



# A holistic interpretation and translation of Song of Songs 6:12

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Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Masters of Theology in Old Testament* at the North-West University

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Graduation ceremony: May 2023

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many individuals and institutions have had a substantial share in the completion of this project. Although I am deeply grateful for all those who have invested time, energy, and funds into the success of this study, I would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals in particular.

- » Professor Albert Coetsee – For his support, guidance, and encouragement at every stage of the process. I am sincerely grateful for your invaluable feedback, quick responses, and patience with me as I piloted the various phases of this project.
- » The Benefactors at NWU – Thank you for your generosity and financial support during the two years in which it took to complete this project. I am exceedingly grateful.
- » Stellenbosch University – For access to library resources during the global lockdown.
- » My parents, who continuously supported and encouraged me in undertaking this study. Your prayers, guidance, and love kept me moving towards completion of my study.
- » My best friend, Ivette Dreyer, whose love and sacrifice motivated me to continue till the end. I am grateful for all your late hours spent editing, for without you it just would not be the same.
- » Our gracious God, who bestowed me with the gifts necessary to do this research. May He be glorified in all of it.

## ABSTRACT

Song of Songs 6:12 has long since been viewed as one of the most difficult verses in the Song of Songs to interpret and translate. The difficulty is to be found in the first place with the syntax and semantics of the Hebrew words, and secondly in the form, voice, tone, genre, and imagery conveyed by those words. Consequently, a vast array of translations and interpretations have been proposed for SS 6:12. The objective of the present study, thus, is to propose a revised formal translation and fitting interpretation of SS 6:12 based upon careful investigation of the syntax and semantics of SS 6:12.

This study is divided into two main parts. Part One looks at Song of Songs as a whole, conducting detailed literature reviews on previous interpretations (chapter 2) and structural analyses (chapter 3) of SS 6:12. Part Two homes in on the verse in question, conducting a precise syntactico-semantic analysis of SS 6:12 (chapter four) in order to draft a revised interpretation. In chapter five, the translation of SS 6:12 is explicated within its immediate context, especially examining the impact of form, voice, tone, genre, and imagery on the interpretation.

The results from the linguistic analysis of SS 6:12 indicates that the most fitting formal translation is “I did not know, [that] my desire made me [to be] chariots of my noble-people”. Regarding interpretation, SS 6:12 is nestled within a shorter love poem (SS 6:11-7:1) in which the woman warmly recalls a time she was overwhelmed by her beloved’s affections (SS 6:12), her desire moving her in such a way that it causes her to feel as a chariot, a regal image which conveys the sense of royalty, nobility, exaltation, and the highest respect.

The present study contributes to the field of OT Theology by understanding trends in the literature regarding (i) the genre (ii) and structure of Song of Songs and—most importantly—by proposing a (iii) revised translation and (iv) fitting interpretation of SS 6:12 based on the syntactic relationships and meaning in context.

**KEY WORDS:** Song of Songs; Song of Solomon; Song of Songs 6:12; Wisdom Literature; OT; Interpretation; Translation; Biblical Poetry; Hebrew Syntax.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Afr1933/53	1933/53 Afrikaans Translation
Afr1983	1983 Afrikaans Translation
Afr2020	2020 Afrikaans Translation
ANE	Ancient Near East
ASV	American Standard Version
AYBC	Anchor Yale Bible Commentary
BC	Before Christ
BCOTWP	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BHQ	Biblia Hebraica Quinta
BST	Bible Speaks Today
CEB	Common English Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
cf.	Confer (“Compare”)
CJB	Complete Jewish Bible
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
e.g.	For example
ET	English Translation
GNT	Good News Translation
GNV 1599	1599 Geneva Bible
GW	God’s Word Translation
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
ISV	International Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJ21	21st Century King James Version
KJV	King James Version
LEB	Lexham English Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	new American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NET	New English Translation
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSVUE	New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition
OJB	Orthodox Jewish Bible
OTL	Old Testament Library
OT	Old Testament
REB	Revised English Bible
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary
s.a.	Sine anno (“Without date”)
SS	Song of Songs
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
YLT	Young’s Literal Translation

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and problem statement

### 1.1.1 Background

Throughout the centuries, the book Song of Songs (or the Song of Solomon) has been subject to multiple vastly divergent approaches to its translation and interpretation, in fact, according to Gault (2019:1), “[n]o other book in the Hebrew Bible has suffered under so many different interpretations as the Song of Songs.” Tradition considers this book to be a pure allegorical reference to the love between Christ and His Church. In recent years, however, Song of Songs has been interpreted as a practical Biblical text, rejoicing in the explicit sexual love between a man and a woman (Schwab, 2008:744). Although this explanation has greatly improved our understanding of the message of the book and its place within the context of the vetero-testamentary Wisdom Literature, there remain many opaque verses and strophes in Song of Songs that require more research for an informed interpretation.

The reasons why Song of Songs 6:12 (henceforth “SS 6:12”) “is one of the most challenging verses in the Bible to translate” (Duguid, 2016:115), and consequently has generated such a vast array of explanations, can be distilled under five main difficulties: (i) the syntax<sup>1</sup> of the Hebrew text, (ii) the semantics<sup>2</sup> of the Hebrew words, (iii) the identity of the speaker, (iv) the literary context of the verse, (v) and the interpretation of the metaphors in SS 6:12. In the discussion that follows, these challenges are further unpacked.

First, the syntax of the Hebrew text (BHS) of SS 6:12 is problematic (cf. Longman III, 2001:185), as shown in the gloss in (1).

- (1)
- |               |             |            |               |            |                |
|---------------|-------------|------------|---------------|------------|----------------|
| עַמִּי-נָדִיב | מִרְכָּבוֹת | שָׂמַתְנִי | נִפְּשִׁי     | יְדַעְתִּי | לֹא            |
| noble         | my people   | chariots   | placed/set me | my soul    | I did not know |
- ‘I did not know... my soul... placed/set me... chariots... my people...prince/noble’

The challenge lies with the absence of deictic markers and the ambiguity in constituent combination, rendering the relationship between the different words difficult to determine.

Second, although the words used in SS 6:12 are quite common in the OT—all of them except נָדִיב ‘prince/noble’ have more than 100 occurrences—their intended meaning in SS 6:12 is uncertain (Carr, 1984:152). The ambiguous syntax creates confusion as to the communicative purpose of the different words as employed in their poetic context. There seems to be no consensus among modern English Bible translations as to the meaning of the comparatively less frequent Hebrew word נָדִיב

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<sup>1</sup> Syntax is a branch of linguistics which studies the hierarchical relationships of language at the level of the sentence (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:49). More specifically, syntax can be defined as “[t]he way in which words and clauses are ordered and connected so as to form sentences” (Baldick, 2015:354).

<sup>2</sup> Semantics is broadly defined as the study of “linguistic signs” (Louw, 1992:1077). More specifically, semantics is concerned with the conveyance of lexical meaning in context (Louw, 1992:1078).

'noble/prince'. It is either rendered as a proper noun (in combination with אַמִּינָדִיב: 'Amminadib' [KJV, 1611; NJB, 1999]), a common noun ('nobleman' [CSB, 2017]; 'prince' [CJB, 1998]; 'prince' [ESV, 2018]; 'royal one' [OJB, 2011]; 'prince' [NRSVUE, 2021]), or as an adjective 'princely people' [ASV, 1901]; 'royal chariots' [NIV, 2011]).

Third, there is disagreement about the identity of the speaker in SS 6:12. Some commentators take it to be the male lover (Provan, 2001:349-350), while others interpret the verse to be words spoken by the woman (Carr, 1984:151; Exum, 2011:223; Garret, 1993:418; Gledhill, 1994:199; Hess, 2005:208; Longman III, 2001:186). Essentially, the disagreement concerning the identification of the speaker is directly tied to the following difficulty presented by SS 6:12.

Fourth, the disagreement about the speaker of verse 6:12 obscures not only the meaning of the verse, but also the immediate poetic context (Roberts, 2001:484–489). The verses from 6:11 to 7:1 are quite puzzling and difficult to place within the broader literary scheme of the chapter and the book as a whole. Song of Songs 6:11—as shown in (2)—seems arbitrary or out of place when read with 6:12.

- (2) I went down to the grove of nut trees to look at the new growth in the valley, to see if the vines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom.  
(NRSVUE, 2021: SS. 6:12)

Once more, the interpretation of the identity of the speaker of 6:11 influences the interpretation of 6:12. As shown in (3), the relationship of subsequent verse, 7:1<sup>3</sup> (Masoretic Text [henceforth "MT"]), to SS 6:12 is even more obscure (Longman III, 2001:191-194).

- (3) Come back, come back, O Shulammite; come back, come back, that we may gaze on you!  
Why would you gaze on the Shulammite as on the dance of Mahanaim?  
(NRSVUE, 2021: SS. 6:13)

In SS 7:1, questions arise as to whom is being referred to with the vocative "Shulammite", and the meaning of the phrase כַּמְחֻלַת הַמַּחֲנַיִם 'as on the dance of Mahanaim' is engulfed in a cloud of mystery. As with 6:11, the interpretation 7:1 will have a direct bearing on the interpretation of 6:12.

Fifth and finally, as with virtually all poetic texts in the OT, there is a difference of opinion on how the metaphoric language of 6:12 should be understood. Particularly, the interpretation of SS 6:12 is influenced by the way in which the interpreter approaches the function of parallelism<sup>4</sup> within the verse on the one hand (Alter, 2019:585), and the ambiguity in the verse on the other (Alter,

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<sup>3</sup> Numbered 6:13 in most English translations.

<sup>4</sup> Murphy (2003:122) defines parallelism as a "common BH poetic literary device in which the second line corresponds in some way to the first".

2019:586). The uncertainty surrounding the meaning and interpretation of 6:12 is already evident in the LXX,<sup>5</sup> which renders the verse as follows in (4).

- (4) “οὐκ ἔγνων ἡ ψυχὴ μου· ἔθετό με ἄρματα Ἀμιναδάβ.”  
‘my soul was not aware; it made me as Aminadab’s chariots.’  
(Treat, 2007:665)

This uncertainty is also evident in the ways in which well-known English Bible translations translate the verse, as illustrated in (5).

- (5) (a) Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Aminadab.  
(KJV, 1611: SS. 6:12)
- (b) Before I was aware, my soul set me *over* the chariots of my noble people.  
(NASB, 2020: SS. 6:12)
- (c) Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people.  
(NIV, 2011: SS. 6:12)
- (d) Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.  
(ESV, 2018: SS. 6:12)
- (e) Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince.  
(NRSVUE, 2021: SS. 6:12)

The same variation is true of Afrikaans translations of SS 6:12. Compare the following three translations in (6).

- (6) Afrikaans translations of SS 6:12
- (a) *Voordat ek dit geweet het, het my verlange my verplaas op die waens van my edele volk.*  
‘Before I knew it, my desire had placed me on the chariots of my noble people’.  
(Bible, 1933/53)
- (b) *Ek ken myself nie, dit is of sy my laat ry op die strydwa van die keur van my volk.*  
‘I know myself not, it is as if she lets me ride on the chariots of the choice of my people’.  
(Bible, 1983/92)

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<sup>5</sup> Also known as the Septuagint, the LXX is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and completed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Murphy, 2003:151; Sheeley & Nash, 1997:17). The LXX was used by Jews in the diaspora and later became the canonical text of the Hebrew Bible for the early Church (Murphy, 2003:151; Sheeley & Nash, 1997:17).

- (c) *Sonder dat ek dit besef, het my begeerte my verplaas na die strydwaens van die vooraanstaandes van my volk.*

‘Without realising it, my desire had placed me to the chariots of the officials of my people’.

(Bible, 2020)

The tendency for nineteenth and twentieth scholarship to depart from the allegorical approach to SS in favour of a more practical, literal interpretation (Gault, 2019:216) entails that subsequent analysis has generally understood SS 6:12 as referring to the sexual or amorous desire of the woman which has placed or set her somewhere or next to someone. When it comes to a more nuanced interpretation of the verse, however, there is less observable consensus among scholars. The various analyses of this verse are compared in (7).

- (7) (a) Carr (1984:151-152) and Longman III (2001:185-187) explain the literal reading of the verse.
- (b) Garret (1993:419) understands 6:12 as a wedding custom, where the woman is “departing with the groom in a triumphal procession”.
- (c) Gledhill (1994:200) states that this scene is probably a fantasy.
- (d) Hess (2005:208) goes further by describing the woman to be in the chariot with her lover and that this fantasy creates a sense of danger and excitement.
- (e) Duguid (2016:131) sees 6:12 as words expressing the woman’s amazement after the man expresses “his unique and committed love to her alone”.

Clearly, a vast array of possibilities has been proposed for the interpretation of 6:12. However, in order to reach a more informed interpretation of 6:12, the verse calls for further investigation.

### 1.1.2 Problem statement

While most of the above-mentioned studies take various matters relating to the interpretation of 6:12 into account, few of them examine the metaphorical language of SS in a consistent manner. The metaphorical language is a key barrier to overcome in the holistic interpretation of SS 6:12. Through careful investigation of the syntax, semantics, and metaphorical language of Song of Songs 6:12 *within the context* of the adjacent verses, the chapter, and the book as a whole, a more informed interpretation and a formal translation of Song of Songs 6:12 can be achieved. The present study contributes to the body of research on OT Wisdom Literature by conducting a comprehensive examination of the translation and interpretation of SS 6:12 based on all the abovementioned fields.

The purpose of the present study is twofold and summarized in (8).

- (8) (a) To provide a formal exegetical translation of 6:12; and

- (b) to provide a more informed interpretation of 6:12 based on this translation.

## 1.2 Research questions

In order to reach a more informed translation and a fitting and meaningful interpretation of 6:12, the present study will answer the questions in (9).

- (9) (a) What are the main previous interpretations of SS?
- (b) How does the overall structure of the Song of Songs (whether linear or loosely connected individual poems), as well as the structure of the surrounding passages, influence the interpretation of SS 6:12?
- (c) What is the most probable explanation of the syntax and semantics of the words employed in SS 6:12?
- (d) In light of the syntactico-semantic analysis, what is the most probable formal translation and interpretation for 6:12 within the context of Song of Songs 6:11-7:1?

## 1.3 Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to reach a more informed translation and a fitting and meaningful interpretation of SS 6:12. The concrete objectives which will guide the study in reaching this goal are stated in (10).

- (10) (a) To review previous interpretations of SS.
- (b) To determine how the overall structure of the Song of Songs (whether linear or loosely connected individual poems), as well as the structure of the surrounding passages, influence the interpretation of 6:12.
- (c) To determine the most accurate formal translation for SS 6:12.
- (d) To determine the most plausible interpretation for 6:12 in the light of the abovementioned conclusions.

## 1.4 Central theoretical argument

The conclusion reached in the present study is that SS is love poetry describing the erotic love between a man and a woman. Specifically, the various poems of SS are argued to be delicately and artfully unified by various poetic devices, most notably by the repetition of words, phrases, motifs, and character portrayals. Regarding SS 6:12 in particular, thorough syntactico-semantic analysis reveals that the most accurate formal translation of the verse is "I did not know, [that] my desire made me [to be] chariots of my noble-people". SS 6:12 describes the powerful and positive reaction of the woman to the beloved's affections, carrying with it connotations of exaltation and high esteem.

## 1.5 Theoretical framework and methodology

This study is done from a Reformed perspective and employs the following methodology.

Part one of the present study is concerned with Song of Songs as a whole.

- » The literature review in chapter two summarizes and evaluates previous interpretations of SS (Long, 2008; Schwab, 2008).
- » In chapter three, a second literature review focuses on the structure of SS, comparing and evaluating various structural proposals for SS to determine a working structural proposal for the whole of SS.

Part two homes in on SS 6:12 specifically, approaching the verse from both linguistic and literary perspectives.

- » To determine a formal translation of SS 6:12, chapter four consists of a detailed syntactico-semantic analysis. After collecting quantifiable data from various extant translations, the Hebrew syntax will be examined by the aid of well-known Hebrew reference works (cf. Arnold & Choi, 2022; Joüon & Muraoka, 2008; van der Merwe et al., 2018; Waltke & O'Connor, 1990), and the semantics with the aid of Hebrew theological dictionaries (cf. *Brown et al.* 2017; Clines, 1993-2011; Koehler & Baumgartner, 1995) .
- » In chapter five, the most plausible interpretation of SS 6:12 is ascertained through a literary analysis focusing on form, voice, and poetic imagery. The findings from the previous chapters as well suggested translations from commentaries are synthesized for the final translation and interpretation of SS 6:12. The theological dictionaries of Botterweck et al. (1995) and VanGemeren (1997) will serve as the primary aid for deciphering the poetic imagery.

Finally, chapter six summarizes the findings from the present study, concluding with a discussion of the study's shortcomings, contribution, and directions for further research. The aims, research questions and respective research strategies are summarized in Appendix A.

## 1.6 Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter has been (*i*) to delineate the problems surrounding the translation and interpretation of Song of Songs 6:12 and (*ii*) to present the aims and strategies espoused in the present study to remedy those challenges in proposing a revised formal translation and interpretation of SS 6:12. To achieve this, the present study is divided into two parts, the first of which consists of literature reviews of previous interpretations and structural analyses of Song of Songs in its entirety, and the second presenting the data and conclusions drawn from more in-depth linguistic and literary analyses of SS 6:12. In the following chapter, the different proposed interpretations for SS are examined more closely.

**PART ONE:**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**  
**PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS AND STRUCTURAL**  
**ANALYSES OF SONG OF SONGS**

## 2. PREVIOUS APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING SS

### 2.1 Introduction

A fundamental first step for the present study is to carefully examine previous approaches to the interpretation of SS. To give a thorough account of every interpretation proposed for SS is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will provide an overview of the most common interpretations proposed for the interpretation of SS.<sup>7</sup> At each different interpretative approach, the following elements will be examined and discussed:

- » A brief description and motivation for the specific interpretation;
- » the explanation of SS 6:12 according to the specific interpretation; and
- » a critical evaluation of the specific interpretation.

### 2.2 Allegorical interpretation

#### 2.2.1 Description and motivation

Early scholars interpreted SS as an allegorical piece of literature.<sup>8</sup> When a metaphor is extended into a story, it becomes an allegory (Kaiser, 2007:146). With an allegorical reading strategy, a spiritual symbolic interpretation is sought for behind the literal meaning of the text (Osborne, 2006:329). Throughout history, SS has been viewed as containing a deeper spiritual meaning, one that extends further than the mere literal interpretation of its written words. This deeper spiritual sense can only be uncovered by a key, which in this case is the allegorical interpretation (Kaiser, 2007:261). The allegorical method as interpretative strategy for SS found its way into Judaism, probably through Philo of Alexandria, and again into the Christian community through both the Epistle of Barnabas and Origen of Alexandria (Carr, 1993:282). The allegorizing of SS was such a popular method for medieval interpreters that Bray (2005:35) dubs SS as “[t]he *locus classicus* for Christian allegory”. The extreme flexibility of the allegorical method of interpretation has resulted in six different allegorical interpretations: (i) Jewish allegory; (ii) Christian allegory; (iii) historical allegory; (iv) philosophical/mystical allegory; (v) eschatological allegory; and (vi) political allegory.

- i. For Jewish interpreters, SS was seen as an allegory of the relationship of Yahweh with the nation of Israel, with Solomon as an anthropomorphic representation of Yahweh and the woman as a representation of Israel (Delitzsch, 1885:1; Longman III, 2005:758).
- ii. Christians adopted the Jewish approach to SS but understood the main character, Solomon, to represent Jesus Christ and the woman as a representation for the church (Exum, 2011:73).

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<sup>6</sup> Surveys that can be consulted for a more in-depth historical overview of the interpretation of SS include Garrett (2004:59-91), Murphy (1990:11-41), and Pope (1977:89-229).

<sup>7</sup> For another study surveying various approaches to SS, see Johnston (2009:36-52, 163-80, 289-305).

<sup>8</sup> For an explanation of the difference between an allegorical piece of literature and an allegorical interpretive strategy, see Bray (2005:34), Bullock (1988:246), and Longman III (2001:23-24). For reasons why SS might have been interpreted as an allegory, see Exum (2011:77) and Schwab (2008:740-741).

- In the twelfth century, Christian interpreters began to interpret the woman as representing the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (Exum, 2011:74; Pope, 1977: 188-192).
- iii. SS was seen as a type of historical allegory in early Jewish circles, a view which is especially prevalent in the Targum's translation and explanation<sup>9</sup> of SS (Longman III, 2001:24). The Targum presents SS as a constructed allegory of Israel's redemptive history under the guidance of Yahweh (Beaton, 2008:763). In contrast to general Jewish allegorical interpretation, the Targum presents SS almost as a precise chronological history of Israel (Longman III, 2001:25). The Targum interprets SS as starting with Israel's exodus out of Egypt and "ends with a section on the description of the Messianic period (7:14-8:7)" (Longman III, 2001:25).
  - iv. SS was also interpreted to be a philosophical or mystical allegory. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204) suggested that the feminine character in SS portrays the individual human soul or "passive intellect" which wants to reunite with God (Beaton, 2008:32; Murphy, 1990:32; Thorne & Collocott, 1986:872). This interpretation was followed further by many subsequent Christian interpreters such as Origen (185-254), St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), and St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) (Beaton, 2008:32; Murphy, 1990: 32; Pope, 1977: 183-188; Thorne & Collocott, 1986:736, 1004, 1311). Isaac Ben Jehudah Abarbanel (1437-1508), followed a more philosophical allegorical method of interpretation for SS, understanding the male character in SS to be Solomon and the female character as personified wisdom itself (Beaton, 2008:759, 763; Longman III, 2005:759; Thorne & Collocott, 1986:1).
  - v. SS as a type of eschatological allegory, pointing to the coming of the Messiah (Fox, 1985:237), overlaps somewhat with the historical and mystical allegorical interpretations. This interpretive approach is a combination of historical allegory and "apocalypticism" (Gault, 2019:15). For example, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) identified "the bride's bringing of her groom to her mother's house (3:4, 8:2) as the future reconciliation of Israel to Jesus mediated through the church" (Douglas et al., 1974:709; Gault, 2019:15).
  - vi. More recently, SS has been interpreted by Stadelmann (1990) as a political allegory (Longman III, 2001:47). Stadelmann (1990:1-2) identifies various personae in SS; Solomon, for example, is seen to be "the representative of the monarchical state and the Davidic dynasty", and the Shulamite is the "representative of the native population of Judah". Longman III (2001:47) remarks that the great Reformer of the sixteenth century, Martin Luther, may have been the first theologian to see a political element to SS.

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<sup>9</sup> In general, the Targumim (singular Targum) are Aramaic translations to the Hebrew Scriptures, ranging from being literal to being very paraphrastic in nature (Murphy, 2003:166; Wegner, 2006:173). The Targum for the SS is considered to be extremely paraphrastic, which adds "interpretive and explanatory material" to its text (Edwards, 2008:787; Wegner, 2008:797).

### 2.2.2 Interpretation of SS 6:12

To illustrate the reasoning behind the allegorical methods of interpretation, this section looks at the commentary of the English Puritan Matthew Henry (1710:1952-2038) as a case study of an allegorical interpretation from a Christian viewpoint. Henry (1710:1952) writes that SS is a book that “excites pious and devout affections in holy souls, to draw out their desires towards God.” With these words, Henry (1710:1952) points to a spiritual message of SS and uses Psalm 45 as the key with which to unlock that meaning (1710:1952-1953). This spiritual message is then applied by Henry (1710:1953) specifically to Christ and His believers. Henry (1710:1953) ends his introduction to the SS with the following words.

When we apply ourselves to the study of this book we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, *put off our shoe off our foot*, and even forget that we have bodies, because *the place where we stand is holy ground*, but we must, with John, *come up hither*, must spread out wings, take a noble flight, and soar upwards, till by faith and holy love we *enter into the holiest*, for *this is no other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven*. (Henry, 1710:1953, emphasis his)

When coming to SS 6:12, Henry (1710:2018) takes these words as belonging to the male character, which he interprets as referring to Jesus Christ. Though distant in the first eleven verses of chapter 6, in verse 12 Jesus feels “a powerful, irresistible, inclination in his own bosom to return to his church” (Henry, 1710:2018). According to Henry, the woman is a representative of the church in the New Testament, which is of course Christ’s bride (1710:2019). The chariots mentioned here refer to the willingness of the church to seek Christ and to desire Him to be in their midst (Henry, 1710:2019).

### 2.2.3 Evaluation

Fox (1985:238) remarks: “Allegorical exegesis, thinking to reveal the treasure that lay under the cover of literal meaning, in effect covered the literal meaning under layers of allegory.” Although a broad spectrum of reasons can be put forward as to why the allegorical approach is probably an incorrect interpretation of SS,<sup>10</sup> only a few will suffice.

- i. *Origin*. The ancient Greek philosophers experienced difficulties with the problematic behaviour of their gods and their mythological heroes as depicted by Homer, Hesiod, and others (Longman III, 2001:36). The allegorizing of a text was a technique to reinterpret the old stories of the Greek poets to fit the philosophies of the Greek philosophers (Schwab, 2008:740). Christian interpreters, like Origen of Alexandria, adopted this allegorizing technique to reinterpret difficult Bible passages as pointing away from themselves to a more relevant meaning of the time (Schwab, 2008:740). Garrett (1993:365) concludes: “Allegorical interpretation, therefore, is not intrinsic to biblical thinking but is an alien method to interpret the text out of regard for philosophical assumptions that are themselves unbiblical.”

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<sup>10</sup> For a different critique of the allegorical interpretation, see Brenner (1993).

- ii. *Identity*. Usually, allegories do not hide their identities; they clearly indicate that they should be interpreted as allegories (Fox, 1985:238). SS, however, never hints in the faintest to another level of meaning (Longman III, 2005:759). When Biblical writers make a point by using symbolic language, a further hint or explanation would usually be given in the text (Exum, 2001:76; Gault, 2019:17). For example, Jotham explains his fable (Judg. 9:7-15) by clearly applying it to the kingship of Abimelech over the Shechemites (Judg. 9:16-20). When the prophet Nathan confronts David with a parable of the poor man and his lamb (2 Sam. 12:1-4), he explicitly identifies David as the “rich man” (2 Sam. 12:7). The prophet Isaiah, when singing his allegorical song of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-6), provides an explanation of it (Isa. 5:7).
- iii. *Unlimited possibilities*. Longman III (2001:36-37) argues that if an inappropriate spiritual meaning is assigned to a text, like it has been in the case of SS, then the danger exists of unlimited possibilities of interpretation. These interpretations would from the start be foreign to the text, and again this is seen in the history of interpretation of SS.
- iv. *Negative view on sexuality*: There is a general consensus<sup>11</sup> that the allegorizing of SS is probably a result of an effort to avoid the erotic language of the book (Pope, 1977:113). This would imply that pleasures of sexual love is not worthy of Scripture, and therefore SS in its literal interpretation cannot be included in the Bible (Bullock, 1988:247). However, this stands against the rest of the Scripture, which uses erotic language elsewhere and presents the pleasures of sexual love (Gen. 2:23, 25; Prov. 5:15-19; Ezek. 16:7, 39; 23:26).
- v. *Allegory and the LXX*. A strong objection against the allegorizing of SS is that there is no trace of allegorizing or even spiritualizing of the message of SS in the LXX (Keel, 1994:4-5; Provan, 2001:238).
- vi. *Allegory and ANE parallel texts*. In the early twentieth century, archaeologists uncovered many Ancient Near Eastern (henceforth “ANE”) documents that show various similarities with SS (Gault, 2019:23). Egyptian, Sumerian, Akkadian, and North-west Semitic love poetry were discovered which speak of human sexual love (Longman III, 2001:37).<sup>12</sup> In particular, Egyptian love poetry shows the most similarities with SS, being very erotic and having some of the literary features as SS (Long, 2008:750-753; Longman III, 2001:37). This indicates that the concept of love poetry was not foreign to the ANE and therefore suggests that SS should be read in a more literal fashion (Longman III, 2001:37).

In light of the abovementioned criticisms, it is unlikely that a pure allegorical approach is the most accurate interpretation of Song of Songs.

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<sup>11</sup> Beaton (2008:765) argues against the notion that medieval commentators rejected the physical and the sexual. Even if Beaton’s proposal would hold ground, this would only account for the medieval period and no other times.

<sup>12</sup> For a short survey of the parallels between the SS and the relevant literature from the ANE, Long (2008:750-760) can be consulted.

## 2.3 Reader-response methods

Reader-response methods approach Biblical texts by incorporating values and responses of the readers of the particular text (Gault, 2019:18). Reader-response criticism is not a single theory but is made up of various diverse hermeneutical approaches (Parry, 2005:658-659).<sup>13</sup> That which these different approaches or theories do have in common, however, is the active role of the reader in the interpretation of a text (Parry, 2005:658-659). The discussion that follows examines two such reader-response criticisms, namely the (i) feministic and the (ii) psychological methods of interpretation.

### 2.3.1 Feministic interpretation

#### 2.3.1.1 Description and motivation

The feminist hermeneutical approach is broad and encompasses a variety of feministic interpretation models (Nordling, 2005:228).<sup>14</sup> The Western feminist spectrum of Biblical interpretation can, broadly speaking, be divided into a rejectionist, a reformist, or a loyalist model (Conn, 1988: 255-256; Nordling, 2005:229).<sup>15</sup> Generally, within all these models, the woman is placed in “the centre of theological inquiry”, and the woman is the criteria by which a text is interpreted (Nordling, 2005:228). Therefore, the task of a feminist Bible scholar is to extract female voices in the Bible or to read the feminine voice into Biblical texts (Tiemeyer, 2008:206). To feminist scholars, SS is supposedly an overturn of the patriarchal tone of the OT<sup>16</sup> and therefore has enjoyed a considerable amount of writing on the part of the feministic scholarship (Exum, 2011:80; Tribble, 1978:145).<sup>17</sup>

#### 2.3.1.2 Interpretation of SS 6:12

Falk (1993), a well-known feminist scholar, does not translate or explain SS 6:12, as the verse puzzles her. LaCocque (1998:141) interprets SS 6:12 as both metaphorical and rhetorical. Metaphorically, the woman (identified as the Shulammite) is compared either with the chariot that transported the ark of Yahweh (cf. 1 Sam. 6:7-8) or with the prophets who were identified as being the chariots of Israel (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:12; 13:14) (LaCocque, 1998:140). The Shulammite is transformed metaphorically by the shepherd’s love into a chariot that carried the ark of Yahweh (LaCocque, 1998:141). With the words, “I no longer know myself,” the woman is conveying the sense intoxication, something prophetic and erotic (LaCocque, 1998:141). In the rhetorical sense, the Hebrew words

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<sup>13</sup> For a more thorough explanation of reader-response criticism, see Osborne (2006:478-482) and Parry (2005:658-661).

<sup>14</sup> Nordling (2005:228) points out that, although feminist scholars can differ socially, politically or religiously, they operate from out a common set of assumptions: (i) language shapes the world we live in; (ii) women have been made lesser by male-centred language, symbols, and structures; (iii) Biblical texts are generally reflections of a patriarchal hierarchy; and (iv) all interpretation should serve the interpreter’s interests.

<sup>15</sup> For a description of the three primary approaches to Western feminist theology, see Conn (1988:255-256) and Nordling (2005:228-230).

<sup>16</sup> For a perspective on how SS overturns the patriarchal culture of its day, see deSilva (2008:298-299).

<sup>17</sup> For a brief summary of the contributions from feminist scholarship to the SS, see Exum (2011:80-81), Garrett (2004:84-90), and Gault (2019:19-22).

עַמִּי-נָדִיב: 'my people/noble' is taken to refer to the proper noun, "Amminadab", in whose house the ark of Yahweh was lodged (cf. 1 Sam. 7:1) (LaCocque, 1998:139). The Shulammitte is identified by the lover as "princely and awesome" like the chariot of the ark of Yahweh (LaCocque, 1998:141). This chariot was the most famous chariot in all of Israel's history (LaCocque, 1998:141).

