

"I Sought Him, But Found Him Not" (Song 5:6) - Public Space in the Song of Songs

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ABSTRACT

As far as the relation of sexes is concerned the Song of Songs seems to create a counter world compared with the world described by other biblical books and compared with the Song's assumed historical sociological background. By focusing on the Song of Songs' assumed social setting, and on the Song's perspective on this social setting as reflected by its presentation of space, a more specific understanding of gendered norms is offered. The interaction between "conceived" and "lived" space (Lefebvre) depicts the Song's sociological background. Different groups of locations represent different categories of space. Locations such as the vineyard and garden are largely metaphorical, while private locations are, to a higher degree affected by conceived space than public locations. Song 3:1-5 and 5:1-8 show that places, streets and squares (public locations) partake in lived space to a relatively high degree. While locations of fulfilled love, the vineyard and the garden work as metaphors, locations where the share in lived space is high, show a patriarchal society that does not generally defer from other biblical books or Greek literature of the same period, such as Theocritus' Idylls. The Song and the Idylls sympathize with its female protagonist, but criticism of the gendered norms in the Songs is due to the modern reader's concepts.

A INTRODUCTION

Recently, as far as the Song of Songs' presentation of gender relations is concerned, there is some consensus that the Song presents a counter world to the patriarchal world behind the text. However a closer look at the Song of Songs' assumed social setting, and at the Song's perspective on this social setting as reflected by its presentation of space, might offer an alternative understanding of the Song's representation of gender relations. Theocritus' "Idylls," which are comparable to the Song of Songs in certain respects, approximately originate from the same period as the Song of Song's final version, and represent a similar sociological setting, serve as a comparison.

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B PROLEGOMENA – SONG OF SONGS IN LATE EXEGESIS

Throughout the history of its reception, the *Song of Songs*' view on gender relations has been at the centre of debate. Judging by introductory literature, a degree of consensus seems to have been recently achieved, according to which the *Song* creates a counter world compared with the world described by other biblical books and compared with the *Song*'s assumed historical sociological background. This consensus originates with authors like Phyllis Trible or Athalya Brenner. Trible celebrates the *Song of Songs* as regained paradise and as the rearrangement of the world after the fall.² Brenner highlights the female voice, singular within the voices of the canon of the Bible. The *Song of Songs* is the articulation of a "counter world" to the patriarchal world behind the text.³ Counter voices are a minority. Clines considers the *Song of Songs* as a male voice's projection and as the opposite of an alternative concept.⁴

So the *Song* is the dream of a dream. The male author is dreaming a love poem, and the love poem takes the form of a women's dream, of a woman dreaming her male lover's words.⁵

C A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

While the above-mentioned exegetes are not explicitly interested in the *Song of Songs*' sociological background, in a very general way they take it into account. The *Song of Songs* is "not patriarchal"⁶ (Brenner) in contrast to the "patriarchal society"⁷ (Schwienhorst-Schönberger) that marks its context. The lovers' behaviour has "no far reaching consequences"⁸ in the world the text assumes. A conscious recourse to social history might be a useful corrective.

Questions concerning the sociological background of the final version of the *Song of Songs* are not easily answered. Interpreters nevertheless use presumed sociological contexts as arguments to understand and interpret

² Cf. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rethoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 1978).

³ Athalya Brenner, "Das Hohelied: Polyphonie der Liebe," in *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (eds. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), 241.

⁴ Cf. David J. A. Cline, "Why is There a *Song of Songs* and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?" in *Interested Parties* (ed. David J. A. Cline; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995).

⁵ Cline, "Why is there a *Song of Songs*," 104. Some exegetes have been claiming inconsistencies within the counter world. Cf. Sigrid Eder, "Ein Happy End im Hohelied?" *PzB* 13 (2004): 3-24.

⁶ Cf. Brenner, "Das Hohelied," 241.

⁷ Cf. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "Das Hohelied," in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (ed. Erich Zenger, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2008), 395.

⁸ Cf. Brenner, "Das Hohelied," 241.

individual figures' behaviour, however the results are ambiguous. Interpretations arising from the meaning of רדיַּד (the word denotes a piece of garment of uncertain quality), its role in social life and – derived from this – its role within the text, may serve as an example. In Song 5:7, while searching for her beloved in the city's streets and in the city's public places, the central female protagonist is found by the city's watchmen, who take her רדיַּד from her. In the biblical context, רדיַּד is used only once more in Isa 3:23, in which it is part of a long list of luxury articles that are taken away from the daughters of Zion on the Day of Judgment. Most exegetes working on the meaning of רדיַּד translate it as "veil" and do so for two main reasons. In either case a רדיַּד is assumed to have had a role in the social life of the world, behind the text. First, the Targumim use רדיַּד to translate צעיף in Gen 38:14, where צעיף denotes the veil Tamar uses to disguise herself from her father-in-law. As Tamar intends, he mistakes her for a prostitute and has sexual intercourse with her. According to that interpretation the veil marks a prostitute in the world behind the text. Second, according to a far earlier piece of Assyrian law from the 12th century B.C., a veil is only worn by a free woman.⁹ Female slaves and prostitutes are not allowed to cover themselves with a veil in public. In both interpretations, the woman in the Song is considered to be a prostitute by the watchmen and treated as such. Following the first meaning, the woman is dressed like a prostitute. In the second understanding, the woman unconvincingly pretends she is not a prostitute. Both interpretations argue with conflicting sociological settings of a world behind the text. A main problem turns out to be the difficulty to find a proper point of comparison outside the text.¹⁰

