

# Song of Songs 1:1—Text and Paratext

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## Abstract

The argument draws upon literary theory to revisit the two clauses that, traditionally, make up Song 1:1. (1) The title evaluates the work as the song-most of songs. I argue that the evaluation refers to the work's manifold form of simulation—a literary work representing the speech of a dreamer, who speaks from both inside and outside the dream. (2) The scoring in MT, the rubric in LXX (Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus), ancient interpreters and modern all take the first words of the *Song of Songs* to be a heading, comprising title (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים) and attribution (אֲשֶׁר לְשֹׁלֹמֹה). I argue that the clause marked and understood as an attribution may be the beginning of the character's speech.

## Keywords

Song of Songs – paratext – representation – Genette

This study examines the two phrases comprising Song 1:1, שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים and אֲשֶׁר לְשֹׁלֹמֹה.<sup>1</sup> First it seeks what aspect of the work might be referred to by the first phrase, the superlative שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים. It takes seriously that the heading considers the work a single song or poem, and takes seriously the superlative to seek what structures it so. Then it surveys the weaknesses of reading the second phrase, אֲשֶׁר לְשֹׁלֹמֹה, as paratext that attributes the work to Solomon,

1 Citations of MT = Dotan, *Biblical Hebraica Leningradensia*; LXX = Rahlfs and Hanhart, *Septuaginta*; Talmud = <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/jewish-collection/Talmud/Pages/default.aspx> (images; accessed on January 5, 2022); <https://bavli.genizah.org/Global/home> (transcriptions, synoptic views; accessed on January 5, 2022).

as traditionally done, and explores the strengths of reading it as text, the first words of the speaking character, which implies that the ancient verse-division might be mistaken.



Gérard Genette has developed a distinction important to literature between *text* and *paratext* that has the potential for a fuller impact on study of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> *Text* he defines (“very minimally”) as “a ... long series of verbal statements ... endowed with meaning.”<sup>3</sup> *Paratext* refers to everything that shapes how one experiences the text and processes its meaning. That includes author interviews and the author’s world, publisher’s marketing and promotional material, titles and readerly aids, chapter divisions and titles, formatting like lineation, paper and fonts, and so on.<sup>4</sup> The claim is not prescriptive, that one must know and analyze such things to interpret the text correctly, only descriptive: whatever the interpreter knows or is attentive to will play a substantial role in their interpretation.

Though Genette goes into detail about the world of modern works, he keeps a keen eye on ancient literature, which too has paratext of valuable analysis. Relatedly, though he views paratext as the prompt for the reception of text, like a threshold, a vestibule,<sup>5</sup> one may reverse direction through it. Paratext does not only cue the interpreter towards the text’s meaning; it also clues them to the text’s production, its history. Indeed, one could argue that a feature of religious literary canons, the Hebrew Bible and other works valued as “Scripture,” consists of interpreters treating paratext as text—calligraphy, ink-color, formatting, chapter numbers, superscriptions and postscripts, marginalia, and so on. Scriptural criticism, then, should include identifying those elements treated now as text that ought to be analyzed as paratext. The Hebrew Bible—collected works from (s.) Judea, (n.) Israel, and Babylonia, many of which are themselves collections—has plenty of paratext.<sup>6</sup>

2 Genette, *Paratexts*.

3 Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.

4 Genette, *Paratexts*, 1–2. Thought through to the end, the idea makes “text” a Platonic ideal of wording, since text is never encountered without paratext (Genette says “rarely” [p. 1]) and the reader always perceives it through their own lens. Like a mirage, the closer one approaches pure text the more it dissipates and something more continuous materializes. Still, it would be foolish to jettison such a useful set of concepts.

5 *Ibid.*, 2.

6 My view of the Hebrew Bible as the product of a phased process mainly of collection (not selection) that turned on changes in book culture (among other things) follows Haran, *Biblical Collection* (esp. 1.6–11, 23–78); *idem*, “Book-Scrolls in Israel in Pre-Exilic Times”; *idem*,

Examples are well known, if not precisely in these terms. The work (originally a scroll) now titled *Proverbs* offers the most explicit and elaborate instance in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>7</sup> It opens with a preface<sup>8</sup> describing the content—proverbs (מְשָׁלִים) composed or gathered by Solomon son of David king of Israel<sup>9</sup>—and listing the many practical and intellectual benefits afforded by it (1:1–6).<sup>10</sup> *Proverbs* has additional headings, like 10:1 מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה, which, by not acknowledging it follows proverbs by Solomon, suggests that separate works were copied together one after the other onto this one scroll, and like 25:1 גַּם־אֲלֶה מְשָׁלֵי וְשְׁלֹמֹה, which, acknowledging other such works, suggests additional scenarios.

The remark (or set of remarks) at the end of *Hosea* (14:10) looks like a postface warning that the preceding is tricky and decodable only by the worthy.<sup>11</sup> *Qohelet*, though bracingly clear, closes with a strikingly similar set of remarks (12:9–14). Just about all take those remarks as a postface that works to undo or modulate the message and effect of the text.<sup>12</sup> Such voices external to the text and talking about the text are paratext.<sup>13</sup>

“More Concerning Book-Scrolls in Pre-Exilic Times”; idem, “Book-Scrolls at the Beginning of the Second Temple Period”; idem, “Book-Size and the Thematic Cycles in the Pentateuch.” Haran’s series of studies in the 1980s and 1990s, picked up by Stern, *Jewish Bible*, anticipated the current interest in book culture gaining steam among scholars of the Hebrew Bible.

