The imaginative language—the *mashal*—is false if taken literally; its "corrected" meaning conforms with "truth" (*emet*).[52]

1.1.4 *Literal Sense of a* Mashal: Peshaṭ?

Ibn Ezra's use of the term *peshaṭ* in his *mashal* exegesis differs from his normal use of this term to denote *biblical interpretation based on sound methodological principles*, as opposed to midrashic homiletics.[53] While in that case *peshaṭ* is a label of approbation indicating a *correct* reading, in Ibn Ezra's *mashal* exegesis the term *peshaṭ* denotes *a literal reading*, which is not necessarily correct.[54] For example, when formulating his rule, "anything that reason does not contradict, we interpret *ki-peshuṭo*" (above),[55] Ibn Ezra implies that otherwise a *mashal* reading is indicated, in which case the literal reading is not the correct one.[56] This becomes a problem when he speaks about the literal—and thus incorrect (or at least incomplete)—reading of the Song

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[52] The *mashal* vs. *emet* dichotomy occurs in rabbinic literature (see Loewe 1964:173–75). Yet authors educated in a Muslim environment would have naturally associated this terminology with the *majāz-ḥaqīqa* dichotomy. (In fact, in Arabic literature, *mathal* is occasionally opposed to *ḥaqīqa*; see Heinrichs 1984b:135. Compare the Qur'anic *mathal* vs. *ḥaqq* [truth] antithesis; see Wansbrough 1977:240.) Maimonides, e.g., contrasts *nashal* and *emet* in *MT, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:6 (my thanks to Prof. Bernard Septimus for this reference). See also *Guide* III:22;488, "the sages [*ḥakhamim*], to whom the term *ḥakhamim* (lit. wise ones) may be applied in truth (*bi-l-ḥaqīqa*)," i.e., not merely as a figure of speech (= "by way of *majāz*").

[53] The superiority of the former in Ibn Ezra's view is indicated by the rabbinic dictum אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו; by contrast, he explains, *derash* is merely "extra meaning"; see above, n. 10 and below, p. 151.

[54] In Arabic, Sa'adia refers to the latter as *ẓāhir*, i.e., the apparent or superficial sense. When Sa'adia wished to contrast the plain meaning of Scripture with a far-fetched midrashic reading, he used the term *basīṭ*, which he equates with the Hebrew term *peshuṭo* in the Rabbinic maxim אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו; see his comm. on Prov 30:1 and Simon 1991:38.

[55] See also his comm. on Ex 13:9 (above).

[56] In other words, according to Ibn Ezra *ẓāhir* is not equivalent to *peshuṭo* in the rabbinic dictum אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו. Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon, on the other hand, used the rabbinic dictum to support Sa'adia's rule that a verse must be taken *literally* unless it contradicts reason, another verse or rabbinic tradition (see Zucker 1984:448; Fenton 1997:276). He thus equates Hebrew *peshuṭo* with Arabic *ẓāhir*, i.e., the literal sense (whether correct or incorrect). To express the idea of the *correct* interpretation, Samuel ben Ḥofni uses the term *ḥaqīqa*. As he explains, in a case that does not call for reinterpretation, the *ẓāhir* (obvious sense) is the *ḥaqīqa* (correct interpretation): אלמאאהר ואלחקיקה מענאהמא ואחד (lit. the *ẓāhir* and *ḥaqīqa*, the meaning of the two of them is one; see Zucker 1984:xlii [compare Samuel ben Ḥofni, Pentateuch comm., Greenbaum ed., 478]; Fenton 1997:277).

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of Songs, a cluster of love poems that Ibn Ezra, following the Rabbis, interpreted allegorically.[57] Ibn Ezra wrote two versions of his commentary on the Song: the "standard" one in the Rabbinic Bible was completed in France in 1156; but an earlier recension dates to Ibn Ezra's arrival in Rome ca. 1140.[58] He advocates the rabbinic position consistently, as he writes in his introduction to the standard recension: "Heaven forbid that the Song of Songs [consists of] erotic matters, except by way of *mashal*." Accordingly, he structured both commentaries according to the same three-level format: one level of commentary addresses difficult words and grammar; the second the literal story of the lover and his beloved; the third the deeper meaning, namely, God's relationship with Israel throughout history. In Arabic, he could have used the *ẓāhir* vs. BĀṬIN dichotomy to label the second and third levels, as Moses Ibn Ezra, for example, does when defending erotic medieval Hebrew poetry by adducing a precedent in the Song:

