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An Analysis of Hebrew Poetry with the Example of The *Song of Songs* from the Perspective of Hegel Aesthetics under Algorithmic Rationality

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Abstract

This study employs Hegelian aesthetics to reconceptualize the Song of Songs' interpretive paradox—its simultaneous celebration of erotic love and theological sublimity. Hegel's notion of the "sensuous manifestation of the Absolute" provides a unifying lens, revealing how bodily imagery (e.g., lovers' physical descriptions) does not contradict but embodies spiritual meaning, while its poetic metaphors (vineyards, gold, fire) mediate between tangible beauty and divine transcendence. Unlike traditional allegorical or literal readings, Hegel's framework illuminates the text's dialectical structure: the lovers' desire enacts the self-revelation of Spirit through material form, and the poem's sublime intensity emerges precisely where human passion encounters the ineffable. By synthesizing corporeal aesthetics and theological depth, this analysis demonstrates how Hegelian theory resolves the Song of Songs' apparent contradictions, positioning it as a paradigm of art-as-spiritual-mediation—a dynamic fusion of eros and the sacred.

Keywords: Hebrew Poetry; *Song of Songs*; Hegel Aesthetics

1. Introduction

Song of Songs, also called Song of Solomon, is a well-known book of the Bible made up of eight chapters of ancient Israelite love poetry, expressing the longing, seeking, passion, and power of love in the form of couples' dialogues. The first line of the book declares that it's "the *Song of Songs*," a Hebrew idiom similar to "*vanity of vanities*" or "*king of kings*." It's a Hebrew way of saying that something is the greatest. This song is the greatest song of all.

In recent decades, many scholars have studied it both at home and abroad. The study of the poem in foreign research mainly focuses on three aspects. Some study the relationship between

Song of Songs and history, society, politics, aiming to explore more realistic and universal issues in the world, such as *Multiple Womanhoods in* the *Song of Songs* ,some studying the politics of the era in which the poem was written, such as *Song of Songs as political satire and emotional refuge: Subverting Solomon's gilded regime*, while others studying the text of the poem itself, such as *The bride as a 'locked garden': An eco-sustainability retrieval of nature metaphor in Song of Songs 4:12–15.* Most of the papers analyze the connection between the theme of the poem and the world. There are relatively very few essays that analyze words, phrases, and sentences in the poem.

Domestically, most of scholars delve into the poem itself. The content of these research is relatively focused on one specific aspect, such as word、metaphors、structure and the translation skills of the poem. These papers analyze and appreciate the beauty of words, images, language techniques, structures in the poem. And domestic scholars usually make comparative studies with *Song of Songs* and Book of Songs to study the cultural differences between Hebrew people and ancient Chinese people, such as such as Chen Siqi's "*Comparison between Song of Songs and Guofeng*" from Journal of Hong he University. In one word, there are very few papers of analyzing and appreciating the entire text from aesthetic perspectives. Even if there are, they tend to be from a general aesthetic perspective. In this paper, the author will employ Hegel's aesthetic theory to analyze the beauty throughout the entire poem.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is a German philosopher, who developed his aesthetics by a series of lectures at Heidelberg and Berlin Universities. After Hegel's death in 1831, his student Hotho collected and published the three-volume *Aesthetics* in 1835-1838, based on the notes of Hegel's students and the syllabus of Hegel's lectures. Overall, Hegel discussed imitation and defense of Aesthetics, refutation of objections, scientific ways of treating beauty and art, concept of the beauty of art, common ideas of art and historical deduction of the true concept of art. In part one, he mainly talked about the idea of the beauty of art or the ideal. Part two focuses on development of the ideal into the particular forms of the beauty of art. The system of the individual arts belongs to the third part. The original books were written in German. The theories the author use in this paper are in the English version translated by T. M. KNOX.

2. The Beauty in *the Song of Songs*

2.1. The Beauty of the Human Body: A Hegelian Reading of the *Song of Songs*

2.1.1. Reproduction

The *Song of Songs* presents a profound aesthetic exploration of human embodiment that demands more nuanced interpretation than biological determinism permits. While traditional readings emphasizing procreative functionality persist, a Hegelian analysis reveals deeper dimensions of embodied spirituality in this biblical poetry. Hegel's aesthetics, particularly his concept of "sensuous manifestation of the Idea" (Hegel 1:124), offers a sophisticated framework for understanding the poem's representation of corporeal beauty.

