

The Literary Structure of the Song of Songs *Redivivus*

Richard M. Davidson
Andrews University

The literary structure of the Song of Songs has been the focus of a number of scholarly studies during the last several decades. Despite progress in unlocking the structural secrets of the Song's symmetrical beauty, no consensus has emerged, and there remain crucial enigmatic literary-structural features that need further attention. In this article I survey the major recent attempts to grapple with the literary structure of the Song and then set forth the (tentative) results of my own research, building upon the insights of, and suggesting refinements to, the work of those who have gone before.

Survey of Recent Scholarly Studies

Studies Supporting a Unified Song

I have been unconvinced by the popular suggestion that the book is simply an anthology or collection of various unrelated love songs.¹ If one takes seriously the statement of the superscription, the book constitutes “The Song [*šîr*, singular] of Songs” (1:1)—a unified song, not an anthology. Furthermore, a number of modern studies point to strong evidence within the contents of the

¹For example, in 1902 Paul Haupt wrote that the book was “simply a collection of popular love-ditties, and these erotic songs are not at all complete . . . neither are they given in their proper order” (Paul Haupt, “The Book of Canticles,” *AJSL* 18 [1902]: 205). The following more recent commentaries espouse this view: W. Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth: Das Hohe Lied: Die Klagelieder*, Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962), 97–98; H. L. Ginsberg, “Introduction to the Song of Songs,” *The Five Megilloth and Jonah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), 3; Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 17–18; Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 40–54 (who also discusses earlier commentators with this view); Marcia Falk, *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), 3, 69; Robert Davidson, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon*, Daily Bible Study Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 98; Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 17–18; and Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 54–56.

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Song itself of its integral unity, rather than its being a collection of unrelated love poems. For example, Roland Murphy points to recurring refrains, themes, words, phrases, and elements of dialogical structure;² J. Cheryl Exum analyzes numerous stylistic and structural indications of “a unity of authorship with an intentional design, and a sophistication of poetic style”;³ and Michael Fox elaborates on four factors that point to a literary unity: (1) a network of repetitions (repetitions), (2) associative sequences, (3) consistency of character portrayal, and (4) narrative framework.⁴

Finally, several recent literary-structural analyses point to an overarching literary structure for the entire Song. These literary macrostructural studies constitute our special focus in what follows.

Literary Macrostructural Studies

J. Cheryl Exum. Exum’s pioneering 1973 study, “A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs,” posits a unified Song with six poems.⁵ Micro-structurally, several of these poems are seen by her to contain chiasmic structures. Macrostructurally, Poems 1 and 6 are paired in an inclusio, poem 2 is paired with poem 4, and poem 3 is paired with poem 5, thus forming the overall broken chiasmic structure of ABCB’C’A’. This micro- and macro- structural analysis provides helpful, even foundational, insights, although Exum herself recognizes that “the artistry in the Song is even more intricate than we have been able to suggest here” and urges that “much more investigation of the poet’s style needs to be done.”⁶

William Shea. Shea’s 1980 study⁷ also finds six sections in the Song (although with slight adjustments to Exum’s division boundaries).⁸ Unlike Exum, Shea sees these six sections as forming a concentric chiasmic structure for the entire Song: ABCC’B’A’. Shea’s chiasmic analysis calls attention to crucial chiasmic parallels between paired units in the Song, and his overall structure has much to commend it. But there are some difficulties with his analysis: Shea’s

²Roland E. Murphy, “The Unity of the Song of Songs,” *VT* 29 (1979): 436–443; idem, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 64–67.

³J. Cheryl Exum, “A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs,” *ZAW* 85 (1973): 47–79.

⁴Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1985), 209–222. Note his conclusion (220): “there is no reason to posit an editor to explain the Song’s cohesiveness and stylistic homogeneity. The most likely explanation of these qualities is that the Song is a single poem composed, originally at least, by a single poet.”

⁵The six poems recognized by Exum are: (1) 1:2–2:6; (2) 2:7–3:5; (3) 3:6–5:1; (4) 5:2–6:3; (4) 6:4–8:3; and (6) 8:4–14.

⁶Exum, 79.

⁷William H. Shea, “The Chiasmic Structure of the Song of Songs,” *ZAW* 92 (1980): 378–396.

⁸The six sections recognized by Shea are: (1) 1:2–2:2; (2) 2:3–17; (3) 3:1–4:16; (4) 5:1–7:10 [Eng. 9]; (5) 7:11 [Eng. 10]–8:5; and (6) 8:6–14.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

delimitations of the endings of at least three of the poems (2:2; 4:16; and 8:5) disregard now-generally-accepted literary boundaries marked by refrains; his detailed parallels occasionally seem forced (sparse evidence, or only thematic and not terminological parallels); his large sections C and C' appear in need of subdividing more explicitly into several sections of panel writing and not chiasmic arrangement; and the two central verses of the Song's macrostructure (4:16 and 5:1) astutely recognized by Shea seem to call for a separate paired section for these verses in the chiasmic outline.⁹

Edwin Webster. Webster's 1982 study of "Pattern in the Song of Songs,"¹⁰ in dialogue with Exum's study (but apparently unaware of Shea's work), finds in the Song a "five-section chiasmus with each section (except the central one) divided into two distinct units marked by ring constructions," yielding the following pattern:

- A 1. 1:2–2:6 Banter and praise
- 2. 2:7–3:5 The maiden
- B Interlude 3:6–11
- 1. 4:1–7 The youth
- 2. 4:8–15 The youth
- C 4:16–6:3 The maiden
- B' 1. 6:4–10 The youth
- 2. 6:11–7:10 The youth
- A' 1. 7:11–8:3 The maiden
- 2. 8:4–14 Praise and banter

While Webster offers some provocative analysis, his penchant for identifying "ring constructions" (complementary verses at the beginning and end of each unit) leads him to suggest a number of rather forced parallelisms (e.g., 1:2a and 7:11; 7:11 and 8:3; 8:4 and 8:14) with verses that are clearly not refrains (e.g., 4:8, 15; 6:4), to posit an interlude (3:6–11) with no parallel to any other part of the Song, and to omit some of the crucial refrains that serve as boundary-markers of the Song (e.g., 2:17; 5:8).

G. Lloyd Carr. Carr's 1984 commentary on the Song of Songs¹¹ refers explicitly to the work of Exum and Shea and rectifies some of the inadequacies of their analyses by recognizing and respecting the boundaries of macro-units

⁹In an unpublished class handout based upon Shea's analysis, literature professor Ed Christian of Kutztown University (and editor of *JATS*) spells out more clearly the block parallelism (or panel writing) of sections C and C', diagrams the central two verses of the Song as D and D', and tidies up Shea's outline in general.

¹⁰Edwin C. Webster, "Pattern in the Song of Songs," *JSOT* 22 (1982): 73–93.

¹¹G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 44–49; this structure is developed more fully in idem, "Song of Songs," *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 290–295.

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

marked by refrains. Carr, like Webster (whom he does not cite), sees five, not six, main sections of the Song, forming a symmetrical chiasmic structure:

- A 1:2–2:7 Anticipation
- B 2:8–3:5 Found, and Lost—and Found
- C 3:6–5:1 Consummation
- B' 5:2–8:4 Lost—and Found
- A' 8:5–14 Affirmation

While Carr has identified four of the major refrains in the Song that demarcate macro-units, there are others that he has overlooked. He also considers that the presence of a chiasmic macrostructure of the Song is an explanation of why the Song does not have a sequential narrative plot, but rather “the individual units seem to fold back on each other rather than moving the story forward.”¹² This assumption that the chiasmic structure points away from the existence of a linear narrative-plot will be re-evaluated in a forthcoming study.

