used twice in 7:1 has intrigued interpreters. The word appears nowhere else in the Song or the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The interpretation I prefer represents a connection to the root slm (שלום) from which peace, Jerusalem, and the name Solomon also derive. There is an obvious connection to Solomon through the titular line as well as references to him in 1:5; 3:7-11; and 8:11-12. Her lover is never directly identified as Solomon himself, but the king and his extravagance pop up throughout the Song. The connections between the woman and Jerusalem throughout the Song are numerous. As examples, her companions are the Daughters of Jerusalem and the two night scenes depict her in the midst of a walled city. Leaning on the etymological relationship to peace/wholeness (שלום), Fox translates the term as “perfect one,” which ties nicely back to the terms used for her in chapter 6. Towards the end of chapter 8, the woman identifies herself as “like one who finds peace” (כְּמוֹצְאֵ֥ת שלום), deepening the association (v. 10). This etymological connection between the city, the king, peace, and the woman further dissolves the boundaries between all of them.

The final name he gives her in this section is “daughter of nobility” (בת נדיב) in 7:2. Attributing nobility to each of them occurs throughout the Song, elevating the status of one


141 See treatments of possibilities in Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 596-600; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 157-58; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 226-28. In addition to attention to its Hebraic root, possibilities for association include a geographical origin to the town of Shunem/Shulem and a relationship to the war goddess Ishtar.

142 See also Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001), 81.

143 Fox, *Song of Songs*, 157.
another and their relationship (cf. 1:12; 3:9). It need not indicate actual noble birth. Michael D. Goulder argues that Nadiv/Nodab is a Arabian tribal name, which is why it occurs previously in 6:12, saying that he has “made her a chariot of her own people.”

The lover’s identifying her ethnicity then functions as an acknowledgment of welcoming a foreigner.

Interpersonal dialogue is predictive. The most predictive part of this section of text wraps around the end of chapter 4. The man begins with the inaccessibility of his bride. He introduces the image of the woman as a “garden locked” (גַּ֥ ן נָﬠ֖וּל) in 4:12 before describing its appealing scents and tastes that he cannot reach. She then calls for the wind to blow, infusing the air with her scent, and invites her lover into the garden to eat its choice fruits (מְגָדָֽיו פְּרִ֥י וְיֹאכַ֖ל), solving the problem of inaccessibility (4:16). This results in his announcement in 5:1 that he is indeed coming to his garden. He introduced a problem which she then solved, allowing them to unite once more. The dialogue did not demand that particular resolution, but the man’s first image opened the possibility for her to respond in such a way.

The opening line of chapter 5 reveals that the man participates in the practice of self-narration as the woman does in the two night scenes. However, his is much less detailed and lacks any elements of plot. It reveals a kind of mental discourse in which she is still his focus even when she is not being addressed directly. He maintains the metaphorical content of his previous description of her. His union with his garden, sister, bride is indulgent, bringing


145 Goulder reads the Song to celebrate the arrival of a foreign queen as the wife of Solomon. Goulder, *The Song of Fourteen Songs*, 71.

146 It is possible that the man also speaks this line. “My garden” could be spoken by either of them, but I have chosen to read this as her interjection. The lack of clarity in speaker only adds to the argument of their blending identities.

147 She then again claims this image for herself in 6:2, describing herself as “his garden.”
together myrrh and spice, honeycomb and honey, wine and milk for his consumption. He takes her and the various scents, textures, and tastes into himself.

The clarity of speaker is lost in 6:10-7:1, and scholars group the lines into various units complicating the matter further. Keel suggests v. 10 is spoken by the man as a climactic conclusion to his description, tied together with the repetition of “awesome as the banners/sights” (כַּנִּדְגָּלֽוֹת אֲיֻמָֽ֖ה) from v. 4. Or, it is possible that the groups of women (daughters, queens, and concubines) designated in the previous verse answer with this question, as Murphy concludes. A similar construction of “who is this” (מִי־זֹ֥את) occurs in both 3:6 in reference to the excitement in the wilderness and 8:5 in more direct reference to the woman who leans upon her lover. I propose that it is the Daughters of Jerusalem speaking here due to their use of questions throughout the Song (e.g. 5:9), but as always the open possibility of the text contributes to the blurred sense of boundary between the speakers in the Song.

None of the helpful tropes to identify the speaker as in 4:1 with “my friend” or 4:16 with “my lover” occur in 6:11-12. Exum posits that v. 10 concludes the man’s long speech while vv. 11-12 belong to the woman because she is more likely to narrate actions (e.g. 3:1-5) and it would make more sense for her to be asked to return in 7:1 if she had left for the garden in 6:11. Keel thinks that v. 11 is spoken by the man but v. 12 by the woman because of his common association with going to the “garden” and her connection to the courtly or military world (as in

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149 Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 178.

In 6:2 she states that her lover has “gone down” (יָרַד) to his garden, so it makes sense that the same person would go down here. But is a nut garden (אֱגוֹז) the same as my garden (גַנִּי)? Instead of having all the gardens refer to the woman, perhaps this is a play on a slight shift of images like that of the lily and apple tree in 2:2-3, suggesting that it is indeed the man referenced here. Additionally, the woman frequently speaks of her heart (1:7; 3:1-4; 5:6) while this would be the only instance of him using the term.

The interaction regarding the Shulamite in 7:1 involves plural forms of the verbs for seeing in the first (וְנֶחֱזֶה) and second line (מַה־תֶּחֱזוּ). Is the lover simply trying to show off the Shulamite by inventing a crowd? Exum suggests he is including the audience of the poem as the audience for the dance. Bergant assumes that it is the woman responding in the second line, referring to herself as the Shulamite. Her “demure response” must be interpreted based on the nature of the dance she performs, but Bergant does not present specific options. Bloch and Bloch posit an exchange between two subgroups of the Daughters of Jerusalem, drawing a parallel with their question eliciting a detailed description of one of the lovers by the other as in 5:10-16.