Considering the difficulty of finding a point of comparison outside the Song of Songs, the reader is thrown back on using the text itself. To a certain degree, the text allows conclusions concerning the text's social setting to be drawn from the text itself. As Clines says:

My purpose [is] then not to move from the text to the historical actuality that generated the text, but rather to sketch the kind of historical matrix the text implies.¹¹

The category of space may be a good starting point.¹² During the 1970s, the Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre developed a theory of space that has

⁹ Cf. Othmar Keel, *Das Hohelied* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1992), 183.

¹⁰ The difficulty to find a point of comparison increases if one takes the long history of the text into consideration.

¹¹ Clines, "Why is there a Song of Songs," 95.

¹² The category of space seems to have been highly appreciated lately. Cf. Christl Maier, *Daughter Zion. Mother Zion: Gender, Space and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Michaela Geiger, *Gottesräume - Die literarische und theologische Konzeption von Raum im Deuteronomium* (BWANT 183; Stuttgart:

influenced a range of disciplines.¹³ In *La production de l'espace* he distinguishes three categories of space: *Perceived Space* as mere physical space, *Conceived Space* as the cultural or ideological concept of space, and *Lived Space* as experienced space. We might presume that metaphors and stereotypes represent *conceived space*, while lived space is represented at moments in the narrative when space is not a predominant or explicit motif.

D SPACE OF DIFFERENT KIND

The following table offers a preliminary view of a number of locations that play a role in the Song of Songs: the vineyard, the garden, the field, the desert and the mountains, market places, squares and streets, the (mother's) house and the (bed) chamber.¹⁴

		locations used as attributes	the lovers' origins used as metaphors	locations of the lovers' successful or failing encounter used as metaphors	actual locations
חֶדֶר	1:4; 3:4			1,4 (the king's) chamber	3:4
בֵּית (אִמֵּי)	2:9 ¹⁵ ; 3:4; 5:2-6; 8:2				2:9; 3:4; 5:2-6;
עִיר	3:2; 5:7				3:2; 5:7
שׁוֹקִים וַרְחַבּוֹת	3:2				3:2
כֶּרֶם	1:6; 1:14; 2:13; 2:15; 7:13; 8:11, 12	1,14		woman	consumption
				1:6b; 2:15; 8:11, 12	
בֵּית הַיּוֹן	2:4				2:4

Kohlhammer, 2009); a SBL-unit called "Place, Space, and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World."

¹³ Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Édition Anthropos 1974).

¹⁴ Cf. the list of locations in Stefan Fischer, *Das Hohelied Salomos zwischen Poesie und Erzählung: Erzähltextanalyse eines poetischen Textes* (FAT 72; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). Fischer is interested in the literary function of these locations, rather than in the social reality behind the text.

¹⁵ מִן הַחֲלֻנוֹת אַחֲר כְּתָלָנוֹ refers to a house. Behind its walls, windows or lattice (cf. Yair Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied* [HTKAT; Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2004], 148) the female protagonist is situated. In other passages, such as in 3:4 and 8:2, this house is the mother's house. 2:9 and 5:2-6 do not explicitly identify the female protagonist's residence.

¹⁶ The vine house or banquet house in 2:4 is most likely a metaphor. Whether the image designates the public or the private space is controversial. Cf. Keel, *Hohelied*, 83f.

בָּ	4:12, 16; 5:1; 6:2; 8:13			4:12, 16; 5:1; 6:2	8:13	
גַּן אֲגַדָּת	6:11			6:11 ¹⁷	6:11	
shepherds' camp ¹⁸	1:7				1:7	
שָׂדָה	7:12					7:12
מְדָבֵר	3:6; 8:5		3:6; 8:5			
mountain to ps (לְבָנָן) (גַּלְעָד)	4:1; 4:8; 4:15; 5:15	4:1; 4:15; 5:15	4:8			

The meaning of a location within a certain text is determined both by its concrete function within the text and by the concepts of the world behind the text. The text potentially shares those concepts with other products in the authors' sociological background.¹⁹ The sociological background and the world behind the text are best described by the interaction of *conceived space* and *lived space* within the text. A location's concrete function within a text and the concepts of *conceived space* and *lived space* that it betrays have to be distinguished carefully. Within the Song of Songs, different groups of locations differ to the degree they represent perceived, conceived or lived space.