M. Timothea Elliott. Sister M. Timothea Elliott’s 1989 monograph explores the literary unity of the Canticle.¹³ In her detailed 383-page structural analysis of the Song, Elliott identifies a macrostructure of six units almost identical to that of Exum (with only slight modifications in establishing the exact place of transition between the units).¹⁴ Within these macro-units Elliott recognizes a number of subdivisions, also usually marked off by (sub)refrains, although it is unclear how she has determined which are the major refrains marking the main units and which are minor ones marking their subdivisions.¹⁵ Elliott systematically works her way through the Song’s six units, providing insightful microstructural analysis along the way. The most positive contribution of this monograph is that it provides an astonishing array of formal and stylistic evidence for the unity of the Canticle (her stated goal according to the title).

On the level of macrostructure, I am convinced by Elliott’s evidence that the Prologue (1:2–2:7) and Epilogue (8:5–14) form an inclusio to the entire Song, sharing many verbal and structural correspondences. However, her attempts to correlate Parts I and III (2:8–3:5 and 5:2–6:3) and Parts II and IV (3:6–5:1 and 6:4–8:4) are far less persuasive. She herself tacitly admits this, acknowledging the presence of “other elements, establishing a multiplicity of

¹²Carr, “Song of Songs,” 291.

¹³M. Timothea Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle*, European University Studies, Series 23, vol. 371 (Frankfurt am Main/Bern/New York/Paris: Peter Lang, 1989). This study is a revision of Elliott’s doctoral dissertation in Biblical Science at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, defended in 1988.

¹⁴The six units are: (1) Prologue—1:2–2:7; (2) Part I—2:8–3:5; (3) Part II—3:6–5:1; (4) Part III—5:2–6:3; (5) Part IV—6:4–8:4; and (6) Epilogue—8:5–14.

¹⁵Most of these refrains and sub-refrains roughly coincide with the results of my independent analysis, but, as will become apparent below, I do not find any criteria within the Song to separate between major and minor refrains.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

correspondences among the various parts [of the Song].”¹⁶ By distinguishing arbitrarily between major and minor refrains (and thus major parts and their subdivisions in the Song), Elliot has (in my view) limited the number of major macro-units in the Song. This has kept her from comparing these smaller units (her subdivisions), and thus the overarching symmetrical macrostructure of the Song has not been allowed to fully emerge.

David Dorsey. Dorsey’s 1990 published study of “Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs”¹⁷ indicates a chiasmic structure in the Song similar to the analyses of Exum and Shea, but with seven sections, instead of six, in the overall macrostructure of ABCDC’B’A’.¹⁸ Dorsey rightly points out the failure of both Exum and Shea to recognize 3:1–5 as a discreet unit and points out several of their boundary markers as questionable (one of Exum’s and two of Shea’s). Dorsey finds chiasmic features in six of the seven poems, and five of these poems are seen to be septenary. Dorsey’s recent (1999) monograph, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*,¹⁹ reaffirms this basic structure of the Song. At the same time, by revealing Dorsey’s proclivity to find a septenary structure almost everywhere in the OT books, it causes one to reassess whether the seven-part structure is discovered inductively or artificially imposed upon the text.

Robert L. Alden. Duane A. Garret’s 1993 New American Commentary on Song of Songs reproduces the chiasmic structure of Robert Alden.²⁰ Alden points out some twenty-eight key words and motifs (many of the same terms and catch phrases as noted by Shea and Exum) that occur in a broad chiasmic parallelism (labeled by Alden from *A* through *L* and *L*’ back to *A*’) throughout the Song, and rightly finds the central verses to be 4:16 and 5:1 (his *L* and *L*’). In the inner parts of the Song (which he labels *Ja* [3:1–5], *Jb* [3:6–11], *Jc* [4:1–7], *Ja* [5:2–9], *Jb* [5:10–6:1], *Jc* [6:4–11]) he also correctly (in my view) points out the existence of block parallelism (panel writing) as well as chiasmic features. But the overall structure of Alden gives very little attention to the boundary markers (refrains) or chiasmic macro-units of the Song. Thus his proposal, while demonstrating the overall chiasmic “flow” of the Song of Songs, provides little assistance in grasping the literary macrostructure of the Song as it emerges from his analysis of the relationship between/among the Song’s macro-units.

¹⁶Elliott, 236.

¹⁷David Dorsey, “Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs,” *JSOT* 46 (1990): 81–96.

¹⁸The seven sections are: (1) 1:2–2:7; (2) 2:8–17; (3) 3:1–5; (4) 3:6–5:1; (5) 5:2–7:11[10]; (6) 7:12 [11]–8:4; and (7) 8:5–14.

¹⁹David Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 199–213.

²⁰Duane A. Garrett, “Song of Songs,” in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 14:376. Robert Alden’s concentric chiasm is elaborated in his unpublished paper presented at the national ETS meeting, December 1985, entitled “The Chiasmic Structure of the Song of Songs.”

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Ernst Wendland. Wendland's 1995 structural analysis of the Song of Songs²¹ makes a significant contribution. Wendland points to literary criteria for determining the presence of poetic refrains in the Song, and his application of these well-defined criteria identifies seven major epiphoric junctures (or refrains) indicating boundaries of closure and dividing the Song of Songs into eight different poems or Songs.²² Wendland does not attempt, however, to interrelate these Songs in an overarching macrostructure. Wendland himself also points to the apparent imbalance in the length of some of his suggested cycles (he cites Song 3 and 4 as an example), and I find that according to his own criteria for determining boundaries of closure he has omitted several additional refrains that indicate macro-units of the Song.

D. Philip Roberts. The most recent (and most comprehensive) structural analysis of the Song that I have located is an unpublished 2001 doctoral dissertation by D. Philip Roberts.²³ Roberts' 810-page dissertation begins with detailed microstructural analysis of minimal structural units (i.e., poetic strophes) and then moves up the hierarchical structural ladder to the determination of twelve larger blocks of poetic material.²⁴ However, Roberts himself acknowledges that he "does not reach a final conclusion regarding the overall structure

²¹Ernst R. Wendland, "Seeking a Path Through a Forest of Symbols: A Figurative and Structural Survey of the Song of Songs," *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 7/2 (1995): 13–59.

²²The eight sections (Songs) identified by Wendland are: (1) 1:2–2:7; (2) 2:8–17; (3) 3:1–5; (4) 3:6–5:1; (5) 5:2–6:3; (6) 6:4–7:10; (7) 7:11–8:4; (8) 8:5–14. The common recursive structuring devices (in Hebrew poetry in general) noted by Wendland involves repetition (the main structuring device) and the "convergence at key points" of other poetic features such as "metaphor/simile, metonymy, hyperbole, euphemism, exclamation/verbal intensification, dramatization (direct discourse), condensation, phrasal expansion, intertextual citation/allusion, colorful diction (including archaism and neologisms), syntactic perturbation (word order variation), grammatical shifting (*enallage*; e.g., tense, person), along with the usual alterations in cast (participants/characters), setting (time, place), perspective (speaker), or circumstance (emotive tone or psychological attitude)" (34–35). Wendland also notes the recursive structuring device of the *inclusio* (or sandwich construction), illustrated in the beginning and ending of the Song (1:4 and 8:14), there coupled with lexically equivalent references to King Solomon and images of sexual enjoyment (wine/scent/perfume, vineyard/fruit/spices). In the Song of Songs Wendland sees the compositional cue of epiphora (where the respective endings are parallel) as especially prominent, realized through the recurrence of various kinds of refrains. Specific aphoric abstract descriptions serving as diagnostic indicators or "motif-markers" for refrains of the Song include: left/right arm embrace, gazelle/doe/stag/ imagery, do [not] arouse/waken love; I am my lover's/my lover is mine; garden and related (fruit) motifs, movement imagery (coming/going), and daughters of Jerusalem.

