THE CONSIDERATIONS OF INTERPRETATION THROUGH THE FUNCTION OF
IMAGERY IN THE SONG OF SONGS AND ITS APPLICATION
TO THE CURRENT BELIEVING COMMUNITY

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LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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ABSTRACT

THE CONSIDERATIONS OF INTERPRETATION THROUGH THE FUNCTION OF IMAGERY IN THE SONG OF SONGS AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE CURRENT BELIEVING COMMUNITY

Sanggeol Lyu
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
Mentor: Dr. Ronald L. Giese, Jr.

The Song of Songs parallels with the synthetic method of literary criticism. This criticism places value on the text because it is literature for the believing community to maximize the celebration of delight and consummation of love within marriage and it de-emphasizes the search for the hidden meaning beyond the text. Literary criticism demonstrates not only the function of the literary message but also the aesthetic effect, and is suitable and adaptable to explain and help determine the identity of today’s young adults. The study focuses on the wisdom of others and how it is adapted for today. It also reduces the gap between the pulpit and the young adult community, while helping the preacher to be more honest in teaching the Song of Songs.

Total: 125 words
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is dedicated to my faithful wife, Naomi Lyu, and to my two children, Deborah and Boaz. I want to thank them all for their continued support and prayers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible, edited by William Foxwell Albright <em>et al.</em></td>
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<td>ATR</td>
<td>Anglican Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>Authorized (&quot;King James&quot;) Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Bride</td>
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<tr>
<td>BASP</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</td>
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<td>BETS</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
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<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
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<td>BibInt</td>
<td>Bible Interpretation</td>
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<td>BLS</td>
<td>Bible and Literature Series</td>
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<td>BSac</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Sacra</td>
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<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theological Bulletin</td>
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<td>BTr</td>
<td>The Bible Translator</td>
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<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<td>Dan.</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
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<td>Deut.</td>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAJT</td>
<td>East Asia Journal of Theology</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>Ecc.</td>
<td>Ecclesiastes</td>
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<td>Esth.</td>
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<td>ET</td>
<td>Expository Times</td>
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<td>Ex.</td>
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<td>Ezek.</td>
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<td>FOTL</td>
<td>The Forms of the Old Testament Literature (eds. Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucher)</td>
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<td>G</td>
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<td>Hos.</td>
<td>Hosea</td>
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<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
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<td>imp.</td>
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<td>impv.</td>
<td>imperative</td>
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<td>inf.</td>
<td>infinitive</td>
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<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td>JAAR</td>
<td>Journal of the American Academic of Religion</td>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td>Journal of the American Oriental Society</td>
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<td>Jas.</td>
<td>James</td>
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<td>JB</td>
<td>The Jerusalem Bible</td>
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<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>Jer.</td>
<td>Jeremiah</td>
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<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of Evangelical Theological Society, Wheaton, III</td>
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<td>JOTT</td>
<td>Journal of Translation and Text linguistics</td>
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<td>JQR</td>
<td>Jewish Quarterly Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Journal of Semitic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kin.</td>
<td>Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJ</td>
<td>King James Version of the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBS</td>
<td>Library of Biblical Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>The Septuagint</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms(s)</td>
<td>Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAB</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
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<td>NEB</td>
<td>New English Bible</td>
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<td>Neh.</td>
<td>Nehemiah</td>
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<td>NIV</td>
<td>The New International Version (1978)</td>
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<td>NKJ</td>
<td>New King James Version</td>
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<td>Num.</td>
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<td>Prov.</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
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<td>Ps.</td>
<td>Psalm(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
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<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sam.</td>
<td>Samuel</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series</td>
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<td>SJOT</td>
<td>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>suff.</td>
<td>suffix</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTC</td>
<td>Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum</td>
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<td>Vulg.</td>
<td>Vulgate</td>
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<td>ZAW</td>
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The Statement of Purpose

The Songs of Songs is a short book of sacred scripture that continues to attract and elude the church with its meaning.\(^1\) It has often been compared to a lock for which the key has been lost.\(^2\) The entire book can be read aloud in less than twenty minutes, yet despite its brevity, the Song has proved to be the source of endless discussion.

Unfortunately, it is a book too often ignored and neglected by the church. Some reasons for this lack of attention are the difficulties one experiences in finding the correct interpretation along with the absurdities of a spiritual application that does not involve the sexual imagery found in the Song.

There are many diverse reactions to the Song. Rabbi Aqiba called it “the Holy of Holies”\(^3\) of Scripture and condemned the practice of using the Song as “a drinking ditty

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\(^1\) The Song of Songs will be referred to as “the Song.”

\(^2\) C. D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs and Qoheleth* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1970), 36-37. It was Saadia ben Joseph Gaon (882-942), the translator of the Hebrew Scriptures into Arabic, who, in his commentary on the Song, made these statements.

\(^3\) Ibid; Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc. 1974), 9. Cited by *Mishna Yadaim*, 3:5. Rabbi Akiba championed the Song’s canonicity by arguing: “Heaven forbid! No one in Israel ever disputed that the Songs defiles the hands. All the world is not worth the day that the Songs was given to Israel; all the writings are holy but the Songs is the holy of holies.”
of profane love song.⁴ There are some rabbis who even restrict the use of the Song. They recommend that only those over thirty years of age be allowed to read it.⁵ Even though it is not recommended for teenagers, the Song is applicable for those at an age to marry.

In more recent centuries, the Song was probably one of the least preached about and one of the least read books in the entire Bible; however, there has been a renewal of interest in the Song. This rise in the study of the Song is undoubtedly due, in part, to the emphasis on sexuality in our society. A loosening of views on sexual purity is prevalent today, necessitating the church to offer the world a better way to describe the delight of human sexuality within the framework of marriage.

There are some basic aims of this study beginning with the importance of the contents of its message concerning issues faced by today’s Christian young adults. The Song is the foundation of this critical message. This is a crucial time to preach and teach the message of the Song despite the difficulty in understanding its meaning.⁶ The perversion and distortion of the concept of love has lead to premarital sex in today’s Christian society. The results are devastating and effecting the youth of today. Seventy percent of females and eighty percent of males lose their virginity before graduating from High school. Within this tragic situation, the failure to transform the lives of American young adults arises from a negligence to preach the Song’s message in today’s churches.

⁴Ginsburg, 37. Cited by Tosefta Sanhedrin, 12:10; cf. Babylonia Talmud Sanhedrin, 101a. Akiba said, “whoever trills his voice singing the Songs in a banquet hall, regarding it a common song of praise, has no part in the world to come.”


⁶H. L. Ginsburg, The Five Megillot and Jonah (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 5-17. This elusiveness is of two kinds: (1) passages where the meaning of the Hebrew itself is uncertain; (2) passages are difficult to understand in their present context.
Secondly, the young adult Christian generation needs to be taught about their sexuality in the church. Romance should be taught and cultivated through the Song’s message in a nurturing environment like a tree or flower that grows in a garden. The discipline of purity, intimacy and sexual abstinence before marriage are instructed in the Song. The natural reward of these disciplines is a warm and positive celebration of sexuality in the context of marriage. Lifelong purity is the soil in which the undying nature of love grows.

Thirdly, the aim is to rediscover the “celebration of love,” “conjugal love” and “exaltation of joy” found within the institution of marriage, while maximizing the mysterious nature of love through the literary devices in the Song. Nowhere is sexuality and love exposed so nakedly in the Bible as in the Song. One should not be alarmed by this display. It pertains to a new idea. By paying attention to only our spiritual love toward God, we de-emphasize the importance of romance between a man and a woman. Discussing human love and marital sexual relationships can no longer be taboo.

Lastly, this study concentrates on the discriminating choices of a cogent interpretation. It involves a hermeneutical perspective as well as a synthetic methodology. Understanding these aspects will convey the message with emotive, cognitive, perceptive and pictorial effects causing a reflection of the truth and an effective response. Today’s young readers will be invited by the poet to appreciate the qualities of joy, sensual intimacy and mutual esteem in dimensions that are socially desirable and a love that is beautifully mysterious.
The Statement of Problem

One cannot evade the implicit and known problems of the Song. Widely, the problem of the Song runs parallel with three questions.

The first question is “Why does the Bible include the Song of Songs?” This paper will address the conflicts about the instruments of interpretation used as well as the inclusion of the Song in the Canon for its historical value. The second question is “What does it do?” It relates to the biblical interpretative method for the reader’s understanding. The third question is “What would be lost if the Song did not exist?” This one is of a hermeneutical level concerning the application of its message for today’s readers and the result of the interpretation. On the contrary, one can ask, “What would be gained if the Song was read, understood and interpreted?” Modern interpretation, through literary criticism, would function as an anecdote to solve the puzzles in the hermeneutic process.

Who are the characters in the Song and what are their names? This depends on the method of interpretation that is selected. The allegorist compares Solomon to God or Christ and the Shulamite to Israel or the church. In a literal or literary interpretation, the protagonists can be “a man and a woman,” or “a bride and a groom” who are married. They are not only ideal literary characters, but are also unknown historical individuals.

What is the plot? The Song is not a chronological story that follows a romance from beginning to end. Rather, it sets a mood of love by viewing basic emotions of love from a number of different time frames and angles. Concerning the structural unity of the

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7 These include wisdom tradition, prophetic tradition and allegorical interpretation.

8 One is perplexed with the conflict between sharp allegorical and literal interpretations.
Song, the evidence of a strong storyline can be unwrapped by using the literary device, chiasmus.

How many of the details of the Song should be interpreted? If the Song is, in fact, a “mood piece,” is it even possible to accomplish a precise interpretation of the details? Interpreters can change a stressed point according to the general mood or feeling of the poet or author. However, trying to determine a specific significance for every detail can easily lead to becoming immersed in subjectivism.

What special problem does the language of the Song cause for the reader? The sexual language is explicit in the Song. Is it about the emotion of love or about lovemaking? Is it real or imaginative? Though it is frank in its description of human sexuality, it is more sensuous than sensual, more romantic than erotic. The description of human sex within marriage is not bad. The inclination to make expressions of sex taboo can mean a loss of opportunities to teach preventive sex education, resulting in terrible, social outcomes among young adults.

Is the Song about the romance of a man and a woman or the love of God and His people? The long-standing and deep-rooted allegorical interpretation of God’s love for His people is still reflected through many commentaries, modern Bibles and pastors. It is not easy to negate an allegorical interpretation and admit other literary interpretations.

Why does the name of God not appear in the Song? Most scholars do not deal

9Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc. 1974), 28-9. The deep-seated reluctance to use the Divine name, which finds expression in the Third Commandment (Ex. 20:7), became increasingly felt with time...the desire to avoid mentioning God’s name would be felt particularly strongly in connection with an oath (Song 2:7; 3:5) concerned with the physical aspects of love... in this reticence with regard to the use of
with the question of why the name of God is not mentioned in the Song. In part, this indicates the audience’s lack of concern when approaching the Song. There are two additional words that could be construed as names of God (8:6, 2:7, 3:5), but English readers do not understand nor see “the Name of God” in the Song.

One of the controversies that centers on the proper interpretation of its imagery is wasf in 4-7 (4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-7; and 7:2-8). Wasf is still problematic, and the concern depends on how to understand the metaphorical language. It is difficult to avoid seeing sexual allusions everywhere, until the whole work becomes saturated in references to genitalia, intercourse and explicit sex. Love between the sexes is more than a physical expression. The literal, literary interpretation of the Song can be a stumbling block and a cause of sexual temptation to Christian teenagers. As a matter of fact, the author of this thesis does not want his two teenage children to know the contents of this thesis. When they are more mature, they will be permitted to know them.

The Statement of the Limitation

The allegorical interpretation has been perpetuated throughout the centuries as well as in today’s message of the Song and is described as the “love of God to His

10Marcia Falk, Love Lyrics from the Hebrew Bible: A Tanslation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs, BLS 4 (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 87-87. Wasf, an Arabic word meaning “description,” has come to refer to a kind of poem or poetic fragment that describes through a series of images the parts of the male and female body. The failure of scholars to interpret wasf is because they do not appreciate the very essence of metaphors, at the core of great poetry from many different eras and cultures, from a literalistic approach.
people." Despite its terrible drawbacks and difficulties, the interpreter has transferred from an allegorical method to a literal interpretation, which describes the Song as “the celebration of romance between a man and a woman in marriage.” The interpretation of the Song will be applied to the believing community. Can the preachers of the church play a key role as messengers to protect the young adult generation from premarital sex? Preachers have a tendency to avoid interpreting the Song literally because of the difficult meanings and the challenge to apply it spiritually to young adults. It is certain that the Song is the best scripture for the message to young adults and that this thesis will contribute to lessening the burden of interpretation for preachers.

There are some conflicts about the literal usage of the proper names of “Solomon” and the “Shulamite,” within a historical-critical emphasis. Conversely, the Solomon of the Song is used as a poetic symbol, or as the ideal “groom.” The Shulamite is also designated as “a bride” in the Song. There is no historical evidence that Solomon was an author of the Song.

There were difficulties in choosing the method of interpretation to use for the Song. The chiasmus method contributes to discovering the macrostructure and solving the problem of the sequence of time, motif, subject and the event as literary devices. The macrostructure is also used to discover the central wedding cycle that is the literary focus and climax of the Song. This method has aided in the demarcation of the individual unit and of the larger sections. The microstructure plays the key role in discovering the message and motif. Eventually, application of the message functions on the poet’s creativity and reflection along with basic considerations within the Song. The various units have a similar style and mood, and display a new set of sub-motives while noting
the subtle changes in their details. It is probably wise to be open-minded when insisting on the correctness of a particular analysis.

The "secular" feeling is perplexing. The Song is the only book of the Hebrew Scriptures in which God is not mentioned explicitly. The division between the sacred and secular in ancient Hebrew was not distinct. The idea of God permeating every area of one's life was fundamental to the Israelite society. The social world, the natural order and the realm of spirituality, were all mutually interlocking and interdependent parts of the whole. A literal reading of the forthright eroticism of the Song may pose a question for some who view the book as a biblical resource for spirituality. In such a situation, much depends upon how spirituality is understood. An integral component of spiritual union is more rational than a false dichotomy between spirit and body, or body and nature, as we cannot imagine body without soul. "The love that forms human partnership and community, and that sustains the whole of creation, is a gift of God's own self."13

The translator has been content to stay close to a literal translation to keep a poetic style rather than undertaking the meaning. Other translations of some verses can be

11Spirituality today presumes integration of all aspects of human existence. Sandra M. Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers Rivals or Partners?" Horizons 13 (1986): 266. Schneider defines it as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives."

12Dianne Bergant, Song of Songs: The Love Poetry of Scripture Spiritual Commentary (Hyde Park, NY: New York Press, 1998), 10. Since the heart of biblical spirituality is love of God and love of others, and since sexuality is the physiological and psychological grounding of the human ability to love, sexuality plays a very important role in spirituality. Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 105. He illustrates the Biblical references: Lev. 19:17-18; Deut. 6:4-5; 7:6-11; 10:12-22; 1 Kin. 10:6-9; Jer. 31:1-6; Ps. 146:5-10; John 15:5-17; 1 Cor. 13; 1 John 4:7-21.

13Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 105. He illustrates the Biblical references: Lev. 19:17-18; Deut. 6:4-5; 7:6-11; 10:12-22; 1 Kin. 10:6-9; Jer. 31:1-6; Ps. 146:5-10; John 15:5-17; 1 Cor. 13; 1 John 4:7-21.
found in the *Septuagint* and in the suggestions made by the BHS editor in the apparatus. It is virtually impossible to reproduce these meanings in any kind of translation, so the simplicity of the original text has been demonstrated in the hermeneutical issues and textual criticism.

The text is designed to point the perceptive reader beyond the surface sense to a more profound theological meaning, which can be discovered when the Song is read in the light of other scriptural sources. Therefore, the preacher creates the application eclectically and holistically in the realm of spirituality and with wisdom from the messages found inter-textually throughout scripture.

This hermeneutics refers to the special approach used on interpreting the Biblical material. When using technical words, the terms exegesis and commentary, or the interpretation and hermeneutics can be interchanged. 14

The lovers in the Song can be referred to as “a bride” and “a groom.” Their marriage in the Song took place at the usual age of the early or mid teens, but data about the age of marriage in Israel is sparse. It would be reasonable to picture the girls in the love songs as between thirteen and sixteen and the boys as not much older. 15 Adolescence must have been much shorter than it is today, both emotionally and chronologically. The marriage age of today’s readers is generally older, around 20-30

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14Terence J. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 167. This refers to the interpretation of texts including both the formulation of rules governing a valid reading and also the exegesis or commentary on the meanings expressed in the text.

15Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World,” *BSac* 135 (July-September 1978): 242-3. In the Old Testament no minimum age is stated as desirable for marriage. In the Jewish Talmud the minimum age for marriage was recommended for girls at the age of puberty of twelve or twelve and one-half. Males married between fourteen and eighteen.
years old.

In textual issues, two verses help to discover the theological stigma in the Song. The poet used the Divine name implicitly “by the gazelles, or the hinds of the field,” instead of “the Lord of Host and God Almighty.” In the divine epithet “yah,” the short form of Yahweh, is discovered in the “the flame of God” (salhebet-yah) or “an enormous flame” regarding love as stronger than death. The two views have stimulated debate. Although they have a shaky support, they both have plausible evidence.

The Statement of Methodology

“For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the known speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.” This passage offered a profound idea in choosing the methodology of this thesis. This designates the qualification of interpreters and interpretative methodology. The methodology should be distinct, provisional, intelligible, technical, articulate, clear, communicable, applicable, experiential, urgent, audible and life giving like a warrior who prepares for war.

Two surveys with multifold questions supply the motives of the department of this study. The first survey evaluates the reasons why today’s preachers are reluctant to use the Song of Songs. The survey was taken by forty preachers at random. The results are in

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16 The Song 2:7. See the textual criticism section for more details.

17 The Song 8:6. See the textual criticism section for more details.

18 1 Cor. 14:8-9.
the appendix. The second survey evaluates the context of today’s young adults. It has been helpful to ask hermeneutical questions. The ranges from interpretation to hermeneutics will be dealt with deeply. Twenty Christian Liberty students were evaluated along with twenty Christian Liberty Korean students and the results are in the appendix.

The title of this thesis needs some explanation concerning the methodology of interpretation. The term “the function of imagery,” appears first because it is the primary motif in the Song. There are clusters of imagery in the Song. Regarding the use of a methodology, the function of figurative language in imagery ascribes to and is substituted by literary criticism. The right understanding of imagery builds up a sound interpretation.

The history of six interpretations relates to the diverse understanding of the Song. The distance between the literal sense of the text and an allegorical reading is so large that considerable hermeneutical problems arise. The varieties and absurdities of speculative interpretations prohibit sound interpretation and enthusiastic teaching. A literal interpretation using many literary devices was chosen as a more complementary and comprehensive method.

The basis of this thesis comes through textual criticism to help understand the Song, which deals with a highly paradoxical hermeneutical situation aroused in the ancient and modern readings of the poem.19 The benefits of this criticism range widely from selecting the adequate translation, to looking for the characteristics of language, the culture of language and the form of grammar and original images of the word in the cultural age. Analyzing the imagery of poetry provides a hint in choosing the methods of

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interpretation. It helps the reader to picture the image of language that consists of linguistic, rhetoric and stylistic elements on the basis of the ancient culture of the Song. The result of the textual issue is that it has its own rules, ideas of poetry, diverse parameter and directly offers crucial material for both units of structure and poetic function in the literary criticism.

Literary criticism is a hermeneutic tool approached through every angle of critical holistic interpretation. The interpretation demands understanding of the language that is interwoven with erotic imagery through the poetic function of figures of speech and its artistic work in all its particularity. This style of criticism needs various and minutely discriminating attention given to the artful use of language, which enables disciplined scholarship. The criticism helps to extract out the meaning from the imagery and figures of speech used in order to reveal the message.

Hermeneutic commentaries explain to people today’s community the authority and value they seek from the Song as well as how to use the Song by breaking it down to apply, signify, represent and adapt to their purpose and needs. The Song can be used in the young adult generation today by representing and re-signifying the book to address new problems. The commentary becomes stable, pliable and flexible and adaptable to ever-changing contexts and problems. A commentary on the exegesis is accomplished through a literary spectrum on the basis of a literal reading of the straightforward

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20 J. Cheryl Exum and David J.A. Clines, “The New Literary Criticism” in The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible, JSOTSup 143 (1993): 15-16. Literary criticism stands for an attitude toward texts that sees them as works of art in their own right, rather than as representations of the sensibilities of their authors. It regards texts as coherent intelligible wholes more or less independent of their authors, creating meaning through the integration of their elements. It emphasizes the literariness of literary texts and tries to identify the characteristics of literary writing. It approaches the texts as unified wholes. It describes itself as “synchronic” rather than “diachronic.”
eroticism of the Songs. In the verse-by-verse commentary, succinct reflection will be made about each small unit in order to amplify the reader's appreciation for this exquisite love poetry in the Hebrew Bible. The hermeneutic issue can be incorporated in not only the sound results of textual issues and functional figures of speech, but also in the text itself and inter-textually with discrimination and justification. In detail, hermeneutic understanding can be developed through the whole Bible, not only inter-textually, including Genesis chapters 2 and 3, the tradition of wisdom and prophetic tradition, but also the interpreter's subjective reflection.

In chapter 2, six basic positions will be discussed with respect to the literary genre

David S. Dockery, Biblical Interpretation: Then & Now (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1992). 90. This states that Scriptures were understood in a straightforward fashion, resulting in the plain, simple and natural meaning of the text being applied to the lives of the people. It is the foundation for all other hermeneutical development.

Phyllis Trible, "Love's Lyrics Redeemed," God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 144-65. She suggests that Genesis 2-3 is the hermeneutic key, which unlocks this imagery of a garden. The Song was composed by expanding upon the lyrics of eroticism in Gen. 2. The poet respects and affirms the beauty and order placed by God within all creation. The poet savors the natural beauty of all creatures. All plants and animals enter into the service of the lovers in their dialogue of love. The bride and groom in the Song want to situate in an archetype Garden of Eden that had neither sin nor shame. God created sex without shame. The destruction of the order of creation leads to that of love. Here, interpreters voluntarily started to elucidate the words and apply them to their situation, such as in this case. For an excellent analysis of the relationship of the Song to the story of creation and fall from Eden, it may even turn out that their ancient text has something new to teach us about how to redeem sexuality and love in our fallen world.

Anre LaCocque, Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 33-39. The Song was received into the Hebrew canon along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Both the Septuagint and Vulgate maintain the order, which is composed of wisdom literature. The Hebrew Bible places the Song within the five scrolls, or Megillot, after Ruth and before Ecclesiastes, which did not originate in the same wisdom circles. This placement infers that the Song does not attempt to moralize or teach practical lessons. Nevertheless, the Song will be considered a wisdom writing in relation to the themes of human sexuality and marriage.

Ilana Pardes, "I Am a Wall, and My Breasts like Towers": The Song of Songs and the Question of Canonization, Countertradition in the Bible: A Feminist Approach (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 118-43. Prophets offer a profusion of detailed chastisements concerning Israel's wanton ways. Prophets use the patriarchal mental model in depicting the conjugal relationship on the basis of a prophetic metaphor between God and Israel to highlight the hierarchal structure of the covenantal bond. God functions like a typical patriarchal husband.
of the Songs: allegory, typology, cult (liturgy), dream, drama, and literary. Adherents to each position frequently differ regarding both the internal structure and the overall interpretation.

In chapter 3, the poetic analysis will consist of a closely unified dialogue, coherent refrain, and an integral part of the text itself. The development of the analysis then moves from macrostructure to microstructure. Understanding the unity as a whole facilitates the appreciation of the meaning and function of the details. Formal levels (structure) are an important indicator for criteria of structure: motifs, images, parallelism, and chiasmus. Verbal repetitions are the most important criterion for discerning the limits of poetic units in Song. The poetic structure and content work together. Love in the Song is a repeated pattern: the absence of the loved one, pursuit and discovery of the loved one, the presence of the loved one and the contemplative gaze upon the loved one, which motivates a search, praise and desire.

In chapter 4, the object of displaying the textual criticism will be the means for discovering the hermeneutical key. The linguistic characteristics, the possibility of diverse interpretations and the cultic background for studying the imagery will be discussed. It is a crucial issue to do literal translation with a sense of poetic traits. Comparing the multifold manuscripts leads to discovering the original meaning of the text, and gives a hint about theological material. It helps to recognize the vivid imagery of Hebrew that is hidden in English. Chapters that were separated between the textual criticism and the hermeneutic commentary were merged into one to help the reader understand more fully.