### 2.3.1.3 Evaluation

The following critiques of the feministic interpretation of SS are summarized below.<sup>18</sup>

- i. *SS's dialogue format.* One problem with the feminist theory is that it solely focuses on the feminine character in SS. Broadly speaking, the male character is left somewhat outside the scope of focus. Although it is true that the female character has more words assigned to her than that of the man in SS (deClaissé-Walford, 2008:391), her words still exist in conjunction with those of the male character (Exum, 2011:14; Fox, 1985:264). From a literary point of view, to change the dialogue of the man and woman into an exterior monologue would be a denial on the part of the interpreter of the SS's clear literary devices (Fox, 1985:261-262).<sup>19</sup>
- ii. *Abandonment of the reader.* Another central critique against the feminist theory is the reader's active involvement in interpreting the text according to feminine ideals. Without a doubt, the woman is one of the primary characters in SS, but SS is not primarily written as a liberation manual for women. The feminist scholar Exum (2011:13) acknowledges this and warns that SS is not focused on prescribing gender relations of any sort. SS is love poetry, giving us a display of mutual erotic love (Exum, 2011:13). Therefore, to construct a feminine gender theory out of SS would be contrary to the explicit text of SS. Ryken (1992:289) remarks that, because of SS's style and content, "a sense of abandonment" is required by the reader. In other words, the reader must detachedly observe rather than projecting personal agendas onto the text. SS is not analytical in its approach to love but effective (Ryken, 1998:289).

In sum, the feminist approach to interpreting SS downplays textual cues in favour of socio-political eisegesis.

## 2.3.2 Psychological interpretation

### 2.3.2.1 Description and motivation

The paths of modern psychology and biblical theology crossed somewhere between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (Kille, 2005:653-654; Gault, 2019:18). Since then, one school of thought interprets SS from a psychological perspective by incorporating modern-day psychological principles into their interpretation of the book (Gault, 2019:18). At its core, modern-

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<sup>18</sup> Gault (2019:19-22) gives an overview on the most influential feminist scholars and gives a noteworthy critique of their particular approaches.

<sup>19</sup> For a comparison of the difference between a dialogue and an exterior monologue, see Fox (1985:261, 264-265).

day psychology—as Kille (2005:653) defines it—is the “systematic study of human behaviour, such as cognition, personality, and motivation.” Therefore, when an interpreter reads SS through the lens of the above-mentioned elements, the interpreter is identifying the psychological phenomena which SS has on its reader (cf. Jeeves, 1998:543-547; Kille, 2005:654-655). For example, Black (2009:1-2) studies specifically the proclivity of the imagery of SS to dumbfound its readers. Landy (2011) “applies Freudian and Jungian categories and concepts” to SS’s characters and metaphors (Longman III, 2001:46). Boer (2000:276) examines the desire of SS through the psychoanalytic concept of *Wunsch* (“wish”).

### 2.3.2.2 Interpretation of SS 6:12

Adherents of the psychological interpretation of SS tend to avoid 6:12. For instance, Landy’s (2011) commentary on SS provides no translation or interpretation of 6:12.

### 2.3.2.3 Evaluation

In examining the psychological approach to SS, a couple of challenges to the theory surface, namely (i) its over-simplification and (ii) alienness to the historical context of SS.

- i. *The simplicity of psychological theory.* Although many benefits can come from studying the Bible and the psychological effect thereof,<sup>20</sup> the theory is too reductionistic. The psychological interpretation, as Kille (2005:655) argues, does not take into calculation the linguistic features of the text, namely its genre and structure, as well as the historical or literary context.
- ii. *Forcing foreign concepts into the text.* The psychological interpretation reads modern-day psychological theories into the text of SS (Gault, 2019:19). Psychological science, as we know it today, is far removed from both the literary content as well as the historical context of SS. The psychological interpretation can furthermore be classified as a “quasi-allegorical reading” that is very subjective in its nature (Gault, 2019:19). As Longman III (2001:47) aptly concludes, “once again we encounter a type of allegory, in this case the allegory of one’s psyche, rather than an exposition of the text.”

As with the feminist approach, the psychological interpretation of SS relies too heavily on human insights rather than letting the text and its literary devices speak for themselves.

## 2.4 Comparative methodologies

As mentioned in section 2.2.3, archaeology has discovered various love poems from the ANE, with many of these bearing similarities to SS (Long, 2008:750; Gault, 2019:23). These archaeological discoveries have prompted scholars to compare SS with various ancient love literature (Long, 2008:750), leading to the rise of various “comparative analyses” (Gault, 2019:23). Four types of comparative methodologies will be investigated in the discussion which follows, namely

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<sup>20</sup> See Kille (2005:654-655)

(i) the wedding-week theory, (ii) the mythological interpretation, (iii) the drama interpretation, and (iv) the love poetry interpretation.

#### 2.4.1 Wedding-week interpretation

##### 2.4.1.1 Description and motivation

The wedding-week theory maintains that SS is a text which was sung especially at Near- or Middle Eastern wedding ceremonies (Garrett, 1993:364). This theory was advanced by Wetzstein<sup>21</sup>, a German consul in Syria who observed local wedding festivals (Gault, 2019:25). Syrian wedding celebrations lasted for seven days, during which the groom and the bride were treated as king and queen (Exum, 2011:79). Descriptive poems were also sung in their honour by describing their physical beauty (Gault, 2019:25). These Syrian wedding customs are then cited to support the approach that SS is “an ancient Israelite epithalamium”, consisting of a series of songs meant to be sung during a wedding festival (Garrett, 2004:83).

##### 2.4.1.2 Interpretation of SS 6:12

The wedding-week theory provides no specific interpretation of SS 6:12 ff. per se.

##### 2.4.1.3 Evaluation

Despite the persuasiveness of these extra-biblical Syrian traditions, the wedding-week theory must also contend with several objections. Specifically, the two main challenges to this theory are that (i) SS not only deals with nuptial themes and (ii) that Syrian and ancient Jewish cultures do not correspond quite so neatly.

- i. *SS not only a nuptial song.* Although SS probably alludes to a wedding ceremony in 3:6-11, the rest of the text does not (Exum, 2011:79). Moreover, SS cannot with ease be divided into seven songs corresponding to the wedding-week ceremony (LaSor, 1996:516).
- ii. *Cultural gap between Syrian culture and SS.* A great problem with the Syrian wedding-week interpretation is the sheer gap between the nineteenth-century Syrian culture and SS in terms of culture and date (Garrett, 2004:83; Johnston, 2009:169). The Syrian wedding customs do not translate back into the culture of ancient Israel and therefore, this line of reasoning does not have substantial scholarly support (Exum, 2011:79; Garrett, 2004:83).

#### 2.4.2 Mythological interpretation

##### 2.4.2.1 Description and motivation

Also known as the “cultic” or “funerary” interpretation, the mythological interpretation argues that SS is a sanitized liturgical poem from a fertility cult (Garrett, 2004:82; Gault, 2019:26). In fertility cults, gods of various names, like Dumuzi or Tammuz, rise from the dead through the agency of their respective “goddess-consort,” for example Inanna or Ishtar (Garrett, 2004:82). According to this

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Wetzstein’s theory see, Delitzsch (1885:162-176) and Gault (2019:25).

interpretation, SS should be classified as a liturgy of the Tammuz-Ishtar cult, whose rites were practised by Israel (cf. Ezek. 8:14; Gault, 2019:26). This implies that SS should be read as a type of a sacred marriage between two gods of some sort or even as a sexual union between a deity and a human being (Gault, 2019:26; Longman III, 2001:45).

#### 2.4.2.2 Interpretation of SS 6:12

Pope (1977:590-591) interprets the word “chariot” not as a war instrument but rather as a mythological vehicle that transports the two lovers. Pope (1977:590) further suggests that one of the sacred marriage songs of Sumer<sup>22</sup> might have a possible parallel with SS 6:12. Other than these remarks, Pope gives no full interpretation of SS 6:12.

#### 2.4.2.3 Evaluation

Although the mythological interpretation of SS seems plausible on the surface, two key contradictions from SS and the wider OT context suggest otherwise, specifically (i) the lack of typical fertility cult motifs and (ii) the negative view of paganism in the OT.

- i. *Absence of fertility cult motifs.* SS lacks any of the common themes or motifs usually found in fertility cults (Garrett, 1993:362). For instance, the theme of death and resurrection is absent from SS (Garrett, 1993:362), as is the portrayal of the lovers as gods (Exum, 2011:80). Even when the lovers describe each other in metaphoric language, they never refer to each other as gods or goddesses (Exum, 2011:80).
- ii. *The OT rejects paganism.* Nowhere in the OT do we find any positive view of the Tammuz-Ishtar Cult (Longman III, 2001:45). What we do find in the OT is the rejection of any idolatrous cult (Ezek. 8:12, 14, 16) (Bullock, 1988:252; Gault, 2019:27). As Bullock (1988:252) rightly argues, “the possibility that any cultic associations of the Song were gradually displaced by the allegorical interpretation, thus paving the way for orthodox acceptance and canonization, is indeed remote.” In the early postexilic era, Israel would have been strongly against idolatry, and even in the later Hellenization of Israel, the priests and scribes guarded the holy Tanakh from foreign influences (Bullock, 1988:252).

Given that SS lacks the necessary motifs for identification as fertility cult literature and is written in Jewish tradition, which spurns the very mention of paganism, it follows that it is highly unlikely that SS is mythological (Garrett, 1993:362).

### 2.4.3 Dramatic interpretation

#### 2.4.3.1 Description and motivation

The dramatic approach was a popular way of interpreting SS in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Exum, 2011:78). Proponents of this view see SS as a written script for a dramatic

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<sup>22</sup> Pope (1977) refers to one of the sacred marriage songs of Sumer, as discussed by Kramer (1969:96).

performance, while others see it as a literary drama built on “the pattern of a theatrical model” (Johnston, 2009:38). In this framework, SS is divided into individual acts, speeches are attached to *dramatis personae*, and a plot is reconstructed within the text (Johnston, 2009:38; Longman III, 2001:39-40). Within this interpretation, two approaches emerge: (i) a two-character drama or (ii) a three-character drama (Longman III, 2001:40-42).

In the two-character drama, two historical figures are identified as the two major characters in SS, namely King Solomon and a rustic maiden, who is called the Shulammitte (Garrett, 1993:358). The plot, according to this approach, consists of King Solomon falling in love with this rustic maiden and then taking her to be his bride (Delitzsch, 1885:20-21). King Solomon is so flabbergasted by this rustic maiden’s pure and beautiful soul that he renounces his former polygamous lifestyle for true love (Exum, 2011:78).

According to the three-character drama, the three major characters in SS are King Solomon, the rustic maiden, and the rustic maiden’s shepherd lover (Exum, 2011:78). According to this plot, King Solomon is a lustful king, who has spotted the rustic maiden and wants to carry her away to his harem (Longman III, 2001:41). This rustic maiden, however, is already in love with a shepherd, and throughout SS she stays faithful towards him (Longman III, 2001:41).

#### 2.4.3.2 Interpretation of SS 6:12

The main difference between the two- and three-character approaches in terms of the interpretation of SS 6:12 is the identity of the speaker; in the two-character interpretation, it is the woman who speaks, while in the three-character approach, the voice belongs to the male lover.

- i. *Two-character hypothesis.* Delitzsch (1885:117-119) argues that 6:12 does not refer to movement within the Shulammitte's soul, but rather to her position as queen. The Shulammitte does not let her heart be taken over by pride because of her elevated position as queen (Delitzsch, 1885:119). The movement that the Shulammitte speaks of is her love for her people and for her king (Delitzsch, 1885:119). Therefore, the chariot that the Shulammitte refers to, is a reference to her people (Delitzsch, 1885:119).
- ii. *Three-character hypothesis.* The words in SS 6:12 are taken to be spoken by the male lover, who realizes with a shock that he is one of many men attracted to his beloved; “he joins the heard of ‘stallions’ straining after the beloved... and not quite recognizing himself in his own behavior” (Provan, 2001:251).

#### 2.4.3.3 Evaluation

Although the dialogue in SS points to a dramatic genre, this method of interpretation is faced with two main criticisms, including (i) the late introduction of this genre into Jewish tradition and (ii) the lack of other features which are fundamental to drama.

- i. *Historical anachronism.* Drama, as we know it today, is a creation of the Greeks dating roughly to the fifth century BC (Garrett, 2004:81; Johnston, 2009:40). Theatrical drama was only introduced to Israel in the Roman period, when the first amphitheatres were built (Johnston, 2009:40). Regardless of whether one opts for an early or late date composition for SS, in either case the dramatic genre would not have been introduced to Israel before the writing of SS (Garrett, 2004:81; Johnston, 2009:40). Therefore, the SS could not have been written as drama, seeing that the template for a drama was not yet introduced to the Israelites in Palestine (Johnston, 2009:41).
- ii. *Lacking features of a drama.* A central concern against the drama theory is that one must read a lot into the text in order to turn it into drama (Exum, 2011:78).<sup>23</sup> The result is very similar to the allegorical approach, but with the difference that details of historical value are read into the text and not those of spiritual value. For example, to have a dramatic plotline in SS, one has to “overinterpret the text in order to make the plot work” (Longman III, 2001:43). There is some sense of conflict and resolution (cf. SS 3:1-4; 5:2-7), but no consistent overarching plotline can be determined in SS (Carr, 1984:33). Another feature lacking in SS is the indication of *dramatis personae* (Johnston, 2009:41). Almost 10% of the time, the reader is uncertain as to who is speaking (Longman III, 2001:42-43). Therefore, it is difficult to accurately assign utterances to specific characters (Garrett, 1993:359). Other dramatic features lacking in SS include character development, stage directions, divisions into acts and episodes, narrative voice, etc. (Carr, 1984:33; Johnston, 2009:41).

The abovementioned discrepancies cast doubt on the validity of the interpretation of SS as drama, begging the question whether any viable alternatives still remain. The final alternative is discussed in the following section.

#### 2.4.4 Love poetry interpretation

##### 2.4.4.1 Description and motivation

With the discovery of Egyptian love poetry dating from the Ramesside Period between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties (c. 1300-1150 BC) (Long, 2008:750), scholars noticed striking similarities between the Egyptian songs and SS (Gault, 2019:28). Like SS, these Egyptian songs or “love lyrics” have no unifying storyline but rather consist of an unspecified combination of love poems (Longman III, 2001:50). Similar to SS, Egyptian love poetry portrays the human enjoyment of sexual love and describes it in the most erotic terms (Long, 2008:750). Both SS and Egyptian love songs place great emphasis upon describing the beloved in a physical sense and both appeal to tactile, auditory, gustatory, and visual senses (Cosby, 1984:62). In addition, both works describe the scenes

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<sup>23</sup> Garrett (2004:80-81) gives illustrations on how interpreters of the dramatic approach have to bend the text to fit into their storyline.

of lovemaking in very symbolic language by using bucolic imagery (Cosby, 1984: 62; Gault, 2019:28).

#### 2.4.4.2 Interpretation of SS 6:12

According to the love poetry interpretation, the words in SS 6:12 belong to the woman, expressing how her desire has overcome her and transported her into her lover's chariot (Longman III, 2001:187).

#### 2.4.4.3 Evaluation

In comparison with other methods of interpretation, the love poetry interpretation provides the most plausible interpretation for SS, as it takes the text at face value (cf. Greene-McCreight, 2005:455-456). Taking SS as love poetry requires fewer presuppositions than many of the previous interpretations mentioned above (Murphy, 1990:60). A few of the advantages of the love poetry interpretation include the following.

- i. *Cross-cultural consistency.* Rather than manipulating the text to fit to foreign interpretation methods, the love poetry interpretation finds its support by comparing SS to similar texts from the same cultural milieu, namely that of the ANE (Exum, 2011:30; Johnston, 2009:175).
- ii. *Makes sense of the poetic language.* The significance of the metaphors in SS is most notable when it is interpreted in the context of love poetry from the ANE (Garrett, 2004:90). The images of the poetic language are, as Garrett (2004:90) writes, "not theological, political, ideological or philosophical ciphers", but rather expressions of the emotion of love (Ryken et al., 1998:806). This will be explained in more detail in chapters four and five of this study.
- iii. *Makes sense of the characters.* The love poetry interpretation succeeds, to a great extent, in its identification of the characters in SS. If SS is poetry (as is argued above), it makes more sense to see the lovers as "creations of a literary imagination" (Gledhill, 1994:21). As Gledhill (1994) explains:

They are not real people acting out a real-life drama in a particular concrete situation. We do not know whether they are socially, intellectually or temperamentally compatible. We know nothing about their personalities. Were they shy introverts or noisy extroverts? Were they highly sophisticated city dwellers or simple country folk? What we do know, however, is how they respond to each other, and as much as their responses and feelings are those typical of all men and women in love, then we can identify with them. (p. 21)

The lovers are therefore not historical personae but are rather types of a man and a woman in love (Longman III, 2001:50). This implies that the figures in SS are universal, and their love is timeless (Exum, 2011:8).

In conclusion, for the reasons stated above, the present study considers the love poetry interpretation to provide the most plausible description of the genre of SS. The remainder of the study will therefore be carried out within this theoretical framework.

## **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter has set out to examine and evaluate the different interpretations that have been proposed for SS. The investigation has shown that one's approach to the interpretation of SS will undoubtedly affect or even change the meaning of the text. Although various interpretations have been put forward, the interpretation of SS as love poetry interpretation is the most convincing in light of SS scholarship. To date, it offers the most plausible explanation for SS without sacrificing the integrity of the text or succumbing to cultural influences. In comparison with the alternatives—including allegorical, reader-response, and other comparative methods—the love poetry interpretation is the most faithful to the character of SS. Thus, the present study and will henceforth approach SS as within the love poetry framework.

### 3. PREVIOUS STRUCTURAL ANALYSES OF SS

#### 3.1 Introduction

Literary structure refers to the purposeful organisation of the constituent parts of a piece of literature, including the techniques used to link the constituents into a seamlessly cohesive and beautifully artistic whole. The objective of structural analysis, according to Ryken (1992:209), is to (i) provide an overview of the piece of literature and (ii) to identify clear pathways of progression through the work. Having established the objective of structural analysis, the method of inquiry is straightforward; Dorsey (1999:16) identifies three steps in explicating the structure of a piece of literature:

- i. Identify the literature's most basic units;
- ii. pursue the ordering of the literature's most basic units; and
- iii. contemplate the literature's structure to its meaning.

Systematically parsing and explicating the progressive structure of a literary work, however, proves to be no easy feat, leading to many and often highly divergent theories.

The difficulty which continues to permeate biblical scholarship on the Song of Songs is the lack of consensus regarding its poetic structure. This debate is of considerable relevance to the present study, as a more comprehensive and accurate interpretation of SS 6:12 hinges on an understanding of the overall structure of the book (Hwang, 2003:97). The way in which one views the organization of SS will have a direct influence upon the meaning of SS 6:12 (Dorsey, 1999:17; Silva, 1994:221). Words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs are "capable of multiple meanings" in different contexts (Green, 2005:132). Green (2005:132) further explains that "[s]entences... in a text have their interpretation constrained by the preceding text, as words, sentences, and entire units of discourse are shaped in their significance by the larger contexts within which they appear."

As argued by Ryken (1992:207-208), the logical method in the explication of poetry is to move from the big to the small, guiding the reader by gradually bringing the text into sharper focus. Therefore, having reviewed previous interpretations of Song of Songs in chapter two, the purpose of the present chapter is to examine previous structural analyses of SS in order to determine the most reasonable structural scheme within which to analyse the syntactic and semantic import of SS 6:12 in Part 2 of this study. The present chapter is structured as follows. Section 3.2 highlights the challenges for structural analyses of SS, while section 3.3 reviews previous approaches to the structural analysis of SS. In section 3.4, a modified analysis is presented, and section 3.5 closes with a chapter summary.

### 3.2 Problem statement: Challenges for the structural analysis of SS

Various scholars have, in one way or another, tried to delineate SS's structure but have found that SS "is perhaps the most fluid and least amenable to organizational analysis" (Schwab, 2008:746). There are a number of reasons for this, of which the most basic include the following.

- i. *Insufficiency of traditional divisions.* The traditional chapter divisions in English and Afrikaans translations do not aid a reader sufficiently in making sense of SS's structure (Garrett, 2004:25; Schwab, 2008:746). Even in the BHS text, the 19 "setumah" markers (the Hebrew alphabet letter, ם, as a closed paragraph marker) and the one "petucha" marker (the Hebrew alphabet letter, פ, as an open paragraph marker) are placed at obvious places to demarcate passages, particularly for synagogue reading (Falk, 1993:xix; Garret, 2004:25; Murphy, 2003:128, 152). However, these markers are insufficient to aid the determining the structure of SS.
- ii. *Homogenous imagery.* Given that the imagery in SS flows continuously throughout the book, it is difficult to precisely demarcate the various poetic units within SS (Exum, 2011:37). The poetic imagery tends to blur distinctions from one unit to the next, without an obvious organizing principle (Schwab, 2008:746).
- iii. *Free use of parallelism.* Alter (2011:233) notes that semantic parallelism occurs within SS with a freedom hardly ever found in other poetic texts of the Bible. This implies that the parallelistic technique associated with many other poetic texts in the Bible cannot be meticulously applied to SS.
- iv. *Plurality of Poetic Devices.* SS is known to be embedded in poetic patterns, literary devices, and various forms of figurative language (Hunt, 2008:x). Because of the abundance of poetic features in SS, there is more than one avenue to follow in constructing a structure for SS (Exum, 2011:37). Exum (2011:37) notes that, in "[r]elying on different formal features and correspondences to isolate different poetic building blocks, different interpreters perceive different structural patterns."

These problems and numerous others contribute to the difficulty associated with SS's structure. As discussed further in section 3.3, this has led different scholars to grapple with the SS's structure in different ways, with many improbable avenues being taken (Johnston, 2009:37).

### 3.3 Previous approaches

To investigate all existing structural analyses<sup>24</sup> of SS falls outside the scope of this study. Based concluded in the previous chapter, this study is limited to investigating the main structural

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<sup>24</sup> For a survey of various structural approaches to SS from different interpretation theories, see Roberts (2001:6-18) and Johnston (2009:36-52, 163-80, 289-305).

analyses within the love poetry genre. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 3.1, considerable differences exist between within this camp (Longman III, 2001:54)<sup>25</sup>.

**Table 3.1** Comparisons of proposed divisions for SS

Number of poems	Carr (1984:45)	Fox (1985:94-180)	Gledhill (1994:7-9)	Longman III (2001:viii)	Garrett (2004:32)	Exum (2011:vi)
1	1:2-2:7	1:2-4	1:2-2-7	1:2-4	1:2-4	1:2-4
2	2:8-3:5	1:5-8	2:8-3:5	1:5-6	1:5-6	1:5-2:7
3	3:6-5:1	1:9-17	3:6-5:1	1:7-8	1:7-8	2:8-3:5
4	5:2-8:4	2:1-7	5:2-6:3	1:9-11	1:9-2:7	3:6-11
5	8:5-14	2:8-17	6:4-8:4	1:12-14	2:8-17	4:1-6:3
6		3:1-6	8:5-14	1:15-17	3:1-4:15	6:4-7:10
7		3:7-11		2:1-7	4:16-5:1	7:11-14
8		4:1-7		2:8-17	5:2-6:10	8:1-14
9		4:8-5:1		3:1-5	6:11-7:1	
10		5:2-6:3		3:6-11	7:2-8:4	
11		6:4-10		4:1-7	8:5-7	
12		6:11-7:6		4:8-9	8:8-12	
13		7:7-13		4:10-5:1	8:13-14	
14		8:1-5a		5:2-6:3		
15		8:5b-7		6:4-10		
16		8:8-10		6:11-12		
17		8:11-12		7:1-11		
18		8:13-14		7:12-14		
19				8:1-4		
20				8:5-7		
21				8:8-10		
22				8:11-12		
23				8:13-14		

The number of constituent poems given in the leftmost column corresponds to each scholar's parsing of SS. For example, Fox (1985) argues in favour of 18 distinct cycles of poems within SS, with the corresponding chapter and verse boundaries. The structural divisions encapsulated in Table 3.1 are not a comprehensive representation of all love poetry divisions for SS. The comparison illustrates, with just a few mentioned proposals, how different each scholar's view of the structure of SS is.

<sup>25</sup> For additional comparisons of various structural approaches from scholars who view SS as love poetry, consult Ogden and Zogbo (1998:5), Hwang (2003:99), Schwab (2008:747) and Exum (2011:39).

From the myriad of structural analyses in the literature on SS, two basic schools of thought can be identified:

- i. *SS as an anthology of independent love poems.* According to this view, SS is a collection of love poems, with each segmented poem acting as an independent unit with its own micro-structure (Roberts, 2001:17; Garrett, 2004:26).
- ii. *SS is a unified piece of literature.* In this school of thought, SS is a unified piece of literature with “an over-arching macro-structure” (Roberts, 2001:17; Garrett, 2004:26).

The discussion turns to these two schools of thought in the following sections.

### 3.3.1 SS's structure as an anthology of independent love poems

Scholars who read SS as an anthology of independent love poems follow an “atomistic approach” (Estes, 2010:291) to SS. These scholars argue that SS consists in its majority of unrelated poetry (Estes, 2010:291). According to this view, there is no deliberate or intentional arrangement of structure within SS (Roberts, 2001:485-486; Estes, 2010:291). Proponents who follow this approach include Brenner (1993), Falk (1993), and Keel (1994).

Fox (1985:205) identifies five criteria by which one can examine if SS should be understood as a loose anthology with only “superficial editing”. The criteria can be summarized as inconsistencies in (i) organisation and style, (ii) character identity, (iii) facts or events, (iv) doublets, and (v) lack of cross-references within sequential poems. For the purposes of the present discussion on the validity of viewing SS as an anthology of independent love poems, Fox's (1995:205) criteria will be slightly modified. In the following subsections, the arguments in favour of and against this view are assessed in light of (i) (dis)similarities with other texts of this genre, (ii) authorship, (iii) character identities, and (iv) plotline.

#### 3.3.1.1 Arguments for SS structure as an anthology of independent love poems

A few of the arguments made in favour of SS as a loose anthology are summarized as follows<sup>26</sup>.

- i. *Genre: Resemblance between SS and Egyptian love poetry.* Due to the parallels between SS and Egyptian love poetry (c. 1300-1150 BC, see Long, 2008:750), which typically consist of independent poems, White (1978:163) argues that SS is likewise “an anthology of disparate poems.” White (1978:163) concludes that SS consists of 30 independent poems, which are occasionally linked with “catchwords”.
- ii. *Authorship.* The tradition of Solomon as the sole author of SS has been criticized by various scholars (Falk, 1993:xiv; Longman III, 2001:2-7). This has led to the conclusion that SS is a

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<sup>26</sup> Fox (1985:202-204) also provides a summary of arguments for SS as a pure anthology, which he also critiques.

compilation of various poems (Falk, 1993:xiv; Longman III, 2001:7). If SS has multiple authorship in its origin, it follows that the poems in SS are independent of each other (Falk, 1993:xv).

- iii. *Character identities.* Some scholars argue that SS does not have a few fixed characters throughout its poems but rather has different characters or speakers (Brenner, 1993:268-269; Falk, 1993:xiv). It follows that, if the speakers in SS consist of different love couples, SS should be seen as consisting of distinct love poems (Brenner, 1993:269).
- iv. *Plotline.* Both Brenner (1993:269-269) and Keel (1994:15-17) assert that SS has no formal structure or plotline. Brenner (1993:268) states that “any reading of *meaning* into the principle(s) of organization, be it (they) structural or material, is motivated by the reader’s personal ideology or convictions.” For Brenner (1993:268-269), this implies that SS has no structure and therefore the poems should be regarded as a loose anthology. Although Keel (1994:17) acknowledges repeating formulas and metaphors, he reaches the same conclusion as Brenner (1993:268).

In sum, the arguments in favour of SS as an anthology of independent love poems include its resemblance to Egyptian love poetry, which consists of loose poems, the variation in its speakers, and the lack of a unifying plotline.

### 3.3.1.2 Arguments against SS structure as an anthology of independent love poems

In rebuttal of the argument in favour of SS as an anthology of independent love poems, the following counterarguments can be put forward.

- i. *Genre: Dissemblance between SS and Egyptian love poetry.* Although there are similarities between SS and Egyptian love literature, there are also notable differences. Most notably, in Egyptian love literature, the lovers typically speak *about* each other, while the lovers in SS predominantly speak *to* each other (Longman III, 2001:50; Gault, 2019:29). In contrast to SS, Egyptian love literature features “interior monologue (soliloquy), exterior monologue (where the speaker addresses another), double monologue (where one lover’s words are conjoined to the other’s or the speakers alternative)”, but no dialogue, as in SS (Exum, 2011:51).
- ii. *Authorship.* Even though it is probable that SS—in its final form—was authored or edited by various writers (Schwab, 2008:739), this does not necessarily imply that there is no unity within SS. The purpose of Solomon’s name in SS 1:1 and other verses (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) might be, as Exum (2011:90) argues, an editorial technique to create a “Solomonic aura” to SS,<sup>27</sup> or, as Estes (2010:274-275) argues, to provide a link to SS as a “wisdom text” in the Solomonic wisdom tradition. Also worth mentioning is that שִׁיר ‘the song’ in SS 1:1 is in the singular and not in the plural (Exum, 2011:91), implying that SS was seen in Jewish tradition

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<sup>27</sup> Ogden and Zogbo (1998:5) add that the recurrences of themes within SS advances the arguments that SS is indeed in some sense unified.

not as an anthology of independent love poems but rather as one poem (Exum, 2011:91). Furthermore, in contrast to the Psalms or Proverbs, SS has no superscriptions to indicate “composite status” (Exum, 2011:91).

- iii. *Character identities.* One would expect that, if the characters in the poems of SS were different from one to poem to another, there would be differences in terms of viewing love, sex, and the body (Exum, 2000:29). This, however, is not the case. Rather, a very similar tone about love, sex, and the body is found in the various poems (Exum, 2000:29). Furthermore, the male and female voices are placed in such a way in SS that the different poems form a dialogue between the man and the woman (Exum, 2000:29). Longman III (2001:15) perceptively points out that, although there is no overarching narrative, “the characters whom we hear in the Song have a consistency of persona.”<sup>28</sup>
- iv. *Plotline.* Although no plotline can be effortlessly discerned within SS, this does not of necessity imply that there is no unity within SS. When comparing SS with other anthologies, SS does indeed exhibit some sort of a structure (Fox, 1985:204). For instance, in comparison with the Papyrus Harris 500, consisting of three groups of songs which “have no closure, unity of character, or associative sequence...[,] the Song has strong unity of character portrayal, closure, coherence and associative sequences” (Garrett, 2004:30).

Thus, on the matters of genre, authorship, characters, and plotline, SS can be argued to be a unified piece of literature rather than an anthology of independent love poems.

### 3.3.1.3 Evaluation

In light of the criteria presented in section 3.3.1, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that SS is an anthology of independent love poems (Fox 1985:205; Exum 2011:35-36). Even the strongest adherents to the atomistic approach have been criticised for not trying to uncover the structure of SS but rather to “validate atomization” (Decker, 2001:174). In fact, this structural analysis has provoked a strong reaction among scholars against a pure atomistic view of SS and in favour of a more unified approach (Exum, 1973:48; Roberts, 2001:18).

### 3.3.2 SS as a unified piece of literature

Scholars within this category argue that the title of SS suggests that the book is composed as one unified song (Roberts, 2001:19; Davidson, 2003:44; Garrett, 2004:26). Scholars who identify SS as lyric poetry examine four diagnostics in finding unity, namely (i) a sequential narrative, (ii) dialogue, (iii) literary macrostructure, and (iv) repetition (Roberts, 2001:19-20; Estes, 2010:291).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Longman III (2001:15-17) gives an apt synopsis of the character's persona within SS.

<sup>29</sup> Estes (2010:291-292) also identifies “an impressionistic or poetic structure” in SS, though he uses the term ambiguously so that one does not know how it differs from the previous approaches. “Impressionism”, as Baldick (2015:179) points out, is in essence a very vague and subjective term.

The advantages and disadvantages of each of these diagnostics are weighed in the following subsections.

### 3.3.2.1 Unity through sequential narrative

The first method by which scholars seek to unify SS is by determining a linear narrative development or progression (Estes, 2010:42; Exum, 2011:42). Proponents of this approach include Glickman (1976), Deere (1986), Nelson (1998), and Duguid (2016).<sup>30</sup> A condensed version of Deere's (1986:1010) outline of SS sufficiently illustrates how SS is viewed by this approach. For the purpose of the current investigation, the place of SS 6:12 within this outline is emphasised (in bold) in Figure 3.1.