²³D. Philip Roberts, "'Let Me See His Form': Seeking Poetic Structure in the Song of Songs," Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001.

²⁴The larger poetic blocks of which Roberts is reasonably certain include: 2:8–17; 3:1–5; 3:6–11; 4:1–7; 4:8–5:1; 5:2–6:3; and 6:4–10. Other possible poetic blocks are 6:11–7:11; 7:12–8:4; and 8:5–7. The segments of 1:2–2:7 and 8:8–14 Roberts identifies as composed of smaller units of two or three strophes each that do not evidence the same internal cohesion as the other blocks. Most (in fact, all but two) of the larger poetic blocks identified by Roberts coincide with my own analysis of the macro-units of the macrostructure of the Song.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

of the Song.”²⁵ His tentative assessment, following in the tradition of his major professor Tremper Longman III, is that the structure of the Song is “paratactic, i.e., as consisting of a series of related, but largely self-contained vignettes,” although he appears to go beyond his *Doktorvater* in arguing that “this paratactic structure consists of a much higher order of structured units than is typically recognized by anthologists.”²⁶

The Literary Macrostructure of Song of Songs: A Tentative Proposal

My own literary analysis builds upon what I consider the strengths of the aforementioned studies, but ultimately is based upon my own intensive inductive analysis of the literary macrostructure of the Song.

The Literary Macrostructure of the Song of Songs

- A 1:2–2:7 Mutual Love
- B 2:8–17 Coming and Going

- C 3:1–5 Dream I: Lost and Found
- D 3:6–11 Praise of Groom, I
- E 4:1–7 Praise of Bride, I
- F 4:8–15 Praise of Bride, II

- G 4:16 Invitation by Bride
- G’ 5:1 Acceptance of Invitation by Groom and Divine
Approbation

- C’ 5:2–8 Dream II: Found and Lost
- D’ 5:9–6:3 Praise of Groom, II
- E’ 6:4–12 Praise of Bride, III
- F’ 7:1 [Eng. 6:13]–10 [Eng. 9] Praise of Bride, IV

- B’ 7:11 [Eng. 10]–8:2 Going and Coming
- A’ 8:3–14 Mutual Love

I identify here twelve macro-units of the Song of Songs, indicated by refrains (repetends) that denote the boundaries between these sections.²⁷ The

²⁵Roberts, 755.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 758.

²⁷Besides the seven macro-juncture markers identified by Wendland (2:6–7; 2:16–17; 3:5; 5:1; 6:3; 7:11 [Eng. 10]; 8:3–4), I accept three others supported by Roberts’ meticulous structural analysis: 3:11; 4:7; and 6:10 (see Roberts, 298–304, 332–335, and 456–463, for substantiation of these boundary markers of macro-units). The one additional macro-juncture marker I recognize in the Song is 5:8. This, I believe, is clearly (by Wendland’s own carefully articulated criteria) to be identified as a refrain with its adjuration of the daughters of Jerusalem (“I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem. . .”), which parallels the same phraseology in the widely-recognized refrains of 2:7; 3:5; and 8:4.

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

twelve sections of the Song form an artistic symmetrical macrostructure, comprised of reverse parallelism (i.e., chiasm) and block parallelism (i.e., panel writing) in a fourteen-member pattern (including the two-verse central climax): AB–CDEF–GG'–C'D'E'F'–B'A'.

These various sections of the literary macrostructure are paired in a parallelism of theme, terminology, and structural devices. Thematically, members A and A' describe various features of mutual love; B and B' highlight the coming and going of the lovers; C and C' are most probably dreams, with an overarching motif of presence-absence or lovers lost and found; D and D' record praise of the groom; E and E' presents praise of the bride; members F and F' record another round of praise for the bride; and G and G' form the climactic (and central, by word count) two verses of the Song, containing the invitation by the bride for the groom to consummate the marriage, the groom's acceptance, and the omniscient approbation of the marriage union.²⁸

After completing the basic research for this article, I was given what is to my knowledge a still unpublished paper by Gordon H. Johnston, "The Enigmatic Literary Structure of the Song of Songs," Dallas Theological Seminary (no date), which posits eleven poems in the Song, divided by ten major macro-juncture markers. Johnston, 2, nicely summarizes the different kinds of elements/motifs comprising the refrains/repetends and other macro-juncture markers of the Song: adjuration (2:7; 3:5; 8:4; cf. 5:8), mutual possession (2:16; 6:3; 7:11 [Eng. 10]); sexual embrace (2:6; 8:3); "Be like a gazelle!" (2:17; 8:14; cf. 4:6); Journey to a Garden (6:2, 11); and concluding exhortations in the imperative (3:11; 5:1; 7:1 [Eng. 6:13]). Johnston also points to a structural marker that appears at the *beginning* of two macro-units of the Song, namely, the question "Who . . .?" (3:6; 8:5). Johnston's analysis points to the same basic macro-junctures of Canticles as I do, with the exception of my inclusion of 4:6–7, which he apparently overlooks (4:6–7 repeats the same phraseology as in the undisputed refrain of 2:17: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away . . ."; and with Roberts I accept 4:6–7 as a refrain of the Song and add this phraseology as one additional element/motif utilized for macro-structural boundary closure in the Song beyond Johnston's summary).

²⁸Johnston's overall literary macrostructure coincides very closely with the one that has emerged from my own research. A major macrostructural difference between Johnston's structural analysis and mine is that his section E (4:1–5:1) I divide into two sections, E (4:1–7) and F (4:8–15), in light of the refrain in 4:6–7 (unrecognized by Johnston), which repeats the same phraseology as in the undisputed refrain of 2:17: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away . . ." This division in the first half of the chiasmic structure matches the similar division which Johnston recognizes in the two parallel members (6:4–13 and 7:1–11) which Johnston labels E and E', respectively, bringing a fully balanced symmetry to the two chiasmic halves of the Song (in contrast to Johnston's "hanging" member E', with no balancing section in the first half of the chiasm). Thus I posit twelve macro-units of the Song's macrostructure, instead of eleven—as Johnston does.

Furthermore, I separate the central two verses of the Song (4:16 and 5:1) as distinct sections G and G' of the chiasmic diagram (though recognizing them also as part of the macro-unit of 4:8–5:1, as does Johnston), making a total of fourteen members to the chiasmic structure, or seven paired members of the Song.