The hermeneutical commentary focuses on the young adult generation at every
state along the way. The focus is on the authoritative tradition of the Song to pass on to heirs of today. The various themes with their colorful images jostle each other to form a beautiful complex fabric. The delineation of each theme in the microstructure is posed to apply the message of the Song. Many of the questions could be discussed by adolescents in marriage preparation classes. The important themes are the attraction and articulation of beauty, joys and tensions, erotic arousal, betrothal and marriage, consummation of love, and the permanency of love. Her love for him is challenged and emerges triumphant, and her experience makes her richer and stronger. The Song prepares the reader for the joy as well as trauma of love. It prepares the woman for marriage and gives the man an added cause to appreciate and admire his bride. It is also a celebration of the woman’s love, both as a gift she gives the man and as a significance of her own value and character. The Song speaks of love victorious over pain. Love is as strong as death and passion as unyielding as the grave.

In conclusion, the leading thread is the hermeneutical principle. The author consistently shuns any recourse to allegory, because the Song has a somewhat untidy structure with many repetitions and sudden changes of mood. The Song is a camouflaged vehicle of a mysterious message. That textual issue plays an important role in building the other literary function on the macrostructure. The close attention to structural units indicates proper function. There still remains a plot on the surface of the poem. Chiasmus plays an important role, presenting the central motif and conclusion in the Song. All messages of motif are twisted. The poet uses the language impregnated with religiosity of prophets, sages, procreation of Adam and Eve, and spirituality. Many details of the Song must be read metaphorically rather than literally. The Song affirms and celebrates
mutuality; there is no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex. The only storyline is that a couple marries and has their honeymoon and the bride loses her virginity. What is meaningful is the psychological and emotional exploration of all that this entails.
CHAPTER TWO
THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Few books of the Old Testament exhibit such a wide range of differing interpretations as the Song. The varieties of interpretation do not clarify the exact meaning of hermeneutic problems satisfactorily. The following note of Frantz Delitzsch expresses the anguish about interpreting the Song, which is left for today’s interpreters.

The Song is the most obscure book of the Old Testament. Whatever principle of interpretation one may adopt, there always remains a number of inexplicable passages, and if we understood them, would help to solve the mystery. And yet the interpretation of a book presupposes from the beginning that the interpreter has mastered the idea of the whole. It has thus become an ungrateful task; for however successful the interpreter may be in the separate parts, yet he will be thanked for his work only when the conception as a whole which he has decided upon is approved of.¹

Although he designated an approved and successful conception in his time, his view applied one method and fell short of the holistic notion. As Roland K. Harrison pointed out, “the absence of specifically religious themes has combined with the erotic lyrics and the vagueness of any plot for the work to furnish for scholars an almost limitless ground for speculation.”² A lot of interpretative conflict brought forth a variety of interpretative methods. Which method can function as a key for the Song’s

interpretation within the community of faith? The solution is to turn to the valid hermeneutic, the holistic level of interpretation that emphasizes the text modified and augmented for the community of faith.

This study includes a reviewing of the chief theories that have been used throughout the Song’s history, evaluates the hermeneutical foundation they posed and determines to serve as an appropriate foundational study for an interpretation appropriate for future generations. Many theories that are under speculation have led to allegorical, dream, dramatic, cultic and typological interpretations in order to gain a consensus. Ultimately, the most appropriate view is summed up in the literal or literary approach that requires conspicuous and synthetic methods of interpretation.

Allegorical Interpretation

The early Christians confronted such erotic material for acceptance in the Canon by rereading the Song as a song of love between God and God’s people. The Targum interprets the book in five movements as Israelite history. In an extended metaphor,
Solomon⁶ is an anthropomorphic representation of Yahweh, or Christ. Shulamite is designated as the personification of the congregation of Israel, and the church. In Christian groups, the Song is related to the mutual love of Christ and the Church as His bride.⁷ How did allegorical interpretations arise in the Song?⁸ David Carr proposes that:

> Within this world of essentially identical bodies and fluid boundaries between the sexes, it was a small step from seeing the man as superior to the woman in the hierarchy to seeing men and women as both in some sense actually the woman in a hierarchy extending upward to God.⁹

The superiority of the female and the domination of the male are not accepted legitimately. Ilana Pardes suggests that it is at least partially appropriate to stimulate “the overriding monotheistic patriarchal discourse in the Bible.”¹⁰ Those deciding canonicity gave expression to voices, which negated the uniformity of religious practice and sacred hierarchies.

Traditionally, the authority and intrinsic value placed on the allegorical view were

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⁶We cannot conceive that Solomon was symbolized as the Messiah. The reason is that Solomon was displayed in the revels of an Eastern harem and was seduced to practice idolatry to represent the one who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners” subsisting the pure and holy union between Jesus Christ and the church.


⁸Allegorical interpretation, which resulted from the attempt to interpret difficult imagery, sees the Song as a depiction of the love between God and His people, while the literal approach views it as human love reflecting the image of God.


important factors in such expositions for canonicity.\textsuperscript{11} Most scholars attribute Akiva’s success to his implicit empowering of the allegorical reading of the Song, which arose from an extension of the prophetic metaphor concerning the covenental bond.\textsuperscript{12} Gerson D. Cohen interrogates, “Why would anyone treat the work as an allegory in the first place? Why would religiously questionable texts, such as Song of Songs, be alongside mainstream works?”\textsuperscript{13} Other strong reasons, its open sexuality, along with the fact that there is no mention of God or moral teaching in the poems, may have contributed to its early allegorical interpretation, but the scholars seldom promote this.\textsuperscript{14}

This misreading was carried throughout the centuries despite the various ugly elaborations. Most clearly, it depicts the divine-human relationship between male and female lovers. This allegorizing is nothing more than an artistic way of despising the text. In a good sense, an allegory is a story intended by the author to convey a hidden meaning.\textsuperscript{15} However, there is a danger in choosing the “allegorizing,” or the allegorical method of interpretation. The result is ideas that differ from those that clearly appear in the Biblical passages.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid. Here Akiva’s role to put the Song in the Canon came from the allegorical interpretation. However in the first century, when Jewish scholars gave rise to the question about the canonicity of this scripture, they interpreted the Song radically to acquire some deeper spiritual truth. The grammatical-historical meaning of the text is ignored, so that the intention of the original author took second place. Akiba instrumented allegorical interpretation to the inclusion of the Song into the Canon. He sets out to limit the circulation of the Song to religious practice, as befits canonical texts.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.


There is a problem applying the interpretative method used in Hosea and Ezekiel to the Song. Their usage of a strong allegorical method results in a difficulty to accept the literal interpretation to expose the intention of the text itself. The result of the distorted allegorical method, as Othmar Keel judged, is, “its search for a deeper meaning can be arbitrary, unsatisfactory and often revoltingly grotesque.” The status of the text’s contents can no longer be accepted and are deemed unnecessary. The long-standing usage of the allegorical method makes it very difficult to accept a literal interpretation.

Though the Song may draw on form and specific cultic traditions that depict divine love, the Song itself shows no clear signs of having been written to depict God’s relation with His people or with the soul. The Song originally focused on human lovers as Fox notes, “the equality of the lovers and the quality of their love, rather than the Song’s earthy sensuality, are what makes their union an inappropriate analogy for the bond between God and Israel.”

Regardless of the original intentions of the text, it is vicious to forcefully fill a religious need. Although the mark of the patriarchal model, especially in the prophetic tradition, is at least in part (1:6, 8:9-10) indirect, there is no indication that it should be read as an allegory. Marvin V. Pope has also stated the hidden problem of this allegory:

Despite the long use of the allegorical method, it suffers most from the lack of consensus of meaning. The flexibility and adaptability of the allegorical method, the ingenuity and the imagination with which it could be, and was, applied, the difficulty and virtual impossibility of imposing objective controls, the astounding and bewildering results of almost two millennia of application to the Song, have all contributed to its progressive discredit and almost complete

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desertion. Innumerable absurdities, and great mystery in interpreting the Song incite the allegorical interpretation.\(^8\)

It tends to discover a hidden meaning that the author neither intended nor envisioned and centers on the complete subjectivity of the interpretation. Although the allegorical interpretation may appear to be piously attractive, anything that draws the reader away from the intended message of the text is destructive and discredited.\(^9\) Now, one is to search for the literal significance in any metaphorical text, which may appear in the text, rather than have an intentional meaning beyond its literal sense.\(^20\)

**Typological Interpretation**

There is a clear distinction between this typological method and an allegorical method. Allegory ignores the historicity or factualness of the Old Testament account and imposes a deeper, hidden or more spiritual meaning on the text. Typology recognizes the validity of the Old Testament account, and then finds in that account a clean, parallel link with some event or teaching in the New Testament. This, then, foreshadows the Old Testament account. This typological interpretation does not provide a different meaning that replaces the one the text appears to present, but instead, gives an added dimension to the sense already present in the text. Many commentators have argued that typology is the


correct approach to the Song.\footnote{G. Lolyd Carr, The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary TOTC (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 25.} From the Jewish interpretation, the account was understood in terms of the Lord’s relationship with Israel. Israel is the trusting bride whose faithful lover, the Lord, will support, encourage and preserve her as His chosen beloved.\footnote{Ibid. 25.}

There are variations of the identity of the beloved. Within the Christian community, the Song is often understood to describe the loving concern for Christ, the lover/bridegroom for his church, or the beloved/bride, and for the individual believer. Each verse is then read through Christological eyes for what it can reveal about that relationship. Delitzsch presents the principle about the typology in the Song:

The typical interpretation proceeds on the idea that the type and the antitype do not exactly coincide; the mystical, that the heavenly stamps itself in the earthly, but is yet at the same time immeasurably different from it. Besides, the historic-ethical interpretation is to be regarded as the proper business of the interpreter. But because Solomon is a type of the spiritual David in his glory, and earthly love a shadow of the heavenly, and the Song a part of sacred history and of canonical Scripture, we will not omit her and there to indicate that love subsisting between Christ and His church shadows itself forth in it.\footnote{Delitzsch, 6.}

However, the Song has no historical evidence. To misunderstand the poetic imagery is to illustrate a weakness and absurdity of interpretation. By using the typology, the text of the Song gives no indications and facts that are intended for Christological interpretation or its application.\footnote{Ibid. 31.} The theory cannot be applicable to all books. To interpret the Song by the typical view is to do so at the interpreter’s suggestion, not that of Scripture itself.
Cultic Interpretation

This interpretation, proposed by Meek, regards the Song as erotic literature from the fertility cults associated with Babylonian Tammuz and Canaanite Baal of ancient Near Eastern mythology. The myth cycle concerns the dying of a heroic god in his struggle with a god of darkness and chaos and his resurrection with the help of his lover. Meek was impressed by similarities between the Song and the Akkadian hymn list. He came to the conclusion that the Song was an expurgated version of the Canaanite fertility cult of hymnal material.

This view is the assumption that a pagan ritual, later secularized, was accommodated to Yahwistic usage. The Near Eastern mythical pairs known to Israel were the Canaanite Baal and Anath and the Babylonian Tammuz and Ishtar. In 1906, Wilhelm Erbt related the Song to the Babylonian astral cult. His specific proposal pictures the new-moon goddess, Shalmit-Ashera-Ishtar, moving among the constellations in search of the sun god, Shelem-Dod-Tammuz. Wittekindt concluded that the Song is the literary monument of an Assyrian-Canaanite Tammuz-Ishtar cult at the spring lunar festival.

Similarly, Marvin Pope presented in his Proem that "the origins and background of the Song was based on the sacred sexual rites of ancient Near Eastern fertility cults. In

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25 It is also called "liturgy." See Connie J. Whitesell, "Behold, Thou are Fair, my Beloved," Parabola 20, no. 4 (winter 1995). The Yahwist cult functions to redefine human sexuality in the Song by comparing the Song with the ancient Near Eastern thought.


28 Ibid.
these cults, the issues of life and death were the crucial concern,”\textsuperscript{29} referring to the statement, “Love is as strong as death, and jealousy is as severe as Sheol.”\textsuperscript{30}

Their theories have a large problem, for it does not appear that the harvest festivals in Israel ever had dying and rising rituals connected with them. It is not certain that there are equivocally liturgical terms in the Song. The most difficult problem is the view that the pagan ritual was revised for Yahwistic use. Heathen cultic songs would then be admitted into Israel's canon, especially one of a generally immoral character.\textsuperscript{31} If this theory is true, it is strange that the divine name is lacking.

Although it is not known how cultic forms influenced the Song in its present form, the parallel between the pagan love song and Song of Songs is not overlooked. Even though there are many similarities, the meaning is still very different.

**Dream Interpretation**

Solomon B. Freehof suggested that the Song regards dreams as a vehicle of communication between God and man symbolically or allegorically. In 1948, Freehof pointed out fifty-two verses in the entire book. The dream characteristics are allegorically found not only in chapter 5 of the Song, but also throughout the book. The classic dream experience of running through the city and over the fields appears constantly as 1:4, 6:1, 7:1, and 8:5. The book is full of strange flights and sudden movement, the characteristic

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{29}Pope, 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{30}Song 8:6.
  \item \textsuperscript{31}Norman K. Gottwald, “Song of Songs,” IDB, 423.
\end{itemize}
According to Freehof, the rabbi, Akiba, sensed the true nature of the book and gave it symbolic interpretation because he regarded the book as the vehicle of communication between God and man. The love language of the dream suggests the eternal love between Israel and God.

The dream theory has some interesting points; however, there are weaknesses about the dream theory. Pope uncovered that the dream theory seems very appropriate to the sort of sleep in which one is not wholly unconscious but can respond immediately to a real or imagined sound (3:1). There is no clear indication that the whole book is a dream. Dreams are suited to the condition of one expecting or hoping for a tryst with a lover, but are not historical and ethical, not reality. A dream is a dream. Dream sequences express poignantly the ambivalent experience of erotic excitation and fear of separation.

**Drama Interpretation**

In the past two hundred years some interpreters have figured out that the Song is a dramatic pastoral because of the allegorical interpretation and innumerable absurdities with no sure results. Some see two main characters in the drama and others see three main characters.

*The Two-Character Drama*

From primal times the Song was valued as dramatic. The dramatic view was

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33Ibid.
embellished with great inventiveness and skillfulness in the nineteenth century. Franz Delitzsch improved the simplest type with two characters and an uncompounded plot: Solomon and a Shulamite shepherdess. Delitzsch set forth that the Song was a drama picturing Solomon falling in love with a Shulamite girl. The literary integrity and the dramatic theory of this interpretation make up a basic unity. Delitzsch divided the Song into six two-scene acts, with two main characters. Shulamite was a historic celebrity who was the daughter of a humble country maiden. Her beauty captivated Solomon, and the purity of her soul turned him away from the immorality of polygamy, and gave him a desire to be married. Solomon sings of his experience, idealizing it after the manner of a poet.

Even though she was far beneath him in social rank, he built her up to equality with himself. According to Delitzsch it was not her outward beauty that attracted Solomon to Shulamith, but her beauty that was heightened by the majesty of her soul. She is a pattern of simple devotedness, naïve simplicity, unaffected modesty, moral purity, and frank prudence—a lily of the field, more beautifully adorned than he could claim to be in all his glory. The erotic external side of the poem has an ethical background. Whatever may be in the sphere of the divinely ordered marriage relation that makes love the happiest is presented to us here in living pictures.

The book is not an allegory identifying Solomon as God. The Song has consequently a typico-mystical meaning with a moral motive and ethical rather than a historic aim. There is no evidence in the scriptures to support Delitzsch’s historical point of view.

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Delitzsch, 1-15.
Kinlaw says “there is an absence of stage direction, lack of agreement on how many characters or who said what, the lack of any clear signs of division into ‘acts’ or ‘scenes.’” Many scholars point out that there is scarcely any of the development or progression in the story line that would be expected of a drama though there are elements of conflict and resolution (3:1-4; 5:2-7).

The Three-Character Drama

The three-character approach introduces a country lover and a more complicated plot. For Ginsburg it is “in the example of virtue in a young woman who encountered and conquered the greatest temptations, and was eventually, rewarded.” Against the counter-tradition of the restriction of women, women liberation emphasizes the function of women in particular. The focus on the human love in marriage relates to the literal criticism. Some reflection is didactic and is similar to that of literal criticism. The lesson that the drama interpretation offers itself is in a good position, regardless of the text’s intention.

As far as the Song is concerned, there has been, on the whole, a reluctance to rest on the surface appearance of the text as a song or a collection of songs solely celebrating human love. The reason for this is the pressure exerted on the text in the Canon of Scripture. The three-character drama interpretation in the Song is not interested in the text, or in the author’s intention and evidence of text. This view


36 Carr, The Song of Solomon, 34.

37Ginsburg, 4.
emphasizes morality and ethics. It makes the protagonist a perfect woman or man intentionally and artificially. Eventually, the perfect man symbolizes Jesus and the perfect woman the church.

The Song has an insufficient narrative content, plot or character development, and, therefore, is less potential to be a drama. Highly imaginative proposals place the figure of Solomon in the foreground, but the personage of Solomon actually does not speak. The three-character drama creates a classic “love-triangle.” The result is not at all in keeping with the text. It was unknown in ancient Hebrew literature. It was highly favored for good reason, but has lost ground. It doesn’t present a picture of attempted seduction by the king. There is no indication of the change of male characters. It is unlikely that an Israelite shepherd would have the means to provide the luxuries mentioned in some of the passages assigned to the shepherd. In their case, they would have no problem with Solomon also being a shepherd.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century the dramatic theory was highly favored. Since then, with good reason, it has lost ground. It is, as Norman Gottwald said so well, “a vain attempt to salvage a moral point and structural coherence.”

38 Mary Timothea Elliot, The Literary Unity of the Canticle (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 13.

39 Craig Glickman, A Song for Lovers (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity, 1976), 178-82.

40 Gottwald, 42.
Literal and Literary Criticism

An explanation of terms can be a departure from the interpretation. Generally, literal interpretation is an attempt to understand Scripture in its plain and ordinary sense without seeing a deeper or spiritual meaning. Dockery classifies the literal approach in three categories. A literal meaning can be seen from three perspectives. The author-oriented perspective is an approach to determine the meaning intended by the author and understood by the original reader as a “historical-critical” interpretation. A “reader-oriented” interpretation has fullness of meaning in that the meaning that is communicated to the reader is broader than the meaning that the author intended to convey. A “text-oriented” interpretation is not so much to discover the “author’s intention,” but the “author’s result.” What is understood or appropriated, then, is not necessarily the author’s intended meaning, or the historical situation of the original author or readers, but the text.

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42 David S. Dockery, Biblical Interpretation Then and Now, Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1992), 188.

43 Ibid., 170-175.

44 Ibid., 173. It lacks the significance of the text that can be read and applied beyond the author’s intentions.

itself.\textsuperscript{46} The literal meaning chosen here can be validated in the text-oriented interpretation along with the reader-oriented interpretation and is appropriated in literary approaches to the biblical text. In this point of view, the pursuit of a literal interpretation is interchanged equally with literary criticism.

The allegorical interpretation is opposite to a literary approach, which emphasizes specifically the text and community of faith. Vendler points out “an enemy” of the text that is rooted in the tradition of biblical commentary. The allegorical interpretation is an analysis of a deceptive nature and causes one to forget the formidable reverse side of writing such as bliss and organ ecstasy in the Song.\textsuperscript{47} Similarly, French critic, Roland, says that an enemy in literature is an interpretative activity that leads to “foreclosure of the text and its pleasure”\textsuperscript{48} and covers and conceals the text’s true significance as a garment.

On the contrary, the changes of an interpretative approach enlarge the boundary of literal interpretation. Literal interpretation fluctuates the boundaries of the text.\textsuperscript{49} The literal role of interpretation does not consist of one method, but binocular critique, that is, an uncommon synthesis of methods. This means taking up “the whole armor” of

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\textsuperscript{49}The text is designed to point the perspective of the reader beyond the surface to a more profound theological meaning. Often this thesis calls the Song of Songs a theology of human love in the image of God. The author is interested in emphasizing and clarifying the propensity of the poet by using allusions and double entendre.
\end{flushleft}
interpretation in order to read the Song.\footnote{Eph. 6:13.}

The synthetic methods for the literal meaning of the text are demonstrated by the literary device within the letter of the text itself and inter-textual scriptures. All prospectives can be integrated, in detail, on the unified holistic prospective of human love and spirituality, the analogue through an extensive metaphor of Genesis 2 and 3 and the Song,\footnote{G. Lolyd Carr, Ibid., 56; Landy, Ibid., 312-3, 318; Brenner, Ibid., 83-4; Kinlaw, Ibid., 1207; Phyllis Trible, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” IAA 41, no. 1 (March 1973): 35-48. She follows “the Song’s antipatriarchal bent, defines the relationship of the lovers in the Song as an egalitarian one: there is no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex.” comparing Genesis and Song of Songs she uses Midrash here to designate a type of exegesis, not a literary genre. On the contrary, Ilana Pardes, Ibid., 118-143. She reads a relationship between the Song and Genesis as a prophetic metaphor, insisting that the dialogue between the lovers does not embrace equality, but it is set within a patriarchal environment. In other words, patriarchal presupposition is primarily intended to control female eroticism as function of father, brother, and husband. By law just as the guard in the Song she both abides and challenges. According to the interpreter’s hermeneutical challenge, both views can be eclectically employed here, even though their views have tension.} and the category of wisdom tradition by sages.\footnote{The Genre links the poetry of the Song of Songs with biblical Wisdom literature. Roland E. Murphy, \textit{Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther}, FOTL 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 104. He sees a link with Proverbs in that the Song may be viewed as “an expansion of the wonder perceived in Prov. 30:19, ‘the way of a man with a maiden,’ and expressed also in Prov. 5:18-19.”} Several far-reaching disciplines should be incorporated in pursuit of the literary method. Full justice of literary criticism must give equal attention to the formal unity of the Song and effective delivery of meaning of text without ignoring the concern of young adults or de-emphasizing the role of the vital romance of a couple.

A characteristic of the Song is the figurative speech, which demands a literary key for interpretation. The perspectives of the various poetic disciplines’ give insight, knowledge, and motivation to address the hermeneutical-literary approach. The figurative language in the text, as poetic literature, uses images in a great variety of functions. The
function of images makes abstract ideas into concrete solidity,\textsuperscript{53} embody moral truths\textsuperscript{54} and theological realms,\textsuperscript{55} and control the modes of thought,\textsuperscript{56} using emotional responses and aesthetic sensitivities.\textsuperscript{57} Figurative images in the Song do not seem to directly express the moral concern in a theological field. Eventually, figurative language is left to a human understanding in a more holistic, dynamic, and metaphorical form. The activity requires that the preacher be able to enter into the world of the text by means of the imagination.

The only method of interpretation that satisfies the function of figurative language is literary criticism from the text-oriented prospective, which acts as a synthetic prospective. Literary criticism of the Song is defined based on an analysis of both Robert Alter's definition\textsuperscript{58} and rhetorical criticism\textsuperscript{59} plus an augmentation of both views.

Literary criticism means giving minutely discriminating attention to the sound, syntax, poetic viewpoint, structural units, the metaphorical language and the creating


\textsuperscript{54}C. S. Lewis, Miracles (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1947), 89.


\textsuperscript{58}Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 44. His theory came from the narrative viewpoint. It should be fixed under a trait of poetry. Literary analysis means the various and minutely discriminating attention given to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and more; the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare and the novels of Tolstoy.

\textsuperscript{59}Roy B. Zuck, Basic Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth (Colorado Springs, CO: ChariotVictor Publishing: 1991), 124. He defines the word “rhetoric” as the art of language as a way of communication with a literary effect. His definition of rhetorical interpretation refers to determining how to style, form and influence how it is to be understood. The method of rhetorical interpretation analyzes its genre (kind of composition), structure (how the material is organized), and figures of speech (colorful expressions for literary effect) and how those factors influence the meaning of the text.
meaning of ideas. It builds vivid imagination within the reader’s mind, designs meaning from the text, or the author’s intention, conveys rhetorical, emotive, cognitive, perceptive, and pictorial effects, and encourages reflection of the truth conveyed, eventually generating an effective response in the community of faith.

This literary viewpoint relates to how literature of a text communicates. The literary method as expressed in detailed analysis has included all processes from the total understanding of the biblical text and setting through the effective imagination of the reader, to giving well being to the community of faith through the form of the metaphorical language. The biblical idea of literary criticism seems to be found in 1 John 1:1-4. The verses embody a vivid, effective function of message that makes the obscure into concrete, invisible into visible, with the aesthetic function that gives the joy of the message to an audience. In the Song the reaction of the community ought to realize that the author of the Song uses images to represent the real event in which we live. In this prospective, literal criticism functions as an “incarnational nature of literature.”