7 Fox (*Proverbs 1–9*, 58, 71–73) stresses its uniqueness in the Hebrew Bible and outside it.

8 On the preface, see Genette, *Paratexts*, 161–226.

9 What מְשָׁלִים meant exactly—clearly not “proverb”—is another matter. See recently Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*.

10 The ambiguous syntax allows several readings (Hurowitz, *Proverbs*, 1:128–130). The ascription to Solomon may indicate who formulated the proverbs, not who wrote the work (so Radaq, in Cohen, *Mikra’ot Gedolot ‘Haketer’: Proverbs*, 26). The paratext at 25:1 shows the ancients making precisely this distinction: הָעֲתִיקוּ אֲנֹשֵׁי חֲזִקִיָּה מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר הִעֲתִיקוּ אֲנֹשֵׁי חֲזִקִיָּה מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה מִלְּפִי־יְהוֹנָדָה “These too are proverbs by Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judea transcribed” (Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 73–74). For another “purpose” heading, see Ps 102:1.

11 Weiser, *Kleinen Propheten*, 104; Wolff, *Hosea*, 239–240. Ehrlich’s different analysis of the syntax (*Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*, 5.212) does not affect the point. Ps 107:42–43, strikingly similar in inverted order, is text not paratext, because it balances 107:1 and ends the refrain at vv. 8, 14, 21–22, 31–32; so too Qoh 8:1; Jer 9:11 (contra Wolff, *Hosea*, 239). Isa 40–48 makes this set of elements its very theme (Who [but Yahweh] could explain history? The righteous will hear Yahweh’s explanation of it!), weaves them as a *leitmotif* throughout Yahweh’s speech, and uses them to structure the whole; note “Who?” (19×) throughout (and “I!” 42×) and how the text concludes with the righteous on straight paths, praising Yahweh, and destruction for the wicked (48:17–22).

12 Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*, 17–21. For an argument that the remarks belong to a character in the text, see Chavel, “Knowledge of the Lord,” 54–63.

13 See Genette, *Paratexts*, 237–293.

Genette notes that sometimes it can be difficult to decide whether something is meant as text or paratext.<sup>14</sup> Is Prov 24:23 גַּם-אַלֶּה לְחֻכְמִים by the same speaker as 22:17–21 (text) or a heading like 25:1 (paratext)?<sup>15</sup> Some works may fudge the distinction for effect. Ps 137:1 עַל נְהִרוֹת בְּבֶלַי may first seem like paratext providing a backdrop for the text to come, but quickly it emerges as text, the speakers' first words, which anchor a series of references (vv. 1–3 שָׁם ... בְּתוֹכָהּ ... שָׁם).<sup>16</sup>

Some paratext, added long after the composition of the work, can misread or mis-mark the text and mislead readers or create a new reading for them. In a complex example, *Isaiah* has an anonymous remark (verbal paratext) dating “this *massa*” of Isaiah to the year of Ahaz’s death (14:28). Paragraph-spacing (formatting paratext) makes it the head of a speech addressing Philistia (vv. 29–32).<sup>17</sup> But, formulated to emphasize the date, like an afterthought, the remark may originally have concluded the prior speech addressing Babylonia (13:2–14:27), which is introduced as a *massa* (13:1).<sup>18</sup> In a different example, at Gen 49:19–20 (MT; SP) ancient word-division (formatting paratext) reasigned the letter *mem* from a 3mp suffix at the end of Gad’s blessing (v. 19) to a preposition at the beginning of Asher’s (v. 20).<sup>19</sup> As a result, instead of Jacob blessing Gad with successful counter-raiding of עֲקֻבָּם “their heel” (the heels of Gad’s would-be raiders), then blessing Asher with crops worthy of a king, Jacob

14 Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.

15 MT offsets it as paratext; see the tenth-century codex Aleppo: [https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/&example=viewer5, 32-289-v](https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/&example=viewer5,32-289-v) (accessed January 5, 2022; compare 32-290-r and 32-289-r), and the 11th cent. codex Leningrad/St. Petersburg Biga: [https://archive.org/details/Leningrad\\_Codex/page/n839/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex/page/n839/mode/1up) (accessed on January 5, 2022; compare [https://archive.org/details/Leningrad\\_Codex/page/n837/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex/page/n837/mode/1up); accessed on January 5, 2022). LXX’s wording makes 24:23; 30:1; 31:1 all text, so that *Proverbs* has only two headings (1:1ff; 25:1), both naming Solomon (compare Hurowitz, *Proverbs*, 1:48).

16 For discussion of additional examples, see Skornik, “Paradigms and Possibilities,” 169–173.

17 See the “Great Isaiah Scroll” (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, 2nd cent. BCE): <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah#14:28> (accessed on January 5, 2022); MT Aleppo: [https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/&example=viewer5, 13-110-r](https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/&example=viewer5,13-110-r) (accessed on January 5, 2022); MT Leningrad: [https://archive.org/details/Leningrad\\_Codex/page/n455/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex/page/n455/mode/1up) (accessed on January 5, 2022). For discomfort with the formulation as the heading for Philistia, see Dillmann, *Prophet Jesaia*, 142–143; Duhm, *Buch Jesaia*, 124.