- I. Superscription (1:1)
- II. The courtship (1:2-3:5)
- III. The wedding (3:6-5:1)
- IV. The maturation of the marriage (5:2-8:4)
  - a. The indifference and solution (5:2-6:13)
    - i. The wife's indifference and the husband's absence (5:2-8)
    - ii. The attractiveness of the lover (5:9-16)
    - iii. The lover in his garden (6:1-3)
    - iv. The couple's reconciliation (6:4-13)**
  - b. Praise of the beloved and her love (7:1-10)
  - c. Invitation from the beloved (7:11-13)
  - d. The beloved's desire for greater intimacy (8:1-4)
- V. The conclusion (8:5-7)
- VI. Epilogue (8:5-14)

**Figure 3.1** Deere's (1986:1010) Outline of SS

The main argument in favour of a sequential narrative as the unifying force in SS is the evident progression of events (Deere, 1986:1010; Glickman, 1976:182-187). Roughly speaking, SS 1:2-3:5 is seen as the courtship section, SS 3:6-5:1 as the wedding, and 5:2-8:4 as the maturation in the couple's marriage (Deere, 1986:1010; cf. Duguid, 2016:xxi-xxii). The conclusion section (SS 8:5-7), however, interrupts the chronological order, as the epilogue contains a flashback (SS 8:8-12) to how the relationship began (Johnston, 2009:47). Duguid (2016:xxi-xxii) follows this pattern with

<sup>30</sup> Duguid (2016:xxi) denies that SS has "a straightforward sequential narrative." However, Duguid (2016:xxi) describes SS 3:6-5:1 as the couple's wedding consummation and sees anything described before or after this section, as before or after in terms of development.

some alterations. Although many variations of the sequential progression in SS have been proposed, scholars generally concede some form of development in the book's plotline.<sup>31</sup>

Although approaching SS as a sequential narrative seems logical at first glance, scholarly literature from the past two decades argues otherwise. Counterarguments to the narrative approach to SS rely on distinguishing between (i) narrative and narrativity, (ii) linearity and circularity, and (iii) episodocity and dialogue.

- i. *Narrative vs. narrativity.* The seeking of narrative elements within SS stems from confusing the concept of "narrativity" within poetic units as an indication that a piece of literature is a "narrative".<sup>32</sup> A NARRATIVE is a piece of literature that is interwoven with the basic elements of characters, plot, and setting (Phillips, 2008:492). These three elements, which usually constitute a narrative, are not easily identifiable within SS. Chronological indicators such as, for example, "when they had lived there about ten years" (Ruth. 1:4), are quite absent from SS (Phillips, 2008:494). On the other hand, NARRATIVITY, as Alter (2011:44) defines it, is "the narrative development of metaphor". In keeping with the general principle of parallelism within Biblical poetic verse, Alter (2011:42-43) explains that narrativity is the movement from one poetic line to the following by the underlying connection of syntagmatic<sup>33</sup> links within these poetic lines (Exum, 2011:44-45). These syntagmatic links can range from two or three poetic lines to a "small-scale" narrative, such as 2 Samuel 22 (Alter, 2011:43).<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, narrativity is the dominant pattern within SS poems (Alter, 2011:234), and therefore the movement from one line to another should not be regarded as an indication of a narrative.<sup>35</sup>
- ii. *Linearity vs. circularity.* Ryken (2008:62) aptly explains that "[a] plot is not simply a *succession* of events but a *sequence* of related events possessing a beginning, a middle, and an end... a plot gives us one or more *single* or *whole* actions." In light of this definition,

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<sup>31</sup> Tanner (1997:142) follows a literal-didactic approach and states that SS is framed by an *inclusio* with the words "brothers" and "vineyard" (Tanner, 1997:144-145; 152). However, he also asserts that SS is a story with a plot (Tanner, 1997:159; 160-161). Munro (1995:145-146) finds unity within SS through its continuous use of imagery, but finds some sort of narrative dynamic within it particularly regarding regal imagery and water imagery. Although Estes (2010:292) denies the sequential narrative approach and advocates for an impressionistic approach, he does acknowledge a "general temporal development" (2010:295) within SS and expounds the passages before SS 4:16-5:1 as indicating that the "Shulamith" has not had any sexual intercourse with "Solomon."

<sup>32</sup> Johnston (2009:45-50), in his evaluation of SS as "poetic narrative", seems to collapse the distinction between *narrativity* and *narrative* by using these terms synonymously.

<sup>33</sup> The syntagmatic axis "is the 'linear' aspect of language" (Baldick, 2015:354). Silva (1994:221) defines *syntagmatic relations* as "relations holding between units that may combine to form contexts." Syntagmatic relations stand in contrast to *paradigmatic relations*, which are "relations holding between similar but contrasting units that may occupy the same linguistic context" (Silva, 1994:220). For further discussion, see Silva (1994:119-120) and Baldick (2015:265, 354).

<sup>34</sup> For a more extensive explanation of narrativity, see Alter (2011:29-73).

<sup>35</sup> Exum (2011:42-44) argues that scholars like Fox (1985), Longman III (2001), Garrett (2004), etc. are guilty of acknowledging a sequential narrative progression within SS. However, this may also be a result of ambiguous terms used by the authors that refer to *narrativity* (cf. Exum, 2011:38).

it is improbable that a consistent plot may be traced within SS. Of course, SS consists of various events, but stringing these events into a linear sequence seems to be forcing the text beyond its intention (Estes, 2010:292; Johnston, 2009:48). Glickman (1976:183), a proponent of unifying SS through narrative sequence, admits that he too must wrangle the texts of SS together to form the sequence of the plotline. Based on the premise that the progression is not that easily identifiable, it follows that the linear approach is faulty. Furthermore, various passages before the so-called wedding night (SS 4:1-5:1) might suggest that the couple had already consummated their love (cf. SS 1:4, 17; 2:4-6, 17: 3:4) (Johnston, 2009:48-49). The endeavour of trying to construct a plotline within SS stems from the assumption that SS is chronologically arranged (Tanner, 1997:157). However, scholars have countered this argument by stating that SS is not arranged chronologically (Ryken, 2008:279) but is more accurately *circular* in its progression (Gledhill, 1994:37-38; Munro, 1995:65, 146; Ryken 2008:279; Exum, 2011:45). In the words of Carr (1993:291), the “individual units seem to fold back on each other rather than moving the story forward.”

- iii. *Episodicity vs. dialogue.* Like the linearity argument, the argument that SS has a typical episodic structure is also unlikely, given that episodic structure necessitates a central and—crucially—consistent character (Baldick, 2015:122).<sup>36</sup> The presence of such a character links the various episodes to each other, with each episode constituting a part of the larger story (Ryken, 2014:80). However, rather than demarcating episodes, the various scenes in SS form a dialogue between the man and woman without exclusively focusing on the woman as character (cf. SS. 5:9, 6:11-12, 7:1, 8:8-9).

In summary, the progressive tendencies within SS point to circular narrativity marked by dialogue rather than an overall linear and episodic narrative plotline. Crucially, it must be borne in mind that SS is poetry; therefore, when constructing a structure for SS, one must adhere to the rules of Hebrew poetic literature.

### 3.3.2.2 Unity through dialogue

Scholars argue that SS has a strong unity within itself solely in terms of its dialogue<sup>37</sup> (Exum, 2011:38; Murphy, 1990:62). Exum (2011:38) argues that “the poetic development of the Song” is determined by the dialogue from the man, woman, and women of Jerusalem. Proponents of this method include Murphy (1990) and Exum (2011:38). A typical outline of SS based solely upon dialogue is shown in Figure 3.2 (based on Exum, 2011:38-41; Johnston, 2009:51; divisions according to the BHS).

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<sup>36</sup> An example of episodes linked via a central character within the Bible is the story of Abraham (Ryken, 2014:80). “In Genesis 12, the call of Abraham (vv. 1-9) and Abraham and Sarah’s sojourn in Egypt (vv. 10-2) are episodes in the larger story of Abraham” (Ryken, 2014:80).

<sup>37</sup> Dialogue can be defined as “[t]he technique of embodying literary content in the form of conversation between two or more people in a story.”

- I. Compilation of various speeches from the man, the woman, and the woman of Jerusalem (1:2-2:7)
- II. The woman's first long speech (2:8-3:11)
- III. The man's first long speech (4:1-5:1)
- IV. The woman's second long speech (5:2-6:3)
- V. The man's second long speech (6:4-7:10)
  - i. *Man's first metaphoric description of the woman (6:4-6:10)*
  - ii. **Woman's speech for man to visit the nut garden (6:11-12)**
  - iii. *Other voices than that of the man or woman (7:1)*
  - iv. *Man's second metaphoric description of the woman (7:2-10)*
- VII. Compilation of various speeches from the man, the woman and the women of Jerusalem (7:11-8:14)

**Figure 3.2** Outline of SS based on dialogue (Exum, 2011:38-41; Johnston, 2009:51)

Murphy (1990:62), who finds no "overt literary structure" in SS, believes that the dialogue between the primary characters creates a "contrived unity". This dialogic structure creates a sequential arrangement of poetic units within SS and lends a coherence to the text (Murphy, 1990:66).

Though ostensibly plausible, this dialogic structure is not a failproof solution to the question of unity in SS. While it is true that there is dialogue within SS (Ryken, 2014:59), SS is first and foremost lyric poetry and cannot simply be reduced to a dialogue (Ryken, 2014:59; Strawn, 2008:443). Criticisms against this approach appeal to (i) the lack of historical annotations in Hebrew manuscripts and (ii) the discontinuity in the dialogue.

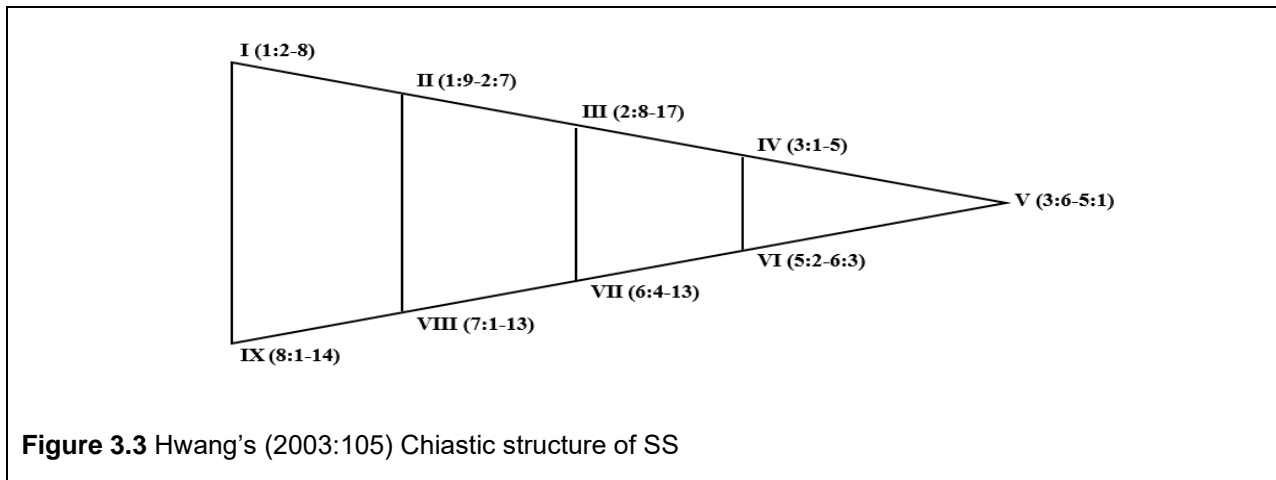
- i. *Lack of historical divisions.* The foremost challenge for the dialogue approach to the unity of SS is that title identifications for the various speakers within SS are absent in the original Hebrew manuscript (Longman III, 2001:42). The LXX is the first manuscript to have notations in the margins assigning verses to certain characters (Webster, 1982:73). The earliest examples of rubrics within the text of SS are seen in the Greek manuscripts *Alexandrinus* and *Sinaiticus* (Carr, 1984:47; Longman III, 2001:42). If dialogue was the primary way by which SS should have been divided, one would arguably expect such titles to have been part of the original MT text.
- ii. *Dialogic discontinuity.* Arguments in favour of dialogic divisions usually draw them as a last attempt (cf. Murphy, 1990:62, 64-65; Exum, 2011:38). Murphy (1990:64), who argues for a "dialogue structure" for SS, acknowledges that there is an "apparent lack of continuity at several points in the text, where there are sudden shifts of scene, topic, and ostensible speaker." Likewise, while Exum (2011:38) argues that SS is "composed of two cycles of long speeches" each from the man and woman, she (2001:40) acknowledges that the second long speech of the man (6:4-7:10 [ET SS 6:4-7:9]) is interrupted by the woman's words in SS 6:11-

12, thus breaking the pattern. Furthermore, the dialogic structure for SS often fails because, in seeking to identify which speech should be given to which character, it may misattribute text to the wrong speaker (Johnston, 2009:51-52).

In conclusion, although it has echoes of drama, SS is lyric poetry, employing various techniques, including—but not limited to—dialogue (Ryken, 2014:59). In light of historical facts and dialogic discontinuity, the unity of the book cannot solely hinge upon dialogic interactions between the various poetic voices.

### 3.3.2.3 Unity through literary chiastic macrostructure

Adherents of the chiastic method argue that SS is unified by rhetorical figures, like an inclusio<sup>38</sup> or chiasm<sup>39</sup>, creating recurring motifs which form parallels within SS (Exum, 1973:49). Literature endorsing this approach include Carr (1984), Davidson (2003), Exum’s (1973) earlier work, Garrett (2004)<sup>40</sup>, and Hwang (2003). There is general agreement among scholars that the first unit, SS 1:2-2:7, corresponds approximately with the last unit, SS 8:5-14 or 8:8-14 (Roberts, 2001:24). SS 3:6-5:1 forms some sort of thematic climax within SS (Roberts, 2001:24). There also seems to be some sort of a recurring dream sequence in SS 3:1-4 and SS 5:2-8 (Murphy, 1990:63). Hwang (2003:105) provides a quintessential example of a chiastic structure for SS, as reproduced in Figure 3.3.



Scholars who argue for a literary macrostructure for SS do so because reoccurring phrases, words, motifs, themes, character portrayal, parallelisms, and refrains within the book appear at “crucial junctures”, contributing to the idea that SS is a structured unity (Exum, 1973:49; Dorsey, 1990:82; Tanner, 1997:152). Specifically, it is argued that the structured unity of SS is a chiasm, in which

<sup>38</sup> Also known as an “envelope structure” (Longman III, 2008:323). Ryken (2014:76) defines this device as “[t]he use of identical or similar material at the beginning and ending of a story or poem.”

<sup>39</sup> A chiasm can basically be defined as a “literary pattern in which the second half of a work takes up the same subject as the first half, but in reverse order” (Ryken, 2014:42).

<sup>40</sup> Garrett (2004:31) differs from the aforementioned scholars in the sense that he does not argue for a precise chiastic structure for SS, but rather for an asymmetrical chiasm.

parallel poems within SS ultimately “revolve around the central pivot at Song (4:16-5:1)” (Garrett, 2004:35; see also Exum, 1973:49; Shea, 1980:396).

As with previous approaches to unity in SS, the chiasmic approach is not without its challenges, namely (i) the excess of distinguishing features in SS and (ii) unbalanced parallels.

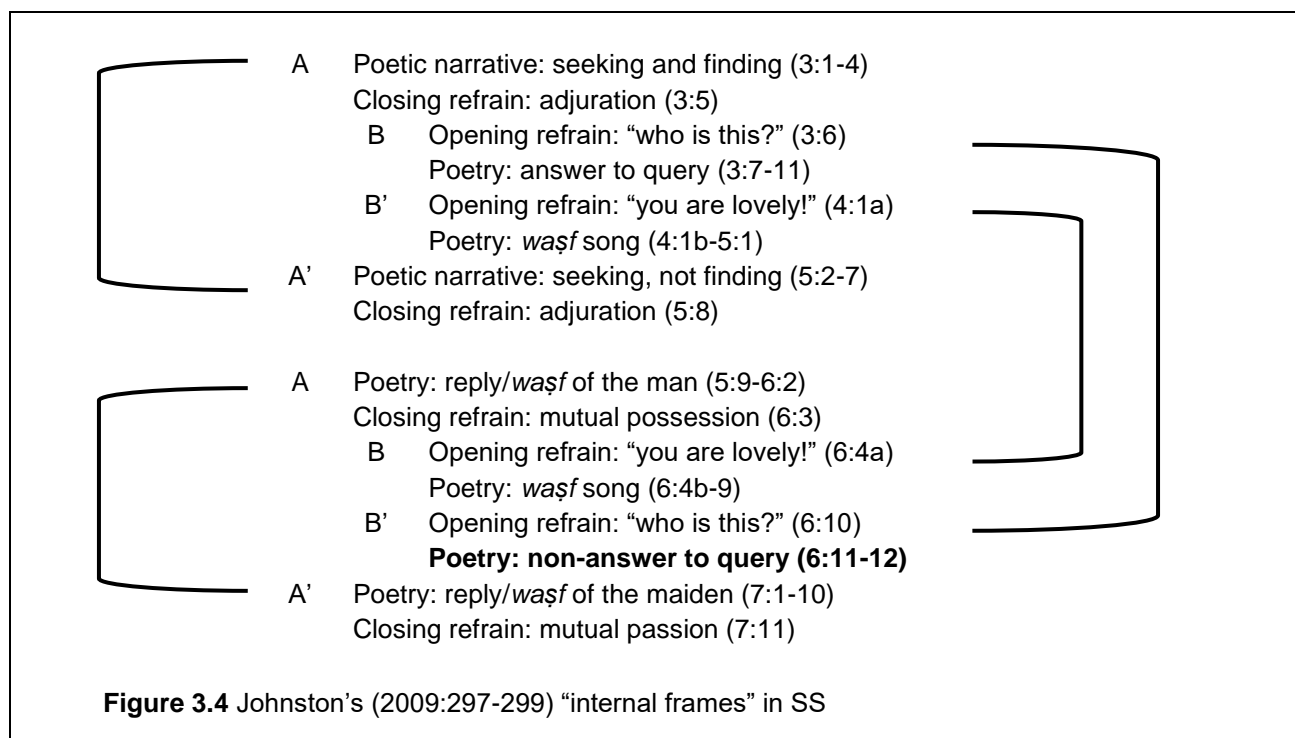
1. *Excess of structural features.* One of the reasons why this method is practically difficult to employ within SS is that the book is saturated with “structural features [which] one could isolate and find meaningful” (Exum, 2011:37). Exum (2011:37), who previously sought to follow a formalistic approach towards SS (Exum, 1973), points out that the abundance of structural features in SS leads to a plethora of potential patterns and interpretations. The text of SS “has numerous repetitions of words and key phrases, inclusions and parallels” (Tanner, 1997:154), and therefore, to force a simplified poetic pattern onto SS is to undermine its poetic artistry.
2. *Unbalanced parallels.* Where the literary macrostructural method succeeds in demarcating “sectional boundaries”, it fails to determine exact parallel units within SS (Tanner, 1997:27). For example, although parallels seem to be noticeable between SS 1:1-2:7 and SS 8:5-14, it can also be argued that SS 2:8-17 has parallels with SS 8:5-14 (Tanner, 1997:154). In reviewing M.S. Elliott’s (1989) *The literary unity of the Canticle*, Landy (1991:571) writes that Elliott “tends to gloss over contrast and elements conducive to disunity.” Hwang (2003:105), who also argues for a chiasmic structure for SS, admits that the variation between the size and number of proposed “micro-structural” units “arouses suspicion among scholars”.

In summary, although literary macrostructural proposals have some weight to their argument, they ultimately press the details of SS into moulds in which they do not naturally fit (Tanner, 1997:154). As Longman III (2001:56) observes, “[t]he fact that these scholars do not agree in their analyses bears out the subtle manipulation of the evidence necessary to make their patterns work.” When approaching SS 6:12, Roberts (2001:486) admits that both the difficulty of SS 6:12 and the inadequate method of a literary macrostructure contribute to the misunderstanding of SS 6:12. Murphy (1990:63) concludes by stating that “[t]he problem is to determine whether or not minute stylistic features are sure signs of structure, assessing them in light of other coherent sequences, which weigh against literary unity.”

#### 3.3.2.4 *Unity through repetition*

In the fourth approach, the organizing principle for SS is argued to be found in the reoccurring refrains. Among others, scholars who see the structure of SS made up through repeating refrains, include Johnston (2009) and Ogden and Zogbo (1998). Johnston (2009:296-299) identifies “double” and “single” refrains which respectively constitute an “external frame” and an “internal frame”. Additionally, Johnston (2009:299-305) identifies five sets of parallel panels within SS, which are formed by repetition of keywords, parallel sequences, and refrains. Johnston’s (2009:296-299)

“internal frames” illustrate how he positions SS 6:12 strictly according to refrains. This is illustrated below in Figure 3.4.



Ogden and Zogbo (1998:6), on the other hand, broadly identify six poems, demarcated by reiterating refrains, while also acknowledging the reoccurrence of “keywords” throughout SS (i.e. “flowers” in SS 4:5; 5:13; 6:2, 3) (Ogden & Zogbo, 1998:9). Although it can hardly be doubted that reoccurring refrains do appear within SS (Ryken, 2014:172), they alone are not necessarily sufficient markers of unity. The recurring refrains as well as the recurring images and themes within SS are so numerous that, in the words of Landy (2011:35), “[t]he analysis of the repetitions in the Song would be an exhausting business, since normally we are dealing with a multitude of equivalences: the Song is an extraordinarily intricate fabric.” Such an approach is therefore quite problematic if one is trying to forge SS’s structure according to a strict repetition structure.

### 3.4 Proposed structural analysis

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the structural analysis of SS has a considerable effect upon the understanding of SS 6:12. Having discussed various approaches to the structure of SS, we can now briefly indicate how the different proposals view the literary context of SS 6:12. See Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Effect of structural approaches on SS 6:12		
Structural approach		Effect on SS 6:12
Atomistic approach		SS 6:12 should be read in relative isolation from the rest of SS without trying to compare the various poems within SS.
Unified approach	Narrative approach	SS 6:12 should be read within the larger narrative development within SS and investigated regarding how it helps move the progression along.
	Dialogue approach	SS 6:12 should be read as being part of a dialogue between the man and the woman. The verse should then be compared with the other speeches from the same speaker, whether it is the woman or the man.
	Chiastic approach	The parallel unit of SS 6:12 should be identified. With comparative analyses the meaning of SS 6:12 can then be determined within the literary chiasm of SS.
	Repetition approach	Themes recurring in refrains should be identified within SS 6:12 explicated accordingly.

At this juncture, the problem faced by the present study is that many of the structural proposals evaluated above struggle to explain the structure of SS in its entirety, without denying many of its structural intricacies. Dorsey's (1990:81) words still ring true today: "The literary structure of the Song of Songs has been the subject of considerable scholarly controversy over the centuries... and there is still no consensus regarding either the book's unity or the number of constituent units/songs that comprise it." This statement, however, does not mean that all mentioned proposals are consistently inadequate or even that this whole chapter has been unfruitful. Indeed, the literature review conducted in the present chapter has unveiled several conclusions. Firstly, SS is characterized by

indications of both unity and disunity. The repetition of verses, themes, images, vocabulary, and character labels achieves a certain unity. And yet, the absence of a clear plot movement and the lack of a consistent development in the relationship between the central pair undercut this apparent unity. (Huwiler, 1999: 235)

In other words, SS strikes a balance between uniformity and variation. Ultimately, however, the discussion tends to favour the position that SS is indeed a unified work. Thus, the second conclusion reached in the present chapter is that, although SS displays varied uniformity—or uniform variation—, it is compellingly unified, and this is especially shown in the studies done by Murphy (1979) and Fox (1985:202-226). At the risk of becoming redundant, the following list presents a few of the most persuasive points in support of the unity of SS .

- i. *Repetends*<sup>41</sup>. Various phrases reoccur throughout SS, with somewhat varied form, including "adjuration" (SS 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4), "romance" (SS 2:6, 8:3), "mutual possession" (SS 2:16,

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<sup>41</sup> A repetend is a "word, phrase, or line that recurs in a poem" (Baldick, 2015:308). It differs from a refrain in the sense that a repetend only repeats partially, or "only at irregular intervals" (Baldick, 2015:308). Some scholars use the term "refrain" when speaking of repetends (cf. Johnston, 2009:289-292; Murphy, 1979:436-437). See the discussion on repetends by Fox (1985:209-210).

- 6:3, 7:11), “gazelle” (SS 2:17; 4:7; 8:14), “admiration” (SS 1:15; 4:1; 6:4), and “query” repetends (SS 3:6; 6:10; 8:5) (Fox, 1985:209; Johnston, 2009:290-292; Murphy, 1979:99).<sup>42</sup>
- ii. *Repeating keywords.* These keywords include “beloved” (SS 5:2-8; 6:1-3), “garden” (SS 4:16; 6:2; 11), “Solomon” (SS 1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12), and “vineyard” (SS 1:6, 14; 2:15; 7:12) (Murphy, 1979:438-439; Ogden & Zogbo, 1998:9).
  - iii. *Recurring motifs.* The motifs relating to “seek” and “find” (SS 3:1-4; 5:6-8), “fruit” (SS 1:3; 2:5; 6:11; 7:13), “flowers” (SS 4:5; 5:13; 6:2, 3) and “open” (SS 5:2-6) recur at regular intervals (Ogden & Zogbo, 1998:9).
  - iv. *Associative sequences.* This refers to clusters of words or phrases that reoccur in the same order elsewhere in SS (Fox, 1985:215). This type of reoccurrence creates parallels within SS, including the nocturnal sequences (3:1-5; 5:2-8) and the descriptive poems (*waṣf*) (SS 4:1-7; 6:4-10) (Johnston, 2009:304). For example, the descriptive poems (SS 4:1-7; 6:4-10) both start with praise of the woman’s beauty (SS 4:1; 6:4); both describe the physical charms of the woman in identical order: eyes, hair, teeth, (lips), cheeks (SS 4:1-2, 3; 6:5-7); and both use gradual numeral parallelism<sup>43</sup> (SS 4:4; 6:8) (Johnston, 2009:304).
  - v. *Character portrayal.* There seems to be a consistent character portrayal of the man and woman throughout SS (Fox, 1985:217).

Although the above list is by no means all-encompassing, it does reveal unifying patterns within SS. The continual occurrence of repetends, keywords, motifs, and associative sequences within SS points to the prominence of repetition throughout the whole of the book. This seems to indicate that SS is predominantly structured by these reoccurring devices of repetition, in one way or another, and thus analysable within this framework. Therefore, arguments for structuring SS according to repetition provide the strongest support to date. Although in no sense a conclusive study, the premise that repetition is crucial in making sense of SS, will be adopted in the remainder of this study.

### 3.5 Chapter summary

The purpose of the present chapter has been to review previous approaches to the structural analysis of Song of Songs in order to determine the literary context of SS 6:12. A summary of the main approaches is presented in Table 3.3.

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<sup>42</sup> For further discussion on refrains, see Longman III (2008:641-643).

<sup>43</sup> For example, “one thousand bucklers//all the shields” (SS 4:4); “sixty queens//eighty concubines//innumerable virgins” (SS 6:8).

<b>Table 3.3</b> Summary of previous analyses of the structure of SS		
<b>Structural approach</b>	<b>Effect on SS 6:12</b>	<b>Proponents</b>
Atomistic approach	SS is composed of independent love poetry, with no intentional organising principle.	Brenner (1993); Falk (1993); Keel (1994).
Unified approach	Narrative approach	Although love poetry, the poems of SS follow a linear narrative development.
	Dialogue approach	SS is organised mainly through the conversation between the primary characters, namely the man and the woman.
	Chiastic approach	SS is a literary unit, structured according to rhetorical figures, e.g. chiasm.
	Repetition approach	SS is structured mainly through repetition of words, themes, phrases refrains, et cetera.

The evaluation of the above-mentioned methods of analysing the structure to SS is by no means comprehensive. What the study does indicate is that, while no sure structural proposal fits perfectly onto the fluidity which SS exhibits, each structural proposal, when not taken to its extreme form, highlights a certain facet of the structure of SS. The atomistic approach points out that SS is divisional at many places and manifests a loose poetic structure. The narrative approach highlights that narrativity is expressed in the poems of SS, and therefore that a cyclic poetic progression is discernible in the whole of SS. The dialogic analysis stresses that many of the poems within SS rotate around the interaction between man and the woman, guiding the reader in understanding many of the characters' reactions. The literary approach highlights many of SS's artistic poetic devices—such as chiasms and inclusios—which bring structural unity between many of the poems within SS. The repetition approach shows that repetition, in the form of recurring themes, keywords, images, refrains, et cetera, are discernible and have the purpose of emphasizing the cyclic aspect of sexual love between the man and woman.

This chapter had shown that many extensive studies have been done on the structure of SS, without any consensus on the appropriate analysis. This does not imply that SS has no structure, as is indicated above. In light of all the arguments presented in this chapter, the present study understands repetition to be the most powerful—but not exclusive—unifying device in SS.

Dorsey (1990:36) emphasizes that the structure of a particular piece/genre of literature is linked to its theme and message. SS is lyric poetry about the intimate sexual love between a man and a woman and therefore, in accordance with SS's theme on sexual love, the structure conveys the fluidity of love and that sexual love cannot be pressed into a precise scheme or mould. Sexual

love between a man and woman moves repetitively, cyclically, and rapidly at certain times and shows that there are no bounds to the enjoyment of sexual love within God's design (cf. Gen 1,2). Fox (1985:226) aptly summarizes this point with the following words: "The Song takes a single romance and turns it around and around like a gem, displaying all its facets. The reader finally sees the gem as a whole, and the order in which the facets were shown does not much matter."

# **PART TWO: DATA AND ANALYSIS**

**TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF**

**SS 6:12**

## 4. SYNTACTICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF SS 6:12

### 4.1 Introduction

Having reviewed previous interpretations and structural analyses of Song of Songs in Part One, Part Two of the present study now turns to a closer analysis of SS 6:12 in order to determine the most accurate translation and interpretation thereof. More specifically, the present chapter conducts a linguistic study of the morphosyntax and semantics of SS 6:12, with the objective of producing a faithful formal translation which will serve as the basis of the literary analysis in chapter five. At its core, the problem posed by SS 6:12 is twofold, namely the *(i)* structural ambiguity and *(ii)* semantic or lexical ambiguity.

Regarding the first challenge, while all the constituents in SS 6:12 are superficially in the correct order—that is, breaking no phrase structure rules (i.e., determiners precede nouns, verbs select noun phrases, etc.)—, the constituents may be syntactically combined and subdivided in various ways, creating structural ambiguity, also known as AMPHIBOLOGY. Consider the examples in (11), in which square brackets are used to demarcate possible subdivisions. Syntacticians use tree diagrams to illustrate these differences.

- (11) The girl saw the man with a telescope
- (a) The girl [saw the man with a telescope] – ‘the girl used a telescope to see the man’
  - (b) The girl saw [the man with a telescope] – ‘the girl saw a man who had a telescope’

While all the constituents in (11) are syntactically in the “correct” order, the meaning of the sentence changes based on the internal combination of those constituents. A similar problem is posed by SS 6:12.

In addition to the structural ambiguity, SS 6:12 also contains lexical or semantic ambiguity, that is, when one word form corresponds to multiple meanings. Consider, for instance, the phrase, “he found a bat”, where “bat” could either mean “flying nocturnal animal” or “object used to hit a ball”. While the lexical ambiguity in SS 6:12 is not quite as drastic, several words are heavily nuanced and correspond to multiple lexical senses. The syntactic and semantic ambiguity in SS 6:12 may, however, be decoded by looking at morphological and other contextual clues in the text itself. As Osborne (2006:82) quite aptly explains, “[w]ords provide the building blocks of meaning, [and] grammar and syntax the design.”

The present chapter is arranged as follows. In section 4.2, the sample of English and Afrikaans Bible translations to be used for data collection in the linguistic study are listed and scrutinised. In section 4.3, the five syntactico-semantic challenges for the translation of SS 6:12 are identified and analysed. Solutions to these five challenges are proposed in section 4.4, followed by a synthesis of the findings and a workable translation of SS 6:12 in section 4.5. For the purposes of the present chapter, the study is confined to a linguistic analysis of the text, leaving literary and interpretative implications for discussion in chapter five.