What does the Song communicate on the perspective of literal criticism? The Song celebrates the dignity and purity of human love within an established marital relationship. It extols human love in courtship and marriage by letting the lovers speak

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60 NIV. If the motif of these verses is about the incarnation of the word, it gives an idea of literary criticism called an incarnate method because of having the features of rhetorical language. Italic, bold, and underline forms are the writer’s: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”


62 Carr, The Song of Solomon, 52-4.
for themselves. The Hebrew Bible provides a coherent framework interpreting the Song as expressing a theology of human sexuality. This theology is that marriage is the institution in which sexual love is rightly fulfilled.

The beauty and love of the Song is both physical and spiritual. Concerning human love and spirituality, it does not separate sexuality and spiritual life, human’s flesh and soul, human beings from nature, and body from Spirit.63 Murphy supports this view:

One cannot ascertain the precise historical reason why the canticle was accepted into canon, but surely a poem of love, which exalts pure love between husband and wife, is not below the dignity of divine inspiration. Nor does the term naturalistic do justice to such a view, which recognizes sacred features in human life, instituted and blessed by God. The work would never have entered the canon had it been a poem about merely human love. Human love is certainly worthy of divine inspiration since it is of divine creation.64

It is interesting that one’s sexual experiences influence one’s religious perspective. The goal of the lovers in the Song is not only the intense union of a couple but also intense union with the Father through Jesus Christ by living in the Spirit. Their human love follows the example of Christ. Our target is to attain this highest ideal or goal.

Inter-textuality deals with the analogy between Song of Songs and Genesis chapters 2 and 3 within the Bible’s interpretation. One realizes that what God created is good, including the relationship of love between a man and a woman. The Song’s humanistic viewpoint in the broader vision sketched in Genesis 1 and 2, is

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demythologized, desacralized and secularized. It is a vital part of God’s gracious design for human life, a good gift to be enjoyed. God’s action of creating us as sexual beings was no accident or compromise. It was the divine intention. The Song is an extended commentary on the creation story, and an expansion of the finest recorded love-song in history.65 The effect of love’s purity is protection from a fall, and the romantic and Edenic qualities of these love songs have prompted a poetic restoration of paradise lost, or as an imaginative vision of paradise found in a future still to be achieved. It teaches the excellence and dignity of the love that draws man and woman together. It presents love as free from puritanical restraint.

Concerning the wisdom tradition,66 we could say that the Song is an object lesson, and an extended proverb illustrating the rich wonders of human love itself as a gift of God’s love.67 Brevard Childs exemplifies this by stating:

Reflection on the joyful and mysterious nature of love is between a man and a woman within the institution of marriage. The frequent assertion that the Song is a celebration of human love per se fails utterly to reckon with the canonical context... nowhere is human love in the Song as wisdom’s itself celebrated in wisdom literature, not in the whole Old Testament for that matter. Wisdom, not love, is divine, yet love between a man and his wife is an inextinguishable force within human experience, “strong as death,” which the sage seeks to understand.68 The function of wisdom based on reflection in the human experience in relation to

65Car, Ibid., 34.

66Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs, 99. Wisdom is praising the incomparable joys and benefits of human love for personified wisdom. The sages seem to have added their own generally self-consciously didactic signature in 8:6-7.


68Childs, 575. He adds that the wisdom framework served to maintain the Song’s integrity as a phenomenon of human experience reflecting the divine order, which the community of faith continued to enjoy.
divine reality is essentially didactic and philosophical. In conservative protestant scholarly circles, E. J. Young highlights the literal-didactic view:

The correct interpretation is that the Song celebrates the dignity and purity of human love. This is a fact which has not always been sufficiently stressed. The Song, therefore, is didactic and moral in its purpose. It comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble true love is.  

The Song has sparked an interest in the rediscovery and reemphasis of its modern message with a didactic view. "The Song and its modern message," written by Lawrin in 1962, describes the Song most simply as expressing the deep love between a man and a woman.

The Song provides the religious teacher with excellent material to teach the importance of fidelity and mutuality in human love to young adults, engaged couples, and married couples within the community of faith.

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70 Robert B. Laurin, "The Life of True Love: The Song of Songs and its Modern Message," *Christianity Today*, August 3 (1962), 1062-3. He offers practical lessons about the purpose of the Song of Songs. "... Love is exalted...The Bible is fully aware of lust as the muse of sex; but at the same time it is forthright in approving the wholesomeness of sex... as a healthy, natural thing...God-ordained wholesomeness to sex...not to be shunned, but to be praised... the meaning of beauty...the whole personality...humility and selflessness (2:1, 2; cf. 1:5, 6)... the ingredients of love...the contemporary world has popularized infidelity to the marriage bond...it speaks of the exclusive love of two people... (7:13, 4:4, 7:4, 5, 6:5, 6:4)...Steadfastness...(8:6, 7)...(2: 10-13)...love as the power of life...separation can never be a permanent situation...(cf. 2:5-6; 3:1-5; 5:2-8; 8:14)...the Christian faith has brought a new power, a new force into the love relationship...transform the commonplace and help us to achieve the true use of sex and real fulfillment in love that mere biological and romantic love cannot... something more...help us understand that our love for one another is an imperfect example of God's love for us. The maiden said that, 'love is strong as death'; Paul tells us that God's love in Christ has overcome death (Rom. 8:35-39)."

71 Brinkerhoff, Dempsey, "The Interpretation and Use of the Song of Songs," *Dissertation*, Boston University School of Theology, 1963, 141. Cited by Pope, 197. Dempsey suggests that the modern use of Song of Songs ought to include premarital counseling and in some cases marital adjustment counseling... Song of Songs is an exquisite presentation of the total involvement of both partners, each for the other,
Advanced methods of this study discover the literal meaning through literary devices, for there is a cluster of imagery in the Song. Figurative language builds vivid imagination within the reader’s mind and creates meaning from the text. The moods and experiences of lovers, feelings of longing, pain, and happiness are all expressed through metaphorical devices.

Sub-Conclusion

The various theories result in different understandings. Concerning the allegorical approach as well as the typological and dramatic approaches, there is a nebulous demarcation and a blurring of boundaries between them. Various interpretations reveal both distinctive facets and open up corresponding possibilities for understanding the Song’s message for the community of faith.

The allegorical approach offers a monotheistic impact and plays an important role in including the Song in the Canon based on the prophetic tradition. The typological approach gives birth to the Christological issue. The cultic view delivers the background, which helps in understanding the metaphorical language. The dramatic view gives an influential insight directly into the intimate human love between a man and a woman within the ethical compass, and it also gives a didactic view. The dream theory offers the creativity and abundant speculation of the author. Despite their contributions, the several theories have the weaknesses that they do not regard the intention of the text.

according to the divine plan for human happiness. In dispelling conceptions of sex, or in helping to rekindle the romance of a marriage, the parish minister, in dealing with troubled marriages can frequently use this poem. John B. White, A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry (Missoula, Mont: Scholar’s Press, 1978), 3.
This literal view will serve as an appropriate foundational study for an interpretation of the book of Song of Songs that is most consistent with a grammatical-historical-contextual-literary-hermeneutic.\textsuperscript{72} It also avoids arbitrary apologetics, which attempt to overcome the absence of religious or theological significance. A study by the literal approach is proficient to evaluate, receive, apply and determine the literal-didactic, wisdomic-didactic, spirituality and higher literary purpose.

Although the literal approach is not designed to elaborate theological doctrine or to teach ethics, its unapologetic depiction of rapturous, reciprocal love between a man and a woman does model an important dimension of human existence, an aspect of life that ancient Israel understood to be divinely instituted and sanctioned. Intertwined with the figurative expressions of the lovers’ experiences and happiness, human love can be complete under the influence of the love of God as God’s purposeful blessing in the relationship of human sexuality.

\textsuperscript{72}J. Paul Tanner, “The History of Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” BSac 154 (January-March 1997): 23-46. Literary-hermeneutic was added by the writer.
CHAPTER THREE

THE LITERARY FUNCTION OF FIGURE OF SPEECH

The Characteristics of the Song

The exquisitely rich imagery of the Song would certainly qualify the Song to be lyrical poetry.1 The Song’s chief poetic characteristics are erotic imagery and verbal recursion. These features are given as a reason for denying the literary integrity. The repeated shifting of speakers is one of the kaleidoscopic changes, which breaks the flow of context.2 Unexpectedly, juxtapositions of unrelated utterances and dispersion of themes disturb a linear succession. No clear demarcation of the individual units that begin and end refrains prevents an overall unit structure.3 No palpable identification of the

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1Marcia Falk, Love Lyrics from the Hebrew Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 71-2. “Lyric,” and “lyrical” are surely among the more impressionistic words used to characterize and praise. The lyric tends to be a subjective form, expressive of personal feelings toward specific subject matter and addressed to a particular listener. The speaker of the lyric is usually an individual first-person speaker, and more than one voice may sometimes speak a lyric. The subject matter of the lyric can vary widely. The audience of the lyric may be almost anyone, a relative, a friend, a beloved, a stranger, God, or the self.

2M. V. Fox, The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 266. The second and third persons are used with the same referent in a single sentence. Through its indirectness third-person addresses convey a tone of respect and awe.

dramatic persons inhibits recognition of the protagonists.\textsuperscript{4} No comprehensible categorization of speech makes it difficult to decide if it is real or imaginative.\textsuperscript{5} The inconsistent storyline diffuses the text by multiplying the points of view and arousing much speculation about the interpretation. The many voices serve to expand the boundaries of the text, add diversity of content and contribute to the open-endedness of the composition.

Nevertheless, the optimistic interpreter tends to understand that the function of the metaphorical language is to build common characteristics and a common identity: (1) It is necessary to determine the internal coherence\textsuperscript{6} and internal structural units\textsuperscript{7} at the level of image through rhetorical skills. (2) Both the symmetry and climax, or center and conclusion are the key structures to the unity of the contextual flow in the Song.\textsuperscript{8} (3) The

\textsuperscript{4}This approach does nothing to forward the identifying of the speakers beyond the simple male and female, singular and plural categories.

\textsuperscript{5}It is useful to categorize the speech in these poems as interior monologue, exterior monologue, double monologue, and dialogue.


\textsuperscript{7}This diffuseness further marks the centrifugal tendency of the Song. Content and form are indissoluble.

\textsuperscript{8}Francis Landy, \textit{Paradoxes of Paradise: Identify and Difference in the Song of Songs}, BLS 7 (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 51-2. Within a tight construction, the same two coordinates exert contrary pressures on the poems: the one, the space of the poem tends towards symmetry, the other, its time, moves towards the climax. There are two structural foci: the center and the conclusion. The center is the space, the silence, between the consummation in the garden in 5:1 and the beloved's awakening in 5:2. The other focus, the climax, is the credo of 8:6-7, the message that love is as strong as death. The consequence of the interaction of the two forces makes the recapitulation an intensification, that condenses previous material to complete the circle, and uses it to sustain the climax.
dialogical structure plays an important role in developing the subunits. 9 (4) The creativity of the poet, characteristics of the poem, initiative of the interpreter and reader-oriented responses cannot be denied. (5) The poetic features of the Song can corresponded to inter-textual recursion, extra-biblical inter-textuality, 10 and the analogies of biblical imagery of inter-textuality. 11 (6) Reading the Song produces a variety of sensory images and vivid mental pictures. (7) From the perspective of the youth, the imagery can be easily understood. 12 (8) Being unable to discern the meaning of imagery does not mean that it does not exist nor does it mean that the metaphor has failed. Rather, it encourages the reader to sharpen his or her appetite, and to attend more closely to the images in question. 13

To begin with, the interpretation of imagery is first discovered in the immediate

9 Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs (MN: Fortress, 1990), 66. Elements of dialogue seem to provide the strongest evidence of sequential arrangement of poetic units with the Song and thus also suggest the work’s overall coherence.


11 This is from a general sort of imitative recursion, which stems from within the Hebrew canon itself: Psalm 45 (Carr, 28-29), Hosea 1-3 (Brenner, 80), Hos. 2:7; Deut. 4:29 (Fisch, 87), Isaiah 62 (Fisch, 92-4), Genesis 2-3 (Carr, 56; Landy, 312-13, 318), Genesis 2:18-25 (Kinlaw, 1207), Wisdom Literature (Alter, 185; Murphy, 104; LaSor, Hubbard & Bush 610; Landy, 318). Alter, Robert. The Art of Biblical Poetry (New York: Basic Books, 1985); William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederic W. M. Bush, Old Testament Survey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

12 M. H. Segal, “The Song of Songs,” VT 12 (1962): 480. Segal speaks of the biblical literature as the undoubted product of youth. It is inspired by the joyous spirit of a healthy normal youth with its happy optimism, its gaiety, and its love of good-natured fun. It abounds in playfulness, in gentle raillery and fun, and touching sentiments of love and tenderness.

13 Jill A. Munro, “Spikenard and Saffron: The Imagery of the Song of Songs,” JSOTSup 203 (1995): 16-8. We should not be daunted by this breath of reference, for it is also the genius of the poet to combine literary commonplaces in a surprising and innovative way.
text itself. The imagery in the book demands proper interpretation to guide one along the path of holistic interpretation.\textsuperscript{14} The study of figures of speech most likely designates the imagery in the Song.

The figure of speech can be divided into three categories. The first category is figures of thought for comparison, regarding similes, metaphors, hyperbole and imagery.\textsuperscript{15} The second category is rhetorical figures involving repeated sound, omission, substitution and arrangement.\textsuperscript{16} The third category is rhetorical structure involving units and structure by using parallelism, chiasmus and refrain. This study will attempt to make a coherent structure, mark the structural boundaries and search out the motif of the Song. The results gained from a literary and structural analysis may be used to solve the numerous exegetical problems and interpretations connected with the Song. The poetic features outline the overall structural organization and a partial explication of the figurative nature interwoven in the divinely established love between a man and a woman in marriage.

\textsuperscript{14}Fisch, 90.

\textsuperscript{15}E. W. Bullinger, \textit{Figures of Speech used in the Bible} (Grand Rapids: Baker Book Hose, 1968), x. Figures of thought, or trope, and rhetorical figures, or scheme. The former main function is transfer or “transfiguration” of meaning. It is “an expression that means something else, or something more than what it says: it is language that departs from its literal meaning.”

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid. The rhetorical figure gives an emotional pleasure in general, and an aural or visual excitement in particular. A lot of poems used in love songs contain the above rhetorical figures to heighten the musical effect.
Figures of Thought for Comparison

The figures that involve thought and comparison consist of five major kinds: simile, metaphor, irony, imagery and hyperbole.

**Simile**

The simile draws a correspondence between two different things while maintaining the literal meanings of both. The words used to introduce a simile are “to be like,” a specialized meaning of “like” and sequences such as “like... so.” The functions of the simile are to open and end a section, to sustain interest, to add emphasis to a motif and to express vividness or emotive intent. Examples of the simile are found in the following verses: 3:6; 1:9; 2:8-9; 10-11; 2:10-13; 2:16-17; 4:1-5c; 6:5-7b; 7:2c-10; 7:2-6; 7:8-19; 8:14.

**Metaphors, or representation**

The metaphor declares that one thing is another. It is an implied comparison between two dissimilar things. The metaphor provides for theological reflection. It is used in an unfamiliar context to give light to the creation of a new meaning. The metaphor’s function defines, expresses, and communicates something for which has no

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18 Alter, 193. A part of this verse is an ostentatious simile for instruction.

19 Ibid., 194. These verses introduce a poetic comparison and explore its ramifications.

20 Ibid. These verses arise and join him in the freshly blossoming landscape.
dictionary meaning. Examples of the metaphor are evident in the following verses: 1:12-14; 4:11\textsuperscript{21}; 4; 5\textsuperscript{22}; 7:5.\textsuperscript{23}

**Imagery**

Both the root of meaning and broad implication of this term are akin to the word "imitate," and refer to a likeness, reproduction, reflection, copy, resemblance, or similitude.\textsuperscript{24} A poet uses this style to bring life and movement to the picture, while appealing to the senses. Imagery applies to figurative language. Why are figures of speech used?

Figures of speech are used to give additional force, bring vividness to life, intensify the feeling, add greater emphasis and deeper meaning, attract attention, make abstract or intellectual ideas more concrete, aid intention, abbreviate an idea and to encourage reflection to the truth conveyed.\textsuperscript{25}

Imagery conveys the pictorial and perceptive effects of figurative language. The readers draw out some of the major images from the figurative language in the text of Song of Songs. Norman Friedman sums up this mental effect of imagery in psychological detail:

We trace mental imagery in big issue. Psychologists identified seven kinds of mental images: visual (sight, brightness, clarity, color, and motion), auditory (hearing), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), tactile (touch, then temperature,


\textsuperscript{22}Alter, 199-203. This juxtaposition technique in the Song 4 and 7 are designed to increase the Song’s effect upon the hearer’s mind and emotions.

\textsuperscript{23}Watson, 270-271.


texture), organic (awareness of heartbeat, pulse, breathing, digestion), and kinesthetic (awareness of muscle tension and movement).\textsuperscript{26}

Imagery affects the reader emotionally and perceptively. Also, the concept of mental imagery is pedagogically useful, increasing the effects of pastoral counseling with the message of God by presenting these vivid images of the poetry. Its function carries strongly emotional, perceptive, cognitive, sensitive and comprehensive values in the message. Imagery is the dynamic product of all figurative language. Imagery cannot easily be restricted within figure of speech. Imagery includes the results of figurative language.

\textit{Hyperbole}

The hyperbole is a deliberate way of expressing exaggeration, in which more is said than is literally meant, in order to add emphasis to the size, numbers, danger, prowess, fertility and the like. The main function of hyperbole is to replace over-worked adjectives such as “marvelous,” “enormous” and “colossal” with a word or phrase, which conveys the same meaning more effectively.\textsuperscript{27} Examples of the hyperbole are shown in the following verses: 1:8ab\textsuperscript{28}; 5:11a\textsuperscript{29}; 1:3.

\textsuperscript{26}Norman, 561.

\textsuperscript{27}Watson, 318-9.

\textsuperscript{28}Their use of the word pair as an epithet is one of many instances where the poet employs various forms of hyperbole to more effectively express the beauty and uniqueness of both lover and beloved.

\textsuperscript{29}“His head is refined gold,” is a type of gold. It is placed here as a hyperbole. The intention is to imply that he is precious in the eye of the beloved, and his beauty dazzles her.
Rhetorical Figures Involving Repeated-Sound

Hebrew poets also use the sounds of words to create poetic effects. Hebrew is an explosive, staccato, sound-conscious language. The devices of alliteration, assonance, paronomasias, and onomatopoeia are used to get an aesthetic advantage. Where sound-units are repeated, the result can be alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and word-play.

Assonance

The repetition of the same or closely similar vowel sound is produced in a series of words. Its chief purpose is to give a feeling of unity to a poetic unit and special emphasis to the words that use it. Examples of the assonance are evident in the following verses: 2:15; 4:8; 5:10; 8:6.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the effect produced when the same or similar consonants recur within a unit of verses. Its principle function is to be cohesive in nature, binding together the components of each line. Besides cohesion, this mnemonic function also serves to assist memorization to promote a more powerful function and to focus the reader’s attention more vividly. Examples of the alliteration are appeared in the following verses:

31 Watson, 224.
32 This gives the verse a lilting, highly musical quality.
33 The aesthetic pleasure is created by the resonant quality of the beloved’s song.
The lover’s name is identified with perfumed oil in 1:3b. The name (1:5d {v. Solomon}) was covertly present in the alliteration and consonants.

The alliteration of s (c), n (n), m (m) in conjunction with the floral images, has the effect of softness and delicacy. In 2:1 rose and lily are common field flowers and used with הַגָּר (plain) and הַשָּׁקָר (valley), they accent a certain lowliness.

Mary Timothea Elliott, The Literary Unity of the Canticle (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 67. The structure, as X (singular) among Y (plural), gives scope for abundant alliteration and the consequent emphasis. The comparison itself is introduced with the alliteration אֶחָד (among) while the two elements הַגָּר (a lily) and הַשָּׁקָר (thorns) have an identical doubling of consonants. The lover takes the word and turns it into an affirmation of superlative beauty by way of contrast. The air of excitement and quickness of movement pictured in the content is reflected in verses 8-9 by the rapid succession of brief alliteration syllables, abounding in breathless ה (n) ה (n) consonants. The two verses are also carefully balanced and unified by the repetition of similar syntagmic forms.

Repetition of the consonant א (b) at the beginning of each line further unifies the section by means of alliteration. In face, b appears as an initial consonant six times, twice in each line. A combination of the vowels א (i/o) at the end of each line adds an element of simple rhyme.

Three terms are repeated in 4:8ab סָבַע (with me), סָבַע (from) and נֵבֶל (Lebanon) in 8c,d. Two ס (from) and וה (the top) appear. Finally 8f repeats only the locative ס (from) at the beginning of each cola. An unusual density of alliteration and assonance in the entire verse complements the actual repetition of words. The two imperative סָבַע (come) and רָאֵי (see) introduce a note of urgency by following one another in quick succession.

A partial acrostic appears.

The alternating א, א vowels and the alternation of the consonant מ give 8:5b a tone of awe as well as a slow measured pace.

Elliot, 195. The repetitive parallelism in 8:6ab initiates a pattern of alliteration (k) and assonances (א, א) that intensifies as the text develops.

Synonymous parallelism, alliteration and assonance are artfully employed from 8:5c onwards to achieve a cumulative climactic effect.


Ibid.
Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia can be defined as the imitation of the actual sounds within the rules of the language concerned. The main purpose is to heighten the beauty (imagery) lending creativity to the poets who skillfully shape it into poetry to entice and delight readers. Such poetry is intended to be listened to rather than read silently. Examples of the onomatopoeia are shown in the following verses: 1:2, 2:12 (harp); 4:16 (water).

Paronomasia

In the absence of homonyms, paronomasia acts by using the same words or similar-sounding words to suggest different meanings. It is sometimes called a “play on words,” a “word play” or a “pun.” Examples of paronomasia are shown in the following:

- 1:2, 1:3, 4:10, 8:1b-2.  

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44 Watson, 235. Repetition of the same root וב (kiss) also creates onomatopoeia. It offers the limited choice of words for “to kiss” and the poet simply repeated the root, producing the desired effect.

45 There is a wordplay in הב (drink) and וב (kiss) in 8:1-2, it may be that 1:2otre oמ שג (sweeter is your love than wine) already suggests this play (5:1). The LXX shows וב (let him kiss me) in the MT as וב (let him give me to drink). The same word play occurs in 8:1-2, but in the latter both words are made explicit. (1:2). In the LXX וב (your love) can be read as וב (your breasts) (sweeter are your breasts than wine). Even the writer of the LXX knows the effect of paronomasia.

46 וב (oil) resembles וב (name). The beloved appears to be savoring the sweet sound of her lover’s name.

47 וב (fragrance) corresponds to 11ד וב (Lebanon) by means of paronomasia with וב (frankincense) וב (11d) and וב (14b) paronomasia. The paronomasia of וב that began in 4:6; 4:8, 11 continues in 4:14, 15.

48 The paronomasia of וב (I would kiss you) and וב (I would give you to drink) suggests the connection between kisses and wine (1:2; 4:10; 7:10).
Rhetorical Figures Involving Omission

Asyndeton, or No-ands

The omission of an expected conjunction is called an asyndeton. It is used to hasten the reader towards the topic to emphasize the figure. An example of the asyndeton appears in verse 5:6.

Zeugma

This is the joining of two nouns to one verb when logically only one of the nouns goes with the verb. The relative ellipsis of a verb is called a zeugma. Its function is to lead the reader to the emphasis of the passage. For example, there are ellipses of the initial verb in 1:10, 8:2b and 3b and non-verbal ellipses in 2:1, 17 and 3:8.

Rhetorical Figures of Speech Involving Substitution

Hendiadys

Hendiadys is used to split a single thing into two, or even three parts. It is the expression of one single but complex concept by using two separate words. The function of hendiadys is to extend the existing vocabulary. Hendiadys is used in place of an adverb as a hyperbole. Examples of the hendiadys are revealed in the following verses: 2:11; 5:18.
Metonymy

This is the substituting of one word for another. At least three kinds of metonymy are used: the cause is used in the place of the effect (Prov. 12:18); the effect is used in place of the cause (Ps. 18:1); and an object is used to represent a different word. Examples of the metonymy can be found in the following verses: 1:5c; 7:10.

