

“THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE”: RASHBAM’S APPROACH TO RASHI’S COMMENTARY ON THE TORAH

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Abstract: *Rashbam’s approach to Rashi’s commentary on the Torah is characterized by contrasts: originality and continuity, independence and dependence, open admiration and flagrant aggression. Scholars have clarified various aspects of this complex stance, yet their analyses do not provide a comprehensive explanation for it. This article argues that Rashbam’s approach to Rashi’s commentary is not based on methodological principles alone, but also includes an emotional element that is in part unconscious. To analyze these complex emotional elements of the text, the article uses a theoretical model that demonstrates that the ambivalence reflected in the text is not unusual, and in fact can be found in relationships between other writers—“the anxiety of influence,” as formulated by Harold Bloom. This conclusion sheds new light on Rashbam’s commentary, including several of its more well-known passages.*

RASHBAM’S APPROACH TO RASHI’S COMMENTARY ON THE TORAH: DATA AND CONTRASTS

A significant part of the Torah commentary of R. Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam, northern France, ca. 1080/1085–1160) relates, in different ways, to the commentary of Rashi, his grandfather.¹ According to Martin Lockshin’s statistical analysis of the commentary, “approximately fifty percent of the commentaries of Rashbam in his commentary to the Torah are intended to challenge the commentary of Rashi.”² In most of these cases, the polemic with Rashi is indirect—Rashbam did not mention Rashi, and without comparing the passage to Rashi’s commentary the reader cannot know that Rashbam was arguing with him. In dozens of passages the polemic is more transparent—Rashbam posited that his interpretation was

1. Rashbam’s father, Rabbi Meir, married Yocheved, Rashi’s daughter; for information about the life of Rashbam and the dates of his birth and death see David Rosin, *R. Samuel B. Mëir als Schrifterklärer* (Breslau: Jungfer, 1880), 6, 9; Ephraim Elimelech Urbach, *Ba’ale ha-tosafot: Toldotehem, hiburehem, shittatam*, 5th ed. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1986), 46; Sara Japhet and Robert Salters, *Perush Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam) le-Kohelet* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 11–12; Meir Isaac (Martin) Lockshin, *Perush ha-Torah le-Rabbenu Shmuel ben Meir* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 2009), 1–3. According to Norman Golb, Rashbam died a short time before 1171: Norman Golb, *Toldot ha-yehudim ba’ir Rouen bi-yeme ha-benayim* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1976), 62. However, Victor Aptowitz, *Sefer Raviah* (Bnei Berak: Sifre Yahadut, 1984), 411, and Israel Moshe Ta-Shma, *Rabbi Zarhiah Ha-Levi ba’al ha-ma’or u-bene hugo* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1992), 8–9 n. 16, bring the year of his birth forward to 1070–80 and in keeping with this, Ta-Shma brings the year of his death forward to 1145–50. (ibid., 42, and in note 32 he challenges Golb’s position, which fixes a later year for Rashbam’s death). For the approximate date for the compilation of Rashbam’s commentary to the Torah, see below.

2. Lockshin, *Perush*, 30.

“according to the plain meaning of the verse” (*lefi peshuto* or *lefi peshuto shel mikra*’, or similar language),³ suggesting that in the background lies a different commentary, one that, according to Rashbam, does not reflect the plain meaning of the text.⁴

The polemic with Rashi is reflected in another surprising way: in several places Rashbam attacked Rashi’s commentary in sharp, scathing language, and even though he did not mention Rashi by name, there is no doubt that the Rashbam’s readers knew very well to whom he was referring.⁵ Such is the case in the commentary on Genesis 49:9: “Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son [*mi-teref beni*], you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up?”⁶ Rashi, following Bereshit Rabbah, understood Jacob’s words to Judah to be the attack on Joseph, while Rashbam assumed that they referred to a prophecy about the future.⁷ Rashbam added the following comment: “Whoever explains this phrase as referring to the sale of Joseph has no understanding of either the context of the verse or the punctuation of the cantillation signs.”⁸ The sharpness of this comment has led several scholars to doubt that Rashbam was indeed addressing Rashi. Their arguments are not convincing.⁹

3. For a definition of the *peshat* method and its exegetical principles, see below.

4. As Lockshin, *Perush*, emphasizes, in the vast majority of the cases in which Rashbam notes that his interpretation is according to the *peshat*, he is disagreeing with Rashi. This phenomenon is apparent in Rashbam’s commentaries to other books of the Bible, although Rashbam’s approach to Rashi in these books is systematic, and thus does not raise the same questions as his approach to Rashi in his commentary to the Torah. See Japhet and Salters, *Rashbam le-Kohelet*, 50–51; Sara Japhet, *Perush Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam) le-sefer ‘Iyov* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 78–95; Japhet, *Perush Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam) le-Shir ha-shirim* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2008), 63–65, 112–13, and see below.

5. Rashbam is not the only commentator on the Bible to use caustic or offensive language in reference to other commentators, cf. Uriel Simon, “Ibn Ezra’s Harsh Language and Biting Humor: Real Denunciation or Hispanic Mannerism?,” in *Abraham Ibn Ezra y Su Tiempo*, ed. Fernando Díaz Esteban (Madrid: Asociación Española de Orientalistas, 1990), 325–34. Rashbam is unique in that his abrasive comments appear strange against the background of his overall connection to Rashi’s commentary.

6. Biblical citations follow NJPS.

7. Rashi: “*Mi-teref*—from that of which I suspected you at ‘Joseph has surely been torn to bits,’ ‘An evil beast devoured him’ [Genesis 37:33], this is Judah who is compared to a lion” (cf. Bereshit Rabbah 98:7 [ed. Theodor-Albeck, 1258]); Rashbam: “*Mi-teref*—From prey, my son, you arise: ‘You, Judah, my son, after you arise from preying on the nations and you crouch and lie down in your city, no enemy shall come to frighten you or make you get up out of your place.’ This is the true plain meaning of the text; *beni* readdresses Judah.”

8. The meaning of Rashbam’s commentary is that the connection of the verse to the sale of Joseph is based on the reading of the words *mi-teref beni* as a construct form, “the devouring of my son Joseph”; however, under the word *mi-teref* there is a cantillation note (*tipḥah*) signaling a stop, and on this basis Rashbam concludes that the word *beni* refers to Judah.

9. See for example, Elazar Touitou, who asserted that “Rashi knew the punctuation determined by the cantillation and Rashbam would not have directed criticism toward his grandfather on this point”; Touitou, *Ha-peshatot ha-mithadshim be-khol yom: ‘Iyyunim be-perusho shel Rashbam la-Torah* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 59. It is clear that Rashi knew the cantillation well but, like the rabbis of the Talmud and other commentators, sometimes chose to ignore it. Cf. Simcha Kogut, *Ha-mikra’ ben te’amim le-parshanut* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 148–90. Touitou (ibid., and following him, Lockshin, *Perush*, 154) noted that in several manuscripts of Rashi’s commentary, the word from the verse cited at the beginning of the commentary (*ha-dibbur ha-mathil* [lemma]) is *mi-teref* and not

No less caustic is Rashbam’s commentary to Genesis 45:28: “Israel said, ‘Enough! [*Rav*] My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die.’” Rashi, following Targum Onkelos, interpreted the word *rav* to mean “much” or “great” and added the missing subject, while Rashbam interpreted it as “enough.”¹⁰ Rashbam also added the following comment: “Other interpretations of this text are contrived and foolish.” This caustic remark led some scholars to argue that it could not have been written by Rashbam but was the addition of a scribe. There is no persuasive argument for this suggestion.¹¹

In several places Rashbam uses a formula to refute Rashi, by first stating (without mentioning Rashi’s name), “[and] he who interprets” (*ve-ha-mefarsho* or *ha-mefarsh*), then summarizing Rashi’s commentary, sometimes only briefly, and finally sharply criticizing his interpretation. For example:

- “he who interprets [...] this interpretation is also folly [*hevel*]” (Genesis 1:1);
- “he who interprets [...] is mistaken [...] and he who interprets [...] is mistaken according to the plain meaning” (Genesis 33:18);
- “he who interprets [...] one should be astonished [*litmoha*]” (Genesis 36:24);
- “he who interprets [...] has absolutely no understanding of the profundities of the plain meaning of Scripture” (Genesis 49:16);
- “he who interprets [...] is false [*sheker*]” (Exodus 2:2);
- “he who interprets [...] is mistaken” (Exodus 2:6);
- “he who interprets [...] must bring a comparable example” (Exodus 12:7);
- “he who interprets [...] is mistaken” (Exodus 19:23);
- “he who interprets [...] is, following the plain sense of Scripture, mistaken” (Numbers 30:3);
- “he who interprets [...] must be mistaken” (Deuteronomy 32:10).¹²

Also, in a slightly different format:

- “he who connects [*ha-medamehu*, ...] is a fool [*shoteh*]” (Exodus 34:29);¹³

mi-teref beni (see also Elazar Touitou, “‘Al gilgule ha-nosah shel perush Rashi la-Torah,” *Tarbiz* 56 [1987]: 228–29) and concluded from this that Rashi connected Jacob’s words to Judah, to the sale of Joseph, on the basis of the word *mi-teref* alone; in other words, he did not ignore the cantillation. As we know, the function of the words cited at the opening a commentary is to provide a reference within the text and thus an exact correspondence between the words cited and the body of the commentary itself is not necessary (cf. Japhet and Salters, *Rashbam le-Kohelet*, 44–48). In any case, it is not possible to answer the question of which version Rashbam worked with, the more common version, *mi-teref beni*, or the less common *mi-teref*, or whether, like Touitou, Rashbam thought that this difference is significant.

10. Rashi: “There is much joy and gladness for me, because my son Joseph still lives” (Onkelos: “Great to me is the joy! Joseph my son is yet alive”); Rashbam: “I have had enough heart-stopping through disbelief. Rather my son Joseph is certainly still alive.”

11. Moshe Sokolow, “Ha-peshatot ha-mithadshim: Keta’im hadashim mi-perush ha-Torah le-Rashbam,” *‘Aleï Sefer* 11 (1984): 78 n. 41.

