

SEEING SOLOMON'S PALANQUIN  
(SONG OF SONGS 3:6-11)

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Critics routinely praise the poetic artistry of the Song of Songs; indeed it praises itself as “the best of songs.” But whereas such features as metaphor (Good 1970; Müller 1984; Alter 1985), imagery (Munro 1995), sound patterns (Krinetzki 1964), prosody (Murphy 1990: 85-91), chiasmus, inclusio, and other structural features (Exum 1973; Shea 1980; Webster 1982; Elliott 1989; Dorsey 1990; Bergant 2001) have received their fair share of scrutiny, relatively little attention has been given to broader questions of poetics, meaning, and effect<sup>1</sup>—in particular, to the way the poem<sup>2</sup> unfolds in time and to the controlling poetic strategies employed across the space of the poem, by means of which the poet shows us, as well as tells us, that love is as strong as death. Among these strategies I include such features as *the illusion of immediacy*, the impression that, far from being simply reported, the action is taking place in the present, unfolding before the reader;<sup>3</sup> *conjuring* (and allowing to disappear), that is, the way the lovers materialize and dematerialize through speech in an infinite deferral of presence; *the invitation to the reader* to enter into a seemingly private world of eroticism; the use of *double entendre, circumlocution and indirect language*, which enables the poem to be read as both delicately and explicitly erotic, and blurring the distinctions between anticipation, enjoyment of love’s delights, and satisfaction (and so between past, present, and future); and *the way the poem circles*

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Fisch 1988; Pelletier 2002; Sonnet 2002. Landy’s (1983) remains, in my view, the most sensitive poetic analysis, and Munro (1995) offers particularly insightful observations about imagery. Black’s discussion of the Song’s amatory technique and readers’ responses to it (1999) also belongs to the kind of project I have in mind.

<sup>2</sup> By “poem” I mean the whole of the Song of Songs.

<sup>3</sup> Created not just by presenting the lovers in the act of addressing each other but also through a preference for participles, imperatives, vocatives, together with other grammatical forms that suggest present time (see Exum 1999a: 48-51).

*back upon itself*, repeating itself and ending without closure so that it can begin again with desire *in medias res*: “let him kiss me ...” These are strategies by which the poet strives to make present, through language, what cannot be captured on the page, the lovers whose various identities enable them to stand for all lovers and, ultimately, for love itself (see, further, Exum 1999a, 1999b, 2003, and forthcoming).

In this article I want to suggest what attention to poetic development can contribute by focusing on one unit, Song 3:6-11. The benefits, as I see it, are twofold. One is that we gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the Song as a poem. Song 3:6-11 is constructed in such a way as to bring a luxurious conveyance bearing Solomon (whom I take to be the male lover in his royal guise) from the furthest imaginable horizon, the wilderness, closer and closer to the speaker who describes the procession, and through whose eyes we perceive the sight in greater and greater detail. This is an act of conjuring, one of the Song’s controlling strategies. The other benefit is that understanding how a poetic unit unfolds can sometimes contribute to the resolution of interpretive cruces. In the case of 3:6-11, if the poetic analysis presented here is accepted, light is shed on three debated questions: (1) who is the speaker in these verses?, (2) who or what is coming up from the wilderness—a person or an object?, (3) do these verses describe a moving means of transport or a fixed structure?<sup>4</sup>

### *Watching the Entourage as It Approaches*

3:6 What is this coming up from the wilderness  
       like columns of smoke,  
 redolent with myrrh and frankincense,  
       from the merchant’s many powders?<sup>5</sup>

The illusion this and the following verses create is that we are watching along with the speaker, our eyes riveted upon something just entering our field of vision, poised between the wilderness

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<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting that first we should look for a poetic structure and then inquire into meaning. Poetic analysis and exegesis work hand in hand and are mutually informing, and so it is that the present analysis is guided by exegetical decisions and vice versa.