Synecdoché

Synecdoché is the substituting of a part of something for the whole or the whole for the part. Proverbs 1:16, "Their feet rush into sin," obviously does not mean that only their feet run. Their feet, the part, represent the whole, namely, themselves. Examples of the synecdoché appear in the following verses: 5:2a זכר (my heart), 5:4a שפם (my inner part), 5:6c ישן (my soul)⁴⁹, 7:1d כבש (as the dance).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Like the tents of Kedar; שתר (like the curtains of Solomon) These are the parallel terms in 1:5c,d. ח Unary (curtains) is used as a metonym for tent. The beloved declares herself to be black as the tents of עיר (Kedar); and beautiful as the curtains of Solomon.

⁵⁰ The poet names a part of the body to stand for the whole person. He advances to underscore the bride’s total response to the voice of the lover.

⁵¹ Mauer I. Gruber, "Ten Dance-Derived Expression in the Hebrew Bible," Bib 62, no. 3 (1981): 343. "The dance" appears to have originated as a way of joyously celebrating a military victory. It was a whirling dance performed by women. In his excellent article on the vocabulary of dance in the Hebrew Bible, Gruber points out that the time came to designate "joy" by synecdoché and also the musical instruments, which were used in the dance. Figures of Speech involve arrangement of words or phrases.
Rhetorical Figures Involving Arrangement

List

Lists can be classified into three groups: simple lists, lists with a final total, and lists with an initial total. Occasionally the total repeats all the items in the lists and it is then termed a gather-line. The modern audience delights in this category, presumably because it combines entertainment with instruction.52

When discussing the necessities of interpreting the figure of speech, Ryken warns that there is no book in the Bible that does not require the ability to interpret poetry to some degree, because every book includes some figurative language. Examples of the list are evident in the following verses: 4:14, 5:11-16 (body of the man), 7:2-10 (body of the woman), 4:1-5 (description of woman’s head and torso), 6:4-7 (the woman’s head).

Rhetorical Structure Involving Units and Structure

Parallelism

This style is called parallelism because of the tendency of biblical styles to establish, through syntax, morphology and meaning, a feeling of correspondence between

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52Watson, 352-6. May your palate be as good as wine (1:2, 4:10, 5:1). Through metonymy מְדִינָה (palate) acquires the meaning “kiss” and binds this verse in a primary way with 1:2: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for your love is sweeter than wine.”
two parts. According to Kugel, parallelism, the terse, subtly differentiated couplet, is the "highest form known to the biblical writer."\footnote{James L. Kugel, The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 2.}

Hebrew poetry is a delicate expression of carefully skilled human speech formed with special attention to give an artistic effect, along with a perceptible, flexible parallelism.\footnote{Kugel, 94.} Alter also presents the purpose of parallelism as "a linguistic coupling of the special unit and as a device for memorability of the discourse."\footnote{David L. Petersen & Kent Harold Richards, Interpreting Hebrew Poetry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 12.}

Kugel prefers to restrict parallelism to one type only, "A is so, and what's more, B,"\footnote{Alter, 9.} schematized as: \[\frac{\mathit{A} \text{ is so, and what's more, } \mathit{B}}{--------//--------} \] with the single slash representing the pause between the clauses (short) and the pair of slashes representing the final pause (long).\footnote{Kugel, 42.} Kugel's theories focus on "connection of thought and action." The sequence expresses "B's connectedness to A."

Parallelism interplays between lines and offers the possibility of relation of the line's internal structure. The term "seconding" is used to demonstrate a close interrelation of the correspondence between lines as an emphatic characteristic. "Seconding" can be explained by functions of interpretation as figurative language. "Seconding" explains the role of line B toward line A. In summary, line B "rounds off, adds, carries, furthers, echoes, defines, restates, contrasts, intensifies, strengthens, heightens, empowers, \footnote{Ibid., 51.}"

\[\text{-----------/----------} // \]

\[\text{with the single slash representing the pause between the clauses (short) and the pair of slashes representing the final pause (long).}\]
particularizes, expands, dramatizes, focuses, and satisfies” line A. The explanation of "seconding" is given by Watson's explanation of the comprising of lines A and B, concerning semantic parallelism.

There is an obvious relationship between "seconding" and interpretation. "Seconding" functions as the criteria for a critical tool, truth and usefulness in that it is appropriate to the data and provides a functional and helpful approach for the purpose of reading and interpreting texts.

The types of parallelism appear to carefully articulate the interrelationship of semantic parallelism with other types of parallelism in the Song: Janus parallelism, synonymous parallelism, semantic parallelism, antithetic parallelism, climatic parallelism, and chiastic parallelism.

Types of Parallelism

**Janus Parallelism**

Janus parallelism, as Gordon notes, appears in the middle of the sentence. The function of Janus' parallelism hinges on the use of a single word with two entirely different meanings.

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The birds’ evocation of the spring turns literally on a so-called Janus-parallelism. "The time of ָּזָּוּן (pruning/singing) has come." Through the ambiguity, pruning complements the preceding ַּּוַּיָּנִים ְֹראֹ 적용 (blossoms appear in the land) and singing supports ַּּולִית הָּוַּיָּדָה (the turtle-dove's voice is heard in our land) as a specification of birdsongs. To measure the writer’s skill, the central word to the whole poem is that which epitomizes the theme of the song. This kind of parallelism is quite ingenious, for it hinges on the use of a single word.

*Synonymous Parallelism.*

Synonymous parallelism states the same thought in successive stitches. It consists chiefly of a certain equality, resemblance, or correlation, where the same sentiment is repeated in different, but equivalent terms. This is mainly due to a preference for variation, inverted word order, contradiction, or expansion of parallel terms. Examples of synonymous parallelism appeared in the following verses: 2:13, 3:4=8:2; 3:4e=8:2b; 3:1-4; 4:1b-2a; 4:8; 5:6-8; 4:12-5:1; 5:1e=5:1f; 5:1e=5:1f; 5:2ef; 8:1cd=8:2ab.

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62 It means possibly both “pruning” and “singing” (2:12).


64 Watson, 368-9.

65 William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard & Frederic W. M. Bush, 308. Synonymous parallelism has a number of variations: “ballast variant,” “compensation,” “incomplete,” and “emblematic” parallelism.

66 Roland. E. Murphy, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 88. Two basic lineation patterns can be distinguished in synonymous or semantic paralleled couplets, balanced and echoing, typically with ellipsis of one grammatical-syntactical element in the second line.
Semantic Parallelism

The relation of the second verse to the first is not really parallelism, but is an explanation, a prepositional or adverbial modifier of the first verse to apprehend the elaborate and precious concreteness of the object. For example: 1:2; 1:4; 2:2-3; 3:6-10; 3:1-4; 4:1; 5:2-8; 5:9.

Antithetic Parallelism

This parallelism balances the stitches through opposition or contrast of thought. This may simply mean that the second stitch recapitulates the thoughts of the first in a negative form (Ps. 1:6). An example of antithetic parallelism is evident in verse 1:5.

Climactic Parallelism

This feature of parallelism compensates an incomplete line for a balanced parallelism. Climactic parallelism is a couplet (or tri-stitch) in which the succeeding lines develop in steps.

In general, the effect of the pattern is to increase the tension of the listener. Once his attention and curiosity have been aroused by the incomplete nature of the first line, the listener feels compelled to learn the outcome. Examples of climactic parallelism are

67 Alter, 186-9. His theory is a synthetic one, including many different kinds presented.
68 Gottwald, 832.
69 Watson, 346. It has a number of variations: Staircase, incremented, intensification and repetitive.
70 Ibid., 150-6.
71 Ibid., 154.

Chiastic Parallelism

Chiasmus is but one form of varied word order in parallelism. Its parallel members form an “X” in Greek. Chiasmus means a series (a, b, c) and its inversion (c, b, a), taken as a combined unit; however, chiasmus is not confined to the couplet. The function of chiasmus in poetry is to relieve the monotony of persistent parallelism. At a more specific level, chiastic patterns may be either structural in function, or expressive. The structural function of chiasmus is used to open, connect, and specify the poem, and expresses reversal of an existing state. Chiastic parallelism gives the audience familiarity, and it alerts an audience to impending change. The use of parallel forms in oral dialogues persuades the audience, dramatizes the story, and delivers the truth. The function of chiasmus in the Song builds a macrostructure and microstructure on the basis of every distant parallelism and refrain. An increasingly resonant pattern of overall thematic

\[\text{\textsuperscript{72}}\text{It serves to highlight the totality and/or the mutuality of love in the descriptive portion of the text.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{73}}\text{In the winter, the rainy season, the sky is overcast with clouds. The winter is used in the sense of rain itself. “To pass, to go” is interchanged. The winter rain is thought of as a person who has passed by. The second verse compensates and intensifies the first verse with the significance of winter.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{74}}\text{It functions to accent the inexorable progression in the events being reported.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{75}}\text{Watson, 205.}\]
significance is in the form of chiastic parallelism. Examples of the chiastic parallelism are evident in the following verses: 2:8-17; 1:4; 1:11; 1:6; 2:10-13; 2:14; 6:8-9.

Refrain

The refrain not only encompasses the poetic characteristic, but also plays a major role in the thematic expressions, the structural arrangement, and the rhetorical dynamics of the Song as a whole. The primary function of the refrain is to establish the formal structure of the poem, mark the poetic units of the canticle stylistically, and create a sense of unity by repeating vocabularies and images at various moments. The minor refrains serve as transitions between subdivisions within the various parts. Sometimes a refrain may be subdivided and combined with different motifs or images to fulfill the organizational principle of associated sequences. The effective role of the refrain in the Song eliminates the difficulties of making structural unity in the Song. The refrain acts as a literary device and demarcation. The demarcation of structural unity is one of the most

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76Ibid., 42. In 2:8-9 the Lover comes, and is compared to a gazelle or fawn leaping on the mountain. In 2:16-17 the same image is used of his departure, an association strengthened by the epithet "who feeds among the lilies," in the corresponding passage. The substructure that links the center to the periphery and integrates the two remaining verses into the total composition tightens both the metaphor and the cohesion of the passage. The voice of the turtledove in 2:12 is identified with that of the beloved as a dove in 2:14.

77It throws the grammatical spotlight upon the ‘perfect dove’ of the lover’s dreams. It enhances its lyrical quality and exhibits more fully its love-encased theme.

78Ryken, 276. Recursion can be used with reiteration of formal, semantic of sound, sense and syntax. It is responsible for the chiasmus, parallelism, and refrain. Imagery in combination with recursion contributes to the “golden style.” Ryken calls refrain “the most purely poetic thing in the Bible.”

79Watson, 104.

80Elliot, 258.
difficult tasks in the Song. The various refrains that appeared in the Song, epithets, verses, motif and images are presented in the tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Refrain of Epithets for a Groom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groom Epithets</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My beloved</td>
<td>13, 14, 16</td>
<td>2, 8, 9, 10, 16, 7</td>
<td>4, 16</td>
<td>5, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16</td>
<td>6, 3</td>
<td>7, 10, 11, 12, 14</td>
<td>8, 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beloved</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your beloved</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her beloved</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friend</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who my soul loves</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My love</td>
<td>19, 15</td>
<td>2, 10, 13</td>
<td>4, 1, 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beloved is Shepherd</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5, 1, 2</td>
<td>3, 1, 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>4, 12</td>
<td>3, 11</td>
<td>5, 1, 2</td>
<td>7, 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
<td>3, 1, 2, 11</td>
<td>5, 1, 2</td>
<td>7, 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Solomon</td>
<td>3, 1</td>
<td>3, 1, 2, 11</td>
<td>5, 1, 2</td>
<td>7, 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dove</td>
<td>2, 14</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>7, 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Refrain of Epithets for a Bride

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bride Epithet</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beloved</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6, 11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your beloved</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6, 11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her beloved</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6, 11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friend</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6, 11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My love</td>
<td>19, 15</td>
<td>2, 10, 13</td>
<td>4, 1, 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bride</td>
<td>49, 10, 12, 16</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My sister</td>
<td>49, 10, 12, 16</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My perfect one</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My sister, bride</td>
<td>49, 10, 12, 16</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My beautiful one</td>
<td>7, 10, 13</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beloved is Shepherd</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dove</td>
<td>2, 14</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most beautiful of women</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shulamite</td>
<td>5, 1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A multitude of epithets employed play an important role in creating a lyrical, dialogical style and is characteristic of the directness with which the lovers address one
another. The refrain of the epithet makes the internal system strong and produces a literary effect.

The refrain of verses plays an important function for formal demarcation of the structural unit in an ending position, including motif and imagery. The theme of love is developed through dialogue, which is one of the most important unifiers of the poem. The refrain of verses used is found in table 3.

Table 3. Refrain of Verses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I adjure you daughter of Jerusalem</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His left hand is under my head, his right hand embraces me</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My beloved is mine and I am his</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until the day breathes and the shadows flee</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 17</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart of the deers</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 9,17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who feeds among lilies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is this going</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am sick with love</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The theme of love is developed through motifs. The motif is developed by means of various images. The repetitions of image and motif make the formal structure. A significant number of motifs and images recur through the dialogue. A literal motif is used here to mean the repetition of a salient element of the overall theme. The usage of motifs is found in table 4.
Table 4. Refrain of Motifs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motifs</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garden</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vineyard</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower, fruit, tree, terms of comparison</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12-13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doves</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Gazelles &amp; hinds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uniqueness of the loved one</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice of the loved one</td>
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<td>Contemplation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eating and drinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embrace</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passing of day</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interpretation of imagery is the way to arrive at the more significant question of the meaning of the text. The function of imagery helps discover the meaning and makes a literary effect only when the units become structural and stylistic. The refrain of images is shown in table 5.

Table 5. Refrain of Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kiss</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fragrance</td>
<td>112-14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vineyard/Vine</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garden</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
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</table>
An increasingly resonant pattern of overall thematic significance is in the form of chiastic parallelism. Under the function of figure of speech, refrains and parallelism, images play an important role in making the units of the poem.

Chiasmus

Function of Chiasmus

No reference to the term *chiasmus* appears in the Bible. The study of chiasmus in exegesis dates back to John A. Bengel in 1742. As Lund notes, in “Gnomon Novi Testamenti at Tubingen, Bengel called attention to the presence of chiasmus in a few passages of the New Testament and made use of the principle for purposes of interpretation.”\(^{81}\) The chiasmus originated from a concern about the tool for interpreting the Bible. Breck’s definition is very comprehensive:

A literary structure that employs bilaterally symmetrical design in which corresponding elements are repeated in reverse order on the phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic, or semantic/thematic level toward a unique central axis in a given pattern which author intends toward audience.\textsuperscript{82}

The effort to make the central axis inadvertent can hurt the central intention of the author. Indeed, the central unit can consist of one verse, one unit, or two corresponding units in the Song. Talbert shows that chiasmus is a literary expression of symmetry, or equilibrium including a center and the principle of balance.\textsuperscript{83} The uniqueness of the chiastic structure lies in its focus upon a \textit{pivotal theme} or central theme in which the author wants to convey.\textsuperscript{84} The chiastic pattern is detected in small, isolated units as well as in whole compositions. The pattern is produced from the intimate connection that exists between rhetorical form and thematic content, between the structure of a literary unit and its theological meaning.\textsuperscript{85}

The employment of chiasmus contributes to perceiving the ornament, observing the force of the language, understanding the true and full sense, making clear the sound exegesis and demonstrating the true and neat analysis of the sacred text.\textsuperscript{86} The chiasmus serves to highlight and heighten the effect of this emphasis in the minds of the readers,


\textsuperscript{84}Breck, 71.

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., 70.

even at an unconscious level. It is utilized for didactic appeal, theological importance, mnemonical advantage, and aesthetical attraction.\(^{87}\)

Analysis of chiasmus is indispensable for a proper understanding of the theological message today's reader intends to communicate.\(^{88}\) This work is a product of the commentator's ingenuity.\(^{89}\) By failing to observe and appreciate this symmetry, some tend to misread the conceptual center and consequently distort the text. The chiasm is a valuable aid in interpreting the Old Testament and New Testament. The artistry in the use of structure is not an end in itself; it is a means toward a more effective communication of their message. Chiasmus underlines the central motif and clarifies correspondence in the text.

*Illustrations of Chiasmus Structure*

Of studies devoted to the Song through chiasmus, the analyses of Exum (1973), Shea (1980), Webster (1982) and Dorsey (1990) are the most successful. Through their practical analysis of the Song, these authors make a contribution to the development of interpretation. Their structures are displayed in figure 1.

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\(^{88}\) Thomson, 1-45. Whereas Thomson emphasizes the need to realize the Biblical author's intention, chiasmus should play a role in helping today's community of faith to understand the text.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 35.
Exum made carefully constructed corresponding units. She points out that the proper articulation of form serves as an indication of the proper understanding. Exum did not imitate the unique center unit, the feature of chiasmus. Her contribution is presenting criteria to limit the unit in order to solve the difficult interpretation. Exum’s criteria are the repetition of key phrases, words and motifs, and the contextual coherence of the poems. She performed the most intriguing study for exegetical proposition in support of this mode of structural analysis.

Shea’s refrains do not play a prominent part in the analysis. He also divided units of these sections according to their thematic comparison of the contents or antithetic thought. His strength is that the chiasmus reaches the center of the Song, and is presented by theme (invitation and response) and by form. His weakness is in utilizing quantitative distribution of text.

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90 Exum, 49.

Webster's pattern is a five-section chiasmus. This chiasmus is identified through parallelism in subject matter and by repetition of words and phrases included in the ring constructions. The subject matter of ring construction illustrates the balance between the complementary pairs of the chiasmus.

Dorsey's principle for delimitation included refrains, alternation, and scene shift. Correspondence between units is generally established by repetition of scene, motifs, themes, structural patterns, lexical items, synonymous parallelism, and complementary or reciprocal parallelism.

The diverse analysis of chiasmus in structure contributes to widening the possibility of interpreting the Song. Critics make an intentional effort to offer a clear boundary of units. The flexibility of poetic characteristics makes it possible to employ the chiastic pattern in an analysis of the Song.

This writer's chiastic parallelism is based on Exum's model and is shown in figure 2. The figurative functions of the refrains, coherent motif of dialogue, and coherent image support the structural unity of Song of Songs synthetically. The internal coherence is strong and overlapped in the units, but the boundaries of the units are flexible and variable. The chiastic units in some rates are overlapped when having similar responding motifs, images, and contents.

An examination of the Song can be determined with a formal structure of ten units (1:2-2:7; 2:8-17; 2:8-3:5; 3:1-3:5; 3:6-5:1; 5:2-6:3; 5:2-7:11; 6:4-8:4; 7:12-8:4; 8:5-14) and eighteen subunits formed in an overall structure. Among the eight units, the strongest formal correlations exist between 2:8-3:5 and 5:2-6:3, and 3:6-5:1 and 5:2-6:3.

Each unit begins with the two lovers apart, followed by expressions of desire, and concludes with the two together. The beginning markers are scene-shifts, which announce the beginnings of each new cycle (1:2, 2:8, 3:6, 5:2, 6:4 and 8:5). The central climax is
3:5-5:1 where one man and one woman come together in the physical “garden” of love (4:16b-5:1a) for sexual fulfillment, joined in the social and moral establishment of a loving marriage relationship. The conclusion of this message is in 8:6-15 where the preeminence and permanence of love is stated in textually authoritative, proverbial, theological and ethical language. The hermeneutic principle follows a macrostructure and microstructure. These major literary units are not arranged in a linear scheme, but chiastic. A formal structure of ten units of chiastic form is not optional because of the complexity of overlapping units. The strongest formal correlations are more selective and convenient to understand the form. The strongest forms are 1:2-2:7 and 8:5-14, 2:8-3:5 and 5:2-6:3, 3:6-5:1 and 6:4-8:4. The first unit and the last unit function effectively as a prologue and epilogue. The last unit 8:5-14 is the climactic reflection on the surpassing power of love. The order of units 1:2-2:7; 2:8-3:5; 3:6-5:1; 5:2-6:3; 6:4-8:14 forms a macrostructure for hermeneutic understanding. The strong correspondence for the chiastic parallelism is shown in figure 3.

Fig. 3. The Writer’s Modified Chiastic Structure

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A 1:2-2:7

B 2:8-3:5

C 3:6-5:1 (4:16-5:1 Key Motif)

B’ 5:2-6:3

C’ 6:4-8:3

A’ 8:5-14 (8:6-7 Key Conclusion)
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CHAPTER FOUR
HERMENEUTICAL DISCOVERY

Textual criticism is basic to establishing the text, which is used for analysis. The
textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible,¹ in regards to hermeneutical issues, is of
importance because it gives the accurate understanding of the text: by comparing the
Masoretic text with various witnesses and translations on the basis of the BHS apparatus.²
It includes an articulate translation and a reasonable exegesis with knowledge of how the
text was interpreted in the past and is interpreted in today’s community of faith. The
textual issues give attention to the artful use of language, ideas, tone, sound, and imagery
as a means to have an effect on the community.

The following are procedures for making a critical analysis of the text: (1) First of
all, the procedures require the analysis of Hebrew vocabulary. (2) The BHS apparatus is

¹Ralph W. Klein, Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: The Septuagint after Qumran
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), iii. Gene M. Turker defines that the textual criticism aims at
recovering the original copies of the biblical books. But none of those original copies exists any longer.
Since such originals are no longer available, the best text must be reconstructed by comparing the extent
texts with one another. Souler agrees with the theory of Turker, adding that the task of Textual Criticism is
to compare the existing MSS, no two of which are alike, in order to develop a “critical text” (q. v) which
lists variant readings in footnotes, called a “Critical Apparatus.” In this way, Textual Criticism not only
provides an idea of how the original text may have read, it also provides knowledge of how in fact it did
read, and is in some respects how it was interpreted, at various centers of faith at various times in Christian

The Masoretic Text, called the central and “received text,” was written in the biblical text. All the reading,
which is quoted in the “critical apparatus” deviated from the central text, is called variant (variant readings,
or textual witness). Additionally, the BHS’s apparatus as critical editions includes the opinions of editor, F.
Horst. He suggests the variation to emend the text in the course of textual transmission.
compared with variations.\textsuperscript{3} (3) The MT is certainly to be valued more highly than other witnesses. (4) One recognizes the limitations of boldness and wisdom to emend the insufficient textual parts.\textsuperscript{4} (5) It is helpful to use the grammar. (6) It views the text from the literary prospective. (7) Using the internal evidence chooses the best understanding of text. The principles of internal evidence to acknowledge as the best text relate with the discovering of hermeneutic issues.\textsuperscript{5}

The Song is the literary creation of imagination of a love song that is sung as a celebration of love, beauty and intimacy under marriage within a social and religious ambiance. The characters in the Song are speaking not only to the readers, but also about them with their language, dialogue and experience, on their journey of love, of self-discovery and of fulfillment.

This interpretation can be satisfied with an exploration of the contextual atmosphere. This atmosphere plays an important role as a tool of hermeneutical interpretation as shown in the following.

First, the Song stands up in the context of the motif of a garden that flows from

\textsuperscript{3}James Barr, “Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,” JSS 25 (1980): 105. The BHS is our chief academic instrument for its clarity, its economy in comment, and for the much-improved access to the Masorah on the basis of using the balance of its critical apparatus.


\textsuperscript{5}Elliss R. Brotzman, Old Testament Textual Criticism (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 128. First, one speaks of the probability that the MT generally preserves the better text with the external variations. Secondly, the “more difficult” reading is to be preferred. Thirdly, unless there is clear evidence for homoiooteleuton or some other form of haplography, a shorter text is probably better. The shorter reading is preferable and more likely the original, for the normal scribe has a tendency to amplify a text by adding words to clarify or smooth out the text. Fourthly, the appropriateness of a reading to its context is preferable in the MT. Fifthly, Tov, 60-3. Qere (what is read) initially as an optional variant has the function of correctional activity to correct the inferior Ketziv reading (what is written); but, not all Qere reading was necessarily consistent or logical. Sixthly, even though the various editors suggest not correcting the corrupt text, it encourages readers to understand more. Lastly, the final step of the selection of the best reading is if the text receives a better feeling for the overall state of the text. In other words, a good variant makes the greatest impact on the exegesis.
Genesis 2 and 3. The extended metaphors of the Garden and the Song can be the same or different. The motif of "garden" is place and person and becomes a direct hermeneutical resource for reshaping the message for today's young adults within the faith community. 