12. Rashbam’s comments on Genesis 49:16; Exodus 2:2, 6; 19:23; and Deuteronomy 32:10 relate to Rashi (and cf. Lockshin, *Perush*, 159 n. 77, 173 n. 41, 174 n. 57, 245 n. 96, 511 n. 29) and not to Ibn Ezra or *Lekah tov*.

13. In this case, Rashbam may also be hinting (perhaps primarily) at Christian exegesis, see Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 175 n. 159; Lockshin, *Perush*, 326 n. 48; this is not the only time in which

and in the plural:

“those who interpret [...] are mistaken” (Numbers 22:33); and “those who interpret [...] they are offering a silly explanation” (Deuteronomy 15:18).¹⁴

Here too he is referring primarily, if not exclusively, to Rashi. Rashbam used this recurring format in another place, although instead of the generic citation “he who interprets,” there he referred openly to Rashi:¹⁵

Look at what my grandfather, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing, explained concerning the verse “Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city” [Deuteronomy 20:19]. [He explained that it means]: “Perhaps [you think that] trees of the field are like people and they should withdraw before you into the besieged city and [should not] stand up against you?” That interpretation is folly. Who would be so idiotic or foolish as to think that the tree has the same powers as human beings?¹⁶

At the heart of this controversy lies a differing understanding of the syntax of the verse: Rashi had interpreted the verse as a rhetorical question,¹⁷ whereas Rashbam saw it as an unequivocal statement.

Rashbam knew Rashi’s commentary well and thus he certainly knew, as would any unbiased reader, that Rashi had not aspired to interpret every passage according to the principles of *peshat* (the plain meaning of the text).¹⁸ On the contrary, Rashi’s commentary to the Torah was based primarily on the classical midrashim (rabbinic homilies); his interpretations according to the plain

Rashbam challenges a proposed solution current among Christians and also familiar from Rashi’s commentary. Compare in particular his commentary to Genesis 49:10. We may surmise that Rashbam assumed that his readers knew both Rashi’s commentary and current Christian exegesis, and therefore, that his criticism was meant to convey an especially strong message—pointing to the similarity between Rashi’s commentary and Christian exegesis.

14. This structure is repeated several times in the context of disagreement with commentaries of scholars other than Rashi; regarding Abraham Ibn Ezra: “those who interpret [...] is also folly [*hevel*]” (Deuteronomy 15:18). Regarding a commentary whose authorship is unclear: “he who interprets [...] is offering a foolish [*shtut*] interpretation” (Exodus 33:14).

15. This is exceptional; where Rashbam mentions Rashi explicitly, he does so in a positive way, and wherever he presents a view different from Rashi’s, he does not mention him by name.

16. This passage was published first by Sokolow (“Ha-peshatot,” 77–78), who concluded that at least part of it was a summary of Rashbam’s Torah commentary. For arguments against this theory, see Jonathan Jacobs, “‘Eynam derekh ’erez le-fi ḥokhmat divre bene ’adam ’o ke-perush ha-pasuk: ‘Ekronot parshanut ha-peshat ‘al-pi Rashbam,” in *Rashi u-bet midrasho*, ed. Avinoam Cohen (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2013), 66–71 (Jacobs argues that the passage is Rashbam’s response to a query from a student.)

17. This is similar to several of the modern commentaries and translations.

18. For the difficulties in translating the term *peshat* into English, see Sara Japhet, “The Pendulum of Exegetical Methodology: From the *Peshat* to the *Derash* and Back,” in *Midrash Unbound: Transformations and Innovations*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Joanna Weinberg (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), 249–50.

meaning of the text are much less frequent, and sometimes it is not clear if Rashi intended to interpret according to the *peshat* or according to the *derash* (homiletic approach).¹⁹ Perhaps he occasionally interpreted according to a specific midrash because he believed that it reflected the plain meaning of the text.²⁰ Still, these instances do not alter the general picture—Rashi made relatively limited use of *peshat* interpretation in his Torah commentary. This clearly should not be seen as an exegetical failure.²¹

Rashi himself declared openly that he would interpret the Torah both according to the *derash* and according to the *peshat*. He wrote in his commentary to Genesis 3:8: “And I have come only for the plain meaning of the Scriptures [*peshuto shel mikra*] and for an aggadah [rabbinic homily] that settles [*meyashevet*] the words of the verses, each word in its proper place” (or: “the words of the verses and their proper meaning”).²²

Rashbam pointed to Rashi’s declaration of methodology in his commentary to Genesis 3:8 to distinguish his own exegetical methodology.²³ Stating “And I [*va-’ani*; contrasting *wāw*]²⁴ have come only for *peshuto shel mikra*’ and for ‘*aggadah meyashevet*,’ Rashi differentiated his commentary from rabbinic literature (“Bereshit Rabbah and other midrashim,” *ibid.*). Rashbam, paraphrasing Rashi, wrote: “And I [*va-’ani*; contrasting *wāw*] have come only to explain the straightforward sense of the text [*peshutan shel mikra’ot*],”²⁵ and similarly distinguished his commentary from Rashi’s by saying “the commentary of R. Solomon, my mother’s father, may the mention of the righteous be for blessing” (*ibid.*). Rashbam’s awareness of Rashi’s extensive reliance on rabbinic midrashim and the *derash* method of exegesis is expressed explicitly at the beginning of this passage: “For Jewish law

19. Cf. Avraham Grossman, *Hakhme Zarfat ha-rishonim: Korotehem, darkam be-hanhagat ha-zibur, yeziratam ha-ruhanit* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 194.

20. As noted by several scholars, we must distinguish between the specific corpus—e.g., the corpus known as rabbinic midrash—and the methodological nature of the statements included in the corpus, which could be based on various exegetical categories; see Sara Japhet, *Dor dor u-parshanav: ‘Asufat mehkarim be-parshanut ha-mikra’* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2008), 170–88, and for relevant statements, see Eran Viezel, “The Secret of the Popularity of Rashi’s Commentary on Torah,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 17 (2014): 213 n. 31.

21. This can be seen clearly from the following words of Ibn Ezra: “Rav Shlomo z”l [...] was under the impression that this is the way of *peshat*, in his writings one will find only one *peshat* out of a thousand”; *idem*, *Safah berurah*, ed. Enriquez Ruiz Gonzalez and Ángel Sáenz-Badillos (Córdoba: Ediciones el Almendro, 2004), 4*. On Ibn Ezra’s own, different approach, see below.

22. Intensive research has been devoted specifically to this statement. See primarily: Sara Kamin, *Rashi: Peshuto shel mikra’ u-midrasho shel mikra’* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 62–77, and for a summary of this issue, see Grossman, *Hakhme Zarfat*, 193–201.

23. Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 71; this does not mean that Rashbam entirely understood the difference between a homily that settles the verse (*aggadah meyashevet*) and one that does not. It is sufficient that he understood that Rashi based a significant part of his commentary on midrashim.

24. See Nechama Leibowitz, *Lilmod u-lelamed Tanakh: ‘Asufat ma’amarim* (Jerusalem: Elinar, 1995), 117.

25. From the beginning of his commentary to the weekly portion *Mishpatim*.

and legend reveal themselves through the superfluous words in the text. Some of the halakhot will be found in the commentary of R. Solomon.”²⁶

Peshat and *derash* are two separate exegetical methods, based on different hermeneutical principles, with distinct objectives. A *peshat* commentator will interpret Scripture on the basis of language and syntactic structure, in keeping with the context and the structure of the narrative unit, with reference to other biblical passages, according to reason and logic and the way of the human world (*derekh 'erez*). In contrast to the *peshat* commentator, the commentator using the *derash* method is not committed to these exegetical principles and is free to ignore all or some of them as he sees fit.²⁷ Accordingly, there is no logic in comparing a *peshat* commentary to a *derash* commentary, and no benefit to assessing a *derash* commentary by means of the analytical tools of the *peshat* method.²⁸ It is possible to construct criteria for assessing *derash* commentaries—for example, to conclude that a specific *derash* commentary is more educational, pleasant, brief, and so forth, and on that basis to prefer it to a commentary that is less educational, pleasant, or brief.²⁹ However, these are external criteria and they indicate nothing about the absolute value of the *derash* commentary. But a *peshat* commentary can certainly be compared to another *peshat* commentary on the basis of their conformity to the principles associated with this exegetical method. Thus one may determine that one *peshat* commentary is more exact or accurate, than another *peshat* commentary, because it more successfully considers the information revealed in the text, more fully accounting for the verse's language, syntax, narrative context, and so forth.³⁰ In his methodological comments Rashbam presents a detailed and sophisticated hermeneutical model that clarifies to his readers that the objectives and underlying principles of the *peshat* and *derash* methods are entirely distinct from each other and that each method is important in its own right.³¹

26. In his commentary to Genesis 37:2, Rashbam wrote: “Due to their piety, the earliest scholars tended to devote their time to midrashic explanations, which are the essence of Torah.” In my opinion, his reference here is to the commentators of the Middle Ages, foremost among them Rashi, and not to the talmudic rabbis; thus it is clear from this sentence that he was aware that Rashi did not intend to interpret only in the *peshat* method. It is important to note that in Rashbam's language the word *ha-rishonim* (the earliest scholars) can refer both to the commentators of his period and to the rabbis of the talmudic period; compare in particular the following examples from his commentary: “interpretations of earlier scholars” (Genesis 1:1); “those who preceded me [*ha-rishonim mi-meni*] did not understand” (Exodus 3:11), and see Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 69–70, 102–3.

27. Cf. Kamin, *Rashi*, 268, and see Mordechai Z. Cohen, “Hirhurim ‘al heker ha-munaḥ *peshuto shel mikra*’ be-teḥilat ha-me’ah ha-‘esrim ve-‘aḥat,” in “*Le-yashev peshuto shel mikra*”: *‘Asufat meḥ-karim be-parshanut ha-mikra*”, ed. Sara Japhet and Eran Viezel (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2011), 5–58.

28. It is clear that this rule does not apply to one who rejects the exegetical status of the *derash* method. See below with regard to Ibn Ezra.