The confusion itself is of interest. If the speaker is not clear, the dialogue falters. Reading these four verses as all spoken by the man as a continuation of his description of his lover is very different than if one reads them as a quick exchange between the Daughters (6:10; 7:1), the man (6:11), and the woman (6:12). If either of the lovers or a third party could possibly be speaking,

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151 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 225.
152 Exum, *Song of Songs*, 226.
153 Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 81.
what do the lines communicate about the relationship? First, it demonstrates the centrality of the relationship to the functioning of the poetry. No matter who speaks, the same qualities emerge again and again. She is beautiful and commands attention, the gardens beckon, nature springs forth, and it all hearkens the richness of nobility and military strength. Additionally, the confusion demonstrates how similarly the two lovers sometimes express themselves that either of them could easily speak v. 11. They both have simply narrated their own actions previously (e.g. 3:2; 5:1). This line recalls the ambiguity of 2:10 in which the female recalls his words, including a celebration of the season of growth. Their voices blend together in these instances.

4.2 Performance

The primary performance in this section is that of the repeated, iterative, and unfinished construction of the embodied female. The text does not present whole bodies but only describes some parts. For example, one of the longer sections of description describes the female’s eyes, hair, teeth, lips, mouth, cheek, neck, and breasts (4:1-7). Landy argues, “The woman becomes transparent; her figure is superimposed on vivid pictures, of minimal descriptive value.”\textsuperscript{155} The images describe her in some way but seem to have little physical depiction. There is no body outside of this text, no body prior to its construction through the poem’s description. These parts do not create a full body or person. Nothing of the connection between the parts materializes. The reader puts the parts together.\textsuperscript{156} This partiality renders the construction of the female more realistic in terms of Butler’s understanding of performance instead of less. “The Song’s bodies,

\textsuperscript{155} Francis Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1983), 75.

\textsuperscript{156} Christopher Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape: Space and the Song of Songs (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 150-51.
in fact, more obviously resemble Butler’s intellectual formation of embodiment as a discursive product. The lovers themselves, after all, explicitly speak their bodies into being.”¹⁵⁷ To produce a body in its entirety within a text is impossible due to the inevitable disjunctions and incoherencies, so the collection of parts presented in these sections allows for a more coherent performance precisely because of its partiality.

Song 4:1-7 is a rigidly structured inclusio. It moves from comparisons to domesticated animals to products of human culture. Overall the progression moves toward more and more sophisticated human projects.¹⁵⁸ He begins with doves, which fly freely. Goats are herded, and flocks of shorn ones require even more human intervention to shear them. Thread must be spun. A tower of stone decorated with shields is an even more detailed construction. The lover starts with her eyes and proceeds down her form to her breasts. Dobbs-Allsopp writes, “the upper torso of the girl is present to the mind’s eye of the auditor, framed window-fashion, just as in an ivory figurine, by the poem’s opening and closing inclusio.”¹⁵⁹ Describing this approach, Landy says, “It has the effect of a still life with its complex absence of main verbs; in it each image is paratactively juxtaposed.”¹⁶⁰ It is interesting that both of these scholars compare the presentation in the poetry to a kind of artwork that typically depicts its subject matter in a realistic way. The Song, however, seems to be much more metaphorical than realistic. Zhang offers an alternative, stating, “This is a humanist approach that looks up to the other as a body with a face, a face with

¹⁵⁷ Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape, 159.

¹⁵⁸ As with all statements about the Song, this also has two exceptions—the slice of pomegranate and the two fawns. It can perhaps be argued that the pomegranate requires some human intervention to be sliced, but this seems a stretch. The fawns are simply wild.


¹⁶⁰ Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise, 76.
a body.” The lover is not concerned with the particularity of her beauty as an object but is enveloped in his encounter with her.

While Song 6:4-7 again starts by describing her from the eyes down, 7:1-10 flows from bottom to top. Beginning with attention to her dancing, it is natural to start with her sandals. Then he describes her thighs, navel, belly, breasts, neck, eyes, nose, head, and hair before beholding her entire height as a palm tree. In this description, there is a prevalence of comparisons made to the work of artisans and craftsmen: work of a master hand (v. 2), a round bowl (v. 3), ivory tower (v. 5), purple (v. 6). The images in the first few verses use relatively small items whereas by the time he reaches her neck, it is a tower. Robert Alter argues this emphasizes the parts of her that could be commonly seen: “As the lover’s gaze moves up from the parts of the body usually covered and thus seen by him alone to the parts generally visible, it is appropriate that the similes for her beauty should be drawn now from the public realm.”

Verse 7 loses the upward momentum. The poem then flashes between her height, breasts, nose, mouth, and then lips.

Despite the intimacy associated with thighs and belly, he begins by examining her appearance from a distance. He has not joined her dance. By the time he reaches her hair, the two lovers are bound together. Alter describes this section stating, “the powerful allure of sandaled feet, curving thighs, and all the rest that has pulsated through every choice of image now culminates in the hair, where at last the lover, through the self-designation of king, introduces himself into the poem, quite literally interinvolves himself with the beloved.” Then he is

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161 Zhang, I, You, and the Word “God,” 68.


climbing the palm tree and “holding its branches” (בְּסַנְסִנָּ֑אֹֽחֲזָ֖ה יו) in v. 9. Throughout the Song he has been less direct than she, but here his metaphors become quite explicit.\textsuperscript{164} He closes with her mouth (much as she did in 5:16), likening it to “the best wine” (הַטּ֛וֹב כְּיֵ֥ין (v. 10). The second and third cola of this line are a bit confusing as to referent. Verse 10b describes the wine that “goes to my lover smoothly” (לְמֵישָׁרִ֑ים לְדוֹדִ֖י הוֹלֵ֥ךְ). He is usually the referent to “my lover” (דוֹדִי), but it seems a strange place to interrupt the man’s speech. Robert Gordis suggests it is an apocopated plural for lovers, which would make her appeal less specific to him but connect wine and love in general.\textsuperscript{165} On the other hand, Murphy reads it as “a sudden transition, … returning the compliment, a device that has occurred before (1:15-16; 4:16b).”\textsuperscript{166} It is almost as if she is completing his thought.