The vineyard and the garden are the locations most often mentioned and are frequently utilized as metaphors. The vineyard and the garden are not always obviously introduced as metaphors, but they are never unaffected by a metaphorical meaning. If they are not plain metaphors (cf. the vineyard that represents the female protagonist) they are double entendre. Passages that are intertextually related use the same imagery and obviously function as metaphors. Exegetes usually agree that the vineyard which the lyric "I"²⁰ keeps according to Song 1:6b becomes a metaphor of her virginity at least in the verse's last stichos ("but my own vineyard I have not kept").²¹ The meaning of the last stichos affects the meaning of the preceding:

¹⁷ For Keel, the feminine grammatical form points to the garden as metaphor for the woman. Cf. Zakovitch, *Hohelied*, 238f.

¹⁸ The vineyard and pastoral imagery are used in love poetry from the ancient Near East, and it is widely used figuratively. Cf. Keel, *Hohelied*, 57.

¹⁹ Those products might be texts, such as stories, songs, legal texts, but also cf. (legal) institutions or buildings.

²⁰ The lyric "I" describes the fictive subject speaking in a poetic text.

²¹ Cf. Zakovitch, *Hohelied*, 120.

Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept! (1:6)

The vineyard and the garden have a symbolic meaning that always transcends their initial designation. The vineyard and the garden are locations of fulfilled love. The garden can be used as metaphor for the lovers' succeeding encounter (garden: 6:11; 8:13),²² and both can represent the woman (vineyard: 1:6;²³ 2:15;²⁴ 7:13; 8:11-12; garden: 4:12, 16; 5:1; 6:2).²⁵

The vineyard and the garden are frequently used as metaphors in non-biblical ancient near eastern and Egyptian love poems.²⁶ Since such love poetry is far older than the last revision of the Song of Songs, it cannot be used as a direct parallel. However, the poems do suggest that at the time of the final redaction of the Song of Songs, the metaphorical meaning of the vineyard and the garden might have become natural.²⁷ Metaphors would represent *conceived space* to a high degree.

Locations such as the desert or the wilderness (*מִלְבָר*) in 3:6 are places that contrast with the garden and the vineyard, literally and, to varying degrees, metaphorically. They represent space that is unattractive, hardly accessible, and even threatening for human beings.²⁸ As isolated and unreachable places they occasionally represent the numinous. In 3:6 and 4:8 the woman is allocated to the desert or the wilderness. By being allocated to locations that are associated with the numinous she is described as a goddess. However the field, as a place where no other human being is (cf. Deut 22:25-27), might just point to the place it literally designates.

The chamber, the mother's house, marketplaces, squares and streets always also refer to actual locations. Other than the vineyard and the garden, neither the (mother's) house nor the (bed) chamber are used as metaphors for

²² The use of the plural in 8:13 indicates that "gardens" do not point to a specific location.

²³ In 1:6, at least the second half of the verse means the female protagonist and lyric "I." Cf. Keel, *Hohelied*, 56.

²⁴ In Egyptian love songs, the foxes are frequently used as metaphors for "gierige Liebhaber und Schürzenjäger." Cf. Keel, *Hohelied*, 104. If this is the case here, then the vineyard, that the foxes are about to destroy, represents the female lover.

²⁵ Some locations as vineyard and chamber (4:1) are occasionally connected to the king. Locations connected to the king would have to be considered separately.

²⁶ Cf. the examples mentioned by Keel, *Hohelied*, 160.

²⁷ If a metaphor is frequently used it becomes natural – in extreme cases, to the point that people stop considering it a metaphor.

²⁸ In 4:8 Lebanon and the tops of the mountains function as counterpart to land cultivated and inhabited by humans. Generally, Lebanon stands for the exotic (4:15) and remoteness.

the (female) lover at any time. Private locations such as the chamber and the house are more affected by conceived space than public locations such as market places, streets and squares. The beloved's speech in front of the closed door might be understood as a *paraclausityron*²⁹ and as such functions as a literary *topos* rather than a metaphor. The public locations' share in lived space is correspondingly high, but this does not mean that public locations have no share in conceived space at all.

E SONG 3:1-5 AND 5:1-8

Song 3:1-5 and 5:1-8 are among the few songs that describe public locations. Space of any kind is defined by the idea of those inhabiting it and by the idea of those inhabitants' interaction. The watchmen interact with the female protagonist and respond to her behaviour within the public space.

1 Structure

Song 3:1-5 and 5:1-8 are characterized by the opposition of private and public locations and both follow a similar structure and a parallel sequence of scenes. The female protagonist, lying on her bed at night is longing for her beloved (3:1; 5:2) and therefore starts to search for him. While she is looking for him she is found by the watchmen (3:3; 5:7) but she continues to pursue him through the city streets. Both songs close by her adjuring the daughters of Jerusalem, once not to interfere, once to look for her beloved.