29. Such is the criterion for choosing midrashim, ‘*aggadah meyashevet*, set by Rashi. Kamin, *Rashi*, esp. 209–62; and most recently Viezel, “Secret,” 211–17.

30. See Japhet, *Rashbam le-Shir Ha-shirim*, 86–87.

31. Rashbam's methodological awareness and his fine distinction between the *peshat* and *derash* methods are emphasized in all of the research. His methodological statements have received intense scrutiny. See for example, Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 98–109. Unlike Rashbam, Ibn Ezra rejected the exegetical

Since Rashbam was aware that Rashi frequently interpreted according to the *derash* method, it is not surprising that his comments refuting Rashi’s commentary reflect the fundamental differences between the two methods. Sometimes, Rashbam indicates that Rashi interpreted according to *derash*, while he himself was interpreting according to *peshat*; alternatively, Rashbam acknowledges that Rashi interpreted according to *peshat*, but did not pay due attention to one of its exegetical parameters (language, syntax, narrative context, and so forth), and as a result his own *peshat* interpretation was preferable. But frequently Rashbam’s polemical comments regarding Rashi’s commentary go beyond these templates of criticism and reflect a more complex methodological perspective. Four representative examples will suffice to illustrate this point:

1. Genesis 28:12: “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” Rashi, following Bereshit Rabbah, made the fine distinction that the verse first indicated that the angels went up the ladder and only afterwards that they went down it; from this he deduced that the angels were on earth.³² Rashbam clarified that “according to the plain meaning of Scripture, the fact that ‘going up’ is written before ‘going down’ requires no explanation, because people usually mention ascending before descending.” The words “according to the plain meaning of Scripture” (*le-fi ha-peshat*) were thus intended to clarify to his readers that Rashi’s commentary followed the *derash* method, not the *peshat*.
2. Exodus 12:7: “They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel [*ha-mashkof*] of the houses in which they eat it.” Rashi derived the word *ha-mashkof* from the Aramaic root *shin-kuf-peh*, known from rabbinic Aramaic, whose meaning is parallel to the Hebrew root *het-bet-tet* (meaning “to bang”): “*Ha-mashkof*—it is the upper [part] against

validity of the *derash* method. He held that the aim of rabbinic homilies was to instruct the reader and preserve content that was included in the oral tradition, not to interpret the Bible. Uriel Simon and Josef Cohen, *R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: Yesod mora’ ve-sod Torah* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2007), 40–41; Eran Viezel, “*Ha-te’amim* ’elohiyim ve-*ha-milot* shel Moshe: Hashkafato shel R. Avraham ibn Ezra bi-she’elat *helko shel Moshe bi-khtivat ha-Torah*, mekoroteha u-maskanoteha,” *Tarbiz* 80 (2012): 407. While Rashbam and Rashi posited separate levels of meaning for the biblical text (*peshat* and *derash*) in which neither detracted from the other, Ibn Ezra posited one single point of truth (cf. “If truth be compared to the central point of a circle” in his introduction to the Torah). At greater length, and on the intellectual-cultural influence at the root of this difference, see Sara Kamin, “Affinities between Jewish and Christian Exegesis in Twelfth-Century Northern France,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1988), 141–55; Mordechai Z. Cohen, “Makor sefaradi ’efshari li-tefusat *peshuto shel mikra* ’ezel Rashi,” in *Rashi: Demuto ve-yezirato*, ed. Sara Japhet and Avraham Grossman (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2008), 358–66.

32. Rashi: “Ascending first, and afterwards descending. The angels who escorted him in the Land do not go out of the Land, so they ascended to the sky, and the angels of outside the Land descended to escort him”; cf. “Those angels who escort a man in ‘*Erez Yisra’el* do not escort him outside the Land. Thus ‘ascending’ refers to those who had escorted him in the Land, while ‘descending’ refers to those who were to escort him outside the Land” (Bereshit Rabbah 68:12 [ed. Theodor-Albeck, 789]).

which the door bangs when they close it, in Old French *lintel*. [The term] *shkifa* [means] ‘banging,’ as, ‘the sound of a rustling leaf’ [Leviticus 26:36] —*de-shakif* [Onkelos].”³³ Rashbam, in contrast, derived the word *mashkof* from the Hebrew root *shin-kuf-peh* (meaning “to look,” *lehaskif*): “*Ha-mashkof*—The upper threshold that is visible to all at the entrance of the house [etymologically it means “looking out”], as ‘Abimelech king of the Philistines, *looking out* of the window’ [Genesis 26:8].” Rashbam also added the following comment: “One who explains it as having the sense of being the part of the frame that ‘butts’ against the door must bring a comparable example with this meaning from the Torah or the Prophets—in Hebrew.” In his comment Rashbam seems to suggest that while Rashi interpreted according to *peshat*, his interpretation failed to take into account the important distinction between Biblical Hebrew, rabbinic Hebrew, and Aramaic.³⁴

3. Genesis 49:16: “Dan shall govern his people, as one [*ke-’ahad*] of the tribes of Israel.” Rashi identified Jacob’s words to Dan with Samson and read the word *ke-’ahad* “as one” as part of the predicate—*ke-’ehad*: “*As one of the tribes of Israel*—All Israel will be as one with him, and he will vindicate them all. [Jacob] prophesied this prophecy about Samson.” Rashbam took issue with this interpretation, saying: “He who interprets this verse as referring to Samson has absolutely no understanding of the profundities of the plain meaning of Scripture. Did Jacob intend to prophesy about one single man who fell into the hands of the Philistines and they ‘gouged out his eyes’ [Judges 16:21] and he died among the Philistines in an unhappy manner? God forbid, God forbid!” While it is unclear whether Rashi thought that the verse referred to Samson according to the *peshat* or the *derash*,³⁵ there is little doubt that Rashbam assessed Rashi’s interpretation according to the analytical tools of the *peshat* method, arguing that in Genesis 49 Jacob prophesizes the good fortune of each of the tribes,³⁶ and therefore he cannot accept the possibility that these words refer to Samson, “one single man” whose fortune is not good.
4. Genesis 33:18: “And Jacob came [to] Shalem [a] city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city.” Rashi, following the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 33b, interpreted the word *shalem* as describing the personal condition of Jacob, and accordingly interpreted the word *shechem* as the name of a city: “*Shalem*—intact bodily, for he was cured of his limp, intact regarding his money, for he did not lose

33. Cf. Rashi’s comments on Genesis 41:6; Leviticus 26:36.

34. Cf. Japhet, *Dor dor*, 159–60.

35. The fact that in a midrash this verse is connected to Samson (e.g. B. Sotah 10a; Bereshit Rabbah 97 [ed. Theodor-Albeck, 1222]) does not help in this case. It is not clear if Rashi was influenced here by the midrash (his language reflects dependence on Targum Onkelos, not the midrash) and as we have seen above, the source of the commentary does not necessarily indicate the exegetical methodology.

36. Lockshin, *Perush*, 159 n. 80.

anything as a result of that gift [which he gave to Esau], intact in his Torah, that while he was in the house of Laban he did not forget what he had learned. *City of Shechem*—the word ‘ir [city] is equivalent to *le-‘ir* [to the city of]. Similarly we have ‘So the two of them went Bethlehem’ [Ruth 1:19]—to Bethlehem.” But Rashbam declared that *shalem* was the name of the city of the man named Shechem mentioned in Genesis 34: “*City of Shechem*—Shechem’s city, similarly, ‘Now Heshbon was ‘ir *Sihon*—the city of Sihon king of the Amorites’ [Numbers 21:26], as it is written, ‘Shechem son of Hamor, the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her’ [Genesis 34:2].” Rashbam rejected Rashi’s commentary on the basis of a recurring pattern that he discovered in the Bible: “He who interprets *shechem* as the name of a city is mistaken, for one never finds anywhere a phrase like ‘ir *Sihon* or ‘ir *Yerushalayim*; the word *ha-‘ir* follows the name of the city [cf. e.g. Jonah 1:2: *ha-‘ir ha-gedolah*].” He also rejected Rashi’s interpretation based on one of its components: the idea that Jacob was “intact regarding his money” fits neither with the style of the biblical text nor with the details of the story: “Whoever understands *shalem* in this verse as meaning ‘with his learning undiminished and his money undiminished’ is mistaken, for that is not proper biblical style. Also, why should the text have to write such a thing? Is it necessary to write this just because of the diminution caused by the present that Jacob gave Esau?” Even if Rashi thought that according to the *peshat* the purpose of the word *shalem* was to describe Jacob,³⁷ it is more difficult to suppose that the three aspects mentioned in the midrash (physical, spiritual, and financial well-being) could all be derived from the straightforward meaning of the text. In this case Rashbam evaluated a *derash* commentary (or at least various details based on *derash*) on the basis of the analytical tools of the *peshat* method.

These complex examples reveal that Rashbam was aware of the essential differences between the *peshat* and *derash* methods, and knew that Rashi often interpreted according to the *derash*. In the first example, he was explicit in signaling that Rashi’s commentary was according to *derash*, not *peshat*, and in the second example, that Rashi’s *peshat* commentary was inadequate because he had not considered all of the textual features of the text. Rashbam sometimes challenged Rashi’s commentary in strong language, judging his *derash* commentary on the basis of *peshat* criteria, effectively presenting it as a failed attempt to interpret according to *peshat* (examples 3 and, especially, 4). If all we knew about Rashbam’s commentary were polemical comments such as these, we would conclude that Rashbam did not understand Rashi’s exegetical methodology at all and was not aware of the utility of assessing a *derash* commentary on the basis of the principles of *peshat*.³⁸

37. Cf. JPS: “Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem.” See Jubilees 30:1, which reflects both possible meanings of the word: “He went up safely [*be-shalom*] to Shalem, which is on the east side of Shechem”; James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 190.