> The love and passion . . . [depicted by Hebrew] poets . . . is not repugnant since this is found in the Holy Writings, even though the deeper meaning (*bāṭin*) of that work is different from the obvious meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the words. (*Kitāb* 143a)

Although he follows rabbinic tradition and sees divine love as the deeper meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Song, the great Andalusian poet recognizes the charm of the literal sense (*ẓāhir*) that makes it a noble artistic model.[59]

Abraham Ibn Ezra had to coin Hebrew terms to express the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* dichotomy.[60] His choice of terminology in the introductory poem of the first recension (which was, in fact, one of his earliest commentaries) is revealing.[61] There he refers to the second tier as being

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[57] In the cases cited above, the two meanings of *peshaṭ* coincide because a *mashal* reading is not indicated. In such cases, the *ẓāhir* is the correct reading (as noted by Samuel ben Ḥofni [see previous note]).

[58] See Reif 1990:243; Simon 1991:147. References below are to the standard commentary unless otherwise noted.

[59] See Pagis 1970:273; 1967:191–96; Brann 1991:78. Ibn Ezra's attitude is echoed by Joseph Ibn 'Aqnīn, who argues that the Song's poetic beauty is intended to captivate readers; see Ibn 'Aqnīn, Song of Songs commentary (Halkin ed.) 2; English trans. in Halkin 1950:407.

[60] He does just this in his introduction to the Pentateuch (above, n. 13), when coining the *nir'im-nistarim* dichotomy (a literal translation of *ẓāhir* vs. *bāṭin*). But this was an ad hoc usage, and he does not apply it elsewhere.

[61] The text of this poem reads:

'al derekh peshuṭo ("by way of its *peshaṭ*"). Although *peshaṭ* was commonly used by medieval translators to render Arabic *ẓāhir* (which can certainly denote an incorrect interpretation),[62] it is unusual for the term *peshaṭ* in Ibn Ezra's lexicon to denote a reading that is defective in any way.[63] The quagmire thickens when he classifies the third tier as being 'al netivot ha-midrash ("on the paths of the Midrash"). While this reading follows rabbinic precedent, it is surprising that he would classify it as Midrash as opposed to *peshaṭ*, an opposition he normally uses to favor the latter. Could this be a hint that the rabbinic reading—in his view—is imposed artificially on the literal one that is, in fact, correct (*peshaṭ*)?[64] More likely, his initial attempt to express Arabic categories in Hebrew was plagued by a confusion of terminology. When revisiting this matter in the second recension, Ibn Ezra relies instead on the *mashal* vs. *nimshal* dichotomy (below, n. 73) to describe the second and third tiers.[65]

1.2   *Moses Ibn Ezra and the Poetics of* Mashal

We will revisit Ibn Ezra's application of Saʿadia's exegetical rules below, but to speak with precision about his *mashal* exegesis, we now explore the underlying literary phenomena he includes in this category. For this purpose, it is helpful to consult Moses Ibn Ezra's *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara*, in which metaphor (*ISTIʿĀRA*), simile (*TASHBĪH*) and allegory (*MATHAL*) are defined among other Arabic poetic devices. Although

ולהיותו בידכין תמים   באריחיו שלש פעמים
בפעם הא אנלה   כל מילה צפונה
ובשנית אוריע משמעתו   על דרך פשוטו
ובשלישית יהיה מפורש   על נתיבות המדרש

[62] Maimonides, e.g., regularly used the term *ẓāhir* (translated into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Tibbon as *peshaṭ*) to denote incorrect, superficial interpretations; see *Guide* I:36;85, I:53;119, II:29;338; see also Harvey 1988a:13–14.

[63] It is conceivable that he was influenced here by Samuel ben Ḥofni who explicitly equated the Hebrew term *peshuṭo* with Arabic *ẓāhir* (above, n. 56).

[64] On this possibility, see below, 5.3.1.

[65] Surprisingly, the opening poem of the first recension is embedded in the introduction to the second recension. (The super-commentary *Meḥoqeqei Yehuda* [= Krinsky 1960] notes this confusion and glosses: על דרך פשוטו—פי' על דרך משל.) Perhaps a copyist conflated the two recensions. Elsewhere Ibn Ezra uses the term *ki-mashmaʿo* to label the literal sense of a *mashal*; see below, n. 150 and comm. on Hos 3:2 (with Simon 1989:46n). Unlike the multivalent term *peshaṭ*, the term *ki-mashmaʿo* means only *a literal interpretation*.