18 Compare Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 292.

19 MT: [https://archive.org/details/Leningrad\\_Codex/page/n64/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex/page/n64/mode/1up) (accessed on January 5, 2022); SP: Tal and Florentin, *Pentateuch*, 193. Compare LXX: ἀντὸς δὲ πεπρατεύσει ἀντῶν κατὰ πόδας. Ἀσῆρ, πῖων αὐτοῦ ὁ ἄρτος. See Dillmann, *Genesis*, 462. Likely, this would have occurred before the final-*mem* form was used there, but not necessarily; see Tov, *Scribal Practices*, 230–234.

blesses Gad doubly: he counter-raids successfully *and* his crops surpass that of Asher, מֵאֲשֶׁר שְׂמִינָה לְחֶמְדוֹ.<sup>20</sup>

Against this backdrop illustrating forms and aspects of paratext in the Hebrew Bible, we turn to the *Song of Songs*. It opens with four words, שִׁיר לְשִׁלְמָה לְאֲשֶׁר הֵשִׁירִים, universally taken as a heading comprising a title and an authorial attribution—paratext. The (Tiberian) Masoretic scoring of all biblical literature for performance-reading (paratext) marks an integrated series with a line-end.<sup>21</sup> The (assumably Jewish) ancient Greek translation renders the words as syntactically interdependent: Ἄσμα ἄσματων ὃ ἐστὶν τῷ Σαλωμων. Several early (Christian) manuscripts set the series apart from all that follows, for immediately afterwards begins a rubric of attributions (paratext) that divides the entire text into the speaking parts of ἡ νύμφη, ὁ νυμφίος, and αὶ νεᾶνδες.<sup>22</sup> The first words are not spoken by anyone. Early Rabbinic sources too explicitly understand the four words as paratext and attribute the work to Solomon.<sup>23</sup>

Produced centuries after the text, all these paratextual indicators of how this and other biblical works were read and ought to be read—visual cues for reading aloud, clarifying translation, external comments—are secondary and attest to secondary reading practices, reception, and interpretation.<sup>24</sup>

20 So Hizzequni (ed. Chavel, 173). On that reading, what follows, וְהוּא יִתֵּן מַעַדְנֵי מֶלֶךְ, could refer to Gad (his yield surpasses Asher's and he, Gad, could supply a king), or it could refer to Asher (Gad's yield surpasses Asher's, and he, Asher, could supply a king—so how much more so Gad). For a case of faulty verse-division along with several other mishaps, see Seow's analysis of אֲנִי אֲנָא at Qoh 8:1–2 (*Ecclesiastes*, 278–279).

21 *Merka—tīfha—merka—silluq*. See codex Aleppo: [https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/&example=viewer5, 32-294-v](https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/&example=viewer5,32-294-v) (accessed on January 5, 2022); Leningrad: [https://archive.org/details/Leningrad\\_Codex/page/n849/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex/page/n849/mode/1up) (accessed on January 5, 2022). On Tiberian Masoretic scoring, see Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, 157–218; Dotan, “Masorah,” 637–639.

22 See the fourth-century CE codex “Sinaiticus”: <http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx?book=29> (accessed on January 5, 2022), or Rahlfs and Hanhart, *Septuaginta*, 2.260. For lists of the rubrics in Sinaiticus and in the fifth-century CE codex “Alexandrinus,” see *ibid.*, 270–271. For transcriptions, discussion, and other manuscripts, see Treat, “Lost Keys,” 399–514.

23 *Seder Olam Rabbah* §15 (ed. Milikowsky, 1.266 [second century CE, see 1.116–129]). Picking up Prov 25:1, a *baraita* attributes the written book (and *Proverbs*, *Isaiah*, and *Qohelet*) to “Hezekiah and his team” (*b. B. Bath.* 14b–15a).

24 The earliest direct reference to verses seems to be *m. Meg.* 4:4, third century CE. Visual divisions were instituted in the sixth through seventh centuries, and exist in tenth-century manuscripts. Verse numbers were added in the 16th century. See Dotan, “Masorah,” esp. 613–614; Penkower, “Verse Divisions.” Dotan reasons that a generally identical division in the Samaritan and Masoretic Pentateuchs suggests its antiquity (“Masorah,” 609), but he does not specify. See further Tov, *Scribal Practices*, 135–142.

Masoretic scoring and Greek translation entailed choices about meaning, which foreclosed some options and prompted certain developments. This study examines both parts of what MT, LXX, and early Rabbinic sources demarcate as a verse, a syntactical unit, and a heading. What does each of the two phrases of “Song 1:1” claim, what claims do they invite, and have they been fully analyzed and properly understood?

We begin by analyzing the phrases according to their sequence. Taking the first phrase on its own for a moment, unqualified by the next phrase, turns up fresh aspects. Genette details kinds and parts of titles—words often placed ahead of the text, in some sense, which cue the audience to the text—and the kinds of effects titles can have.<sup>25</sup> Briefly, titles may consist of thematic elements, which pick up the text’s content directly or by some associative logic like metaphor or metonym, and rhematic ones, which indicate the text’s form or genre. Primarily, these elements describe the text; secondarily, through connotations—creating a mood, conjuring cultural associations, generating expectations—they entice the audience to read it and shape their response to it.