<sup>5</sup> Translations in this essay are mine; for discussion, see Exum ‘The Voice of My Cover’ 2003 pp. 146-57.

and the unspecified location of the speaker, and moving ever closer.<sup>6</sup> “Coming up” (עלה), a participle, is action in progress. On the horizon we see what looks like columns of smoke, perhaps created by the dust stirred up by a large retinue (Budde, Meek, Gordis). The sight of something gradually drawing nearer is accompanied by the smell of incense that announces its approach (“redolent with myrrh and frankincense”). Surely this must be an important procession if incense is so profusely burned that it produces a fragrant, enveloping cloud of smoke (and adding perhaps to the impression of smoke rising in columns).

To whom is the question, “What is this coming up from the wilderness?” (v. 6), addressed? As throughout the Song, the audience is the women of Jerusalem (they will be addressed directly in vv. 10-11) and ultimately, of course, the poem’s readers. The poet here draws the reader into the poem by not as yet specifying the addressee; in the absence of an acknowledged audience, the speaker seems to be addressing the reader directly. By means of a question, the speaker calls our attention to what looks like columns of smoke in the distance. The question that immediately arises is, who or what is the cause? Since fragrance fills the air, is this perhaps a caravan laden with aromatic powders? One might expect a caravan, since the question anticipates as an answer something that is feminine in gender, and the Hebrew word for caravan, הָרָאָה, is feminine. But, no, this is no caravan. Suddenly the speaker recognizes the litter: “Look!,” and we see it too.

- 3:7 Look! It is Solomon’s litter!  
       Sixty warriors surround it  
       from the warriors of Israel,  
 3:8 all of them skilled with the sword,  
       trained in warfare,  
       each with his sword at his side  
       against terrors of the night.

“Look!” (הִנֵּה), like the question “what is this coming up?” in the previous verse, conveys an impression of immediacy and draws the reader into events that seem to be unfolding in the present. The speaker identifies the litter as Solomon’s litter, but on what basis we do not know. Something about it is regal, perhaps the nature of the conveyance, perhaps the size, and consequently the importance, of the entourage. Once we know that a litter is ap-

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<sup>6</sup> The progression is noted by Barbiero (1995:101), who describes it as a progression from outside to inside (“von außen nach innen”).

proaching, we will want to know who is riding in it. We might expect it to be Solomon, since this is Solomon's litter, but this information is withheld until the climax of the unit in v. 11, where we learn not only the identity of the palanquin's occupant but also the occasion for all this commotion. In the meantime, first we see something moving, throwing up dust, and then we smell incense, whose enveloping clouds of smoke contribute to the apparition. Next we learn *what* is responsible for the smoke and scented air, but we cannot yet see *who* it is—apart, that is, from the impressive escort that accompanies the litter. Soon these warriors are close enough for us to distinguish the swords at their sides.

The litter is surrounded by an honor guard of highly trained warriors. The size and degree of military skill of this bodyguard seems excessive. They are armed against the dread, or perhaps even terror, of the night. The mention of preparations for the night suggests that the palanquin is making a journey of a long distance. Is the perceived threat something that a large company of warriors can easily dispel; for example, animals (Dahood 1965: 81-82; 1968: 331) or marauders (Ginsburg, Delitzsch)? Or are they intangible and thus more sinister? Such a degree of preparedness betrays a deep sense of unease. Why are so many warriors necessary? Fear of nocturnal demons who threaten the bridal pair on their wedding night may lie behind the image, although this theme is not developed here (cf. Tobit 3:7-8; 6:13-15; Pirqe dirabbi Eliezar 12; see the discussions of Krauss 1936 and Pope). Night does, of course, present real dangers, and it would be normal for a king to have his guards. The procession seems to move through time; night and its attendant fears yield to day in v. 11, the day of Solomon's wedding and the gladness of heart that it brings with it.