The prevalence of repetition of images and lines of the poetry is obvious, but Butler’s work points to the function of repetition as creating increasingly real and stable identities. An example of this is the image of the garden as an identifier for the woman. The man introduces the image in 4:12 with a description of the metaphor as one locked and later flowing with water (4:15). The woman then uses the image for herself, changing it slightly to focus on its scent of ripened fruit (4:16). After that point, “garden” seems to simply be used as a euphemism for her without requiring further description or adaptation; both the man and the woman use it to simply

\textsuperscript{164}“Her statements of yearning are overall more direct than his, she relies less on metaphoric images, or better, knows when to drop them in preference for candor. She makes such uncoy statements as, ‘Let me give my love to you’ (7:12); ‘I am sick with love’ (2:5; 5:8); ‘Oh that he were embracing me’ (2:6; 8:3); ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth’ (1:2). Her desire is consistently voiced, repeated, vivid, and insistent” in Carey Allen Walsh, \textit{Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 99.


\textsuperscript{166} Murphy, \textit{Song of Songs}, 183.
refer back to her (5:1, 6:2). Another example is the repetition of her words in 2:17 as his words in 4:6: “until the day breathes and the shadows flee.” Zhang writes, “The lover borrows words from his beloved’s invitation, offering his lips as the site of her words to express a shared desire.” The repetition of her words from his mouth ties them closer together and further erases the boundaries between them, which is echoed in the erasure of the difference between day and night.

Instead of just one image repeating and becoming solidified, a whole segment of text is repeated with only minor variations and some gaps in 4:1-3 and 6:5-7. It is not just the woman’s gender or particular qualities being performed here but her whole self. A different inclusio frames 6:4-10, utilizing the phrase “awesome as the sights” (כַּנִּדְגָּלוֹת אֲיֻמָּ֖ה), developing the quality of her beauty. Her eyes are no longer peaceful (or brown/grey) doves but they alarm/excite/confuse him (הִרְהִיבֻ֑נִי). This emphasizes his sense of danger in connection to her. Furthermore, two verses are dedicated to emphasize that she stands apart from multitudes of other women, including even queens (vv. 8-9). This second description in chapter 6 intensifies her qualities in comparison to chapter 4.

Another component that is repeated throughout the descriptions is geographical location. Previously I have discussed the quick jumping from place to place, placing the lovers in the city, in the fields, in a garden, in a home. In some sense, as Meredith writes, “imagining a location simply causes it to come into being around the lovers.” In these extended descriptions of the

167 Note that the image of a garden is not a neutral one. As Meredith points out, gardening in one’s own garden is a relatively recent development as it was primarily a job site, a symbol of surplus riches and power, in the ancient world. See Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape, 74-78.


169 Meredith, Journeys in the Songscape, 34.
woman, the male integrates specific place names, alluding to multiple regions of the land familiar to the people of Israel such as Gilead (4:1), Lebanon (4:8), Hermon (4:8), Tirzah (6:4), Jerusalem (6:4), Damascus (7:5), and Carmel (7:6). As Elaine T. James concludes, “The kind and quality of vision that draws the young woman’s beauty in terms of the land of Israel is a vision of affection, of memory, and is reminiscent of a long-term experience in a particular topography. This landscape is experienced over time, through several reiterations.” The familiarity with the geography and the attribution of its beauty to the woman again demonstrate this relationship unfolding over time through continued encounter and experience together.

The performance is forever incomplete. The descriptions, repetitions, and intensifications still do not complete the presentation of the woman. The partial nature of the two lovers allows them to retain their generic composition, creating a dialogue between any pair of lovers instead of overly particular ones all while celebrating the force and effect of the relationship itself. The frequent naming of geographical locations ties the lovers into the cultural history of the people of Israel but does not tie them closely to a particular time or exact location due to the range of references.

### 4.3 Unboundedness

The concept of the unbounded self due to the influence of relationship can inspire tension and fear. As Linafelt writes, “The commingling of selves exists only in the violation of borders…though we may know such violation as an experience of ecstasy, [it] is no less an

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170 Elaine T. James, Landscapes of the Song of Songs: Poetry and Place (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 150
Throughout the Song, threatening and prohibitive imagery and vocabulary, such as armies and walls, appear. The dangerous language functions both to highlight the fear of vulnerability at stake in relationship as well as to demonstrate an overcoming of the boundaries between lovers. In this manner, the text of this selection emphasizes the fear and effects of crossing boundaries.

Several images and descriptions of the woman emphasize perceived boundaries through attention to her inaccessibility. The same trope occurred in 2:14 when she is identified with a dove “in the refuge of the cliff” (הַמַּדְרֵגָ֔ה בְּסֵ֙תֶר֙). In 4:12 she is “a garden locked.../a fountain locked, a spring sealed” (חָתֽוּם נָﬠ֖וּל גַּ֥ ן נָﬠ֖וּל גַ֥ ן). The passive participles do not clearly relate to the male lover, so it is unclear whether or not the garden and fountain are available to him. “Locked” (נָﬠ֖וּל) refers elsewhere only to bolting doors (cf. 2 Sam 13:18, Judg 3:23), so it is reasonable to read this instance in the Song as excluding everyone from entering the garden. “Sealed” (חָתֽוּם) typically describes the closing of a document with an assurance of the sender’s identity (cf. 1 Kgs 21:8), so it more likely connotes ownership of the fountain rather than its unconditional impenetrability. Commentators are divided regarding the overall effect of the two participles. Walsh argues that the lover is frustrated by his inability to reach her, so all of his descriptions of the garden are lucid fantasies. Conversely, Exum contends that they are “his private, locked garden for his pleasure” and “a spring closed off ... so that others do not access its waters.”