Born to mutuality and harmony, a man and a bride live in a garden where nature and history unite to celebrate the one flesh of sexuality. Being naked without shame or fear, this couple treats each other with tenderness and respect. Neither escaping nor exploiting sex, they embrace and enjoy it. Their love is truly bone of bone and flesh of flesh, and this image of a good male and female is indeed very good. Testifying to the goodness of creation, eroticism then becomes worship in the context of grace. In this setting, there is no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex. Love for the sake of love is its message, and the portrayal of the female delineates this message. The protagonists keep out those who lust, moralize, legislate or exploit. Two portrayals of male and female in Genesis 2 and 3 depict a tragedy of disobedience. Yet somewhere

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6Marcia Falk, *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 97-106. See the detailed images in chapter 3 - Figures of Speech, in this paper. Falk suggests the six central motifs interwoven among the dominant themes of the Song: a) the vine and the vineyard, as a special place and as metaphors and symbols. The vineyard is more than a place; it seems also to be a symbol for female sexuality; b) the garden, as a special place and as an extended metaphor represent other male sexual activity, and may be an allusion to female sexuality; c) eating and drinking as an erotic metaphor, with erotic overtones, intoxicating temptations and erotic experiences; d) regality and wealth, as metaphors, figures and foils; e) sensuality and the senses such as visual sense, olfactory sense, sense of taste, sound and touch. Ivory J. Cainion, "An Analogy of the Song of Songs and Genesis Chapters Two and Three," *SJOT* 14, no. 2 (2000): 233-259. Cainion uses the tool of analogy to discover that there exist aspects of likeness as well as contrast in the Song.

7Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 202. The poetry becomes a kind of self-transcendent of double entente in ambiguity. The beloved's body is, in a sense, "represented" as a garden, but it also turns into a real garden.


between tragedy and ecstasy lie the struggles of daily life. What the Song does is very simply to substitute the beloved for the Garden of Eden through the metaphor. The story of the Garden of Eden is a mirror image of an enclosed space for inspiration and is combined with an aesthetic function elaborated much more richly. The garden is essentially private, protected from wilderness. The garden is a contained, intimate and limited world that man can control. Its scale makes it accessible and secure. The garden is man’s organization of the world, demarcating good and bad and himself and others. The world of the Song is our world, subjected to seasons, responding to rain, but enclosed within it. The gardens are the source of life, which is privileged and protected. Both Genesis 2 and 3 and the Song affirm fluidity in the occupational roles of bride and man in gardens of joy. Nature and work are pleasures leading to love. Parental references merit special attention. The primeval man leaves his father and his mother to cleave to his wife.

Secondly, a wisdomic prospective or didactic angles function in the hermeneutical context. The particular stamp, which they leave as a key for its interpretation of the Song within the community of faith is to view the Song under a wisdomic or didactic reflection that understands the nature of the human world in relation to divine reality. Reflection on human experience is characteristic of wisdom. “The joyous mutuality in uninhibited

12Gen. 2:24, Ruth 1:8.
14Brevard Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 194. Whereas the Song arises originally from within the same wisdom to function canonically as a theological contract, which established a particular context for the book’s reading, the present reality of erotic love in the world of human experience bears witness of the need for wisdom.
surrender and the darkness of a potential shadow to obscure the exuberant pleasure between the couple" are allowed. The promise of enriching joy as well as the threat of egoistic destruction carries the potential of greatest joy or deepest grief within the institution of marriage. The couple in the Song, who has wisdom, stemming from a new vision of God, warns us of the difficult social realities that threaten to destroy the family. The reflection and application of the divine order runs through all of the Scriptures. The didactic message needs to be applied within today’s context.

Thirdly, the moral value of the Song can be compared with the contemporary motif that faces the morale problem. What is the motif of the Song for today’s young adults? (1) It warns “existence without security” which means that nearness without love does not assure an unending future. (2) Romance goes through two cycles of longing, patience and reward. (3) The sexual expression of love is heartily endorsed by God. Sex without love or apart from marriage is empty and wrong. (4) The energy of God is the source of the energy of love. Marital love is exclusive and insured. Love relates with God’s power. The more we get the power of God, the more marital love itself grows, so the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Love is built on the foundation of

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15Ibid., 194. He suggests that “with the context of the entire of O.T Canon, the mysterious joy of human love which continues to erupt as an unquenchable flame is balanced by the thereat of that same human love to destroy and to twist its beauty.”

16Lev. 20:13. Homosexuality, premarital sexual relationships, human fragility, fornication and adultery were prohibited.


19Rev. 2:1-5.

20Col. 1:29.
compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing with one another, and forgiving each other. Such “binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

The example of marital love is seen in what “Christ did for us.”

Fourth, textual context for the hermeneutical progress is beneficial because it addresses the theological issues relating to the marriage. Much of the force of the original Hebrew is lost in the English translation. It is virtually impossible to reproduce these in any kind of translation. Therefore, they are commented on in the exposition. Such verses help to recognize literary conventions, and also help to see the specific emphasis of meaning or message that the Hebrew makes at times. The possible theological issues can be given as the following: (1) Song 2:7 demonstrates the holy oath for marriage by the Lord of hosts and God Almighty. (2) Song 8:6 shows the nature of love. The supreme quality of love is from God. The flame of love is the flame of God. It is theological. The ultimate love is God.

Segments of the text which can be assigned to specific speakers are indicated by capital letters in the left margin: B=bride; G=groom and D= Daughter of Jerusalem. At the top of the translation, the thematic motif is written within the work itself. To the right of the translation are the references. A Literal translation will be conspicuous for interpretation in the light of Hebrew poetic principles. For more understanding of the translation, often the translations of other variants are written in the right margin. The superscriptions found in the verses are note markings for the textual notes. The letters on the left side of the translation mark the indicators for hermeneutical discovery

21 Col. 3:14.

22 The Song pictures a betrothal couple who explore the tactile relationship, culminating in the union on their wedding night.
## The Song of Songs of Solomon

### The First Cycle: 1:2-2:7

#### 1:2-4
An intense pleasure in the anticipation of her love-making (anticipation of union)

1. **Let him kiss me** with the kisses of his mouth
   
   Because of the fragrance of your good oil,
   
   Oil poured forth is your name;
   
   Therefore the virgins love you.

2. **The king has brought me** into his chambers.
   
   We will be glad and rejoice in you.

3. **We will remember your love** more than wine.
   
   Rightly do they love you.

#### 1:5-6
Young bride’s dark complexion (self-worth)

4. I **am** black, but lovely,
   
   O daughters of Jerusalem,
   
   Like the tents of Kedar,
   
   Like the curtains of Solomon.

5. Do not look upon me, because I **am** black,
   
   Because the sun has looked upon me.

6. **My mother’s sons were angry with me;**
   
   They made me the keeper of the vineyards,

7. **Tell me, (oh you) whom my soul loves,**
Where you feed,
Where you lie down at noon
For why should I be like one who veils myself
Beside the flocks of your companions?

If you do not know,
Oh, the most beautiful among women,
Go out in the footprints of the flock
And feed your goats beside the tents of shepherds.

To my horse among the Pharaoh’s chariots
I have compared you, my love.

Fitting are your cheeks with round ornaments,
Your neck with strings of beads.

The earrings of gold will we make for you
With points of silver.

While the king is at his table,
My spikenard yields its fragrance.

A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me,
Between my breasts he will abide all night.

The cluster of henna flowers is my beloved to me
In the vineyard of Engedi.

Behold, you are fair, my love!
Behold, you are fair!
Your eyes are doves.

Behold, you are handsome. My beloved!
What is more, you are lovely
And our bed is luxuriant.

The beams of our house are cedars
Our rafters are firs.
2:1-5 Admiration of mutual wonderful characteristics of lovers in the metaphor

1 a I am the rose of Sharon,
b And I am the lily of the valleys.

2 G a As a lily among the thorns,
b So is my love among daughters ................................................ 6:9-10

3 B a As an apple among the trees of the woods,
b So is my beloved among the sons.
c In his shade I delighted greatly and I sat,
d And his fruit was sweet to my taste.

4 a He brought me to the banqueting house,
b And his banner over me was love.

5 a Sustain me with cakes of raisins,
b Support me with apples,
c For I am sick with love ....................................................... 6:8

2:6-7 Adjuration for maturity of love

6 a His left hand is under my head, ....................................................... 8:3
b And his right hand embraces me.

7 a I adjure you, ................................................................. 3:5; 5:8; 8:4
b O daughters of Jerusalem,
c By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
d Do not stir up nor awaken love
e Until it pleases.

7b in LXX, By the powers and forces of the field.
7b in BHS, God almighty and the Lord of hosts

The Second Cycle 2:8-3:5

2:8-9 The lover's voice and his approach

8 B a The voice of my beloved!
b Behold, he comes
c Leaping upon the mountains,
d Hopping upon the hills.

9 a "My beloved is like a gazelle ............................................. 2:17; 8:14
b Or a young hart of deers.

3 b Behold, he stands
d  Behind our wall
  e  Looking through the windows,
  f  Gazing through the lattice.

2:10-13 His voice of invitation in springtime

10  
  a  My beloved answered, and said to me:
  b  "Rise up, a my love, 2:13; 7:12
  c  My fair b one, and come away. c 1:15; 4:17; 7:2,7

11  
  a  For lo, the winter crossed over,
  b  The rain passed through, went away a to him.

12  
  a  The flowers appear on the earth; 6:11; 7:13
  b  "The time b of singing approaches, a
  c  And the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

13  
  a  The fig tree yields its green figs,
  b  And the vines of the grape bud a give the fragrance.
  c  Rise up, b my love, 2:10
  d  My fair one, c and come forth!

2:14 From her inaccessible region, her voice prevails

14  
  a  My dove in the clefts of the crag 5:2; 6:9
  b  "In the shelter of the steep, a
  c  Let me see your countenance, 8:13
  d  Let me hear your voice;
  e  For your voice is sweet,
  f  And your countenance b is lovely."

2:15 His duty to protect his lover

15  
  a  Catch for us the foxes,
  b  The little foxes, a
  c  The destroyer of the vineyard
  d  For our vines have grape buds.

2:16-17 The solidarity formula and wish to enjoy this mood forever

16  
  a  My beloved is mine, and I am his 6:3; 7:11
  b  Who feeds among the lilies 4:5; 6:3

17  
  a  Until the day breathes 4:6
b And the shadows flee away,
c Turna, my beloved, be like a gazelle
d Or a young hart of deers................................. 2:9; 8:14
e Upon the mountains of Bether.b

3

3:1-5 The passionate search for the absent lover in the dream, yearning in the night

1 B a On y bed in the nights I sought........................................... 5:2-8
b The one my soul loves;
c I sought him, but I did not find him.a

2 a "I will rise now, and go around the city;
b In the streets and in the squares.
c I will seek the one my soul loves."
d I sought him, but I did not find him.

3. a The watchmen found me,
b Going around the city,
c "Have you seen the one my soul loves?"

4 a Scarcely had I passed from them,
b When I found
c The one my soul loves.
d I held him and would not let him go,
e Until I had brought him into the house of my mother................. 8:2

5 a I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,................ 2:7; 5:8; 8:4
b By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
c Do not stir up nor awaken
d Love until it pleases.

The Third Cycle 3:6-5:1

6 (?) a Who is this coming out of the wilderness .............. 6:10; 8:5
b Like pillarsa of smoke,
c Perfumed withb myrrh and frankincense,
d With all the aromatic powders of a merchant?

7 a Behold, his bed, which is Solomon's.a
b Sixty valiant men are around it,
c Among the valiant of Israel.
8  a  Trained in war,
b  Every man his sword on his thigh
c  Because of fear in the nights.

9  a  King Solomon made himself a canopied bed
b  From the woods of Lebanon.

10  a  His pillars has he made of silver,
b  Its support of gold,
c  Its chariost of purple,
d  Its interior is to be designed with love
 e  By the daughters of Jerusalem.

11  a  Go forth, and see O daughters of Zion,
b  King Solomon with the crown
c  With which his mother crowned him,
d  On the day of his wedding
 e  And on the day of the gladness of his heart.

4

4:1-7 His admiration for beloved

1  a  Behold, you are beautiful, my love
 b  Behold, you are beautiful;
c  Your eyes are doves
 d  Behind your veil
 e  Your hair is like a flock of goats,
f  Which lies on the mountain of Gilead.

2  a  Your teeth are like a flock of those shorn,
b  Which came up from the washing
c  All of which bear twins,
d  And absent is not one among them.

3  a  Like a thread of scarlet are your lips
 b  And your mouth is lovely.
c  Like a slice of pomegranate are your temples
 d  Behind your veil.

4  a  Like the tower of David is your neck,
b  Built for weapons
 c  A thousand bucklers hung on it,
d  All shields of the mighty men.

5  a  Your two breasts like two deers
b  Twins of a gazelle.

6 a Which feed among lilies. ..............................................2:16; 6:3
b Until the day breathes ..................................................2:17
c And the shadows flee,
d I will go to the mountain of myrrh
e And to the hill of frankincense.

7 a All of you is lovely, my love ........................1:15; 2:10, 13; 4:1; 7:2,7
b And no blemish is on you.

4:8-5:1 Delight of love’s consummation

8 a Come with me from Lebanon, my bride ......................4:9-12
b With me from Lebanon shall you come.
c You will see from the top of Amanah,
d From the top of Semir and Hermon,
e From the dwellings of lions,
f From mountains of leopards.

9 a You have encouraged me, my sister, bride;
b You have encouraged me with one of your eyes,
c With one necklace from your neck.

10 a How beautiful your love, my sister, bride; ....................1:2,4
b How much better your love than wine ............................1:2,4
c And the fragrance of your oils

d Than all spices........................................................................1:3

11 a Your lips drop honey, bride............................................4:3
b Honey and milk are under your tongue ............................5:1
c And the fragrance of your garments

d "Like the fragrance of Lebanon."

12 a A garden locked is my sister, bride, .........................4:9-12; 6:2
b A spring locked, a fountain sealed.................................4:15

13 a Your sprouts, a paradise of pomegranates,
b With fruits of excellence;

14 a The henna plant with spikenard.
b Spikenard and saffron
c Reed and Cinnamon,
d With all trees of frankincense;
e Myrrh and aloes,
f With all chief spices.
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>A spring(^a) of gardens,(^b)</td>
<td>.............................................................</td>
<td>4:12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>A well of living water.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Awake, north and come, south</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>Cause garden to exhale <em>that</em> its spices may flow out,</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Let my beloved come into his garden(^a)</td>
<td>.................</td>
<td>5:1; 6:2,11; 8:13</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>d</td>
<td>And eat its excellent fruit.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>I have come to my garden, my sister, bride</td>
<td>.................</td>
<td>4:16; 6:2, 11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>I have gathered my myrrh with my spice,</td>
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<td>c</td>
<td>I have eaten my honeycomb(^a) with my honey,</td>
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<td>d</td>
<td>I have drunk my wine with my milk</td>
<td>................................................</td>
<td>4:11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e</td>
<td>“Eat, friends.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Drink and be drunk, loved ones!”</td>
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**The Fourth Cycle 5:2-6:3**

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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>I sleep, but my heart awakes</td>
<td>................................................</td>
<td>3:1-5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>The voice of my beloved knocks,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>G</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>“Open to me my sister, my love,</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>b</td>
<td>My dove, my perfect one</td>
<td>................................................</td>
<td>2:14; 5:2; 6:9</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>For my head is filled with dew</td>
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<td>d</td>
<td>My locks drip with dew.”</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>“I have put off my garment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>How shall I put it on?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>I have washed my feet.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d</td>
<td>How shall I defile them?”</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>My beloved stretched his hand from the hole</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>And my heart was moved for him.(^a)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>I myself arouse to open for my beloved</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>And my hands dropped myrrh</td>
<td>................................................</td>
<td>5:13</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>And my fingers flowed forth myrrh,</td>
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<td>On the handles of the bolt.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>I opened for my beloved,</td>
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<td>b</td>
<td>But my beloved turned around,(^a) gone.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c</td>
<td>My soul came out when he spoke;</td>
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<td>d</td>
<td>I sought him, but I could not find him;</td>
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5:9-6:3 Admiration of lover and confidence in the groom

7  a  I called him, but he gave me no answer. ................................. 3:1-2
    b  The watchmen found me,
    c  Who went around in the city.
    d  They struck me and they wounded me,
    e  They took away my large veil from me,

8  a  I adjure you,\(^a\)
    b  O daughter of Jerusalem\(^b\)
    c  If you find my beloved
    d  What shall you tell him? .................................................. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4
    e  That I am sick with love .................................................. 2:5

9  D  a  What is your beloved more than another beloved,
    b  Most beautiful among the women, ............................................ 1:8
    c  What is your beloved more than another beloved
    d  That you thus adjure us?\(^a\)

10 B  a  My beloved is bright and ruddy,
      b  Distinguished among ten thousand.

11  a  His head is refined\(^a\) gold.
      b  His locks are wavy,
      c  Black as a raven.

12  a  His eyes are\(^b\) like doves .............................................. 1:15; 4:1
      b  On the water-brook,
      c  Washed with milk
      d  Set on the border.

13  a  His cheeks are\(^b\) like a bed\(^b\) of spices,
      b  Towers\(^b\) of perfumes.
      c  His lips are\(^b\) lilies,
      d  Dropping flowing myrrh ................................................. 5:5

14  a  His hands are\(^b\) rods of gold
      b  Filled with precious stones.
      c  His belly is a plate of ivory
      d  Covered with saphires.

15  a  His legs are pillars of marble
      b  Found on the refined sockets.
      c  His countenance is\(^b\) like Lebanon
Selected like a cedar tree.

His mouth is sweetness
And all of him is a desirable thing.
This is my beloved and this is my friend,
Daughters of Jerusalem.

Where has your beloved gone
The most beautiful one among the women?
Where has your beloved turned away?
We also seek him with you.

My beloved went down to his garden,
To the beds of spices;
To feed in the gardens,
And to gather the lilies.

I am my beloved’s
And my beloved is mine,
Who feeds among the lilies.

Beautiful are you, my love, as Tirzah,
Lovely like Jerusalem,
Awesome like those bannered.

Turn away your eyes from me,
For they themselves disturbed me.
Your hair is like a flock of the goats.
That lie down from Gilead.

Your teeth like a flock of ewes,
Which have come up from the washing
All of which bear twins
And not one is absent among them.

Like a slice of pomegranate.
Your temple is behind your veil.

Sixty are the queens
And eighty the concubines,
And virgins without number.
9  a  She only is my dove, my perfect one ........................................2:14; 5:2
b  She is the only of her mother.
c  She is pure to the one who bore her .................................3:4; 8:5
d  Daughters saw her and called her straight.
e  The queens and the concubines, they praised her.

10  a  "Who is she who looks forth as the dawn, .................3:6; 8:5
b  Beautiful as the moon?
c  Clear as the sun,
d  Awesome as those bannered?........................................6:4

6:11-7:1 The garden and dance

11  B  a  To a garden of nuts I went down ................................4:16-5:1; 6:11
b  To see the freshness of the valley,
c  To see whether the vines have budded, ..........................2:12; 7:13
d  And whether the pomegranates have bloomed.

12  a  I know not that my heart set me upon
b  The chariot of my noble people.

7

1  (?)  a  Return, return Shulamite,  
(6)  b  Return, return that we may look upon you.
B  c  "What shall you see in the Schulamite?
d  As the dance of the two camps.

7:26 Admiration

2  G  a  How beautiful are your feet in the sandles, 1:15; 2:10. 13; 4:1, 7; 7:7
(7)  b  Noble daughter!
(7)  c  The curves of your thighs like ornaments,
d  The work of hands of an artisan.

3  a  Your navel is a bowl of roundness
(7)  b  The mixed wine never lacks.
c  Your belly is a heap of wheat,
d  Fenced about with lilies.

4  a  Your two breasts are like two fawns, ................................4:5
(7)  b  Twins of a gazelle.

5  a  Your neck like a tower of ivory; 4:4
(7)  b  Your eyes the pools in Heshbon
At the gate of Bath rabbim.
Your nose like a tower of Lebanon,
Looking toward Damascus.

6
Your head upon you like Carmel
And the hair of your head like purple
The king is tied up in locks of hair.

7
How beautiful you are, .. 1:15; 2:10, 13; 4:1, 7; 7:2
And how sweet you are!
Love, with delights. (vul.) . O loved one, a daughter of delight

8
This stature of yours is like a palm tree,
And your breasts like clusters.

9
I said, “I will go into the palm tree,
I will take hold of its boughs;
And your breasts shall be
As clusters of the vine,
And the fragrance of your nose as the apples;

10 B
Your kisses like the best wine"
Flowing smoothly for my beloved,
Moving gently for sleepers’ lips.

11
I am my beloved’s 2:16; 6:3
And for me is his desire.

12
Come, my beloved, we will go forth to the field,
We will lodge in the village.

13
Let us start early to the vineyard,
See whether the vine sprouts,
The grape bud opens,
The pomegranates blossom,
There I will give my love to you.

14
The manrakes give off the fragrance
And all our doors are all excellent fruits,
New, and old
8

d I have treasured for you, my love.

8:1-2 Free to be intimate

1 a Who may permit you to be like a brother to me,
b Who sucks the breasts of my mother?
c (if) I found you outside, I would kiss you.
d They also would not despise me.

2 a I would lead you,
b And I bring you to the house of my mother who would teach me...
c I cause you to drink the spiced wine
of the juice of my pomegranate.

8:3-4 Do not stir up love

3 a His left hand is under my head...
b And his right hand embraces me.

4 a I adjure you,
b O daughter of Jerusalem...
c Do not stir up and do not awaken,
Love until it pleases.

The Sixth Cycle 8:5-14

8:5-7 The character of love

5 (?) a "Who is this coming from the desert, "
   Leaning oneself on her beloved?"
   "Under the apples I awakened you;
   There your mother travailed,
   There she travailed and gave birth to you."
6 B a Set me as a seal on your heart,
b As a seal on your arm.
c For strong like death is love;
d Cruel like Sheol is jealousy.
e Its flames are flames of fire,
f Its flames.
BHS.. A flame of Yah

7 a Many waters cannot
b Quench love.
c Nor can streams wash away love.
d If anyone would give
All the wealth
Of his house for love,
Anyone would utterly be despised

8:8-10 Maturity and peace (little sister)

8 B a “A little sister is to us
b And the breasts are not hers.
c What shall we do for our sister
d In the day when she shall be spoken for?

9 a If she is a wall,
b We will build on her
c An encampment of silver.
d And if she is a door,
e We will enclose on her
f A board of cedar.”

10 a I am a wall,
b And my breasts are like towers.
c Then I was in his eyes
d As the one who finds peace.

8:11-12 The vineyard of value
(Solomon’s vineyard and the bride)

11 (?) a A vineyard belongs to Solomon
b At Baal Hamon.
c He gave the vineyard to keepers;
d Everyone will bring for his fruit a thousand pieces of silver.

8:13-14 Love does not end

13 G a The one who dwells in the gardens,
b The companions listen to your voice;
c Let me hear.

14 B a Make haste, my beloved
b And resemble a gazelle
c Or young hart of deers ..............................................................2:9,17
d On the spice-laden mountains.
Subscription

In 1:1 there is an editorial superscription that is a typical expression of the superlative filled with some allusions. Solomon is named as the Song’s author; it is “for/dedicated to Solomon” or “about/concerning Solomon.” The MT (Masoretic Text) seems neither necessary nor productive. In this superscription, an ancient editor labeled the work a “poem” or “Song.” The superscription eludes the septennial character. For Brevard Childs, this not only connects the Song with the larger corpus of biblical wisdom literature, but also functions as a hermeneutical guide. Childs avers, “the Song is wisdom’s reflections on the joyful and mysterious nature of love between a man and a bride within the institution of marriage.” It has the merit of defining a context and interpreting what was observable in the biblical tradition, as it has been received and those issues that are to the relevant concerns of contemporary faith.

The First Cycle: 1:2-2:7

The unit 1:2-2:7 commences in 1:2 with the two lovers separated and with the bride expressing her desire to be with her beloved. The passages are filled with exchanges of expressions of admiration and desire. It concludes with the two lovers united in 2:4-7 and with the refrain completing the unit. 1:2-2:7 is supported by the section’s internal coherence. The material’s structures alternate between the bride and the groom. Lexical correspondence occurs. In the first unit the bride express her yearning to be with her

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23Childs, 575.
groom. In this cycle the happy, excited couple exchange expressions of desire, self-doubt, encouragement and expectation in their love-play. Those who divide the book into major sections suggest the use of double refrain lines in 2:6 and 7.

Unit One 1:2-4

Analysis

There are poetic devices employed such as the paronomasia, onomatopoeia, epithet and parallelism. Also the rapid switch from third person (2a) to second (2b) back to third person (4b) and again to second person (4c) is disconcerting (1:12; 2:1-3; 4:6; 6:9; 7:11). The deep and passionate yearnings of love for her lover are the first voice. The imagery of this verse evokes the senses of touch (kiss), taste (wine) and smell (perfumes) making a strong union. The sudden changes of address allow infatuation, openness, chance, a particularly significant notion and a growing vividness of imagination. Its ambiguity functions to explore meanings of the text in multifold ways and the urgency of the voices encourage the reader to fully understand. The attraction and confusion express the uncontrolled flow of emotions in the young lovers. Something new, powerful, and disconcerting is happening to the characters in the Song.

