examining the text presented in this study will see that Ginsburg's characterization of the text was misleading and quite mistaken.

In the following chapters of this study we will present both the evidence that demonstrates the authorship of Rashbam as well as the unique contributions of the text that set it apart as a commentary of enduring worth, foreshadowing much current study of the Song of Songs. In this way it is hoped that the objections of Rosin will be answered and the misconceptions voiced by Ginsburg and those who followed him will be corrected.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Contributions of the Commentary.

I. Recognition of Love Poetry.

As we have noted above, one of the major obstacles to the contextual exegesis of the Song of Songs was the refusal to read the text as love poetry. Various reasons mililated against this reading of the text and advanced in its place the allegorization of the text. In this section we will note the ways, both implicit and explicit, in which Rashbam explains the Song of Songs as love poetry. As we will see, he deals frankly and openly with the sensual and erotic motifs of the text as well as the integration of those themes within the narrative discourse of the book.

This approach constitutes a major, albeit long ignored, contribution to the study of the Song of Songs as literature. Rashbam has anticipated much of what is now considered to be "current" scholarship. He may not use the same terms, but there can be not doubt that he has much the same observations in mind. We will illustrate this point with one example.

Much of modern scholarship on the Song of Songs concentrates on the similarities between this biblical book

and an Arabic form of poetry known as the wasf.[1] This genre of love poetry depicts the beauty of the lovers body and enumerates the parts of the body and their beauty in detail. Although Rashbam had no knowledge of such a genre, there are several comments in which he notes that the characters are describing and praising each other from "head to toe." Commenting on verse 8:16 Rashbam writes:

> Now she speaks to her companions saying, "If you find my beloved tell him that I am love sick. I have made you promise, my friends, that if you find him you know what you must say to him about me"...They answer her asking, "In what way is your love greater than that of others that you are sick because of him?" She answers them: "I am sick for him because he is more handsome than other men and more praiseworthy from head to toe just as I will now describe him."

Rashbam then explains the following verses as a detailed description of the lover's good looks. This method of analysis is also seen in several passages in which, according to Rashbam, the lover describes the beauty of the female character in order to appease and delight her. We shall return to these passages below.

In a programmatic statement concerning the text (vs. 3:5) Rashbam notes the following: "Even today it is the custom of poets to compose love songs that tell a love story concerning both of the characters." Here as in other

[1]. For a discussion of the formal characteristics of this genre and the influence of comparisons with it see Pope, op. cit., pp. 55-56, and Falk, op. cit., pp. 80-87.

comments Rashbam makes it quite clear that he is reading the Song of Songs as love poetry and explaining it as such. To that end Rashbam examines the methods of metaphor and meaning as we will outline in the sections below.

Rashbam recognized the sensual imagery that was both on and "just below" the surface of the text as well. He chooses to deal with the erotic and sensual themes in a way that is both candid and of significance for understanding the text. Commenting on vs. 7:1 he explains that the verse represents the following exchange between the characters:

> Let my friends and I gaze upon the beauty of your body and the loveliness of your stature. She replies to him: "Why should you gaze at me or look upon the beauty of my body? Why do you call me 'perfect one'?" Why do you tell me to expose myself in front of everyone as if I were a dancer? I would be disgraceful for me to be seen by everyone and, therefore, I will not come back to you.

We should note that, while modern scholarship now recognizes the erotic undertones involved in the "dance" that is alluded to in the text, Rashbam was already aware of such undertones and included them in his comment.[2] Commenting on vs. 7:8 Rashbam once again sheds light on the erotic implications that are half-hidden within the text. Seeking to integrate the imagery of the verse into the dialogue of the characters, Rashbam writes:

[2]. For a discussion of the so-called mahanayim dance and the realia behind this allusion, see Pope, op. cit., pp. 601-14.

> [Your breasts are] like two clusters hanging on a vine. Because I love you I have said: "I will climb up the palm and hold its limbs and branches. This should inform you that I will come and love you, embrace you, and kiss you. Let your breasts be to me as two clusters of grapes and your breathe sweet as the fragrance of apples. Your mouth and the taste [of your lips] will be sweeter to me than the taste of wine. Come, awake yourself to my affection and love like good and strong wine that gives joy and spirit to those who are tired and weary"...Now she is appeased by his words and by his praise for her entire body. She is reconciled with him and says,"I am my beloved's."

The commentary of Rashbam excels in this method of placing these individual exchanges of dialogue within the narrative context. Such a methodology is evident in this short comment on vs. 7:12:

> [Come my beloved, let us go out into the open.] Now she appeases her loved one by suggesting that he should walk with her and embrace her saying, "Come, my dear one, let's leave the city and go into the open countryside. Tonight we shall sleep in a village and tomorrow we will continue our walk in the vineyards and we shall see if the time for love has yet arrived!"

We shall consider one more example that will serve as a bridge to another aspect of Rashbam's exposition of love poetry, the theme of tenderness. Commenting on vs. 8:1 he notes:

> [If only it could be] that you could be like a brother to me showing me love and affection. [If that were the case] when I meet you on the street or anywhere in public I could kiss you in front of everyone. Those seeing me embrace you and kiss you would not think anything of it-- they would not disrespect me [because of my open affection for you]. From there [the streets] I would lead you

> to my mother's house where you could teach me how I might please you, there I would pour you a cup of sweet, mixed wine just as a wife is obliged to do for her husband. [Reflecting to herself she thinks] "He would place his left hand under my head, and with his right hand he would hold me, drawing my lips and my body close to him lovingly."