Hegel positions human bodily beauty at the apex of natural beauty, arguing that "in the human form the spiritual's inner being comes into existence" (1:434). This conceptual framework helps

illuminate why the Song's lovers employ such elaborate natural imagery - the descriptions transcend mere physicality to express spiritual communion. When the beloved compares her lover to "a young stag leaping upon the mountains" (2:8), this doesn't merely signify physical vitality but embodies what Hegel terms "the sensuous appearing of the Idea" (1:433), where natural imagery becomes the physical manifestation of spiritual longing.

2.1.2. Spiritual Harmony

The poem's famous somatic descriptions warrant reconsideration beyond reproductive biology. Hegel cautions against isolating body parts when evaluating beauty, insisting we must "consider the body in its wholeness" (1:125). This holistic perspective reveals how the Song's female descriptions - "your hair like a flock of goats" (4:1), "your neck like the tower of David" (4:4) - construct not a reproductive machine but an aesthetic totality where every element harmonizes with the spiritual whole. Similarly, the frequent coupling imagery ("my beloved is mine and I am his" 2:16) represents what Hegel calls the "unity of the infinite and the finite" (1:435), the spiritual made sensuously present.

Modern feminist readings (like those of Brenner and Exum) productively complicate simplistic biological interpretations. The female speaker's declaration "I am dark but beautiful" (1:5) demonstrates independence that exceeds maternal biology, embodying what Hegel terms "the free subjectivity of spirit" (1:437). Her vocational description ("they made me keeper of the vineyards" 1:6) further establishes her identity beyond reproduction - an autonomy Hegel associates with true beauty's self-determination.

The intimate connection between aesthetic appreciation and spiritual fulfillment in Hegel's system (1:436) explains the Song's preoccupation with sensory experience. The lovers don't merely observe beauty - they taste ("your love is better than wine" 1:2), smell ("your anointing oils are fragrant" 1:3), and touch ("his left hand under my head" 2:6). This multisensory engagement exemplifies what Hegel describes as beauty's demand for total "sensuous confirmation" (1:438).

Contemporary aesthetic theory builds on Hegel's insights while addressing his limitations. As Gadamer notes, Hegel's framework helps us see how the Song transforms corporeal experience into "the speculative presence of meaning" - where physical beauty becomes the sacrament of divine love. This interpretation preserves the text's spiritual significance while honoring its embodied celebrations.

Ultimately, reading the Song through Hegelian aesthetics reveals its profound meditation on how finite human form can bear infinite spiritual meaning. The lovers' bodies become what Hegel calls "the existence of the absolute Idea as ideal" (1:439), where physical beauty serves as the visible manifestation of love's transcendent power. This approach neither reduces the text to biology nor spiritualizes away its corporeality, but demonstrates how, in Hegel's terms, "the spiritual shines through the natural" (1:440) in this masterpiece of sacred eroticism.

2.2. The Beauty of Art

The beauty of art can be seen in three aspects in the poem: metaphors, images, and similes. “The imitative or literal picture presents only the thing in the reality that belongs to it, whereas the non-imitative or metaphorical expression does not linger directly with the object itself but proceeds to the description of a second different one through which the meaning of the first is to become clear and perceptible to us. Metaphors, images, similes, etc., belong to this sort of poetical expression (Hegel 1003-1004)”.

Similes are everywhere: “thy name is as ointment poured forth (Son 1:3). “Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke (Son 3:6).” “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon(Son 4:11).” “His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven (Son 5:11).”