38. For a similar deductive method applied to a different matter see Kamin, *Rashi*, 265. Sarah Japhet points out that in his commentary to Job, Rashbam disagrees only with Rashi’s *peshat*

Several additional factors further complicate the picture of Rashbam's approach to Rashi's Torah commentary. At times Rashbam seems to indicate that his commentary was a completion of Rashi's commentary. In his commentary to Exodus 28:6, he wrote: "*They shall make the ephod*—My grandfather explained [this portion]. However, I will explain the items in ways that were never explained before." Similarly, in his introduction to his interpretation of Exodus 25 (the weekly Torah portion *Terumah*): "As to the periscopes of the tabernacle, and breastplate and the ephod—if I am brief there, they may be found in the commentaries of Rabbi Solomon, my maternal grandfather, of blessed memory." Likewise in the opening of his commentary to the book of Leviticus: "There are many laws [in this book]. Scholars should study the interpretations of my grandfather, for I will elaborate only on passages where the plain meaning of the text requires explanation."³⁹ However, a thorough examination of Rashbam's commentary suggests that its purpose, ultimately, was not necessarily to complete Rashi's commentary. Rashbam's commentary is a detailed and integral work that stands on its own. Even though a large part of Rashbam's commentary challenges Rashi's interpretation, it is not dependent on it. In fact, the reader does not need Rashi's commentary to understand Rashbam or to use it to accompany the reading of the Torah.⁴⁰

Rashbam encouraged his readers to study both his commentary and Rashi's because this simultaneous reading would enable them to understand the meaning of the verse according to both the *peshat* and the *derash*. In his words: "Whoever is attentive to the word of our Creator, let him not stray from the explanations of my grandfather Solomon, and not budge from them. For most of the laws and midrashim in them are close to the straightforward meaning of the texts,⁴¹ or can be derived from superfluous expressions or variations in the language. It is best that you grasp what I have explained without letting go of the other."⁴² This passage is

commentaries and not his commentaries according to the *derash* method (Japhet, *Rashbam le-Iyov*, 94). This is a very important point, indicating a development in Rashbam's commentary; this is not the only development revealed by a comparison of his commentary on the Torah to his commentaries to other books of the Bible; cf. Japhet, *Rashbam le-Shir ha-shirim*, 63, 85–86.

39. Cf. also Rashbam's comment on Numbers 34:2, "My grandfather, our teacher, explained [this text] and drew [maps of] the boundaries. Still I will explain in brief."

40. Compare: "The commentary [of Rashbam] is an independent and unique work. It was not written as a 'continuation' or 'completion' or 'reaction' to the commentary of Rashi. His commentary was an independent work known for its uniqueness in methodology, in content and in outlook"; Japhet, *Rashbam le-Shir ha-shirim*, 65. These words, clarifying the relationship between Rashbam's and Rashi's commentaries to Song of Songs, are true also with regard to the relationship between their commentaries to the Torah. See Japhet, *Rashbam le-Iyov*, 78.

41. In the manuscript seen by David Rosin there was a space of three words in which he added "u-me-yituram 'o me-shinui" ("from superfluous expressions or variations in the language") according to Rashbam's commentary to Genesis 1:1. David Rosin, *Perush ha-Rashbam ha-shalem 'al ha-Torah* (Breslau: Schottlaender, 1881), 144.

42. Cf. Ecclesiastes 7:18: "It is best that you grasp the one without letting go of the other, for one who fears God will do his duty by both." Itamar Kislef has argued that this statement is the continuation of the introductory statement at the beginning of Leviticus and is not Rashbam's summary of his commentary on the book of Exodus, as indicated in the printed editions of the commentary; Kislef, "Ve-

problematic in several ways. It will suffice to say that despite Rashi’s strong devotion to midrashim (particularly in the legal sections of the Torah) his commentary is not a complete, seamless fusion of the Written and Oral Laws, nor is it possible to see his commentary as a collection of midrashim comprehensively expressing the spirit of the oral tradition.⁴³ It would have been more logical, and more predictable, for Rashbam to have encouraged his readers to study his commentary along with the midrashim on each verse, a combination that would allow them to reflect on the meaning of the verse from the perspective of both *peshat* and *derash*.

These two points raise another difficulty. Rashbam’s commentary includes dozens of cases in which his interpretation is identical or strikingly similar to Rashi’s.⁴⁴ If Rashbam’s commentary was to be a completion of Rashi’s, there would be no benefit or logic to these repetitions. Similarly, the repetitions are of no value if the reader had to read through both commentaries in order to cover all the relevant interpretations of the verse.⁴⁵ Above all, Rashbam’s comments

‘asher sam libo li-devar yozrenu: Ha-heged ha-metodologi shel Rashbam bi-tehilat perusho le-sefer Vayikra’ u-terumato le-havanat yaḥaso shel Rashbam le-perusho shel Rashi,” *Tarbiz* 73 (2004): 225–31. His explanation appears to be correct.

43. See Maurice Liber, *Rashi*, trans. Adele Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945), 120, 124–25. As is known, Rashi occasionally even interpreted contrary to the Halakhah (Jewish law); see, e.g. Samuel Poznański, *Kommentar zu Ezechiel und den XII kleinen Propheten* (Warschau: Druck von H. Eppelberg, 1913), xvi.

44. Approximately 30 percent of Rashbam’s commentary! Lockshin, *Perush*, 32. So, for example, from a comparison of their commentaries to Genesis, chapters 1 and chapters 18–36, there are approximately 100 overlapping commentaries; Aharon Carmel, “Ha-perushim ha-ḥofefim: ‘Iyyun ba-yaḥas she-ben perushei Rashi ve-Rashbam la-Torah” (Master’s thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2008), 9. (It must be noted that Carmel defines “overlapping commentaries” broadly and with flexibility.) This phenomenon has sparked a controversy among scholars. Some argue that Rashbam copied Rashi’s commentaries into his commentary (word for word or with slight changes), while others argue that the source of the overlapping commentaries is Rashbam, and over time scribes added them to Rashi’s commentary. Compare, among others, the explanations of the following scholars: Rosin, *Perush ha-Rashbam*, xxviii–xxix; Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 229; Japhet, *Rashbam le-‘Iyov*, 80; Lockshin, *Perush*, 33; Mordechai Sabato, “Perush Rashbam la-Torah,” *Maḥanayim* 3 (1992): 123. Recently, Carmel (“Ha-perushim ha-ḥofefim”) devoted research specifically to the phenomenon of the overlapping commentaries and concluded, based on dozens of examples, that most of the overlapping commentaries do not entirely overlap—rather, Rashbam copied them from Rashi’s commentary while adapting and improving them.

45. These later difficulties are solved if we accept the theory that the source of all the identical commentaries is Rashbam’s commentary, and anonymous scribes added them to Rashi’s commentary. In my opinion, we may surmise that over time passages were added to Rashi’s commentary from Rashbam’s commentary, but I find it difficult to accept that this is the only explanation for all of the identical commentaries. As I will explain below, Rashbam wrote his commentary to the Torah about seventy years after Rashi wrote his, and by that point there were already tens (if not hundreds!) of manuscripts of Rashi’s commentary. Therefore, we can expect to find in the chain of extant manuscripts very clear signs of this systematic activity of additions from Rashbam’s commentary, similar to the nine examples Touitou gave. (Touitou has noted that he has a few other examples [*Ha-peshatot*, 237]; however there are many dozens of identical, or very similar, commentaries, in which no sign of scribal tampering was left on the manuscript.)

that his intention was to complete Rashi's commentary, or that the reader should read both commentaries, clash with his polemical comments against Rashi, especially those comments that imply that Rashi failed in his exegetical mission.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO CHARACTERIZE RASHBAM'S APPROACH TO RASHI'S COMMENTARY

Several scholars have suggested that, in accordance with Rashbam's explicit assertions, his commentary should be viewed as a completion of Rashi's.⁴⁶ Some scholars even argue that Rashbam's commentary was not an independent work but rather a series of notes in the margins of Rashi's commentary.⁴⁷

Others have suggested more complex explanations for the relationship between the two scholars, arguing that there was a specific methodology to Rashbam's references to Rashi's commentary—in places where Rashbam wanted to be brief he referred his readers to additional information in Rashi's commentary, or he referred them to Rashi's commentary, because, in his opinion, Rashi connected the verses to Halakhah.⁴⁸ These suggestions have merit but can explain only some of the passages linking Rashbam's commentary to Rashi's.

What seems to have been most disconcerting to many scholars is Rashbam's sharp comments about Rashi. Some have rejected them outright and suggested that in some cases Rashbam argued with another commentator and not with Rashi, or that scribes had added the comments.⁴⁹ Others have attempted to minimize the acerbity of the comments by emphasizing that Rashbam valued Rashi's work, and that his critical comments were minor methodological disagreements.⁵⁰ It is clear that there is no reason for these exaggerated efforts.

46. Among the scholars of the previous generation this theory is most identified with Moshe Greenberg, *Parshanut ha-mikra' ha-yehudit: Pirke mavo'* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1983), 77; Greenberg, "Ha-yahas ben perush Rashi le-perush Rashbam la-Torah," in *Sefer Isaac 'Aryeh Seeligmann*, ed. Yair Zakovitch and Alexander Rofé (Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein's, 1983), 559–67.

47. Eliezer Meir Lifshitz, *Rashi: R. Shlomo Isaaci* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1966), 109, wrote: "Apparently he wrote his commentary note by note to himself and perhaps in the margins of a copy of Rashi's commentary, as a kind of completion of the commentary." This theory is an elaboration of the idea (no longer accepted) that commentators wrote their commentaries in the margins of the biblical text and not as separate works. With regard to Rashi and Rashbam, see Abraham Berliner, *Raschi der Kommentar des Salomo B. Isak über den Pentateuch* (Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1905), x, xvi; Rosin, *R. Samuel*, 91; Rosin, *Perush ha-Rashbam*, xxxv. Recently, Hanna Liss, *Creating Fictional Worlds: Peshat-Exegesis and Narrativity in Rashbam's Commentary on the Torah* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), especially 35–45, has connected Rashbam's commentary to the *glossae* of the twelfth century; in a certain way this theory challenges the concept of the cohesion and integrity of Rashbam's commentary.

48. Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 70–74; Sabato, "Perush," 112; Kislev, "Ve-'asher," 232–36; Lockshin, *Perush*, 32.