How does the first phrase of Song 1:1, שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים, entice an audience and shape its response to the text? The first word, שִׁיר “song,” announces a genre, which as Genette notes, can be the heart and even totality of a title.<sup>26</sup> In the singular, it prepares the audience for a single specimen, one poem.<sup>27</sup> As the characters speaking in the text do not portray or betray themselves to be singing, the word also quickly turns out to signal both the fictive quality of the text<sup>28</sup> and how the audience should encounter it, in song.<sup>29</sup> The text is a song in which people speak. (Those who think that the work comprises many poems must judge the paratext wrong, attribute it to a later and rather obtuse editor, and leave off analyzing it altogether, which runs counter to the ambitious [re]constructive attention invariably given to the alleged attribution to Solomon.)

What follows, הַשִּׁירִים “of songs,” prompts a reanalysis of the previous word as in the construct state and generates the superlative sense. Rather than indicate

25 Genette, *Paratexts*, 76–103; on placement, *ibid.*, 64–65.

26 Genette, *Paratexts*, 58.

27 Treat (“Lost Keys,” 421) stresses that the rubrics in the Greek Bibles too treat the *Song* as a single poem. Genette notes how often genre-titles are in the plural (*Paratexts*, 86).

28 For the concept of fictive speech (simulated, utterly unprompted speech) as the defining feature of literature and its difference from natural or real speech (contextually prompted speech), see Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse*, 3–75.

29 Compare Exum, *Song of Songs*, 90. A *tosefta* has R. Akiva warning that whoever performs the *Song of Songs* as song (מְנַעֵנֵעַ קוֹלוֹ בְּשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ... וְעוֹשֶׂה אֹתוֹ כַּמִּין זְמֵר) in a club (בְּבֵית מִשְׁתָּאוֹת) imperils their afterlife (*t. Sanh.* 12:10; images: <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/jewish-collection/Talmud/Pages/default.aspx>; accessed on January 5, 2022).

the song's topic, like a thematic title does, or even its mood, sub-genre, or musical accompaniment, like so many headings in *Psalms* do, the phrase appraises the song: it is exemplary or exceptional. This heading prepares the audience to be thrilled by technique. If one wondered whether singular “song” refers to many songs (like Isa 2:1 דְּבָרָה), the superlative phrase denies that option. It is a single singular song.<sup>30</sup>

This evaluative phrase speaks only of the form and quality of the text, nothing of its content. In Genette's terms, the phrase offers a rhematic title, not a thematic one. The effect throws the form and quality into focus as of substantial importance for experiencing the text. So tantalizing, it should draw the audience to delve into the text and explore its characteristics. To what aspect might this title refer? Primed by the paratext, what might an audience find exemplary or exceptional?

As it turns out, the answer may shift as one reads. When the song begins, one might expect a raunchy romp—a genre mentioned in the 560s BCE (שִׁירִים עֲנָבִים at Ezek 33:32)—and think the heading promises a prime instance. As the song proceeds, its allusive style never yields and one may think its unusual length makes it exceptional, the work of a virtuoso.<sup>31</sup>

But at Song 2:10 another facet of song emerges sharply. The lover presents herself as quoting her beloved as he speaks (עֲנָה דוֹדִי וְאָמַר לִי “My beloved coos and croons to me”).<sup>32</sup> By extension, *all* the speech in the text is her quotation; she is the speaker of the entire text, which includes everything that others say to her, even if she does not demarcate it so. In fact, the text's opening already signals this situation. The lover begins by calling her beloved to mind (v. 2 יִשְׁקֵנִי יְשׁוּבִים דְּדוֹדִי מִיָּזוּן מִיָּזוּן) and then, mid-sentence, there he is (v. 2 מִיָּזוּן דְּדוֹדִי מִיָּזוּן מִיָּזוּן) and then, mid-sentence, there he is (v. 2 מִיָּזוּן דְּדוֹדִי מִיָּזוּן מִיָּזוּן); she speaks to him (vv. 3–4 ... מִשְׁכַּנִּי אֶחָרִיף ... אֶהְבֹּד ... שְׁמֶךָ ... שְׁמֶךָ) and he speaks

30 Surprisingly, many repeat that the phrase can also mean “a song of many songs” (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Song of Songs,” 375), as if it conveys the genitive of composition not the superlative. Prompted by the very debate over whether the work is one poem or many, the remark is a quip that has it both ways, and the conundrum-like reading seems untenable. For discussion of the *Song's* unity, see Exum's full introduction (*Song of Songs*, 1–87) and Dobbs-Allsopp's unique and important way of carving an in-between type (*On Biblical Poetry*, 214–226).

31 Dobbs-Allsopp explains the rarity and unlikelihood of long lyrical poems in ancient Israel and Judea (*On Biblical Poetry*, 214–226).

32 The remark is in the perfective; according to what precedes (2:8–9) the speaker describes the present, not the past, a defining aspect of the *Song*. That the biblical verb-system primarily marks for aspect, and tense is contextually determined, see WO §§20.2; 29.6–31.6; Pardee, “The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System in a Nutshell.”



to her (v. 4 וְנִשְׁמָחָה בְּדָדָהּ).<sup>33</sup> In other words, she is having a reverie and enters it.<sup>34</sup> She invokes it, then speak from within it. The scene that begins at 5:2 works similarly:

אָנִי יִשְׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֹר  
קוֹל! דֹּדִי דוֹפֵק!  
פִּתְחֵי-לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעִיִתִי יוֹנְתִי תִמְתִּי,  
שְׂרָאשִׁי נִמְלֵא-טָל קוֹצוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לַיְלָה!

