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SINGLE-WORD COLA IN THE SONG OF SONGS?

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This paper argues for the existence of lines containing single words in the poetry of the Song of Songs. These cola function as vocatives, climaxes, and turning points in the text. Especially significant is the usage of this type of line in 5:6 to provide a critical turning point in the central narrative of the poem.

Key Words: Song of Songs, Song 5:6, Hebrew poetry, single-word colon

1. Introduction

The Song of Songs is a fascinating poem with powerful and intense metaphors and word pictures. Its presentation as poetry has invited numerous discussions and studies of its structure and form. Readers of the poetry have identified high points and climactic moments, as well as turning points in the Song. One of the interesting phenomena is the manner in which some of these special points and key expressions occur (or are introduced) by means of an emphasis or form of marking that is strong enough to raise the question as to whether a single word can form a line of its own. This special means of emphasizing or focusing will be examined in the Song to see whether there are any bona fide examples of such single-word lines.[1]

[1] Single-word expressions here include only those that do not have an inseparable preposition or *vav* attached to the form; nor are they construed as part of a construct phrase. The presence of single-word lines in Classical Hebrew poetry is controversial and generally not recognized. See, e.g., M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 118–29; Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 12, 15, 97, 333, 334; Jan P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 61–86. On pp. 47–48, Fokkelman persuasively argues (mathematically) that for 83 psalms, each one scores an integer for the average number of syllables per colon (7, 8, or 9; most often 8). This suggests that the authors were aware of the syllable count of their lines or cola. It implies that a line consisting of a single word and therefore of, at most, two or three syllables would be unusual. However, the exceptions here "prove the rule" by demonstrating the extraordinary nature of single word cola and thus their use to emphasize aspects of the poem by the insertion of these dramatic and unexpected lines.

2. Examples of Single-Word Lines

2.1. Vocatives

Examples occur of single words functioning with a special force and capable of being interpreted as a virtual line. These often appear in vocative or imperative statements. Thus in 1:15–16 the vocatives רַעְיָתִי "my darling" and דּוֹדִי "my lover" are both framed by expressions of praise and delight, with the male speaking and followed by the female:

הִנָּךְ יָפָה	You are so beautiful,
רַעְיָתִי	My darling,
הִנָּךְ יָפָה	You are so beautiful,
עֵינַיִךְ יוֹנִים	Your eyes are doves.
הִנְּךָ יָפֶה	You are so beautiful,
דּוֹדִי	My lover;
אַף נָעִים	You are so pleasant,
אַף־עַרְשֵׂנוּ רַעֲנָנָה	And our bed is a spreading [tree].[2]

Of course it is possible to understand "My darling" and "My lover" as parts of the previous lines. However, they are both situated between two identical or similar lines and thus naturally function in both meaning and syllable count as a separate and additional line. In both cases, these important terms are introduced for the first time in the Song. Within adjacent verses, the favorite terms of endearment are stated by the male for the female and then vice versa. The effect is to focus on these terms in this, their first appearance. By giving them each a separate line and framing them with identical or nearly identical expressions, the poet alerts the reader to the importance of these terms and emphasizes how they serve to describe the relationship of the lovers.

Another occurrence of such a single-word colon is also in the form of a vocative, referring to the female lover. It comes at the end of the first *waṣf* by the male and at the beginning of a passage inviting the female to join him, in 4:8:

אִתִּי מִלְּבָנוֹן	Come with me from Lebanon,
כַּלָּה	My bride,
אִתִּי מִלְּבָנוֹן תָּבוֹאִי	Come with me from Lebanon,

[2] For this translation and analysis, see Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 44, 71–74.