Though Bergant supports the latter proposal, she provides an interesting view of the relationship between the two verbs, suggesting that “locking” happens from within while

172 Walsh, Exquisite Desire, 98, 109.
173 Exum, Song of Songs, 175-76.
“sealing” is of the exterior.¹⁷⁴ Using this understanding, perhaps the ambiguity furthers the predicament of the male lover as he is both excluded from his beloved as well as her safeguard. The paradox continues to feed the man’s desire for what is not fully accessible to him while assuring him that his beloved does belong to him.

Twinges of peril invade the male lover’s detailed descriptions of the female. She scares him because of her power over him. In 4:9 the smallest look from her ravishes him. “Now with just one bauble she has conquered,” writes Exum.¹⁷⁵ He asks her to “turn your eyes away from before me, because they overwhelm me” (6:5). Later, describing her hair, he says “a king is bound” (7:5). Figuratively, she mesmerizes him with her long, dark hair. The language again retains a hint of the violent by using the passive participle of (אָסּוּר) instead of a merely descriptive adjective. This is the same word for captive used when the guards imprison Joseph and when the three thousand men of Judah bind Samson to turn over to the Philistines (cf. Gen 40:3, 5 and Judg 15:10-12). The male lover is not just spellbound by her beauty but literally “tied, bound or imprisoned.” In this line, he asserts she has taken away his ability to freely roam where he pleases.

Military images reinforce this balance between danger and safety. En masse, the number of such allusions in this section of the text is striking. In these descriptions the following military images occur: tower (4:4; 7:5a, 5c), shields (4:4b, 4c), warriors (4:4), banners (6:4, 10), chariot (6:12). Military instruments at peace were seen in a previous section (3:8), where the warriors each have swords but they are not in use. In 4:4 he likens her neck to a tower (and again in 7:5). It is a vision of perfection due to its association with David (דָּוִיד כְּמִגְדַּל) and its magnificent

¹⁷⁴ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, 54.

¹⁷⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 171.
ornamentation with a thousand shields (הַמָּגֵן אֶ֤לֶף). Thereby the woman seems highly unapproachable both as an ideal and as part of an immense system of defense.\textsuperscript{176} The shields evoke the warriors to whom they belong but are ultimately only decorative here, providing another balanced image between peace and war. “These military images are cohesive to the lover’s emotional texture,” Zhang writes, demonstrating the “emotional tension between the lover’s unprotected vulnerability and the beloved’s armed loftiness.”\textsuperscript{177}

At the beginning of his long speech in chapter 6 enumerating all of the beautiful features of the woman, the man says that she is “awesome as the sights” (כַּנִּדְגָּלֽוֹת אֲיֻמָ֖ה) and repeats the phrase a few lines later (6:4, 10). “Awesome” (אֲיֻמָ֖ה) occurs in a shortened form also in Habakkuk as a description of the Chaldeans as they are rising to decimate the nations (1:7). The nominal form describes a “terrifying darkness” (הָאָשֶׁרֶךְ) in Gen 15:12 and the “terror and dread” (הָאָשֶׁרֶךְ) that fell upon the Egyptians trapped in the Reed Sea as retold in the song of Moses in Exod 15:16. These are not situations of disaffected awe but rather moments of intense fear and even anticipated death.

The second word of the phrase (כַּנִּדְגָּלֽוֹת) is a \textit{hapax legomenon}. The NRSV translation “banner” reflects the presence of the root וֹדִיל, which occurs in Numbers several times in reference to the military standards of different Israelite tribes (1:52ff). This translation is disputed by many commentators who argue against the military connotation and “banners” in various ways, often settling on translations that communicate a kind of awe-struck admiration of the woman in comparison to the stars or the cities named in the verse. Cheryl Exum renders this

\begin{footnotes}
\item[177] Zhang, \textit{I, You, and the Word “God”}, 56.
\end{footnotes}
line “as awesome in splendor as they,” while Bloch and Bloch note that her “beauty is so intense, her appearance so majestic, as to strike awe in those who see her.” “Awe” downplays the menace of becoming totally overwhelmed and vulnerable. Perhaps the army banners are out of place, but to excise the layer of fear from the encounter with his lover overly simplifies the emotion at stake. Though the language of violence, military might, and fear may first appear out of place in a love song, they actually enhance the understanding of the relationship.

Whereas in the first unit of the Song (1:2-2:17) the images used for the male and female lovers remained mostly distinct, at this point in the Song there is some blurring. In 4:1 her eyes are again compared to doves as in 1:15; his eyes are also like doves in 5:12. Lebanon serves as a point of reference for her scent in 4:11 and his appearance in 5:15. In 6:8-9, he emphasizes the singularity of his beloved in comparison to “sixty queens, eighty concubines, and maidens without number” (פִּֽוּשְׁמֹנִ֖ים מְּלָכ֔וֹת שִׁשִּׁ֥ים מִסְפָּֽר אֵ֥ין וַﬠֲלָמ֖וֹת يַלַגְשִׁ֑ים;). His singularity is expressed in 5:10 with her assertion that he is “regarded from the ten thousand” (מֵרְבָבָֽה דָּג֖וּל וַﬠֲלָמ֖וֹת יַלַגְשִׁ֑ים). The biggest shift in imagery, however, regards the comparison of her body parts to architectural elements. Just as his thighs are compared to pillars upon stable bases in 5:15, her nose is a tower in 7:5. They are constructed of the same material—ivory (his body in 5:14 and her neck in 7:5). No longer are their descriptions primarily distinct as in the first unit, but by this point in the text their words to describe one another are blending together.