This theme of tenderness is one of the qualities that drew Jellinek's attention in his discussion of the text.[3] While this aspect of Rashbam's treatment does not contribute to a better "scientific" understanding of the text, it certainly enhances the ability of the reader to understand the Song of Songs as a record of human emotion and experience. In this way Rashbam's treatment does much to reclaim the humanistic meaning of the book. The exegesis of Rashbam portrays the characters of the book as very human with all the faults and fancies of those in love. Commenting on vss. 5:2-7 Rashbam expands the sketchy details of the text to paint a complete picture of the events described:

> ...She regrets that her love is far from her. [She says to herself] "I sleep on my couch like one who is lazy and drowsy, but my heart is awake. I hear the voice of my loved one as he knocks on the door and calls me....I answered him saying "I have taken off my robe to lie naked and I am sleepy. How shall I get dressed again and get up, for it is cold. I washed my feet when I laid down- shall I walk barefoot and dirty my feet in order to open the door for you?...When I realized that he was gone I felt faint because of what he had said to me, asking me to open the door. I had not answered him as I should have, nor did I open the door as I

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[3]. See A. Jellinek, op. cit., p. IX.

> should have when I heard him riding anxiously to be with me.

This theme is also expressed in Rashbam's characterization of the female speaker. At times she can speak boldly about her love. At other times she protests that love must be modest and private. Rashbam explains the exchange of vss. 8:13-14 in this manner:

> She now talks about her loved one: "This is what he said to me, 'My dear one, my sister, my beloved, who spends her time in the gardens and orchards, my friends and companions have come with me and long to hear your voice. Let your voice be heard singing a beautiful song so that my friends might listen'"...But she answers him..."run and range on the hills of spices, the mountains of frankincense. I too will go there and we will love each other there, you and I. There will I sing and raise my voice for the two of us and I will please you with my song. But in front of all these others it is not becoming for me to sing for my glory is revealed only in private."

The commentary of Rashbam also portrays the affection of the lovers, commenting on vs. 2:5 Rashbam explains that the love-sickness about which the woman complains is due to the love that she now misses: "He would stretch his left hand forward and rest it under my head and, with his right hand, he would pull me near to him. It is because of a love like this that I am faint."

In summation, we have seen that Rashbam reads the Song of Songs as love poetry. By means of his careful blend of commentary and paraphrase Rashbam fills in the details of each scene and every speech. His commentary foreshadows and

anticipates much of our current understanding of the text. We shall now examine another facet of Rashbam's commentary: his emphasis on dialogue within the text and his analysis of the exchange between the speakers.

II. Dialogue

Rashbam was the first exegete to identify the form of the Song of Songs i.e., as dialogue. As we shall see, Rashbam notes that the entire book represents the reminiscences of the female character as she recalls the conversations between her lover and herself or as she narrates them to her companions. In this sense Rashbam identifies two distinct chronologies within the text. There are the (presumably) former conversations that transpired between the two of them, and the "present"-- the point at which she relates those conversations to those listening to her. These observations may seem very obvious to us but they represent a major accomplishment of independent literary analysis when viewed against the backdrop of preceding exegesis (see Unit One).

In this section we will focus our attention on the analysis of dialogue. This topic will provide an entry into our next consideration, Rashbam's programmatic statements concerning literary structure.

Commenting on the opening verses of chapter two (vss.3-4), Rashbam notes:

> He speaks to her and says, " Like a lovely lily among the thorns is my beloved, comely and beautiful among the women, fairer than any of them."...She answers him saying," Like a good and fragrant apple tree among trees that are barren, so is my beloved more handsome than any of the young men."...This is the way in which they speak to each other: he calls her "a rose," a feminine word, and she calls him "an apple," a masculine word.

This same sense of dialogue is operative in other comments in which Rashbam not only wishes to identify the speakers and their respective speeches but also attempt to specify the scene or context of what is said. Here we see Rashbam busy with the details that bring life to the text. Explaining vs. 1:13 he writes.

> Now both of them lie upon their bed and speak together, [with] words of desire and appeasement they praise each other, [with words] sweet and pleasant; "My dear one is mine as he lies with me and rests his head between my breast like a bundle of perfume or spice."

The commentary is, as we have noted, a running paraphrase of the text that blends quotation and explanation. Much of what provides the continuity of this paraphrasing is the dialogue that Rashbam creates[4] by his analysis of the passages. By means of that analysis the reader is able to identify the speaker and the meaning of that which is said. One final example of the method by which Rashbam blends commentary and text in order to explicate the Song of Songs is seen in his comment on vs. 6:11:

> Now he tries to convince her to go and walk with him in the orchard among the nut trees that give forth their scent, to go to the orchard that is on the river bank. He says, " I went down to see its fruits, to see if the vines had blossomed yet, if the pomegranates are yet in bloom. Come and we

[4]. In this context the word "creates" is not meant to imply that Rashbam creates something that is not found in the text. Rather, he makes explicit the change of speakers and delineates the parameters of the exchange.

> will walk together there and love each other among the trees and their blossoms." She then answers him saying, "I don't know how to get there and I won't go-- it occurred to me to ride upon his chariot and return to my people, noble people, for I am a princess." When he hears this he says to her, "Turn back..."

In this way Rashbam opens new doors by which the reader may enter into the world of the text. The emphasis that Rashbam places upon dialogue is but one facet of Rashbam's exegetical approach to the book. That approach is dictated by one factor more than any other, by the literary structure of the Song of Songs. We shall now examine those passages in which Rashbam sets forth his theory of that structure.

III. Literary Structure

As we have seen, one of the innovations in the commentary of Rashbam was the author's identification of and attention to the book's genre. Rashbam understands the text to be love poetry and proceeds by comparing it to other examples of that genre known to him. For this reason Rashbam sets forth a programmatic exposition of the book that explains its structure and dictates a method of exegesis. In the following comment on vs. 3:5 Rashbam clearly summarizes the total approach taken in his commentary.