The shared narrative structure is broken at several points. In 5:2-6, a missed opportunity precedes the female protagonist's search. The woman's beloved appears at her door and seeks entrance, but she seems indecisive and when she finally opens the door, he has disappeared. 5:2-6 has no immediate correspondence in chapter 3. In 3:4 the female protagonist's search ends when she finds her beloved, and takes him to her mother's house.

Some of the scenes that follow the same sequence of events differ in detail. For instance, in both songs, the female protagonist is found by the watchmen. In the first song, she confronts the watchmen by asking them after her beloved (3:3), although the watchmen appear not to respond. However, in the second song, the watchmen beat and wound her, and they take away her רַקְעָנִים (5:7).

The female protagonist's adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem varies in both songs. In the first song, after finding her beloved (3:5), the daughters of Jerusalem are asked not to interfere. In the second song, the daughters of Jerusalem are asked to help search for him (5:8). While in the first song the daughters of Jerusalem keep silent, in the second song they ask the woman

²⁹ In Greek love poetry, the lover's lament in front of his mistress' door and his request to enter is a widely used literary *topos*.

about her beloved. In the second song, the man is not present in person, he is present in his beloved’s description.³⁰

In both songs, the reader cannot be sure if the protagonists are acting in the “real” world presented by the text, or if the text presents the content of the female protagonist’s dream.³¹ This uncertainty is sustained by the introductory verses and – according to some exegetes³² – by the progression of events. Song 3:1-5 starts with *בלילות*, which literally means, “by the nights.” This striking use of the plural form has often been interpreted as indicating a regular habit of the young woman. At night on her bed, she often dreams about her absent beloved. However, while in the text the woman tells herself to get up and search for her beloved, it is unclear whether this is followed by an actual search or if events are happening in the woman’s imagination. The parallel Song 5:2-8 starts with a striking *לב* אני ישנה ולבי ער is connected to understanding, rather than emotions.³³ Does the female protagonist lie on her bed with rapt attention? Or is she asleep and vividly dreaming?

2 Space in Song 3:1-5 and 5:1-8

Both songs are characterized by searching and finding, and by a steady change between private and public locations.

Both songs start in private locations, and Song 3:1-5 also ends there. *חדר* (3:1) and *חדר משככ* (3:4) point to a house’s living quarters. In biblical texts, *חדר* and *חדר משככ* can be used synonymously.³⁴ as well as *חדר משככ* mean “bedroom,” for instance: in Judg 15:1 Samson and his wife retreat into a *חדר* for sexual intercourse; in Joel 2:16 the wedding night is spent in a *חדר*. In Song 3:4 the woman grasps her beloved and brings him to her mother’s house and

³⁰ The example demonstrates the relevance of text’s limitations. For Zakovitch, *Hohelied*, 299 reads 6:1-3 as a continuation of the woman’s and the daughters of Jerusalem’s dialogue. From Zakovitch’s point of view, 6:1-3 shows that the lover has never actually left her: “Der Geliebte ist gar nicht verschwunden, nur im Traum hat er sich von ihr entfernt.”

³¹ Zakovitch and Müller interpret Song 3:1-5 and 5:2-8 as an ideal (Zakovitch), a dream (Müller) or a day dream (Zakovitch). Cf. Zakovitch, *Hohelied*, 299 and Hans-Peter Müller, *Das Hohelied* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

³² Cf. Zakovitch, *Hohelied*, 167 about 3:2 (“mit nur im Traum möglicher Geschwindigkeit”); Müller, *Hohelied*, 35 (“schließlich ist das Liebeshindernis so schnell überwunden, wie es nur im Traum möglich ist”). The categories of time and space seem to be suspended: “Die Erlebnisschilderung der Frau [...] ist ganz und gar traumhaft: Zeit und Raum verlieren ihre Kontinuität, können sprunghaft wechseln [...] Der Traum gestattet [...] sich von selbstverständlich gewordenen Normen zu befreien.” Müller, *Hohelied*, 54.

³³ Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments* (ed. Bernd Janowski; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010), 84.

³⁴ Cf. 2 Sam 4:7; 2 Kgs 6:12 and Eccl 10:20.

into her **חַדֵּר**.³⁵ **בֵּית** **חַדֵּר** and **בֵּית** are part of a parallelism. The **חַדֵּר** seems to be part of the house into which female protagonist retreats with her beloved.

Archaeological evidence suggests that throughout the centuries, the living quarters usually opened onto a courtyard. This is true for the so called four-chamber-houses that were used well into the sixth century and are the houses most likely to feature in the above cited biblical texts. This particular layout is also typical of the Hellenistic and Roman house used in later times.