The woman finally speaks substantially at the end of chapter 7. Instead of repeating the usual reciprocal statement of their mutual possession (cf 2:16; 6:3), here she substitutes a statement about her lover’s desire. She says, “I belong to my lover and upon me is his desire”

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178 Exum, Song of Songs, 210.
179 Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 189.
(יָעַלִּית ְוָאֵלָה). The man’s extended description of her has emboldened the woman to claim her identity as someone to be desired. This leads into the only invitation for the two of them to go away together presented by the woman (7:12). She is no longer hiding or inaccessible but instead takes initiative, claiming responsibility for her role in the relationship. She promises to give her love to him (ךְלָאֶת־דֹּדַי) and puts on display all the gifts she has hidden for him (ךְצָפַנְתִּי) (vv. 13–14). This demonstrates a closer relationship between them.

4.4 Summary

This portion of the Song (4:1–5:1; 6:4–7:14) presents the woman through her lover’s eyes as part of a larger dialogue between the two of them. Through repetition and iteration, the construction of the woman becomes clearer in terms of their relationship. In reference to the first part of chapter 4, Zhang writes, “the exuberance that permeates the wasf testifies to the unreflected impact of the beloved on her lover.” This portrayal of her impact on him continues throughout the rest of his descriptions; in fact, it is the primary content communicated. I have been less concerned with what the comparisons depict and signify than their rhetorical impact and the form of the comparisons. The similar images and qualities they share throughout the Song bind them together and reveal the strength of their interpersonality.

CHAPTER 5
A SEAL UPON YOUR HEART: SONG 8

8:1 If only you were like a brother to me, one who nursed at the breasts of my mother
I would find you outside—kiss you—and they would not despise me
2 I would lead you—bring you—to the house of my mother, she would teach me
I would give you spiced wine to drink from juice of my pomegranate
3 His left hand under my head and his right would embrace me.
4 I place you under oath, Daughters of Jerusalem,
so that you will not awaken or disturb love until it pleases
5 Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning upon her lover?
Under the apple tree I awakened you, there where your mother conceived you

There the one who bore you labored

Set me as a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon your arm

For strong as death is love, persistent like the grave is jealousy

Her flashes are flames of fire, an eternal flame

Many waters cannot quench love, and floods do not drown it

If one gave all the wealth of his house for love, they would utterly despise him.

8 We have a little sister and she has no breasts

What shall we do to our sister on the day when she is spoken for?

9 If she is a wall, we will build upon her a silver parapet

If she is a door, we will enclose her with a cedar panel

10 I am a wall and my breasts are like towers

Then I was in his eyes as one who produces/finds peace.
There was a vineyard which was Solomon’s in Baal-hamon
he gave the vineyard to keepers,
each would bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver

My vineyard, which is mine, is before me;
the thousand is yours, Solomon, and two hundred for the keepers of the fruit

The one who dwells in the gardens, my companions are listening to your voice; let me hear it.

Flee, my lover, and be like a gazelle or a young deer upon the mountains of spices.

This chapter will discuss the features of the eighth chapter of the Song as a means to conclude the findings of the entire project. Song 8 contains four short sections. The first (vv. 1-5a) describes the woman’s wish that she could more publicly celebrate her and the man’s intimacy. The second section (vv. 5bc-7) includes the most universalizing statements made in the Song as a whole about qualities of love itself. Then comes a short dialogue focusing on metaphors of the accessibility of a little sister and/or the woman as a wall or door (vv. 8-10). The Song concludes with a final discussion of vineyards before the woman encourages her lover again to be like a gazelle (vv. 11-14); it includes the only words spoken by the male in this chapter.

The final chapter of the Song returns to several images and themes that the lovers have previously introduced, including oaths, walls, vineyards, and gardens, but it also introduces new ones. The Song defies neat concluding. Dialogue, performance, and unboundedness again shape the structure of the analysis of the Song. Each section will look first at the particular occurrences within the eighth chapter and then review how the Song as a whole has presented that element. Concluding the current project in this way demonstrates the ongoing nature of interpersonal self-development. The Song functions as a window onto an interpersonal relationship between two
lovers that begins before the text and continues after its last verse; the reader follows its development from the outside.

**5.1 Dialogue**

Following the lengthy description of the female lover by the male, the woman continues her conversation with him at the beginning of chapter 8 and again takes the lead. The focus here is slightly different as she shifts from a celebration of their surroundings as a reflection of their relationship to a description of desired actions. I have translated the interrogative (מִ֤י) in v. 1 to indicate that the whole section is in a kind of optative mood for the following imperfect verbs. If he were her brother, she would do all these things. She appeals to his imagination through the description of impossible yet named actions. By returning to the familiar position of his left hand under her head in v. 3 (cf. 2:6), she blurs the line between wish and reality. She both wants them to be together and describes them as being together simultaneously. The dialogue between them has a power all its own.

Here in the last chapter of the Song, the dialogue remains predictive. The initiator of the exchange regarding the little sister and her likeness to a wall or door is unclear (vv. 8-9). Some scholars, such as Fox and Linafelt, argue that it is the brothers that are mentioned in the first chapter. It seems strange that they did not speak then but would speak now. Exum thinks that they are the words of the woman, talking about a fictive little sister. This still allows for

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182 J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 243, 255. She compares the fictive sister with the fictive vineyards assigned to Solomon in the following section of text. Both vineyard and sister serve primarily as foils, not actual entities.
contrast to be drawn between the young sister and the woman, but it seems strange to introduce a
new character this late in the Song. Furthermore, the brothers were presented as adversarial in
1:6, so it would be striking for her to take their side here without any transition or explanation.
Perhaps the Daughters of Jerusalem speak this section, as they have served as a kind of chorus
throughout. They provide a conventional voice of protecting a young girl from premature
advances. If the question in v. 5 is theirs as well, then there is some consistency in their
resistance or surprise toward the behaviors and attitudes of the woman. The woman then
confronts them in v. 10, affirming her identification as a fully developed woman. One image
gives rise to the next in a predictive, yet not determinative, way.