49. See above for Rashbam's commentary on Genesis 45:28, 49:9.

50. For example, Ezra Zion Melamed, *Mefarshet ha-mikra'* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), 486, calls these comments by Rashbam "the language of adolescence" and thus hints that they are not really serious. On this line of thought, see also Liss, *Creating Fictional*, 202. David Rosin, *Perush ha-Rashbam*, xxviii, emphasizes that "it did not occur to Rashbam to lower the prestige of Rashi's

Still others have suggested that Rashbam’s polemical comments towards Rashi stem from Rashbam’s exegetical objective to emphasize that Rashi’s commentary does not represent the simple meaning of the biblical text.⁵¹ Although this theory is correct, it also cannot fully explain the complexity of Rashbam’s treatment of Rashi’s commentary.

Most of the scholarly references to the question of Rashbam’s approach to Rashi’s commentary have focused on describing the relevant passages and presenting them side by side without attempting to provide a comprehensive explanation for them.⁵² This approach is not surprising. The textual data before us does not lead to a systematic, comprehensive solution. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that we are dealing with Rashbam, the greatest of the *peshat* commentators in the Middle Ages, whose commentary is noted for being exceptionally methodical for its time.⁵³ As scholars have emphasized, his exegetical solutions and attention to the linguistic and literary features of the text reveal a systematic way of thought and a cohesive analytical approach. His approach to the commentary of Rashi, an approach that among other things has been called “complex,”⁵⁴ “ambiguous,”⁵⁵ “multi-faceted,”⁵⁶ “surprising,”⁵⁷ “ambivalent,” and “puzzling,”⁵⁸ is therefore atypical of both his commentary as a whole and his exegetical principles.

In their search for a unifying logic or line of thought (like a hidden key) in Rashbam’s complex commentaries, scholars have been hesitant to use extratextual data to explain the texts, except in cases when such factors can be identified

commentary or to remove it from the heart of his readers.” Similarly, Pinchas Ne’eman, *Rashi mefaresh ha-Torah* (Jerusalem: Masada, 1946), 198, emphasizes that these comments by Rashbam “clearly did not come from a position of contempt [toward Rashi], heaven forbid!” Isaac Avinery, *Hekhal Rashi* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1979), 1:31: “[Rashbam] would disagree a little with the words of his grandfather and argue with him about the need for interpreting more according to the *peshat* and less according to the *derash*.” Cf. Hayim Yosef David Azulai (Hida), *Shem ha-gedolim* (Jerusalem: Ra’am, 1994), s.v. “Rashbam,” 200.

51. E.g. Lockshin, *Perush*, 32.

52. E.g., Rosin, “R. Samuel,” 68–71; Poznański, “Kommentar zu Ezechiel,” xlv–xlv; Melamed, “Mefarshe ha-mikra,” 484–87; Morris Bernard Berger, “The Torah Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1982), 195–208; Avraham Grossman, “The School of Literal Jewish Exegesis in Northern France,” ed. Magne Sæbø, *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000), 2:359–60.

53. Systematic methodology is the line of thought characteristic of modern research, whereas the medieval sages did not always feel obligated to remain absolutely faithful to a specific methodology; see Aron Iakovlevich Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. George L. Campbell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 10–11.

54. Japhet and Salters, *Rashbam le-Kohelet*, 50 n. 176.

55. Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 68.

56. Carmel, “Ha-perushim,” 8.

57. Kislev, “Ve-’asher,” 233.

58. Lockshin, *Perush*, 32.

historically as having influenced the author.⁵⁹ For example, various emphases in Rashi's and Rashbam's commentaries, and even certain deviations from their standard methodologies, can be better understood in light of Jewish-Christian polemic.⁶⁰ The influence of Christian polemic on Rashi and Rashbam's deliberations may reveal a recurring pattern where a system had previously seemed absent.

Very different and much more complicated are those cases in which the external factor influencing the writer cannot be identified historically because it involves personal and emotional aspects. Although the assumption that a scholar is liable to understand the latent and unconscious motives of the writer better than the writer does himself is not a new idea,⁶¹ scholars hesitate to consider personal aspects and psychological motives as a basis for textual analysis, judging that these are merely reflections of an individual and subjective inner life, rather than concrete factors that have shaped the text.⁶² To overcome such a reluctance, it may be useful to pursue a theoretical model that demonstrates that the complexity of this case is analogous to other relationships between writers that display a common pattern of behavior, and that the personal and subjective perspective, in part unconscious, ultimately has its own logic.

"ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE"

Rashbam's approach to Rashi's Torah commentary, both along general lines and in most of its details, conforms to the model of "the anxiety of influence" proposed by the American theoretician Harold Bloom, who portrayed the connections between writers as relationships with oedipal characteristics, sometimes using the Freudian expression "family romances."⁶³ Several necessary historical details and

59. My conclusions here relate to the scholarly intuitions of those researching the texts and not to the theoretical aspect of hermeneutics in its various branches; therefore, when I claim that scholars usually refrain from using extratextual data unless they are identifiable historically, I do not argue for the possibility of complete neutrality on the part of the scholar, as it was acceptable to claim before Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*. For this naïve approach, see for example Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914), 27: "To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions."

60. E.g. Grossman, *Hakhme Zarfat*, 477–80; Lockshin, *Perush*, 532, s.v. "pulmus 'anti-nozri."

61. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 396, §370: "When we compare the thoughts that an author expresses about a subject, in ordinary speech as well as in writings, it is not at all unusual to find that we understand him even better than he understood himself, since he may not have determined his concept sufficiently and hence sometimes spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention."

62. Cf. Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 42–43: "Everyone knows today that human beings do not always, or perhaps even habitually, act from motives of which they are fully conscious or which they are willing to avow; and to exclude insight into unconscious or unavowed motives is surely a way of going about one's work with one eye willfully shut. This is, however, what, according to some people, historians ought to do."

63. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). For a biographic-scholarly examination of Harold Bloom's research and its intellectual sources, see the recently published book by Alistair Heys, *The Anatomy of Bloom: Harold Bloom and the Study of Influence and Anxiety* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). The works of Bloom have also received much attention in the field of Judaic studies; among others see the following (published

textual features can be added to this model. Although Bloom dealt primarily with the literary influence between poets,⁶⁴ his book and subsequent research are filled with quotations and examples from literature, plays, and philosophy, and it is clear that he did not limit the model of the “anxiety of influence” to a specific genre.⁶⁵ Bloom aspired to create a universal theory of the creative mind and to present a timeless model, independent of historical, social, or cultural factors.⁶⁶ Bloom’s model can successfully explain the network of complex connections between one artist and another, connections between poets, writers, and playwrights, connections between theorists and thinkers,⁶⁷ and connections between biblical commentators.⁶⁸

According to Bloom, a later writer (“ephebe”) was recognized by his aggressive and competitive attitude toward an earlier writer (“precursor”) or literary work. The later writer is like a son who challenges his father (or fathers) yet at the same time, against his will, remains in the artistic domain of his father. In reaction to this unbearable state of affairs, the later writer is forced to “misread” the works of the father.⁶⁹ The “strong father,” from the strength of his position and the fact that he exists earlier in time, restrains, paralyzes, and stifles new voices. The son tries to appropriate the work of the father and to rewrite it, and at the

just after his book and more recently): Cynthia Ozick, “Judaism and Harold Bloom,” *Commentary* 67 (1979): 43–51; Inge-Birgitte Siegumfeldt, “From Misprision to Travesty: Harold Bloom’s Use of Rabbinic Sources,” *Nordisk Judaistik* 24 (2003): 167–85. I am using the general term “oedipal” despite Bloom’s explicit objection; see the introduction to the second edition of *Influence* (New York: Oxford University, 1997), “Preface: The Anguish of Contamination,” xxii, and see also Bloom, *Poetry of Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 52, and cf. James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth, 1959), 9:235–42.

64. This is clear from the subtitle of the book. Bloom continued to discuss the influences between artists in his later works, including his three following books, which in a way can be seen as continuations and revisions of *Influence*; Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1975); “Poetry and Repression.”

65. Thus, among other things, he utilizes the model brilliantly to clarify the connection of Jacques Lacan to Freud (Bloom, *Influence*, 67) or Pascal’s relationship to Montaigne (Ibid., 56); see also his article “Freud and the Sublime: A Catastrophe Theory of Creativity,” in *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 91–118.

66. While to some extent, in *Influence* Bloom limited his model to writers from the Enlightenment and later, beginning from his book *A Map of Misreading* he turned it into a permanent and necessary model; this change is emphasized especially in the introduction that Bloom added to the expanded second edition of *Influence*.

67. So too, among others, the connections between Bloom himself and his precursors; see Heys, “The Anatomy of Bloom.”

68. I am not aware of any references to Bloom’s model in research on medieval exegesis. There is no consensus among scholars on the efficacy of the model in describing the connection between rabbinic literature and the Bible; cf. David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 37; Joshua Levinson, *Ha-sipur she-lo supar: ‘Amanut ha-sipur ha-mikra’i ha-murhav be-midrash ha-zahal* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 2, 30, 218.

69. “Misreading” is not unique to the act of reading alone, rather the reference is to the process of revision and rewriting of the earlier work. There is no negative connotation to the act.

same time to pretend that he is not under his constant influence. He tries to convince others that the words of the father need a new and strengthened realization, his realization. The creation of the son, as it were, contains a process that revises the creation of the father, who had acted properly until a certain point, the point from which the son took over.

The complex relationship of the later writer with the earlier writer or literary work is expressed in several ways (“revisionary movements”)⁷⁰ that complement each other, sometimes contradict each other, and share an element of self-defense against influence.⁷¹ Bloom proposed to consolidate these methods into six that “seem to be minimal and essential”⁷² and he dedicated each of them its own chapter in his book and in subsequent discussions in his other works.⁷³

“ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE” IN RASHBAM’S COMMENTARY

According to Bloom, the later writer aspires to revise the work of his precursor, to actualize and intensify the direction in which he was going until, for various reasons, he left the correct path.⁷⁴ This idea is clearly and decisively expressed in Rashbam’s commentary to Genesis 37:2:

Rabbi Solomon, my mother’s father, who illumined the eyes of all the Diaspora, who wrote commentaries on the Torah, Prophets, and Hagiographa, set out to explain the plain meaning of Scripture. However I, Samuel, son of his son-in-law, Meir—may the memory of the righteous be a blessing—[often] disputed [his interpretations] with him to his face. He admitted to

70. Bloom, *Influence*, 10.

71. Cf. the introduction to the second edition of *Influence*, xxiii: “‘Influence’ is a metaphor, one that implicates a matrix of relationships—imagistic, temporal, spiritual, psychological—all of them ultimately defensive in their nature.”