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these three poetic techniques can be subsumed in the more general *majāz* category, Moses Ibn Ezra considered it important to classify each separately.[66] Abraham Ibn Ezra may have actually read *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara* (where he is mentioned honorably [above, p. 35]), which was written in the 1130's while he was still in al-Andalus. If he did not have direct access to Moses Ibn Ezra, his friend Judah ha-Levi, who was in contact with the elder poet,[67] could have made him aware of this singular work on Hebrew poetics. Even if Abraham Ibn Ezra did not actually read Moses Ibn Ezra's poetics, the two authors certainly shared a common cultural perspective that included the poetic terms and concepts defined in *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara*. And indeed, as we shall demonstrate, the Andalusian emigré exegete was thinking primarily about *istiʿāra*, *tashbīh* and *mathal* when using the Hebrew term *mashal*.

1.2.1   Mathal *(Allegory)*

Moses Ibn Ezra defines the biblical technique *mashal*, which he identifies with Arabic *mathal*,[68] as a literary text that has

> a hidden interpretation (*taʾwīl bāṭin*) other than that which is obvious (*yuẓharu*) from [its] language.[69] (*Kitāb* 146a)

He uses the usual Arabic terms for the two parts of a *mashal*: its superficial, literal meaning (*ẓāhir*), as opposed to its deeper, "hidden

[66] A similar trend emerged in Arabic learning. For example, the eleventh-century literary critic al-Jurjānī considered it crucial to distinguish among *istiʿāra*, *tashbīh* and *tamthīl* (see Abu Deeb 1979:5–6; Heinrichs 1991/92:277–81 [on the term *tamthīl*, see below, p. 58]); and the Qurʾanic exegete al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) was careful to distinguish among *istiʿāra*, *mathal*, *tamthīl*, *kināya* (below, n. 149) and *takhyīl* (below, n. 73; see Heinrichs 1991/92:262).

[67] On this relationship, see Abramson 1970; Fenton 1997:16; Brann 1991:59–60, 62, 84–85.

[68] Although Moses Ibn Ezra and others in the Andalusian tradition made this identification, the BH term, in fact, has a much broader range of meanings, including *tale, saying, poem, proverb, by-word, taunt* and *oracle* (see BDB, s.v. משל). Arabic *mathal*, on the other hand, applied to a more narrow range of phenomena more closely associated with allegory and metaphor (see Wansbrough 1977:239; Heinrichs 1977:7).

[69] Note the terms *taʾwīl, ẓāhir, bāṭin*. Moses Ibn Ezra actually applies this definition to both *mashal* and *ḥiddah* (a riddle), though he specifies that not every *mashal* is a *ḥiddah* (*Kitāb* 150a); see Pagis 1970:55–56; Wolfson 1989:125n; compare Abraham Ibn Ezra's use of *ḥiddah* (above, n. 12). Maimonides uses *mashal we-ḥiddah* as a hendiadys in *MT, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 1:12; see also below, 3.1.2.

which are very hot and are not extinguished for a long time. And even when they seem outwardly extinguished and seem like ashes, they still are internally a burning fire.[108] So too (*ken*) the words of [a person with] "a tongue of deceit": he presents himself as though he has no evil intent towards, so that [the other person] will not guard himself, but when he parts from him, he will speak badly. Now it says "with [hot coals of broom-wood]" because he has both [attributes]: the "arrows" and "coals" are both included together within him.

Although he takes his Andalusian predecessor's reading of the sharp arrows as his point of departure, Radak argues that the "hot coals" image is not merely poetic flourish, but actually reflects another dimension of the deceitful enemies.[109]

Ibn Ezra's tendency to explain details of biblical *meshalim* in purely formal aesthetic terms, rather than viewing them as vehicles of additional meaning, conforms with the role he normally assigns to aesthetics in his exegesis. As U. Simon (1992:134) has noted, Ibn Ezra typically identifies biblical poetic techniques such as paranomasia and inclusio specifically to avoid any need to attribute expressive value to the locutions that produce them. In other words, at times the Andalusian poet-exegete does ask: Why did Scripture employ this wording specifically, and not another that would express a similar idea? Whereas this question might launch a sharp rabbinic reading aimed at revealing Scripture's omnisignificance, Ibn Ezra typically answers that this wording enhances Scripture's aesthetic quality and poetic design.[110] In the Psalms in particular he pays careful attention to the inner correspondences between a suppliant's complaint

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[108] His source is *Bereshit Rabbah* 98 [p. 1269], cited by Rashi here. On Radak's use of Midrash in his *peshat* exegesis in general, see Cohen 1994. On its role in his *mashal* exegesis in particular, see below, 6.2.