> The structure of the book is as follows: she sings and recalls each passage about her love for him. After she has recounted a little about her love to her companions she says: "With a love like this he loved me and such a love did I show him." They [her companions] then rebuke her saying, "Let your heart be turned away from him for he despises you, so take one of our lovers." She then makes them promise not to say such things anymore for she will never forget his love. The book itself demonstrates that she recounts all of the events, both her words and his, by the fact that the text reads "He answered and said to me," and not "She answered." Likewise, the verb "sleep" is in the feminine form. [Also] the verse [vs. 5] is also spoken by her as she speaks to her friends and adjures them. Even today it is the custom of poets to compose love songs that tell a story concerning both of the characters.

We have already had occasion to discuss the end of this comment. What is of interest now is the identification of the narrator. Rashbam quotes the text as proof that the female character is the narrator of the book. She recounts the events that happened between her lover and herself. She

addresses the anonymous "companions." Here we should note that as listeners the "companions" are identical to us as readers. Both they and we listen in as she recalls the love story.

There is a frequent, often unnoticed shift in the party addressed. At times it is clear that she is talking to the companions (and us). At other times she shifts to the past as we over-hear the words that she and her lover exchanged. Noting this shift, which is both chronological and expositional, Rashbam comments (vs. 1:2) : "At times the bride sings as if she were speaking with her loved one, at other times she relates to her friends that he is not with her." This same narrative framework is proposed in the introduction to the commentary in which Rashbam writes:

> She mentions him and her great love for him singing and saying, "My beloved showed me a strong love when he was with me." She speaks to her friends those with her [saying], "Such and such did my beloved say to me, and thus did I answer him."

Another facet of Rashbam's overall is one that might be missed by the modern reader whose perceptions are dictated by the artificial boundaries of chapter and verse divisions. As we will point out in the translation, the conventions of chapters and verses are not of Jewish origin but rather appear first in the monastic scribal traditions of Europe. While the modern reader is accustomed to reading the Bible with such divisions, Rashbam and his contemporaries did not. The absence of such divisions enabled Rashbam to write a

commentary that stressed the unity of the entire book. Although modern scholarship recognizes several independent compositions within the Song of Songs, Rashbam understood and explicated the text as a unity. Hence, his comments aim at unifying verses and often run over chapter boundaries. The critical reader may be correct in pursuing individual sources within the book but there remains an irresistible attraction to suspend such judgments in order to enjoy the unfolding of a continuous narrative such as that suggested by the commentary of Rashbam.

It would be fair to say that Rashbam's theory of the literary structure of the book is based upon the assumption that the text is meant to be read as a continuous narrative. Like any work of poetry, however, it utilizes language that is both allusive and elliptical. Rashbam addresses both of these features of the text. He flushes out the full meaning of and realia behind metaphors and fills in many a backdrop against which the action of the book is to be viewed.

As we have seen, Rashbam affirms that the entire book is spoken by the female character as she recalls the events of the past and addresses those who listen to her. Rashbam states the following in the introduction to the commentary:

> [The author] wrote his book ...after gathering wisdom from all the ancients. His wisdom in worldly matters was great and exalted and [is expressed as if written by] a beautiful young woman who laments that her loved one has gone away from her.

Having unlocked the structural key to the book, Rashbam is able to focus on the means by which the text expresses the themes of love, longing, and separation. The significance of dialogue within the book leads Rashbam to propose the respective roles of the two characters; the female character who is active as speaker and the male character who remains the passive subject of her reports.

Within the few programmatic passages of the commentary we find evidence of Rashbam's total approach, i.e., a contextual reading of the text. It should be noted Rashbam's primary reading was exclusively contextual rather than allegorical. It is impossible to judge the sequence of cause and effect in this case but it is quite clear that a commentator such as Rashbam who reads the Song of Songs as a continuous narrative poem would be aware of the very tenuous nature of the allegorical reading that could succeed only by doing great violence to the structure of the text. We will discuss the allegorical component of the commentary below in a separate excursus but we should note at this point the influence of Rashbam's structural analysis upon his use of allegory. This method of allegory, which is uncharacteristic of medieval exegesis, should be seen as an outgrowth of Rashbam's literary theory regarding the text.

All in all we see that Rashbam's concern for detail is dictated by his view of the whole. In the next section we will look at several examples of the ways in which Rashbam integrates one aspect of detailed reading-- the use and

meaning of metaphor-- into his exegesis of the text as a whole.

IV. Metaphor

In his structural comments Rashbam focused upon the ways in which the text as a whole expresses its message. Another aspect of his exegetical achievement is the attention that he gave to detail, in this case literary detail as expressed by metaphor. Modern commentators often dwell on the use of metaphor within the Song of Songs. While all Biblical books depend upon the language of metaphor to a greater or lesser extent, the Song of Songs is unique in its extensive dependence upon metaphor. The analysis of these metaphors is also complicated by their diversity. The book employs both pastoral and urban images, love and beauty are expressed by comparisons to both plants and animals. The world of imagery in which the lovers dwell is a world filled with both the familiar and the exotic. For these reasons a successful exegetical approach to the text must explain both the allusive significance of a metaphor (its realia) and the meaning that such a metaphor adds to the text. As will be seen below, Rashbam addresses both levels of meaning in his analysis of metaphors.