This is not a description of any "real" procession but rather the product of a fruitful poetic imagination capable of delighting us with relatively unessential but well-chosen details like a retinue of warriors armed against unnamed, and thus provocatively mysterious, alarms in the night. There is no need to take the description literally and to attempt to identify the wilderness with a specific place (e.g., Gordis, Goulder 1986: 29). The wilderness represents the furthest horizon the eye can see. The unspecified location from which the speaker perceives the procession in the distance is assumed by the reader, who watches it approach through the speaker's eyes.

- 3:9 King Solomon made himself a palanquin  
 from the wood of Lebanon.  
 3:10 Its posts he made of silver,  
 its upholstery of gold,  
 its seat of purple cloth,  
 its interior inlaid with love.

An imaginative transformation takes place in v. 9: the litter, as it draws closer, becomes a magnificent palanquin, whose trappings progressively come into view. The conveyance is lavish in craft and ornamentation. We see that it is made of wood—not just any wood but wood imported from Lebanon (cedar would be fitting for Solomon)—and that it has silver posts. As it comes even nearer, we catch a glimpse of its upholstery, with the gold thread woven into it perhaps catching the light, and its cushioned seat covered in expensive purple cloth. Finally we look into its very interior (תוכו, v. 10) and view its decoration, perhaps inlays depicting love scenes, perhaps fittings of leather, or precious stones, or ebony—all have been suggested.<sup>7</sup> And who is inside? Why Solomon, of course, as we might have expected!

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<sup>7</sup> It is not at all clear what is meant by an interior “inlaid love” (רצוף אהבה). Pope’s suggestion that the reference is to inlays depicting love scenes is appealing (see his Plates I and II), but it is difficult to believe that, if this were the meaning, it would be expressed in such a cryptic way. Ginsburg translates, “Its interior tessellated most lovely by the daughters of Jerusalem,” which reflects the reading of LXX (“within a tessellated pavement, a love [gift] from the daughters of Jerusalem”), and points out that palanquins were often painted inside with flowers and mottoes expressing the power of love. Dahood (1963: 54) takes the final consonant of רצוף as the particle *pa*, meaning “and,” as in Ugaritic, and reads *tôkô rāsô p’ahābâ*, “within it there is pleasure and love.” Because everything else in this list is made from some specific material, the abstract “love” seems out of place. Driver’s proposal that אהבה means “leather,” in accordance with an Arabic cognate, has the advantage of not requiring textual emendation (1936: 111). Taking the *mem* from the following word, Gerleman suggests emending to אבנים, “precious stones.” Others prefer emendation to הבנים, “ebony.” In the translation above I have retained MT’s problematic “love” because I cannot decide among these alternatives, all of which fit the context well, and also for poetic reasons. “Inlaid with love” is not a “pointless metaphor” (Fox), as Landy shows when he contrasts the expensive “outer framework” of the palanquin with its true fashioning with love (1983: 91), that is, “true perfection” (1983: 209; cf. Munro 1995: 59). This description, after all, draws on poetic imagination as well as details familiar to the poet from the wider cultural milieu. Some propose that both “leather” and “love” are meant here, as one of many instances of double entendre in the Song (Grossberg 1981: 76; Goulder 1986: 30; Elliott 1989: 88).

Women of Jerusalem,<sup>8</sup> (3:11) come forth,  
 look, women of Zion,  
 at King Solomon  
 in the crown with which his mother crowned him  
 on the day of his wedding,  
 on the day of his gladness of heart.