It is again uncertain as to the function of the things the siblings will do for (or to) the little
sister. Are they to further protect her or to ornament her? Are they trying to make her more
desirable or less? I have attempted to maintain this ambiguity by choosing parapets and panels
that can serve both functions (v. 9). If the concern was only for security, then such expensive
materials would not be required, and there would be many other ways to make her more
desirable (or expensive) than building things used for protection against a siege. Ultimately the
little sister here serves as a foil so that the woman can say something about herself.\footnote{Exum, Song of Songs, 255.} Her
assertion in v. 10 functions to both affirm her status as a mature woman and contradict the
insinuation that a young woman needs protection. She is a wall, and her own breasts serve as
towers (which are also an architectural embodiment of protection). She can protect herself
without needing siblings to build upon or enclose her.
In comparison to earlier chapters, remarkably little naming and calling occur here. In v. 13, he addresses her as “the one who dwells in the gardens” (בַּגַּנִּים). As discussed in the previous chapter, the image of the garden becomes synonymous for the woman in chapter 4, but here she is the one who is sitting or staying in the garden. It has been his role previously to visit the garden (5:1). The end of v. 13 hearkens back to the request to hear her voice in 2:14, tying various parts of the Song together. The only name given to the male by the female is “my lover” (דּוֹדִ֗י), which has been her favorite term for him throughout the Song (v. 14). It is a fundamentally relational term.

Instead of providing a string of names or descriptors, the poetry takes on a simpler form of address with the quick succession of first and second person pronouns. To some extent the repeated use of personal pronouns has, of course, been a feature of the entire Song, but here it is reinforced by the lack of other names. For example, tracing just the suffixed personal and possessive pronouns in vv. 1-2 demonstrates their density in this section.

The first verse contains six such suffixes; the first line refers to you then me and mine; the second line balances it with two references to you and then me. Verse 2 also contains six suffixes divided differently; both lines are balanced between you and me, but each occurs twice in the first line and only once in the second. The pattern for the two verses is thus 2-1-1/2-2-1//2-2-1-
1/2-1 (with 1 representing first person and 2 the second person). Even though she is the only one to speak, there is a kind of balance between the two of them with equal pronominal references.

The concluding chapter of the Song continues the dialogue between and about the two lovers without bringing the relationship to a conclusion. Instead, it continues the impression that the reader is being allowed to see into a window of the dialogical relationship that began before the Song and will continue after its last line. There is movement and development within in the Song, but it is from the perspective of the reader more than that of the lovers. The Song reveals the interpersonality of the two lovers by cycling through various metaphors and themes, but it appears as just a glimpse of an ongoing relationship.

The Song as a whole reveals that the relationship is shaped through their rhythmic engagement with one another. It is not always clear who is present at each moment of the conversation of the Song. The woman speaks seven verses in chapter 1 before anyone else speaks. His presence is assumed due to the second person pronouns, but the pronouns shift fluidly between first and second person (e.g. 2:3-4). This question of presence is reinforced throughout the Song with the thematic searching and finding, calling and answering. Two intense night scenes epitomize this search (3:1-5; 5:2-8), though it also pops up elsewhere in smaller images such as a hidden dove (2:14) and a fleeing gazelle (8:14). As Tod Linafelt writes, “Eros is finally a dialectical movement between these poles of absence and presence, lack and plenitude, longing and consummation.”¹⁸⁴ Dialogism frames this movement as not only essential to erotic relationships but in interpersonal exchange more broadly.

The exchange relies on a balance of both sameness and difference. Through the examination of its predictive aspects and the variety of naming and calling of one another throughout the Song, this project maintains the interrelatedness of the two. The gendered language often clarifies which of the lovers speaks or is being described. He is most often “my lover,” and she is most often “my friend.” However, the reliance on the grammatical form to distinguish between them demonstrates how closely related the images describing each of them can be. Both of them have eyes like doves (4:1; 5:12). Both of them are compared to domesticated animals (e.g. “mare” 1:9; “grazer” 2:16) and to plants (e.g. “lily” 2:2; “apple tree” 2:3) and are said to be made of ivory (his “body is plated” in 5:14; her “neck is like a tower” 7:5), yet the images remain distinct as well. They occupy simultaneous yet different space for this conversation.

Even when both of them sink into mental discourse through self-narration, the primacy of the relationship emphasizes their dialogical nature. In chapter 2, she narrates an interaction in which her lover speaks to her, internalizing his language such that the words belong in some way to both of them (vv. 10-14). The man also narrates his actions in relationship to her, saying he comes to her and describing his food and drink habits (5:1). Even when the presence of both lovers is not required due to the grammatical construction of the verses, the concern remains on the relationship.

5.2 Performance

In chapter 8, the performance involving the woman and the Daughters of Jerusalem recalls previous interactions concerning oaths. In v. 4 the oath shifts slightly from earlier occurrences of the oaths aimed at the Daughters of Jerusalem. The oaths in 2:7 and 3:5 use the
“if” construction (אִם) to imply a threat if they do not adhere to her command. In 5:8 she drops the objects of the oath, the gazelles or the deer of the field, but maintains the “if” clause though this time it is not a threat but a condition by which they are to speak to her lover. The Masoretic Text of 8:4 contains not an “if” clause but a clause using “what” (מה) to anticipate a negative answer. This emphasizes her wish to not be disturbed and makes it seem more certain that they will comply. The repetition of the oath formula with its adjustments demonstrates the woman rehearsing this aspect of her identity that both values and fears the power of love.