Commenting on vs. 1:5, in which the darkness of the "tents of Kedar" is mentioned, Rashbam notes "[Tents of Kedar] which are black because the people of Kedar dwell in tents in the desert rather than in houses." This image of darkness resurfaces in the description of lovely hair which

is "black as the raven" (vs. 5:11). On this verse Rashbam comments: "There is no hair color more becoming a young man than black."

In these two short comments we see both concerns addressed. First, the interest in realia-- why are the tents of Kedar dark? Second, we find that the metaphor of black (like the body of the raven) is of interest because the meaning of the metaphor, i.e., the way it expresses handsomeness is important to the meaning of the text.

Another metaphorical usage is the way in which the couple compare themselves to animals. Rashbam explains vs. 1:9 as follows:

> Now she compares herself to an animal of the flock and says to him "You whom my soul loves, tell me where you will let me pasture, where I may rest at noon when the sun is hot that I might graze there. Why must I be as one of the flock, exiled and wandering among the flocks of your companions, the shepherds? I do not desire to go any where but to the place in which you shall pasture [your flock]."

In this manner Rashbam offers the information that is critical to the reader's understanding-- how and what such images mean. Another image from the animal world is illuminated in Rashbam's comment on vs. 1:9 concerning "Pharaoh's mare:"

> Now he praises her and says "At the time that horses were gathered for Pharaoh's chariot I likened you thus and singled you out. You were my fair one, my loved one and I gave you all the adornments and jewels of a royal steed made of gold, silver, and precious stones. They looked

> lovely around your face and neck-chains and beads, necklaces of gold and gems. My friends and I made you chains and necklaces of gold with studs of silver."

In this way the metaphor of the horse is explained and its full impact is made evident. Such comments demonstrate that Rashbam is interested in what we would call the literary qualities of the text. This is but one feature that makes the commentary of continuing value.

The following two comments are offered in order to explain the imagery of verse 4:1 in which a metaphor is meant to compliment the beauty of the female character. Her beauty is expressed by comparing her to a flock of goats. Rashbam explains the intrinsic beauty of the subject of the metaphor:

> [Your hair is like a flock of goats:] There is no hair color more becoming a woman than black like the fleece of goats, most of which are black. This phrase is like "black as a raven." It is the custom for women to arrange their hair around their eyes within their veil for beauty.
>
> [Streaming down from Mount Gilead] In the region of Gilead one finds goats that have very beautiful fleece. It is the habit of goats to wander about on the mountains as they graze. As they descend from the mountain they are a lovely sight to those who observe them from below.

In the commentary of Rashbam the metaphors that might seem strange to the reader are explained using both the backdrop of the book and Rashbam's knowledge of the world. The strangeness of the many metaphors that employ the imagery of

animals is even more foreign to the modern reader than it was to Rashbam's contemporaries. It is apparent that Rashbam wishes the reader to understand the similarity of the comparison of such metaphors. Commenting on vs. 4:2 he writes:

> [Your teeth are like a flock of ewes] Such an expression is meant to compliment a woman for both (her teeth and ewes) are white and fine, well ordered, one next to the other without fault or blemish.
>
> [Climbing up from the washing pools] Most ewes are white and when their fleece is freshly washed it is soft and white.

Frequently Rashbam's observations concerning the use and meaning of metaphors and terms of comparison are very subtle and short: [Your stately form is like a palm] "There is no tree straighter or taller than the palm" (vs. 7:8). Such a short note might tempt the reader to overlook what prompted the commentator's attention but here, just as in longer comments, Rashbam's attention to the realia behind metaphors is clear.

While we have noted this attention to metaphor, the exegesis of Rashbam also utilizes another method for examining the meaning of the text. Rashbam often refers to the social habits of people or the laws of nature in order to explain the meaning of the text. Consistent with our observations above,[5] we shall refer to such comments as

[5]. See above, pp. 51-54.

Derekh Erets interpretations. That term is meant to include any comment that is based upon the exegete's knowledge of the world or his observations about human behavior. In the section that follows we will illustrate this method of exegesis.

V. Derekh Erets Interpretations

Derekh Erets can be translated in many ways: "the way of the land," "common practice," or "as is commonly experienced," may all be correct, depending upon context. In the exegesis of Rashbam the term refers to any explanation that is based upon "reality," be it social customs or the general way in which things are done. This is a very important category in the exegesis of the Song of Songs since so much of the imagery and poetic language is based upon the pastoral setting of many passages. Rashbam, who was, perhaps, a keeper of sheep himself, refers to the habits and characteristics of animals in order to explain the text. In the same way social conventions and human behavior is examined in order to demonstrate that the text, although employing unusual language or imagery, actually reflects common human behavior.

Rashbam's attention to such Derekh Erets interpretations is actually an extension of his exegesis of metaphor and underlying realia. As such it is a part of his total exegetical approach that tends to make the text reflect the familiar rather than the exotic. Two examples of Derekh Erets interpretation stand out in the commentary. The first example is a comment on vs. 3:5, the beginning of which we have noted above.[6] What draws our attention at this

[6]. See, above, p. 134 ff.

point is the conclusion of that comment. Noting that the Song of Songs is written as if narrated by the female character, Rashbam adds: "Even today it is the custom of poets to compose love songs that tell a love story concerning both of the characters." This should not pass as a casual comment but rather as an example of one way in which Rashbam explained the text, i.e., by comparing it to forms of literature known to his contemporaries. Perhaps, in this case, Rashbam is referring to the kind of songs composed and sung by troubadours in his native France.[7] Since we have no evidence of a tradition of "love poetry" such as that which was common among Arabic speaking Jews,[8] it seems reasonable that Rashbam is referring to troubadours whom he no doubt encountered at fairs if not on other occasions.[9]

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7. This observation was first made by M. Güdemann, Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur des Abendländischen Juden, Amsterdam:Philo Press 1966, pp. 32-33. Although this troubadour "theory" can not be proven it does fit the historical reality of Rashbam's time.