The palanquin has brought the king before us, and we (as the audience of whom the poet is ever mindful), along with the women of Jerusalem, are invited to gaze upon him, wearing his crown, on what we now discover to be his wedding day. Does the king's mother crown him prior to his wedding day or on his wedding day? Is it with a king's crown or a garland worn by a bridegroom? We know nothing of mothers crowning their sons, either as kings or as bridegrooms, in ancient Israel, just as we know nothing of kings or bridegrooms riding in litters. Murphy states that one cannot "eliminate the possibility that this detail [the king's crowning on his wedding day] may be *only* a poetic flourish" (1990: 152; italics mine). One often finds among commentators a tendency to ascribe to poetic imagination what they cannot "explain" in the text in any other way, as though poetic imagination did not shape everything in the poem.<sup>9</sup> The description of the bridegroom's arrival in his palanquin, like so many images in the Song, exhibits verisimilitude while complementing it with unusual and exotic features: a wedding procession that originates in the wilderness, a king who travels to his wedding in an ornate litter, an especially large escort of warriors armed against unspecified terrors of the night, a king crowned by his mother.

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<sup>8</sup> With a number of commentators and translations I read "daughters of Jerusalem" in parallelism with "daughters of Zion"; the *mem* on מְבִנּוֹת may be an enclitic (attached to אֶהְיֶה) or the final consonant of אֲבִימִם or הִבְיִים (assuming emendation).

<sup>9</sup> Krinetzki, a commentator attentive to the poetic quality of the Song, says that the palanquin cannot in reality be as magnificently decorated as the text describes it ("... noch ... in Wahrheit so prachtvoll ausgestattet, wie es der Text darstellt"). Like many others, he assumes that some sort of "reality" lies "behind" the text. But there never was any palanquin apart from the one the text describes. Cf. Würthwein, who speaks of poetic exaggeration in the description of the retinue ("junge Männer, die poetisch übertreibend 'Helden' genannt werden") and of the palanquin ("poetische Übertreibung").

*Who Is the Speaker?*

Who is the speaker through whose eyes we witness this scene? It is unlikely that in 3:6-11 the poet addresses the audience directly (as narrator) rather than through one of the personae in the poem, for nowhere else in the Song does the poet intrude on the dialogue of the characters. Nor is it likely that the poet has here inserted an epithalamion about Solomon into a poem that is otherwise a sustained dialogue between lovers. With most critics, I assume that Solomon in these verses is a literary fiction. Solomon appears here not as himself but for what he represents, a king-lover *par excellence*. Elsewhere the male lover is figuratively identified as a king (1:4, 12; 6:8-9; 7:5 [6H]), and here we find him in a Solomonic guise.<sup>10</sup>

Most commentators assign these verses to one of the speakers within the poem, though opinion is divided as to which of the poem's character(s) is (are) speaking.<sup>11</sup> In cases where the identity of a speaker is uncertain, a useful procedure for guarding against arbitrary assigning of dialogue is to posit the same speaker throughout a poetic unit unless there is strong evidence to the contrary. If the poetic analysis offered above has any merit, then it is fairly obvious who the speaker of these verses is: the woman. It cannot be the women of Jerusalem, since they are addressed directly by the speaker. And it cannot be the man since, in his Solomonic guise, he is the subject of the speech. Only the woman is not mentioned in these verses, and this is because she is the one describing the scene. Always in the Song when the man is "the king," the woman appears as herself; that is to say, she participates in the royal fantasy or guise—as, for example, in 1:2-4, where she is imaginatively a member of the court, if not of the

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<sup>10</sup> I doubt that Solomon's wealth and grandeur are being parodied (so Whedbee 1993); rather they are being appropriated to picture the woman's sense of the luxury that love bestows on her and her lover (Fox).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Ginsburg and Delitzsch assign these verses to four onlookers; Meek, to the daughters of Jerusalem; Krinetzki, vv. 6-8 and 9-10 (as a later addition) to the chorus of women and vv. 10e-11 to a soloist; Munro (1995: 25), v. 6 to the daughters of Jerusalem and vv. 7-11 to the narrator; Murphy marks these verses with a question mark, indicating uncertainty about the identity of the speaker. Fox observes that vv. 7-8 could be spoken by the man, with the woman expanding on the description in vv. 9-11, or vv. 7-10b $\alpha$  could be spoken by the women of Jerusalem, in which case vv. 10b $\beta$ -11 is the woman's reply. He concludes on grounds other than literary that they belong to the woman.