Johnston's careful study provides helpful terminological, thematic, and structural comparisons in the parallel members of his proposed macrostructure which also coincide in a number of instances with my own analysis.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Let us look more closely at the individual paired members of this intricate symmetrical macrostructure of the Song, especially highlighting the terminological and structural parallelism.²⁹

Members A and A'. First we observe the parallelism between members A and A'. I am persuaded by the research of Shea, Dorsey, and others who show that the poetic lyrics in both of these sections alternate between the female and male lovers in overall chiasmic structures.³⁰ Thus member A may be outlined as follows:

- a female (1:2–7)
- b male (1:8–11)
- c female (1:12–14)
- d male (1:15)
- c' female (1:16–17)
- b' male (2:1–2)
- a' female (2:3–7)

Member A' has a similar alternation of male and female lyrics:

- a (introductory unnamed voice with rhetorical question about) the female (8:5a)
- b male (8:5b)
- c female (8:6–7)
- d male (the brothers) (8:8–9)
- c' female (8:10–12)
- b' male (8:13)
- a' female (8:14)

The connectedness between members A and A' is highlighted by this seven-fold matching alternation of male and female voices, since no other sections of the Song contain such a concentrated structural pattern of gender alternation.³¹

²⁹It should be kept in mind that in the parallelism of the Song, there is rarely an exact duplication of material; this would not make for good artistry in Hebrew poetry. Hebrew parallelism is just that—material that is parallel but not slavishly identical.

³⁰Shea, 381–385, points out the alternation of gender; Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the OT*, 200–202, 209–210, also shows a gender alternation (with minor differences from Shea), but further indicates the chiasmic connections between the two halves of each of these two sections. I have made minor corrections in the structures of Shea and Dorsey according to my understanding of these sections. Note especially that Shea has 8:12–14 spoken all by the woman (but 8:13 is clearly the man!), while 8:11 he arbitrarily assigns to an (unnamed) male voice. Dorsey assigns 8:8–10 to “the brothers and their sister” and (at least implicitly) counts this as the “male” section of the alternation of genders, whereas v. 10 clearly shifts to the voice of the female; he also labels 8:14 as “concluding refrain” without assigning it explicitly to the woman. I do not here include further discussion of the chiasmic microstructural analysis of these sections, since in this article I am not focusing upon microstructures except as these inform the macrostructure of the Song as a whole.

³¹Some further articulation of the dialogue through gender alternation does occur beyond members A and A'. In fact, my colleague at Andrews University, Jacques Doukhan, suggests (in

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

We find also crucial thematic links: only these two sections of the Song contain a reference to the woman’s brothers (1:6; 8:8, 9). Furthermore, only these two sections include the woman’s statements of self-assurance regarding her beauty (1:5; 8:10; labeled “boast songs” in genre analysis).

The most significant linkages between these sections are the terminological repetitions revealing that members A and A’ are also in generally chiasmic (reverse) parallelism with each other.³² The chiasmic relationship between these two sections of the Song is set forth in Table 1 below:

Table 1
A (1:2–2:7) and A’ (8:3–14): Mutual Love (Chiasm)

A 1:2–2:7	Mutual Love	A’ 8:3–14	Mutual Love
a 1:2–7	“Solomon” “my own vineyard”* “keeper/keep” (<i>ntr</i>)* “companions” (<i>hbrym</i>)* “let us haste” (<i>rwš</i>)	a’ 8:12–14	“Solomon” “my own vineyard”* “keeper/keep” (<i>ntr</i>)* “companions” (<i>hbrym</i>)* “make haste” (<i>brh</i>)
b 1:8–11	“silver	b’ 8:11	“silver”
c 1:12–14	“my breasts”*	c’ 8:10	“my breasts”*
d 1:15–17	building structure with “beams of cedar”*	d’ 8:8–9	building structure with “planks of cedar”*
e 2:1–5	“love” (<i>hbh</i> ; 2:4–5) “house” (<i>byt</i> ; 2:4) “love” (<i>dôd</i> ; 2:3) under the “apple tree”* (2:3)	e’ 8:5–7	“love” (3 times) (<i>hbh</i> ; 8:6–7) “house” (<i>byt</i> ; 8:7) “love” (<i>dôd</i> ; 3 times; 8:6–7) under the “apple tree”* (8:5a)
f 2:6–7	Refrain: “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me”*; “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases”	f’ 8:3–4	Refrain: “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me”*; “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases”

Note from this table that members A and A’ contain a number of terminological parallels; especially decisive are the rare terms and phrases that only appear in this pair of stanzas in the Song³³ and occur here generally in a reverse (chiasmic) order. These unique parallels include a paired cluster of phrases containing references to “my own vineyard,” “keeper/keep,” and “companions”; the woman’s reference to “my breasts”; a building structure with “beams of cedar”;

course lectures) that this gender alternation is actually the key to the entire Song: he finds three cycles of seven alternations between “he” and “she,” with the regular occurrence—following the seventh gender shift in each cycle—of an emphasis upon the imminent coming of the Lover. The scholarly world must await Doukhan’s publication of the specifics of his hypothesis before further discussion of its merits can ensue.

³²Most of these parallel expressions and themes are noted by Shea, 383–385.

³³Terms occurring only in the paired locations in the Song are marked by asterisks here and in later tables. I do not provide the Hebrew terms in this article unless the parallel is not already obvious from the English translation, or unless there are synonyms in the Hebrew that need to be distinguished.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

reference to love “under the apple tree”; and the refrain “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me.”³⁴ Noteworthy also are pairs of words repeated in the same verse only in these sections: “love” (*dôd*) and “apple” (2:3 and 8:5); and “love” (*hbbh*) and “house” (2:4 and 8:7). This sample of verbal parallels is by no means exhaustive: Elliott documents the “unusual concentration of shared vocabulary” by listing some twenty-six terms that are found in both of these two sections of the Song.³⁵

With regard to the refrains in these sections, not only do we encounter the uniquely occurring virtually identical paired refrain—“His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me”—but we find an additional virtually-identical paired refrain that immediately follows³⁶ (which occurs also in 3:5). Such a pair of double refrains, using virtually identical language throughout, occurs only here in members A and A' in the Song.

In this chiastic section of paired members, according to my analysis, the double refrain (8:3–4) must be seen primarily as an introduction to member A', rather than the conclusion of member B' (the macro-unit to be discussed below), contrary to how many others have analyzed the macrostructure at this point. Only thus can one account for the precise match of the double refrain in 8:3–4 with the double refrain that concludes member A in 2:6–7.³⁷ Such an arrangement, matching the conclusion of one member with the introduction of its paired member, is not surprising in the structure of a chiasm or reverse parallelism. This phenomenon of introductory (rather than concluding) refrain we will discover to be the case one other (not surprising) place in the Song: in the only other paired sections of the Song that are in chiastic relationship, i.e., members B and B', to which we now turn our attention.

Members B and B'. Members B and B' are also chiastic, building upon the motif of coming and going. In both members B and B' the man approaches the house where his lover stays; in both he invites the woman to go with him to the

³⁴Beyond the terminological parallels, see also the extensive discussion of motif parallels in the inclusio of the entire Song (1:2–4 with 8:13–14; and 1:5–6 with 8:11–12) in Stephen C. Horine, *Interpretive Images in the Song of Songs: From Wedding Chariots to Bridal Chambers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 74–103, 157, summarized in the following diagram (157):

- a 1:2–4 Proleptic Summary to Appeal-Reaction Rhetoric (via positive imagery/motifs)
- b 1:5–6 Proleptic Summary to Tension Motifs (via impediments to rhetoric)
- b' 8:11–12 Resolution of Tension Motifs (via reversal of impediments)
- a' 8:13–14 Resolution of Appeal-Reaction Rhetoric (via reaffirmation of positive imagery)

³⁵Elliott, 216.