I am asleep (*or*: trying to sleep) and my mind is racing.  
*A sound! My beloved pounding!*  
*‘Open up for me, my sister, my love, my perfect dove,*  
*For my head is full of dew, my tips the drips of night!’*

First the speaker describes herself as half-asleep, then, *as the one half-asleep*, registers the sound of her lover pounding and quotes his speech. Her position switches from renderer of the scene to participant in it. Such a shift belongs to a frame-scenario in which the speaker is someone in a state of reverie.<sup>35</sup> This situation, this kind of text, is what Dorrit Cohn has termed and analyzed at length as the “autonomous monologue”; a first-person voice narrates its own story and in particular its own inner-life, both its self-generated thoughts and its responses to its outside world.<sup>36</sup> In this case, rather than a retrospective account, the voice narrates the present as it happens.<sup>37</sup>

From this point of view, what makes the *Song of Songs* exceptional—to be precise: the song-most of songs—may be its many levels of simulation, *mise en*

33 The sequence recommends taking MT’s 1cp modal verbs (followed by 2fs object) as the man’s coy self-reference (a plural of “modesty,” or “agent defocusing”). On the so-called “divergent” use of the first-person plural (and other pronouns), a cross-cultural phenomenon, see Du Bois, “Grammatical, Pragmatic and Sociolinguistic Aspects,” 323–327; also Siewierska, *Person*, 214–215; Helmbrecht, “Typology of Non-prototypical Uses,” 182–183; De Cock and Kluge, “On the Referential Ambiguity,” 351–354; De Cock, “Register, Genre and Referential Ambiguity,” 370–374. (On my reading, Song 7:1 contains two more instances back-to-back.)

34 Ibn Ezra (Cohen, *Mikra’ot Gedolot ‘Haketer’: The Five Scrolls*, 2; Mathews, *Commentary on the Canticles*, 10).

35 See Arbel, “My Vineyard” (though she confuses the imagining character in the text with the real author of the text and perfective verb forms [indicating aspect] with preterite [tense]).

36 Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 11–17, 141–263.

37 See Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 217–255, and especially 255–263 on why this form looks like both drama and lyric.



*abyme*. To rehearse a well known descriptive chain, in a natural dream the body produces a visual, image-based simulation of life. In live song, whether narrative or other, the body verbally projects or evokes one. Literature mimics—in Aristotle’s terms, “represents”—these live bodily simulations, the dream and especially the song, but it prompts them from outside the body; it transposes the song’s verbal simulation to the textual medium, a visual-verbal simulation of vocal-verbal simulation. This, as Barbara H. Smith likes to refer to it, is “poetry in the broad sense.”<sup>38</sup> The *Song of Songs* is literature that simulates a speaker rendering a dream she is having now, with all the speech happening in it including her own. The recursive representation of the imaginative faculty may be what makes it the songest of songs.<sup>39</sup>

Next comes the phrase אֲשֶׁר לְשׁוֹלֹמֹה, universally taken as paratext attributing the work to Solomon.<sup>40</sup> Genette charts practices around naming a work’s author, its motivations and effects.<sup>41</sup> For ancient Jewish readers of the *Song*, the paratextual attribution to Solomon invited statements about his divine inspiration,<sup>42</sup> debates on the period when he composed this and his other works, *Proverbs* and *Qohelet*,<sup>43</sup> and far-ranging comparison with his father David.<sup>44</sup> For moderns, it indicated an editor’s sense of literary genre or historical school of thought, “Wisdom”; accordingly, one ought to analyze the *Song*

38 Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse*, 3, 24–40, and throughout.

39 On the relationship between dreams, the imagination, and poetry, see Albers, “From the Fields of Sleep.” On that between dreams and punning—which so pervades the *Song*—see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*. That texts were read aloud and before others in antiquity is beside the point; the text is formulated to take advantage of properties uniquely or distinctly afforded by the written medium, like so many monuments and other texts throughout the region over thousands of years. For the full argument, see Chavel, “Speaker of the *Song of Songs*.”

40 As Genette points out (*Paratexts*, 37–38), naming authors of literature was far from the rule in the ancient world, and doing so baldly up front was entirely rare. Indeed, many biblical and Hellenistic Judean works considered to have named an author (even if “pseudepigraphically,” or pseudonymously, which in Mroczek’s analysis becomes a robust cultural phenomenon [*The Literary Imagination*, 51–85 and elsewhere]) actually name the text’s main speaker and not its author—the main character in the text, not the writer or even composer of it. For an argument about named authorship—Genette sportively terms it *onymity* (*Paratexts*, 39)—of a literary work at Ugarit, see Pardee, *The Ugaritic Texts*, 41–50 (who refers to the author as “poet and scribe”).

41 Genette, *Paratexts*, 38–54.

42 *Tg. Song* (Cohen, *Mikra’ot Gedolot ‘Haketer’: The Five Scrolls*, 2).

43 Opinions range: all three in his old age (*Seder Olam Rabbah* §15 [ed. Milikowsky, 1.266]); *Proverbs*, *Song*, then *Qohelet* like 1 Kgs 5:12; and *Song*, *Proverbs*, then *Qohelet*, to match the moods of youth (sensual), midlife (practical), and old age (cynical) (both, in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* §1.10 [ed. Dunsky, 10]).