royal harem—but she does not assume a specific role, such as queen or courtesan.<sup>12</sup> Here in vv. 6-11 she conjures up her lover from afar, from the מִדְּבָר, the unsettled, uncultivated steppe beyond the place where she is, from the desert. She conjured him up earlier, like a gazelle or young deer upon hills and mountains (2:8-11; see Exum 2003); now in a sedan chair, a portable couch, a magnificent palanquin coming toward her, he materializes as a kingly Solomon.

*Who or What is Coming Up from the Wilderness?*

The question מִי זֶה in v. 6 can mean “who is this?” or “what is this?” The interrogative pronoun מִי is sometimes used of things, especially when persons are understood or implied (Ginsburg, BDB 566a, Joüon–Muraoka §144b, DCH 242b). I take this to be the sense here, where the answer is not simply that a litter is approaching but that it is *Solomon’s* litter. Presumably Solomon is riding in it, but it will not be close enough for us to see him until v. 11. The feminine pronoun זֶה, “this,” can be used in the sense of the neuter as an abstract of generalization (cf. Isa. 5:25; 43:9; Mic. 1:5; GKC §136b, Joüon–Muraoka §152a). The feminine participles in the question (“coming up” and “redolent”) anticipate as an answer something that is feminine in gender, and this is what we get in מִטְּהָרָה, “litter” (v. 7).<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of 8:5, where the question “Who is this coming up from the wilderness?” also appears and where the answer is clearly the woman, some commentators conclude that here too the question refers to the woman as the occupant of the litter.<sup>14</sup> Others propose that the litter stands for the woman as a surrogate (Pope) or metaphor (Holman 1998) for her. Some imagine that the bridegroom and his friends are journeying to the bride’s house in order to fetch her and bring her back to the groom’s home, or that the groom’s friends are bringing the bride to meet the bridegroom (e.g., Rudolph, Krinetzki, Würthwein, Loretz), but this is specula-

<sup>12</sup> In contrast, for example, to the bucolic guise, where she and he appear as shepherds, 1:7-8.

<sup>13</sup> The situation is similar in LXX, where the forms in v. 6 are feminine, as is the word for litter, κλίνη.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Delitzsch, Gordis, Keel, Pope; Müller sees vv. 6-8 referring to the bride and vv. 9-11 as the reciprocal scene of the groom brought to meet the bride in his sedan chair, she as a divine apparition, he as King Solomon.

tion based on the questionable evidence of Psalm 45, 1 Macc. 9:37-39, and later wedding customs among Jews and Arabs. Fox, who severs this verse from the following description of the litter, sees it as referring to the woman herself. He points to 6:10, "who is this looking forth like the dawn?," another reference to the woman, as further evidence that the question refers to her, but 6:10, comparing the woman's beauty to that of heavenly bodies, appears in a context quite different from that of 3:6 and 8:5 (Murphy).

Just because the question  $\text{מִי זֶה}$  refers to the woman on two other occasions does not mean that it must refer to her every time it occurs. In 8:5, the woman comes up from the wilderness and the man is with her. Here a palanquin comes up from the wilderness and the man, in his Solomonian guise, is in it. There is no indication in the text that the woman is the palanquin's occupant, whereas, if the analysis of the poetic development of vv. 6-11 offered above is followed, v. 11, as the climax to the description, identifies the occupant as Solomon. Moreover, if the woman were the occupant, we would have to divide vv. 6-11 among different speakers (e.g., vv. 6-10d to the women of Jerusalem and vv. 10e-11 to the woman), for the woman would hardly be describing herself as approaching herself in a palanquin. Since these verses make sense as a whole with the woman as the speaker, I see no reason to complicate interpretation by dividing the speech into parts.