It is difficult to locate a **חַדֵּר** within a house, based only on information provided by the biblical texts. Reconstructions arising from 2 Kgs 6:12 have argued that the **חַדֵּר** is located in the upper store of a house.³⁶ I would argue that 2 Kgs 6:12 intends to stress the inaccessibility of the **חַדֵּר** rather than describe its actual location within the house. In all cited contexts, **חַדֵּר** designates a room that only a select few are authorized to enter.³⁷ For instance, the plot against king Joram of Israel reported in 2 Kgs 9:2 takes place in a **חַדֵּר**, and according to 2 Kgs 6:12, what is spoken in one's **חַדֵּר משכֶב** stays secret under usual circumstances. This compares with Eccl 10:20, in which even private thoughts are kept secret in a **חַדֵּר משכֶב**:

Do not curse the king, even in your thoughts, or curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.³⁸

Keel argues that the assumed location of the woman's bedroom in Song 5:2-5 is highly unlikely, according to historical evidence: "Allein schon die Tatsache, dass ein Mädchen oder eine Frau allein in einem Zimmer mit Tür zur Straße schläft, ist unwahrscheinlich."³⁹ Hagedorn disagrees: "However nothing in the text states that the door through which the beloved attempts to seek entry leads directly to the women's room; even in an upstairs room **קוֹל דָוִדִי דָוִפָק** would have been possible to hear."⁴⁰ If the conversation of the lovers functions as a *paraclausityron*, it can hardly be used as historical proof. The conversation at the door is a literary *topos*, and therefore can only generate limited knowledge about the historical world behind the text. Archeological sources seem to

³⁵ In other verses, **אַחֲרָיו** (3:4) designates an act of violence that often results in death (cf. Judg 1:6; 12:6; 20:6; 4:20). In a small number of texts **אַחֲרָיו** designates the capture of an enemy (cf. Zakovitch, *Hohelied*, 168). In the context of a majority of textual evidences **אַחֲרָיו** has a negative meaning.

³⁶ Cf. Anselm C. Hagedorn, "Jealousy and Desire at Night: Fragmentum Grenfellianum and Song of Songs," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs* (ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 207.

³⁷ In 2 Kgs 9:2 **חַדֵּר בְּחַדֵּר** designates the most inaccessible room of a house.

³⁸ See Hagedorn, "Jealousy," 209, who derives concrete information concerning the actual location of a **חַדֵּר** within a house from that verse.

³⁹ Cf. Keel, *Hohelied*, 176.

⁴⁰ Hagedorn, "Jealousy," 211.

support the idea that conceived space has a thorough foundation in lived space as far as the **חדר** is concerned: Both perspectives are characterized by the **חדר**'s inaccessibility, and it is difficult to separate **חדר** as conceived space and lived space.

Song 5 discusses the permeability of the border between the private and the public space. Song 5:2-6 describes how the beloved advances, but does not go beyond, the boundaries of the private space. The beloved knocks at the door. **דבק** describes an act of violence.⁴¹ The man violently insists on being let in, but the female protagonist refuses. She tells him that she has already taken off her garment (**כחוננה**) and washed her feet. **כחוננה** designates an undergarment that can also be used as outer clothing.⁴² Some exegetes consider the washing of feet to have a sexual connotation.⁴³ However, feet washing is a daily routine undertaken when crossing the border between the public and the private space, and entering a private house. The act of washing one's feet marks that border, despite the suggestion that the woman's description of herself as already undressed and unwilling to dirty her feet, evokes the rather erotic image of a woman lying naked on her bed

The beloved puts his hand in the hole. The female protagonist's inner organs (**מעה**) restlessly move towards him. The man knocks and liquid myrrh drips on the handles of the door bolt, which implies there is an opening in or near the door into which the man can put his hand. The term **חר**, in an unspecific way, denotes an "opening."⁴⁴ The context leaves unexplained what kind of an opening is considered. **חר** might be a peephole in the door, or simply a crack in the wall. The beloved might be trying to force open the door. In any case, **חר** constitutes a connection between inside and outside. This fact is emphasized by the peculiar phrase **מן החר**.

⁴¹ Cf. Gen 33:13 and Judg 19:22.

⁴² Cf. Helga Weippert, "Kleidung," *NBL* 2: 495-499.

⁴³ Zakovitch, *Hohelied*, 214 considers the washing of the feet to be foreplay. However, in 1 Sam 25:41 Abigail offers to wash the feet of David's emissaries, rather than David. 2 Sam 11:8 points to the sexual intercourse of Uriah and Bathsheba as a union that solves David's fathering of Bathsheba's child. At one level, washing Uriah's feet designates his coming home and crossing the border between the public and the private space. In Ezek 23:40, the woman that smartens herself up for her lovers does more than wash her feet. Wherever "feet" (**רגלים**) has a sexual connotation, they describe a man's genitals (Exod 4:25; Ruth 3:8). Where the woman's genitals are meant the term is varied, for instance Deut 28:57 and Judges use **מבחן רגליים** to designate the woman's genitals.

⁴⁴ Cf. 1 Sam 14:11; Job 30:6; Isa 11:8; Nah 2:13; 2 Kgs 12:10; Ezek 8:7.