## 4.2 Previous translations

The first step in determining the most accurate translation of SS 6:12 is to scrutinize previous translations and to identify common trends. Section 4.2.1 briefly defines translation, its purpose, and main schools of thought, followed in section 4.2.2 by a description of the criteria considered in the sampling of English and Afrikaans Bible translations.

### 4.2.1 Purpose and method of translation

The purpose of this subsection is to briefly define translation and its purpose in order to equip the reader for the ensuing discussion on SS 6:12. An in-depth discussion of the finer points of translation theory and the issues associated with it is beyond the scope of this study and are thus not discussed here. The purpose of translation is to communicate the equivalence of what was first expressed in the source language (“SL”) in the target or receptor language (“TL”) (Fee & Strauss, 2007:21; Van Leeuwen, 2005:812). According to Fee and Strauss (2007:30-31), the process of translating is guided by the following two questions.<sup>44</sup>

- i. If it is interpreted in its original context, what is the meaning of the text (Fee & Strauss, 2007:30)? The original context includes the syntactic, literary context of the text as well as the socio-historical context of the authors and readers (Fee & Strauss, 2007:30-31; Osborne, 2006:37).
- ii. How can the meaning of the text in its original context be accurately reproduced in the target or receptor language (Fee & Strauss, 2007:31)?

The two questions described above imply that, essentially, no two languages are ever isomorphic (Rhodes, 2009:20; Silva, 1994:175). This process of translation is intertwined with interpretation, for as Fee and Strauss (2007:31) argue, “all translation involves interpretation”. However, translators differ as to the extent to which interpretation is permitted to influence translation. Translation theorists thus identify three main types of translation, namely (i) formally, (ii) functionally, and (iii) optimally equivalent translation (Klein et al., 2017:191).<sup>45</sup>

- i. *Formally equivalent translations.* Also known as “literal” or “word-for-word” translations (Fee & Strauss, 2007:26; Duvall & Hays, 2008:80). This approach to translation tries to “map” the source language onto the target language in such a way that the word boundaries, syntax, and structure are mostly preserved (Duvall & Hays, 2008:80; Fee & Strauss, 2007:26).
- ii. *Functionally equivalent translations.* Also known as “idiomatic” or “thought-for-thought” translations (Duvall & Hays, 2008:80). This translation theory seeks to carry over only the

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<sup>44</sup> The two summarized questions presuppose many difficulties the translator has to overcome in order to achieve the translation being opted for. For the purpose of our study, it is not necessary to go into all the details. For further reading, see Dewey (2004:67-89) and Rhodes (2009:17-28).

<sup>45</sup> For a summary concerning the goals, strengths, weaknesses, and examples of each translation theory, see Fee and Strauss (2007:34).

meaning of the source text as clearly as possible into the target or receptor language (Fee & Strauss, 2007:28; Klein et al., 2017:191).

- iii. *Optimally equivalent translations*. Also known as “mediating translations” (Fee & Strauss, 2007:28), this translation theory seeks to maintain a middle ground between the first two approaches by prioritizing both clarity and accuracy (Fee & Strauss, 2007:28; Klein et al., 2017:191). It therefore seeks “to maintain a balance between form and function” (Fee & Strauss, 2007:28) within each Biblical passage, although a given translation may slightly favour one or the other (Klein et al., 2017:191).

In other words, while the goal of translation is to produce a TL equivalent of the SL utterance, translators differ as to where the equivalence lies—form, meaning, or both—, and how much interpretation and inference should be conveyed by the final translation. Like other literature, Bible translations also fall on the full extent of this spectrum.

#### 4.2.2 Criteria for sampled translations

As the purpose of this chapter is simply to get an impression of the main trends in the translation of SS 6:12, the data in this investigation consist of a small, yet well-balanced sample of 36 translations. To reference the full list of translations included in the present study, complete with publication date, translation name, translation abbreviation, receptor language, and full translation of SS 6:12, see Appendix B. The translations included in this sample were selected based on following five criteria, namely (i) language, (ii), popularity, (iii) date of publication, (iv) extra-biblical scholastic authority, and (v) theory of translation.

Firstly, translations were evaluated for inclusion in the sample based on the language. The quantity of freely available translations in these languages and relevance for the immediate intended audience of the present study were the two main subcriteria. The first of the two target languages included in the data sample is English. As the current lingua franca, many Bible translations are being produced within the English language, providing a wealth of data readily available for analysis (Sheeley & Nash, 1997:18-21; Klein et al., 2017:192-196). The second language included in the sample is Afrikaans, the predominant language in the (Dutch) Reformed tradition of South Africa.

Overlapping somewhat with criterium (i), the second desideratum for inclusion in the data sample was popularity of the given translation. Widely read as well as relatively obscure and regionally isolated translations were included. Popularity was determined in terms of approximate number of copies published, as well as frequency with which the translations are cited in scholarly works (Dewey, 2004:25-25; Klein et al., 2017:192, 196).<sup>46</sup> Popular translations, such as the NIV (2011), usually enjoy a wide circle of reading and therefore become very influential. On the other hand, more obscure translations, such as the NCV (2005), may employ unconventional wording, and

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<sup>46</sup> For historical introductions to the various major English Bible translations, see Dewey (2004:115-197) and Rhodes (2009:65-208).

thus contribute to the richness of the corpus. Date of publication was also a major factor in evaluating translations for inclusion in the sample, as translations within a particular timeframe tend to adhere to the translation philosophy of the time (Roberts, 2001:6). Therefore, the inclusion of Bible translations spanning 422 years ([GNV, 1599] - [NRSVUE, 2021]) renders the sample more balanced.

Fourthly, translations proposed in extra-biblical sources (such as commentaries or articles) were also included provided that the source was scholarly, peer-reviewed, and authoritative. These alternatives, although not adopted in mainstream Bible translations, highlight important theories and advances in the translation and interpretation of SS 6:12. Lastly, translations were included so as to represent the three main schools of translation theory. Table 4.1 illustrates how groups the translations included in the present study according to the translation theory which they espouse (Duvall & Hayes, 2008:81; Fee & Strauss, 2007:28; Klein et al., 2017:196; Strauss, s.a.).

<b>Table 4.1</b> Translation sample grouped according to theory		
Formal translations	Functional translations	Optimal translations
GNV (1599); YLT (1898); ASV (1901); KJV (1611); NKJV (1982); KJ21 (1994); NICOT (2001); Robert (2001); WBC (2004); Afr1933/53; BCOTWP (2005); OTL (2011); Alter (2019); ESV (2018); NASB (2020); Afr2020; NRSVUE (2021)	CEV (1995); NCV (2005); GW (2020); CJB (1998); OJB (2011); NLT (2015); GNT (1992); REB (1989)	HCSB (2009); CEB (2011); NIV (2011); Afr1983; REC (2016); CSB (2017); LEB (2012); ISV (2014); JB [1966]; NJB(1999)

Section 4.2 has described the method and criteria involved in data collection. The reader is once more referred to Appendix B for the complete list of the 36 translations of SS 6:12. The following section proceeds with the initial analysis of these data.

### **4.3 Challenges in the syntactic-semantic analysis of SS 6:12**

The most striking observation of the data in Appendix B is that—apart from two pairs of the 36 translations (BST & NIV [2011]; KJV [1611] & KJ21 [1994])—no two translations are exactly alike. A mammoth 94% of the 36 translations included in the data sample are unique. Moreover, some translations exhibit considerable deviations from the Masoretic text in order to achieve their proposed translation (Afr1983; CSB [2017]; NET).

The data were parsed according to the word divisions found in the Masoretic Text. For each Hebrew word, the corresponding text in the target language was isolated as cleanly as possible. A sample entry at this stage of data analysis is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Sample entry in data analysis							
BHS	לֹא	יָדַעְתִּי	נַפְשִׁי	שָׂמַתְנִי	[Prep.]	מִרְכָּבוֹת	עַמִּי-נָדִיב:
NRSVUE (2021)	Before	I was aware	my desire	set me	in	a chariot	beside my prince
Alter (2019)	scarcely	I knew myself	she	set me	in	the chariot	noblest
KJV (1611)	Or ever	I was aware	my soul	made me	like	the chariots	of Amminadib
HCSB (2009)	Before	I knew it	my desire	put me	among	the chariots	of my noble people
NLT (2015)	Before	I realized it	my strong desire	had taken me	to	the chariot	of a noble man
YLT (1898)	not	I knew	my soul (it)	made me	∅	the chariots	of my people Nadib

From the initial data analysis, five main challenges for the translation of SS 6:12 were identified. These challenges are listed in (12).

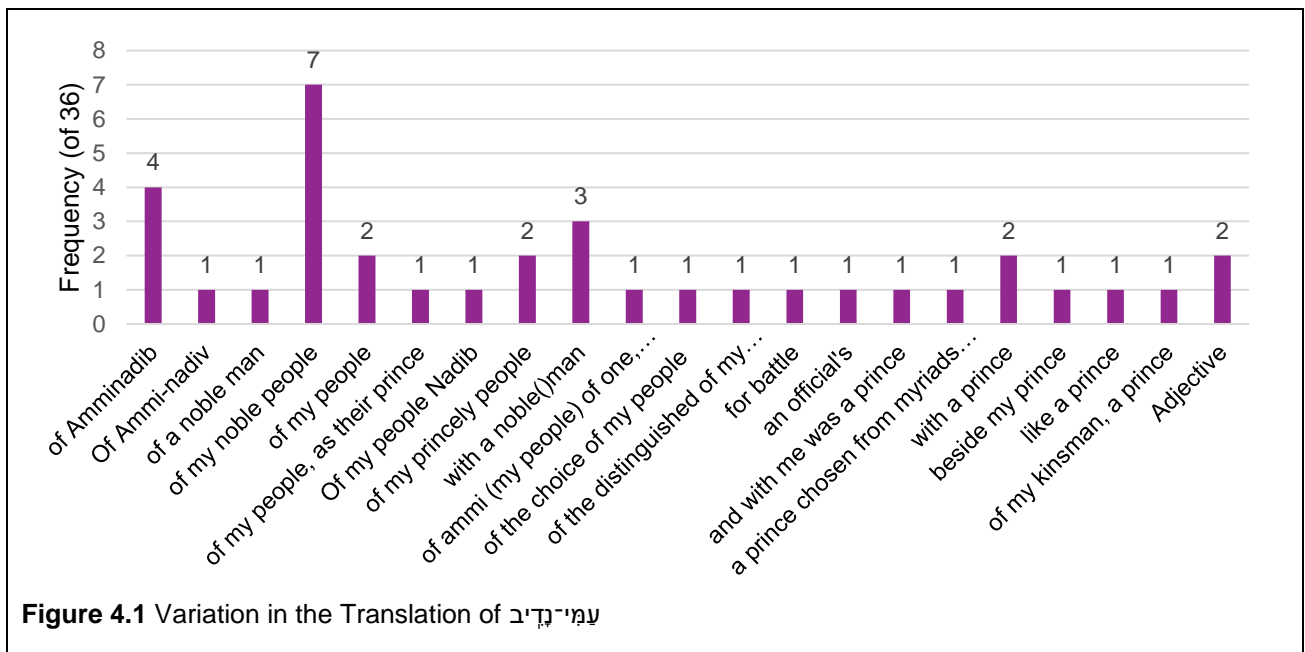
- (12) (a) The “cohesion” between or degree to which מִרְכָּבוֹת ‘chariots’ and עַמִּי-נָדִיב ‘my people of nobility’ relate to one another.
- (b) The appropriateness of inserting a preposition between שָׂמַתְנִי ‘place/make’ and מִרְכָּבוֹת ‘chariots’ where no Hebrew preposition exists.
- (c) Selecting the appropriate lexical sense of שָׂמַתְנִי ‘placed/made me’.
- (d) Determining the proper lexical sense of the subject noun נַפְשִׁי ‘breath, life’.
- (e) Understanding the relationship of לֹא יָדַעְתִּי ‘I knew not’ in SS 6:12 to 6:11.

Given that the second clause of SS 6:12 has historically been subject to greater anatomization—and consequently greater variation in translation—than the first clause (Longman III, 2001:186), the present investigation of the syntax and semantics of SS 6:12 moves counterdirectionally, starting with the final words of the verse and ending with the first words. The five challenges for the interpretation of SS 6:12 will thus be addressed in the same order in the subsections that follow as they appear in (12).

#### 4.3.1 Challenge #1: Constituent cohesion

The data indicate that, of all the words in SS 6:12, the final constituent in SS 6:12, עַמִּי-נָדִיב, has generated the greatest variation in translation. Moreover, several translations (e.g., BST) merged the sense עַמִּי-נָדִיב and מִרְכָּבוֹת into one concept, begging the question whether these two words denote a single or two separate concepts—in other words, the challenge posed by these constituents is its structural ambiguity. The objective of this section is therefore two-fold; first, the variation in translation of the lexical unit עַמִּי-נָדִיב will be demonstrated, followed by a review of the treatment of the relationship between מִרְכָּבוֹת and עַמִּי-נָדִיב.

The myriad of English/Afrikaans translations of עַמִּי־נָדִיב is depicted in Figure 4.1. This Hebrew word consists of two words joined by a *maqṣeph*<sup>47</sup>. Confusion regarding the proper translation of this hyphenated word lies in the fact that the word after the *maqṣeph*, נָדִיב, can function either as a noun<sup>48</sup>, i.e. ‘prince/nobleman’ (CSB [2017]; NCV [2005]; NICOT [2001]; NLT [2015]; OTL [2011]; REC [2016]) or as an adjective<sup>49</sup>, i.e. ‘noble/princely/royal’ (ASV [1901]; GNV 1599; ISV [2014]; HCSB [2009]; NASB [2020]; NKJV [1982]) (Brown et al., 2017:622; Exum, 2011:225). Alternatively, the word may be analysed as a proper name. The data indicate that the most common translation of עַמִּי־נָדִיב is the phrase ‘of my noble people’ (n=7), followed by the proper name “Amminadab” (n=4) and ‘with a noble()man’ (n=3).



- i. The most common approach is to translate the syntactical unit as it is written in the MT—that is, as a phrase communicating a single concept. The first word before the *maqṣeph*, עַמִּי, is taken to be a noun, with a first person, singular pronominal suffix attached. Although עַמִּי can have different senses of meaning (Brown et al., 2017:766; Clines, 2007:431; Koehler & Baumgartner 1995:838), it is usually taken by these scholars to refer to “people” (Barbiero, 2011:359-360).
- ii. The second most common approach is to translate עַמִּי־נָדִיב as a proper noun, which in this case would be “Amminadab” (Gledhill, 1994:200; Hess, 2005:207). Both the LXX and the

<sup>47</sup> The *maqṣeph* refers to the horizontal stroke or hyphen in the MT text, which binds two or more words together to form one “accentual unit” (Joüon & Muraoka, 2008:53; cf. Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:63; van der Merwe et al., 2018:36).

<sup>48</sup> Proper nouns fall under the category of nouns in general (van der Merwe et al., 2018:200). Nouns are considered to be “words that indicate the names of people, places, things or feelings” (van der Merwe et al., 2018:200).

<sup>49</sup> An adjective is a word that “qualifies a noun, pronoun or substantive” (van der Merwe et al., 2018:55).

Vulgate<sup>50</sup> translate the lexical unit as a proper noun (Treat, 2007:665). Support for translating עַמִּי־נָדִיב as “Amminadab” can be found in the following Old Testament passages, namely Exod. 6:23; Num. 1:7, 2:3, 7:12, 17, 10:14; Ruth 4:19-20; 1 Chr. 2:10, 6:7 (MT; in most English translations 7:22), and 15:10-11 (Garrett, 2004:233). Müller (1992:151) argues that the Tell Siran bottle inscription (8<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century BC) provides support to translate עַמִּי־נָדִיב as a proper name, given that “Amminadab” is a well-known Ammonite *Märchenfigur* (Müller, 1992:162). Translations following this alternative, with slight variation of spelling of “Amminadab” (“Amminadib”) for עַמִּי־נָדִיב include the KJV (1611), NIB, Robert’s translation (2001:467), and Alter’s (2019:608) translation.

- iii. The third most common approach to the translation of עַמִּי־נָדִיב is to omit the consonantal letter ‘ י ’ (*yôd*) from עַמִּי before the *maqṣēph*, as well as changing the ‘ ֹ ’ (*pathach*) vowel under the consonant ‘ ע ’ (*ayin*) to ‘ ִ ’ (*hireq*) (Fox, 1985:156; Longman III, 2001:186; Pope, 1977:589). By emending עַמִּי to עַם, the first word before the *maqṣēph* is read as a preposition and is therefore translated as “with” (Longman III, 2001:187; Pope, 1977:589). The word after the *maqṣēph* is then seen as the object whereupon the woman’s attention is focused and is consequently translated as a noun (Exum, 2011:225; Hess, 2005:208; Longman III, 2001:187). When taken together, the whole syntactic unit is translated as “with a noble man/prince” (Longman III, 2001:184; Pope, 1977:589). Commentaries following this proposal include the AYBC, BCOTWP, NICOT, and the OTL.

The translation of עַמִּי־נָדִיב is further complicated by the question of its relationship to מְרֻכָּבוֹת. Apart from the GNT (1992), most translations render מְרֻכָּבוֹת as ‘chariots’, for this is the denotative<sup>51</sup> meaning of the word (Brown et al., 2017:939; Clines, 2001:488; Koehler & Baumgartner, 1995:636). In fact, מְרֻכָּבוֹת is unlike many other rare words within SS, not being a hapax legomena within BH (cf. Ex. 15:4; 2 King 23:11; Isa. 22:18). The connotative sense<sup>52</sup> of מְרֻכָּבוֹת in SS 6:12 is dealt with in chapter five.

Although the lexeme denoted by מְרֻכָּבוֹת is not disputed, differences in translation surface regarding (i) number and (ii) definiteness, as shown in Figure 4.2. Scholars predominantly take מְרֻכָּבוֹת as being either in the singular (Longman III, 2001:184) or in the plural (Garrett, 2004:231), with others opting for a mass noun<sup>53</sup> analysis, or other such alternatives. In the MT, מְרֻכָּבוֹת is a plural feminine noun (Brown et al., 2017:939). The data show that 56% of the sampled translations understand מְרֻכָּבוֹת as being in the plural, including the YLT (1898), ESV (2018), BST, NJB (1999),

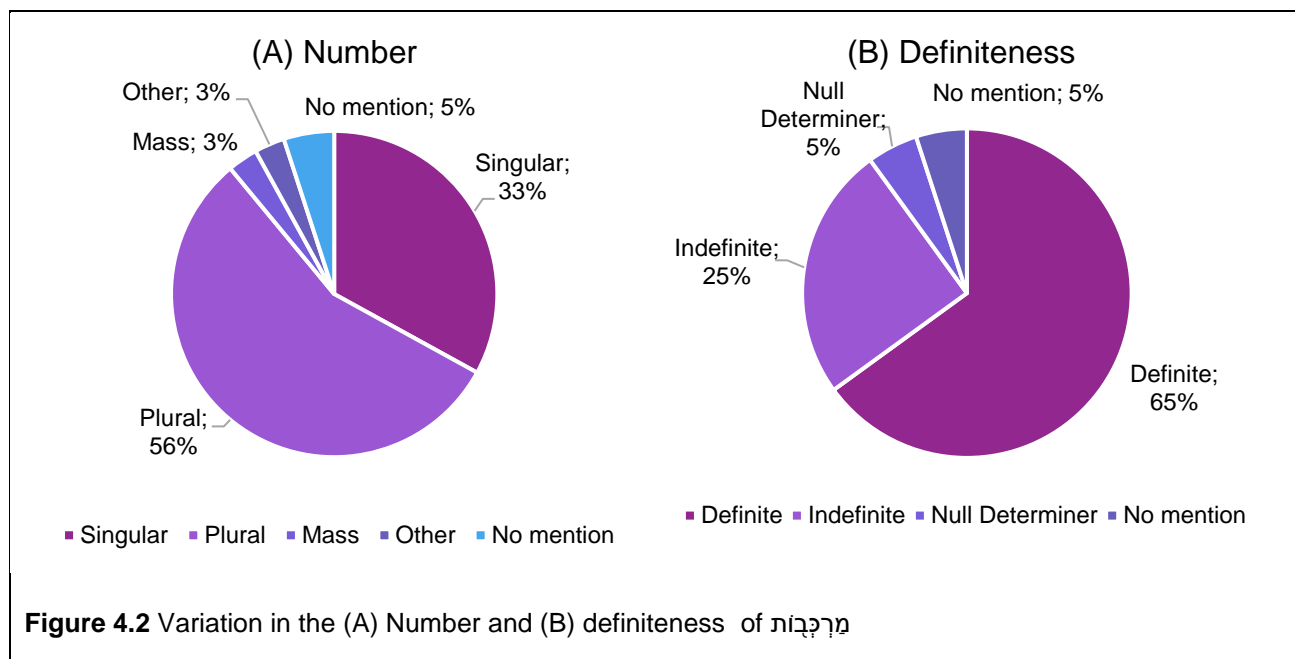
<sup>50</sup> Latin translation of the whole Bible, done by Jerome in the latter part of the fourth century (Sheeley & Nash, 1997:17).

<sup>51</sup> The denotative meaning refers to the primary sense or the straightforward dictionary meaning of a word (Baldick, 2015:73; Ryken, 2008:161).

<sup>52</sup> Murphy (2003:49) defines a connotation as the “subjective meaning attached to word that is not inherent in the word itself but tends to arise from social experience and customs.”

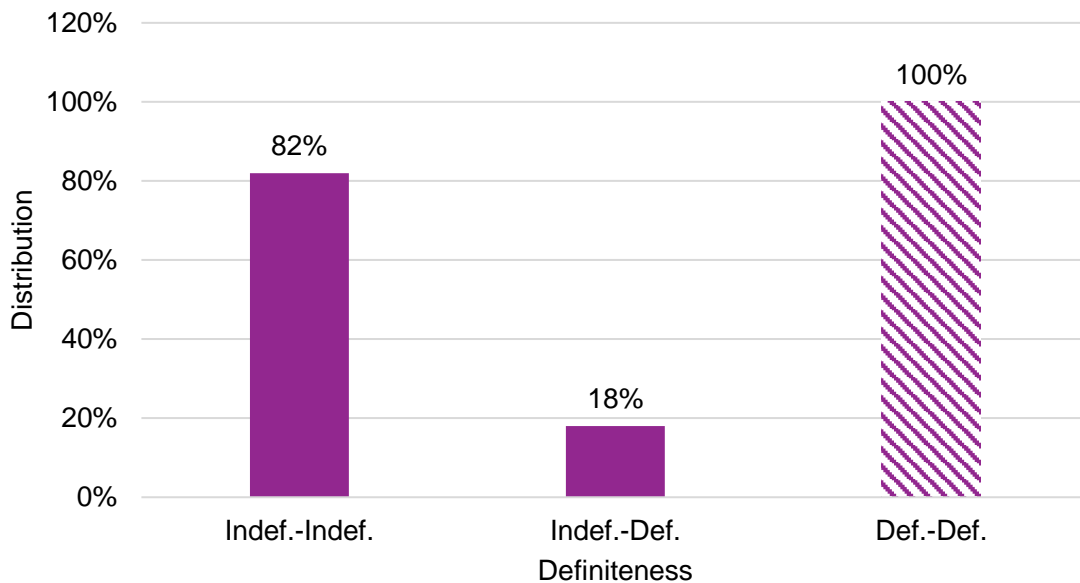
<sup>53</sup> A mass noun is an inherently uncountable noun with a singular article.

and NASB (2020). However, מִרְכָּבוֹת has also been argued to be a singular “complex inanimate noun” (cf. Longman III, 2001:184; Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:120), with the result that nearly a third of the translations analysed (cf. OTL [2011]; CEV [1995]; CEB [2011]; Afr1983; CSB [2017]; NRSVUE [2021]) render מִרְכָּבוֹת as a singular noun.



Turning to the matter of definiteness, although מִרְכָּבוֹת in the MT bears no definite article, it does feature the first person singular pronominal suffix, which is grammatically definite (van der Merwe et al., 2018:53). Figure 4.2B shows that 65% of the sampled translations interpret מִרְכָּבוֹת as being definite ‘the chariot(s)’ while only 30% translate it as an indefinite noun ‘a chariot’ or as a bare noun ‘chariots’. Translations that translate מִרְכָּבוֹת as being definite include the GNV (1599), Afr1599, ASV [1901], NKJV [1982], KJV (1611), 1933/53, NJB (1999), NL, and GW (2020), while the CJB (1998), NRSVUE (2021), CEV [1995], GNT [1992], LEB [2012], NCV (2005), NICOT, and others translate it as an indefinite noun.

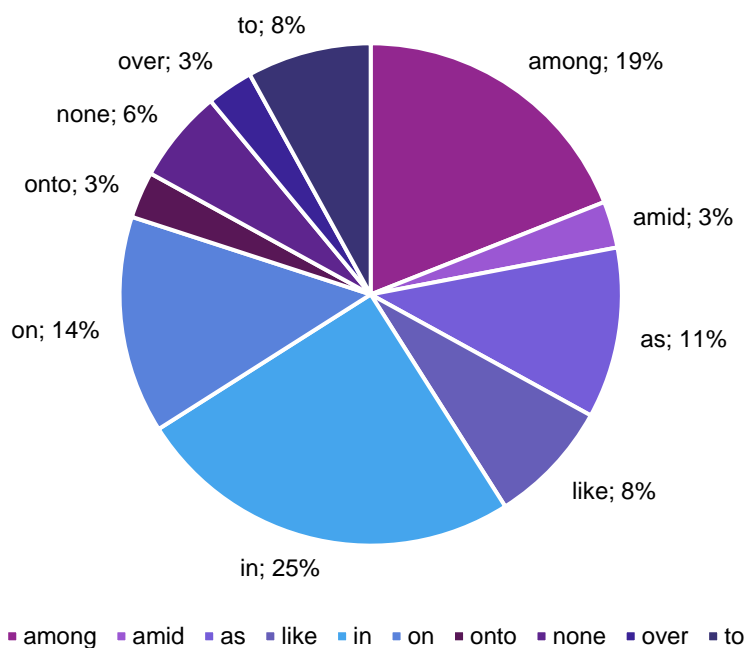
The underlying motivation for this variation is, in fact, simple. As seen in Figure 4.3, there is a clear trend in the data for translators to match the definiteness of מִרְכָּבוֹת with the definiteness of עֲמֵי. Indeed, 82% of translations which understand עֲמֵי-נָדִיב to be indefinite (depicted by columns with block colour in Figure 4.3) render עֲמֵי-נָדִיב as indefinite, and 100% of the translations which identify עֲמֵי-נָדִיב as definite (textured column in Figure 4.3) also translate מִרְכָּבוֹת as a definite noun.



**Figure 4.3** Correspondence of translated indefiniteness between מְרֻבָּוּת and עִמּוּת

#### 4.3.2 Challenge #2: To insert or not to insert a preposition

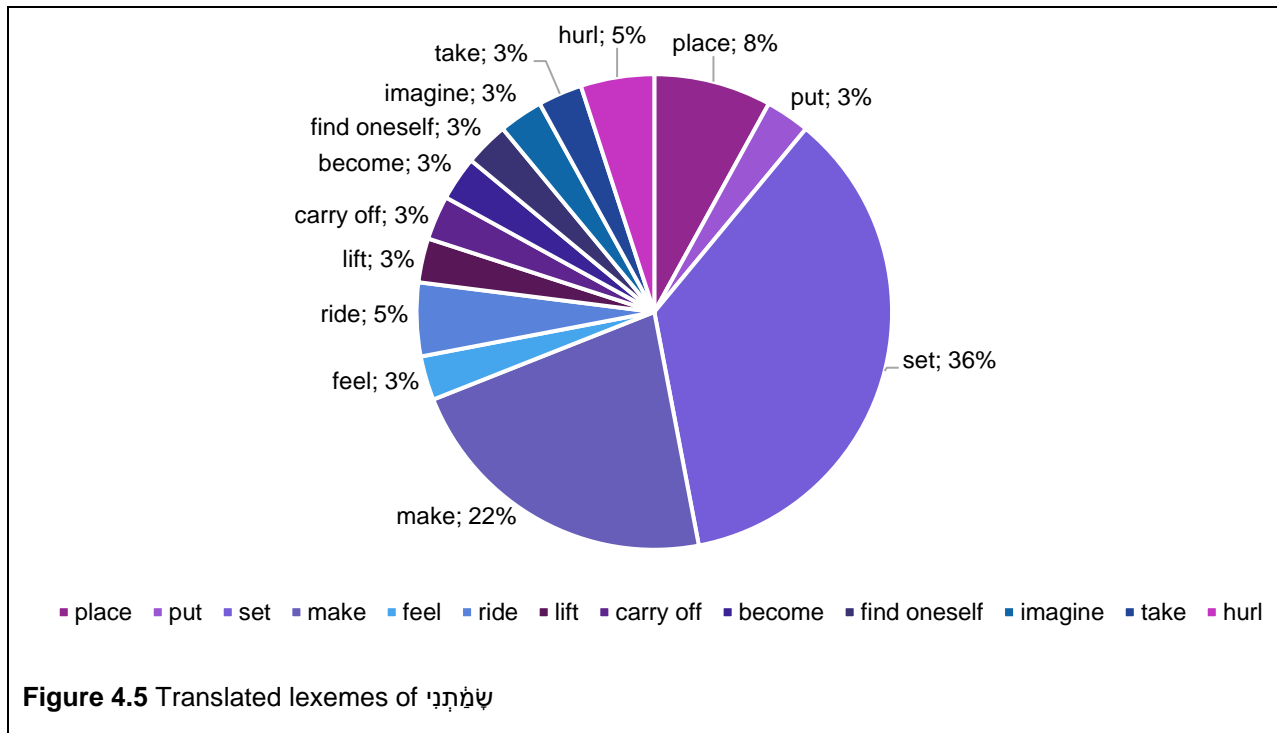
One of the points on which the data differ most conspicuously regards a word which is completely absent from the Hebrew original. The results from the data analysis show a strong tendency for the overwhelming majority (94%) of English/Afrikaans translations to insert a preposition between שְׁמֵתִי and מְרֻבָּוּת, whereas the MT contains no such explicit preposition (Carr, 1984:152; Longman III, 2001:184, 186). Nevertheless, to clarify the relationship between שְׁמֵתִי and מְרֻבָּוּת, various prepositions have been epenthesized (Longman III, 2011:186). As shown in Figure 4.4, in a sample of just 36 translations, nine distinct prepositions stake their claims on the text.



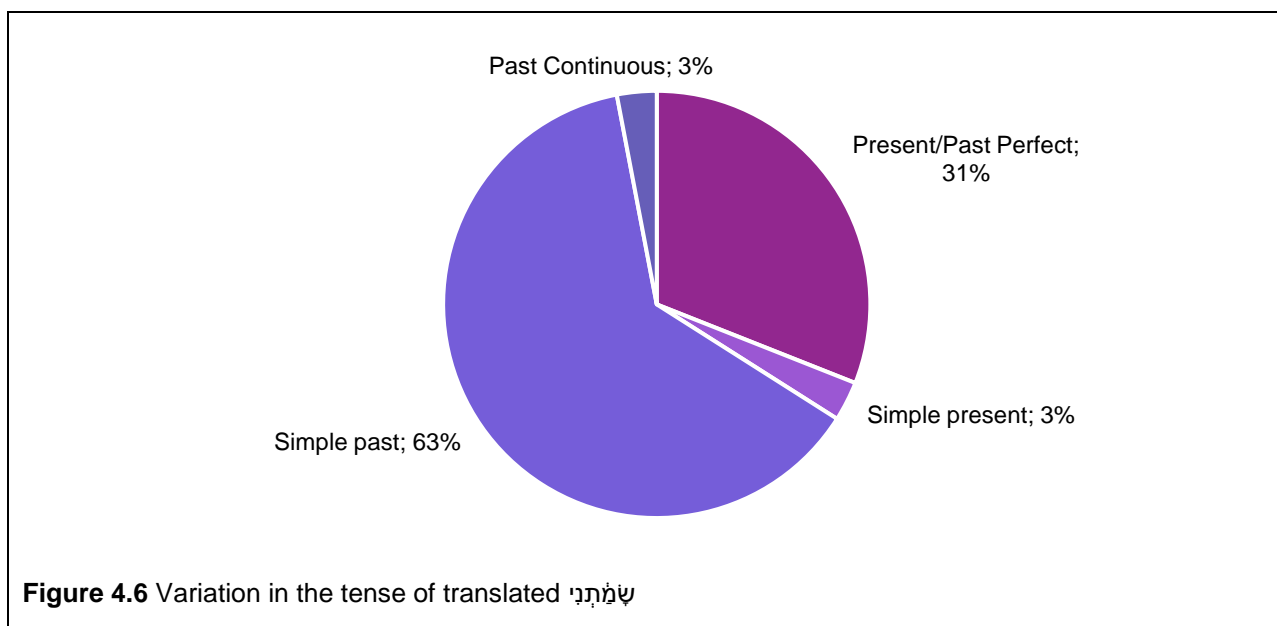
**Figure 4.4** Variation in epenthesized prepositions

### 4.3.3 Challenge #3: Selecting the appropriate translation of שִׁמְתָּנִי

A third point on which the data drastically diverge regards the lexical sense of שִׁמְתָּנִי. Of the 13 distinct lexemes recorded in the data analysis, two options are clearly preferred, namely translating שִׁמְתָּנִי as (i) ‘set’ (36%) or (ii) as ‘make’ (22%). Figure 4.5 illustrates this phenomenon.