תְּשׁוּרִי מֵרֹאשׁ אֲמָנָה	Travel from Amana's peak,
מֵרֹאשׁ שְׂנִיר	From Senir's peak,
וְחֶרְמוֹן	From Hermon,
מִמְּעֹנוֹת אֲרָיוֹת	From the dens of lions,
מֵהַרְרֵי נְמֵרִים	From the mountain lairs of leopards.[3]

The single term כַּלָּה "(my) bride" also occurs alone in 4:11:

נֹפֶת תִּטֹּפְנָה שִׂפְתוֹתַיִךְ	Your lips drip virgin honey,
כַּלָּה	O bride,
דְּבַשׁ וְחָלָב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֵךְ	Honey and milk are beneath your tongue,
וְרֵיחַ שַׂלְמֹתַיִךְ	And the fragrance of your garments,
כְּרֵיחַ לְבָנוֹן	Is like the fragrance of Lebanon.[4]

4:8 constitutes the first occurrence of the term כַּלָּה "bride." Like the earlier single word occurrences, it describes an aspect of the relationship between the male and female and it occurs between two repeated phrases in such a manner as to focus and center the expression. Its further appearance in a single word expression in 4:11 emphasizes the special importance of this term at the center of the entire Song. There as well it occurs between two similar phrases. "Bride" defines a legal relationship of marriage between the couple, either real or desired. That this is not merely a term of endearment, like "brother" or "sister," is suggested by the consistently legal usage of this term both within the Bible and without.[5]

2.2. Climactic Forms

A controversial form of a single-word line may occur in 6:12:

לֹא יָדַעְתִּי	Before I realized it,
נַפְשִׁי שָׂמַתְנִי	My desire placed me,
מַרְכְּבוֹת	In chariotry,
עַמִּי־נָדִיב	With a prince.[6]

The main problem with this verse occurs in the final line. The LXX and Vulgate follow the MT, and take the plural "chariots" in construct with what follows and render the last line as a personal name, Amminadib (Ammi-

[3] For translation and analysis, see Hess, *Song of Songs*, 113, 138–41.

[4] For translation and analysis, see ibid., 114, 144–46.

[5] J. Conrad, "כַּלָּה," *TDOT* 7:164–69.

[6] For translation and analysis, see Hess, *Song of Songs*, 195, 207–8.

nadab). Modern translators largely follow this.[7] However, Pope revocalizes the first part of Amminadib as the preposition "with."[8] This can be done without changing the consonantal text. The result is "Unawares I was set in the chariot with the prince."[9] If the term מַרְכְּבוֹת "chariots" is in construct with the following expression, then this does not qualify as a single-word line. However, if one follows Pope, then the term for "chariots" occurs as a single-word expression. The result appropriately focuses on this word. Unlike the previous examples, מַרְכְּבוֹת "chariots" is not preceded and followed by identical phrases; nor is it a vocative. However, it is climactic.

As an adverbial modifier to the verb on the preceding line it defines the fantastic location of the female in terms of a battle chariot, the most powerful, glorious, and feared weapon of the age. Functioning as a mobile firing platform for archers, this weapon would move with what would seem to be great speed across the battlefield into and out of the thick of the warfare. So much expense and skill were required for this weapon that pharaohs regularly depicted themselves traveling on it.[10] The female fantasizes her passion in such a way that it becomes identified with the pulse-pounding excitement of riding in such chariotry alongside her "prince"; one acting as

7 Recent plausible translations include: Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs* (Herm; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 174, "Before I knew it, my heart made me [the blessed one] of the prince's people"; Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs* (trans. Frederick J. Gaiser; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 225, "Before I was aware, my [desire] set me in [the chariots of Amminadib]"; Duane Garrett, "Song of Songs," in *Song of Songs/Lamentations* (Duane Garrett and Paul R. House; WBC 23B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 231, 233, "I do not know my own soul; it has set me among the chariots of Ammi-nadiv (My-beloved-is-a-prince)!"; Gianni Barbieroo, "Die 'Wagen meines edlen Volkes' (Hld 6,12): Eine structurelle Analyse," *Bib* 78 (1997): 174–89, relates the last phrase to vv. 4–10 and reads it as "Die Wagen meines edlen Volkes." Raymond Jacques Tournay, "Les chariots d'Aminadab (Cant. vi 12): Israël, peuple théophore," *VT* 9 (1959): 288–309, reviews previous interpretations.

8 Marvin H. Pope, *The Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 552.

9 Cf. also Tremper Longman III, *The Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 184, "I did not realize that my desire had placed me in a chariot with a noble man."