As for metaphors: Orchard is the metaphor for uterus, lily the sanctity and beauty, the rose of Sharon passionate woman, myrrh sexual passion, mandrake love, sex, and dove bride/bride’s sanctity. Among these metaphors, mandrakes and the dove are relatively worth studying. “The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved (Son 7:13).” Literally, during the ripening season , the woman preserves the good fruit for the man. In fact, mandrakes mean “plant of love”, “aphrodisiac fruit”. It is believed that women are more likely to conceive when they eat the roots or fruits of this plant. In Genesis, Rachel competes with Leah for favor and is willing to leave Jacob to sleep with Leah in exchange for Leah's mandrakes, suggesting a close relationship between mandrake and Hebrew sex life. “And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night (Gen 30:16).” Another important metaphor is the dove. The temperament of the pigeon, which often gives people a sense of tame and tranquility, coupled with its white and small size, is often described as a symbol of innocence and loveliness, which is the virtue of a cultivated woman. The “dove” used as a sacrificial offering, first of all must be clean and be a symbol of holiness. In Leviticus , “And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons (Lev 1:14).”

For images, the author interpret them from their colors. Hegel defines that “The case is similar with the harmony of colors. Here likewise what art demands is that in a painting the colors shall neither appear as varied and arbitrary confusion nor so that their oppositions are simply dissolved, but that they are harmonized into the concord of a total and unitary impression (Hegel 250). ” There are roughly two kinds of colors that must to be mentioned. Complementary colors and analogous colors. Complementary colors are the colors that sit opposite to each other on the color wheel. As the name suggests (complementary and not complimentary), these colors help each other stand out. They bring out the best in each other by making their complement more vibrant or noticeable. Complementary colors also work together to elevate the overall visual experience. While analogous colors are colors that are next to each other on the color wheel. For example, yellow, green-yellow, and green are categorized as analogous colors. The word

‘analogous’ is defined as two things with a similar function or feature that are comparable to one another. These color scheme types have close relationships to one another. Not only can one spot analogous color schemes in nature, but also in the work of famous artists who turn to serene outdoor settings as muses.

In the poem, there are many descriptions of nature. We can see that the author of the *Song of Songs* created many beautiful natural pastoral views for readers, which are harmonious with the beautiful love of human beings. The bride is described by “gardens”, “vineyards”, and various flowers, such as “lilies”, “roses”and “camphire(Son 1:14-2:2).” The author also used a lot of animals to describe the bridegroom, such as “roe”, “hart” (Son 1:17), and so on. At the same time, the bridegroom was compared to the majestic holy mountain, sun, moon and stars and other natural objects. In this process, the colors of the animals and plants are in harmony. On the one hand, the hue of all the flowers, like camphire, the rose of Sharon, Spikenard, myrrh and saffron among other flowers, is red. No matter they are ruby, coral, garnet or scarlet. On the other hand, roe and hart, and some other animals like foxes, antelopes , they are brown, which is the analogous color in the color wheel. That is why the nature views in the poem are pretty pleasant to the sight.

The author of the *Song of Songs* made some very clever choices on the images. The beautiful pictures are lovely and make readers feel good because the use of metaphors and similes, which help readers to get the essence of an object.

2.3. The Beauty of the Sublime: Finite Love and Divine Infinitude in the *Song of Songs*

The Sublime , as articulated in Hegel’s aesthetics, does not merely signify overwhelming magnitude or divine terror—but rather the tension between the limitless (the infinite) and its restricted manifestation in the finite. For Hegel, the Sublime emerges precisely where the Absolute (God) ruptures sensuous representation, revealing its infinite nature through that which cannot be fully contained by material form (*Aesthetics* , Vol. I, p. 373). The *Song of Songs* —a poetic celebration of human love—paradoxically evokes this Sublime through symbolic mediations between worldly eros and divine transcendence. This section argues that the poem’s imagery of gold/light, fire/flame, and sacred trees functions as a Hegelian dialectic of the Sublime: human love is rendered infinite by means of the finite, while divine sublimity permeates the most sensual metaphors.

(1) Gold and Silver: The Luminous Sublime;

Hegel associates the Sublime with luminosity—particularly in Biblical texts—where light embodies divine manifestation as an incorporeal yet overwhelming presence (Aesthetics , Vol. II, p. 723). *The Song of Songs* repeatedly employs metallic brilliance as an intermediary between earthly beauty and divine glory:

"His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven." (5:11)

"We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver." (1:11)

Here, the lover's radiance is not merely decorative but recalls *Genesis* 1:3, where God's first act of creation is light—a rupture of form into chaos. Gold in Hebrew cosmology signifies not just material wealth but theophanic luminosity, the presence of the divine in its most untouchable form.