72. Bloom, *Influence*, 11.

73. Bloom named these techniques (“revisionary ratios”), as follows: *Clinamen*: the ephebe reads the works of the precursor in a way that appropriates (“misreading”) and repudiates (“misprision”) it. *Tessera*: the ephebe completes the work of the precursor, adopts his terminology, and uses them in a different, supposedly more accurate, way. *Kenosis*: the ephebe weakens himself and thus apparently cuts himself off from the influence of the precursor. *Daemonization*: the ephebe adopts a certain characteristic from the precursor but does not identify the source of the characteristic with the precursor, and so weakens him. *Askesis*: The ephebe detracts from his achievements and abilities in order to distinguish himself from the precursor. Indirectly, he also weakens the precursor. *Apo-phrades*: the ephebe appears as the one who wrote the characteristic work of the precursor. Among the six methods outlined by Bloom there are distinct points of overlap, and his discussions include dozens of quotations and examples appropriate to more than one method. Because I am discussing only one relationship (Rashbam’s relation to Rashi’s commentary on the Torah) the texts I refer to are limited in their scope, and preserving Bloom’s original order of discussion would cause needless repetition and encumber the flow of argument. For the sake of clarity, the material is discussed here in one unit, rather than along the rigid division into six distinct methods.

74. E.g. “A corrective movement [...] which implies that the precursor poem [i.e. Rashi’s commentary or methodology] went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem [i.e. Rashbam’s commentary or methodology] moves,” Bloom, *Influence*, 14.

me that, if only he had had the time, he would have written new [revised] commentaries, based on the insights into the plain meaning of Scripture that are newly thought of day by day.

Rashbam cited the words of Rashi because he realized that his own exegetical method, which was innovative and very different from Rashi’s approach, needed legitimization.⁷⁵ In fact, Rashbam’s exegetical method was not always understood properly and his commentary was seen as a challenge to the Jewish legal tradition.⁷⁶ From Rashi’s words to Rashbam, it is possible to conclude that Rashi himself was unable to realize his exegetical goals and that it was he, Rashbam, who realized and fulfilled them.

The phrase “the plain meanings of Scripture that are newly thought of day by day” expresses with utmost clarity the *peshat* method’s “principle of relativity”: the rules of the *peshat* method do not change, but the knowledge of the commentators becomes more sophisticated and therefore there is a reason to go back and interpret the Bible again and again.⁷⁷ As we have noted, *peshat* is only one aspect, sometimes marginal, of Rashi’s Torah commentary, and it is clear that Rashi’s exegetical aim was not to interpret according to *peshat* alone. However, in his words to Rashbam (if in fact he said them) there is no hint that a significant part of his commentary is based on classical midrashim and, in fact, on the *derash* method. If one were to evaluate Rashi’s commentary in light of the words that Rashbam quotes him as saying, one would conclude that Rashi began to interpret according to the *peshat* method, but, for some reason, constantly deviated from it. Rashbam’s commentary would therefore be viewed as the natural and desired extension of Rashi’s commentary, because it continues, as it were, from the point at which Rashi deviated from the correct path.

It is possible to understand Rashbam’s declarations that he intended only to complete Rashi’s commentary in the same line of thought. At the heart of these declarations stands the feeling of the “son” who remains at all times, against his will, in the domain of the “forefather,” with no way of escape. This is a psychological point of departure rather than a structured methodological principle, as

75. Cf. e.g., Lockshin, *Perush*, 105 n. 18.

76. Compare Ibn Ezra’s strong words regarding Rashbam’s suggestion that the word “day” in the story of creation begins with the rising of the sun. Rashbam on Genesis 1:4–5, 8, 14, 31, and Ibn Ezra, “Letter of the Shabbath,” in Michael Friedländer, “Ibn Ezra in England,” in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 2 (1894–95): 63. Or Joseph Bechor-Shor’s harsh words on Numbers 12:6–9 concerning Rashbam’s commentary to Exodus 13:9—“because, according to the *peshat*, there is no reference to tefillin in the verse.” For a cynical abuse of this commentary in the period of the Enlightenment, see Meir Ish-Shalom, “Tefillin shel Rashbam,” *Beth Talmud* 3 (1882): 223–24.

77. In other words, the linguistic understanding improves, the sensitivity to literary issues sharpens and so forth. On the “principle of relativity” of the *peshat* method see e.g., Uriel Simon, *Bakesh shalom ve-radfehu: She’elot ha-sha’ah be’or ha-mikra’—ha-mikra be’or she’elot ha-sha’ah* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Aharonoth, 2002), 41; Japhet, *Rashbam le-Iyov*, 95–98; Japhet, *Rashbam le-Shir ha-shirim*, 86–87.

suggested by several scholars, and therefore it is not surprising that it left a clear mark on the commentary, although this mark is not systematic or consistent.

According to Bloom, the strong tension in the relationship of the later writer to his precursor is intricately expressed in two slightly contradictory stages. The later writer appropriates and rewrites the words of his precursor, but at the same time, the later writer does not acknowledge that he is under the constant influence of the precursor (and possibly is not entirely aware how much he is influenced by him). This complexity is clearly expressed in Rashbam's attitude to Rashi. Appropriation and rewriting are apparent in his extensive use of Rashi's language without declaring its source. I do not refer to the dozens of cases in which Rashbam's commentary is identical or strikingly similar to Rashi's, but rather to the tens, and perhaps hundreds, of instances in which Rashbam's commentary is entirely original and yet composed of Rashi's idiomatic choice of words.⁷⁸ This appropriation and rewriting reach their apogee in those places in which Rashbam uses Rashi's language in order to present a conclusion contrary to Rashi's, sometimes in an openly polemical manner. This is the case in several of the examples mentioned earlier. In his commentary to Genesis 49:16 Rashbam writes: "*Dan shall govern his people*—will exact the vengeance of his people [...] as it is written 'The LORD will exact vengeance [*yadin*] for His people ... He will avenge the blood of his servants and wreak vengeance on his foes' [Deuteronomy 32:36, 43]." These words are a paraphrase of Rashi's commentary on the verse: "*Dan shall govern his people*—he will avenge the vengeance of his people from the Philistines, as 'For the LORD will vindicate His people' [Deuteronomy 32:36]." However, in his commentary, Rashbam expresses his disagreement with Rashi in strong language. Similarly, in his commentary to Genesis 33:18, Rashbam cites the following proof-text: "Similarly, 'So the two of them went [to] Bethlehem' [Ruth 1:19]." These words are taken from Rashi's commentary: "Similarly we have 'So the two of them went Bethlehem' [Ruth 1:19]—to Bethlehem." As we have seen, also in this case, Rashbam strongly disagrees with Rashi and explains the root of the argument using Rashi's language: "for he did not lose anything as a result of that *doron* [i.e. gift which he gave to Esau]"—"Is it necessary to write this just because of the diminution caused by the *doron* that Jacob gave Esau?" This phenomenon reveals exactly that tension described by Bloom, in which the later writer adopts and rewrites the words of his predecessor, and yet remains all the while under his influence.

The appropriation and the rewriting are expressed in the later writer's use of his precursor's terminology, while giving it a different meaning, purportedly more precise and accurate.⁷⁹ The extensive use that Rashbam makes of the linguistic root *peh-shin-tet* [the root of the word *peshat*] in its various declensions can serve as an example of this fascinating phenomenon. As scholars have concluded,

78. Several scholars called attention to this phenomenon, e.g. Lockshin, *Perush*, 30; Lockshin demonstrates it in dozens of places throughout his commentary on Rashbam's commentary.

79. Bloom, *Influence*, 14: "A poet antithetically completes his precursor by [...] retain[ing] its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough."

in contrast to Rashi, for whom the meaning of the term *peshat* is not yet “defined and formulated in his mind,” “in the commentary of Rashbam, the grandson of Rashi, we find [...] the use of exact terminology in all that belongs to the category of *peshat*.”⁸⁰ The identical terminology serves as a touchstone for scholars in comparing between Rashi and Rashbam. Thus, that which was “unripe,” “unclear,” and “intuitive” in the grandfather’s commentary became “defined” and “formulated” in the grandson’s commentary.⁸¹ These assessments correspond to the pattern of activity of the “son” in Bloom’s model, who attempts to revise the work of the “father” in order to actualize and intensify the direction in which the father was progressing until, for various reasons, he deviated from the correct path.

Rashbam’s frequent use of the root *peh-shin-tet* reflects a further stage described by Bloom: the later writer adopts a certain characteristic of his precursor but traces this characteristic to some vague ancient source, rather than to the earlier writer. In this way the later writer minimizes the accomplishments and unique contributions of the precursor, thus cutting himself off from his influence.⁸² As it is known, the root *peh-shin-tet* is repeated only a few times in rabbinic literature and its methodological meaning there is unclear.⁸³ In both of his more detailed and significant methodological comments, Rashbam conditions the importance of a *peshat* commentary, and in fact the very legitimacy of his own commentary, on the principle that “a verse never departs from its plain meaning [*peshuto*],” mentioned in the words of Rav Kahana in tractate Shabbat of the Babylonian Talmud (63a).⁸⁴ In his commentary to Genesis 1:1: “Let the wise understand that all of our rabbis’ words and midrashic explanations are honest and true. So it is written in tractate Shabbat, ‘I was eighteen years old [and I had studied the entire Talmud], and I had never realized that a verse never departs from its plain meaning.’” Similarly, in his commentary to Genesis 37:2: “Let those who love reason know and understand that which our sages taught us, ‘A verse

80. Kamin, *Rashi*, 267.

81. Kamin, *Rashi*, 266–69; Benjamin J. Gelles, *Peshat and Derash in the Exegesis of Rashi* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 123–24. Rashi’s terminological spontaneity is considered a sign of incohesive exegetical methodology. Compare: “The absence of terminology indicates the incoherence of the exegetical discernment” (Kamin, *Rashi*, 157) and “The groping and unsystematic nature of Rashi’s methodological endeavours has a parallel in the lack of a fully fledged, uniform and unequivocal terminology” (Gelles, *Peshat and Derash*, 117). On the fundamental difficulties in this hasty conclusion, see Elazar Touitou, “Gishot shonot be-ḥeker parshanut ha-mikra’ shel Rashi,” *Tarbiz* 56 (1987): 442–43.