The myrrh that is dripping from the woman's hand, obviously fluid, is myrrh oil, which is used as a cosmetic.⁴⁵ כפוח המנשול (the "palms" or the "hollow of the hands" of the bolt) probably means the thickening ends of the bolt's wooden bars. The כף ("hollow of the hand") of the bolt that the myrrh drips into has its counterpart in the man's "hand" (רֶגֶל).

A couple of terms, such as רֶגֶל and רֶגֶל, are ambiguous. Without losing their first meaning, those terms evoke associations that are connected with "sexuality." רֶגֶל sometimes is used as euphemism for male genitalia,⁴⁶ רֶגֶל signifies the woman's genitals. The First Testament connects emotions with certain parts of the body. The woman's מִזְבֵּחַ, which is said to restlessly move toward her beloved, means inner organs but can also mean "vagina."

Public and private locations are not metaphorical in a strict sense, but still function as a literary topoi and double entendre. As shown above, a wide range of words have second meanings connected with the semantic field "sexuality." The transition between public and private locations has a double entendre. The man entering (or trying to enter) the woman's private space becomes an image of sexual penetration.

Notwithstanding the double entendre and the use of a *paraclausityron*, Song 5:2-6 presumes that the border between the private and the public space is permeable, even though the beloved does not enter a private location connected with the female protagonist. In Song 3:2, the woman goes about the city while in 3:3 and 5:7 the watchmen go about the city.⁴⁷ When the watchmen have found the woman in 5:7, they beat her, wound her and take away her רְדִידָה. The רְדִידָה is not to be identified with the כהונה of 5:3. While the כהונה can be worn as an outer garment, or as an undergarment combined with an over garment, רְדִידָה designates some piece of over garment. Song 4:1 designates what has to be the woman's veil as רְדִידָה. צְמַחַת רְדִידָה might also refer to a veil or it might refer to a stole or some other kind of over garment. The taking away of even the over garment by force shows the woman's vulnerability in public locations.⁴⁸

In the biblical texts, the accessibility of רְחִבּוֹת and שָׁוּקִים is not limited to any specific group, defined by gender or any other identity. According to Zech 8:4, women and girls sit on the רְחִבּוֹת in times of peace. In Jer 48:38 and Eccl 6:5, the רְחִבּוֹת and שָׁוּקִים are locations of public mourning. In opposition to הַדָּר, they are characterized as a public location. For instance, on רְחִבּוֹת and שָׁוּקִים, a

⁴⁵ Keel, *Hohelied*, 182 translates מָוֶר עַבְרִי as "true" myrrhe. The general understanding of the verse is unchanged.

⁴⁶ Cf. Isa 57:8.

⁴⁷ In 3:2 and 5:7 the Hebrew text has סְבִבָּה בָּעֵיר.

⁴⁸ Cf. Joan B. Burton, "Themes of Female Desire and Self-Assertion in the Song of Songs and Hellenistic Poetry," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs* (ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 187.

person is seen and heard. In Prov 1:20, Wisdom cries out and raises her voice in the streets and squares (*רחובות*).⁴⁹

By walking the streets in the middle of the night, the female protagonist is at risk. Some authors assume that the watchmen consider a woman walking the streets at night, a whore. The ambiguity of arguments referring to the *רדי* has already been discussed further above. Besides that ambiguity there are other counter arguments. Both main arguments make the watchmen consider a *רדי* (5:7) to signify that the woman is a prostitute (see above). According to the already mentioned piece of Assyrian law, the ripping of the whore's veil, which she is prohibited from wearing, is part of an official trial and connected with far more severe punishments. In Gen 38:15-19, the purpose of the veil is to prevent Judah from recognizing his daughter-in-law. However arguments referring to the presumed meaning of *רדי* are seldom used in isolation. In addition, exegetes frequently refer to texts such as Isa 23:15-16 and Prov 7:7-18 as inner biblical parallels. Besides Song 3:2, Isa 23:15 is the only example that uses *סבב העיר* outside the military context.⁵⁰ In Isa 23:15, *סבב העיר* describes the behaviour of a whore. Prov 7:7-18 is a warning against a woman, whose behaviour is compared with a whore's. Besides general similarities between the scenario in Prov 7:7-18 and Song 3:1-4, 5:2-8, Prov 7:8, 12 explicitly uses the terms *שוקים* and *רחובות*. In Song 5:2-8, the most reminiscent of the incident in Prov 7:7-18, this significant vocabulary is missing. Considering the assumption that the watchmen consider the female protagonist a whore, none of the examples cited hold proof. Prov 7 does not deal with prostitution but with a married woman having a sexual affair with a foreign man, while her husband is absent. The unchallenged correspondence between Prov 7 and the woman's description in Song of Songs does not regard one or the other woman's profession as a prostitute, no matter if real or assumed. The author of Prov 7 does not approve of the women's behaviour towards the other sex, and neither do the watchmen.