44 *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* §1.6 (ed. Dunsky, 3–4).

for its wisdom and redraw “Wisdom” to account for the *Song*.<sup>45</sup> For all, it connects to the remark in *Kings* that Solomon mastered the genres of speech, from the esoteric to the entertaining, among them song (1 Kgs 5:9–14).

Admittedly, readers have found the formulation ambiguous, regarding the antecedent of אֲשֶׁר in the construct phrase (“song” or “songs”) and the scope of the evaluation (all songs or Solomon’s songs).<sup>46</sup> Does the heading convey that this song by Solomon is the best of all songs (“The *song* of songs, which is by Solomon”),<sup>47</sup> or that this song is the best of all Solomon’s songs (“A song of the songs that are by Solomon”)?<sup>48</sup> *Tg. Song*, for example, gives both options. First it identifies the “songs” as the many hymns composed by Solomon for God; this poem surpasses those. Then it lists the all-time ten best hymns to God by anyone, from Adam on, including one Israel will sing when they return from the Roman exile; Solomon’s is ninth in history but first in quality.<sup>49</sup> Without אֲשֶׁר, the heading לְשִׁלְמָה לְשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים would clearly mean that this is the best of all songs.

In fact, *Psalms* has just over one hundred similar headings with attributions all marked by לִי, like 72:1 לְשִׁלְמָה. Nine have שִׁיר in construct before a plural noun, like 127:1 לְשִׁלְמָה לְשִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת. Not one includes אֲשֶׁר.<sup>50</sup> Within the *Song*

45 Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*; Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus*.

46 For the head of a construct chain as the antecedent (far more common), see Gen 41:43 לִשְׂרָפָה מִן־הַמִּצְרַיִם (Pharaoh’s chariot); Judg 3:20 לִשְׂרָפָה מִן־הַמִּצְרַיִם (Eglon’s attic). For the tail (less common), see 1 Sam 24:5 לְשִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת (Saul’s cloak); 1 Kgs 10:28 לְשִׁיר הַסּוּסִים (Solomon’s horses).

47 So LXX; Rashbam (Cohen, *Mikra’ot Gedolot ‘Haketer’: The Five Scrolls*, 2). Most scholars take it this way, but they do not quite explain. For example, Fox (*The Song of Songs*, 96) says that a relative clause following a construct chain typically applies to the complete chain as a single sense-unit (i.e., to the head)—but statistical predominance does not determine likelihood for any given instance (see previous note). Murphy (*The Song of Songs*, 119) says the relative clause in a work’s heading indicates authorship of the work as a general rule—which begs the question.

48 So Ehrlich (*Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*, 7.1), who claims otherwise it would lack אֲשֶׁר, on the model of Ps 25–27; Fishbane (*Song of Songs*, 24), who connects it to Solomon’s prolific authorship at 1 Kgs 5:12.

49 Cohen, *Mikra’ot Gedolot ‘Haketer’: The Five Scrolls*, 2. In a variation, Rashi says the larger set is the many hymns to God composed by Israel (ibid.).

50 In MT, in addition to Solomon, attributions name David, Asaph, Qorahites, Moses, Heman, and Ethan. Alongside Ps 127:1, the other eight headings on the same model as Song 1:1 are Ps 48:1 שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד (also 88:1); 83:1 שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף (also 108:1); 122:1 שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד (also 124:1; 131:1; 133:1). See too the consistent phrasing סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים throughout *Kings* (and Esth 10:2). To be clear, the argument centers on the style of headings, not the syntactical construction itself, which exists throughout the Hebrew Bible (BDB s.v. אֲשֶׁר §7) and in the Dead Sea scrolls (Qimron, *Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, §400.16).

itself too אָשֶׁר stands out stylistically, since otherwise the *Song* only has ׀ (and ׀) — a full thirty-two times.<sup>51</sup> Responding to this problem, Gordis attributes the complete heading to a later editor who aimed to make it match the language of Solomon's time.<sup>52</sup> By this reasoning, the editor has made Solomon the composer of a song in Late Biblical Hebrew; what does the one instance of allegedly early usage in the title gain? Moreover, historically, אָשֶׁר continued to be productive as late as *Qohelet*, *Daniel*, and *Esther*, so it does not have that old Solomonic ring.<sup>53</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp attributes the choice to considerations of rhythm and alliteration.<sup>54</sup> But the *Song* actually has the (late, Rabbinic) possessive form ׀ + ׀ at 3:7 שְׁלֹמֹה (and 1:6; 8:12 שְׁלִי); were those prosodic interests a determining factor, the combined possessive elsewhere in the *Song* could have been used.<sup>55</sup>

On top of the linguistic oddities around אָשֶׁר (׀) as attribution here is the idea itself that Solomon wrote the *Song*, since the work presents a lover extolling him.<sup>56</sup> A Talmudic discourse troubled by this problem removes it with a twofold reanalysis. Grammatically, ׀ indicates the recipient, not the author, and semantically, שְׁלֹמֹה is a cipher for God. First the discourse states, “all references to שְׁלֹמֹה in ‘the song of songs’ are sacred”; then it glosses the paratext (in a luscious alliteration): “a song for the king of peace (שִׁיר לְמֶלֶךְ שֶׁהַשְּׁלוֹמִים שְׁלוֹ).”<sup>57</sup> Of course, the discourse presumes an allegorical reading of the work.