Textual Issues

In 1:2 there is a wordplay in ֶֽשֶׁ (drink) and ֶֽשׁ (kiss) in 8:1-2. It may be that 1:2 already suggests this play (5:1), but nothing is gained by an alteration of the MT.

In 1:3 the translation of the LXX and the MT are as follows: cf 4f

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MT</th>
<th>לָדִּית</th>
<th>For sweeter is your love than wine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>μασσοί έσον = ραδίμης</td>
<td>For sweeter is your breast than wine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They are using the same words or similar-sounding words to suggest different meanings, which is called paronomasia. This error involves problems with the vowel of the scribe’s vision, and problems of hearing someone else’s consonantal reading. It cannot be defended as the best reading, but as internal evidence of the flow of content.

The vocalization of the MT is preferred.25

1:3a. MT  Because of the fragrance of your good oil
LXX  And the scent of thine ointment is better than all spices

The preposition ב (because) before the word רָדִית (fragrance) has considered to be occasioned as difficult. First, the LXX has the conjunction ג (and) instead of ב. Secondly, the Syriac and KJ took the ב, connecting it with שָׁלֹם (therefore) of the next line. But these words are never used together for cause and effect.26 Thirdly, the Ugaritic solves the difficulty simply by connecting this line with the preceding and constructing הָעַלְיָה (because of the fragrance) as parallel to the preceding יִרְכָּךְ (your love) is sweeter than the scent of your oil (v 3)”

The LXX reads καὶ ὀμην μύρων σου ἐπερ πάντα τὰ ἄρωματα (and the scent of thine ointments is better than all spices). Compare 4:10. The preposition ב of the MT’s

25 BDB, 187. “love” (5:1) “your love” (1:2,4) “my love” (7:13), רָדִית “your love” (4:10,10) in the plural designates acts or expressions of love (5:1).


can be understood according to traditional Hebrew grammar as a kind of dative reference: with respect to fragrance, as for fragrance. According to the MT, the LXX and Vulgate fail to represent the pronominal suffix "your," as presented in the MT.

In 1:3^b it is omitted.

In 1:3^c~d the variations are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>MT</th>
<th>Editor</th>
<th>LXX</th>
<th>Qumran</th>
<th>Aquila, Vulgate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שְׁמַנְתָּו הָרִקְנָה</td>
<td>שְׁמַנְתָּו מַחְבָּרַה</td>
<td>מיוֹרֶם ękקאוֹנָֽתָה</td>
<td>מָרָכָֽת מַחְבָּרָֽת</td>
<td>מִלָּה מַחְבָּרָֽת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oil poured forth”</td>
<td>Oil of purification</td>
<td>Ointment poured forth</td>
<td>Ointment poured forth</td>
<td>Poured oil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The MT’s מַחְבָּרָֽת (poured forth) seems to be the third-person, female, Hophal form, but it is not in agreement with the masculine שְׁמַנְתָּו (oil). Gordis points out that a number of nouns are ambivalent in gender. Horst suggests that שְׁמַנְתָּו מַחְבָּרַה can be read and the LXX represents a Qumran version of מָרָכָֽת מַחְבָּרָֽת. The Quman Hebrew manuscript proposes that which is semantically cogent, since מָרָכָֽת means "perfume" or a mixture of aromatic herbs (cf. Ex. 30:25; 1 Chr. 9:30, and מָרָכָֽת in the Song 5:13), but it is quite difficult to discern support for the reading in published photograph.28

A better suggestion is that the LXX translator may have read the Vorlage of Aquila (Vulgata).29 The Aquila and Vulgate versions also represent a variant of a Hebrew reading of שְׁמַנְתָּו מַחְבָּרַה. If there were some various readings in the Vorlage of the LXX, Vulgate and Qumran, perhaps it was the replacement of a less typical reading (MT) with

28 Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticle or The Song of Songs (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 125.

29 LXX’s ękקאוֹנָֽתָה is aorist, participle, singular. Aquila’s εκχεομενον is present, passive and participle, while ękקאוֹנָֽתָה is perfect, passive, participle. Qumran’s מָרָכָֽת is Hophal, participle, and female.
a more typical reading. The variations are more grammatically correct. While the MT is “more difficult,” it is preferable.  

In 4a-b the LXX reflects the reading εἶλακυσακόν οὐκ (they drew you) and adds ἀραρέα (fragrance of your ointment) after ἀραρέα (after you), “they drew you after you for the odor of your ointment.” Similarly the Vulgate has a slight variation.

In 4c there is a transition, this time from second person “you” to third-person, and the bride speaks of him as “king.” Horst suggests to read it as אבָּתי, (he had brought me), which agrees with the Syriac version.

In 4d BHS’s note suggests that the text should read חַבְרָה, (your room) with the Syriac’s version, but the plural חַבְרָה (his chambers) is a plural of generalization. The MT is more original. The issue here is a little grammatical.

In 4e-e several Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran alternate the two verbs.

In 4f the LXX interpreted רֹאשׁ (your breasts) and gave an ad hoc interpretation of the Hiphil form רֹאשׁ (we will love your breasts). This interpretation is reflected in the NJV and by Pope.

**Interpretation**

Verse 1:2 celebrates the intoxicating power of love as the greatest pleasure in comparison with wine in 2b. It is the first mention of the frequent association in the Song

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30Brotzman, 128. On the basis of his evaluation of variants, to support the MT comes from this reason that the tendency of scribes to simplify and clarify the texts that they were copying much more often than they would have, made them more difficult. There were scribal mistakes that did in fact make them difficult.

31Pope, 304.
of wine and erotic activity\textsuperscript{32} (1:4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:9; 8:2). The double mention of wine evokes a sense of headiness, which is simulated to the readers. She speaks of his kisses, his love, and wine, the king and perfume.

Verse 1:3 talks of the fragrance of each other's oils and equates the proximity of their bodies with the name of the beloved.\textsuperscript{33} His name represents the totality of her lover, his stature, and his public reputation and his character. His reputation is her private and public concern. A good reputation represents a beauty through his whole personality. The bride's love for him spreads as a fragrance that has spilled.\textsuperscript{34} Love is ever possessive, yet paradoxically, it can be shared generously when its foundation is secure.

How can good character be distinguished? Tommy Nelson says, "Good character could be discerned by behavior in stressful conditions.\textsuperscript{35}"

Oil comes from olives that are pressed. When great pressure is applied to ripe olives, out comes pure oil. When one is tested under pressure or under stress, his character can be realized by his reaction and reputation among others.

In 1:4b she calls him "king." The celebration of him becomes clamorous: we rejoice and are delighted. The groom would be present only in the imagination of the speaker. She attracts her lover with the dignity, nobility, and the honor of royalty. His reputation stimulates the bride (3c, 4e). She wants to enjoy the pleasure of love with him.

\textsuperscript{32}The motif of wine is a symbol of their erotic experience, focused in the exchange of kisses. It is the communion of their bodies.

\textsuperscript{33}This conveys his presence to her and the lifting of her spirits.

\textsuperscript{34}Othmar Keel, \textit{The Song of Songs}, A Continental Commentary, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 44.

to extol love. An association with royalty may be an enhancement (attraction) of self-esteem and public honor. The precise location of his chamber is immaterial. The Song draws down the curtain here, leaving the lovers in their secluded intimacy. Solitude can be a place of desperate yearning and loneliness. Their relationship of courtship starts from the presumption of an irreversible commitment to each other. The young couple started with a security of love on the basis of a good reputation. Their anticipation is intoxicating and the marriage bed a pure delight. Lovemaking, deep yearning of love, and conviction culminate in the consummation of their union on their wedding night.

Reflections

An explicit love story arouses the curiosity and fascination of an audience. Nothing seizes an audience like the topic of sex. The characteristics of name intensify the poetic tension. The poet counts on the tensions experienced by the audience. The opening verses force the reader to face his or her deepest conviction about marriage, love, and female sexuality. It forces the reader to see herself or himself, the world, and God. Love lyrics invite the audience into the private world of intimates.

Application

Romance comes from the secure foundation which is approved by the people. The particularity of love is like the fragrance of oil. The stableness of love can be improved by the tested and tried discipline of a love relationship with God. When a match is arranged, a couple’s future is secure. If during the dating time a person manifests anger, withdrawal, resentment, speaks bitter or unkind words, or has a sexual addiction, there is
no value in continuing the relationship. In that case the person must wait for someone of
noble character. What must be safeguarded is the honor and sanctity of the marital status.
Nothing must be done which would bring shame and regret if for any reason the
relationship were to be terminated.

Unit Two 1:5-6

*Analysis*

These verses are held together thematically by the motif of the bride’s dark
complexion. The beloved declares herself to be black as the tents of *kedar*, and beautiful
as the curtains of Solomon. Solomon’s name is used as a symbol of beauty and luxury.36
This culture imagery appears in 1: 5-6.

*Textual Issues*

In 1:5a the Quman Hebrew Manuscrip reads בנותי (my daughters).

1:5b. MT שָלָם Solomon
       BHS’s note שָלָם Shalma

The BHS proposes the emendation of “Shalma” instead of “Solomon.” But the
interpretation of consonantal שָלָם as Solomon has the support of the ancient versions as
well as the MT vocalization.37 Many modern translations and commentators prefer to

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36Gordis, 79.

37Murphy, 126.
The parallelism of שָלֹם (Solomon) with קֶדֶר (Kedar) confirms the interpretation to be a tribe name. The poet’s concern is not in parallelism with tribes, but in comparing the meaning of content. But the poetic characteristic here is not in parallel with tribe, but in parallel with the beauty of nature. The MT admits the poet’s ingenuity. The MT is preferable.

In 1:6, although it presumably addresses the daughters, the verb יָמוֹן is masculine plural in form. This indifference to gender occurs several times in the Song (3:5,15; 1:6). The issue here is grammatical.

**Interpretation**

In 1:5 the debate focuses on the function of “ָּ” (and/ but). It centers on whether the protagonist describes herself as “black and beautiful” or “black but beautiful.” The latter establishes a contrast between blackness and beauty. The former asserts that black is beautiful. The better option is “black but beautiful,” since in verse 6 she seems to...
be fighting to defend the color of her skin. She begs the daughters of Jerusalem not to stare at her. Verse 1:5cd shows similes and antithetical parallelism (nomadic: 1:5c and urban: 1:5d). This poetic device helps emphasize her self-esteem of beauty. The imagery shifts to an emphasis on the visual (dark, lovely).

In 1:5b the daughters of Jerusalem function more as a significant chorus. The chorus is a literary device in the Song whereby the lovers express their emotions and thoughts more fully. The daughters of Jerusalem create rhetorical questions or make interpretive comments.

In 1:5c the tents of Kedar are strong enough to endure the desert climate. She is both hardened and beautiful. Her external appearance became dark, but her internal self-portal was beautiful.

In 1:5d there is opposition to these feelings. The bride has a quiet confidence and positive outlook of her own worth and the assessment of her appearance. They render her as splendid as Solomon’s curtains and as secure as the king who dwells with her. Solomon’s standing here helps to confirm this. Her beauty can be secured by the stability of her lover.

In 1:6 the reference to the sun maintains the speaker’s sense that his lover’s listeners are staring at her dark skin. Her dark complexion is not accepted. One is left to take heart in her bold act of self-assertion and description.

43 Fox, 101. Dark skin identified her as of the laboring class and left her vulnerable to scorn that “would originate in social, not racial, prejudices.”

In 1:6d the vineyard is a symbol of female sexuality (Is. 5:1). It is presented as a valuable asset, and in need of constant care and attention.

In 1:6e the first use of “vineyard” can be literal or figurative and continues throughout the Song (2: 13b,15; 7:11c,13,13b; 8:11-12). The metaphor of the “vineyard” is a series of images identified with erotic associations and feminine charm. Whenever a bride found a chance to be with her lover in the ancient Near East, she gave herself an air of infamy; like her dark complexion, this infamy only heightens her attractiveness. Her attractiveness is the whole purpose of the self-portrayal in the literary form.

“My own vineyard I have not kept,” refers to the beauty of her character as revealed by the faithful execution of her duties, rather than her most natural concern, her personal appearance. It illustrates the sapient concept of the Song

Reflection

The vineyard has erotic overtones throughout the Song (2:15; 7:12; 8:12). It draws sexual inferences. The vineyard represents the totality of the women’s personality. Her vineyard represents everything that conveys her essential femininity—her looks, her complexion, her dress, her status and her sexuality. Some interpreted it according to the verses “a bride has not guarded/preserved her sexual being.” Others may say, “A bride has not cultivated, her vineyard.” The implication is that she is a chaste, pure virgin with no previous sexual experience. She is chaste, in light of the whole tenor of the Song as

46Keel, 49.


48Jill A. Munro, “Spikenard and Saffron: The Imagery of the Song of Songs,” JSOTSup 203 (1995): 98-99. Whatever lies behind the neglected vineyard, it is a perfect image of the shame and rejection she feels.
being a celebration of mutual love, fidelity, and loyalty. Together they convey her vulnerability before the daughters of Jerusalem, who are so different from her.

Application

We face the problems of our own self-image. Can we accept ourselves as we really are? Do we like the way we look? Can we accept our own temperaments? An inferiority complex leads to a sense of worthlessness, self-rejection and self-hatred. How do we cope and come to a more balanced sense of self-worth? There is only a limited amount that we can do to improve our outward appearance. That limited enhancement may call for a little attention such as enjoyable exercise. This can work wonders for our self-esteem and sense of well being. There is also a spiritual level. The spirit can transform a broken image into a new creation in Christ.\(^4^9\)

Unit Three 1:7-8

Analysis

Verses 1:7-8 form a reference to the milieu of the shepherd; 1:2-4 are the royal country, 1:5-6 are the vineyard and 1:7-8 are pastoral images, which are a setting for love poetry. The elements of uncertainty, tension, and shame are carried throughout these passages. There is a direct threat to her lover. “If you do not tell me, I will be taken as a loose bride.” It gives an indication of the depth of her urgency, a throwing of caution to the winds.\(^5^0\) Two lovers become partners in a dialogue.\(^5^1\) Those verses are most likely a

\(^{4^9}\)Nelson, 106.
teasing exchange. The controlling metaphor is that of shepherding or pasturing. Her tone is urgent and complaining perhaps even fearful or doubting. Why hasn’t he told her before of his whereabouts? “To graze the flock” and “intimate companion” hold the same meaning. The term is used metaphorically in a description of some sort of erotic activity.  

Textual Notes

1:7a. MT כנדים like one who veils myself Symmachus, Syriac, Vulgate and Hebrew Manuscript כננד like a wanderer

The participle כננד here has some difficulty. Many modern commentators (NAB, NJV) presuppose a metathesis, reading the word as an Aramaic form of the Hebrew נלע (wander). The MT’s note suggests it to read ננדלע (like a wanderer). The literal translation of ננדלע πεθανομενη is “one who covers one’s self.” Many modern exegetes adopt the reading of the Syriac, Vulgate, and Symmachus reflecting ננדלע (a wanderer) with metathesis of the first two consonants of the MT. However, more difficult, the MT is preferred. The LXX and many translators support the MT.

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51There is a diversity of speakers here. Someone says, the speaker of verse 1:8 is the daughter of Jerusalem.

52Gledhill, 109.

53Brotzman, 114. Metathesis (transpose) refers to the accidental reversing of consonants in the copying of a word.

Interpretation

In 1:7 it is the urgency of the bride’s search for her lover. “Whom I fervently love” displays her desire greatly as she claims. “One who wrapped” alludes to harlotry and that the bride is testing the groom for jealousy. The question “Why should I be like a veiled bride?” means that if she does not know precisely where he is, she will have to put on her veil and go to the pastures looking for her beloved. Through the simile the poem adds a certain air of threat and tease. We detect a petulant tone in her voice. It is to avoid identification by the companion. Her question is serious.

Verse 1:8 shows his reply is enigmatic. Does he in fact tell her where to meet him? Does she in fact go? It is all very uncertain. She will remain an external observer forever. His love for her is only a part of his total being. His professional life runs in parallel so that he tried to soften her impatience and boldness in asking. There is a harmony between the impatience and boldness within the enclosed answer.

Reflection

These verses prompt one to reflect on the degrees of aloneness and togetherness which are necessary in order for a developing relationship to thrive. One needs to have a degree of “private space” to be able to stand apart and evaluate or come to terms with the growing friendship. New interests can blossom and flourish within the relaxed harmony

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55 Delitzsch, 10.

56 Elizabeth Huwiler, “The Song of Songs,” New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Ma: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 252; Pope, 330-332; Murphy, 131; Snaith, 19. If she is seeking her beloved, she knows, there is no need for her to dress up like a prostitute.

56 Murphy, 734; Carr, 80. Its picture of the veiled cult prostitute soliciting business among the shepherds is an implication the bride wants to avoid at all costs.
of love. There is a time in which “togetherness” can be stifling, syrupy and claustrophobic, ossification, stagnation, and introversion. “Aloneness” is the need to be alone with nature. It can be an almost mystical experience to communicate with oneself, and with the Creator. A man loves the solitude of nature. He contemplates his own existential loneliness, an aching void, which none other can fill except his God.

*Application*

The bride is a mirror of self-scrutiny. The bride has a desire to be loved genuinely and is willing to give herself unselfishly to love. Her love refuses to submit to the human will and is rarely predictable. She focuses on doing things never done before, to present to feelings never felt before, and to pair herself with people never imagined. The risks are stretching. Love exposes people for who they really are and who they are not. Nothing divulges secrets and unmasks preconceptions like love. The female captures one’s noblest yearning. She forces one to face one’s prejudices about the other gender. Both lovers have a balance. She has an impatient emotion and on the contrary, he has serenity. Characteristically, they are opposite, but tend to strike a balance. She needs togetherness. He needs aloneness before togetherness. They make harmony. It is a time to have meditation, in preparation for God’s direction before togetherness. Isolation is harder.

*Unit Four 1:9-11*

*Analysis*

In 1:9-11 the scene shifts from the simple world of the shepherds to the magnificent world of the horse-loving pharaoh. Whereas the beloved claimed to be dark
but beautiful, the lover likens her to "a mare among the chariots of pharaoh." Verses 7-8 are about longing and searching; verses 9-11 are the praise of a proud loved one. These verses include two important clusters of images. Animal images occur in the Song’s praises (4:1-5; 5:10-16; 6:4-7; 7:2-10). Military images are present in the praise songs as well (3:10, 6:12). The royal motif displays the pharaoh. The point of the metaphor shifts slightly, concentrating now on the mare’s adornment. The beauty of his loved one is every bit as dramatic as the awe-inspiring display of the Egyptian chariot. Both the pastoral language (7-9) and the mention of fine jewelry (9-11) heighten the sense of joy in love. The former passage conveys the beauty of that which is natural on the bride. The latter makes the impression that love is of great value and adorns the bride with materialistic ornaments. A man compliments a bride with imagery borne of andocentric activities (sports, warfare) and based on andocentric values (power, domination). The implication is that the beloved female is as tempting and alluring as a mare.\(^58\) The sensory images are primarily visual (earrings, jewels, gold and silver).

*Textual Notes*

In 10\(^a\) the LXX and Symmachus reflect the exclamatory מְזוּזָה "how lovely" before this verse, which is not in the MT.

\begin{align*}
1:10^b & \quad \text{MT} & \quad \text{בַּעַרְוָא} & & \quad \text{with strings of beads} \\
 & \quad \text{LXX, Vulgate} & \quad \text{בַּעַרְוָא} & & \quad \text{like turtledoves}
\end{align*}

The LXX and Vulgate reflect ὡς τρυγώνες (as those of a dove) instead of מְזוּזָה (with round ornaments). But in context, round ornaments are preferable

because a turtledove has no checks.\(^{59}\) The judgment of the MT is right.

In 1:9 “The chariots of pharaoh” function like “the curtains of Solomon.” They are an image of majesty and elegance.\(^{60}\) The comparison naturally is understood as complimentary, since her beauty is the central theme. The emphasis of comparison is always conveyed on the mental image.\(^{61}\) “My love,” which is the concept of friendship and companionship are linked with the expressed concern for the protection of her well being.\(^{62}\) The comparison of a mare underscores the bride’s attractiveness. A mare that is let loose among the royal stallions would create intense excitement. This mention of horses can parallel sexual arousal,\(^{63}\) but rather conveys the idea of ornamental beauty.\(^{64}\) Her lover compares his bride to a mare among the chariots of pharaoh. Part of the comparison to a mare and the chariots of pharaoh have produced a plethora of translations and interpretations. Marvin Pope, who notes that Egyptian practice was to use only stallions for royal chariots, makes the sense of this image clear. He cites a text that describes setting a mare loose among the chariots to distract the stallions.\(^{65}\) Horses

\(^{59}\) Franz Delitsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M. G. Easton (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 34. Here is a pure onomatopoeia. On the sides of its neck the turtledove has black and white variegated feathers, which furnish no comparison to the color of the cheeks.

\(^{60}\) Mary Timothea Elliot, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 56.

\(^{61}\) Carr, 82.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 83. This is the ultimate in sex appeal.


\(^{65}\) Pope, 336-40; Carol Meyers, “Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs.” *Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Brenner Athala (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993): 217. Meyers said that the horse does violence to the military effectiveness of the Charioteers. Pope found a solution to both difficulties by
are very sensual animals with vibrancy and excitement. There is a sense of awe at the aesthetics of such power. This underscores both the bride’s attractiveness and sex appeal (3:10; 6:12). A mare loose among the royal stallions would create intense excitement. Our lover senses a similar excitement with his bride, a kind of animal magnetism. It is unsettling to him just having her within his proximity. 66

In 1:10 the jewelry that complements her cheeks and neck are discussed. “Neck” is virtually a synonym for “pride” (Ps. 75:5(6); 4:4; 7:4(5)). An outstretched neck and jewelry are used to show praise for her worthiness. Metaphor of Jewelry and a horse’s bridle is similar to this definition.

In 1:11 the precious material is in order to match and radically intensify her own attractiveness. The innovative imagery is striking.

Reflection

Hesitation, tension and ambiguities are dissolved in the lover’s poem of admiration. The bride is her groom’s friend or “companion.” She is not a subsequent. She is his friend. They are compatible together. They have interests in common and they have different interests. They are able to give each other space to develop. They are distinct personalities with different types of needs emotional, social, physical and intellectual or psychological needs. The recognition of this enables them to be companions. They are calling attention to a monument of an Egyptian officer named Ameneaheb (1450 B.C). He tells of the occasion of a battle near Kadesh in Syria. The enemy had sent a mare into the midst of the Egyptian army to confuse the stallions pulling the chariots. But Ameneaheb chased the mare on foot, slit open her belly, and cut off her tail, thus saving the Egyptian army from catastrophe 66

66 Victor Sasson, “King Solomon and the Dark Lady in the Song of Songs,” VT 39, no. 3 (October 1989): 410. He has a different interpretation. This verse alludes to the pharaoh’s daughter (1 Kin. 3:1). For all the proverbial wisdom Solomon was a fool in love-matters. Eventually, his liaisons led to a political disaster- the collapse of the unified monarchy (1 Kin. 11).
not squeezed, but support each other. They can be proud of each other’s achievements. Togetherness is a mutual self-absorption, not egotistic, but a relaxed harmony of two distinct and very different personalities. A tantalizing presence could throw these well-disciplined horses into total confusion. Total confusion is natural in a man. How could he overcome internal pressure? When the mare is killed, the confusion of war is silenced. To kill the mare means that the groom instead, of acting on his sexual passion by having physical contact and inadvertently getting her, transfers his sexual confusion into an expression of her physical appearance. He praises her beautiful appearance while maintaining abstinence. To control love is virtuous and beautiful.

Application

Our self-esteem is in some degree linked with our external appearance. Whatever the inner motivations, it is always a boost to our own self-confidence to know that we are looking our best. We can enhance our mutual attractiveness by taking a little thought over our personal appearance. This is not to be despised and, from careful sowing of such small seeds, we may reap an abundant harvest of delight.67

Unit Five 1:12-14

Analysis

In 1:12-14 the common unifying theme is the fragrance of the beloved. She gives him the names of three specific scents. The groom himself is identified with myrrh and henna blossoms. The primary physical sense here is that of smell, perfume, myrrh, and

67Gledhill, 115.
henna blossoms. We have two small units here combined in a single poem (1:12-14 “from the south,” 1:15-17 “from the north”). The fertile Engedi and the Cedars of Lebanon were well enough known to serve as literary, almost proverbial images. There are allusions to the sexual smell (1:12-14) in the beloved’s soliloquy. The bride responds to her lover’s praise with three erotic similes, which emphasize the lover’s name. In all probability, they are similes that express her sweet feelings toward her lover. The bride returns her lover’s compliments in terms she knows best. The parallelism between verses 13 and 14 makes it clear that the pouch of myrrh and the cluster of henna blossoms represent the lover.