8. Concerning Hebrew love poetry composed under the influence of a parallel genre in Arabic poetry see R. Scheindlin, Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems and the Good Life, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986.

9. On the economic and social role played by fairs in medieval France see S. Baron, "Rashi and the Community of Troyes" in Rashi Anniversary Volume, ed. H. L. Ginsberg, New York: American Academy for Jewish Research 1941, pp. 47-71.

Another example of an interpretation based upon human behavior is found in Rashbam's explanation of vs. 7:6 in which he states "It is still the custom of young lovers to collect the hair ribbons of their loved ones as a keepsake of the love between them." In this comment we again see that Rashbam turns to the world around him in order to explain the text in a way that is consistent with experience. Such comments not only clarify the text but serve to "humanize" it as well; Rashbam makes clear his evaluation of much of the text-- it records human experience and human emotion and can be properly understood only within the framework of human behavior.

Rashbam's concept of Derekh Erets also includes the animal world. Since so much of the imagery of the book is based upon the appearance and behavior of animals, Rashbam often finds the need to comment on the realia of such images, presumably for the sake of those readers who would be unfamiliar with the habits of animals. In this sense we might say that Rashbam goes beyond the peshat level of exegesis in order to explain the realities below and behind the peshat. Quite correctly he sensed that without the explanation of that which lies below the text or that knowledge that was assumed by the author, the text would remained closed to the reader.

Commenting on vs. 4:5 Rashbam offers an explanation of the imagery that seems to be based upon his knowledge of the animal world:

> [Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of the gazelle] It is customary for a gazelle to give birth to twins that pasture together while they are still young. They are a pleasant sight to behold. In this passage the lover once again recounts the beauty of his beloved...

Rashbam answers a question that presents itself to any reader: What qualities do her breasts and new-born gazelles have in common? His answer is more than what is obvious- not only is their number the same but so is their beauty. It is in this way that Rashbam bridges the gap between the animal world and the parallel image of the human body.

The use of animal imagery can also be of a simpler kind when used in passing but must, according to Rashbam, be explained. Vs. 2:9 reads as follows: My beloved is like a gazelle or like a young stag. There he stands behind the wall, gazing through the window, peering through the lattice. Commenting on this verse Rashbam integrates the image of the gazelle, and its normal custom (that it is a fast runner) with the general context of the verse:

> [My beloved is like a gazelle] or a young stag in regard to the swiftness of his feet when he hurries to my father's house to bring me out from there. But when he arrives he stands outside gazing, peering, and looking at me through the windows and the lattice work of the house to see me. Although he can't see me clearly, he is embarrassed to enter the house to speak to me and to see me because of my family.

The Song of Songs records the way of lovers in the real world not in an ideal world such as lovers' imagine. It is

from the real world, therefore, that Rashbam draws his exegetical material. His concern for Derekh Erets also prompted Rashbam to comment on other aspects of realia that aid the reader in his understanding of the text. Explaining vs. 8:13 Rashbam writes: "It is the usual practice that vineyards are not located near the city but close to rural villages." This and similar comments show the attention to detail that fills the commentary, all for the sake of demonstrating that the "world" of the text is basically like our own.

Derekh Erets interpretations cover a wide range of concerns- realia behind metaphors and imagery, the customs of people and animals, the ways in which people act and dress. Often such comments focus on details that escape the casual reader or details, the full impact of which might not be obvious to the reader. One last example is offered which illustrates Rashbam's attention to the way in which women wear jewelry. Commenting on vs. 4:9 Rashbam notes:

> [One coil of your necklace] A necklace is always worn outside the blouse but there are some women who wear a "doubled" necklace with one coil inside the blouse and the other outside.

With such observations Rashbam creates a meeting ground upon which the world of the texts meet our own. The result of that meeting is a fuller understanding of the characters and the meaning of their words which we overhear. We now turn to

the issue of the identity of the characters who speak to us through the text.

VI. Dramatic Characters

We have now examined several ways in which Rashbam sought to clarify the meaning of the Song of Songs based upon its literary form and the conventions used within the text. All of these features dwell on the expressivity of the text and, if arranged independently, could well serve as useful prolegomenon to the reading of the book. In this section we will discuss another novum of Rashbam's exegesis, his analysis of the dramatic characters of the text.[10]

As will become clear, Rashbam depends upon the principle of contextuality to arrive at his understanding of what could be considered the poetic voices heard within the text. To anticipate our examination of the commentary, Rashbam, having based his commentary on the principle that the Song of Songs is a dialogue, explains that such dialogue was spoken either between the female character (she is actually the narrator) and her lover, or between this same

[10]. The use of the word "dramatic" is not meant to invoke the modern so-called dramatic theories that seek to explain the Song of Songs as a primitive play. This author rejects that theory completely as not only alien to the exegesis of Rashbam but to the text itself as well. My use of the word dramatic simply, for lack of a better term, indicates those characters who, according to Rashbam, take part, either actively or passively, in the exposition of the book. Although possibly causing confusion, the term should be retained for the sake of demonstrating the contribution of Rashbam concerning the "character" who is not involved in the story-line, i.e., Solomon.

character and her friends to whom she recounts her tale of love.