Notably, there is a strong correlation between the translation of שִׁמְתָּנִי and the epenthesized preposition. For example, translations rendering שִׁמְתָּנִי as ‘make’ typically opt for the prepositions “as” or “like”, translations of שִׁמְתָּנִי as ‘place’ or ‘set’ tend to co-occur with “among”, “in”, or “amid”. Although the data vary most radically regarding the lexical sense of שִׁמְתָּנִי, there is also variation in the translated tense of the verb, as indicated in Figure 4.6.



In the vast majority of translations, *נַפְשִׁי* retains the past tense in the target language, with roughly two-thirds (63%) of translations rendering *נַפְשִׁי* in the simple past and 31% translating it as being in a (past or present) perfective tense.

#### 4.3.4 Challenge #4: Lexical sense of *נַפְשִׁי*

Data analysis indicates that the lexical sense of *נַפְשִׁי*, as with all constituents in SS 6:12, is a subject of considerable debate. Variation in the translation of *נַפְשִׁי* is depicted in Figure 4.7.

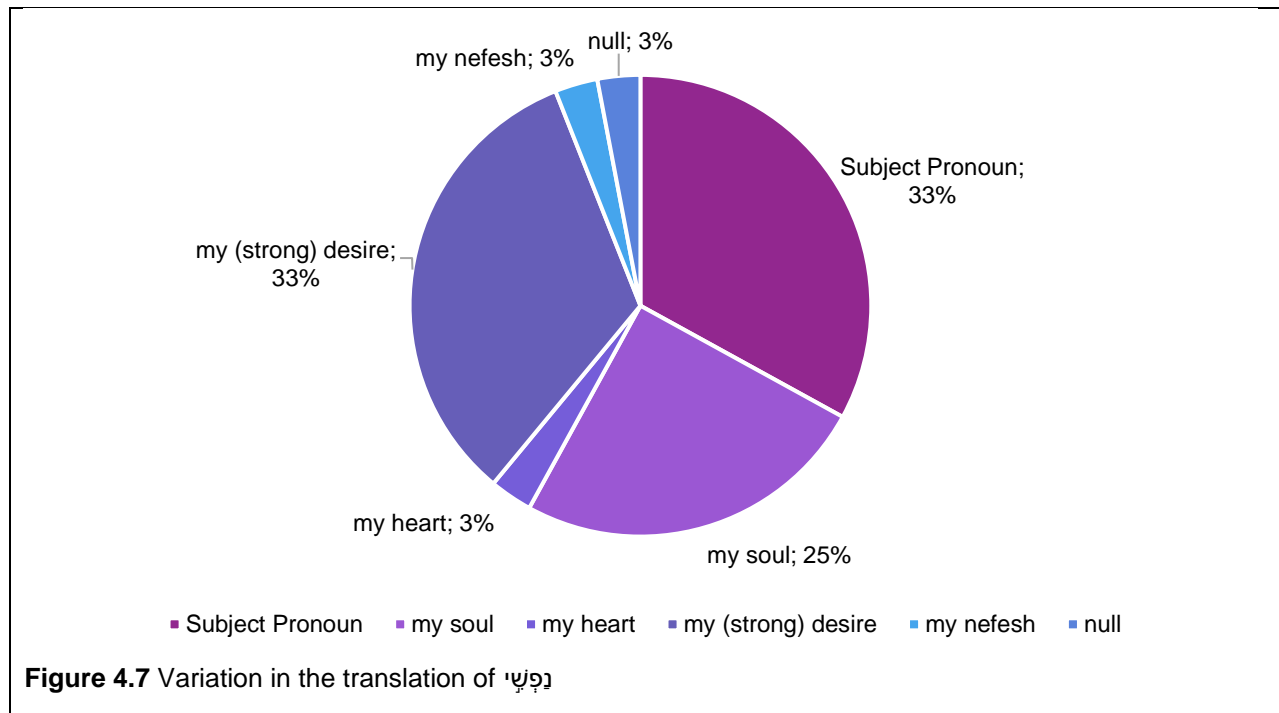
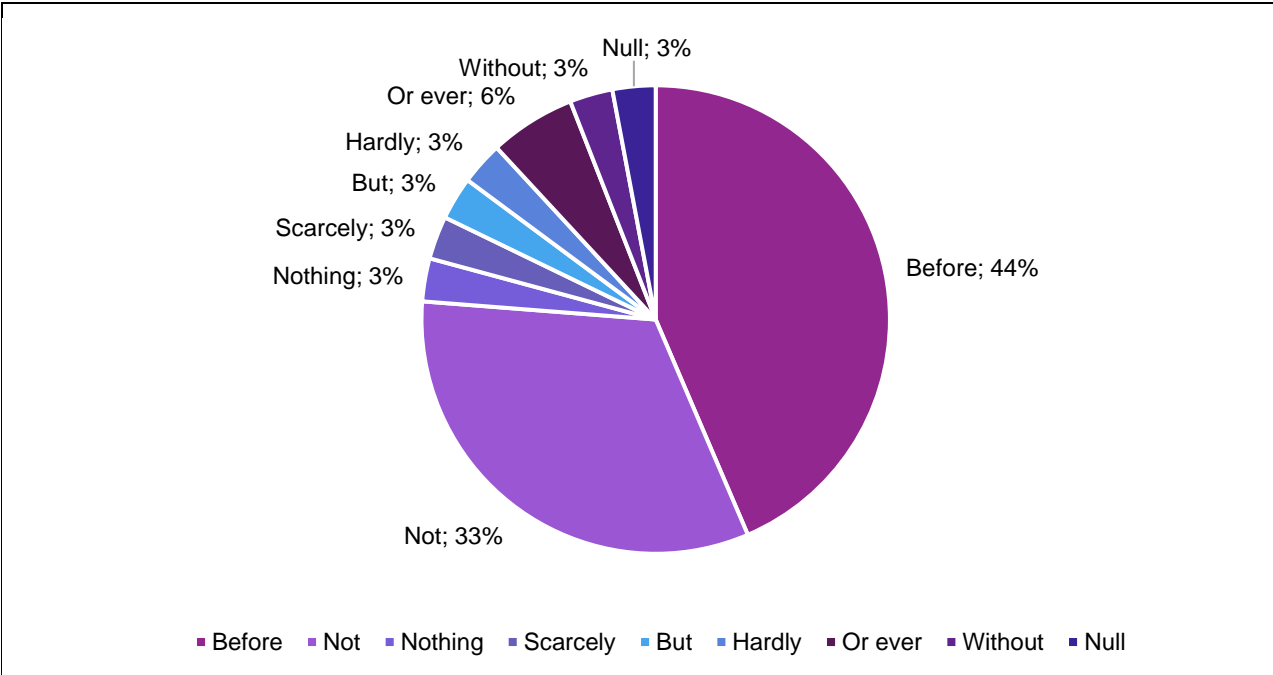


Figure 4.7 indicates that *נַפְשִׁי* is generally translated in three ways, namely as (i) 'desire' (33%), (ii) a personal subject pronoun (33%), or (iii) the 'soul' (25%).

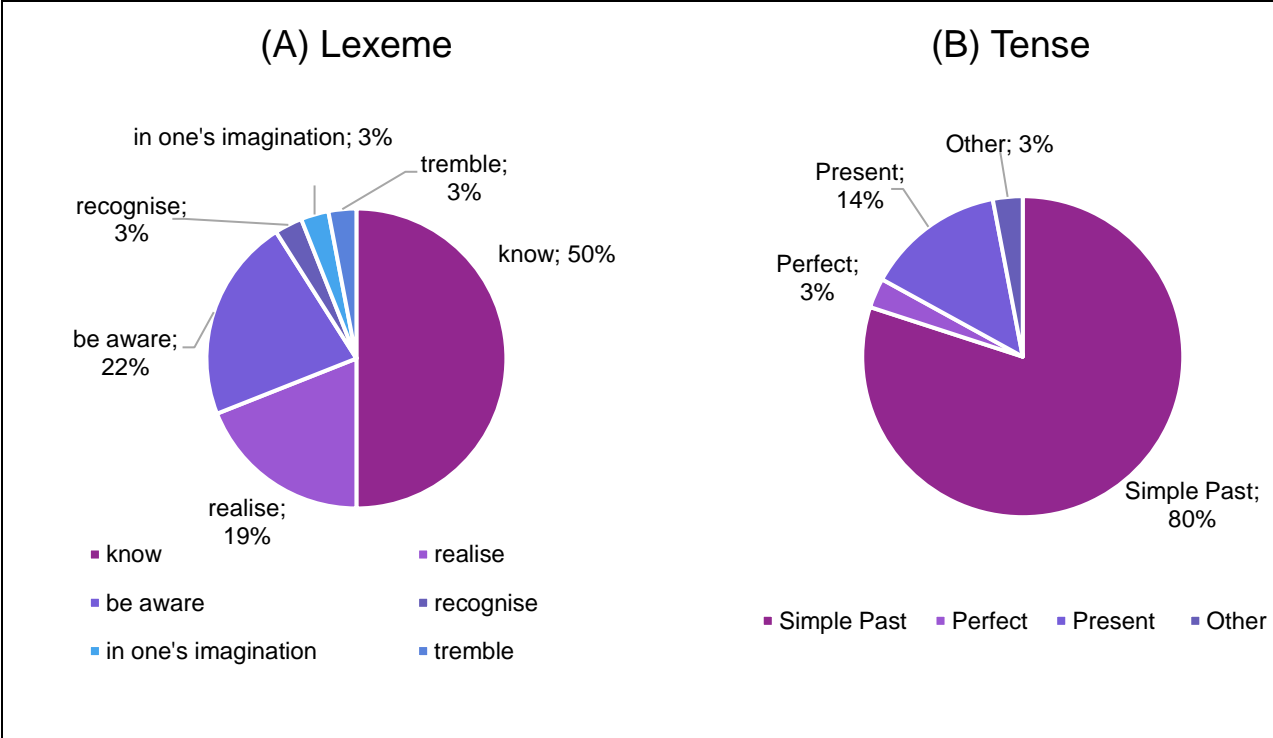
#### 4.3.5 Challenge #5: Translating the sense and referent of *לְפָנַי*

The final bone of contention among scholars regarding SS 6:12 is the translation of the phrase *לְפָנַי*. Once again, the issue is further complicated by the polysemy of the constituent parts. Both *לְ* and *פָנַי* are compatible with different translations based on their immediate contexts. As demonstrated in Figure 4.8, there are two preferred translations of the particle *לְ*. It is most commonly translated as the temporal adverb 'before' (44%) but is also often translated as the negative particle 'not' (33%).



**Figure 4.8** Variation in the translation of לֹא

Like שֶׁמֶתְנִי from section 4.3.3, יִדְעָתִי displays variation in the translation of both the lexical sense and verbal tense. Consider Figure 4.9.

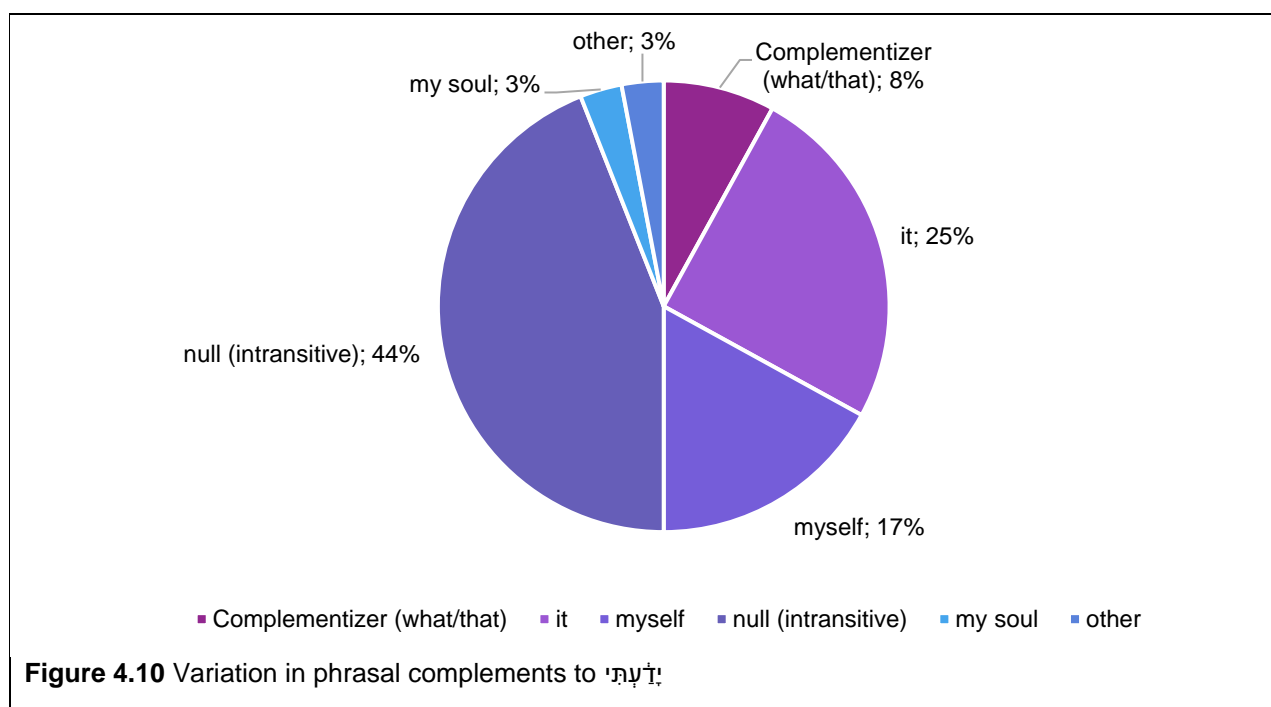


**Figure 4.9** Variation in the (A) lexeme and (B) tense of יִדְעָתִי

According to Figure 4.9A, the verb יִדְעָתִי is by far most commonly translated in English/Afrikaans as the lexeme ‘know’ (50%, cf. ISV [2014]; HCSB [2009]; CEB [2011]; Afr1933/53; Afr1983), denoting both cognitive and spatial awareness. Less popular alternatives include the lexeme ‘be aware’ (22%, cf. ESV (2018); NKJV [1982]; KJ21 [1995]; NASB [2020]), referring to psychological or spatial

awareness, trailed by ‘realise’ (19%, cf. NIV [2011]; BST [1994]; NICOT [2001]; BCOTWP [2005]; NLT [2015]) meaning to obtain a mental grip upon your circumstances. Again, like  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  from Figure 4.6,  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  is shown in Figure 4.9B to exhibit some variation in tense, although the majority (80%) of sampled translations opt for the past simple tense.

Interestingly, the verb  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  varies in the translation (or lack) of its substantival complement. Figure 4.10 illustrates this variation. While 44% of the sampled translations view  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  as intransitive, analysing  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  as the subject of  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  in the clause that follows (Longman III, 2001:186), the majority (56%) of the translations include some form of accusative nominal or verbal phrase. For example, where  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  is transitive, the first person singular pronominal suffix of  $\text{יָדָהּ}$  may be translated as a reflexive pronoun (i.e., ‘I did not know myself’, OTL [2011]). Alternatively, translations may epenthesize the pronoun “it” (i.e., ‘Before I knew it’, ISV), adopt  $\text{נַפְשִׁי}$  as the direct object (i.e., ‘I did not know my soul’, WBC), or introduce the subordinate clause as a verbal substantive complement using the complementizers “what” or “that”.



#### 4.3.6 Section summary

In summary, the object of section 4.3 has been to present the results from the initial data analysis of the sample of 36 translations of SS 6:12. Across the board, the findings uniformly demonstrate radical disparity between the translations with respect to each Hebrew word due to both structural and semantic ambiguity. Five challenges for the translation of SS 6:12 were identified, corresponding to the five main constituents of the verse. In section 4.4, reasonable solutions to each of these challenges are proposed and defended, leading to a more accurate and faithful translation of SS 6:12.

#### 4.4 Proposed solutions to challenges #1-5

The five challenges associated with SS 6:12 syntax and semantics which were identified in section 4.3 “has given rise to an enormous number of emended and conjectural readings” (Garrett, 2004:232). Murphy (1990:176) laments that “[n]one of the many emendations proposed by scholars is really convincing.” To date, no emendation of SS 6:12 brings the meaning of the verse into clearer focus, for emendations either result in “guesswork” or leave SS 6:12 to come across as even more cryptic (Roberts, 2001:481). Therefore, the present study proposes to start afresh by returning to the bare bones of the Masoretic Text and determining the semantics by analysing the text purely in terms of the syntactic relations.<sup>54</sup> The purpose of providing solutions to each of these challenges is to produce a formal English translation of SS 6:12. As the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God, every jot and tittle are significant and carry meaning. Moreover, while every translation includes some measure of interpretation, interpretation is primarily the work of commentaries. Moving too far toward a functional (or “thought-for-thought”) translation risks the addition to or subtraction from God’s eternal Word. Often, there is profound and faceted truth communicated by a specific word or tense. However, to accommodate the fact that a translation must still be readable in the target language, the present study notates any additional words that optimize reading with square brackets to indicate that they are not original to the Hebrew text.

##### 4.4.1 Solution to challenge #1: Constituent cohesion

As a reminder to the reader, challenge #1 (section 4.3.1) regards the structural ambiguity of (i) עַמִּי־נָדִיב (i.e., whether it is one constituent [proper name] or two [depending on the syntactic categories of the constituent parts]) and (ii) between מַרְכָּבוֹת and עַמִּי־נָדִיב. As mentioned in section 4.3.1, עַמִּי־נָדִיב can be translated in three alternative ways. The first option is to translate עַמִּי־נָדִיב as the proper noun ‘Amminadab’. However, there are multiple obstacles to this analysis.

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<sup>54</sup> The present study does not approach the text from specific linguistic theories (i.e., generative linguistics, minimalist syntax, etc.), as such theories relate to the *philosophy* and *modeling* of language, which is not the focus of the present study. However, the study is done to a great extent from a structural linguistic perspective. Structural linguistics “views a language as a self-contained, self-regulating system, whose elements are defined by their relationship to other elements” (Matthews, 2014:383). This approach stands in contrast to cognitive linguistics which presupposes “that the ability to speak and understand a language is continuous with other mental, or in a broad sense ‘cognitive’, abilities” (Matthews, 2014:62). Specifically, regarding semantics the present study does not approach the translation and interpretation of SS 6:12 from a purely cognitive semantic perspective because “cognitive linguistics regards ‘meaning’ or ‘semantics’ simply as conceptual content as it is organized by language. Thus, general conception as experienced by individuals – i.e., though – includes linguistic meaning” (Talmy, 2011:623). In other words,

Meanings are in the head. More precisely, a semantics for a language is seen as a mapping from the expressions of the language to some mental entities. A consequence of the cognitivist position that puts it in conflict with many philosophical semantic theories is that no form of truth conditions of an expression is necessary to determine its meaning. The truth of expressions is considered to be secondary, since truth concerns the relation between mental structure and the world. To put it tersely: Meaning comes before truth. (Gärdenfors, 1998:21).

Thus, approaching Bible translation from a strictly cognitive perspective, which is relativist in that it is not truth-conditional, introduces the danger of eisegesis and overlooks absolute truth. However, since cognitive semantics asserts that language is socially as well as individually constructed, the present study seeks to maintain a balance between structural and cognitive approaches by relying most heavily on the text itself yet acknowledging culture-bound connotations of concepts such as “chariot” (see chapter five).

- i. Firstly, to achieve a proper name translation, one would need to change the Hebrew vowel pointing under the last syllable in order that the lexical unit does not read as דַיב but as דַב (Garrett, 2004:233). In textual criticism, however, to emend the Hebrew text should be considered as a last course of action, and thus poses a problem for the proper name analysis.
- ii. Secondly, although the historical figure עַמִּינָדָב 'Amminadab' is the ancestor of David (1 Chr. 2:10; Ruth 4:19-20) and the father of the prominent figure Nahson (Num. 1:7, 2:3, 7:12, 17, 10:14), he is nowhere near as famous as the other figure mentioned in SS, namely king Solomon (SS 1:1, 5, 3:7, 9, 11, 8:11, 12) (Barbiero, 2011:358; Dillard, 2007:193). Unlike Solomon, Amminadab is not considered within the Bible to have any notable links with themes such as love, nor with poetic texts such as SS (Barbiero, 2011:358; Exum, 2011:224; Longman III, 2001:187).
- iii. Third, in Hebrew tradition, proper names are usually written without any kind of orthographic separation<sup>55</sup> and therefore it seems unlikely that עַמִּינָדָב would be considered "an error of transcription" (Barbiero, 2011:359).

Müller's (1992) proposal for translating עַמִּינָדָב as "Amminadab" is critiqued elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> Although a very tempting analysis, the arguments listed above render the proper noun analysis improbable (Barbiero, 2011:358-359; Longman III, 2001:43).

The second alternative proposed for the translation of עַמִּינָדָב, provisionally dubbed the "with" analysis, is to amend the first part of the syntactical unit in order to isolate the preposition "with", yielding the translation 'with a noble man/prince' (Longman III, 2001:184). Generally, scholars who propose that the Hebrew vowel pointing of עַמִּי should be emended and that the *mater lectionis*<sup>57</sup> should be dropped provide no plausible reasons for why and how these elements should be considered as errors within the Masoretic text (cf. Longman 2001:187). Pope (1977:589-590) argues that the ending of עַמִּי, the *hireq-yôd*, should be understood as paragogic<sup>58</sup>, and thus admissible. However, the paragogic *hireq-yôd* 'י', referred to in the *Hebrew Gesenius' Grammar* as the *hireq compaginis* (Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:481, 253), fulfils a critical role in marking the construct state or certain participial forms. The fact that the *hireq-yôd* is present on the noun עַמִּי thus undermines Pope's (1977) argument, pointing to purposeful placement rather than careless mistakes.

Though the "with analysis" is understandable in that the preposition "with" would greatly simplify the translation by explicitly stating the relationship between מְרַכְבֹּת and עַמִּינָדָב, emendation

<sup>55</sup> Barbiero (2011:359) notes that עַמִּינָדָב in SS 6:12, is also written separately within ancient translations (cf. Peshitta, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion and Quinta of Origen).

<sup>56</sup> See Longman III (2001:187) and Hess (2005:207).

<sup>57</sup> The *mater lectionis* refers to a letter in the consonantal script of the MT used to designate a vowel (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:691).

<sup>58</sup> *Paragogic* is a Greek term which refers to "an element that is added at the end of a word" (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:692).

should be one's last course of action when presented with a difficult text like SS 6:12 (McCarter, 1986:75). McCarter (1986:75) argues that emendation is only a viable option when one can answer at least one of the following two questions in the positive.

- i. Does the proposed amendment explain all the transmitted readings?
- ii. Is the emendation suited to its context?

In answer to both questions, a negative can be given. Moreover, Bergant (2001:80) notes that by emending the text, interpreters are "thereby determining its meaning rather than discovering it." Therefore, from a text critical standpoint the alternative to emend the text is not a liable avenue to take (McCarter, 1986:75).

The third and best course of action is to translate עַמִּי-נְדִיב as two words, bound by the use of the *maqṣeph*. The first of the two words, עַמִּי, can with relative certainty be translated as a common noun with a first person singular pronominal suffix, roughly translated as 'my people'. Without amending the text, עַמִּי can be taken no other way that makes grammatical sense (Owens, 1993:656). As mentioned earlier, the second word, נְדִיב, can function either as an adjective or as a noun (Barbiero, 2011:359; Brown et al., 2017:622; Exum, 2011:225).

- i. If נְדִיב is taken as a masculine singular adjective, it has the sense of 'willing' or 'noble' (Brown et al., 2017:622; Clines, 2001:625). One argument in favour of נְדִיב as an adjective is that, in Biblical Hebrew grammar, an attributive adjective usually follows a noun, as is the case here (Arnold & Choi, 2022:32; van der Merwe et al., 2018:267). It follows then that, if נְדִיב is considered to be an adjective, it will function in the attributive sense ('my noble people'), rather than as a genitive ('my people of nobility') or predicative adjective ('my people are noble') (Arnold & Choi, 2022:33-34; van der Merwe et al., 2018:268-270; Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:73)
- ii. Although it is possible to analyse נְדִיב as an attributive adjective, it is more probable that נְדִיב is a noun or an adjectival substantive<sup>59</sup> (cf. Arnold & Choi, 2022:34). Two reasons can be formulated as to way this might be the case. First, because of the use of the *maqṣeph*, עַמִּי is made proclitic<sup>60</sup> and therefore relies on the accent of נְדִיב (Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:63; Joüon & Muraoka, 2008:56-57). Secondly, as will be argued below, analysing נְדִיב as a substantive adjective will help explain the syntactical relationship of מְרַכְּבוֹת with עַמִּי-נְדִיב as a whole.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> A substantive adjective is an adjective functioning as an independent noun (Arnold & Choi, 2018:26; Murphy, 2003:160).

<sup>60</sup> A word that is made proclitic refers to a word which has lost its own accent and is bound to the following word (Murphy, 2003:137).

<sup>61</sup> That the phrase עַמִּי-נְדִיב with or without מְרַכְּבוֹת, could be regarded as a genitive by circumlocution (also known as periphrasis) seems improbable because of the absence of the preposition לְ (Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:419; Murphy, 2003:40).

The ambiguous relationship between מְרֻכָּבוֹת and עַמִּי-נָדִיב has generated either unhelpfully vague or frustratingly complex explanations (Pope, 1977:586-590). However, following the principle of Ockham’s Razor<sup>62</sup>, the solution is usually the most intelligible and the least complex of all the possibilities (Blackburn, 2016:338; Lawhead, 2015:202). Based on this premise, it follows that the best alternative is to make sense of the relationship between מְרֻכָּבוֹת and עַמִּי-נָדִיב by explaining it in the most intelligible and least complex way. The proposed solution to the challenge of “cohesiveness” between מְרֻכָּבוֹת and עַמִּי-נָדִיב is, therefore, that they stand in *status constructus*<sup>63</sup>—that is, a genitive relationship—, yielding the translation ‘chariots of my noble people’. The *status constructus* analysis is supported by morpho-syntactic arguments involving (i) number, (ii) definiteness, and (iii) Masoretic accents.

- i. *Number*. Morphologically, מְרֻכָּבָה in SS 6:12 carries feminine plural marking (Owens, 1993:656). Specifically, the ending וֹת- is found on feminine plural nouns, signalling that the word is the *nomen regens* (first word) within the *status constructus* (Brown et al., 2017:939; Clines, 2001:488; van der Merwe et al., 2018:222). This implies that עַמִּי-נָדִיב must be the *nomen rectum* (second word) in the *status constructus* (van der Merwe et al., 2018:221). For עַמִּי-נָדִיב to be the second element of the *status constructus*, it must be understood as a compound noun, or at least a single concept, as established by the presence of the *maqṣeph*. Although compound nouns in Hebrew are usually used for proper nouns<sup>64</sup>, common nouns in a compound form, though rare, are attested (Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:225; Joüon & Muraoka, 2008:218-219).
- ii. *Definiteness*. In a construct chain, the first word in the *status constructus* is never prefixed with a definite article (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:156-157). The fact that מְרֻכָּבוֹת is unmarked regarding definiteness—in which case the noun is typically indefinite (Arnold & Choi, 2022:36)—makes perfect sense within the *status constructus* analysis (Murphy, 2003:90). At first glance, the definiteness attributed to עַמִּי-נָדִיב by the possessive suffix appears to pose a problem for the *status constructus* analysis, as nouns with differing definiteness values tend to be conjoined by a preposition rather than mere juxtaposition (van der Merwe et al., 2018:53, 223). However, according to Waltke and O’Connor (1990:156-157), the definiteness of the *nomen rectum* determines the definiteness of the *nomen regens*; seeing

<sup>62</sup> Also known as the “principle of parsimony” or the “the principle of economy” (Lawhead, 2015:202).

<sup>63</sup> The *status constructus* is a special form of the word that is used to indicate that it forms a construction... with the word(s) that follow it” (van der Merwe et al., 2018:221).

<sup>64</sup> Garrett (2004:233) makes the claim that עַמִּי-נָדִיב is “the woman’s sobriquet for her beloved”, which is a proper noun, namely “My-beloved-is-a-prince.” Assis (2009:199) follows Garret (2004:233) and considers עַמִּי-נָדִיב as the woman’s epithet for her beloved. To support this claim, Garrett (2004:233) refers to SS 7:2 (English 7:1) where the man calls the woman “daughter of a prince” (בַּת-נָדִיב). However, Garrett (2004:233) assumes that עַמִּי-נָדִיב is substituted for דָּוִד. Although both these words refer to the woman, Garrett (2004:233) neglects to see that both these words have different senses in their contexts. Garret (2004:233) might committing the fallacy of the “misuse of parallels” (Osborne, 2006:6).

that the compound noun עַמִּי־נְדִיב is definite (the pronominal suffix attached to נְדִיב), the whole construct chain is therefore definite.

- iii. *Masoretic accents.* At first glance, the presence of certain Masoretic accents appears to jeopardize the *status constructus* analysis. Normally, disjunctive accents<sup>65</sup> indicate that a word is in the *status absolutus*<sup>66</sup> while conjunctive accents<sup>67</sup> indicate that a word is in the *status constructus* (van der Merwe et al., 2018:221). In the case of SS 6:12, only disjunctive accents are found underneath the clause in question; specifically, the disjunctive accent *Tiphhā* (ֿ) is underneath the last syllable of מְרַבֵּוֹת while a disjunctive accent *Sillûq* (ֿ) is under the last syllable of נְדִיב (Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:59-60; van der Merwe et al., 2018:37-38). Thus, the Masoretic accents present a seemingly unsurmountable obstacle for the proposed *status constructus* analysis. However, disjunctive accents are placed in a hierarchical order among each other, with strict rules pertaining to the Masoretic accents allowed in the rest of the sentence (Park, 2020:10-12; Price, 2010:xv). The *Sillûq* (ֿ) accent is, for example, in a higher hierarchical level than the near disjunctive accent *Tiphhā* (ֿ) (Park, 2020:12, 15). According to Price (2010:128), “when a segment ends with a compound phrase requiring more conjunctive accents than is permitted, the near disjunctive must of necessity occur whether the syntax expects a conjunctive”. The result is that the near disjunctive accent *Tiphhā* (ֿ) functions as a conjunctive, but simply creating “a delay for the greater finale” (Park, 2020:20). Thus, the Masoretic accents do not contradict the *status constructus* analysis (Roberts, 2001:479).

In sum, the proposed solution to challenge #1 for the translation of SS 6:12 is that מְרַבֵּוֹת and עַמִּי־נְדִיב stand in a *status constructus* relationship. In adherence to Ockham’s Razor, the *status constructus* analysis is the least complicated and the most straightforward, supported by syntactic evidence in terms of number, definiteness, and Masoretic accents. According to this analysis, the most probable translation of מְרַבֵּוֹת עַמִּי־נְדִיב is ‘chariots of my noble-people’. The following section proceeds with a discussion of the proposed solution to challenge #2.