Interpretation

In 1:12 the king’s table represents the highest society. The “couch” in this context has definite erotic connotations. A person’s fragrance stands for their name or reputation (Ecc. 9:1; Ex. 5:21). The sweet scent of the bride attracts the groom to her as he relaxes. Nard was used as a love-charm and was considered to possess aphrodisiac qualities. Her perfume refers to her arousal as well as her attractiveness.\(^68\) The scarcity, and hence the value of this exotic fragrance (nard) made it much in demand as a love-potion.

1:13 shows how myrrh was an aphrodisiac. It served to emphasize the erotic implications. The image of the groom as a small sachet of myrrh between the bride’s breasts is striking. He is, as it were, of diminutive size and overwhelmed\(^69\) by her love when nestled there. The fully-grown lover is simultaneously perceived cradled between

\(^{68}\) Fox, 106.

\(^{69}\) Landy, 8.
the breasts, tiny as a bag of myrrh. Myrrh was used as a cosmetic treatment on young women preparing for sexual relations with their husbands to be (Ecc. 2:12).

In 1:14 the cluster of henna flowers presented in the midst of the barren desert is another allusion to the extra ordinaries of this deeply loved man. The flowers are in the same shape as the human male sexual organ when extended. The previous verse (verse 1:13) refers to the female breasts, and this verse balances it with a delicate image of the male sexual organ. The vineyards of Engedi represent the bride herself. Here the metaphor may have more explicitly sexual or erotic undertones. Gedi (kid) may possibly have sexual overtones. The bride regarded her own sexuality as a luxuriant oasis of fertility in a very barren environment and her lover as a spring or a cluster of henna within her oasis. The Song is very rich in its descriptive power. All the five senses are used: tasting, touching, seeing, hearing, and smelling. Just as in 1:9, where Pharaoh’s horses were the best, so here, the produce from Engedi is the best of the best.

**Reflection**

The perfume represents the lover’s reputation and his identification. He is a captivating source of perfume. The beloved possesses the lover, so she has one of God’s great blessings. The “bag” lying between the breasts is the beloved himself. The bride is protected by his sure and intimate solidarity with her. He endows her with vitality and distinction.  

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70Keel, 66.
Application

The familiarity with the ordinariness of life dulls our senses. We do not take time to consider, hear, and listen. The ordinary, everyday experience may become a source of wonder and rest if only we stop and take the time to ponder, think, and imagine. We are not at the moment thinking of spiritual lessons. Let’s look at all of life as a gift from the benevolent Creator. We are truly rich, not because we possess things, but because we are able to enjoy what others possess. Surely that is a bonus, a gift and a capacity worth having from our creator God. Let us love one another.

Unit Six 1:15-17

Analysis

As mutual admiration, the bride is called “my dove” in comparison to 5:2 and 6:9. This section combines a variety of sensory imagery. Sight predominates in reference to attractiveness. Cedars and firs suggest the sense of smell. A certain density of repetitive parallelism is present in the next brief exchange of dialogue (1:15-17).

Textual Notes

In 17 several Hebrew Manuscripts agree with the Qere, according to Theodore H. Horst, the editor of this section of the BHS. The readings are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kethiv</th>
<th>חִישׁי</th>
<th>Our rafters are of firs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qere</td>
<td>חִישׁו</td>
<td>The rafters are of firs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ketiv חִישׁו as a hapax legomenon does not have a meaning. The Qere

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71 Huwiller, 254.
changes the laryngeal ֶ to ֶ. The Kethiv is more difficult reading, so that the text could have easily been corrected in the transmission of the text, a correction that came to be represented in the unambiguous Qere. Also, errors of the scribes are related to the confusion of similar letters "כ and כ" because the כ is sometimes pronounced harshly like the כ. Their errors resulted in a contextual exegesis problem. The Qere had expressed a meaning that the Kethiv could not explain. Then the textual problem would have been classified as having major importance for the exegesis of the passage. The translation follows the Qere רַחִישִׁים (our rafters) as being better known than the hapax רַחִישִׁים. The Hebrew manuscript used by Ginsburg explained the word as meaning "bolt" because it runs backward and forward. The root רָהָמִים means "run" in Syriac and Aramaic. רַחִישִׁים (our rafters) stands evidently in parallelism with בֵּית (our house) and is of a similar importance. Many manuscripts support Qere.

Interpretation

In 1:15 the bride is called my dove as in 5:2 and 6:9. The image incorporates softness, color, and associates doves with love. This section combines a variety of sensory imagery. Our eyes are the focus of attention in any act of communication. The eyes mirror our inner disposition exactly. Beautiful eyes were a hallmark of perfection in a bride including a beautiful personality. They are the initial means of contact. The

73Ginsburg, 140.
74Ibid.
75Carr, 86.
Bride's eyes are like doves. He is referring to her eyes as oval shaped, like a dove's oval body and timid like its gentleness. The human eyes, together with the mouth are the most eloquent expressions of our inner feelings.

1:16 implies that the royal bed was daily strewn with fresh, newly cut foliage and rushes. The greenery may have taken over the bride's imagination, and a real chamber has become another rustic fiction. The bed implies some sort of canopied bed with fancy carved panels and decorative screens. The female is expressed through poetic creativity that captures our utmost attention, and the imagery is permeated with "biblical reminiscences."  

In 1:17, beams and rafters enhance the luxury. This is not an actual house but an arbor of cedar and cypress. Even this has no literal reference but is highly romanticized and is a vision of the idyllic. Couples who are overcome by the power of love and usurped this divine prerogative for themselves withdraw from the rational world of social restraints (7:11-12). Life can unfold undisturbed in the shadow of the great cedar, the tree of life (Ezek. 31:6) and love can take place under the apple tree (8:5).

Reflection

Neither the groom nor the bride even say, "I love you" a phrase we would expect to hear. Always, and in both cases, it is "you" who takes precedence over "I." Their love for each other is not based on their self, but is wholly dependant upon the other. They can

77 This is a characteristic of imagery.
quite naturally speak using terms like “our.”\textsuperscript{79} The backdrop of creation is an encouragement to them who participate in the natural order of things. This natural backdrop is used as a literary device. The lovers are free from the trappings of convention, of society, and of civilization in order to express themselves fully to each other.

*Application*

She considers him charming, attractive and a delightful beauty. Beauty is not just skin deep. A truly beautiful personality will inevitably shine through and reveal a beautiful spirit. Our self-esteem does in some respects depend on how we view ourselves. They give each other heart-felt praise. The psychological effects of praise and affirmations are beneficial to our well being. It makes us feel good, important and valuable to others.

*Unit Six 2:1-5*

*Analysis*

An inclusion based upon the repetition of “I” establishes 2:1-5 as a brief unit. This unit proceeds by a continuity of setting and alternative dialogue. It is extended similes. Although the lover has declared her to be beautiful (1:15), the beloved observes that her beauty is of a rather humble variety. Alliteration in conjunction with the floral images has the effect of softness and delicacy.

Textual Notes

2:4a. MT יבשנ his banner
        LXX εἰσαύηγετέ me bring me

The LXX construed the verb as a Hiphil, plural and imperative. The LXX version was influenced by the imperatives of the following verse (2:5). However the transition to the third person is addressed in the MT. It is more preferable to accept the MT.

In 2:4b Ginsburg rendered “that bower of delight,” explaining the words as but a designation of the groom’s manifestations of love denoted in the preceding verse by the delicious apple tree.80

2:4c. MT יבשנ his banner
        LXX, Syriac, רכזל set love
        Aquila, Vulgate רכזל Heap upon
        Symmachus ἐπιστορέωσατε Heap upon

The LXX and Syriac rendered as an imperative, רכזל “set (love before me)” to correspond with the reading of the verb of the preceding line. The Vulgate and Aquila has a finite form of the verb, the Symmachus apparently reads רכזל “heap (upon me love,)” The MT reads רכזל. The root רכזל is used there more times (5:10; 6:4,10). Many interpreters retain the MT reading. Gordis solves the difficulty in the primary meaning of the Akkadian root dagalu. Marvin Pope disapproves the study of Gordis, because the exact sense desiderates here. The noun diglu is used in Akkadian in the other sense of “wish, desire, or intent.” Pope prefers “intent” as a meaning of רכזל.81 The issue here is not grammar in semantics, but poetic imagery that the poet created. No error is

80Ginsburg, 143-4.
81Pope, 375-6.
found in the MT.

In 2:5a the context can be considered as an appeal to the daughters, who are addressed with masculine gender in 2:7,15; 5:8. The masculine plural imperative is addressed as a matter of speculation. 82

Interpretation

In 2:1 the flowers most frequently used in the Song are discovered (2:1; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2; 7:2). “I am a rose of Sharon,” is not self-praise. It is an expression of modesty and self-deprecation. I am just a little flower, hardly noticeable among the thousands of flowers that cover the valley. For the lily, there are two interpretations. First, it is native to Palestine. It is an image of great delicacy, evocative of the bride’s purity and simplicity. 83 A second possibility is that it belongs to the Egyptian water lily “lotus.” 84 It is known by means of an artisan representation. 85 The water lily implies the presence of water. She is a water lily (2:1). Her breasts suggest the luxuriant water lilies (4:5). She is the garden to gather water lilies (6:2). It is a metaphor for her special charms. She is indistinguishable from the other flowers of the field. Lily is the simple and sublime feminine principle. It is untouched and unguarded and the identity ultimately is desirable, but alone in the world; one may say it conveys images of the vagina, nipples and lips. 86

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82 Pope, 378.  
83 Munro, 81.  
85 Pope, 368.  
86 Landy, 83.
In 2:2 the bride’s beauty is compared to the beautiful wild flowers that grow in the most unpromising rocky grounds. The lover takes the word lily and turns it into an affirmation of superlative beauty by way of agreement. She is a lily among plainness, softness among prickly things, and uniquely fragrant through the literary device as a simile. Her lover turns her modesty to highest praise.

Verse 2:3 extends the metaphor. The vertical image of a tree appropriately complements the horizontal on 2:1-2 (crocus of plain, lily of valleys). She models her praise of him as an apple tree. The sturdy apple tree becomes appropriate for her lover who, with masculine chivalry and with fatherly tenderness, shelters his young bride (2:3cd). The simile of 2:1-2 is replaced by a metaphor. The object of the image of the fruit is her modesty (2:1) and his chivalry (2:3). The groom replied that she is like a lily among thorns, compared with other maidens. Our bride finds other men tasteless compared to her lover. There may also be the additional elements of the unlikelihood of such a beautiful flower growing in such hostile surroundings. There is much speculation about the nature of the apple tree. “Apple” seemingly has some erotic connotation; his fruit is sweet to my taste, she enjoys his intimate and sweet kissing and, more importantly, she delights to sit in his shade. Here is a strong indication of the role of the male as the provider of protection of the female. He provides her security. This male role is not only financial, but also emotional and psychological strength to the women. A

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87 Huwuiller, 254.

88 Elliot, 61.

89 The Piel stem usually indicates intensification of the basic root. Here, that would translate as “desire passionately” or “with great delight.”
bride without some male protector was considered most pitiable, and without real identity. Matthew Henry comments:

The bride was made of a rib, out of the side of Adam; not made of out of his head to rule over her, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.90

Verse 2:4 speaks of the vertical tree, which gives its shade and has a counterpart in the banner. The lover’s fruit will be tasted at the house of wine; wine is a metaphor for love and for children (1:2). These verses are a continuation of the bride’s soliloquy. This rapid progression transports her into a fever of desire. Wine is associated in the Song with the ideas of kissing; it seems better to interpret the house of wine metaphorically as his mouth. He invites her to enter, to enjoy their deep kissing.

The use of symbolism is heightened by the use of the charm of the sentiments expressed.91 If the bride’s sexuality is associated with a vineyard, the “house of wine” might be an appropriate place where her sexuality is brought to intoxicating fruit.92 The banner erected over the female recruit in the wine hall can be the symbol “love.” “Love” is her mission and her patron.

Verse 2:5 shows that cakes of raisins and apples have already been identified with her lover (2:3). The raisin cakes have a pagan cultic connotation. There is a strong erotic association here. Apples have the powers of an aphrodisiac,93 and will restore her strength for more lovemaking. The context hints that the lover is the source of this sweet,


91Gordis, 38.

92Huwiler, 255.

93She is not calling for aphrodisiacs contrary to Pope’s interpretation.
sustaining fruit. The loved one is the only patent remedy; the apples and raisin cakes are whimsical surrogates, which cannot actually cure love sickness. "Sick" means "weak." Her strength is consumed. She will be restored by new lovemaking, through listening, flirting, teasing, and whispering oblique fantasies. We are reminded of how resilient and trusting, and hence inscrutable, the human heart is.

Reflection

The lover's sincere devotion to her makes the bride ask herself what elicits love. She awakens a new self-respect in herself. These verses of mutual admiration prompt one to ask the question as to exactly what one must admire in one's partners or spouses. Such heart-searching can bring one to a deeper self-knowledge. It is better to withdraw than to blunder on in a hopelessly unsuitable match. We must make sure that there is much to stimulate us. We should see our partner as a rich vein of precious rock, to be explored and mined in an ever-deepening relationship.

Application

Verses 1-5 are the consequences of their mutual admiration. She has firmly settled

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94 Huwiler, 255.
95 Landy, 214.
96 Knight, 16.
97 Tommy Nelson, 51-60. To develop a deep relationship we need deeper communication: sharing one's deepest desire, hopes, and dreams; revealing any dark secrets from one's past, tragic or disturbing aspects of life; discovering their innermost thoughts, opinions, feelings, and secrets; sharing their expectations regarding a spouse without any feeling of recrimination or apology.
on him for protection and safety in the Hebrew (Ps. 17:8; 36:7(8); 91:1; Hos. 4:13). One who is consumed in the service of love can be cured only by love.

Unit Eight 2:6-7

Analysis

The beloved speaks of her lover in the third-person. This Song has the same constellation of person and action. The exhortation of 2:6-7 occurs a third time in 3:5.

Textual Notes

In 2:7a the adjuration is certainly addressed to the “daughters of Jerusalem” despite the masculine pronominal suffix (הנה). The use of masculine for the feminine is frequent in the Song (4:2; 5:8; 6:8).

Verse 2:7b is rendered in the LXX as “ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐχιδεσίν τοῦ αἰγοῦ” (by the powers and forces of the field). This presupposes a different understanding, but not a different Vorlage.98 The appearance in an oath is strange. The best suggestion has been made by Gordis:

There is present a deliberate reluctance to use the Divine name. The lover replaces such customary oaths as ἰδαμμεῖς (God almighty and the Lord of hosts) by a similarly sounding phrase ἰδαμμεῖς (by the gazelles or hind of the field) choosing animals, which symbolize love, for the substitutions.99

The desire to avoid mentioning God’s name would be particularly strongly felt in connection with an oath concerning with the physical aspects of love. One of the most

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98Murphy, 133.

99Ibid.
significant puns in the book is the cluster of male-female antelope images that is used in the bride’s reiterated adjuration (2:7), which sounds suspiciously like the important theological appellations, “the Lord of hosts” and “God almighty” respectively. The reason for the goddess’ special connection with these animals is not hard to see, since their beauty and amative propensities are part of the imagery of the world’s love poetry. Mesopotamian magical spells mention the gazelle as the epitome of sexual poetry. It seems strange to find a biblical writer making people swear by the gazelles or the hinds of the field. The Hebrew word for gazelle is very similar to certain expressions for God. In fact “Lord of hosts” and “gazelles” have the same consonants and vowels, and “the hinds of the field” closely resembles “God Almighty.” They are circumlocutions for the titles of God.

Interpretation

In 2:6 there are no verbs, and so no tense is found here. Can it be read as present tense, a past event, the future or even a possible event? It is connected to a statement about fulfilled love.

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101 Pope, 386; Keel, 93-4.

102 Fox, 109.

103 Elliot, 64. The poet hesitates to use the ancient and honorable titles for the God of Israel in this erotic context. Some misunderstood “it” as “she” or “he.” They choose the object of arousal as lovers. It misses the grammatical or contextual flow for the speaker is “she.”
In 2:7 the problem with the interpretation is how to understand “do not awaken;” is it “do not disturb” or “do not incite?” What is the object of the “please”? Is it “Lover,” or “love?” Are lovers “in the process of love-making” or in “expectation to make-love."

As the former view is Gordis’s, he suggests that the content implies that she is already experiencing passionate love in all its fullness. Here the verbs, “Arouse, stir up” are rendered in the sense of “disturb, interfere with love. “Until it pleases,” means “until love wishes” or “until love wishes to be disturbed, because it has been satisfied.” They are chosen for this verse because the way one disturbs lovemaking is to wake the couple in the morning. This theory misses the moral thing in lovers. It is about the full satisfaction of orgasm. This means, do not disturb the lovemaking until the lovers enjoy sexual satisfaction fully.

As the latter view is Pope’s he suggests the missing point. The adjuration can hardly be an appeal not to be interrupted or not to be disturbed in the course of lovemaking before satisfaction has been achieved. The verb “awaken” in the simple and passive stems is used for being aroused or excited to some activity. The object of the excitation is love. Words for love are virtually personified in many poetic uses and love certainly has a will of its own. The word for “please” denotes pleasure, desire, and striving for. The request not to excite love till it is willing is not necessarily contradictory. The Jerusalem girls are adjured not to excite love till it is willing (eager/desire, strive

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104 Gordis, 28.
105 Fox, 110.
106 Some commentators suggest that the lovers simply do not want to be disturbed. They wish to be left to themselves until they are ready to be interrupted. But the passage is not speaking directly of the lovers but of love.
107 Pope, 387-8.
The poem contains a number of such plays on words, which are lost in translation, but would not have been lost to the original listeners. It is a promise, implicit in “until it pleases,” of maturity that love will be ready. It is also ironically reflexive, since it is they who will awaken through love. Pope interprets the adjuration as a request of the women to not stir up sexual desires by means of aphrodisiacs before the proper time. There is a searching and unfulfilled mood of longing. It is the key interpretation to unlocking the otherwise elusive message.

What is the purpose of her adjuration that she lays upon the daughters of Jerusalem? The charge is that the women should not allow themselves to be aroused sexually until the proper time and person arrives. The natural joy of sexual awakening is ruined by premature experimentation. For a bride to awaken love before it pleases is to deprive herself of the full experience of romance and sexuality symbolized by these graceful animals. And this contents of the verse consists in accordance with the adjuration and the regular use of an oath formula, the positive condition introduces a negative oath. It is not in the process of lovemaking, but in the oath in the future.

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103Car, 94. In any oath taking, one always swears by some higher authority is a universal instinct. The use of an oath formula gives this verse a sense of urgency and gravity unusual in the Song.

109Garrett, 392-3.


111Pope, The Song of Songs, 387. The adjuration can scarcely be an appeal not to be disturbed or interrupted in the course of lovemaking before satisfaction has been achieved. Lovemaking is special; lovers can go beyond the scope, not maintaining control of themselves. So this oath is directed toward to the third-person, that is the bride of Jerusalem, taking control and warning them not to miss the moral security.

112Ibid. Since the validity of the oath depends ultimately on the deity who sanctions it, the security of a society will be followed.
This point gives the moral lesson to wait until the adequate time to be able to enjoy lovemaking comes. The interpretation using “awaken,” instead of “disturb,” with the role of the girls of Jerusalem is preferable. What did she demand of the daughters of Jerusalem? The role of the daughters of Jerusalem is to afford an important sense of security that serves to hold the community together among other people.\textsuperscript{113}

\textit{Reflection}

Sometimes people are so eager to find love that they rush into an unwise relationship. Love is of God (3 John 4:7). Real love in marriage and our spiritual life is a gift from God. It can’t be forced or hurried. Give it time and give God time to work it out for you. He can bless your marriage and your life with love.\textsuperscript{114} The bride’s experience served as a lesson to her Jerusalem female friends. A female’s moral example becomes a prophylaxis,\textsuperscript{115} a warning and guide to the path of love for neophytes.\textsuperscript{116} What exactly about love has she learned about love? There is a time for love and a time to wait for love.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{113}David A. Hubbard, \textit{The Communicator’s Commentary: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon} (Dallas: WordBooks, 1991), 288. Pope, “oaths,” 575. In the text is a “do not disturb” sign to be hung on the door of their rendezvous? The preferable meaning is that the experience of lovemaking is too powerful, too all-consuming to be lightly aroused, unless the couple has the commitment, the desire, and the right opportunity to enjoy it. John F. Brug, 35. They will hinder their love by premature actions. Her words seem to serve as a brake on the preceding love scene.


\textsuperscript{115}This means a preventive treatment.

\textsuperscript{116}This means a new convert, a novice, and an inexperienced practitioner.

\textsuperscript{117}This kind of courtship chooses to wait for sexual fulfillment.
We are the happiest, most creative and most forgiving when we are in love. We are also our most confidant and secure about ourselves as individuals when we know that we are loved unconditionally. Our ability to love makes us capable of transcending our finitude, our humanity, and our creature lines. It is a tale of love, courtship, compassion, intimacy, longing, and mutual delight resounding with many of the elements that characterize God’s dealings with His people. The Song provides its audience with a glimpse into two human beings’ efforts at perfecting human love, building intimacy and the lessons they learn about themselves and each other along the way.\textsuperscript{118}

The lovers are well on their way to fulfilling physical communion either in fact or fantasy. What, then, is there to learn about our own love relationships, our thought-lives, and our fantasies? The danger signals should start flashing. She wants their love to be consummated, but she is in great tension, because she knows that the time is not yet ripe. She is basically telling herself to cool it, to wait for the appropriate time, which is always within the context of marriage. We are all so clever at rationalizing our own desire, at excusing our own lack of self-discipline of our bodies and of our thought-lives. It is wrong when those desires run away from us and spiraling totally out of control, and when we meet those desires in illegitimate ways. An example is Ammon’s affair with Tamar. There is a no more poignant statement in the whole Bible “of how love can be totally corrupted by lust.”\textsuperscript{119} This very perversion of what is so noble and good has its own terrible cycle of maturation and death.\textsuperscript{120} As well as falling under the objective moral

\textsuperscript{118}Weems, 390-91.

\textsuperscript{119}2 Sam. 13; 2 Sam. 13:15.

\textsuperscript{120}Jas. 1:14-15.
judgment of God, the pursuit of lust is also subject to the law of diminishing returns (the frustrations of pursuing an ever-increasing pleasure only to be met by an experience of ever-diminishing intensity).

Application

Teenagers who pledge to remain sexually abstinent until marriage are thirty-four percent less likely to have sex than those who do not take virginity vows. "Pledging decreases the risk of intercourse substantially and independently."121 This is great news. True Love Waits is an international campaign that challenges teenagers and college students to remain sexually abstinent until marriage.122 The study, “Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges as they Affect the Transition to First Intercourse,” appeared in the January 2001 issue of the American Journal of Sociology, and was reported on January 4th in The New York Times and USA Today. Peter S. Berarman and Hannah Bruckner discovered several results from the survey. (1) Taking a pledge delays intercourse for an extended time and sometimes as long as eighteen years. Making a pledge to abstinence has given the young people a reason they can fall back on when they are tempted to engage in premarital sexual activity. (2) Teens living in two-parent homes are less likely to have sex earlier than teens living in single-parent or step-parent homes. (3) Perceived parental disapproval of sex has a strong delaying factor through adolescence. (4) Teens

121Lackey, Terri. “Study Reports: Teens who says ‘no’ to sex are less likely to have it,” Baptist Press (4 January 2001).1-6. The covenant cards signed by teens state; “believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship.” At the heart of the pledge, these kids are committing to God to live a life of purity.

122The campaign is sponsored by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.
who are more religious are also more likely to delay having sex. (5) The combination of academic achievement and sports participation has the strongest delaying effect in early and middle adolescence. (6) In late adolescence, women with high self-esteem are less likely to engage in premarital sex than women with low self-esteem. All young lovers have to learn to wait. For it is only in the security of their future marriage that they will be able to experience the fulfillment of all their deepest longings.

The Second Cycle 2:8-3:5

The commencement of the new unit 2:8-3:5 is marked by a sudden shift in the scene. It is the groom who is the central speaker. The groom expresses his desire for her to come and be with him. The movement of the plot line is again, from the lovers being apart, to expressions of desire, and then to union. A symmetrical structure is in use. Verses 3:1-5 as the parameters of 2:8-3:5 moves from her yearning for her absent beloved, to searching for him and their union. The structure is symmetrical.