The protagonists' opinion of the woman's behaviour has to be carefully distinguished from the text's (or its author's). The Song of Songs narrates the encounter between the watchmen and the woman from her point of view. There is no sign, however, that indicates an explicit or an implicit accusation of the watchmen. The woman's behaviour does not seem to be rule-consistent in the social setting which the Song presumes. While the text allies with the woman, it does not question those rules.

⁴⁹ In Prov 5:16 streets and squares also indicate the public space, publicity and accessibility. Cf. Prov 7:12.

⁵⁰ Ps 59:7.15 combines the image of a threat to a city with wild dogs circling a town.

F PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE IN THE SONG OF SONGS

In both songs, the public and the private space are highly gendered. Although private locations are mainly connected with female protagonists,⁵¹ this is partly because the Song of Songs mostly adopts the female protagonists' point of view.

As Song 8:1 demonstrates, the male protagonist is not necessarily allowed to approach a private location connected with his female antagonist, but Song 5:2-8 shows he is able. Although he is neither allowed nor necessarily able to intrude, his intrusion is imaginable. The text plays with the possibility and principal accessibility of the private space connected with the female protagonist, by her male antagonist. The female protagonist is never portrayed as approaching a private location connected with her beloved. She is never found searching for him in his private context and if she looks for him, she exclusively looks for him in public.

While the public space is accessible for both sexes, its accessibility is subject to certain restrictions. At least under certain circumstances, the female lover is endangered in public locations. Those circumstances are not made explicit, although it is suggested that she is endangered when alone and at night. The danger of her violation in public locations is taken for granted. The text's and the author's adoption of the female protagonist's point of view does not result in a critical evaluation of the dangerous situation itself.

The encounter between the Song's female protagonist and her beloved does take place neither in the mother's house nor in the city's streets, squares or market places. The lovers meet in the field, the vineyard and the garden. "Vineyard" and "garden" are highly metaphoric, to the extent that they do not signify actual locations. In contrast to locations that belong to the private or the public space, they must be carefully distinguished from their counterparts in the real world.

The reader's inability to distinguish between dream and reality has no effect on the validity of social norms in the world the text assumes.⁵² The

⁵¹ The (private) house is usually introduced as the mother's house. The sole exception would be the chamber of Solomo. The pater familias represents the family in the public space. On the one hand, the term *בֵּית אָמִי* may be used to stress the non-public character of this space. On the other hand, there are examples of women acting as subjects in public, cf. legal affairs (legal transactions) in Hellenistic times.

⁵² Hagedorn, "Jealousy," 224, uses the term "anti-structure," which is misleading. Wherever the Song deals about a dream, the "anti-structure," representing the reality of women's lives suggests another level of reality. Another perspective seems more helpful: the social structure that underlies the Song in general leaves room for some elements of some "anti-structure" that does not question that social structure at all.

presentation of dream or reality might each represent *perceived* as well as *lived space*.

A thorough distinction has to be made between the narrator's standards and values, and those held by the protagonists. The least that can be said is that Song 5:2-8 does not give clear evidence of the author's point of view. Notwithstanding its general sympathy for the woman's point of view, the text does assume the validity of norms represented by the watchmen within the world in which the narrative is set. Even the presentation of the violation of norms is transparent for those norms and the text does not obviously criticise them.

G PARALLELS FROM A HELLENISTIC CONTEXT⁵³

A comparison with Theocritus' Idylls, which originate from approximately the same time as the Song of Songs' assumed final redaction, shows certain parallels concerning the representation of public space.

Theocritus' Idylls were probably written in Alexandria, during the third century B.C.. At approximately the same time, the redaction process of the Song of Songs came to an end. At that time, Alexandria was the residence of the Ptolemies, who also ruled over Judah. The Idylls are mimes,⁵⁴ short texts, in epic verses (hexameters). They ironically deal with the everyday life of ordinary people. Most of the Idylls are situated in Hellenistic cities and some have a rural setting and deal with shepherds. It is highly controversial if these Idylls show everyday life or if they are images and metaphors. The metaphoric character of a rural milieu would be another parallel between Theocritus' Idylls and the Song of Songs.

In his second Idyll, the lyric "I" is represented by a woman who has been left by her lover. We meet her mixing a love potion to help her to regain her unfaithful lover.

Under these circumstances, whether the term "anti-structure" is meaningful is open to question. At two points Hagedorn speaks about a break from the "anti-structure." Cf. Anselm C. Hagedorn, "Die Frau des Hohenlieds zwischen babylonisch-assyrischer Morphoskopie und Jacques Lacan," *ZAW* 122, 1/2 (2010): 9.

⁵³ In his commentary, Zakovitch refers to a single publication dealing with parallels between the Song of Songs and Theocritus. This article, by William G. Seiple, dates back to 1903: William G. Seiple, "Theocritean Parallels to the Song of Songs," *AJS* 19 (1903): 108-115. There is one more recent article by Joan B. Burton: Burton, "Themes," 180-205. Burton deals with parallels concerning the representation of female desire in both texts.