#### 4.4.2 Solution to challenge #2: To insert or not to insert a preposition

As mentioned above, although a preposition is absent in the MT, a simple and accurate translation of the phrase עַמִּי־נְדִיב מְרַבֵּוֹת is not only possible but, arguably, more precise, without forcing a preposition into the translation. Trying to graft a preposition into this part of SS 6:12 tends to read an interpretation into text, rather than to let the text speak. The key to understanding

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<sup>65</sup> Disjunctive accents are accents from the “Masoretic pointing system” that designates that there is separation between words (Murphy, 2003:62).

<sup>66</sup> The *status absolutus* follows the construct noun in BH and is in a “genitive relationship” with the *status constructus* (Murphy, 2003:17).

<sup>67</sup> Conjunctive accents are accents from the “Masoretic pointing system” that joins words together in pronunciation” (Murphy, 2003:49).

the superfluity of an epenthesized preposition is found in the solution to challenge #3, as explained in section 4.4.3.

#### 4.4.3 Solution to challenge #3: Selecting the appropriate lexical sense of שְׁמַתְנִי

The main verb of the second clause in SS 6:12, שְׁמַתְנִי, is written in the *Qal* conjugation, with a pronominal suffix construct (Owens, 1993:656). Seeing that שְׁמַתְנִי is in the *Qal* stem, the verb has the possibility of functioning in the fientive<sup>68</sup> or the stative sense<sup>69</sup> (van der Merwe et al., 2018:76; Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:363). Verbs in the *Qal* stem functioning in the stative describe “a state or quality of the subject” and therefore delineate an external/physical or psychological/perceptual “circumstance or state” (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:364; cf. Arnold & Choi, 2022:48). Verbs in the *Qal* stem functioning in the fientive sense describe a dynamic “action, motion or change of state” (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:363; cf. Arnold & Choi, 2022:47-48), usually performed by an agent. Usually, stative verbs are used intransitively while fientive verbs can be used both intransitively and transitively (van der Merwe et al., 2018:529, 542). In the case of שְׁמַתְנִי, it can be interpreted in both senses. However, if שְׁמַתְנִי is taken as functioning as a stative verb, it follows that שְׁמַתְנִי should be intransitive. The outcome will be to take נִפְשִׁי שְׁמַתְנִי as a separate clause, leaving the verb יִדְעֵתִי without an object (Roberts, 2001:479-480). Table 4.3 illustrates the impact of a tri-colon versus a bi-colon arrangement from SS 6:12 (Roberts, 2001:478).

Bi-colon	Tri-colon
<p style="text-align: center;">לֹא יִדְעֵתִי נִפְשִׁי שְׁמַתְנִי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">לֹא יִדְעֵתִי נִפְשִׁי שְׁמַתְנִי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב</p>

Although the Masoretic Text supports a tri-colon arrangement for SS 6:12, it seems a better alternative in taking שְׁמַתְנִי with the later part of SS 6:12, given that—in a tri-colon analysis—the final *status constructus* would be left without a verb (Roberts, 2001:478, 480). By doing so, the result will be to not take שְׁמַתְנִי as a stative verb, but rather as an fientive verb. If this course of action is correct, then שְׁמַתְנִי should indeed be considered as a transitive verb, taking the accusative<sup>70</sup> מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב.

Accusatives can either be objective or adverbial in function (Arnold & Choi, 2022:20, 25; Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:163). Objective accusatives function as a complement, while adverbial accusatives function as an adjunct in the sentence (van der Merwe et al., 2018:277; Waltke &

<sup>68</sup> The term *fientive* is used for “active” voice (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:363). Therefore, to avoid confusion the term *fientive* is used to refer to a “type of action” (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:363).

<sup>69</sup> Verbs in the *Qal* stem can also function in the passive, but this is a rare occurrence (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:373-374).

<sup>70</sup> Importantly, the accusative refers to the direct object that “is the recipient of the verbal action committed by the subject” (Murphy, 2003:18).

O'Connor, 1990:162-163). Given that מְרַבֵּוֹת is not an optional constituent in the clause and gives no dispensable details about the verbal action being conducted, it is most likely an objective accusative (cf. Murphy, 2003:20; van der Merwe et al., 2018:277; Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:169). Moreover, the verb שׂוּם is a causative verb and therefore requires a direct object upon which to exercise influence (Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:370).

Having established that שׂוּם is a causative verb in the fientive state—and thus able to be transitive—, taking an agent as its subject and an objective accusative as its complement, the discussion now turns to the proposed solution to challenges two and three. Clines (2001:127-129) identifies eight senses<sup>71</sup> with which שׂוּם could be translated in the *Qal* conjugation: (i) place, put; (ii) set, set up; (iii) set, direct; (iv) set, establish, found, determine, ordain; (v) appoint as, appoint over, place over, make (into); (vi) make, transform; (vii) give; (viii) give a name, make a name. The proposed solution to the matter of the appropriate lexical sense of שׂוּם is that the verb should be translated following sense (vi), namely ‘make’ or ‘appoint’. The arguments in favour of this proposal are twofold: (i) the lack of an explicit preposition, and (ii) the presence of a double accusative.

- i. *Absence of Preposition.* According to Brown et al. (2017:962-963), although other senses of שׂוּם such as ‘set’ or ‘place’ may not require the presence of an explicit preposition of place or movement, many examples in which the root verb is translated as ‘place’, ‘put’, ‘set’, etc. include an explicit preposition (cf. Gen. 9:23, 21:14). The absence of a preposition within the MT seems to direct the translation of שׂוּם towards “make.” The translation “make” does not need a preposition, even though a preposition is implied within its reading (“into” or “as”) (Clines, 2011:139). The absence of such a preposition in SS 6:12 renders alternative translations much more probable.
- ii. *Double Accusative.* Double accusatives usually follow “verbs of making, forming, naming, or counting” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:23-24; Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:371), which is one of the attested lexical senses of שׂוּם. Clines (2001:139) mentions that the fifth potential sense of שׂוּם (‘make/appoint’) has the possibility of taking two accusatives. Thus, the verb שׂוּם ‘make/appoint’ is argued here to take on a double accusative (Arnold & Choi, 2022:23; Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:371;). Specifically, the verb takes both (i) the first person, singular pronominal suffix ‘ִי’ ‘me’ and (ii) the phrase מְרַבֵּוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב as its objects<sup>72</sup> (Barbiero, 2011:357; Roberts, 2001:478). More accurately, this second accusative can be categorised as a “predicative accusative” in which the silent infinitival phrase “to be” can be

<sup>71</sup> Brown et al. (2017:962-964) identifies only five senses of שׂוּם in the *Qal* conjugation, though his fifth sense fits roughly Clines’ (2001:128) fifth sense. Brown et al.’s (2017:964) variation (b) of the fifth sense is applicable to the present case. Koehler and Baumgartner (1996:1322-1325) distinguish between 21 senses for שׂוּם in the *Qal* conjugation; variation (d) of sense 18 again seems to support the present argument (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1996:1325).

<sup>72</sup> The LXX seems to take מְרַבֵּוֹת also as a double accusative: ἔθετό με ἄρματα (Pope, 1977:585; Treat, 2007:665).

inferred, i.e., “I make you (to be) king”, where “you” and “king” constitute the double accusatives. Both Waltke and O’Connor (1990:175) and Clines (2001: 139) categorise this type of double accusative as belonging to the “person appointed + rank” category. Waltke and O’Connor (1990:175) reference Isa. 3:7 as an example of a “person appointed + rank” predicative accusative, as illustrated in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 “Person appointed + rank” predicative accusative (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:175)		
Hebrew	Accusative: <i>person appointed</i>	Accusative: <i>rank (status)</i>
לא תִשְׂמְנֵנִי קָצִין עָם:	Do not make <i>me</i>	[to be] <i>the leader</i> of the people.

In the case of SS 6:12, the first person singular pronominal suffix ‘ִי’ ‘me’ is the direct object (the person appointed), and the phrase מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי־נְדִיב ‘chariots of my noble-people’ is the predicative accusative (indication of “rank”) (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:175).

Regarding BH verbal tenses, verbs are not marked by a tense system but “rather, their relationship to time is noted by aspect” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:219; Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:346-347). The aspect of a verb identifies “the contour of a situation in time” in reference towards “completion, duration, or repetition,” sometimes referred to in the German *Aspekt*<sup>73</sup> (Arnold & Choi, 2022:46, 65; Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:347). The “structure of an action” is identified either as a “Qatal form/suffix conjugation/perfect”<sup>74</sup> or as “Yiqtol form/prefix conjugation/imperfect” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:46,65-66). If taken as the forementioned, the action is described and viewed—from the speaker’s perspective—a whole, while the latter indicates that the event is not viewed as a whole (van der Merwe et al., 2018:153). The verb שְׂמְנֵנִי is in the *Qatal* form<sup>75</sup> and therefore the word refers to “a situation from the outside, looking upon it as a complete whole... It may refer to an action or state in the past, present, or future, although it tends to view it as a complete situation or action that is temporally undefined...” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:66-67, 69).

Within the *Qatal* form, verbs can also be classified in semantic categories (Arnold & Choi, 2022:67-69). Most probably within the context of SS 6:12, שְׂמְנֵנִי could be placed in the semantic category of completeness, which indicates that the “action or state is viewed as a complete whole, with the beginning and end in view” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:67). Applied to שְׂמְנֵנִי, this semantic category implies that שְׂמְנֵנִי could be translated either in the simple past, present perfect, or pluperfect (Arnold & Choi, 2022:67), the most common—and thus most likely—being the simple past. Therefore, the most accurate translation of שְׂמְנֵנִי in conjunction with the predicative accusative מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי־נְדִיב is ‘made/appointed me [to be] chariots of my noble-people’.

<sup>73</sup> c.f. *Aktionsart* identifies “the type or kind of action with regard to voice, fientivity, transitivity, causation, and various reflexive actions” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:46; Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:348).

<sup>74</sup> Both the terms “perfect” and “imperfect” should not be confused to refer to functions of verbs but rather understood as referring to form (Arnold & Choi, 2022:65; van der Merwe, et al., 2018:153).

<sup>75</sup> Also known as the perfect or suffix conjugation (Arnold & Choi, 2022:66).

#### 4.4.4 Solution to challenge #4: Translating the phrase 'שׁוֹפָר'

Three reasons support the present position that 'שׁוֹפָר' should be taken as the subject of 'שׁוֹפָר' (following Longman III, 2001:186; Pope, 1977:585; Roberts, 2001:478). First, the Masoretic accents favour and reinforce this analysis (Barbiero, 2011:356; Roberts, 2001:479). Furthermore, if 'שׁוֹפָר' were taken to be the object of 'לֹא יִעָתֵר לָךְ', the verb 'שׁוֹפָר' is left without a subject and would thus render the clause ungrammatical (Barbiero, 2011:356; Delitzsch, 1885:117). Furthermore, in five other places in SS, 'שׁוֹפָר' acts as the subject of a clause (cf. SS 1:7; 3:1, 2, 3, 4). Therefore, it seems reasonable to read 'שׁוֹפָר' as the subject of the second clause within SS 6:12 (Deckers, 2001:190). Having established the syntactic role of 'שׁוֹפָר' as subject in the second clause of SS 6:12, the discussion now turns to the appropriate translation of the lexical sense of the word. The alternatives mentioned in section 4.3.4 are addressed one-by-one in the discussion which follows.

- i. The first possibility is to translate the feminine noun 'שׁוֹפָר' as 'soul' (Brown et al., 2017:659, 660; Clines, 2001:724, 728; Koehler & Baumgartner, 1995:711). However, some caution against this translation, as the concept "soul" hails from Greek philosophy and is foreign to the text of SS (Deckers, 2001:189; Seebass, 1998:508-510). Seebass (1998:510) states that "*nepes* does not denote the soul as one nuance among others – it refers rather to the psychic power, abounding personality, energy that exorcises all gloominess."
- ii. The second option, namely translating 'שׁוֹפָר' as a subject pronoun, also seems improbable, given that subject pronouns in BH are usually free morphemes (Murphy, 2003:159). In addition to subject pronouns, 'שׁוֹפָר' has also been translated as a reflexive pronoun. However, as Joüon and Muraoka (2008:511) point out, "[t]hough 'שׁוֹפָר' is commonly said to be used as a **substitute** for the reflexive pronoun, a syntagmatic analysis of its usage suggests rather that it retains its lexical meaning to varying degrees" (emphasis theirs). Worth mentioning is that the "syntactic antecedent of a pronominal suffix determines the nature of the pronominal suffix" (van der Merwe et al., 2018:299). In other words, if the "syntactic antecedent" appears in the same clause as the pronominal suffix, the pronominal suffix will have a reflexive nature (van der Merwe et al., 2018:299). This is, however, not the case with 'שׁוֹפָר' in SS 6:12. Also, as argued earlier, in making 'שׁוֹפָר' the object of the phrase 'לֹא יִעָתֵר לָךְ', the verb 'שׁוֹפָר' would be left without a subject.
- iii. The most probable alternative is to translate 'שׁוֹפָר' as "desire" or "longing" (Hess, 2005:207), particularly given that this is the translation of choice in other places in SS (SS 1:7; 3:1-4; 5:6) (Barbiero, 2011:355; Hess, 2005:207). This fits in with the genre of SS as a lyric poem about erotic love and sexual desire (Exum, 2011:1). Furthermore, the woman explicitly expresses her desire for her beloved on at least two occasions (cf. 3:1-5; 5:2-8) (Longman III, 2001:15). Gastronomic imagery throughout SS are usually references to sexual desires (SS 1:2-4; 2:3-5; 4:10-5:1; 7:8-10; 8:1-2) (Gault, 2019:183; Hess, 2005:207).

Therefore, in light of the abovementioned arguments, the most reasonable conclusion is that the correct lexical translation of נַפְשִׁי is ‘my desire’ or ‘my longing’.

#### 4.4.5 Solution to challenge #5: Translating the sense and referent of לֹא יָדַעְתִּי

The most common negative particle in BH is אֵל and is used both as a sentential negative<sup>76</sup> and as a constituent negative<sup>77</sup> (van der Merwe et al., 2018:463). As a modifier of a verbal phrase, אֵל within the context of SS 6:12 functions as a sentential negative. Although several translations render אֵל as a temporal particle (e.g., CJB [1998], NRSVUE [2021], etc.), there is little evidence to support this decision (Garrett, 2004:232). Rather, אֵל is “explicitly negative” (“I did not know”) and not “strictly temporal” (as in NIV [2011], “before I knew”) (Hess, 2005:207). This implies that the sense of אֵל “is one of not realizing the experience rather than the suddenness of it” (Hess, 2005:207).

The verb יָדַע is in the Qal conjugation featuring a first-person pronominal suffix (Owens, 1993:656). As a Qal active verb, יָדַע can, before a subordinate without a conjunction, mean ‘know’, ‘realize’, ‘be aware’, or ‘have knowledge (of)’ (Clines, 1998:99-100). Although יָדַע has various senses, the most common is ‘to know’, as 50% of sampled translations in the present study affirm. Although נַפְשִׁי is not taken to be in a clause with יָדַעְתִּי, as has been argued above, יָדַע is taken as a transitive verb (Roberts, 2001:479). Section 4.5 offers further discussion on this matter. Regarding the tense of the verb, as with שָׁמַעְתִּי, it is argued that the most common and therefore most likely rendering of יָדַע is in the simple past tense. In sum, it suffices to conclude that the most likely translation of יָדַע is ‘I knew not’ or ‘I did not know’.

#### 4.5 Synthesis: Formal translation

Up to this point, the discussion of the translation of SS 6:12 has simply focused on isolated words and phrases. However, in the light of the syntactico-semantic analysis, the translation of SS 6:12 can now be examined more holistically.

Following Roberts (2001:478), SS 6:12 is understood to be a bi-colon with the exception that נַפְשִׁי ‘breath/life/desire’ is placed with the second clause and not the first. The result is that לֹא יָדַעְתִּי ‘I did not know’ is rendered as the first clause while מְרִכְבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב נַפְשִׁי שָׁמַעְתִּי ‘my desire made me chariots of my noble-people’ is rendered as the second clause (Roberts, 2001:480). Admittedly, this rendering of SS 6:12 is unusual for Hebrew poetry, but is the most accurate representation of the original syntax of the verse (Roberts, 2011:480).<sup>78</sup> By this logic, SS 6:12 cannot qualify as a simple

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<sup>76</sup> A sentinel negative is when אֵל is used to negate “verbal clauses” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:149).

<sup>77</sup> A constituent negative is when אֵל is for example used “to negate non-verbal lexical categories, including noun phrases..., proper names..., adjectives..., and prepositional phrases” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:149; van der Merwe, et al., 2018:466).

<sup>78</sup> For a more in-depth discussion regarding the bi-colon and tri-colon arrangement, see Roberts (2001:477-480).

sentence<sup>79</sup> but rather as a compound<sup>80</sup> or complex sentence<sup>81</sup> (cf. Arnold & Choi, 2022:176; Joüon & Muraoka, 2006:526).<sup>82</sup> The process of determining whether SS 6:12 is a compound or complex sentence is somewhat problematic, given that BH frequently “makes no grammatical distinction between subordination and coordination” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:184). Subordinate or coordinating clauses can be syndetically<sup>83</sup> or asyndetically<sup>84</sup> introduced (Joüon & Muraoka, 2006:526). However, whereas compound or coordinating clauses have the same subject, this is not the case with the two clauses in SS 6:12 (Arnold & Choi, 2022:176; Gesenius & Kautzsch, 1910:457). It is therefore more sensible to assess SS 6:12 as a complex sentence.

In light of the conclusion that SS 6:12 is a complex sentence, the first clause *לֹא יָדַעְתִּי* ‘I did not know’ is the main or independent clause, which, by introduction of the particle *לֹא* ‘not’, is considered as a negative clause (Arnold & Choi, 2022:176; Joüon & Muraoka, 2006:526). The second clause, *נִפְשֵׁי שְׂמֹתַי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמֵּי-נָדִיב* ‘my desire made me chariots of my noble-people’, must therefore function as the subordinate clause (Longman III, 2001:186; van der Merwe et al., 2018:63-64).

The question remains, however, regarding the subordinate function of *נִפְשֵׁי שְׂמֹתַי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמֵּי-נָדִיב* ‘my desire made me chariots of my noble-people’. Two types of subordinate clauses exist in BH, namely (i) complement clauses and (ii) supplement clauses (Arnold & Choi, 2022:184; van der Merwe et al., 2018:64). The latter are clauses which “serve an adverbial function and could be omitted without changing the meaning of the main clause” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:184; cf. van der Merwe et al., 2018:64). However, since the second clause of SS 6:12 cannot be omitted without drastically altering the meaning of the main clause, it is unlikely that the subordinate clause is supplementary. Therefore, the second clause of SS 6:12 is considered as a complement clause, for it is “integrally linked to the main clause” (van der Merwe et al., 2018:64).

Notably, only one class of subordinate clauses can function as a complement, namely the substantival clauses (Arnold & Choi, 2022:185). Generally, substantival clauses can either have the function of a nominative, genitive, or accusative (Arnold & Choi, 2022:185). Notably, the second clause, *נִפְשֵׁי שְׂמֹתַי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמֵּי-נָדִיב* ‘my desire made me chariots of my noble-people’, cannot function

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<sup>79</sup> Murphy (2003:155) defines a simple sentence as “[a]n independent clause composed of just a substantive and a predicate.”

<sup>80</sup> A compound sentence refers to a sentence made up of two or more independent clauses that are of “equal syntactical status (or function)” (Arnold & Choi, 2022:176; Murphy, 2003:46).

<sup>81</sup> A complex sentence refers to a sentence made up of two or more clauses of “unequal status,” in which one clause is dependent (subordinate) to the main clause (Arnold & Choi, 2002:176; Murphy, 2003:46).

<sup>82</sup> That the two clauses of SS 6:12 can be understood as two separate verses, is dubious. In Hebrew poetry, parallelism is a key factor; because of this, the two clauses of SS 6:12 are in some sort of relationship with each other (LeMon & Strawn, 2008:502-503).

<sup>83</sup> Syndetically refers to the linking of clauses by the use of particles (Arnold & Choi, 2022:184; Murphy, 2003:163).

<sup>84</sup> Asyndetically refers to the linking of clauses that are linked to each not by use of particles but rather by being in juxtaposition with each other (Arnold & Choi, 2022:184).

as a nominative, as the verb יָדַע 'know' has already a subject (cf. Arnold & Choi, 2022:185). Furthermore, in the context of SS 6:12, the second clause cannot function as a genitive, given that it does not modify a noun (cf. Arnold & Choi, 2022:185). Rather, the complement subordinate clause in SS 6:12 functions as an accusative. This conclusion aligns perfectly with the arguments in section 4.4.5, since the transitive verb יָדַעְתִּי 'I knew' requires a direct object (Arnold & Choi, 2022:185-186; Roberts, 2001:479). Following Arnold and Choi (2022:186), the subordinate complementizer "that" can reasonably be included in the text in order to make the target language more idiomatic. In order to avoid confusion and emphasize that the complementizer is not present in the original text, it will be kept in square brackets. The proposed formal translation of SS 6:12 is provided in (13).

- (13)    נְדִיב            עַמִּי            מִרְכָּבוֹת            שְׁמֵתִנִּי            נַפְשִׁי            לֹא יָדַעְתִּי:  
          noble    my people    chariots    made me    my soul    I did not know  
          'I did not know [that] my desire made me [to be] chariots of my noble-people'

#### 4.6 Chapter summary

The objective of chapter four has been to conduct a syntactic-semantic study of SS 6:12 in order to produce a formal English translation thereof. The procedure followed in order to achieve this goal included (i) conducting a quantitative study of previous approaches to the translation of SS 6:12, (ii) analysing the syntactic context of each constituent in SS 6:12, (iii) and synthesizing the results in the formal translation "I did not know [that] my desire made me [to be] chariots of my noble-people". Chapter five proceeds with the interpretation of the formal translation.

## 5. INTERPRETATION OF SS 6:12

### 5.1 Introduction

As chapter four has provided a formal translation for SS 6:12, we can now turn our attention in interpreting the discussed verse. Chapter five therefore builds upon the foundations laid in chapter four and will continuously reference the reader back the findings of chapter four.

The following discussion is organised as follows. The first step is to briefly lay down the technical terms necessary in order to propose a satisfactory interpretation for SS 6:12. Section 5.3 examines trends in previous interpretations of SS 6:12, including previous approaches to (i) form, (ii) voice, (iii) tone, (iv) genre and (v) imagery. In section 5.4, the attention turns the implications of these findings for SS 6:12 in particular, as each facet is addressed in turn. Section 5.5 looks at the whole of SS 6:12 in regard to its syntax and grammar. Section 5.6 closes.

### 5.2 Cardinal concepts

When interpreting the Bible, one investigates the summative, connotative, and pragmatic meaning of the verse in question beyond the procedural meaning of the individual words. As this study does not seek to provide a thorough inquiry into the concept of meaning,<sup>85</sup> readers will be directed elsewhere for such a study.<sup>86</sup> The purpose of the present section is to define the vocabulary required for a discussion of the interpretation of SS 6:12. Terminology used in Biblical poetry is somewhat confusing, as scholars either use different terms for the same concept or use the same term for different concepts (Lucas, 2008:520; Watson, 1986:11). Moreover, the sense in which scholars use terms often conflict with usage in the mainstream fields of linguistics and literary studies<sup>87</sup>. Therefore, to prevent confusion and improve clarity, key concepts relating to semantics and pragmatics must be defined.

Poythress (2016:131) writes that “[t]exts make sense because they use elements of language.” These elements—such as phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, discourses—constitute levels of hierarchy within a language and should be taken into account when determining meaning (Arnold & Choi, 2022:175; Waltke & O’Connor, 1990:49). For the purposes of the present study, words are taken to be the starting point as they are the “most rudimentary unit of semantic signification” (Murphy, 2003:181). However, words have “no inherent meaning” in themselves and should be understood as semantic signs (Klein et al., 2017:331; Osborne, 2006:94). In reality, a word’s meaning is rooted within the context of its occurrence (Osborne, 2006:94). Context is what actualizes a word’s meaning, for without context, a word has only “potential meaning” (Osborne, 2006:94). Context is therefore great determiner of a word’s meaning, and this is especially true when one considers what a word in a specific passage connotes (Baldick, 2015:74; Silva, 1994:138-141).

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<sup>85</sup> For a broad philosophical understanding of meaning, see Garcia (2005:492-499).

<sup>86</sup> For a good introduction towards the concept of meaning for Biblical lexicography, see Silva (1994).

<sup>87</sup> For an explanation of the difference between structural and cognitive approaches, see footnote 55 (p. 54).

A distinction must be drawn between denotative and a connotative meaning (Klein et al., 2017:331; Ryken, 2008:161; Silva, 1994:102). DENOTATIVE MEANING refers to the primary sense or the straightforward dictionary meaning of a word “as it points to an extralinguistic entity” (Baldick, 2015:73; Murphy, 2003:57; Ryken, 2008:161). Denotation is therefore the relationship of a lexical unit with the extralinguistic entity to which it refers (Matthews, 2014:98). For example, the lexical unit “bull” denotes a specific class of animals (Matthews, 2014:98). The denotative meaning of a word can be contrasted with its connotative meaning (Murphy, 2003:57). The CONNOTATIVE MEANING of a word refers to a range of associations triggered by its denotative meaning (Klein et al., 2017:332; Matthews, 2014:98). The connotations of a word can be communicated “as a series of qualities, contexts, and emotional responses commonly associated with its referent” (Baldick, 2015:73-74). The connotation is therefore a subjective meaning that “tends to arise from social experience and customs” (Murphy, 2003:49). To explain these additional overtones in meaning, Ryken (2008:161) gives the example of the word “home”, which denotes “the house where one lives.” The connotative sense of “home”, on the other hand, stirs up notions of “family, security, provision, and love” (Ryken, 2008:161). Therefore, the secondary meaning of a word is usually understood in relation to what it connotes (Baldick, 2015:73).

In Baldick’s (2015:73-74) definition of connotation, he uses the word “referent”. The REFERENT refers to the extra-linguistic thing to which a symbol as a word refers, whether it is an object, event or process (Kaiser & Silva, 2007:35; Silva, 1994:102, 220). The referent of a word can be animate,<sup>88</sup> inanimate<sup>89</sup>, or non-animate<sup>90</sup> (Murphy, 2003:145).<sup>91</sup> The referent is distinguished from its symbol and sense (Osborne, 2006:94-96; Silva, 1994:102). A helpful device in understanding this distinction is the adapted triangle of Ogden and Richard (1946:11) in Silva (1994:102-103), as shown in Figure 5.1.

At the lower left corner in Figure 5.1, a SYMBOL refers to a word as an arbitrary or semantic sign, in its phonetic and written form (Silva, 1994:102). The symbol consists of “symbols or sounds” which represents an idea and therefore has a certain meaning associated with it (Klein et al., 2017:325; Silva, 1994:220). The assignment of a certain word to a certain meaning is chiefly a matter of convention (Klein et al., 2017:325; Silva, 1994:104). Therefore, if a certain word represents a

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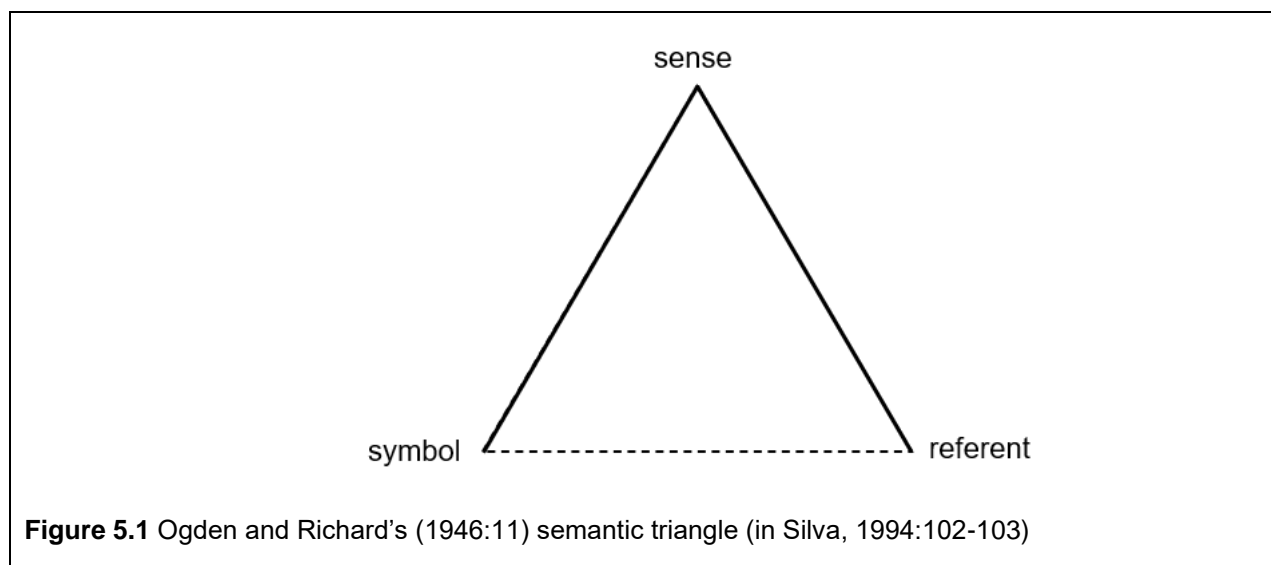
<sup>88</sup> Denotes to living entities, e.g. gazelle, woman (Murphy, 2003:25).

<sup>89</sup> Denotes to a non-creaturely entity, that is static or a material object, e.g. mountain, jewel (Murphy, 2003:25, 89).

<sup>90</sup> Also known as abstracts (Murphy, 2003:25, 115). Denotes something that is nonconcrete, which includes abstract ideas, theoretical concepts, and emotion, e.g. love, beauty (Murphy, 2003:17, 115).

<sup>91</sup> It should however be noted that words can be placed on a continuum of referentially, for some words do not have a direct link with the physical entities they refer to (Osborne, 2006:95; Silva, 1994:107). The study of words in these cases, would be what is called a “word and thing” approach (Osborne, 2006:95). For more upon this topic, see Osborne (2006:94-96) and Silva (1994:106-108).

given idea or ideas, then it is important for the current study that the words in SS 6:12 are understood in the same way the writer used it in its original context (Klein et al., 2017:326).



The SENSE, on the other hand, is the mental content that is associated with the symbol (Silva, 1994:102, 220). In other words, the sense “is the picture built in the mind by the term, that image which is connoted” (Osborne, 2006:96). Osborne (2006:504) explains sense in contrast to referent by stating that “[s]ense is the meaning values assigned to the terms within the sense, reference to the real world behind the sentence.” Using an example of the German philosopher Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), the lexical units “the morning star” and “the evening star” refer to the same planet, namely Venus (referent), but differ in sense (Matthews, 2014:362; Thorne & Collocott, 1986:519). Therefore, the sense of a particular symbol (word) cannot be obtained in isolation but only through its semantic relationship to the other senses of symbols within the context (Osborne, 2006:504; Silva, 1994:119).

Finally, words can be studied in two types of relations, namely paradigmatic<sup>92</sup> and syntagmatic relations (Murphy, 2003:164; Silva, 1994:119). Whereas paradigmatic relationships describe words in vertical relationships (synonymy, antonymy, etc.), syntagmatic relationships are horizontal and concern the influence exercised by words on each other in a given utterance (i.e. verb conjugation, plural/singular number agreement, etc.). In other words, syntagmatic relations refer to the “study of linguistic units in relation to one another in sentence construction” (Murphy, 2003:164; Silva, 1994:119). In analysing the connotative meaning of SS 6:12, attention must be paid both to paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships in the verse.

As mentioned in chapter four, one of the problems posed by SS 6:12 is the lexical or semantic ambiguity, that is, the state in which a word denotes more than one sense. A more nuanced variation

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<sup>92</sup> Paradigmatic relations refer to when words “can occupy the same slot in a particular context” (Matthews, 2014:286; Silva, 1994:119). For example, in the sentence “I saw the cat,” the lexical unit “cat” can be replaced with any other unit, namely woman, boy, flower etc. (Matthews, 2014:286).

of this ambiguity is when one sense of a word has multiple connotations. The challenge, then, in interpreting SS 6:12 is to decipher the semantic ambiguity of its lexical items.