[109] Radak elsewhere attributes symbolic meaning to details of a *mashal* that Ibn Ezra explained merely as elaboration of earlier imagery; compare, e.g., their commentaries on Gen 49:9 ("Judah is a lion's whelp ... he crouched, laid down ...") and Ps 84:12 ("God is sun and shield").

[110] For examples of paranomasia (word-play) that Ibn Ezra attributes to the biblical authors' notion of literary elegance (*sahot*), see Melammed 1978:578–79, 582. In his comm. on Ps 104:1, Ibn Ezra notes King David's tendency to employ inclusio. In seeking to identify the elements of biblical poetic style, Abraham Ibn Ezra manifests the thinking of his older Andalusian contemporary, Moses Ibn Ezra, who devoted much energy to this subject in his poetics, *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara*; see Cohen 2000b:294–97. On the possible link between these two authors, see above, p. 49. A parallel to Abraham Ibn Ezra's use of stylistic observations to account for biblical locutions can be found in the northern French exegetes Joseph Bekhor Shor and Eliezer of Beaugency; see Harris 1997:221–48.

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and his prayer for salvation. He thus comments on Ps 43:3, "Send Your light and Your truth, let them guide me":

> Your light—as opposed to (*ke-neged*) "I walk in darkness" (43:2).
> Your truth—as opposed to "[Save me from] a man of trickery" (43:1).
> ... Let them guide me—as opposed to "I walk [in darkness]" (43:2).[111]

In these observations, Ibn Ezra indeed pays close attention to the formulation (*millot*), in addition to the content (*te'amim*). Yet, in doing so, the poet-exegete aims only to demonstrate that the psalmists chose their language carefully in order to enhance the poetic unity of their supplications, but he does not seek additional meaning in these correspondences, as the Midrash might do.

5.3 *Exceptions to the Rule*

Having defined the principles of Ibn Ezra's substitution-based *mashal* exegesis, we should take note of some exceptional examples and trends. Apart from making our evaluation of his method complete, this study also sheds light on his own perception of the *peshat* principles he had devised. In other words, revealing the circumstances under which the great Andalusian *peshat* exegete permitted himself to diverge from those principles tells us something about his methodological self-awareness.

5.3.1 *Interpreting The Song of Songs*

Although Ibn Ezra normally focuses on the *nimshal* and avoids the analysis Radak would lavish on the *melisah*, he conspicuously focuses on the literal sense of the Song of Songs, a book he takes to be a *mashal*. In his programmatic introduction (above, 1.1.4), he makes a point of fully explaining the literal level (which he calls the *mashal*) before interpreting the book allegorically (the *nimshal*). Accordingly, he first explains the Song as a love story between a shepherd and his beloved, a young farmer girl; he then explains in detail how each episode of that pastoral symbolizes another episode of the relationship between God and Israel throughout the course of history. In

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[111] For similar observations, see Ibn Ezra on Ps 3:8, 11:3, 13:4, 30:1, 33:11.

paying close attention to the details of the literal level and then scru-
tinizing them to derive the Song's allegorical meaning, Ibn Ezra fore-
shadows Radak's program, stated on Isa 28:24ff., that he "first will
explain the *melisah* and then explain the *mashal*" (above, 3.2.1). This
leads to a surprising resemblance between Ibn Ezra's commentary
on the Song and that of Rashi, which manifests a clear midrashic
orientation. But in light of the Andalusian exegete's typically reduc-
tionist method, we might have expected something akin to Maimonides'
analysis of the *mashal* in general terms, and a view of the details
merely as literary embellishment.