⁵⁴ Short scenes in the form of dialogues that use everyday language and characterize ordinary people and everyday life.

Πᾶ μοι ταὶ δάφναι; φέρε Θεστυλί: πᾶ δὲ τὰ φίλτρα; στέψον τὰν κελέβαν φοινικέω οἰδς ἀώτω, ὡς τὸν ἐμὸν βαρὺν εῦντα φίλον καταθύσομαι ἄνδρα, ὃς μοι δωδεκαταῖος ἀφ' ὧ τάλας οὐδέποθ' ἵκει, οὐδ' ἔγνω πότερον τεθνάκαμες ἢ ζοὶ εἰμές. οὐδὲ θύρας ἄραξεν ἀνάρσιος. ἢ ῥά οἱ ἀλλᾶ ὡχετ' ἔχων ὁ τ' Ἔρως ταχινὰς φρένας ἢ τ' Ἀφροδίτα;

Where are my bay-leaves? Bring me them Thestylis. And where my magic stuffs? Wreathe the bowl with fine crimson wool that I may bind a spell upon my love, so hard to me. For eleven days now he has not even visited me, the wretch, and knows not so much as whether I am dead or alive. Nay, he has not once knocked at my door, so cruel is he. Of a surety Love and Aphrodite have carried else whither his fickle fancy. Tomorrow I will go to Timagetus' wrestling-school to see him, and will reproach him that he treats me so.⁵⁵

In the lyric the woman, the lyric "I," brews her love potion and she recapitulates her story. She recounts how she found her beloved and lost him again. After having been brought into her house by her female servant, he told her that he would have approached her on his own if she had not. He tells her what he would have been doing, if she had not let him in:

εὶ δ' ἀλλᾶ μ' ὠθεῖτε καὶ ἡ θύρα εἰχετο μοχλῷ, πάντως καὶ πελέκεις καὶ λαμπάδες ἥνθον ἐφ' ὑμέας.

But had you tried to thrust me out else whither and the door been barred against me, then truly axes and torches had come against you.

Like the Song of Songs, Theocritus assumes that the female protagonist trespasses certain social norms and both texts sympathize with the trespassing protagonists. They do not question those norms or even consider them questionable. The norms, that are mentioned *en passant*, are not the main topic of the texts.

ἀ δ' ἐμὰ οὐ σιγῇ στέρνων ἔντοσθεν ἀνία, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τήνῳ πᾶσα καταίθομαι, ὃς με τάλαιναν ἀντὶ γυναικὸς ἔθηκε κακὰν καὶ ἀπάρθενον ἥμεν.

[Y]et not still the torment in my breast, but all on fire am I for him that he has made me, alas, no wife but a wretched (or: bad) thing, no maiden now.

Parallels between the Song of Songs and Theocritus do not indicate any direct dependency. But although both texts belong to different literary genres they

⁵⁵ Translation from: Andrew F. Gow, ed., *Theocritus: Introduction, text, and translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

have some general aspects in common.⁵⁶ They concern both the literary form, its *Sitz im Leben* and the sociological setting it reflects.

Both texts work with short poetic pieces. Whatever its prehistory might have been, the Song's final version would have been a *literary* text, and its *Sitz im Leben* (as the Idylls) would have been a private lecture rather than an oral presentation in a public context.⁵⁷ Besides the Song's analogy with Greek literature, such as Theocritus' Idylls, it is the elaborate order of the individual Songs that suggests such a perspective.

Both texts originate in a similar sociological setting that reflects both the assumed world behind the text and the texts' perspective on that world. Notwithstanding the text's using the woman's perspective, the text does not question the norms represented by the world behind the text. The breach of the norm is treated with irony and a wink.

H CONCLUSIONS

Judged by the Song of Song's assumed social setting (Song 3:1-5 and 5:2-8), which is not criticised by the text, the Song does not work as an antithesis to other biblical texts. The Song is about two lovers whose love escapes social conventions, although most of the time their wishes and desires remain unfulfilled. Where those desires and wishes are fulfilled, the lovers as well as the fulfilment of their desires are constantly endangered. The protagonists' desires are fulfilled in spite of social norms and conventions, not by questioning them. Disturbing social structures are part of the perceived as well as of the lived space.

The Song of Songs consequently keeps to the conventions of its time. The comparison with Theocritus shows that although those conventions accept transgressions of the norm to some degree, they do not principally question the norm. They make the reader sympathize with the transgressor. A different but negative evaluation of those norms that goes further is due to the modern readers' interpretation. The Song does neither forbid nor provoke such an evaluation; it opens up opportunities.

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⁵⁶ Hagedorn, "Frau," 419, suggests that the Song of Songs at least in its final version is a text to be read. Besides its proximity to Hellenistic works of the kind (as Theocritus) the carefully constructed order of single songs within the Song of Songs argues for Hagedorn's suggestion.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hagedorn, "Frau," 419.

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