### 5.3 Previous approaches to the interpretation of SS 6:12

To determine the most cogent interpretation of SS 6:12, the first step is to carefully examine previous interpretations for SS 6:12. However, this is no easy task, for in certain cases scholars are quite fluid and vague with their interpretation of SS 6:12. For the purpose of this study, a sample of 21 interpretations are identified by the following three criteria.

- i. *Genre*. Firstly, The interpretations included are mostly proposed by scholars who identify SS as love poetry, with the exception of Delitzsch (1885) and Pope (1977).<sup>93</sup>
- ii. *Valid attempts*. Secondly, solely viable and straightforward interpretations of SS 6:12 are included. Sources which regard SS 6:12 too obscure and avoid it altogether, are not included.
- iii. *Varied structural analyses*. Thirdly, interpretations espousing different structural schemes for SS were incorporated into the study.

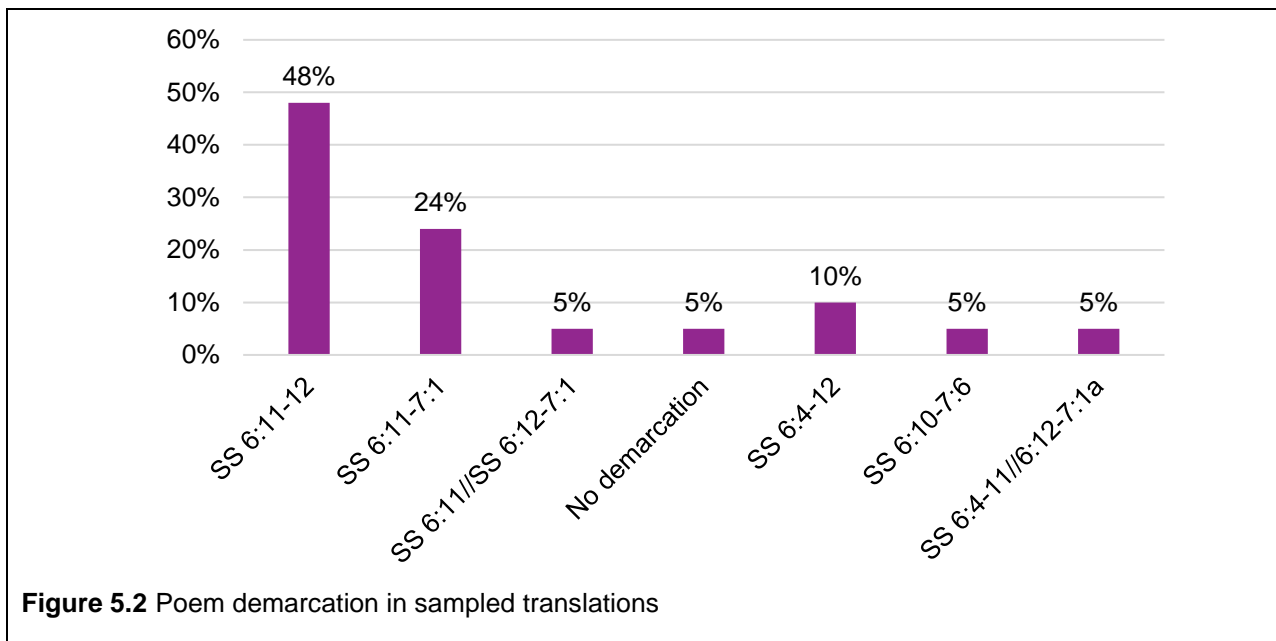
The sampled translations span 134 years, from 1885 to 2019 (Delitzsch [1885] – Alter [2019]). A sample data entry of the parsed interpretations is shown in Table 5.1. For the full list of sampled interpretations, the reader is referred to Appendix C.

Date	Author	Speaker	1 <sup>st</sup> Clause	2 <sup>nd</sup> Clause
1998	LaCocque	Woman	Woman is numbed in her consciousness regard her beloved.	The lover changes the woman into a sacred chariot that transports the ark of the covenant.
2010	Estes	Woman	Woman lost her composure and is beside herself	In her delight she is with her lover - symbolizes reconciliation as they are together.
2019	Alter	Man	The man is experiencing ecstatic confusion and mental confoundment.	Chariot refers to woman body of which the man enters.

#### 5.3.1 Form: Poem delineation

As Song of Songs is understood to be collection of unified poems (chapter three), determining the form of SS 6:12 lies in clearly delineating the boundaries of the poem in which it occurs. Results from the analysis of the poetic demarcation of the immediate context of SS 6:12 in the sampled interpretations are presented in Figure 5.2.

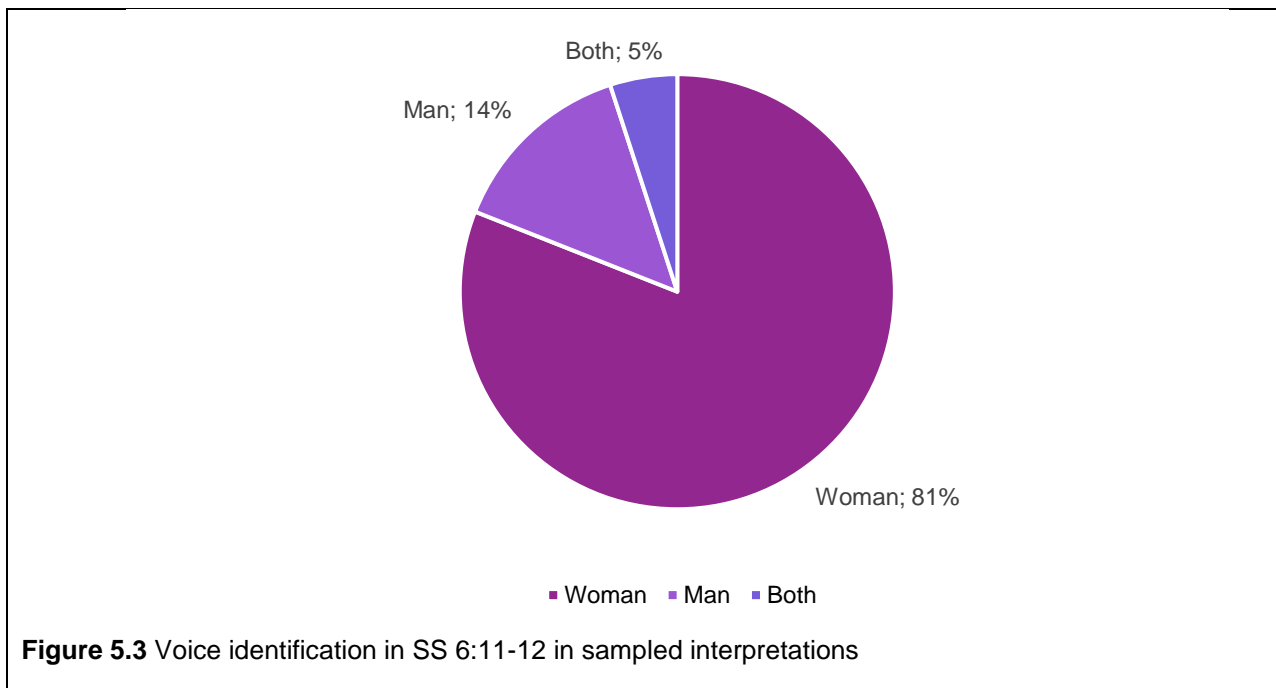
<sup>93</sup> See chapter two of this study for further details.



As shown in Figure 5.2, two main tendencies emerge from the data. Nearly half of the commentators (48%) view SS 6:11-12 as one distinct poem. According to this approach, the previous poem starts in SS 6:4 and ends with SS 6:10 (Longman III, 2001:177), while the subsequent poem is argued to begin in SS 7:1 (ET 6:13) (Bergant, 2001:79-80). The next most popular analysis, favoured by 24% of interpreters, is the view that SS 6:11-12 includes SS 7:1 to form a single poetic unit (ET SS 6:13) (Estes, 2010:387-388), as in SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13), the woman is called back by the Daughters of Jerusalem from her visit to the “nut garden” (טִלְגַּן תְּגַל) in SS 6:11 (Garrett, 2004:231-232; Snaith, 1993:94).

### 5.3.2 Voice: Speaker identity

In determining the identity of the speaker in SS 6:12, interpreters look to SS 6:11 for an indication. Although this seems straightforward, here, again, the correct analysis is much disputed. Interpreters typically opt for one of three approaches, namely those who take SS 6:12 to be the words of (i) the man (Barbiero, 2011:350-151; Bloch & Bloch, 2006: 192), (ii) the woman (Assis, 2009:197-198; Exum, 2011:222-223), or of (iii) both the man and the woman, such that verse 11 is spoken by the woman, and verse 12 by the man (Keel, 1994:225). The distribution of the sampled interpretations along these three veins of analysis is illustrated in Figure 5.3.



Keel (1994:222, 225) is the sole scholar from the sample to take attribute vv. SS 6:11 and SS 6:12 to different speakers. A slightly more popular approach is to analyse both verses as being spoken by the man (14%). This conclusion is closely tied to the significance attributed to the “nut garden” (רִיגָן תְּגָלָה) in SS 6:11 as a metaphor for the woman’s body and is, therefore, attributed to the man (Alter, 2019:608-609; Bloch & Bloch, 2006:192-193). However, the overwhelming majority<sup>94</sup> (86%) of interpretations attribute the words of SS 6:12 to the woman and perceive the “nut garden” (רִיגָן תְּגָלָה) in SS 6:11 as a metaphorical place where the lovers meet (Assis, 2009:197; Exum, 2011:223). According to this approach, SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13) is taken as a call from the Daughters of Jerusalem to the woman to return from her “metaphorical flashback” (Garrett, 2004:232, cf. Fox, 1985:154-155; Garrett, 1993:418-419).

### 5.3.3 Tone: Positive or negative

As mentioned, interpreters tend to divide SS 6:12 into two clauses. The difference arises, as discussed in section 4.5, regarding the object of the verb in first clause יָדַעְתִּי אֲנִי ‘I did not know’. Although there is slight variation among commentators regarding the reference of the first clause, the basic tenor can be captured with the words “surprise,” “amazement,” “realization” and, notably, “ascetic confusion” (Alter, 2019:608; Bloch & Bloch, 2006:193; Duguid, 2016:131). Generally, the woman is taken to be positively astonished by the events described in SS 6:11 (Fox, 1985:155). Some take אֶשְׁרָא (‘my desire, breath, life’) as reflexive (cf. Bloch & Bloch, 2006:193; Exum, 2011:224; Fox, 1985:154) while others place it with the subordinate clause (cf. Estes, 2010:386; Longman III, 2001:186). If it is understood as reflexive, the woman experiences a “partial loss of consciousness due to overstimulation of the emotions” (Garrett, 2004:232). If, however, the word belongs to the

<sup>94</sup> If understood correctly, Pope (1977:574-584) understands both SS 6:11 and 6:12 as spoken by the woman.

subsequent subordinate clause, *וְנַפְשִׁי* ('my desire, breath, life') might have the sense of the emotion as governing or propelling the woman (Keel, 1994:226).

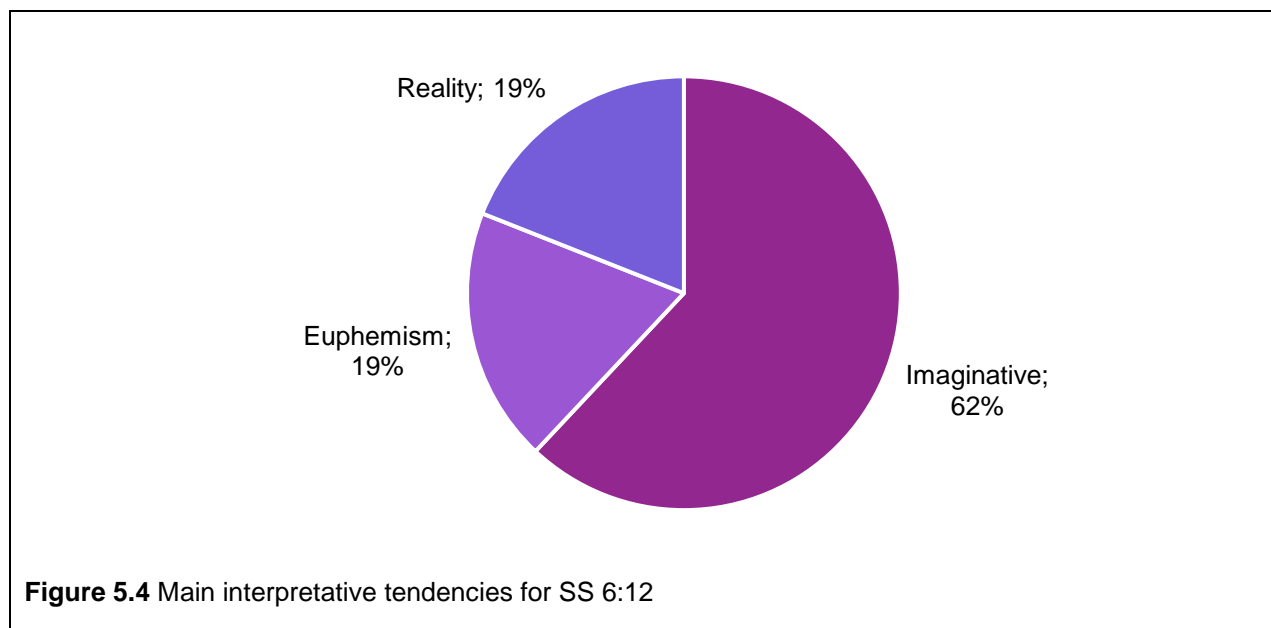
Thus, in contrast to the matters of form and voice, the sampled interpretations unanimously conclude that SS 6:12 is predominantly positive in tone. In other words, regardless of the identity of the speaker, the tone of SS 6:12 "is clearly one of great joy, excitement, or amazement" (Bloch & Bloch, 2006:193).

#### 5.3.4 Genre

As with tone, there is consensus in the data sample that SS 6:12 should be regarded as a description of a "past rendezvous experience" (Assis, 2009:197). The sub-genre of the love poem in SS 6:11-SS 7:1 can thus be categorised as a wistful reminiscence.

#### 5.3.5 Imagery

The extent to which the imagery is taken to be literal or figurative directly affects the proposed interpretation of SS 6:12, as depicted in Figure 5.4.



Although no interpretation can be taken to be an exact indication of an interpreter's understanding, given that many are fluid in their interpretation of SS 6:12, the trends in Figure 5.4 do illustrate the propensity of commentators to gravitate towards three main interpretations of SS 6:12, namely that SS 6:12 is (i) purely imaginative, (ii) a euphemism, or (iii) is a literal reality.

- i. *Imaginative*. On the whole, 62% scholars have the proclivity to see the second clause as a fantasy, dream, or vision (Barbiero, 2011:356; Bloch & Bloch, 2006:194; Exum, 2011:224). This approach holds that the speaker, usually identified as the woman, is metaphorically transported by her desire (*וְנַפְשִׁי*) for her lover, finding herself next to her beloved prince in a chariot of sorts (Bergant, 2001:80).

- ii. *Euphemism*. Secondly, 19% of scholars<sup>95</sup> interpret SS 6:12 in a somewhat figurative manner, seeing the second clause as referring to the physical consummation of love (Assis, 2009:201; Murphy, 1990:179). Alter (2019:609) goes even further by interpreting the chariot as referring to the woman's body. This version of the proposal was first argued by Bloch and Bloch (2006:195) who consider the chariot to have a double role: (i) to indicate honour and royalty; and (ii) having a sexual connotation by "evoking an image of riding".
- iii. *Reality*. Thirdly, 19% of commentators interpret the second clause literally. Keel (1994:5, 14), for example, argues that the milieu of 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. can be regarded as the *Sitz im Leben*<sup>96</sup> of SS. Delitzsch (1885:119) regards the woman to be elevated to a royal position, while Garrett (1993:429; 2004:232-233) sees the second clause as referring to a wedding custom in which the bride departs with the groom in a triumphal procession.

In summary, section 5.3 has examined 21 previous approaches to the interpretation of SS 6:12, particularly regarding (i) form, (ii) voice, (iii) tone, (iv) genre, and (v) imagery associated with it, showing that, much like the translation of SS 6:12 (see chapter four), the interpretation of SS 6:12 is subject to considerable variation and debate.

## 5.4 Interpretation of SS 6:12

In light of the above analysis of previous approaches, the present study now proposes a revised interpretation of the proposed formal translation of SS 6:12. Again, the five elements of literary analysis, namely (i) form, (ii) voice, (iii) tone, (iv) genre, and (v) imagery, will form the framework for the following analysis (Osborne, 2006:238-241; Ryken, 2008:207-211).

### 5.4.1 Form: Poem delineation

In chapter three, it was established that SS is love poetry consisting of multiple smaller poems which are artfully unified, primarily through repetition.<sup>97</sup> The question remains, however, as to which poem or poetic unit SS 6:12 should be allocated. One of the reasons why the interpretation of SS 6:12 is such an arduous and frustrating exercise is because the surrounding literary context is likewise shrouded in obscurity. The relationship of SS 6:12 to SS 6:11 and SS 7:1 (ET 6:13) is quite difficult to determine and, thus, is much disputed (Exum, 2011:214-216; Keel, 1994:22). Therefore, in order to determine the scope of the poem of which SS 6:12 is a part, one must identify the closest established poem and then ripple out in concentric circles toward SS 6:12 (Assis, 2009:196). The closest recognized poem to SS 6:12 is SS 6:4-10 (Longman III, 2001:177), as it is framed by an *inclusio* (Assis, 2009:186-187; Carr, 1984:150; Exum, 2011:215-216). The *inclusio* pattern consists of the verbatim repetition of the phrase "awesome as the most distinguished" in both vv. 4 and 10 (Assis, 2009:193), as shown in Table 5.2.

<sup>95</sup> This includes Alter (2019:609); Assis (2009:201); Bloch & Bloch (2006:195); Murphy (1990:179).

<sup>96</sup> German term, meaning "setting in life" (Murphy, 2003:155). Murphy (2003:155-156) explains that it "refers to the life setting in which events took place or the context out of which forms or genres grew."

<sup>97</sup> See Section 3.4

Table 5.2 Structure of SS 6:4-10 (Assis, 2009:187)	
SS 6:4	SS 6:10
יְפֵה אֶת רַעֲיָתִי כְּתִירְצָה נְאוּה כִּירוּשָׁלַם אַיְמָה כְּנִדְגָלוֹת:	מִי־זָאת הַנְּשֻׁקָה כְּמו־שֶׁחַר יְפֵה כְּלִבְנָה בְּרַה כְּחֶמֶה אַיְמָה כְּנִדְגָלוֹת:
“You are beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, <i>awesome as the most distinguished.</i> ”	“beautiful as the moon, splendid as the sun, <i>awesome as the most distinguished.</i> ”

Garrett (2004:226) explains:

The man begins this section by singing of the woman being as awesome as the great cities of his day and concludes it by comparing her to the heavenly host. The three lines in v 10 (“Beautiful as the moon, / bright as the sun, / awesome as the panoply of heaven”) answers the three lines of v 4 (“You are beautiful, my companion, like Tirzah, / lovely, like Jerusalem, / awesome like panoplied cities”). (Garrett, 2004:226)

In other words, the *inclusio* neatly bookends and completes the poem in SS 6:4-10. Therefore, SS 6:11 must therefore be understood as to be the start of a new poem.

On the opposite front, the closest poem *following* SS 6:12 extends from SS 7:2 to v.11 (ET SS 7:1-10) (Exum, 2011:214-215; Longman III, 2001:188). Admittedly, there is some dispute as to where this poem ends, but this is not pertinent to our study (cf. Alter, 2011:245-246; Carr, 1984:153). Rather, the question addressed in the present analysis is whether SS 6:12 (*i*) belongs to the previous poem (SS 6:4-10), (*ii*) is part of the following poem (SS 7:2-11), or (*iii*) is contained in a different poem altogether.

To answer this question, the discussion first turns to the relationship of SS 7:1 (ET 6:13) to SS 6:12. It is argued by scholars that SS 7:1 (ET 6:13) forms a poem with SS 6:11-12 (Estes, 2010:386; Garrett, 2004:231, 233; Snaith, 1993:99-100), while others regard it as comprising a new poem in conjunction with SS 7:2-6 (Assis, 2009:202-203; Bergant, 2001:80; Murphy, 1983:119). Proponents of the latter view argue that SS 7:1 (ET 6:13-7:5) functions as an introduction to the man’s descriptive poem (*waṣf*)<sup>98</sup> of his beloved in SS 7:2-5 (Assis, 2009:202-203; Bergant, 2001:80). According to this analysis, the woman is called back by the speakers in SS 7:1 that they might “behold” or “see” (הִרְא) her in order that “the description of the physical charms” which began in SS 6:4 may resume (Brown et al., 2017:302; Exum, 2011:215, 225; Longman III, 2001:188-189). Scholars espousing this view highlight the man’s peculiarly uncharacteristic sequence in describing

<sup>98</sup> In the *waṣf* or descriptive poem, the man and the woman express their love for one another “by describing how the other’s body affects them” (Schwab, 2008:835). For more on *waṣf*, see Schwab (2008:835-842).

the woman from her feet upwards (SS 7:2-6; ET 7:1-7:5), as if inspired by the dancing of her feet in SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13) (Alter, 2019:609; Bloch & Bloch, 2006:195), whereas his usual method of ekphrastic praise is by working top-down (cf. SS 4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-8) rather than bottom-up (Longman III, 2001:188-189; Murphy, 1990:185).

Although the arguments in favour of reading SS 7:1 with SS 7:2-5 are intriguing, the arguments against this proposal are more compelling. In the words of Exum (2011:231),

The view that the woman is dancing is widespread but finds little support in these verses. If she were, one might expect at least one of the comparisons to be to something in motion... or some such phrase as "how gracefully your arms move as you turn" or "how your hips sway like grasses in the breeze." But in fact this description of the body, part by part, is no different in this respect from the earlier ones (4:1-5; 5:10-16; 6:4-7), except that, whereas they start at the head and move downward, this one starts at the feet and moves up. None of them indicates that the person described is doing or what the perspective is. (Exum, 2011:231)

Regarding the reference to dancing in SS 7:1 (ET 6:13), Murphy (1990:185) observes that the woman "compares the interest of the onlookers to the interest that such a dance would inspire. She does not say that she is dancing or intends to dance." Furthermore, scholars arguing that SS 7:1 belongs to the descriptive poem in SS 7:2-6 admit that there remains a tangible connection between SS 6:11-12 and SS 7:1 (cf. Assis, 2009:198; Duguid, 2015:142; Fox, 1985:157).

A second reason why some scholars feel reluctant to place SS 6:12 and SS 7:1 (ET 6:13) with each other is the lack of homogenous words and images (Roberts, 2001:484-485). However, the jaggedness of SS 6:12-7:1 (ET 6:12-13) can be explained by what Ryken (2014:187) calls "stream of consciousness." Ryken (2014:187-188) defines stream of consciousness as the following.

A form of structure in a composition consisting of the flow of thoughts and feelings that run through an author's or speaker's mind while pursuing a chosen topic. This is a form of psychological realism in which a reader or listener is taken inside the thought process of an author or speaker and follows the quick jumps and associations of ideas that people experience in their thinking and feeling. The usefulness of the label is that it allows us to see a principle of organization in a poem... that might otherwise seem chaotic and disunified. No matter how fluid and random such composition may be, everything is unified by the fact that the sequence of details is what the author or speaker is thinking or feeling. (Ryken, 2014:187-188)

In other words, the disjointedness of SS 6:12-7:1 (ET 6:12-13) does not repudiate the conclusion that SS 6:12-7:1 (ET 6:12-13) should be regarded as one poem. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that SS 7:1 (ET 6:13) should rather be taken in conjunction with SS 6:12. Moreover, as SS 6:11 does not belong to the previous poem (SS 6:4-10), it is also most readily analysed as belonging to SS 6:12-7:1 (ET 6:12-13). To investigate this connection any further would require a separate

investigation of the micro and macro structure of SS 6:11- 7:6 (ET 6:11-7:5) and is beyond the scope of the present study. See Roberts (2001) for a tentative investigation thereof.<sup>99</sup>

#### 5.4.2 Voice: Speaker identity

Having determined the demarcation of the various poems, the identity of the speakers in each must be determined. Once again, the discussion begins with the widely accepted poems, particularly SS 6:4-10, before turning to SS 6:11-7:1.

Starting again with SS 6:4-10, the words of this poem are generally held to be the words of the man for three reasons (Bergant, 2001:75-76; Exum, 2011:210-211). Firstly, the speech in SS 6:4 starts off in a manner very similarly to that of the man's speeches elsewhere in SS (1:15; 4:1, 7), namely with lavish praise and complementation (Bergant, 2001:76; Murphy, 1990:177). Secondly, it is noteworthy that the addressee of in the poem, in line with the ANE tradition of portraying cities as females (cf. Lam. 1:1-7; Ezek. 23:4-5), is compared to the grandeur of two cities, namely Tirzah and Jerusalem (Bergant, 2001:76; Murphy, 1990:177). Thirdly, both the words for "sun" (כְּלִבְיָהּ) and "moon" (רָחַב) in SS 6:10, are grammatically feminine and seems to the suited similes for the woman (Alter, 2019:608; Garrett, 1993:418). Therefore, it reasons to assume that SS 6:4-10 is uttered by a male character rather than the female character.

As with the inclusio mentioned in section 5.4.1, the voice—or speaker identity—also serves to signal a change. Whereas SS 6:8-10 is spoken in the third person, SS 6:11 is spoken in the first person, signally a change or break from the previous poem (Assis, 2009:202; Keel, 1994:222). The content of SS 6:11 also differs from that in SS 6:4-10 in the sense that the former describes a garden whereas in the latter, the woman is described by the man (Assis, 2009:202; Keel, 1994:222). Stylistically, SS 6:4-10 is characterized by the speech act of present tense complementation, while SS 6:11 switches to past tense narration. Moreover, whereas SS 6:4-10 make predominant use of the second-person singular pronoun "you", SS 6:11 switches to the first person. Thus, SS 6:11 formally signals the beginning of a new poem (Alter, 2019:608; Keel, 1994:222). Furthermore, given that both SS 6:11 and 6:12 are spoken in the first person, it is reasonable to assume that these two verses form a single unit (Barbiero, 2011:35; Snaith, 1993:94).

In approaching SS 6:11-12, the voice of these verses is predominately attributed to either (i) the man (Barbiero, 2011:350-151; Bloch & Bloch, 2006: 192), (ii) the woman (Assis, 2009:197-198; Exum, 2011:222-223), or (iii) to both the woman (v.11) and man (v.12) (Keel, 1994:225). The third possibility is easily eliminated, as the consistency of first-person speech makes it unlikely that the

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<sup>99</sup> Roberts (2001:546) notes that SS 6:11-12 might be the beginning of the section of SS 7:1-11. This may also be possible, seeing given the rare proximity of the word נָדִיב 'noble/prince' within SS 6:12-7:2 (Roberts, 2001:546) (cf. Roberts, 2001:488-489, 546-548).

verses are uttered by different speakers. To choose between the first two mentioned alternatives, however, is much more difficult.

The main argument in favour of the man as the speaker in SS 6:11-12 is that v. 11 uses garden imagery. Throughout SS, the garden is a symbol for the woman (Barbiero, 2001:350-351; Exum, 2011:222). Repeatedly, the woman is described by the man as a “locked garden” (SS 4:12), a “garden spring” (SS 4:15), and “the one who dwells in the gardens” (SS 8:13) (Cornelius, 1997:877; cf. Bloch & Bloch, 2006:192). It is also argued that the woman is the only person in SS to be associated with “vines” and “pomegranates” (SS 6:11; cf. 1:6; 4:13; 7:9, 13; 8:2), whereas the man is associated with only the “apple tree” (SS 2:13) (Bloch & Bloch, 2006:192; Keel, 1994:222). Bloch and Bloch (2006:192) argue further that throughout the Bible, as is the case here in SS, the man is depicted as the agent or initiator of sexual intercourse (“he came to her”), and never the woman. It is therefore argued that the man is the one who goes down to the nut garden in SS 6:11 and not the woman (Bloch & Bloch, 2006:192). According to this argument then, the man is describing in SS 6:12 the effect the woman has on him and how he is transformed by “the power of love... into a princely figure with chariots at his disposal” (Exum, 2011:223).

Although the first proposal presents strong arguments in its favour, four arguments suggest that the words of SS 6:11-12 are more reasonably understood as belonging to the woman.

- i. Firstly, in the broader sense, the garden imagery in SS is not used solely for the woman but also refers to the place to which the couple return to experience the pleasures of their love relationship (cf. SS 2:15) (Cornelius, 1997:877–878; Ryken et al., 1998:317). Curiously, the garden image described in SS 6:11 differs slightly from previously mentioned gardens, in the sense that it is described as a “nut garden” (רִגְלַת תְּאֵנָה) (Bergant, 2001:79). The isolated occurrence of this phrase in the OT might suggest that it should be regarded as a literal place in SS, and not as a metaphor for the woman’s body (Murphy, 1990:179; Assis, 2009:197; Gault, 2019:117). This point is further discussed in section 5.4.5.
- ii. Secondly, the imagery of seeing whether the “vine” (רִפְּאָ) and the “pomegranate” (רְמוֹן) have blossomed is reprised by the woman in SS 7:13 (ET SS 7:12) (Exum, 2011:223). In light of the fact that these images come from the woman’s lips in SS 7:13 (ET SS 7:12), there is a strong likelihood that it is she who speaks using the same images in SS 6:11 (Exum, 2011:223).
- iii. Thirdly, Exum (2011:223) notes that throughout SS, the woman’s “characteristic mode of communicating her feelings” is through storytelling. Once again, this would seem to indicate that SS 6:11-12 are the words of the woman, as these verses are characterised by past tense narration.
- iv. Fourthly and finally, Deckers’ (2001:194) word study of נַפְשׁוֹ ‘soul, being, life’ in SS reveals that it is found only in the mouth of the woman. In syllogistic terms, if only the woman uses

the word **שָׁדָד** 'desire', and the same word is found in SS 6:12, it logically follows that it must be the woman who utters the words in SS 6:12.

In light of the abovementioned proposals, the present study analyses the voice in SS 6:11-12 as that of the woman. However, in SS 7:1, the voice seems to change.

Like in SS 6:11-12, however, the voice of SS 7:1 is a much-debated issue (Bloch & Bloch, 2006:195). The first half of SS 7:1, the speaker speaks in the first-person plural, addressing the interlocutor using the second-person feminine singular pronominal form of address. Conversely, in the second half of the verse, the interlocutor is referred to in the second-person masculine plural pronominal form of address (Owens, 1993:656). Most probably, the plural speakers in the first part of the verse are the "women of Jerusalem", for up to this point in SS, no other plural speakers have been introduced (Estes, 2010:389; Longman III, 2001:191). Longman III (2001:191) notes that, though the woman's brothers speak in SS 8:8-9, the context surrounding SS 7:1 seems to be contrary to their nature, as depicted throughout SS [cf. SS 1:6; 8:8-9]. Indeed, the brothers are repeatedly depicted as trying to protect their sister's sexuality; it would be strange if they were the ones in SS 7:1 calling on her in order to look at her physical beauty (Longman III, 2001:17). The masculine plural verb **תִּבְרְכֵנּוּ** 'you look' does not necessarily mean that there is a male chorus, for SS "never uses the second feminine plural form, even when women are clearly being addressed" [cf. SS 1:6; 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4] (Garrett, 2004:233). Scholars also speculate as to whether the second part of verse 7:1 is uttered by the woman herself (Exum, 2011:228; Longman III, 2001:191). However, if this was the case, the woman would rather "refer to herself as 'me' rather than as Shulmammith" (Estes, 2010:389). The most reasonable conclusion is thus that the speaker of the second part of SS 7:1 is the man, who might be rebuking the woman of Jerusalem "for not showing proper respect to this woman" (Roberts, 2001:500; Garrett, 2004:23).

In summary, the poem in SS 6:11-7:1 features three speakers or groups of speakers, namely (i) the woman (SS 6:11-12), (ii) the women of Jerusalem (SS 7:1a), and (iii) the man (SS 7:1b). Understanding the voice(s) of this poem also aid in determining the tone in which it is spoken.