This set of anomalies makes it attractive to examine the phrase אָשֶׁר לְשְׁלֹמֹה as if it does not indicate attribution, does not conclude the heading, and is not paratext. Rather, it is text, the character's first words as she slips into her reverie: “... Regarding Solomon—he should kiss me with his mouth-kisses.”<sup>58</sup> In this experimental reading, אָשֶׁר ׀ represents

51 Note the balance in *Qohelet* (60× each), the mix in *Jonah* (esp. 1:7 בְּשִׁלְמֵי הָרֶעָה הַיְאֵת and 2:10 בְּשִׁלְמֵי הָרֶעָה הַיְאֵת), and the use only of אָשֶׁר in *Daniel* and *Esther*. On the *Song*'s date, see Dobbs-Allsopp, “Late Linguistic Features”; Berlin, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, on 5:2–16 and 8:6–7 (forthcoming).

52 Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 78; many argue similarly.

53 See nn. 50, 51 above.

54 Dobbs-Allsopp, “Late Linguistic Features in the Song of Songs,” 30.

55 GKC §129h n. 1; Ben Yehuda, *Complete Dictionary*, 14.7114. Muraoka resorts to calling אָשֶׁר לְשְׁלֹמֹה a calque of שְׁלֹמֹה (JM §130e n. 2).

56 All the psalms attributed to David have nothing comparable. Psalm 45 offers an instructive contrast.

57 *b. Shav.* 35b. (The discourse goes on to discuss exceptions at 3:7 and 8:12.)

58 Namely, on her mouth. So Ibn Ezra (Cohen, *Mikra'ot Gedolot 'Haketer': The Five Scrolls*, 2; Mathews, *Commentary on the Canticles*, 1) and a Hebrew commentary from 12th-century France (Japhet and Walfish, *Way of Lovers*, 134). The pronominal suffix in a bound phrase often applies to the head rather than the tail (wo §§9.5.3b; 16.4e).

לְ of specification (“regarding”) preceded by an artificial, even ungrammatical lead-in.<sup>59</sup>

As text, all three elements of the phrase—in reverse order: the name Solomon, the לְ of specification, and the jarring beginning with אֲשֶׁר—integrate well, each one in a different way. Elsewhere in the text the speaker of the reverie refers to her beloved as Solomon—not to claim he is Solomon, but to cast him as Solomonic; he is *her* Solomon, her Prince Charming—majestic, exotic, exquisite, endowed, and eloquent.<sup>60</sup> Within her reverie he refers to her in corresponding terms, not formally as his precise other, שְׁלוֹמִית “Solomona,” as might be expected, but relationally, dynamically, as the one made by him into his complement, הַשְׁלוֹמִית “the besolomoned,” with the passive theme-vowel /u/ (7:1).<sup>61</sup> It would be consistent and effective for the speaker to initiate her reverie-discourse by naming the beloved who will feature in it and by giving him a name with distinctive associations that will unfold through the reverie.

The לְ of specification that introduces her Solomon recurs in the very next sentence.

לְשֵׁלֹמָה—יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ בִּי־טוֹבִים דְּדִיךְ מִיַּיִן  
לְרִיחַ—שְׁמֵיךְ טוֹבִים

*Regarding* Solomon—he should kiss me on the mouth, for your love is better (טוֹבִים) than wine.

*Regarding* scent—your perfumes are good (טוֹבִים)!

The match in form, which includes the alliterative use of שׁ (launched by שְׁלֹמָה) followed by טוֹבִים, would indicate a match in source. The same speaker speaks both. This is how the text’s character speaks, fronting a topic, then elaborating on it, and doing so poetically.

As for אֲשֶׁר, the text starts in the mind of a character, whether at 1:2 “He should kiss me” or 1:1 “Regarding Solomon.” Such a beginning pairs two standard

59 On לְ of specification, see GKC §119u; Ben Yehuda, *Complete Dictionary*, 5:2569–2570; WO §11.2.10d, g. On אֲשֶׁר, see Holmstedt, *Relative Clause*, esp. 215–247, 365–381. On deliberate ungrammaticality, see Rendsburg, “Confused Language” (examples in characters’ speech are stronger); on inventiveness, Greenstein, “Language of Job”; idem, “Invention of Language.”

60 See Song 1:4, 12; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11–12. At 1:5 שְׁלֹמָה is an external standard, not a reference to her beloved. For the idea of royal beauty, see Isa 33:17; Ps 45:3.