In a programmatic statement already cited Rashbam makes clear those involved in the dialogical exchanges. Concerning the inner dynamics of the text he commented on vs. 3:5 that the structure of the book unambiguously demonstrates that the female character recalls the events that happened to herself and her lover. She recounts all this to her companions. Although these "companions" remain anonymous for the most part (unless "daughters of Jerusalem" can serve as a real identity), it is this group that listens to the tale of love. While some passages seem to indicate that she is speaking directly to her beloved, Rashbam seems to think that such instances of direct discourse are actually her recollections of events already past. The only "present" in the text is the time when she narrates the events. All other speech is but a flashback. The dialogue that we actually hear is the dialogue between the narrator and her audience.

All of this may seem rather simple by modern literary standards as well as when judged by the standards of current literary theories that seek to explore deep structures of a text. If this be so it should simply serve as a warning for the student of exegesis to judge a work by its own historical and cultural context - not by comparing it to subsequent works but as a step in the development of those subsequent exegetical accomplishments. In this sense we

cannot overstate the methodological advances seen in the commentary of Rashbam. Even if his results seem to fall short of our needs we must, nonetheless, appreciate the questions and answers found therein. Both represent definite advances in the exposition of the book.

The most important of these advances is made in an area of the text that remains dark to this day. The light of modern scholarship still fails to illumine one part of the text-- the role of Solomon. Many commentaries have arrived at theories that propose that the Song of Songs is a story of the classic love triangle. Such theories portray Solomon as the lustful king who would seduce a simple country maiden and steal her love from the helpless country boy whom she loved. While such theories make entertaining reading, they do not make for good exegesis. The more intricate such theories become the weaker their arguments.[11]

Below we will look at several passages in which Rashbam explains the mention of Solomon within the text. We should note that the resulting exegesis is not only consistent with Rashbam's literary understanding of the text, but, and perhaps more importantly, the result is a contextually sound and sensible reading of the text that many contemporary exegetes would do well to study and emulate! Regarding the problems caused by the mention of Solomon and the word

[11]. On this aspect of the dramatic theory see above, Unit one, Chapter two, Unit V. For a recent advocate of this view see Waterman, op. cit.

"king" (that would seem to invoke his royal presence) Gordis notes the following in his list of arguments against the theories that would add Solomon to the cast of characters:

> The distribution of the name "Solomon" in the book is worthy of note. Aside from the superscription (1:1), the name occurs six times more-- in 1:5 where it is used generically, and in two other sections, i.e. in chapter 3 (vv. 7, 9, 11) and in chapter 8 (vv. 11, 12), and nowhere else... Suffice it to note that if Solomon were a principal protagonist of the drama, we should expect a more consistent use of his name throughout the book than the existing pattern. As for the noun "king" hamelekh, which might conceivably be an epithet for Solomon in the drama, it is also very rare in the book, occurring in only three additional passages (1:4, 12; 7:6) besides its use together with "Solomon" in two cases (3:9, 11).[12]

Gordis's remarks are well taken and do much to dispel the confusion that is apparent in many commentaries. Much of his contribution is, however, anticipated by some of Rashbam's comments which, both implicitly and explicitly, indicate that the role of Solomon is quite different from that of the characters. Like Gordis, Rashbam also explains the occurrences of the word "king" in a different manner. In a passage that makes clear the "role" of Solomon, Rashbam offers the following comment on vs. 3:11:

> Go forth and gaze...Go, my maidens and my friends, and gaze upon my beloved who is praiseworthy like King Solomon who was crowned with the crown that his mother, Bathsheba, gave him on his wedding day... King Solomon who composed this book found

[12]. Gordis, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

> no other king whose majesty was greater than his own and, therefore, likened the praises of the male character to images of his own kingship whenever the female character speaks about her beloved.

In this passage we observe several points. Rashbam reaffirms the traditional ascription of authorship but sees in this ascription the explanation for the occurrence of Solomon's name and royal imagery within the text. Solomon, as the author, was in need of imagery for the book but could find no more appropriate model than himself. Rashbam, almost viewing Solomon as a vain author, sees the mighty king as unable to resist the temptation of an Alfred Hitchcock cameo! Thus, King Solomon is not a character within the book but serves merely as a source of imagery and comparison. He is not lurking in the dark waiting to seduce the naive country maiden but, as author and world figure, lends his own greatness to the description of the lover. This same explanation is mentioned concerning vs. 3:6:

> There is Solomon's couch... She recounts the praises of her lover to her companions and says, "The splendor of my lover is such that when he lies upon his couch it is as if it was the couch of Solomon whose warriors, trained in warfare and each with his sword bound at his side, guard him at night.

The mention of Solomon is, according to Rashbam, meant to provide the image of kingship and, just as importantly, to provide examples of realia for the text. Verse 6:8

mentions the great number of "queens and concubines." Rashbam explains this image as follows:

> There are sixty queens... This illustration was taken from the life of King Solomon who had many wives and concubines with whom he travelled.The author of the book likened this image to God who created many worlds.

Rashbam repeats this explanation as the motive behind vss. 8:11-12 in which another illustration from Solomon's life is referred to in the text.

One last comment should be examined in order to understand how Rashbam explained the use of the word "king" in the book. As we have seen, exegetes have tried to explain the occurrences of the word as allusions to Solomon and his presence within the dramatic action of the text. Rashbam rejects this possibility, choosing to explain "king" as a nickname for the lover to express both his handsome features and his uniqueness. Regarding vs. 1:12 Rashbam wrote: "While the king, my beloved, was still on his couch..." From this passage it is clear that within the contexts of the book the word "king" can only refer to the beloved, the same male character praised and extolled throughout the rest of the book.

In summation, we have demonstrated that Rashbam's literary analysis of the book is interrelated with his analysis of the characters involved. This considerations are based upon the contextual reading of the book as well as the application of other standards (e.g., the ways in which

Rashbam supposes love poetry to be written and the ways in which the author and his characters express themselves.)