It would appear that the Song of Songs is an exceptional type of
mashal that required special treatment. In the first recension of his
introduction, Ibn Ezra describes the literal tier of his commentary
as being "by way of its *peshat*," whereas the allegorical tier follows
"the paths of the Midrash" (above, p. 48). This suggests that he saw
the need to explain the literal sense of the Song as a *peshat* direc-
tive. Though Ibn Ezra normally did "not pay attention to the words"
(above, p. 242), i.e., the incidental poetic wording, he may have
made a distinction between the Song and other *meshalim*. In a typ-
ical biblical *mashal*, the surrounding literary context points to its
metaphorical nature and suggests the identity of its *nimshal* as well;
but neither are indicated in the Song, which is a self-contained lit-
erary work. Hence, the *peshat* method would militate against ana-
lyzing this text as a *mashal*, and our Andalusian exegete does so out
of deference to rabbinic tradition, a choice that led one scholar of
Ibn Ezra to say that here he "sold out to folklore and naivete" (Levin
1969:35). This does not mean that Ibn Ezra's rabbinic position is
insincere,[112] but it is possible that he explains the Song's literal sense
in order to show how the *peshat* method otherwise would render this
book.[113] The external impetus to interpret the Song allegorically may

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[112] Indeed, as Levin (1969:35) shows, the midrashic analysis of the Song appealed
to Ibn Ezra's nationalistic sentiment and imagination. Maimonides, too, recognizes
this value of the midrashic reading in *The Epistle to Yemen* (though he interprets the
Song differently elsewhere); see above, chapter four, n. 28. Interestingly, Yefet ben
'Eli interprets the Song prognostically as a prophecy about events befalling the
Jewish people in his time; see Frank 2000:122–23; Polliack 2001:231–82. It is con-
ceivable that the great Karaite exegete was influenced in this respect by the tradi-
tional (i.e., rabbinic) national allegorical reading, although Yefet did apply a prognostic
method independently to other biblical texts as well.
[113] As Levin (1969:35) argues. Ibn Ezra elsewhere shows that he is capable of
such speculation by devising a *peshat* reading only to reject it out of deference to

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also explain his unusual detail by detail derivation of the *nimshal*:
since this reading is dictated by rabbinic tradition rather than his
own *peshat* method, he yields to the manner of the midrashic analysis.[114]

5.3.2   Creative Philosophical Mashal Analysis

But other exceptions stem from Ibn Ezra's own exegetical wellsprings.
For example, he independently devises a Midrash-like *mashal* analy-
sis of Ps 1:3, said about a righteous man:

> He shall be like a tree planted beside streams of water,
> Which yields its fruit in season
> And its foliage never fades
> And whatever he does prospers.[115]

What might we expect here from our rationalist exegete? This psalm
praises the righteous man, who "has not followed in the counsel of
the wicked" and for whom "the teaching of the Lord is his delight"

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the Rabbis; see, e.g., his comm. on Lev 21:2; Num 31:23; see also Melammed
1978:680; Simon 1965:138; Lockshin 1989:178–83; Maori 2002:203.
[114] His acceptance of the midrashic model causes Ibn Ezra to write unchara-
teristically:

> There is nothing greater that the Midrash on Song of Songs that the Rabbis
> expounded. Therefore, since I have seen great sages, pillars of the world, who
> likewise devised *darash* [readings] by adding and detracting [i.e., from earlier
> midrashic sources], I have followed in their footsteps.

This enthusiastic assessment conflicts sharply with Ibn Ezra's usual attitude, reflected
in his pointed criticism (Pentateuch introduction, fourth approach) of contemporary
exegetes who composed new midrashic readings (see above, p. 39). (I am indebted
to Mrs. Shifra Schapiro for pointing out this comparison). Although Ibn Ezra nor-
mally took a dim view of such "reworked Midrash," he deemed it necessary in the
case of the Song of Songs. It is conceivable that Ibn Ezra had Rashi in mind when
speaking here about "the great sages and pillars of the world," who composed
midrashic commentaries on the Song that Ibn Ezra took as his model. Indeed, the
similarity between Ibn Ezra and Rashi on the Song of Songs is striking. Although
these two exegetes normally take very different paths, they find common ground
here because Rashi on the Song strives most consistently to choose midrashic inter-
pretations that correspond to his *peshat* analysis (see Kamin 1991:13–30), while Ibn
Ezra on the Song is at his "most midrashic" (see Reif 1990).
[115] Or: Whatever it produces thrives. This ambiguity, noted in NJPS, is observed
by Ibn Ezra, who comments:

> "And whatever he does prospers"—[the pronoun] refers to the man compared
> to (*ha-nimshal le-*) a tree. And others say that "and whatever it does prospers"
> refers to the tree, that if a branch is taken from it and is planted, it will be
> successful. . . .

In his early recension of this commentary (see Simon 1991:322–23), Ibn Ezra seems
to adopt the first reading, whereas the second view is attributed there to Moses
Ibn Chiquitilla.