10 In the second millennium B.C.E. archives of West Semitic societies such as Alalakh and Ugarit, a special elite class, the *maryannu*, maintained and operated chariots and the horses that pulled them. The plural here may suggest a squadron of chariots going to battle. Cf. Gernot Wilhelm, *RIA* 7:419–21; Eva M. von Dassow, "Social Stratification of Alalah under the Mittani Empire" (PhD diss., New York University, 1997), 258–332; Richard S. Hess, "Occurrences of Canaan in Late Bronze Age Archives of the West Semitic World," in *Past Links: Studies in the Languages and Cultures of the Ancient Near East* (ed. Shlomo Izre'el, Ithamar Singer, and Ran Zadok; IOS 18; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 365–72.

driver and the other as archer. Thus the term מֶרְכָּבוֹת "chariots," which occurs only here in the whole of the Psalms and Wisdom literature, provides an emotional climax to her brief reflection of vv. 11 and 12. This serves as a center and pivot to the male's *waṣf*-like descriptions of his lover that precede (6:1–10) and follow (7:2–10a [ET 7:1–9a]) the female's statement. Thus the female reflects his passion and builds on it as he will then build upon her emotion.

The following *waṣf* said by the male for the female (7:2–10a [ET 7:1–9a]) contains repeated examples of single-word designations of parts of the female's body that introduce similes: your navel, your waist, your neck, your eyes, your nose, your palate. However, these are closely connected with the following phrase by a preposition and may be interpreted as together constituting a colon. Nevertheless, in the midst of this *waṣf* at 7:7 [ET 6], the male summarizes the whole of his lover at a peak of emotional fervor:

מַה־יָּפִית	How beautiful,
וּמַה־נָּעַמְתְּ	How desirable,
אַהֲבָה	O Love,
בַּתַּעֲנוּגִים	O Daughter-of-Pleasures.[11]

This is a climactic point in the male's last *waṣf* of his lover. Each line contains a special epithet of beauty or delight. The first line uses the common root for יָפָה "beauty, beautiful." It occurs some sixteen times in the book, here for the last and climactic time. The second line uses a term for desirability whose root occurs only here in the Song. This desirability is not found elsewhere for the male, only in the female's charms. The third term is a single word. In its form it is the noun for "love." Thus it is best interpreted as a vocative, as the male addresses his lover by using a term that does not distinguish between the emotion, the relationship, and their object. Here the single-word line comprises both a vocative and a climactic statement. This form occurs here for the seventh time in the book.[12] The final term appears to be composed of two separate words in construct. The term, "pleasures, delights," occurs as the object of a construct relationship in three of its remaining four occurrences in the Bible (Mic 1:16; 2:9; Eccl 2:8). Its appearance here is unique to the Song. Thus each term of praise in this verse occurs only here or has a special position in this verse. Only here in this *waṣf* does the male summarize the woman's beauty and he does so above all in the third line by describing her with an expression of both his love and his vision of her as the embodiment of love.

[11] For translation and analysis, see Hess, *Song of Songs*, 197, 218–19.

[12] Previously in 2:4, 5, 7; 3:5, 10; 5:8. It will occur in 8:4, 6, 7.

2.3. A Focusing Form

A final example, and perhaps the most interesting of all, occurs in Song 5:6:

פָּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי	I opened to my lover,
וְדוֹדִי חָמַק	But my lover turned,
עָבָר	He departed,
נַפְשִׁי יָצְאָה בְדַבְּרוֹ	I fainted as a result of his flight,
בִּקַּשְׁתִּיהוּ וְלֹא מְצָאתִיהוּ	I searched for him but I did not find him,
קְרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי	I called for him but he did not answer me.[13]