Commentators are virtually unanimous in connecting the question in v. 6 to the following description of the palanquin in vv. 7-11. Fox and Bloch and Bloch (who appear to be following Fox on this point) are exceptions; they connect this verse to the preceding verses (vv. 1-5). Fox bases his reading (1) on the combination of the so-called refrain of adjuration and the question "who is this coming up from the wilderness?" in 8:4-5, which, in his opinion, shows that the question does not begin a unit but rather responds to the adjuration (in this case, 3:6 would be the response to 3:5), and (2) on the assumption that "who is this?" here in v. 6 refers to the woman. It is, however, by no means evident that 8:5 belongs with 8:4, and, as I have indicated above, the question in 3:6 does not require that the answer be the woman. Joining this verse to the preceding vv. 1-5 leaves Fox somewhat uncertain as to the identity of the speaker here in v. 6; he thinks it is probably the women of Jerusalem, but that they should speak now, having just been told in the previous verse not to disturb the lovers, is odd. Indeed, Fox is hard pressed to explain why the woman would

charge the women of Jerusalem not to disturb her and her lover in 3:5 and 8:4 and then suddenly appear coming up from the wilderness both here in 3:6 and in 8:5.

Perhaps the strongest argument against reading this verse with the preceding vv. 1-5 is that it spoils the closure achieved in these verses. Like the section that precedes it (1:5-2:7), 2:8-3:5 ends with the appeal to the women of Jerusalem not to arouse love until it wishes. The lovers are together, enjoying the delights of love, and it is hard to imagine a more suitable form of closure. There follows in each case something new. In 2:8 "Listen! My lover! Look! He's coming ..." invites the reader to watch the man's approach from afar through the woman's eyes. Similarly here in 3:6 "What is this coming up from the wilderness?" invites the reader to watch the man's approach in his palanquin through the woman's eyes. It is thus a fitting introduction to her description of the palanquin gradually drawing closer until it is possible to see its occupant, the lover in his Solomonic guise.

#### *Sedan Chair or Fixed Structure?*

A *מטה* is a bed or couch or litter, and can be either stationary (Amos 6:4; Est. 1:6) or portable (2 Sam. 3:31). Exactly what kind of construction is meant by *אשריון* is open to question. The word is a hapax, whose meaning and origin are debated; most likely it is a loan word derived from the Greek *φορεῖον* (Rundgren 1962), and this is how LXX renders it. A *φορεῖον* is something that is carried, a sedan chair; what seems to be envisioned in these verses is an enclosed litter, since it is said to have an interior (*תוכו*, v. 10). Some critics, however, think that the *אשריון* is a fixed structure, with pillars and an inside. Gerleman, who sees vv. 9-11 as separate from vv. 6-8, proposes that a palace room or throne room is meant. Goulder maintains that the description is of the throne itself (1986: 29; cf. Budde, who sees the description of the litter as recalling that of Solomon's throne in 1 Kgs 10:18-20). On the basis of its Aramaic cognates, Fox posits that *אשריון* has a wider range of meaning than Greek *φορεῖον*, and that the description of Solomon's *אשריון*, with its columns, interior, and "(probably) a paved floor" resembles the "court of the garden of the king's pavilion" in Esth. 1:6. He postulates that *אשריון* is used here as a metonym for the chamber or pavilion-like structure in which Solomon's couch is set.

The description of the אַפְרִיָּן in these verses contains a number of words whose meaning is uncertain, and thus it is of little help in deciding the exact nature of the אַפְרִיָּן. Conversely, because we do not know exactly what an אַפְרִיָּן is, we cannot be sure about the details of the description. A litter or palanquin could have pillars or posts and an interior. Delitzsch draws attention to the similarity between the אַפְרִיָּן here, with its silver pillars and purple seat, and descriptions of φορέϊα provided by Athenaeus. On one occasion, Athenaeus mentions a silver-legged φορέϊον with purple coverlet (*The Deipnosophists*, v. 212c5) and on another, the occasion of a festal procession by Antiochus Epiphanes, he describes two hundred women sprinkling perfumes from gold pitchers, followed by eighty magnificently clad women carried on golden-legged φορέϊα and five hundred on silver-legged φορέϊα (v. 195c2).