#### 5.4.3 Tone: Positive or negative

The tone of SS 6:11-7:1 (ET SS 6:11-13) is to a great extent, determined by the understanding of the reaction found in the phrase **אֲנִי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי** 'I did not know' in SS 6:12. This is, however, a troublesome endeavour to undertake, for the verse is somewhat open-ended (Roberts, 2001:471). The phrase **אֲנִי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי** 'I did not know' can have a negative sense, as in Job 9:21 when Job despairs "I do not know myself, I loathe my life" (Bloch & Bloch, 2006:193). On the other hand, the phrase can be intended in a positive sense (Bloch & Bloch, 2006:193). Most scholars tend to view this phrase in a positive light, asserting that the woman does find the garden in bloom (Exum, 2011:224). If viewed as negative, the interruption of the woman's word SS 6:11-12 might be intended to convey her disappointment in not finding their love blooming, as if to indicate to the man that his

compliments are empty, for when she sought his love, it was absent. Though the negative analysis is possible, there are two striking indicators which suggest that SS 6:11-12 is intended a positive sense.

- i. Firstly, it would be strange for the man to further describe his beloved in SS 7:2-6, when she is disappointed at the loss of his love in SS 6:11-12.
- ii. Secondly, the basic tenor throughout SS is one of joy between the man and the woman. Although certain passages like SS 5:6-8 might be seen as having a negative sense, in those cases it is clearly specified in the context.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that SS 6:12 describes the woman's experience in a positive sense. In accordance with many scholars, the woman is probably experiencing a mixture of excitement and confusion in the first clause of SS 6:12 (Alter, 2019:608; Assis, 2009:199). The woman is stunned as "she finds herself in some heightened ecstatic state, as though she is out of the body. She has lost her balance or normal sense of composure, because of the great joy and excitement her lover instils on her..." (Gledhill, 1994:200). The woman's words in the first clause אֲלֵךְ יָדָעְתִּי 'I did not know' therefore do not refer to abstract knowledge being gained but rather to experiential knowledge which has an emotional undertone (Botterweck, 1986:464; Fretheim, 1997:410).

#### 5.4.4 Genre

Chapter two of this study determined that SS as a whole should be considered as love poetry.<sup>100</sup> Within this category, Murphy (1983:101, based on Horst's [1961:176-187] study) identifies six genres within SS: namely, (i) song of yearning/desire, (ii) a teasing poem, (iii) admiration song, (iv) description of an experience, and (v) a descriptive song of physical charms (*wasf*).<sup>101</sup> Assis (2009:197) identifies only four genres within SS (description, adoration, desire and rendezvous) but states that SS 6:12 belongs to none of them. However, it is acknowledged that the poetic unit SS 6:11-12 is a longing reminiscence by the woman of her beloved. (Assis, 2009:197; Murphy, 1983:61).

Traditionally, SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13) is taken to be a part of the descriptive poem that follows (SS 7:2-6; ET 7:1-7:5) (Assis, Longman III, 2001:188). However, given that SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13) forms a poem with SS 6:11-12, rather than identifying SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13) as descriptive, this verse should be considered as expressing 'longing', as the Daughters of Jerusalem desire to look upon the woman and call her back in SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13) (Gledhill, 1994:201). This element of longing in SS 7:1 (ET SS 6:13) also corresponds with the woman's *uṣṣā* 'desire' in SS 6:12 which metaphorically transforms her. Thus, it is argued that SS 6:11-12 constitutes a wistful reminiscence, which gives way to the element of longing/desire in SS 7:1 (ET 6:13). This conclusion presupposes that what occurs

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<sup>100</sup> See chapter two and the conclusion reached in Section 2.4.4.

<sup>101</sup> A *wasf* is an Arabic term, referring to a "detailed recitation" of the bride (Schwab, 2008:835).

in SS 6:11-7:1 (ET SS 6:11-13) is a dream-like fantasy (Gledhill, 1994:200). This will be discussed in more in depth in the following section.

#### 5.4.5 Imagery

Already alluded to above, the context of SS 6:11 is pertinent to understanding the imagery of SS 6:12. As has been expounded in chapter three, the repetition of themes, images, and lexical items greatly facilitates the interpretation of SS as a whole and therefore also of 6:11-7:1. Consequently, these repetitions can be used to make sense the context within SS 6:11. Strikingly, there are strong lexical connections to be found between SS 6:11 and 7:12-13 (Munro, 1995:118; Roberts, 2001:475), namely that both passages (*i*) use the keyword נֶצַח 'bloom/blossom' (Brown et al., 2017:475), (*ii*) both contain the phrase הַגִּזְו הַרְמָנִים 'have the pomegranates bloom', (*iii*) both question whether or not the vine has blossomed, employing the interrogative particle ה and the conditional particle אִם 'if' respectively (Brown et al., 2017:49-50), and both passages (*iv*) spearhead the question of whether or not the vegetation has budded with the Qal verb רָאָה 'see' (Brown et al., 2017:906). These four lexical correspondences between SS 6:11 and 7:12-13 are strong enough to convincingly suggest that the context of SS 7:12-13 is an indispensable tool to help us understand the ambiguous context of SS 6:11 (Gault, 2019:120).

Notably, other than SS 6:11, Roberts (2001:474) identifies three other "going to the garden" strophes in SS, namely in SS 5:1; 6:2 and 7:12-13. Both in the case of SS 5:1 and 6:2, גַּן 'the garden' is a metaphor for the woman's sexuality (Exum, 2011:182, 189; Roberts, 2001:474).<sup>102</sup> In commenting on SS 5:1, Exum (2011:182) writes the following.

The woman's invitation in the previous verse ("Let my lover come to his garden!") and the man's reply here in this verse ("I come to my garden," etc.) are complementary expressions of desire gendered in terms of a cultural version of love as something a woman gives and a man takes. The garden, its plenteous water supply, and its lush plants suggest female sexuality; entering the garden, gathering, eating, and drinking its produce describe male sexual activity (as does pasturing elsewhere... 2:16; 6:2, 3). (Exum, 2011:182)

Notably, the passages in SS 6:11 and 7:12-13 differ from SS 5:1 and 6:2 in the sense that they do not describe "trips to the garden to eat" but rather trips to "see" (רָאָה) if the garden is in bloom (Assis, 2009:198; Roberts, 2001:475).

Specifically, the context of SS 7:12-13 suggests that, rather than random fantasy, a physical place within the poetic literary world of SS is also primarily in view in SS 6:11 (Gault, 2019:120). This reference to a physical place, both in SS 7:12-13 and SS 6:11, is not merely a reference of geography, but rather a reference towards a place of love (Gault, 2019:120). The woman is

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<sup>102</sup> cf. Cornelius (1997:877-878) who argues that along with SS 4:1, SS 5:1 and 6:2 should be considered, not as the beloved, but rather as "the *place* of love" (emphasis author's).

described as going down to the *גַּנַּת אֶגְנוֹן* ‘nut garden’<sup>103</sup> as if to say she is going down to a literal place within the figurative world of SS (Gault, 2019:120). Not only does the woman go down to the nut garden, but she does so with great expectation (Garrett, 2004:232). The woman goes down to the nut garden in order to *רָאָה* ‘see’ or ‘seek’ “evidence of the return of spring” by searching if “the flowers are in bloom” (Duguid, 2015:140; Murphy, 1990:110, 179). Images in SS 6:11 of *בְּאַבְי הַגַּחַל*, ‘green shoots of the valley’, *הַפְּרָחָה הַגֵּפֶן* ‘the vine has budded’, and *הַרְמָנִים הִנְצוּ* ‘pomegranates have bloomed’ are all signs for the woman that, as nature blossoms, their own love as couple blooms (cf. SS 2:10-14) (Assis, 2009:198; Munro, 1995:119). In fact, the signs of spring in the external world act as a stimulus for the lovers’ desire for each other “and are to some extent the projection of this longing” of the couple (Munro, 1995:114). Typical of pastoral poetry,<sup>104</sup> the rustic landscape in all its idealized beauty mirrors “the pleasure the couple finds in their mutual love” (Munro, 1995:199; cf. Ryken et al., 1998:317), as “[b]oth the place and person of love contain beautiful sights, wonderful aromas, and intoxicating tastes” (cf. SS 4:2-5:1) (Gault, 2001:122).

This explanation of the context of SS 6:11 fits the seemingly strange reaction of the woman in SS 6:12, as she is positively overwhelmed by the affections paid to her by her beloved (Duguid, 2016:131). The motivation for this interpretation is further substantiated by the findings of Paul (1978:545-546), who compares the first clause of SS 6:12 with that of an Akkadian expression found in a Mesopotamian medical text. The Akkadian expression to which Paul (1978:545) refers describes “a patient’s (partial) loss of consciousness” and, when translated, expresses that “he does not know himself”. The Akkadian expression’s “exact interdialectal semantic equivalent” of the first clause within SS 6:12 is regarded by Paul (1978:546) to refer to “a mental disturbance... caused by great joy and exhilaration.”

The discussion now turns to the interpretation of the imagery found within the second clause of SS 6:12. Chapter four (section 4.5) concluded that the second clause is considered as a subordinate clause, *נִפְשִׁי שָׂמַתְנִי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמֵּי-נְדָיִב* ‘my desire made me chariots of my noble-people’ to the main clause *לֹא יָדַעְתִּי* ‘I did not know.’ The subordinate clause functions as the phrasal complement to the main clause within SS 6:12. The subordinate clause starts with the subject *נִפְשִׁי* ‘my desire’, which refers to the “inner person” rather than denoting to the entire being (cf. Jer. 2:24; Deut. 6:5) (Fredericks, 1997:133; Seebass, 1998:508). In SS 6:12, the woman is propelled by her desires, which is a reaction to the encounter with her beloved in SS 6:11 (Keel, 1994:226). The

<sup>103</sup> The imagery of the nut (*אֶגְנוֹן*) is still a very much debated issue. Works that can be consulted on this regard include Exum (2011:224); Hess (2005:207); Longman III (2001:184-185); Pope (1977:580-584).

<sup>104</sup> Typical of pastoral poetry, Ryken (2008:274) writes, is that “the characters are shepherds, the setting is rustic, and the actions are those customarily done by shepherds. The very landscape counts for a lot in such poetry, and descriptions of the setting are prominent. Such poetry is metaphoric from start to finish. No one pretends that it portrays literal events... in any event the life portrayed is a metaphor for the realities of love.”

woman's נַפְּסָה 'desire' is so ignited by her beloved's love that she is שְׁמַתְנִי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב 'made chariots of my noble-people'.

As demonstrated in section 4.4.3, the translation of the verb שִׁימ as 'make' implies that the woman undergoes some sort of transformation, which can occur on a number of levels (Barbiero, 2011:357; Meier, 1997:1239-1240). Specifically, the verb שִׁימ 'make' can sometimes describe a "transformation of quality. The object retains its essential identity but either becomes debased or enhanced in value or ability" (Meier, 1997:1239). This sense of שִׁימ within SS 6:12 takes us a step closer to ascertaining the meaning of the last phrase מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב 'chariots of my noble-people'.

Regarding the word מִרְכָּבוֹת "chariot", three categories dominate throughout the OT: (i) chariots as divine vehicles, (ii) chariots as war instruments, and (iii) as royal vehicles (Ryken et al., 1998:138).

The first approach is adopted by LaCocque (1998:140-141), who conducts a comparative analysis of SS 6:12 with other OT texts (cf. 1 Samuel 7:3; Jeremiah 3:14-16, 31:17-19; Ezekiel 1; 10; 2 Kings 2:11-12). According to LaCocque (1998:141), the love of the beloved transforms the woman into "the (sacred) chariot that transported the ark of the covenant to and from the house of Abinadab." However, LaCocque (1998:140-141) commits the fallacy which Osborne (2006:91) labels as the "misuse of parallels." LaCocque (1998:140-141) supports his hypothesis by only using parallels within in the OT that would support his claim. The word מִרְכָּבוֹת 'chariot' occurs nearly 150 times throughout the Bible, yet LaCocque (1998:140-141) overlooks the meaning of מִרְכָּבוֹת 'chariot' as it occurs in SS 6:12 and confuses its reference with his quoted parallels.<sup>105</sup>

Seeing מִרְכָּבוֹת "chariots" as referring to war or battle instruments, on the other hand, is a very plausible alternative to take. This is the position taken by Barbiero (2011:357), who regards word מִרְכָּבוֹת 'chariot' a military metaphor. Interestingly, Barbiero (2011:357-358) identifies מִרְכָּבוֹת 'chariot' as symbolizing a chariot of YHWH, coming close to LaCocque's (1998:140-141) "divine vehicle" interpretation. However, Barbiero's (2011:357-358) analysis does not sufficiently take the syntagmatic relations of מִרְכָּבוֹת 'chariots' into account. Most importantly, the themes of wars, battles, and aggression are not compatible with the overarching theme of love in SS. The images of war which do occur within SS, such as "banner of love" (SS 1:9) or "Pharaoh's chariots" (SS 2:4), are always used in contexts of affirmations of love. Thus, SS 6:12 should be taken similarly (Exum, 2011:115).

If the context of מִרְכָּבוֹת "chariots" are taken into account, it seems that this word can only refer to vehicles of royalty. In general, the metaphors in SS are intended "to make a transfer from one level to another", but seldom is this transfer one of a visual correspondence (Ryken, 2008:277, 2014:186). Rather, the principle underlying SS's metaphors is principle of "the best of the best"

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<sup>105</sup> Barbiero (2011:357) critiques LaCocque (1998:337-338) of following an allegorical interpretation.

(Ryken, 2014:186). Frequently, the metaphors in SS compare the subject with the “superlative quality” of the thing named (Ryken, 2014:186). What should be inferred from the metaphors in SS is “the *value* or excellence of an object” (Ryken, 2008:277, emphasis his). It is this value or excellence of an object which unlocks the meaning of the phrase מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב ‘chariots of my noble-people’. Taken in isolation, מִרְכָּבוֹת ‘chariots’ has the possibility of referring to severe and threatening battle vehicles. However, in combination with עַמִּי-נְדִיב ‘my noble-people’, the metaphor shines an altogether different light on the chariots as “royal vehicles” (Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997:31-32; Conrad, 1998:224; Ryken et al., 1998:138). The value being communicated here in SS 6:12 is one of royalty and exaltation (Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997:31-32; Conrad, 1998:224). Chariotry elsewhere in SS (cf. 1:9) also conveys the sense of the woman’s “nobility” (Munro, 1995:38).<sup>106</sup> Specifically in SS 6:12, the woman is in a fantasy, were “[t]he scene itself conveys connotations of nobility, royalty, glamour and splendour” (Gledhill, 1994:200). Ultimately, the implies that the woman’s experience of the man’s love in SS 6:11 results in the experience of being metaphorically elevated to the exalted status akin to that of the royal chariots. She “feels” as an extremely valuable and prized receiver of the man’s love (Carr, 1984:152).

It should be noted, as has been argued in chapter four (see section 4.4.1) עַמִּי-נְדִיב ‘my noble-people’ should be regarded as a compound noun (consisting of a noun and substantive adjective). Therefore, the nobility to which this phrase further points, is bound up in the reference of עַמִּי ‘people/nation’, which is most likely a reference towards Israel. Thus, appealing to עַמִּי ‘people/nation’, is the woman’s way of saying that the man’s love elevates her to such an extent than she feels she is prized above all common folk (Delitzsch, 1885:118-119).

The discussion now turns to the effect of the analysis of imagery on the interpretation of SS 6:11-7:1 as a whole. As shown in Figure 5.4 (section 5.3.5), there are three main tendencies in the interpretation of SS 6:12, namely as (i) literal, (ii) imaginative, and (iii) euphemistic. Based on the superlative nature of SS metaphors, the second clause cannot be taken in a literal sense. Moreover, SS is considered as pastoral poetry, which is usually fictional in character (Alter, 2011:236; Ryken, 2008:274). In general, SS is known to be deeply rooted in figurative language, probably more than any other book in the Bible (Alter, 2011:236; Ryken, 2008:289). Exum (2011:45) aptly explains that real-world reality and “realism” within SS are not the same. SS is realistic in that it uses objects of the real world, for example house, streets, watchmen etc, to build a poetic world of its own (Exum, 2011:45; Ryken, 2008:277). The world that SS describes is magical but not unrealistic and is therefore “immanently accessible to readers who would identify with the lovers, since lovers know the world as real but magical as well” (Exum, 2011:47).

Secondly, the analysis of מִרְכָּבוֹת ‘chariots’ as a euphemism for the act of love making is likewise unlikely. Though Bloch and Bloch (2006:195) argue that SS 6:12 as sexual connotation by

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<sup>106</sup> Munro (1995:35-42) has done an extensive study of “regal imagery” found within SS.

“evoking an image of riding”, this verse is not dynamic in the sense of describing physical movement, but rather static in the sense of describing a state of being (cf. Barbiero, 2001:355-256; Gledhill, 1994:200). Rather, SS 6:12 has been argued to evoke images of royalty/nobility, which is substantiated by references to other vehicles within SS (cf. SS 3:7; “the litter of Solomon”), which usually “contribute[] to the royal fiction employed” in the book as a whole (Bergant, 2001:80). Furthermore, SS is considered “erotic” but not “pornographic” (Gault, 2019:23). In respect to this, Gault (2019:23) writes,

Like erotica, the Song employs sexually explicit, imaginative metaphors to convey the lovers’ increasing amorous desire, evoking the same yearning in its readers, rather than satisfying such desires with repeated, pornographic displays of the sex act itself. (Gault 2019:23)

Lastly, the above-mentioned analysis squares with the command from the Daughters of Jerusalem. For the woman is “lost in her dreams” and is therefore called back (שׁוּבִי ‘return’) by the Daughters of Jerusalem so that they might “gaze on her beauty” (Duguid, 2016:131; Gledhill, 1994:201). The woman dreams of her past encounter with her beloved (SS 6:11) and is called back by the Daughters of Jerusalem to the poetic reality (Garrett, 2004:223).

## 5.5 Form and meaning

As stated at the outset of this investigation, the ambiguous syntax of SS 6:12 has baffled translators and interpreters for centuries. However, as have been noted above (section 5.4.1), SS 6:11-7:1 (ET SS 6:11-13) is bound by the technique called “stream of consciousness” (Ryken, 2014:187). This vital to understanding the form and meaning of the verse, for, as Baldick (2015:343) explains,

stream of consciousness is a special style of interior monologue: while an interior monologue always presents a character’s thoughts ‘directly’, without the apparent intervention of a summarizing and selecting narrator, it does not necessarily mingle them with impressions and perceptions, nor does it necessarily violate the norms of grammar, syntax, and logic; but the stream-of-consciousness technique also does one or both of these things. (Baldick 2015:343)

In other words, “the confusion in the verse [SS 6:12] could possibly be intentional and be meant to reflect the woman’s sense of excitement and wonder” (Assis, 2009:199), thus supporting the interpretation proposed in chapter five. Thus, SS 6:12 is perfectly crafted so as to reflect its desired meaning in all aspects of its form.

## 5.6 Chapter summary

The objective of chapter five has been to propose a revised interpretation for the proposed formal translation of SS 6:12. Following the definitions of key terms in section 5.2, section 5.3 presented the analysis of a sample of 21 interpretations according to their views on (i) form, (ii) voice, (iii) tone, (iv) genre, and (v) imagery. Section 5.4 guided the reader step by step through the proposed analysis, concluding that SS 6:12 is part of a smaller poem in SS 6:11 to SS 7:1. The voice in SS

6:12 is that of the woman, as she positively reminisces about a previous encounter with her beloved, which caused her to feel exalted, esteemed, and respected. Lastly, section 5.5 finished with concluding remarks regarding the consistency between form and meaning in SS 6:12. Chapter six reviews the objectives of, methods used, and conclusions drawn in the present investigation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

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From the outset, the primary goal of this study has been to (i) determine a formal translation and (ii) to conceive a tenable interpretation of SS 6:12. In order to achieve this goal, the study was divided into two main phases, the first viewing Song of Songs as a whole, and the second shining the spotlight on SS 6:12 in particular.

In Part One of the study, literature reviews were carried out to survey previous interpretations (chapter two) and structural analyses (chapter three) of SS. Through the assessment and critiquing of numerous proposals, the study concluded that SS is most convincingly categorised as a body of love poetry, artfully and intricately unified by a variety of poetic and literary devices, the most characteristic of which is the use of repetition.

Part Two of the present investigation narrowed its focus to concentrate specifically on SS 6:12. The syntactico-semantic analysis in chapter four revealed extensive variation in previous approaches to the translation of SS 6:12, fuelled by five main challenges corresponding to the five main constituents of the verse. Through careful analysis of the data and thorough consultation of grammatical authorities, it was determined that (i) the constituents in the phrase מִרְכָבוֹת עַמִּי-נְדִיב 'chariots of my noble-people' stand in a construct relationship, referred to one concept and acting as a single unit. As the present study opted (ii) not to epenthesize a preposition where the BH has none, (iii) the verb יָשָׁה was argued to take a double accusative—specifically, a predicative accusative of the “person appointed + rank” variety—and thus was most accurately to be translated ‘made me’. Furthermore, the present study argued for (iv) the translation of the noun שֹׁפָר as ‘desire’ and that (v) the phrase לֹא יָדַעְתִּי ‘I did not know’ requires an accusative complement manifested in SS 6:12 as the verbal substantive ‘my soul made me [to be] chariots of my noble people’. Ultimately, the proposed formal translation for SS 6:12 can be formulated as shown in (14).

(14) Proposed translation of SS 6:12

I did not know, [that] my desire made me [to be] chariots of my noble-people

Chapter five proposed a tenable interpretation of the formal translation of SS 6:12. By analysing a sample of 21 interpretations, it was shown that considerable variation in interpretation—along three contradictory veins of interpretation (dream, euphemism, reality)—resulted not only from divergent translations of SS 6:12, but was also due to conflicting notions of the (i) form, (ii) voice, (iii) tone, (iv) genre, and (v) imagery of the immediate context. Only by examining SS 6:12 in terms of these five elements of literary analysis could it be deduced that SS 6:12 is nestled within a shorter love poem (SS 6:11-7:1) in which the woman fondly remembers a time she went out to find her beloved’s love (SS 6:11) and was overwhelmed by his affections (SS 6:12). Song of Songs 6:12 is therefore a recorded reaction towards the events of SS 6:11, in which the woman’s desire moves

her in such a way that it causes her to feel as a chariot, a regal image which conveys the sense of royalty, nobility, exaltation, and the highest respect.

In final analysis, the study is unique in the sense that it is the most thorough investigation of the literature on, linguistic structure of, and connotative interpretation of SS 6:12. The translation proposed in chapter four is unlike any other primarily in its combination of refusing to epenthesize a preposition and proposing the double accusative analysis. Moreover, the accompanying interpretation as laid out in chapter five is unique in that it emphasises the regality and exaltation of the woman's experience of her beloved's attentions. This points to the positive light in which Scripture bathes the most intimate relationship between a man and his wife.

With this said, the study is not without its shortcomings. Because of the width of its scope, the present investigation is by no means exhaustive in any of its research components. To this day, the genre, the structure, and the usage of metaphors within SS is still a point of considerable debate among scholars. Furthermore, discrepancies in terminology (between Biblical studies and mainstream linguistics, for example), may have muddied the waters of the various analyses. In light of these shortcomings, there are several clear directions for further research. First, the field would greatly benefit from a more thorough investigation concerning the genre of each delineated poem within SS. Additionally, a more in-depth analysis focusing specifically on the function of repetition within SS and the consequences for the overall structure for SS would be a most rewarding and illuminating study. Third, whereas the present study focused on English/Afrikaans translations and commentaries, an examination of manuscript evidence may also be helpful. Finally, an attempt to standardise the terminology used for analysing Hebrew poetics would be a great asset in making OT research more accessible for those outside the field.

In conclusion, the hope for the present investigation is that—is however small—a more accurate translation and interpretation of SS 6:12 might contribute *(i)* to a deeper understanding of the text and *(ii)* to advocating for a more methodical approach towards the study of SS as a whole, in order that the Church of Jesus Christ may benefit from this beautifully rich and profoundly practical book, and that God may be glorified by it.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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## APPENDIX A

Appendix A. Summary of aims, research questions, objectives, and research strategies.		
Research question	Aim and objectives	Research strategies
	<b>Aim:</b> To reach a more informed translation and a fitting and meaningful interpretation of 6:12.	
What are the main previous interpretations of Song of Songs?	To review previous interpretations of Song of Songs.	Literature study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of interpretation, reception in the Canon and Ancient Near Eastern parallels (Schwab, 2008; Long, 2008)</li> </ul>
How does the overall structure of the Song of Songs (whether linear or loosely connected individual poems), as well as the structure of the surrounding passages, influence the interpretation of 6:12?	To determine how the overall structure of the Song of Songs (whether linear or loosely connected individual poems), as well as the structure of the surrounding passages, influence the interpretation of 6:12.	Literature study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structure of the book as a whole &amp; independent analysis of Song of Songs 6:1-7:13</li> <li>Rhetorical analysis (cf. Roberts, 2001),</li> <li>Literary analyses (cf. Alter, 2019; Ryken, 2008)</li> <li>Poetic analysis (cf. Assis, 2009 &amp; Hunt, 2008)</li> </ul>
What is a most probable explanation of the syntax and semantics of the words employed in 6:12?	To determine the most probable translation following the syntax and the semantics of the words employed in 6:12.	Syntactico-Semantic Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hebrew grammar and syntax reference works (Arnold &amp; Choi, 2022; Joüon &amp; Muraoka, 2008; van der Merwe et al., 2018; Waltke &amp; O'Connor, 1990)</li> <li>Hebrew dictionaries (cf. Brown et al. 2017; Clines, 1993-2011; Koehler &amp; Baumgartner, 1995).</li> </ul>
In light of the syntactico-semantic analysis, what is the most probable translation and interpretation for 6:12 within the context of Song of Songs 6:11-7:1?	In light of the translation of SS 6:12 and its immediate context, to determine the most probable interpretation for 6:12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literary Analysis focusing on form, voice, and poetic imagery (Gault (2019); Watson (1986).</li> <li>Relevant commentaries (Longman III, 2001; Exum, 2011; Gledhill, 1994; Bloch &amp; Bloch, 2006; Keel, 1994; etc)</li> <li>Theological dictionaries (cf. Botterweck; 1998; VanGemeren; 1997).</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

<b>Appendix B. Translations included in data sample</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Translations</b>	<b>Language</b>
1599	GNV 1599	I knew nothing, my soul set me as the chariots of my noble people	English
1611	KJV	Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.	English
1898	YLT	I knew not my soul, It made me -- chariots of my people Nadib.	English
1901	ASV	Before I was aware, my soul set me Among the chariots of my princely people.	English
1966	JB	Before I knew... my desire had hurled me on the chariots of my people, as their prince.	English
1982	NKJV	Before I was even aware, My soul had made me As the chariots of my noble people.	English
1989	REB	I did not recognize myself: she made me a prince chosen from myriads of my people.	English
1992	GNT	I am trembling; you have made me as eager for love as a chariot driver is for battle.	English
1994	KJ21	Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.	English
1994	BST	Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people.	English
1995	CEV	But in my imagination I was suddenly riding on a glorious chariot.	English
1998	CJB	Before I knew it, I found myself in a chariot, and with me was a prince.	English
1999	NJB	Before I knew... my desire had hurled me onto the chariots of Amminadib!	English
2001	NICOT	I did not realize that my desire had placed me in a chariot with a noble man.	English
2001	Robert	I did not know myself; She made me as the chariots of Amminadib.	English
2004	WBC	I do not know my own soul; it has set me among the chariots of Ammi-nadiv.	English
2004	Afr1933/53	Voordat ek dit geweet het, het my verlange my verplaas op die waens van my edele volk.	Afrikaans
2005	NCV	Before I realized it, my desire for you made me feel like a prince in a chariot.	English
2005	BCOTWP	I did not realize, my desire set me, in a chariotry, with a prince.	English
2009	HCSB	Before I knew it, my desire put me among the chariots of my noble people.	English
2011	CEB	I hardly knew myself; she had set me in an official's chariot!	English
2011	NIV	Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people.	English
2011	OJB	Before I was aware, my nefesh lifted me up to the merkevot of ammi (my people) of one, a royal one.	English
2011	OTL	I did not know myself, carried off amid with a prince.	English
2012	LEB	I did not know my heart set me in a chariot of my princely people.	English
2013	Afr1983	Ek ken myself nie, dit is of sy my laat ry op die strydwa van die keur van my volk.	Afrikaans

## APPENDIX B CONTINUED

<b>Date</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Translations</b>	<b>Language</b>
2014	ISV	Before I knew it, I imagined myself among the chariots of my noble people.	English
2015	NLT	Before I realized it, my strong desire had taken me to the chariot of a noble man.	English
2016	REC	I don't know what's up with me. You set me in chariots with a nobleman.	English
2017	CSB	I didn't know what was happening to me. I felt like I was in a chariot with a nobleman.	English
2017	NET	I was beside myself with joy! There please give me your myrrh, O daughter of my princely people.	English
2019	Alter	I scarcely knew myself, she set me in the noblest chariot.	English
2018	ESV	Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.	English
2020	GW	I did not know that I had become like the chariots of my noble people.	English
2020	NASB	Before I was aware, my soul set me Over the chariots of my noble people.”	English
2020	Afr2020	Sonder dat ek dit besef, het my begeerte my verplaas na die strydwaens van die vooraanstaandes van my volk.	Afrikaans
2021	NRSVUE	Before I was aware, my desire set me in a chariot beside my prince.	English

## APPENDIX C

<b>Appendix C. Interpretations included in literary analysis (chapter five)</b>				
<b>Date</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>1ste Clause</b>	<b>2nd Clause</b>
1885	Delitzsch	Woman	The woman's soul ("her love for Solomon") lifted her up.	She is elevated to the position next to her king.
1977	Pope	Woman	Woman experiences hallucinations, imagination and caprice.	The woman is placed with nobleman (her beloved) in chariot
1984	Carr	Woman	The woman is surprised by the reception of her beloved.	The woman "feels" that she is beside her prince.
1985	Fox	Woman	Woman overwhelmed by excitement of love.	She is placed in a chariot with her nobleman lover
1990	Murphy	Woman	Woman experiences unawareness suddenly.	Woman is reminisced in love making with the man.
1993	Garrett	Woman	Woman overwhelmed by her love experience.	Wedding custom, where woman now enters married life
1993	Snaith	Woman	Girl experiences excitement.	Girl is placed in a chariot with a prince.
1994	Gledhill	Woman	Excitement instils the woman, and she is at lost with her composure.	Woman is a consort to her royal hero; as she is being taken by him.
1994	Keel	Woman	Woman does not have clarity of thought.	Amminadib has luxurious chariots to charm woman.
1998	LaCocque	Woman	Woman is numbed in her consciousness regard her beloved.	The lover changes the woman into a sacred chariot that transport the ark of the covenant.
2001	Bergant	Woman	Woman are taken by surprise.	The chariot serves as a vehicle for the lovers to engage in love making.
2001	Longman III	Woman	Woman are confused and ignorance of the occurrences.	Woman placed with her nobleman in a chariot
2004	Garrett	Woman	Woman have a partial loss of consciousness because of the overstimulation of her emotions	Wedding ceremony - Woman is placed next to her beloved which are called by the epithet "My-beloved-is-a-prince"
2005	Hess	Woman	Woman does not realize the experience she is having.	She is taken to be in war chariot with her nobleman.
2006	Bloch & Bloch	Man	Girl taken by surprise and excitement.	Girl placed in a chariot with a prince.
2009	Assis	Woman	Woman amazed and surprise.	An intimate experience with her lover.
2010	Estes	Woman	Woman lost her composure and is beside herself	In her delight she is with her lover - symbolizes reconciliation as they are together.

### APPENDIX C CONTINUED

2011	Barbiero	Man	Man is no more master of his own soul, for he is overwhelmed by a force great that he.	Man surrenders his resistance to the woman but is transformed into a chariot.
2011	Exum	Woman	Woman is expressing a state of confusion and loss of composure.	Woman sees herself being placed with her lover in a chariot.
2016	Duguid	Woman	The woman is astonished that the man receives her back.	Part of the first clause, explaining that is she "is caught up into the clouds in raptures"
2019	Alter	Man	The man is experiencing ecstatic confusion and mental confoundment.	Chariot refers to woman body of which the man enters.