61 With names, scholars generally note etymological and phonic wordplay, but the range is wider; see Garsiel, *Biblical Names*. In another instance that turns on morphology, Ezekiel describes Yahweh handling him roughly, וַיִּדְ-יְהוָה עָלַי חֲזָקָה, “And Yahweh’s hand rode me hard” (Ezek 3:14), which evokes his name but takes it as intransitive G אֵל יַחֲזִק (“God will be forcible, do forcibly”) rather than transitive D אֵל יַחֲזֵק (“God will strengthen”).

problems in literature: how to begin a text and how to represent the mind of a character.<sup>62</sup> One technique employed for both involves manipulating syntax and using formulations that suggest interruption or disjuncture, as if the audience breaks into the speaker's thought midstream. In the *Songs of Songs*, אָשֶׁר might be seen to serve that end, shuffling the audience into the mind of the character. Notably, biblical literature evinces writers both aiming to convey the minds of characters and being inventive regarding the form, meaning, and use of words;<sup>63</sup> and at the time of the *Song*, אָשֶׁר is in a period of striking grammaticalization.<sup>64</sup>

Certainly, asserting such a phenomenon to be at work runs the risks of forestalling falsification and of being wielded as a catch-all failsafe in a misguided effort to protect biblical literature from critical analysis and emendation. But denying out of hand that the literary works making up the Hebrew Bible activated the range of built-in simulative properties of literature constrains both our interpretive possibilities and our assessment of human creativity in antiquity—unnecessarily and to our detriment.

In short, as paratextual attribution, אָשֶׁר לְשֵׁלֹמֶה deviates from strong syntactical and stylistic traits in the *Song* and in headings elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, it creates unproductive ambiguity, and it leads to convoluted, questionable reconstructions about the history of the book. As text rather than paratext, the speaking character's first words, it is consistent with her situation, mode of thought, and style of speech, and it joins several examples of a somewhat

62 On the importance and character of beginnings, see Harshav, *Explorations in Poetics*, 24–27; on the compounded complications in ancient works on the beginnings of the world, see López-Ruiz, “How to Start a Cosmogony.” For the history, techniques, and dynamics of representing characters' minds, see Cohn, *Transparent Minds*.

63 See above, n. 59. For a telling instance of ungrammatical speech conveying the mind of a character, see the series of uncompleted, topic-switching starts, twice headed loosely by לָכֵן, at Ezek 11:14–18 (see Chavel, “Yahweh Become a Temple?” 117–118).

64 Earlier than the *Song* (presumably), see the heading אֶל־יְרֵמְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא at Jer MT 14:1; 46:1; 47:1; 49:34 (compare LXX 25:14 “Ἀ ἐπρόφῆτευσεν Ἰερεμίας; 26:13 “Ἀ ἐλάλησεν κύριος ἐν χερσὶ Ἰερεμίου; 32:13 “Ὅσα ἐπρόφῆτευσεν Ἰερεμίας, which may reflect now-lost Hebrew texts). Later, אָשֶׁר heads modal sentences in *Serek Hayahad* (1QS v 10, 14–16; IX 16 [but not v 4; VIII 25]; ed. Parry and Tov, 22, 36); see Muraoka, *Syntax of Qumran Hebrew*, 70–72, 301. Holmstedt understands all these as nominalizing (*Relative Clause*, 221, 375). Pardee explains ׀ and ׀ between the heading and the body in Judean letters from the second century CE as transitions, comparable to (ה)ועתה in the seventh through sixth centuries BCE (Pardee et al., “Overview,” 339), which would match the experimental reading of אָשֶׁר at Song 1:1; Mor analyzes those too as nominalizing (*Judean Hebrew*, 343–349). The grammaticalization is reversed by the Mishnah in the second through third centuries CE (Holmstedt, *Relative Clause*, 225).

understudied aspect of biblical literature, the representation of a character's mind through unusual forms of speech.



To conclude, Genette's categorical and descriptive distinctions between *text* and *paratext* can help sharpen our appreciation of the presentation of ancient literature, in particular those works valued as "Scripture," and of what can happen to its reception over the course of time. When it comes to the two phrases of *Song* 1:1, universally taken as a heading, this focus raised several realizations. On the one hand, without a full accounting scholarship dismisses the significance of the title, that the work presents a single song and that it has a describable unusual quality. On the other hand, scholarship takes the attribution for granted: the reference to Solomon connects the work to the figure of Solomon as a *master of speech*, per 1 Kgs 5:9–14, and warrants far-reaching historical reconstruction of a broad, biblical genre and a broad social setting. Analyzing the two phrases anew led the meaning of each in a new direction.

Presuming that the writers of titles have substantive ideas in mind and that titles affect how readers encounter a text yielded results. It prompted a question rarely treated in scholarship on the *Song*, to what in the *Song* does the superlative evaluation point as exemplary or exceptional? Several suggestions—which are not mutually exclusive—became apparent, the last of which covers—perhaps we should say uncovers—the structure of the entire work, a woman narrating her dream as she dreams it.

Reanalyzing the second phrase led to the realization that reading it as attribution both makes it anomalous by multiple measures and entails positing a convoluted literary history. The details undergirding this realization led to an alternative analysis, that rather than conclude the paratext, the phrase begins the text proper. In this reading, the phrase integrates rather well with the text. The reading does entail positing a level of literary sensibility that scholarship generally has not accorded ancient writers in Hebrew. On balance, though, the reading of the phrase as text has a greater measure of literary integration and a more limited level of questionable historical reconstruction than does the reading of it as paratextual attribution. Not to put too fine a point on it: the inventiveness accorded the writer of it as text should be more believable than the clumsy style and readerly obtuseness that would have to characterize the editor(s) of it as paratext.

Last and some might say least, it is surely well known that verse-division and other readerly aids are secondary phenomena in biblical literature. But the analysis here illustrates how one may revisit the apparatuses as paratext,

as reception history that both aimed to orient readers in certain directions and also reflect which interpretations came to dominate and which they obscured by the time they were written.

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