A few comments are in order on the translation of some of the more controversial forms in this verse. The verb חָמַק "had turned" in the second line follows the translation of Pope.[14] As a passive participle in 7:2 [ET 1], it describes the curves of the dancer's hips or thighs. The root occurs in the reflexive stem (Jer 31:22) and is applied to a perverse girl. Pope also notes an Arabic cognate with the sense of one who is stupid. A basic sense of all these is "to turn," whether literally as in Song 7:2 or in terms of one's thinking as in Jer 31:22.[15] In contrast to the MT, LXX, and Old Latin, Garbini notes that Aquila, Symmachus, the Vulgate, and the Syriac recognize a different form.[16] For him the root חבק "embrace" implies that the male embraced the female before turning.[17] Garrett follows the Vulgate and Aquila and Symmachus with a rendering "he has lost interest."[18] This results from reading the opening line as the female's surrendering of herself to the male's sexual interests. However, such an interpretation places too much weight upon a metaphorical understanding of פָּתַחְתִּי "I opened," remarkably brief in its description of consummated love given the detailed poetry used elsewhere in the Song's close encounters. Further, I have difficulty following Garrett's distinction between "signifier" and "signified" which results in two narratives running parallel in the account. While this may explain some difficult statements, it seems an arbitrary exercise to identify one phrase with one narrative and another phrase with the other story. I prefer the MT and LXX, both as equally strong witnesses and also for the powerful effect of the verbal sequence found here.

13 For translation and analysis, see Hess, *Song of Songs*, 161–62, 174–75.

14 Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 525.

15 Cf. also Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 165.

16 Giovanni Garbini, *Cantico dei cantici: Testo, traduzione, note e commento* (Biblica: Testi e studi 2; Brescia: Paideia, 1992) 80–86, 156–57.

17 However, Garbini's interpretation of the next line is also different.

18 Garrett, "Song of Songs," 212.

The word for "had departed" is עָבָר. The LXX and Old Latin do not recognize a word here. However, the Syriac, Vulgate, Aquila, and Symmachus preserve it. Garbini's reordering of the root as רבע "to lean, copulate" cannot be justified.[19] The same root and consonantal form occurs in v. 5 as עֹבֵר "flowing." Perhaps an MT scribe's eye rose a line or so to v. 5 and read this verb. However, the absence of dittography elsewhere argues against this interpretation. Garrett prefers the rendering "he moved on."[20] He argues that the meaning reflects a loss of interest on the male lover's part following the putative consummation. However, nowhere else can this usage be found. Even the example that Garrett cites, Gen 18:5, involves the deliberate transfer of people from one place to another, not the sense of going about one's business. Further, the argument that הָלַךְ should be used for departure instead of עָבָר is not convincing. There are 102 verses in which both these verbs appear, often as virtually synonymous. This includes Song 2:11, where the verbs occur in parallel lines:

כִּי־הִנֵּה הַסְּתָו עָבָר	Indeed, the winter has passed,
הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הָלַךְ לוֹ	The rains are over and ended.[21]

The best way to interpret עָבָר remains that of going away. The phrase נַפְשִׁי יָצְאָה בְדַבְּרוֹ "I fainted at his flight" is literally "my soul went forth when he went away." In many places (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:32) נַפְשִׁי "my soul" substitutes for the pronoun "I." The death of Rachel (Gen 35:18) is described by the "going out" (root יצא) of the soul. In Ps 146:4 it also refers to death, although נֶפֶשׁ "soul" is replaced with רוּחַ "spirit." Fox sees here the act of fainting in a near death experience.[22] I analyze בְדַבְּרוֹ as related to the Akkadian D-stem *duppuru.* Thus it would indicate the sense of "go away." The *beth* inseparable preposition is followed by a Piel infinitive construct with a pronominal suffix.

Contextually, the beginning of this verse responds to the command of v. 2, where the male requests his lover to open her door. However, enough time to utter more than forty words has passed. The structure of this verse uses a variety of forms to convey its role as the turning point in the narra-

19 Garbini, *Cantico dei cantici: Testo, traduzione, note e commento,* 80–86, 156–57.

20 Garrett, "Song of Songs," 212.

21 For translation and analysis, see Hess, *Song of Songs,* 161–62, 174–75.

22 Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985), 146.

tive. Murphy argues that the first verb is emphatic and then followed by an independent personal pronoun.[23] This also occurs in the first line of v. 5.[24]

The three words of the first line as well as the first word of the second line each end with the *–î* suffix. "I" or "my" refers to the female. The expression, דּוֹדִי "my lover" occurs at the end of the first line and the beginning of the second. Thus the focus shifts from the female to the male. The two are bound together by these methods as well as by their complementary expressions of endearment. These two words are followed by verbs in which the male is the subject. They describe his departure. Applying one verb to a line, the first line has three words, the second has two, and the third has one. The first line has six full syllables, the second has four, and the third has two. This reduction focuses on the verb עָבָר "he had departed."