One of the major contributions of Rashbam's commentary is seen in his ability to identify and isolate the characters and their speeches. Going one step further, he endeavors to explain the author's choice and purpose in using certain imagery and illustrations. In his analysis of the characters Rashbam's concern both for the literary conventions and the realia behind those conventions are apparent. It is with these factors in mind that Rashbam constructs his analysis of the dramatic characters and the role of Solomon.

VII. Technical Vocabulary

One of the features that characterizes peshat exegesis is its technical vocabulary. This term is meant to include words and phrases that are regularly used to denote the features of a text both in its minutiae and in its overall structure. The technical vocabulary of any commentary is crucial, for without a set of regular and fairly consistent exegetical terms, a commentary can quickly become a work that requires a commentary of its own!

The terms by which any individual exegete or group of commentators label and analyze the style or vocabulary of a text is highly indicative of the exegetical concerns of the commentator(s). While the technical terms employed by an exegete may be, at least to some degree, idiosyncratic, it is more often the case that his choice of technical terms will correspond to the general agenda of his exegetical goals. Such is the case of the commentary studied here. In the discussion that follows we will demonstrate the ways in which the use and choice of technical terms reflect the overall peshat approach to the text of the Song of Songs.

The present analysis should, therefore, further our study of both the methodology and the exegetical contributions of the commentary. In the next chapter we shall devote a section to the evidence for the authorship of Rashbam that can be adduced from the technical vocabulary.

Since that is a completely different use of the information gained by an analysis of the technical terms of the work, we shall reserve observations concerning authorship for that section below.

The distribution and use of technical terms can best be viewed by dividing them into topical groups: the terms found in the commentary can be considered under three headings according to the levels of the text that they address. These groups respectively explicate the linguistic, literary, and allegorical content of the text. Far from being arbitrary, this division reflects the components of the commentary.

Most notable among the linguistic terms are the following: כפל מלה which occurs eight times (vs. 2:1, 2:9, 4:6, 4:10, 4:12, 5:5, 7:13, and 8:5) and the equivalent term כפל מלתו which occurs three times (twice in comments on vs. 2:7 and on vs. 2:9). An examination of these terms reveals that they are used to refer to words that are synonymous. In this sense it may be possible to differentiate these two terms which are actually the same from two other similarly worded terms found in the commentary.

The term כפל בראשתו is found in the comment on vs. 4:1, and a similar term כתוב זה כפול is found in the comment on vs. 4:8. The occurrence of the latter term is accompanied by a comment that verse 4:8 is similar to verse 4:1. From this we should understand the two terms to be equivalent. While worded similarly to the two terms noted above, there does actually seem to be a difference. Both of

the former terms, כפל מלה and כפל מלחו, seem to refer to individual words and connote the synonymity of those words. The latter terms, כפל בראשיתו and כתוב זה כפול , are used with regard to sections of verses that involve parallelism. Both cases in fact are verses that display what is commonly called "staircase parallelism." Based upon this observation we should conclude that the former terms connote semantic synonymity while the latter two denote synonymous parallelism.

It should be noted that these terms appear throughout the commentary and reflect the consistent use of the exegetical methods implied by these terms-- sensitivity to the meanings of synonymous words and synonymous (in this case, repeated) cola. Such attention is the hallmark of a commentary that is based upon a peshat reading of the text. While reflecting innovation on the part of the commentator, the modern reader would find these the most obvious considerations for understanding the text.

It should be noted that in both phrases the word מלה is used in the sense of "language," not "word." This usage is evident in the introduction to the commentary in which the phrase שיסחו כמלחו is used in the sense of "context and language."

Other terms are also employed in the exegesis of philological problems. The term פחרונו לפי ענינו occurs twice in the commentary (vs. 1:7 and 2:12) and represents the author's reliance upon the contextual use of the word in

question. Quite admirably, when faced with a unknown word the author invokes the לפי ענינו method of explaining what the word "must mean" according to the context. This general concept of "context-based meaning" is used many times in the commentary in which the explanation of a word or phrase is prefaced with the word ענין used by itself. The word appears in this manner eighteen times in the commentary.[13] The connotation of "context-based meaning" is evident since an alternate term, לשון , is often used thus creating the distinction between the two types of comments.

A similar term, כמשמעו , is used in the commentary although it is very difficult to establish the exact meaning of this term. This term appears on the comment on vs. 1:6 and seems to indicate that the word "vineyard" is to be understood in its "usual" meaning. The obvious problem is, therefore, establishing the reason for the comment. Perhaps the author was reacting to another commentary that claimed a different explanation for the word.[14] To this term we might also add לשון חלמוד which the author uses in his comment on vs. 4:3. In addition the term לא דקדק

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13. Cf. vss. 1:16, 2:5, 2:13, 3:7, 3:10, 3:11, 4:1, 4:6, 5:1, 5:6, 5:12, 5:14, 5:15, 7:2, 7:6, and 8:2.

14. Cf. Rashi's comment ad loc.

appears in the comments on vs. 6:8. This term is used to indicate that the author did not intend a precise number but rather a round one-- "many."

The second group of terms are those employed to discuss the literary features of the text. We have seen many examples above that demonstrate the literary considerations of the commentary. These considerations are reflected in several exegetical terms as well. The term דוגמא is found five times in the commentary (vss. 1:2, 5:16, 6:8, 8:8, and 8:11). It is used in reference to words or images in the text that provide an example or illustration of a point being made either by the text or the commentator. The term is used to refer to motifs that repeat within the text and can be understood as referring back to each other. The use of the term points to the commentator's approach to the Song of Songs as a unified composition each part of which can be used to explicate other parts.