82. Bloom, *Influence*, 15: “The later poet opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent-poem that does not belong to the parent proper, but to a range of being just beyond that precursor. He does this, in his poem, by so stationing its relation to the parent-poem as to generalize away the uniqueness of the earlier work.”

83. Several scholars have gathered the sources and discussed them in detail. See particularly Kamin, *Rashi*, 23–56; Moshe M. Ahrend, “Le-berur ha-musag *peshuto sellamiqra*,” in *Ha-mikra’ bi-re’i mefarshav: Sefer zikaron la-Sarah Kamin*, ed. Sara Japhet (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 237–44; and see David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 52–88.

84. Also B. Yevamot 11b, 24a, and see B. Ketubbot 38b.

never departs from its meaning.” From these comments it would appear that the *peshat* method was known and understood by the rabbis of the talmudic period,⁸⁵ although Rav Kahana’s statement clearly shows that the method of *peshat* and the principle “a verse never departs from its plain meaning” were not known to him at all. Rashbam’s presentation suggests that the method and principles of *peshat* are an eternal truth known to all since ancient times, and has reached its realization in his own commentary.⁸⁶ Thus he obscures and perhaps even deliberately conceals the fact that it was Rashi who made the root *peh-shin-tet* current in biblical commentary and gave it its clearly defined methodological meaning.⁸⁷

Bloom noticed another very interesting phenomenon: the later writer weakens himself, even humbles himself, in an act of “self-emptying” or “self-crippling” and thus, as it were, cuts himself off from the influence of the precursor in “a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor.”⁸⁸ It would appear that this sophisticated act is expressed in Rashbam’s candid declaration in his commentary to Genesis 37:2: “Due to their piety, the earliest scholars tended to devote their time to midrashic explanations, which are the essence of Torah.” If the disregard of *peshat* by the “earliest scholars” (*ha-rishonim*), that is Rashi, is testimony to their great piety, what can be deduced about the character of Rashbam himself, who focused on *peshat*? Rashbam’s language implies that his area of activity, the discovery of the simple meaning of the text, is an indication of a certain stain on his character.⁸⁹

As Bloom noted, in the stage of self-weakening there is also some fascinating revisionist logic. As we have seen, self-weakening severs the later writer from

85. This anachronistic perception is familiar from other biblical commentators who also posited that the talmudic rabbis knew how to interpret the simple meaning of the text but preferred to interpret according to the *derash*; regarding Ibn Ezra, see Simon and Cohen, *Yesod mora*, 40–41. At the heart of Ibn Ezra’s declarations lie considerations different from Rashbam’s, which cannot be discussed within the framework of this paper.

86. As we saw above, the word *ha-rishonim* (“the earliest scholars”) in Rashbam’s commentary to Genesis 37:2 apparently refers to Rashi and his contemporaries (or perhaps Rashi alone) and not the rabbis of the talmudic period. But even if the reference is to the early rabbis, this does not contradict my position. Rather, it follows that the principles of *peshat* and its importance were known to the rabbis, although they refrained from intensive use of the *peshat*, believing that the *derash* is the “the ‘*ikar* of Torah,” regardless of whether the meaning of the word ‘*ikar* is “essence” or “true.” See the recent publication, Jonathan Jacobs, “Peshutam shel mikra’ot,” *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 22 (2013): 270–71. For earlier discussions see the bibliography in Itamar Kislev, “Ha-shimush shel Rashbam be-perusho la-Torah be-divre ḥazal: Galuy ve-samuy,” in Japhet and Viezel, “Le-yashev,” 163.

87. Compare, for example, Kamin, *Rashi*, 264: “The phrase ‘a verse never departs from its plain meaning’ [...], which is marginal in the Gemara, turns into a central concept in the usage of Rashi, and in this his great importance is reflected.”

88. Bloom, *Influence*, 14, 90, 109.

89. Several scholars used Rashbam’s words to understand his fundamental and theological approach to the *peshat* method; see e.g., Kislev, “Ve-’asher,” 235–36; Lockshin, *Perush*, 33; Cohen, “Hirhurim,” 32; and see also Uriel Simon, “The Religious Significance of the *Peshat*,” *Tradition* 23 (1988): 41–63. We can assume that also in this case the fundamental theological aspects scholars emphasize are accompanied by an emotional element.

the influence of the precursor. However, this stance cannot completely cancel out such a strong influence. The result is that the precursor is also hurt and weakened, because it is he who paved the controversial way in which the later writer followed.⁹⁰ Rashi’s admission that if he had been able to he would have written new commentaries, in other words, written Rashbam’s commentary,⁹¹ and the comment that Rashi devoted a certain amount of attention to *peshat*⁹² were intended to grant legitimacy to Rashbam’s choice of the *peshat* method. At the same time, in keeping with the complexity pointed out by Bloom, these details also raise a question about Rashi’s own level of piety.

For Rashbam, and in fact also for other medieval Jewish biblical commentators, Rashi corresponds completely to what Bloom called a “strong father.” The works of a “strong father” are the basic and fundamental point of departure for the “son,” the later writer. Rashbam’s sources have not yet been fully revealed⁹³ and it is entirely possible that in time additional sources that shaped his work will come to light. However, these sources will not challenge our impression that Rashbam remained always in Rashi’s realm of influence. It appears that Rashbam continuously read Rashi’s commentary as he worked on writing his own commentary.⁹⁴ His dependence on Rashi is accentuated by the methodological differences between the commentaries. As we have seen, Rashbam held fast to the *peshat* method (almost) without exception, whereas *peshat* played a relatively small role in Rashi’s Torah commentary. Therefore, there is no methodological imperative to conclude that it was only natural that Rashbam saw Rashi’s commentary as his first point of reference. Further, the fact that Rashbam was Rashi’s grandson would not necessarily have led him to regard Rashi’s commentary as a necessary point of departure. There are examples from the world of medieval biblical commentary that demonstrate that family ties do not in every circumstance lead to the clinging dependence of the later exegete on his precursor.⁹⁵

90. Sometimes the damage to the precursor is worse, Bloom, *Influence*, 91: “The ephebe takes care to fall soft, while the precursor falls hard.”

91. “He admitted to me that, if only he had had the time, he would have written new [revised] commentaries . . .” (Rashbam on Genesis 37:2).

92. “Rabbi Solomon, my mother’s father [...] set out [*natan lev*] to explain the plain meaning of Scripture” (Rashbam on Genesis 37:2).

93. Rashbam mentions several commentators and commentaries by name, among them Rashi, Joseph Kara, *Midrash lekaḥ tov* by Tuviah ben Eliezer, the *Maḥberet* of Menachem ben Saruk, and the responsa of Dunash ben Labrat, but scholars have pointed out commentators and other works that were known to him, among them Ibn Ezra’s short commentary to the Torah and *Midrash sekhel tov* (on the last two see below).

94. Or, alternatively, he knew Rashi’s commentary by heart, which means that its influence on him was very deep.

95. The best example of this is the attitude of the members of the Kimḥi family to each other’s commentaries: Rabbi Joseph Kimḥi was the father and teacher of Rabbi Moshe Kimḥi, who was the brother and teacher of Rabbi David Kimḥi; see Frank Talmage, *Perushim le-sefer Mishle le-bet Kimḥi* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 14–15. Nonetheless, a comparison between the commentaries of Moshe Kimḥi and Joseph Kimḥi, and a comparison between the commentaries of David Kimḥi and Moshe Kimḥi do not reveal a connection as close as Rashbam’s connection to Rashi’s commentary. The matter is different with regard to David Kimḥi’s connection to his grandfather, Joseph Kimḥi,

This complex situation may explain the scholarly debate over the question of Rashbam's approach to Rashi's Torah commentary. On the one hand, scholars who focus on the idea that Rashi was the starting point for Rashbam's commentary naturally conclude from Rashbam's declarations of intent to complete Rashi's commentary that this was in fact his primary goal. On the other hand, scholars who focus their research on Rashi's and Rashbam's differing exegetical methodologies naturally emphasize Rashbam's independence and conclude that his statements of intent cannot be used to correctly define his objectives.

Bloom compares the precursor, the strong father, to the "covering cherub"⁹⁶ who guards the entrance to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24) (to which the artist, as it were, aspires to penetrate by means of his works) or to the "shielding cherub" from Ezekiel's prophecy (28:13).⁹⁷ This strong father, from the force of his very essence, stifles new voices. It is possible that this limiting and paralyzing influence is one explanation (and perhaps the primary one) for the fact that Rashbam wrote his commentary to the Torah at a very late stage in his life, between the years 1145–53, many years after Rashi's death. The *terminus a quo* is determined by the approximate date of the death of his father, Rabbi Meir, whom Rashbam refers to as deceased,⁹⁸ and by the time of the composition of the work *Midrash sekhel tov* by Menachem ben Shlomo and the "short commentary" of Abraham Ibn Ezra, traces of which appear in Rashbam's commentary.⁹⁹ The *terminus ad quem* is determined by the time of the composition of another Torah commentary by Ibn Ezra, in which traces of Rashbam's commentary appear.¹⁰⁰ In other words,

and this subject warrants research in its own right. For now see, Melamed, "Mefarshē ha-mikra' ," 743–49, and compare Bloom's statement of principle that "influence cannot be willed" (*Influence*, 11).