For Hegel, the Sublime occurs when "the finite proves inadequate to the infinite" (*Aesthetics* , Vol. I, p. 479). Gold, in this context, serves as a failed signifier : it gestures toward divine infinitude, yet remains bound to materiality, thus heightening, rather than resolving, the tension between immanence and transcendence. The lovers' descriptions do not merely praise corporeal beauty—they struggle to articulate the ineffable through the limitations of language, an aesthetic failure that, paradoxically, intensifies the Sublime effect.

(2) Fire and Flame: Divine Passion and the Consuming Sublime

Hegel's Sublime frequently intersects with the concept of destructive-preservation —where the infinite abolishes the finite while simultaneously affirming its necessity. Fire, a recurring Biblical theophany (e.g., Exodus 3:2's burning bush), exemplifies this: it destroys yet does not consume, revealing the divine as both immanent (within phenomena) and transcendent (beyond them). *The Song of Songs* echoes this paradox:

"Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." (8:6)

Hegel would classify this as the dialectical Sublime : human love is lifted beyond finitude through a metaphor (fire) that threatens dissolution. The flame's "vehemence" does not merely intensify erotic passion but aligns it with Yahweh's uncontainable presence (cf. Deuteronomy 4:24—"the Lord your God is a consuming fire").

In this movement, finite love is both annihilated and exalted —it burns with divine ferocity yet remains bound to human experience. The tension mirrors Hegel's view that the Sublime appears where "the world is negated in its finitude in order to give utterance to God's glory" (Aesthetics , Vol. I, p. 375). The lovers' ardor does not imitate divine love—it becomes its finite vessel, where the fire's sublimity exposes love's incapacity to fully represent the Absolute, even as it strives to do so.

(3) Trees: The Living Sublime Between Earth and Heaven

Hegel distinguishes between nature's "formal" beauty (e.g., symmetry) and the Sublime, where natural objects (mountains, storms, towering trees) evoke the infinite's intrusion into the finite (Vol. I, p. 482–84). The Song's arboreal imagery— cedars of Lebanon, palm trees, and vineyards —operates not as mere pastoral decoration but as mythic mediators between human and divine:

"His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars." (5:15)

"Your stature is like the palm tree… I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit." (7:7–8)

The cedars symbolize Israel's election (Psalm 104:16) and the Temple's incorruptible sanctity (1 Kings 6:9), while the palm tree—associated with the Tree of Life in Jewish mysticism—embodies paradisiacal endurance (Ezekiel 40:16).

Hegel would read these images as natural Sublime: the trees' verticality (reaching toward heaven) and perennial vitality signify a striving for the infinite within rooted finitude. The lover's body, likened to these sacred forms, becomes a site where human desire and divine infinitude intersect—yet never fully merge, preserving the Sublime's essential tension.

(4) Human Love as the Finite Vehicle of the Sublime

Rather than reducing divine metaphors to mere embellishment, a Hegelian analysis reveals the Song's deeper dialectic: the lovers' passion is Sublime precisely because it fails to contain the Absolute it invokes. The gold's radiance, the fire's unquenchable heat, and the trees' sacred height all point beyond themselves, enacting Hegel's definition of the Sublime:

"The finite here serves merely to express the inadequacy of appearance in contrast with the idea." (Aesthetics , Vol. I, p. 378)

The poem's genius lies in making human eros the fragile yet necessary medium for experiencing divine infinitude—not by dissolving into mysticism, but by sustaining the Sublime's unresolvable tension. Thus, the Song does not simply borrow divine imagery; it transforms human love into the Sublime's most intimate, yet most overwhelming, manifestation.

3. Conclusions

The *Song of Songs* has important literary value, especially from an aesthetic point of view. Therefore, the paper uses the relevant theories of Hegelian aesthetics to analyze the beauty of the human body, the beauty of art, and the sublime beauty by close reading of the text.

The beauty of the human body in the *Song of Songs* is in line with natural needs to multiply. The artistic aspect is mainly reflected in the harmony of colors, the clarity of imagery by the use of metaphors and similes. Finally, through some images associated with the God, the sublime becomes the elevation of human love to the level of the God.

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