As with the oaths in 3:5 and 5:8, the oath in 8:4 is followed by a question, but this time she does not answer. The previous two questions following the nighttime searches led into the extravagant descriptions of the parade in the wilderness (3:6-11) and her lover (5:10-16). In chapter 8 following the woman’s wish to be able to kiss her lover in the streets and bring him to her mother’s house, the Daughters may be acknowledging her display of affection in surprise. This time the woman leaves their exclamation unanswered and turns her attention back to her lover, addressing him instead of the Daughters.

The performance of identity is always incomplete. The image of the vineyard appears again here and takes on a new direction. In the first chapter, the woman describes how her mother’s sons were angry with her and made her keep the vineyards. She concludes this section: “my vineyard, the one that is mine, I have not kept” (קָרְמִי לָנָֽטָֽרְתִּי) (1:6). It presents a sense of conflict and neglect. She returns to the image of the vineyard at the end of the Song; this time it is not something that she has not kept but one that she is going to keep all to herself without concern for all the others that Solomon and his keepers can maintain (8:11-12). Exum, however,  

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suggests that this is instead the man speaking about his vineyard, the woman.\textsuperscript{186} Putting these words in his mouth demonstrates that he values the woman beyond any other and reinforces the exclusivity of their relationship. Both of these readings contribute to the ongoing process of identity formation by pointing to a continued responsibility instead of a fixed one.

Moreover, the last line of the Song does not wrap the relationship neatly into a box but continues to reach beyond the text itself. She commands him to “flee” (ברך) and “be like a gazelle or young deer” (זָהָלֵי לְעֹפֶר או לְצָבִי וּדְמֵה לְךָ) (v. 14). Though she has compared him to these animals before (e.g. 2:17), the command is new and seems to be sending him away. However, the woman is identified with mountains of spices as in 4:6 when he says he will go to “the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense” (הַלְּבוֹנָה ואֶל־גִּבְﬠַת הַמּוֹר). As always her command is ambiguous, urging him to go on the surface but simultaneously directing him back to herself. The Song does not conclude with a tidy inclusio, showing some kind of completeness. Instead the poetry ends with a statement that could well point to a continuation of their back and forth.

Performance is the practice by which the dialogue coheres into consistent, interrelated identities. The essentiality of relationship for identity is repeated throughout the Song in the refrain that slightly adjusts at each repetition: “My beloved is mine and I am his” (2:16); “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (6:3); “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me” (7:10). This iterated performance continuously identifies him as her lover (in terms of their relationship) and herself in terms of him.

\textsuperscript{186} Exum, \textit{Song of Songs}, 255.
The partiality of the physical and historical aspects of the two lovers contributes to the ongoing nature of their performed identities throughout the Song. The lovers are both embodied in meaningful ways with careful attention given to sense experience and body parts and actions, yet the depictions are disjointed, metaphorical, and impressionistic. They call attention to one another’s mouths, eyes, and scents, but the words describing them are not easily translated into specific qualities. They participate in a world full of geographic locators of particular mountains and cities familiar to Israelites, but they leap easily from one to the next without establishing a solid grounding in any one of them. The wealth, prominence, and spectacle of Solomon enhance the lines, but he takes on a phantasmal presence rather than directly engaging or being identified with either lover.

The category of performance entails societal roles as well. As Fiona Black writes, “the lack of identity is important, both because it means a certain unanimity and universality to the lovers’ experience and because it has political implications for the unnamed.”\(^{187}\) The lovers do not have set roles, because their particular circumstances are unknowable to readers and the figurative nature of the language used blurs reality and aspiration, convention and its flaunting. By including the Daughters of Jerusalem as an audience for the lovers, the Song validates the relationship between them. Linafelt identifies the rhetorical function of the Daughters as “evoking or even provoking the passionate response of the lovers.”\(^{188}\) The Daughters “are called sometimes to witness occurrences and sometimes to empathize with the Shulammite,”\(^{189}\)

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\(^{188}\) Linafelt, “Arithmetic of Eros,” 250.

according to LaCocque. They hear the woman’s thoughts about awakening love (e.g. 2:7). They echo the valuing of the woman’s beauty and spur on her search for him (5:9; 6:1). Their function as an audience makes the relationship public in some ways while also allowing for excursions that would likely transgress societal norms. The Daughters come across as friends, not enforcers. The watchmen of 3:3 and 5:7, on the other hand, represent the societal force that threatens to come between them. The combined force of these textual audiences draws the performance of the lovers beyond the boundaries of their interpersonal relationship to put it in a broader context.

5.3 Unboundedness

Unboundedness means that the two lovers become intertwined with one another, making the boundaries between them fluid. Even here in the last chapter, new images and concepts are being introduced to describe the interrelationality between the two lovers—seal, death, grave, flames, and floods. The woman proposes a metaphorical binding ritual whereby she would become part of his public identity. A seal is a mark representing ownership, identity, and authenticity. As Landy writes, “She is thus impressed on his heart, i.e. his feeling and thoughts, as his identity; she governs his relations with the world. No closer fusion can be imagined.”

The other images stress the strength and unboundedness of love itself. These universalizing statements are unique in the Song, describing the nature of love broadly rather than extolling a particular experience of it. The fourteenth century Rabbi Abraham b. Isaac haLevi Tamakham asserts this is a somewhat desperate plea for reassurance from her lover:

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Having enjoyed her lover’s company, the maiden is again filled with fear of losing him and of being forgotten by him. She therefore entreats him to set her as a seal upon his heart, etc.,—an allusion to her hope that she abide forever in his memory. She tells him how troubled she was during his absence, an absence that was as harsh as death. Without their lover she would live in desolation, looking on in loneliness at the serene delights of other maidens with their lovers. Her jealousy would be cruel as the grave. Although she uses a third person, it is clear that the reference is to herself. [emphasis original]  

However, if it is a plea for reassurance, it falls flat without response from him.