³⁶This refrain also appears in 3:5. In a forthcoming study, I will deal with the structural/theological significance of this three-fold repetition as I explore the possible linear (narrative-plot) development in the Song coinciding with the symmetrical macrostructure discussed in this article.

³⁷One could also argue that the double refrain in 8:3–4 does double duty, serving both as the conclusion of member B' and the introduction to A'. I am not opposed to such a suggestion, but have chosen to assign the refrain to the one macro-unit where it fits best structurally.

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

country. The descriptions of their countryside adventure refer to several natural phenomena mentioned in both members B and B': vines, vineyards, and flowers. Two of the paired terms appear only in these two members of the Song: "blossoms" (*smdr*) and "give fragrance" (*ntn ryh*). A similar refrain (but reversed in sequence of referents!) concludes member B. This introduces the chiasmatically matching member B': "My beloved is mine and I am his"; "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me."³⁸

This chiasmatic parallelism is summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2
B (2:8–17) and B' (7:11 [Eng. 10]–8:2): Going and Coming (Chiasm)

B 2:8–17	Coming and Going	B' 7:11 [Eng.10]–8:2	Going and Coming
a 2:8–9	Coming: Approach of lover To her house <i>Inclusio with v. 17: "leaping on the mountains" "like a gazelle or young stag"</i>	a' 8:1–2	Coming: Approach of lover To the house of her mother
b 2:10–15	Going: Invitation to go to the country "Rise up, my beloved, and come away [<i>hlk</i>]" "appear [be seen]" (<i>nr 'w</i>) "flowers/blossoms" (<i>hnsnym</i>) "blossoms" (<i>smdr</i>)* "vine" (<i>gpn</i>) "give fragrance" (<i>ntn ryh</i>)* "vineyards" (<i>krmym</i>) "Let me see your form, let me hear your voice"	b' 7:12–14 [Eng. 11–13]	Going: Invitation to go to the country "Come [<i>hlk</i>] my beloved, let us go forth. . . . Let us get up early" "to see" (<i>nr 'h</i>) "to flower/blossom" (<i>hns</i>) "blossoms" (<i>smdr</i>)* "vines" (<i>gpnym</i>) "give fragrance" (<i>ntn ryh</i>)* "vineyards" (<i>krmym</i>) "I will give you my love"
c 2:16–17	Refrain: "My beloved is mine and I am his" <i>Inclusio with vv. 8–9: "like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bethel"</i>	c' 7:11 [Eng. 10]	Refrain: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me"

Members C and C'. Members C and C' are structured in block parallelism (or panel writing), pairing two night dreams and highlighting the motif of presence/absence. Aside from the common nocturnal dream setting and overall theme of losing and finding, numerous identical (or virtually identical) parallel Hebrew clauses and phrases link these passages in the same sequence of the panel writing: "I sought him but I did not find him" (2x); "I will arise/arose"; "the watchmen who go about the city found me"; "I found the one I love"/ "If you find my beloved . . ." The closing refrain in each member features an oath addressed to the same group: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem."

³⁸This refrain, like 8:3–4, may serve double duty in the Song. I find it functioning primarily (in the macrostructural flow of the Song) as the introduction to member B', but it also could be regarded as a conclusion to member F'.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

This parallelism is summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3
C (3:1–5) and C' (5:2–8): Lost/Found and Found/Lost (Panel)

C 3:1–5	Dream I: Lost and Found	C' 5:2–8	Dream II: Found and Lost
a 3:1a	Night setting/sleep (dream)	a' 5:2	Sleep, but heart awake (dream)
3:1b	"I sought him but I did not find him"*	5:3–4	Beloved comes and leaves before she opens the door
b 3:2a	"I will arise"	b' 5:5	"I arose"
c 3:2b	"I sought him, but I did not find him"*	c' 5:6	"I sought him, but I did not find him"*
d 3:3	"the watchmen who go about the city found me"*	d' 5:7	"the watchmen who go about the city found me"*
e 3:4	"I found the one I love [<i>'hbh</i>]"	e' 5:8	"If you find my beloved, tell him I am faint with love [<i>'hbh</i>]"
f 3:5	Refrain: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem . . ."	f' 5:8	Refrain: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem . . ."

Members D and D'. Members D and D' are also structured in block parallelism (or panel writing), as indicated in Table 4 below:

Table 4
D (3:6–11) and D' (5:9–6:3): Praise of the Groom (Panel)

D 3:6–11	Praise of the Groom I	D' 5:9–6:3	Praise of the Groom II
a 3:6	Introductory question: "Who?" (<i>Inclusio</i> with " <i>Solomon</i> " in 3:11)	a' 5:9	Introductory question: "What?" (<i>Inclusio</i> with " <i>where?</i> " in 6:1)
b 3:6	Description of the groom's procession "coming up" (<i>'lh</i>)	b' 5:10 ff.	Description of the groom himself from head to toe (down)
c 3:7–8	Numerals: Solomon's couch with 60 valiant men	c' 5:10	Numerals: Solomon's personage chief among 10,000 men
d 3:9–10	Solomon's palanquin described (generally from bottom up): wood from Lebanon (= cedar) "pillars" (<i>'mwdym</i>)* supports of gold couch/bed (<i>mth</i>) or palanquin (<i>'prywn</i>) ("perfumed with myrrh") interior of palanquin paved (<i>rꝯꝯ</i>) with love	d' 5:11–16	Solomon's body described (generally from top down): countenance like Lebanon, excellent as cedars "pillars" (<i>'mwdym</i>)* head like finest gold, hands rods of gold, bases of gold cheeks like bed (<i>'rwgh</i>) of spices; lips = lilies dripping myrrh body = ivory inlaid (<i>'lp</i>) with sapphires
e 3:10e	"by the daughters of Jerusalem"	e' 5:16e	"O daughters of Jerusalem"
f 3:11	Refrain: "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart."	f' 6:1	Refrain: Daughters of Jerusalem: "Where has your beloved gone . . . that we may seek him with you?"
		6:2	Journey to the Garden, to the bed of spices, to gather lilies
		6:3	"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Both members D and D' concentrate on Praise of the Groom. Member D is in the setting of Solomon's wedding procession, and the focus of attention is not on the groom's personal features but upon his wedding palanquin. Member D', by contrast, describes the groom in detail. While member D emphasizes the "going up" of the wedding procession and describes the palanquin from bottom upward, member D' by contrast describes Solomon's personage downward from head to toe; thus there is also a chiasmic element in the overall block parallelism of these members. Some terminological parallels occur in the respective sequencing of the panel writing, such as the supports/bases of gold on both palanquin and Solomon's body, the cedar wood from Lebanon of which the palanquin is made and to which Solomon's countenance is compared; references in both members to a couch/bed of spices, including myrrh. Only in these two members is the term "pillars" (*mwdym*) found in the Song. Both members conclude with mention of the daughters of Jerusalem. The final refrain in member D is addressed to these daughters, while the final refrain in member D' is spoken by the daughters; both refer to the daughters going out to see Solomon.