96. Following William Blake; see Damon Samuel Foster, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965), 93–94.

97. Bloom, *Influence*, 24: "Tharmas is a poet's or any man's power of realization, even as the Covering Cherub is the power that blocks realization," and *ibid.*, 35–39.

98. It would appear that Rabbi Meir died between the years 1130–40; cf. Eran Viezel, *Ha-perush ha-meyuhas le-Rashi le-sefer Divre Ha-yamim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010), 321.

99. *Midrash sekhel tov* was written in 1139; cf. *Midrash sekhel tov* on Exodus 12:42, ed. Shlomo Buber (Berlin: Itskovsky, 1900), 144–45: "[It has been] from the creation of the world, four thousand and eight hundred and ninety nine years (4899=1139) until now, when I, Menachem son of Rabbi Shlomo, am writing this composition, which I have called *Sekhel tov* ['a good mind']." With regard to its influence on Rashbam's commentary see, Martin I. Lockshin, "Zikat perush ha-Rashbam la-Torah 'el midrash *Sekhel tov*," *Proceeding of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1994), 135–42. Ibn Ezra composed his "short" commentary in Italy between the years 1141–45, see Shlomo Sela and Gad Freudenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings: A Chronological Listing," *Aleph* 6 (2006): 18, 27–28, and regarding the influence of Ibn Ezra's commentary on Rashbam's commentary, see in particular Itamar Kislef, "Ha-peshatot ha-mithadeshim be-khol yom: perusho ha-kazar shel Rabi Abraham Ibn Ezra la-Torah ke-makor le-Rashbam be-perusho la-Torah," *Tarbiz* 79 (2011): 413–38.

100. The "long commentary" written in Provence in 1153, approximately. See Sela and Freudenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings," 21, 44, and see also Itamar Kislef, "The Relationship between the Pentateuch Commentaries Composed by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra in France and the Significance of this Relationship for the Bibliographical Chronology of the Commentator," *Journal*

Rashbam wrote his commentary to the Torah over forty years after Rashi's death, and about seventy years after Rashi wrote his commentary.¹⁰¹ However, it would appear that Rashbam worked on his commentary for many years before its final composition. Indirect evidence for this is found in his commentary to Genesis 37:2, quoted above, according to which Rashbam discussed exegetical issues with Rashi.¹⁰² Further evidence can be found in the commentary to the Pentateuch of Hugh of Saint-Victor, which he wrote before 1125, several passages of which indicate a connection to Rashbam's commentaries, which can be explained by Hugh's specific interest in the Jewish exegetical tradition and Rashbam's connection to Christian scholars of his time.¹⁰³ It is very plausible, as certain scholars surmise, that the two men actually met.¹⁰⁴ If this hypothesis is correct, it may also indicate that Rashbam worked on his commentary to the Torah for many years, yet for an unknown reason did not commit it to writing. This behavior

of Jewish Studies 60 (2009): 282–89. Kislev distinguishes between “the other version” that Ibn Ezra wrote on Genesis and “the long commentary” that he wrote on Exodus. On the question of the influence of Rashbam's commentary on Ibn Ezra's, see Kislev, “Ha-zikah bein perushehem shel Ra'ba' ve-Rashbam: Sugiyat markive ha-ketoret,” *Tarbiz* 78 (2009): 61–80.

101. For the approximate timeframe when Rashi wrote his Torah commentary, see Gelles, *Peshat and Derash*, 138–43.

102. Gelles (*Peshat and Derash*, 143) dates this conversation to the first years of the twelfth century, that is, close to Rashi's death. However, this conversation tells us that Rashbam studied exegetical issues with Rashi and it is not obvious evidence of Rashbam's intention to write a commentary.

103. Damien van den Eynde, *Essai sur la succession et la date des écrits de Hugues de Saint-Victor* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 1960), 40–45, 91, 207, 214; Beryl Smalley, “An Early Twelfth-Century Commentator on the Literal Sense of Leviticus,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 35 (1969): 82. Rivka Basch, “Sensus Litteralis—Peshuto shel Miqra: A Comparative Examination of Jewish and Christian Interpretations from the Twelfth Century” (Master's thesis, Baltimore Hebrew University, 2003); Montse Leyra, “The Victorine Exegesis on the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets: The Sources of the In Hebreo Interpretations in the Light of Its Parallels with the Peshat School of Northern France and Other Jewish Sources” (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2011), 269–95. On the connection between Rashbam's and Hugh's commentaries on Exodus 1:15, 3:22, 4:10, see also Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 104–5; Ora Limor, *Ben yehudim le-nozrim* (Tel Aviv: Open University Press, 1997), 4:39–40; Chen Melech Merchavia, *Ha-Talmud be-re'i ha-nazrut* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970), 158–59; Michael A. Signer, “Peshat, Sensus Litteralis, and Sequential Narrative: Jewish Exegesis and the School of St. Victor in the Twelfth Century,” in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, ed. Barry Walfish (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1993), 1:203–16; Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 31, 122. On Hugh's interest in Jewish exegesis see: Marianne Awerbuch, *Christlich-jüdische Begegnung im Zeitalter der Frühscholastik* (München: C. Kaiser, 1980), 215–30; Rebecca Moore, *Jews and Christians in the Life and Thought of Hugh of St. Victor* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), esp. chapters 4–8. On Rashbam's connection to Christian scholars, see e.g. Touitou, *Ha-peshatot*, 34–45; 164–76.

104. Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 104–5. On lines of similarity between Rashbam's exegetical method, as he formulated it in his methodological statements, and the exegetical model that Hugh of Saint-Victor presented in his important methodological work *Didascalicon de studio legendi*, see Eran Viezel, “Da'ato shel Rashbam bi-she'elat helko shel Mosheh bi-khetivat ha-Torah,” *Sfnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 22 (2013): 185. In my opinion, this general similarity strengthens the possibility that the two men knew each other.

corresponds to the influence of the “covering cherub,” who paralyzes the son and prevents him from creating.

The later writer thus remains against his will in his precursor’s realm of influence, and, this “strong father” restrains and paralyzes him. This unbearable situation drives the later writer to develop an aggressive approach to the precursor and to “misread” his work.¹⁰⁵ Those instances in which Rashbam strongly and offensively rejects Rashi’s commentary may be understood as expressions of this phenomenon. There is no logic or benefit to assessing exegetical solutions arrived at by the *derash* method according to the criteria of the *peshat* method. Assessing Rashi’s Torah commentary on the basis of the assumption that he held to the *peshat* in every case reflects a basic, fundamental lack of understanding of his exegetical objectives. Only someone who misread Rashi’s *derash* commentaries, which are based on midrashim, could conclude that Rashi tried to interpret according to *peshat* but failed. Only an exegete whose relationship with the earlier exegete was particularly complicated—so complicated that the later exegete remained in an almost pathological way in the creative sphere of the earlier exegete—could express aggression as strong as that revealed in Rashbam’s scathing comments about Rashi.

* * * * *

Rashbam’s attitude towards Rashi’s Torah commentary reveals an intriguingly complex and contradictory approach, atypical of Rashbam’s commentary as a whole, a work characterized by systematic methodology and great clarity. His literary relationship with his precursor is marked by innovation and continuity, methodological independence and linguistic dependence, open esteem and flagrant aggression, admiration and refutation. As scholars have previously argued, Rashbam referred his readers to Rashi’s commentary in several places in which he chose to be brief, and he referred them to Rashi’s commentary in other places in which he thought that Rashi connected the verses to halakhot. He sought to emphasize that Rashi’s commentary was not a faithful representation of the *peshat* method and therefore frequently challenged Rashi’s interpretations.¹⁰⁶ However, these explanations can account for only a part of the relationship between Rashbam’s and Rashi’s commentaries.

A theoretical, extratextual model, such as Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence,” demonstrates that the complexity revealed in the textual data, rather than an isolated phenomenon, is characteristic of the connections between other writers. Although it does not simplify Rashbam’s relationship to Rashi, it helps us understand that this fraught relationship expresses a pattern of creative human behavior

105. In a certain way it is fitting to apply the rule formulated by Bloom with regard to Freud, also an especially “strong” creator, to Rashi’s commentary: “There is no ‘true’ or ‘correct’ reading of Freud because Freud is so strong a writer that he *contains* every available mode of interpretation,” Bloom, *Agon*, 92. This rule can serve as a point of departure for assessing the way Rashi’s commentary has been understood by his many admirers and commentators (supercommentators) throughout history, who have ascribed to him esoteric meanings that cannot be understood from the written text.

106. See above, section 2.

and thus explain more easily what appear to be inherent contradictions and astonishing statements. Most important, it allows us to comprehend those comments in which Rashbam presents himself as intending to complete Rashi’s commentary, and yet attacks him with offensive language.

This is not to say that Rashbam’s relationship to Rashi’s commentary solely reflects emotional dimensions. The emotional aspect, the Bloomian “anxiety of influence,” is integrally connected to Rashbam’s methodological awareness, to the systematic principles of his work, and to his own recognition that his commentary is fundamentally different from Rashi’s. The complexity of Rashbam’s connection to his grandfather’s commentary can be understood only as a combination of these two disparate elements, the fundamental-methodological on one hand and the emotional on the other hand.

An entirely different question is to what extent the “anxiety of influence” model is revealed in Rashbam’s other works, the commentary to the Talmud (of which only a small part has survived), which is believed to have been written before the commentary on the Torah, and the commentaries to the books of Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, which apparently were written after the commentary to the Torah. In the Talmud commentary, which is not different methodologically from Rashi’s commentary, it is possible to identify revisionist stages, although it is not always clear if the “strong father” with whom Rashbam struggles is Rashi alone.¹⁰⁷ Rashbam’s commentaries to other books of the Bible reveal a very interesting development in his approach to Rashi, which corresponds along general lines to the development of the relationship of the later writer to the precursor as formulated by Bloom.¹⁰⁸ This matter requires extensive analysis in its own right.

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107. Cf. Bloom, *Influence*, 11: “Some of the fathers [...] are composite figures.”

108. Bloom, *Influence*, esp. 141, 147.