Severing vv. 7-11 from v. 6 is crucial to Fox's argument that nothing in these verses suggests that the bed is moving, and thus a stationary bed and not a litter is meant here. With most commentators, I take נִשְׂכָּה as portable because I see v. 6, "what is this coming up from the wilderness?," as referring to it. Moreover, I do not agree with Fox that nothing in vv. 7-11 suggests motion. If אַפְרִיָּן in v. 9 is a sedan chair or palanquin, then it is moving. Furthermore—and this is where exegetical evidence suggesting mobility is strengthened by the poetic development in these verses—motion is implied in the way the magnificent conveyance, first called a litter, then described as a palanquin, is pictured as coming closer and closer to the speaker.

### *Movement Arrested in Time and Space*

Gerleman thinks that the poet was inspired by a familiarity with processions in Egyptian festivals, and there are Mesopotamian analogues as well (see Pope). There seems to be an Israelite backdrop too, an allusion, through the choice of imagery, to the Israelites' entry into the land of Canaan from the wilderness, where they were led by a column of cloud.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the cultural influences and literary precursors, and surely there were influences, the poet has put an Israelite stamp on this exotic depiction ("war-

<sup>15</sup> Rudolph; cf. Robert, who gives it an eschatological significance, in keeping with his allegorical reading.

riors of *Israel*," v. 7) and used it in the service of an artistic feat of conjury. In the female persona of the Song, the poet has created a consummate conjurer, and here she engages in this, her favorite pastime, evoking the presence of the loved one through the power of poetic representation.

Our looking, the crowning, and the wedding all seem to be happening at once, yet the coronation belongs to some unspecified time in the past, the day Solomon's mother *crowned* him (Landy 1983: 19). Past and present, coronation and wedding are merged in a royal wedding day that symbolically anticipates that of the lovers. What sets this day apart from others is the groom's gladness of heart. If the male lover likened to Solomon becomes a king on his wedding day, it is because love makes him a king. The woman conjures up her lover as a bridegroom in all his Solomonic splendor, but she does not describe the wedding itself. She appears in this royal fantasy not in a royal guise but only as herself, the speaker whom the palanquin approaches, bearing her kingly lover on his wedding day. The wedding day thus embraces the present (we watch the groom arrive) and the future (the wedding is about to take place) as well as the past (when the groom was crowned). Such blurring of distinctions between past, present, and future is typical of the Song, where love is always already in progress and consummation is simultaneously anticipated, enjoyed and deferred. Conjuring up the beloved—and letting the beloved disappear so that the conjuring can begin again—this is the game the lovers are continually playing. There is no end to it, no real closure to this poem of desire, for closure would mean the death of desiring, the silence of the text (Brooks 1993: 20). In creating a poem in which love, in its rhythms of seeking and finding, is always already in progress, a poem that begins *in medias res* and ends without closure, the poet affirms a love as strong as death.

#### ABSTRACT

Song 3:6-11 shares distinctive poetic features with the rest of the Song of Songs, such as the impression of immediacy, the conjuring up of the loved one, the blurring of distinctions between past and present, and the address to an audience that includes the reader. This pericope is constructed in such a way as to bring a luxurious conveyance bearing Solomon (the male lover in his royal guise) from the furthest imaginable horizon, the wilderness, closer and closer to the speaker who describes the procession, and through whose eyes we perceive the sight in

greater and greater detail. The poetic analysis sheds light on three debated questions in Song of Songs interpretation: (1) who is the speaker in these verses?, (2) who or what is coming up from the wilderness—a person or an object?, (3) do these verses describe a moving means of transport or a fixed structure?

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