Members E and E'. The intricate successive parallelism of key terms and motifs in these members is summarized in Table 5 below:

Table 5
E (4:1–6) and E' (6:3–6:12): Praise of the Bride I and III (Panel)

E 4:1–6 a 4:1a	Praise of the Bride I "Behold, you are beautiful [<i>yph</i>], my love. Behold, you are beautiful [<i>yph</i>]." (<i>inclusio</i> with 4:7)	E' 6:3–12 a' 6:4	Praise of the Bride III "O my love, you are beautiful [<i>yph</i>] as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem." "Awesome as an army with banners" (<i>inclusio</i> with 6:10)
b 4:b c 4:1c	Description of eyes Description of "hair like a flock of goats going down from Mount Gilead"*	b' 6:5a c' 6:5b	Description of eyes Description of "hair like a flock of goats going down from Gilead"*
d 4:2	"teeth like a flock of shorn sheep come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them"*	d' 6:6	"teeth like a flock of shorn sheep come up from the washing, every one bears twins, and none is barren among them"*
e 4:3	Temples "behind your veil like a piece of pomegranate"*	e' 6:7	Temples "behind your veil like a piece of pomegranate"*
f 4:4	Graded numerical parallelism*: 1000 bucklers, all shields	f' 6:8–9	Graded numerical parallelism*: 60 queens, 80 concubines, maidens without number
g 4:6–7	Refrain: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee" "mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense" (cf. 2:17) "You are all fair [<i>yph</i>], my love, and there is no flaw in you." (<i>inclusio</i> with v. 1)	g' 6:10–12	Refrain: "Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair [<i>yph</i>] as the moon and clear as the sun," "awesome as an army with banners?" (<i>inclusio</i> with v. 4) Journey to the garden (cf. 6:2)

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Members E and E' both contain a *wasf* (poetic description of the beauty of the spouse). The relationship between these two members is another panel writing or block parallelism. The *wasf* describing the woman's beauty in member E contains numerous clauses, phrases, and terms that are virtually identical to those found in member E', many of which occur only in these two sections of the Song. The following parallels occur in the successive order of panel writing: "Behold, you are beautiful, my love"/"O my love, you are beautiful"; "How fair is your love"/"How fair and how pleasant you are, O love"; description of eyes; hair "like a flock of goats going down from Mount Gilead"; teeth "like a flock of shorn sheep come up from the washing"; temples "behind your veil like a piece of pomegranate"; and the only usage in the Song of graded numerical parallelism.

The *wasfs* describing the beauty of the woman are continued in the next parallel sections of the Song, members F and F'. Although a case can be made for regarding these two sections as still part of members E and E', the presence of refrains demarcating boundaries at 4:6 and 6:10–12³⁹ has led me to the conclusion that four separate sections of Praise for the Bride are present in the Song of Songs: I, II, III, and IV. The paired panel matching the Praise of the Bride I and III constitute members E and E' of the Song's macrostructure, just discussed, and the paired panel matching of Praise of the Bride II and IV constitute members F and F', to which we now turn our attention.

Members F and F'. The panel structure of members F (7:8–15) and F' (7:1 [Eng. 6:13]–7:10 [Eng. 9]) is evident from the following successive parallel terms and motifs as set forth in Table 6 below:

³⁹For a time I hesitated to recognize these as full refrains (labeling them as "sub-refrains") and did not divide 4:1–15 and 6:4–7:11 [Eng. 10] into two paired sections. However, I have become convinced that the macro-junctures are distinct, and the separate macro-units are clearly defined, even though the verbal repetends are rather short ("until the day breaks and the shadows flee" [4:6, paralleling the refrain in 2:17] and "awesome as an army with banners" [6:10, paralleling the introductory refrain in 6:4]. In the case of chapter 4, not only does 4:6 contain a macro-junctural refrain, but this is underscored as 4:7 provides an additional refrain, and forms an inclusio with 4:1: "You are all fair, my love." Furthermore, only 4:8–15, and not 4:1–7, contains the special term of endearment for the woman, "bride" [*klh*]. In the case of Cant 6:4–7:11, the refrain of 6:10 ("awesome as an army with banners") forms an inclusio with the beginning of the section in 6:4, and a division at this point is also supported by a second refrain incorporating the "Journey to the Garden" motif (6:11–12, paralleling 6:2, which accompanies the refrain of 6:3). Further evidence for the separation of these matching praises for the woman into four separate parallel sections comes from the chiasmic matching of Praise of the Bride I with Praise of the Bride IV, and of the Praise of the Bride II with Praise of the Bride III, as described below.

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Table 6
F (4:8–15) and F' (7:1 [Eng. 6:13]–7:10 [Eng. 9]):
Praise of the Bride II and IV (Panel)

F 4:8–15	Praise of the Bride II	F' 7:1 [6:13]–7:10 [Eng. 9]	Praise of the Bride IV
a 4:8	“Come [<i>bo</i>] . . . , look [<i>šwr</i>]”	a' 7:1–4 [6:13–7:3]	“Return, return, [<i>šwb</i> , <i>šwb</i>] O Shulamite, . . . that we may look [<i>hzh</i>] upon you!”
b 4:8	Geography (mountains): Lebanon Amana, Senir, Hermon	b' 7:5–6 [Eng. 4–5]	Geography (mountains/cities): Lebanon Heshbon, Bath Rabbim, Carmel
c 4:9	The woman's mysterious power: his heart ravished (by a look of her eyes)	c' 7: 6b [Eng. 5b]	The woman's mysterious power: the king held captive (by the tresses of her hair)
d 4:10–11	“How fair [<i>yph</i>] is your love” Her love compared to various delica- cies: wine, spices, honeycomb, honey, milk, fragrance of Lebanon	d' 7:7 [Eng. 6]	“How fair [<i>yph</i>] and how pleas- ant [<i>n'm</i>]you are, O love, with your exquisite, luxurious delights [<i>t'ngwg</i>]!”
e 4:12–14	Comparison to a locked garden Metaphors from the products of a garden/orchard: pomegranates, various (eight differ- ent named) spices	e' 7:8–10a [Eng. 7–9a]	Comparison to a palm tree Metaphors from the products of the orchard/vineyard: date clusters, clusters of the vine, apples, best wine
f 4:15	Garden fountain, well of living (flowing) water, “flowing streams [<i>nzl</i>]”	f' 7:10b [Eng. 9b]	Wine “flows” (<i>hlk</i>), “moving gently, gliding over [<i>dbb</i>]” the lips
[4:16 and 5:1]	[Refrain = members G and G' be- low]	[7:11 (Eng. 10)]	[Refrain: “I am my beloved's And his desire is toward me” (<i>inclusio</i> with 6:3) = introduc- tion of member B']

Member F is set against the wedding procession and wedding day mentioned in 3:6–11 and probably constitutes part of the wedding ceremony proper. Here alone in all the stanzas of the Song (and I include members G and G' in this stanza, although we structurally place them at the climax of the macro-structure), the woman is mentioned as “sister” and “bride,” clearly placing this section in a wedding context. In this wedding *waysf*, the woman is likened to a “locked garden,” (4:12), most likely denoting her virginity.⁴⁰

⁴⁰There is a wide agreement among modern commentators that here the locked garden denotes virginity. For example, Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 123, recognizes that the garden here is a euphemism for the female sexual organs and concludes that “a fountain sealed and a garden locked speak of virginity.” C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, rev. and exp. (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 230, writes: “That the wedding had not been consummated [before 4:16] and that the kind of love treated in the Song is not promiscuous are clear from the beloved's description of his betrothed as ‘a garden locked’ and ‘a spring sealed up’ (v.12).” Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 6 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, by C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, trans. M. G. Easton (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 84, comments: “To a locked garden and spring no one has access but the rightful owner, and

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

In both members F and F' there is a call to "come/return" and "look." Both contain a unique concentration upon geographical place names, in particular, mountains: Lebanon, Amana, Senir, Hermon, Carmel (cf. the cities of Heshbon, Bath Rabbim). In both members F and F' the man is "ravished/captivated" by the woman's stunning beauty, and the beauty of her love is compared to luxurious, exquisite delights. Both F and F' compare the woman to a garden/orchard or its products: garden; orchard of pomegranates; various spices; date palm tree; apples; wine. There is also a play on word pictures between the "flowing" water in the woman's garden (member F) and the "flowing" of the wine in the woman's mouth (member F').