Instead she draws conclusions about love in general from her experience in this relationship. There have been hints of its dangers and strengths in the warnings to the Daughters of Jerusalem about stirring love before it pleases (e.g. 8:4), but here she equates love with jealousy. Fox argues that her jealousy is not aimed at other women but “society conceived generally, including any outside party who might try to interfere, as have her brothers and the watchmen. The Shulammite declares that love is so powerful that the jealousy it sparks is as ineluctable as the insatiable appetite of Sheol.” I have taken the *hapax* in v. 6 (שַׁלְהֹֽבֶתְיָֽה) as an intensified “flame” (שַׁלְהֶ֥ב). Some understand the suffix as a reference to YHWH, and in Ezek 21:3 there is a flame that will not be put out, so eternal seems appropriate. It also echoes the persistence of jealousy in the previous line. The lovers have mentioned water before (e.g. spring 4:12; pool 5:12), but those waters are entirely tame compared to the “many waters” (מַ֣יִם רַבִּ֗ים).

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192 Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 170.

“floods” (נְהָר֖וֹת) mentioned here (v. 7). Death, fire, and floods are indiscriminate, affecting all in their path. The boundaries between the two lovers blur through the force of love.

Perceived boundaries and thresholds throughout the Song call attention to the perpetual balance between their twoness and oneness. At the beginning of the Song, she is hidden behind a wall and in the cleft of the rocks (2:9, 14). In the night scenes of chapters 3 and 5, she begins inside but must go outside in search of him, yet the desire for union and the union itself are not easily delineated. She is “a fountain locked, a spring sealed” (חָתֽוּמ מַﬠְיָ֥ ן נָﬠ֖וּל גַּ֥ל in 4:12, but this simultaneously implies that she is kept apart from everyone yet belongs to him. The rheumy thresholds both present obstacles they must overcome and also call attention to their ability to do so.

Military and defensive imagery is particularly striking as a way of calling attention to the assumed boundaries between them. The towers (4:4, 7:5), shields (4:4), and warriors (3:8; 4:4) of previous chapters all serve to highlight the perils associated with the vulnerability inherent in a relationship. At the same time, all of them are not engaged in war but at peace. The connection between the two of them also protects them. In chapter 8 in contrast with a little sister, the woman says, “I am a wall and my breasts are like towers” (כַּמִּגְדָּל֑וֹת וְשָׁדַ֖י חוֹמָ֔ה אֲנִ֣י (v. 10). Walls with towers function as mechanisms of protection and forewarning as well as locations of assault. She is prepared to withstand outside threats, but her defensive status indicates again the need for such protections. She goes on in that verse to say that she then is “in his eyes as one who finds peace” (שָׁלֽוֹם כְּמוֹצְאֵ֥ת בְﬠֵינָ֖יו). It is her relationship with him that produces peace in a

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194 Interpreters often connect the waters here to the primordial waters of creation, e.g., Robert Alter, Strong as Death is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruther, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2015), 50. Madeline L’Engle’s young adult novel Many Waters connects the phrase to the floods survived by Noah and his family due to love for God and others.
situation of preparedness for violence. The walls and towers that should signal combat and borders instead bring the two together.

The dissolution of boundaries between two people also leads to dissolution of boundaries between human and natural world. The lovers become indistinguishable from their figurative descriptions. Both the man and the gazelle stand at the lattice (2:9). Both she and the canals put forth the fragrance of henna, nard, saffron, and cinnamon (4:13-14). Time itself dissolves as day is confused with night as the shadows flee (2:17), and the present melds with past and future as seasons blend together (2:11-12). The two lovers are not bound by the physics of time or place.

5.4 Conclusion

Literary theorist Jonathan Culler asserts, “narrative poems recount an event; lyrics . . . strive to be an event.” In the Song of Songs, the event is the relationship itself. The final chapter of the Song does not conclude the relationship but continues shining a light onto a seemingly ongoing relationship that the viewer has only limited access to through the window of this text. This analysis does not aim to understand the essential characteristics of either of the lovers but instead to explore the sense of self-construction at work in the relationship between the two of them.

The analysis of dialogue, performance, and unboundedness throughout the Song of Songs demonstrates the interpersonal development of the two lovers. Engaging in dialogue as a rhythmic exchange of mutual influence shapes the relationship but also their identities. The two

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frequently occupy simultaneous but different space, emphasizing a constant balance between sameness and difference. Encounters are predictive with the words or actions of one opening a range of possible responses from the other. They name and call one another, putting them in particular roles and relationships while excluding others and shaping their understanding of themselves as reflected even in their mental discourse. Performance is the process by which this dialogue gets repeated and iterated, becoming a practiced part of identity. This aspect of rehearsal accentuates that the performance of identity is never complete but constantly shapes and reshapes identity. The quality of unboundedness as explored in the Song demonstrates that the center of identity reaches beyond the individual self. Their comparisons and speeches take on commonalities such that it can be difficult to distinguish between them if grammatical gender markers do not specify which is speaking. It dissolves the binaries of male/female, self/other, and you/me. The interpersonal self depends on both individual and relational identities.

The analysis of the interpersonal self attends to perceptions of both sameness and difference. Perhaps the interrelatedness of the two lovers is only remarkable because of a sense of anticipated otherness. The assumption that any individual defines herself in contrast to another is fundamentally alienating. Gergen aspires to upend that assumption, writing, “My hope is to recast the discourse of mind in such a way that human connection replaces separation as the fundamental reality.” The Song demonstrates a relationship in which that connection is foregrounded. The two lovers co-create themselves.

As an example of a one-dimensional reading of the interpersonal construction of the self, this project underlines the importance of relationship in the development of the self. It serves as

one example of the ways in which relationship determines identity that can then be extrapolated into broader webs of relationships, all influencing self-development. My lover is mine, and I am his. My family is mine, and I am theirs. My friends, colleagues, and neighbors are mine, and I am theirs.
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