The final three lines each contain three words. They contain 6, 8, and 6 syllables respectively. This is a much more common form of parallelism. All three lines have the same subject. The first of these lines, however, is distinct. The female's reaction, "my soul went out," is used elsewhere of death. This could identify the female's reaction to the absence of her lover. The final two lines have a synonymous grammatical parallelism.[25] This is followed by וְלֹא "but ... not" and a verb.

The disintegration portrayed in the structure of the first half of this verse is matched by the content. Continuing what was antecedent, the optimistic first line looks forward to bringing the female into her lover's arms. Something goes wrong in the second line. A change or turning is suggested by the use of a rare verb. The third line expresses the loss in a single word. The male has departed. The single word expresses a poetic pause so that the woman can comprehend what has happened. The impact of this departure continues into the next line where she comes close to death. Here the poetic pattern is re-established. The female now is the subject. Verse 7 summarizes the final lines. The woman seeks but does not find. She calls but there is no response. This suggests a chiastic construction with vv. 2–4. In v. 2 she first hears her lover and his voice (v. 2). Then, thrusting his hand through the keyhole, he demonstrates his desire and search (v. 4). His failure to find her, despite calling and seeking, is now also her lot.

[23] Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 165.

[24] Murphy considers the following two verbs emphatic as well, due to their asyndetic relationship.

[25] Both begin with the same form of the verb, a perfect tense/aspect, followed by the same object suffix, a third masculine singular.

Why did the male depart? Earlier, in 3:1–4, he was absent. However, there a search discovers him. In 2:9, 17 the male leaps around on hills and mountains. He comes and goes as he pleases. Nevertheless, this male's desire for the female is as strong as the female's desire for him (2:10–14; 4:1–8). So why is there a departure of the male? Perhaps this reveals the lover's unpredictability. Beyond this, the text suggests no reason for the departure of the male.[26] His love and passion remain as strong as ever, but the unexpected departure interrupts the expected consummation of love. Absence contradicts expected presence. Still the male will again be present. The sense of his absence is effectively conveyed by the technique of a change in the first three lines, reducing each line so that the third and last line consists of a single word with two syllables.

It is this technique of narrowing the cola to a single word that occurs here and may be understood as a distinctive and effective means of emphasizing a particular event and of providing a turning point in the scene.

3. Summary

In summary, we have seen the use of single-word cola in a variety of key contexts. As vocatives, they introduce most important expressions of endearment and title given by the lovers to each other. In 6:12 the single-word line introduces a peak of emotional excitement as the female is transported into the thrill of chariotry alongside her lover. In 7:7 [ET 6], the expression אַהֲבָה "O Love" may combine both the vocative bestowal of a title of endearment and a fever pitch of intensity in the male lover's poetry. Finally, 5:6 takes the usage of single-word cola in a different direction. It provides the dramatic turning point in the central narrative of the book. Nevertheless, it is also a moment of emotional intensity. It summarizes the female's ongoing experience with her lover as she knows union with him, but then experiences his absence. This emotional roller coaster continues right through the last verse in the Song where the female exhorts him to flee like a gazelle.

It is the contention of this study that single-word cola exist in the Song of Songs. Beyond the identification of these single-word vocatives, climaxes, and turning points as separate cola is the role of the poet as an artist of

[26] André LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on the Song of Songs* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 53, suggests that the male is wild and therefore cannot tolerate the bed, a symbol of civilization. However, in that case, it is not clear why the male would try to enter the room at all.

words, harnessing these single-word expressions to function at key points in the love poetry of the Song of Songs.