Finally, there seems to be an implied parallel between these two members in the respective functions of their refrains that actually serve as part of succeeding sections of the Song. The refrain of Cant 4:16 and 5:1 may be regarded as part of the macro-unit we have labeled member F, but because of its centrality in the Song and its own parallel structure, is better placed as a succeeding section of the Song's overarching macrostructure (which I label members G and G' below). Likewise, the refrain of 7:11 [Eng. 10] may be regarded as part of the macro-unit I have labeled member F' (and this is the view of a number of scholars), but because of its parallel with the matching element in member B (as discussed above), this refrain is better placed with the succeeding section of the Song's overarching macrostructure (which I have labeled member B' above).

The overall structure of members E and E' and F and F' is not only block parallelism, as demonstrated by the previous parallels, but also involves an interconnecting chiasmic arrangement in which member E (Praise of the Bride I) is in chiasmic parallelism with member F' (Praise of the Bride IV), especially apparent in 4:1-5 and 7:2-6 [Eng. 1-5]. In 4:1-5, the beauty of the woman is described from head *downward* to the breasts, including eight anatomical parts: eyes, hair, teeth, lips, mouth, temples (or cheeks), neck, and breasts. Cant 7:2-6 [Eng. 1-5], conversely, describes the woman's beauty from feet *upward* to the head, including eight anatomical parts: feet, thighs, navel/belly/genitals, waist, two breasts, neck, nose, and head/hair. There is also chiasmic interconnection between member E' (Praise of the Bride II) and member F (Praise of the Bride III), with both sections focusing upon the woman's head (lips/tongue in 4:11 and hair/teeth/temples in 6:5-7) and the mysterious and awesome power in her eyes: "You have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes" (4:9); "Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me" (6:5). By the chiasmic interlinking of paired members E and E' with members F and F', as well as the overall panel

a sealed fountain is shut against all impurity." Joseph C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex: The Biblical Guide to Married Love* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1977), 81, states explicitly: "The garden refers to her vagina. When Solomon says it is locked, he is saying it has never been entered; she is a virgin." S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976), 22, concurs: "the fountain is sealed and the garden is locked (4:12). This is a poetic way to praise her virginity and at the same time gently to request that she give herself to him."

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

construction of these sections, the close literary coherence of the various *wasfs* praising the bride of the Song is accentuated.

Members G and G'. Finally, members G and G', which actually belong to the sixth of the Song's twelve macro-units, form the apex to the entire Song. As intimated above, I separate these two verses into distinct structural members in the overall macrostructure because they are obviously parallel verses, and such symmetry would not be accounted for if they were left as the final verses of the panel writing in member F with no such matching symmetry at the end of member F'.⁴¹ Further, these two parallel verses, 4:16 and 5:1, appear in the exact middle of the Song (111 lines or 60 verses on either side). They were thus clearly designed by the Song's artistic composer to form the central, climactic verses of the entire symmetrical structure of the Song.⁴² These verses seem to be equivalent to our modern-day exchange of marriage vows, or alternatively, represent the consummation of the marriage in the marriage bed.⁴³ The groom has compared his bride to a garden (4:1 2, 15), and now the bride invites her groom to come and partake of the fruits of her (now his!) garden (4:16), and the groom accepts her invitation (5:1a-d). The marriage covenant solemnized, an Omniscient Voice, whom I take to be Yahweh Himself,⁴⁴ extends divine approbation,

⁴¹It also does not seem structurally sound to divide 4:16 and 5:1 between the two middle sections of the Song—as their respective introduction and conclusion—as Shea's analysis suggests (Shea, 396). To be fair to Shea, however, he compares these two verses to "two resplendent peaks that surmount twin mountains," and thus recognizes the distinctiveness of these two verses "at the very center of the Song and its chiasm" (394), even though he does not structurally label them as separate sections of the Song's literary macrostructure.

⁴²It is hardly accidental that these two verses are situated at the exact physical midpoint of the book. Numerous commentators recognize this as the highpoint of the Song. See, e.g. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 376 (citing R. L. Alden's chiasmic structure of the Song); Wendland, 42; Carr, "Song of Songs," 294; and Shea, 394.

⁴³Shea, 394, argues for linking 5:1 with what comes before, all as part of "the wedding service proper." On the other hand, Delitzsch, *Song of Songs*, 89, insists that "between iv. 16 and v. 1a the bridal night intervenes." Cf. also Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 407, who is convinced that "This [4:16; 5:1] is the consummation of the marriage." The Hebrew verbs in the perfect in 5:1 could be translated to support either view, as a present (or even future) or as a past tense. Perhaps the text is intentionally ambiguous, blending the public (legal) and sexual (physical) consummation of the marriage. Such ambiguity is present often elsewhere in the Song, especially when allusions are made to sexual intercourse. Glickman, 84-85, speaks of the "almost formal request and acceptance," the "delicate formality" of 4:16-5:1. While Glickman simply attributes it to a certain stiffness of mood in lovemaking on their wedding night, it could also allude to the formal covenant-making setting of the wedding "vows." The wedding couple is both *saying* "I do" and *acting* on it!

⁴⁴Commentators have puzzled over the identity of this voice at the center of the Song. Many suggest that it is the groom extending an invitation to the guests to join in the wedding banquet. But this is improbable since the two terms "friends" (*re'im*) and "lovers" (*dôdîm*) used in 5:1e, are the terms used elsewhere in the Song for the *couple* (5:16; 1:13-14, 16; 2:3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17; 4:10, 10, 16; 5:2, 4, 5, 6, 6, 8, 9 (4x), 10, 16; 6:1, 1, 2, 3; 7:10 [Eng. 9], 11 [Eng. 10], 12 [Eng. 11], 13 [Eng. 12], 14 [Eng. 13]; 8:5, 14), not for the companions/guests. If the terms in 5:1e refer to the couple, they could not be spoken by either bride or groom. The "omniscient" narrator/poet at this high point in the Song seems to have a ring of divine authority and power—to be able to bestow a blessing and

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

summoning the bride and groom to “drink deeply” in the consummate experience of sexual union (5:1e–f).

These two verses at the climax of the Song each contain six cola (or poetic lines), which may be set forth and labeled as follows:

4:16:
a Awake, O north wind,
b And come, O south!
c Blow upon my garden,
d That its spices flow out.
e Let my beloved enter his garden
f And eat its pleasant fruits.

5:1:
a I entered my garden, my sister, bride;
b I plucked my myrrh with my spice;
c I ate my honeycomb with my honey;
d I have drunk my wine with my milk.
e Eat, O friends!
f Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!”

Shea suggests that the arrangement of these twin peaks may be a microcosm of the entire Song’s structure.⁴⁵ I find this proposal plausible and intriguing. But whereas Shea takes the six cola in each verse at the center of the Song as corresponding to the six macro-units into which he divides the entire Song, I suggest rather that it is more appropriate to view the twelve (six matching) cola here at the center of the Song as corresponding to the twelve (six matching) macro-units of the Song that have emerged from our macrostructural analysis.