Another group of terms that are used in the literary exposition of the text are terms that include the words דרך or מנהג . These phrases appear in comments on vss. 1:9, 1:10, 3:5, 4:1, and 4:5. Although one might hesitate in calling these various phrases technical terms they actually are. There is a common point to all of these usages. That point revolves around the author's concern for social convention and realia as noted in the sections above. For this reason all occurrences of these phrases should be seen

as part of a method to explain the conventions of the text on the basis of common usage and social custom.

Another technical term, דמיון , is that term which is used consistently and exclusively to introduce the allegorical comments found within the commentary. This term appears thirty-four times.[15] We will discuss this term in the next section as well as in the excursus that constitutes Unit V. In the present discussion we need only note that the term is distributed throughout the commentary and thus supports the claim that the commentary is a unified composition. The use of this term stands in a close relationship to the book as well, and although one might claim that its frequency could cause one to question the assumption that this is, indeed, a peshat commentary, the choice of the term דמיון points to the author's attitude toward the allegorical level of interpretation.

One last feature of the commentary that we should consider under the topic of technical terms is the way in which Scriptural quotations are introduced. It is customary for similar words or phrases to be quoted to explain words in the text considered. This is one of the basic tools of the Bible exegete-- to explain a passage by comparing the various occurrences of the same word or phrase. What is of note here is that we find several terms used to introduce

15. Cf. vss. 1:2-9, 1:12, 2:2-5, 2:7-8, 2:10, 2:14, 2:17, 3:1, 3:5-6, 3:11, 4:11-12, 4:16, 5:1-2, 5:16, 6:9, 7:8, 8:1, 8:6, 8:9, and 8:14.

Biblical quotations within the commentary. Among these is the word כמו which is the most common, occurring twenty nine times.[16] Other introductory words include שנאמר which is found four times,[17] כמו שנאמר occurring three times,[18] כתיב which is used twice,[19] and נאמר which is used once.[20] While these terms are used interchangeably, they are of note because they point to the general tendency of the author to use a multiplicity of exegetical terms.

We shall return to the discussion of the commentary's technical terms in our discussion of authorship in the next chapter. Before that discussion there remains one more feature of the text to examine.

16. Cf. vss. 1:1, 1:6, 1:7-8, 1:12, 1:14, 2:10, 2:12, 2:14-15, 2:17, 4:1, 4:4, 4:6, 4:8, 4:10-12, 5:1, 5:7, 5:11, 5:14-15, 7:5, 8:5, and 8:6.

17. Cf. vss. 3:11, 4:1, 5:12, and 5:15.

18. Cf. vss. 1:3, 1:5, and 1:16.

19. Cf. vs. 4:14.

20. Cf. vs. 1:3.

VIII. "Secular" view of the text

The use of the word "secular" in this context is one that deserves consideration. By choosing the word secular we mean to indicate not a theological stance but an exegetical method. The approach found within the commentary reflects the author's use of everyday examples in order to clarify the text. This secular method of interpretation could also be considered a humanist approach of sorts, an approach that seeks to "normalize" the text, i.e., to interpret it by means of the same criteria that would be operative in the analysis of other texts. More than any other point this approach may serve to demonstrate to what extent Rashbam was willing to sublimate the constraints of the allegorical tradition in order to provide the peshat interpretation.

Rashbam was not a "secularist" by any definition of the word but, in the exegetical enterprise, it was often necessary to resort to parallels in contemporary behavior and customs in order to understand the text. In short, a knowledge of the text demanded a knowledge of the world. It may not be too far off the mark to see the inner dynamics of the commentary as demonstrating a very real intellectual conflict of the twelfth century, the conflict between Volksgeist and Zeitgeist. Although space is lacking here for a full discussion, the intellectual background of peshat exegesis might well be clarified by an examination of how

these two intellectual forces were synthesized by the peshat exegetes.[21] In terms of the work considered here it is clear that much of the Zeitgeist of the twelfth century was incorporated into the exegetical considerations with the result of producing a commentary that addressed love poetry as just that and (perhaps) nothing more.

We have but to recall examples in which it is quite clear that the Song of Songs, though remaining a sacred text, could be clarified only by resort to several very "secular" parallels. Commenting on verse 3:5, Rashbam indicates that the literary form, the structure of the book, and the voices heard within the text are all to be understood by the conventions by which poets compose love songs. While one might need to exercise considerable retrospect to appreciate the background of the allegorical interpretation, the peshat could be easily understood by a quick glance at the world of the present.

There are also many comments in which the behavior of animals and people are cited as examples clarifying the text. Likewise, Rashbam notes the habits of lovers, habits that have not changed despite the passing of time. In this way the "universals" of the text, the points common to the Song of Songs and to all people at all times, are explained.

[21]. Cf. the discussion on the spread of ideas in Charles H. Haskins, Studies in Mediaeval Culture, New York: Ungar, 1929, pp. 92-104.

These factors are consistent with all of the features of the commentary that we have outlined above. Peshat exegesis of the Song of Songs demands the exposition of the contextual meaning of the text. A great contribution of Rashbam's exposition is found in his ability to explain the Song of Songs within the "context" of the life and experience of the contemporary reader as well.

In his effort to "normalize" the text, to remove it from the realm of allegorical interpretation and place it on the secure base of peshat exegesis, Rashbam uses the world around him as a paradigm for the world of the text. This can be described as a secularizing or humanizing of the text because the synthesis that results creates a text that is at once both very much a part of the world and very well understood in the context of the world. There is no longer the allos of allegory that defies that which the text seems to say. Allegory may not be abandoned, but it can no longer rupture the essential connection between the life of the text and the life of the reader.