Regarding the microstructure of these central verses, scholars generally agree that 5:1a–f should be analyzed as a triplet of bicola. Most commentaries and translations have likewise scanned the lines of 4:16a–f as a triplet of bicola, and this arrangement is supported by the careful microstructural analysis of

approbation upon the consummation of the marriage of the bride and groom. In parallel with the reference to Yahweh that climaxes the other highpoint of the Song (8:6–7), as discussed in my forthcoming monograph, *Flame of Yahweh: A Theology of Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Hendrickson), I find it most likely that the Voice of Cant 5:1e is that of Yahweh Himself, adding His divine blessing to the marriage, as He did at the first Garden wedding in Eden. In the wedding service, only He has the ultimate authority to pronounce them husband and wife. On the wedding night, only He is the unseen Guest able to express approbation of their uniting into one flesh and summons them to enjoy their love to the full. Here I concur with Dillow, 86: “The poet seems to say this is the voice of God Himself. Only the Lord could pronounce such an affirmation. He, of course, was the most intimate observer of all. Their love came from Him (Song 8:7). Thus, the Lord pronounces His full approval on everything that has taken place. He encourages them to drink deeply of the gift of sexual love.” So also Glickman, 25: “In the final analysis this must be the voice of the Creator, the greatest Poet, the most intimate wedding guest of all, the one, indeed, who prepared this lovely couple for the night of his design.”

⁴⁵Shea, 394–395.

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Roberts.⁴⁶ Based upon this poetic line division, the thematic and verbal parallels between members G (4:16) and G' (5:1) give evidence of chiasmic arrangement as follows:⁴⁷

Table 7
G (4:16) and G' (5:1): Consummation of Wedding/Marriage
 (Exact center of Song: 111 lines [60 verses] on either side)

<p>G 4:16 Bride's Invitation</p> <p>a She summons the winds: (cola a-b) "Awake, O north wind, And come, O south!"</p> <p>b She calls on the winds to blow her (cola garden fragrances to her groom and c-f) invites him to enter her garden and eat its fruit: "Blow upon my garden, That its spices flow out. Let my beloved enter his garden And eat its pleasant fruits."</p>	<p>G' 5:1 Groom's acceptance</p> <p>a' [Refrain] The Omniscient Voice sum- (cola mons the lovers to enjoy their love: e-f) "Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O lovers!"</p> <p>b' He accepts her invitation to come to her (cola (=his) garden, to gather the spices and a-d) eat the delicacies: "I entered my garden, my sister, bride; I plucked my myrrh with my spice; I ate my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk."</p>
---	--

Note that in this chiasmic (abb'a') arrangement the outer members comprise an inclusio of opening and closing bicola (members a and a') that represent a call to/by an outside entity (call to the winds by the woman, call by the Omniscient Voice to the couple). The inner members (b and b') are linked by four crucial verbal parallels (garden, spice/s, entering, and eating) and by clear thematic echoes of the bride inviting the groom—and the groom accepting her invitation—to enter her (now his) garden and partake of its delicacies.

While the majority of commentators/translators analyze 4:16 as a triplet of bicola, Shea, following the translation of Marvin Pope, views the six cola in this verse as a couplet of tricola.⁴⁸ Roberts' meticulous microstructural analysis yields further evidence that 4:16 "exhibits the structure of two tricola."⁴⁹ In fact,

⁴⁶This is the commonly-accepted poetic analysis of 4:16. See, e.g., Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 154, and the major modern translations (NRSV, NASB, NKJV, NIV, etc). Roberts, 363-364, shows how thematically the verse most naturally divides into three bicola (16a-b has the woman summoning the winds to arise; 16c-d has her calling on the winds to blow her garden fragrances to her groom, and in 16e-f she invites the man to come to her garden). Structural clues also point toward three bicola in this verse (16b starting with a *waw* [and] indicates that 16a-b belong together as a bicolon; the third masculine singular ending of *bšmyw* of 16d is anaphoric to *gny* in 16c, thus binding 16c and d together as a bicolon; and 16e-f belong together as a bicolon with both having the same subject).

⁴⁷I am indebted to Ed Christian, who, after reading an earlier draft of this study, pointed out these chiasmic relationships between members G and G'.

⁴⁸Shea, 395.

⁴⁹Roberts, 363-366 (quotation 364). Roberts points out that the first three cola in this verse all begin with imperatives and the last three cola all commence with "jussive-like imperfects." Further, the last three cola all end with the third-person singular suffix.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Roberts concludes that *both* of these structural analyses are probably correct for 4:16: “we have two poetic patterns with one superimposed on the other. We actually have two tricola and three bicola.”⁵⁰

Shea’s proposal of 4:16 as a couplet of tricola and 5:1 as a triplet of bicola is diagrammed by him as 3 x 2::2 x 3 (a tricolon times two and a bicolon times three), and he suggests that this 3:2::2:3 poetic pattern constitutes a structural chiasm at the center of the Song corresponding to the chiasmic nature of the Song as a whole. If Roberts is correct that 4:16 is also a triplet of bicola (as the majority of commentaries/translations likewise indicate), we can then further diagram the poetic pattern of these two verses as 2 x 3::2 x 3 (a bicolon times three and another bicolon times three), which constitutes by form a panel structure (block parallelism).⁵¹ I suggest that these two superimposed poetic patterns at the twin-peak apex of the Song—chiasmic and panel—epitomize the overall macrostructure of the Song with its combination of matching chiasmic members (ABB’A’) and panel members (CDEFC’D’E’F’) and its superimposing of chiasm and panel writing (in members EF and E’F’).

Summary and Conclusion

A literary-structural examination of the Song of Songs reveals twelve macro-units, the boundaries of which are indicated by specific refrains. The twelve sections of the Song form an artistic symmetrical macrostructure, comprised of chiasmic and block parallelism (or panel writing) in a fourteen-member pattern (including the two verse central climax): AB–CDEF–GG’–C’D’E’F’–B’A’. The first two outer-paired members of the Song are designed in a chiasmic arrangement (ABB’A’). Next come four paired panel (block parallelism) structures (CDEFC’D’E’F’). Member pairs E/E’ and F/F’ contain not only panel but also chiasmic features (E–F’ and F–E’). The Song’s symmetrical macrostructure climaxes in a final chiasmic and panel pairing of the two central verses of the whole Song (GG’).

The astoundingly intricate symmetry between each of the matching pairs in the literary-structural outline seems to rule out the possibility of a redactor imposing an artificial structure upon a miscellaneous collection of love poems. No doubt further study will uncover even more literary-structural artistry than surveyed and preliminarily set forth here. Such detailed and multidimensional macrostructure surely displays the overarching unity and stunning literary beauty of Scripture’s Most Sublime Song.

⁵⁰Roberts, 365.

⁵¹I say that “by form” it represents a block parallelism because, as we noted above in Table 7, by theme and by verbal parallels these paired tricola also give evidence of chiasmic arrangement.

DAVIDSON: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Richard M. Davidson is J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Chair of the Old Testament Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. In addition to his books *Typology in Scripture*, *Lovesong for the Sabbath*, and *In the Footsteps of Joshua*, he has published many articles. He is a past-president of the Adventist Theological Society. davidson@andrews.edu