A new cycle of the Song begins here with an invitation to a meeting in springtime and closes with the adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem. Within this overall cycle of verses 2:8-17, 2:8 and 2:17 have the chiasmic fashion of gazelle stag and mountain. She begins her remarks by announcing his arrival (8). She closes her remarks by shooing him away (17). Nine occurrences of the pronoun “my” within the span of nine verses (8-17) is not a trivial matter. They are aware that some might question the propriety of their relationship. The lover “closes the distance” between himself and the beloved by his rapid approach, using the Piel form.
Analysis

Two major motifs are the voice of the lover and his approach. The air of excitement pictured in the content is reflected by this passage in verses 8-9. The rapid succession of brief alliteration, abounding in breathless h (ṣ) and h (n) consonants, can also be identified. It describes an immediate and noteworthy perception. These verses are balanced and unified by similar repetitions.

Textual Notes

In 2:9ᵃ-ᵇ the LXX includes an addition after this verse ετέ ορηβαηηηη (on the mountains of Baethel). An addition is presumably based on 2:17ᵇ. Two different words have fallen together as non-homologous homophones in Hebrew (םם); one meaning “gazelle,” and the other “beauty,” there seems to be a deliberate play on the words.¹²³

Interpretation

In 2:8, the bride refers to her anonymous male lover, “my lover,” (2:1-3) “my friend” (5:16) and “he whom my soul loves” (1:7; 3:1-4). The desire to be with his beloved enables the groom to leap over the mountains and hills that separate them (Ps. 121:1; 125:2). Love gives them a superhuman power. In 2:9, repetitions of participles, prepositions and plural noun convey a sense of intensive movement and heightened expectation.

¹²³Pope, 399; Murphy, 139.
Reflection

The speed and leaping ability of gazelles and hinds is proverbial in the Old Testament. The natural speed of the gazelle is intensified through the theme of the hunt. The leaping and jumping expresses agile grace and a heightened feeling of life more than they do an unbridled passion. The lover is leaping and bounding as the observer (v.8), but he is also standing as the one observed. The two lovers then become the mentor of love for each other.

Application

The energy of leaping and jumping is transformed into that of gazing and looking. His patience and abstinence is very conspicuous. Sexual passion is controlled well. He is in the process of maturity.

Unit Ten 2:10-13

Analysis

In 2:10-13 the literary construction of the passage is marked by the groom’s invitation at the beginning and end. It is not clear what is a description of natural reality and what is the metaphor. The poem describes the awakening of nature for its own, and possibly the awakening of nature implies the blossoming of the bride to sexual maturity. When should the bride go? The time for singing (pruning) has come. Pruning is a natural

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124Keel, 98.
order of creation. Singing is of the buds. Big trees and the vines in blossom were a
reference to the future blessing. The bride describes both visual and auditory images.

Textual Notes

In 2:10a the Vulgate and LXX add ἀνάστα ἐλθε (go).

In 2:10b the LXX adds πέριπερα μου my dove.

In 2:10c the LXX is wanting. The LXX’s translation is “my kinsman answers, and
says to me, rise up, come, my companion, my fair one, my dove.”

In 2:11a the Mss, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate have קָפַל (and went away). The
asynthetic is stylistically effective.125

In 2:12a-b it is difficult to decide between the two meanings of תָּכִים (singing or
pruning). They are probably transposed in the end. In תָּכִים, the ancient versions and
authorities, the LXX, Aquila, Symmachus, Vulgate and Targum opted for “pruning;”
NEB, JB, GNB, Gordis, Fox and most modern interpreters favor “singing.” It is difficult
to decide here between the two meanings of תָּכִים “pruning,” or “singing.” If it is given
the sense of “pruning,” 12b is in synonymous parallelism with 12a. But if it is in
synonymous parallelism with 12c, it is an onomatopoeia.126

In 2:13a the BHS suggests “the grape bud” to be deleted.

In 2:13b the Qere קָפַל “arose, come,” agrees with the LXX, which adds “my
dove.” compare to 10c.

125Murphy, 39.

126Delitzsch, 51.
Interpretation

In 2:10, the pet names for his love are more inventive and diverse. He relies on a plethora of epithets to address the bride.\textsuperscript{127} The forceful imperative “rise” and “come” forward the tone of urgency and quickness of movement so characteristic of verses 8 and 9. The possessive pronouns imply reciprocal self-giving and acceptance of the other.

In 2:11 the lover presents a vivid description of springtime with its newness of life. Sight, sound, and fragrance appeal to the beloved’s senses as motives for her to come forth and enjoy.

In 2:12 the unit rhapsodizes the feeling of love that spring brings. “Giving forth” probably signals the intensity of an erotic presence (7:13,14). She is urged to come forth, just as the new life of spring has come forth. With springtime comes belief in new adventures, new possibilities, and a new outlook on life. With the intoxicating feelings that nature and spring arouse, the shepherd refers to this time as “the seasons of singing,” all of nature is aroused to newness. Verse12 emphasizes primarily the significance of the hour. It explicitly emphasizes the temporal aspect. The repetition of a reference to the land introduces a spatial element and here obviously means the open country in contrast to the houses of the walled city.

In 2:13 the flow of sap through the fig tree is ripening the fruits; the generation of vines that are bringing forth blossoms and giving forth fragrance are all harbingers of spring. The delicacy of new life and the promise that it extends, the enchantment with which spring invades the senses, calls the bride into spring and calls her into love.

\textsuperscript{127}1:8; 5:9; 6:1 (fairest among women), 1:9,15; 2:10,13; 4:1,2; 5:2; 6:4 (my darling or my love) 2:10,13 (my fair one, my beautiful one), 2:14; 5:20; 6:9 (my dove), 5:2; 6:9 (my perfect one, my flawless one).
Reflection

The renewal of nature is not seen as a sexual allusion in any way. But the great creator God, the covenant God of Israel Yahweh of hosts stood over and behind the natural order of both the transcendent and immanent. He is the sustainer and upholder for men and nature. He works in the cycle of the seasons and in the lives of his people, from the secret growth in days of darkness, to the exuberance of new life (Is. 55:10-13). Therefore, the bright flame of love can transfigure even the most mundane of circumstances.

Application

There is a movement from seeming barrenness to the full flower of fertility; from dark days of the past to the blossoming of new hope in the future. Whatever the circumstances, the lovers smile with happy benevolence on all whom cross their paths. It refers to the enchanting days of courting when each is learning daily more of the mysteries and excitements of love.128

Unit Eleven 2:14

Analysis

2:14 is filled with the sound of the lover’s voices. Each luxuriates in the sound of the other’s voice.

128Knight, 18.
Textual Notes

2:14\textsuperscript{a}. MT you countenance
2:14\textsuperscript{b}. MT your countenances

The BHS suggests שְׁרֵי (your countenances) as plural, in agreement with the Ketiv.

Interpretation

The bride is playing “hard to get” and she is deliberately setting a challenge to her lover. The bride seems to be inaccessible to him, withdrawn like a dove hidden in the high crevices of a cliff. Dove is a term of endearment, tenderness in sound and sight and gentleness in contour and color.\textsuperscript{129} The sound of its cooing has a calming effect in the spring. Visual and auditory sensation has an effect of endeavourers. In any other theory, the imagery of the dove in the rocks may lead to an inference that the groom wants to be alone with her there to make love to her, not just to gaze on her face but also to see and gently touch the rest of her beautiful and wondrous form and to hear her shy and mellowed response. There is a language between lovers, which is appropriate for their ears only.

Reflection and Application

A bride knows she will ultimately be caught; however, she wants to sustain the

thrill of anticipation by delaying the act of self-giving and prolonging the chase. She sees herself as independent and free as a dove. Her independence may be too valuable to her. He values her virginity. But as soon as he takes her, he loses what he values.

Unit Twelve 2:15

Analysis

The resulting alliteration and assonance gives this verse a highly musical quality. The bride in the response to the groom’s request sings this verse.130

Textual Notes

In 2:15a the LXX and Vulgate omit 2:15a. “Foxes, the little foxes” is an example of “repetitive parallelism of the single-word type.”131 It seems preferable for stichometric balance.

Interpretation

Vineyard and fox are metaphors. In context, the big puzzle is in the pronoun, regarding “for us” and “our vineyard.” If “for us” is not about her, not about any other young women but about their relationship, what is “our vineyard”? The vineyard alludes to be the bride’s chastity (female sexuality). The “our” of “our vineyard” is not the relationship of a couple. For a suitable flow of meaning, “our” should refer to “the

130Munro, 127. She responds to his call first with a warning about the little foxes.

beloved,” because this verse identifies it as “a ditty they used to sing together;”132 but if the female chorus sings this verse, “our vineyard” portrays women as a sexual female image. Yet it presents a problem in the context.

This fox parallels those who are frowning upon and destroying the free love of the couple in the Song.133 So she anticipates from her lover the protection from seduction, an annoying menace to the security of the vineyard. What is in danger is not Jerusalem, the city of God, but the lovers.

**Reflection**

The fox will utterly, instantly destroy the bloom of the vineyard. The verb is used in the “Piel” form for accentuation. In order to protect the vineyard, the lovers must catch the fox. The little and pretty fox approaches but little foxes are not a real danger at first.134 In the end, his true nature will appear as a serious destroyer.

**Application**

What is the reason the relationship of love is being destroyed? Without protection, true love cannot remain forever. Love is beautiful and should be protected in a beautiful

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132Calvin Seerveld, *The Great Song in Critique of Solomon* (Trinity Pennyasheet Press, 1967), 30; Murphy, 141. He refers to as “a fragment of a popular ditty.” If so, the number of speakers and hearers do not need to match up with any number in the text.

133Tanner J. Paul “The Message of the Song of Songs,” *BSac* 154 (Jan-Mar. 1997): 151. This verse is linked to the fear and insecurity the bride experiences. The little foxes can be an expression of the tension that the bride would feel in relation to the women of Solomon’s harem in the light of 2:6 and 6:8-9.

way. When love runs its course, it is neither interfered with nor prematurely provided. We are warned against obstructing love. Those who obstruct love, impede love, or interfere with love should beware. They do so at the risk of crushing lovers’ enthusiasm, destroying the lovers’ faith in life, and bruising their sense of esteem.

Unit Thirteen 2:16-17

Analysis

These verses are an independent form about an affirmation and an invitation. These verses are the actualization of a happy situation and express the wish to experience this happiness again and again. Humans find fullness, security, peace, and freedom in this happy duality. The bride uses the images of her beloved as a gazelle grazing among lotus flowers to characterize the contentment of their solidarity. He finds in her a refreshing love and a renewal of life. Like the flowers, the bride brings forth renewed vivacity and vitality.

Textual Notes

17a. MT סכ turn
LXX, Syriac, Vulgate ἀπόστρεψον return

17b. MT Bether
Syriac, Theodotion spices
LXX κοιλομάτων the Ravines

The Syriac reads θυμωματων (spices). Horst suggests that the Hebrew original perhaps reads הבחר at this point. It is important to understand הבחר in the light of 8:14, where הבחר (spices) occurs in its place. The etymology of הבחר (Bether) “mountains of
cutting” is as a proper name unknown. The “mountains of Bether” seem to be a symbol of the bride herself. The LXX took the word as characterizing the mountains κοιλωματων (the Ravines).

**Interpretation**

In 2:16 this verse affirms the fundamental theme about the depth of their mutual belonging. Their relationship is totally symmetrical. Their reciprocity and this mutuality is something that shines out from the Song. The final consummation of this is an act that is reserved for the married relationship alone. The lovers in our Songs are thinking about this, and dreaming and fantasizing about the fulfillment of their relationship. In “feeds among the lilies” the bride is symbolically identified with the lily or lotus blossoms. Feeding on the lilies may be an indication of sharing kisses or more intimate behavior.

Verse 2:17 is an enigma. What is certain is that the ambiguity is deliberate, a double entendre. Is it until morning, or until evening? The shadows of the day lengthen and flee as the sun sets. Shadows of the night disappear as the sun rises. References to the day (breathing) could mean the cool breeze of the day flowing as the sun rises. She is requesting him to go away and fly through the night, and come back again to her in the morning. The phrase is subtle, an indirect invitation to the groom to come and make love to his bride all night (until the morning). This requires us to view the metaphor of the stag and gazelle as an indicator of young and ardent sexual potency. The rugged hills

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135 Huwuiller, 260.

136 Pope, 405-7; Carr, 102.
by (the mountains of Bether) are euphemisms for the bride’s shapely body on which he is to skip and cavort. So the ambiguity of the language indicates the ambiguity of human responses.

**Reflection and application**

The classic solidarity formula with its emphasis on mutuality does not imply an owner’s pride in the other, but like the relationship formula of Gen. 2:23 “this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,” it expresses the feeling of deepest and most intimate connectedness.

“My beloved is mine, and I am his,” can be portrayed within her relationship with her lover, her brothers, and the watchmen, as well as with her mother and the daughters of Jerusalem. The consummation, maintain of mutual love and security of their mutual love are from the perspectives of the categories of honor and shame. Honor itself is a claim to mutual worth in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others. It is the basis of one’s reputation. Shame is the sensitivity that one has regarding this reputation. It is a positive attitude, concerned with public opinion. It keeps one’s behavior in check lest the rules of propriety be transgressed and one’s honor be placed in jeopardy. The loss of the conscientiousness of shame is a loss of honor. The consciousness of shame is the defense of honor. For the sake of honor, love was conscientiously protected and controlled.

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134Car, 104. This picks up the imagery from 2:8f (2:7) of mountains of Bether (AV, ASV), or rugged hills (NIV). No known geographic site seems entirely suitable. The meaning of the verbal root is to divide an animal in a sacrificial ritual. The idea of rugged mountains is derived from the meaning “divide.” They themselves are “divided,” or that they “divide” or “separate the lovers.” One sees another erotic touch here, with the “divisions” being the breast of the beloved (4:5; 7:7).

The bride is not a mere subservient partner. Together they represent the divine ideal.\footnote{Knight, 19.}

Unit Fourteen 3:1-5

Analysis

This poem sets forth a portrait of a bride of extraordinary virtue. This unit describes the bride's yearning for the groom she loves (1-2), her search for him (2-3), and her eventual discovery of and union with him (4). The poem possesses an internal consistency created by the repetition of a word or phrase.

These verses are a description of a dream, not a conscious experience.\footnote{Delitzsch, 57; Garret, 396-7. He presents four theories: literal, dream, cultic, and symbolic. He chooses the symbolic. His interpretation breaks the natural flow of content. His theory is closer to the allegorical. It is best if we take the whole unit as a dream expressing the bride’s insecurities literally.} These verses are "a dream sequence" and "search-find" motif. The poet uses artistic means to create a reality of its own. The reader should relax and enjoy the poet's playful use of language and exploration of human eroticism. Allow the lovers' playful jostling back and forth and curious speech to inspire your thinking about the way figurative and coded speech creates special memories for intimates.

Textual Notes

In 3:1\textsuperscript{a} the LXX's expansion occurs after 1\textsuperscript{b} with the addition of εκαλεσε αυτό και ουχ ουκουσεν μου (I called him, but he hearkened not to me) (cf. 3:5,6).

Compare 3:5\textsuperscript{a} to 2:7\textsuperscript{a}.
Compare 3:5^b to 2:7^b.
Compare 3:5^c to 2:7^c.

_Interpretation_

“Whom my soul loves” does not at all means that the bride loves her beloved only spiritually or deeply, but that her whole desire, all her yearning, her thoughts, her feelings, and her physical needs are directed toward him. It is this kind of longing and passion that the poem wants to portray.\(^{141}\)

The “house of my mother” could literally be the chamber where motherhood becomes a reality, that is, her womb. Metaphorically the bride’s own secret place, and the entrance to her womb, the “chamber,” is the innermost sanctum of intimacy to which she longs to bring her lover.\(^{142}\)

_Reflection_

There are some characteristics of love. First, the poem describes the wholesome passion of the bride (Hosea 2:14-16; Isaiah 54:4-8; 62:1-5; Jeremiah 31:31-34). If human love is a fitting way of characterizing divine love, then human passion itself is undeniably a praiseworthy attribute. Secondly, tenacity in one’s commitment to love is another covenant virtue. In fact, steadfast love is the foremost characteristic of covenant allegiance (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Ps. 5:7; 33:5; 59:17; 89:28; 136:1-26; 145:8). Thirdly,

\(^{141}\)Keel, 121.

\(^{142}\)Tom, 145.
she acts assertively with undaunted courage to overcoming every possible obstacle in pursuing the union. This is where courage comes in. Love is this powerful and creative.

The young couple's lovemaking clearly has her mother's full approval and blessing. There are a number of themes profitable to explore. First of all, one can see the pain of love. There is a place for pain in every true relationship, the opportunity to grow in love, the pain that learns to live with limitations, with frustrated desires, and with unfulfilled ambitions. Secondly, there is the pain of separation (Prov. 13:12). Separation also gives room for thought, for reflection and contemplation. It needs to be followed by true communication and honest dialogue. Thirdly, subconscious fears are brought to the surface in dreams. Her dream is also an expression of her deepest wish to be united to her lover. The path of true love is never smooth. In love there is always pain, which is experienced also by the one who loves us. It is an expression in agonizingly revealing terms of the simple fact that pain is always present in true love.

Application

Obviously true love must be tested to discover our fidelity to one another and to the God of love. God's creative love is offered to us, not to defeat us, but that we might be strengthened to meet the vicissitude of life and love. Human to human relationships, like human-divine relations must be cultivated, nurtured, safeguarded, cherished, including intimacy with God. It costs us our time and our energy. A willingness to be present, to remain, to be accountable, to see things through, to come out from hiding is

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143 Knight, 21.
144 Ibid., 20.
necessary to nurture a relationship. We must take care to spend time with those we love and to find time to talk with each other. Care should be given to create an atmosphere in which conversation and intimacy can thrive. Mindfulness and attentiveness are popular terms within our culture to remind us that beauty, love, joy, abundance, the sacred, and the possibility for happiness surround us in the ordinary routines of human living, if we would only take the time to notice and nurture them. Striving, like the lovers in the Song 2:14, to behold beauty and to hear the sacred in our routines we must take care to lean closer and see God’s face and to hear God’s voice in our lives.

The Third cycle 3:6-5:1

The third cycle is the lovers’ royal wedding motif. We are viewing the approach of either the bride or the groom, coming up from the wilderness. The speakers are unidentified. The protagonist coming out of the wilderness is the bride. The groom’s words of admiration and desire for her (4:1-15) and the description of the their union (4:16-5:1) is a splendid vision. The functions of the internal structure are to unify the units. These verses exhibit linear development, beginning with the two lovers apart and ending with them together. This features a well-conceived symmetrical design, with in the form of chiasm. The groom admires the physical attributes of the bride, enumerating seven items in each. The entire unit is then framed by the introductory vision of the approaching bride-to-be, with fragrance of myrrh, with the two lovers apart (3:6-11) and by the concluding climax, with their union and the repetition of the motif of fragrance (4:16-5:1). Its corresponding unit is 6:4-8:4. It moves towards the climax realized in 4:8-
5:1, the emotional intensity achieved with the celebration of the wedding day.

Unit Fifteen 3:6-11

Analysis

The moment of quiet union in 3:1-5 abruptly gives way to a scene filled with excited activity (3:6-11). This intrinsic poetic artistry of 3:6-11 functions in the development of the Song of Songs. It evokes a wide range of human emotions (excitement, questioning, fears, awe, love, and joy) and its imagery appeals to every sense except taste. The use of imagery especially engages all the senses and emotions in a celebration of love and mutual possession. The bride approaches the waiting groom in the wedding procession (3:6-10d) and he goes forth to receive her (3:10e-11e). Night gives way to day, the wilderness to the city and terror to joy. The final reference to day is the day of marriage and the day of joy. 3:6-8 were marked by the lively exclamation of anonymous participants (“Who is this? Look”) and focuses on the bride hidden in Solomon’s sedan. This poem (3:9-10) describes the most important preparations for this procession. The two poems (3:6-8, 3:9-10d) are held together by the catchword Solomon’s sedan and by the legendary figure of Solomon.

Textual Notes

In 3:6a the LXX and Vulgate appear to be connected in construing the plural form as a generalization and rendering it as singular, “like a pillar of smoke.”

Verse 3:6b is the Pual, feminine, participle of רָעָשׁ (smoke) and refers back to הָרוּנ (this). The vocalization of the MT should be retained, against the Targum and Aquila ἀπο
Verse 3:9 is a hapax, and probably a loan word. In 3:9 the person who had the carriage made is identified in the MT as “King Solomon.”

In 3:10 the parallels are substances like “silver,” “gold,” and “purple.” There also seems to be strong reason for accepting the rendering “leather.”

In 3:10 Murphy designates either the attitude of the worker or the loveliness of the work. Interpreters have been troubled with the use here of the word “love,” in connection with the ornamentation of a piece of furniture. The NEB, and G.R Driver’s proposal is “leather.” A number of critics want to emend “love” to “ebony” (Graetz, Budde, Haupt, Miller, Haller), and Gerleman to “stones.” The BHS suggests to read הובג (love) as הבני (ebony). But the MT is preferred, because the creativity of the poet put here and its connection with “daughters of Jerusalem.” The beauty of this poetry is enjoyable. The poet recognized that inner, invisible part should be covered by jewelry as love. The comparison between the outside and inside is sung with imagery. In context, contrast parallelism is preferable to similar parallelism. The MT should be chosen.

Verse 3:11 is absent from the LXX.

Interpretation

Verses 3:6-9 pose one of the most difficult questions in the interpretation of the Song. Verses 3:7-11 are taken as a response to 3:6. There are several directions according to “this” in “who is this coming up.” First, “this” in “who is this” is feminine. Verse 3:6 asks the question “Who is this?” and calls for the answer in 3:7-11. “This”

145 Murphy, 149.
Delitzsch interprets this as the bringing of the bride from her isolated Galilean home to her new "home" in the royal city, and the identification of the bride rather than Solomon as "the one coming up." This provides the best clue to the link between this unit and the following section. The bride’s beauty is paralleled with the beauty of the royal chariot. We see the protagonist’s fantasy about her wedding day. A wedding scene is reminiscent of the days of Solomon. Secondly, The word “this” is a neutrum and refers to the whole spectacle in view. It allures to the fact that some person (Solomon) is obviously at the center of the approaching marvel. His approach from the wilderness heightens the dramatic nature of his arrival. Wilderness is the ream of innocence and purity. There are notes of the six references to Solomon (1:5; 3:7,9,11; 8:11-12). These verses are clearly the wedding of Solomon. However, the reference to “Solomon” does not mean that Solomon is a character in the Song; the figure of Solomon is a poetic symbol and a foil. Solomon is the royal figure par excellence and is a symbol for the glory that belongs to any groom. Also, the reference to

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146 Peter B. Dirksen, “Song of Songs 3:6-7,” VT 39, no. 1 (April 1989): 223. The speaker is not interested in what is coming. RSV, AT, NEB, GNB: “What is this coming up?” the reason for translation of as “what” is the fact that in the following passage no mention is made of a person. The bride is the center of the wedding procession. It is the literary introduction to a description of Solomon’s royal status.

147 Delitzsch, 60-61.

148 Carr, 107.

149 Waltke and O’connor, 312. They define that this (female) serves the function of “neutrum” as a grammatical element of vague or broad reference, often in Hebrew a feminine pronoun.

150 It should not be taken literally, but as part of the lyrics of the Song.

151 Murphy, 151. Every man in love is a Solomon in all his glory.

152 Carr, 109-10.

153 Garret, 401.
Solomon’s wedding might well express their longing for public affirmation of their own life together.\textsuperscript{154}

In 3:10 the phrase “its interior is inlaid with love” hints at the purpose for the groom’s approach, the wedding night.\textsuperscript{155} Love probably describes the motif of the ornamentation on the inside of Solomon’s sedan. The portrayal of the external features is that of the central element, the interior of the litter. The concern is no longer for the building materials but for the motif of the entire unit.\textsuperscript{156} Love should be recognized as an example of the rhetorical figure “synecdoche,” where the most central, interior place stands for the person of the beloved herself.\textsuperscript{157}

Verse 3:11 shows how it was signally important to have the mother-in-law’s blessing, since brides upon marriage moved to their husband’s locality. Frequently it would be in the compound where his father and mother lived. Thus “gladness of heart” is a superlative kind of joy. It is a gladness that possesses a person completely, extending from the center to engulf every aspect of the human with happiness.\textsuperscript{158}

\textit{Reflection}

The Song is reminders of how naive and idealistic people are on their wedding, regarding to handle and to nurse another wounds and bruises, and how to behold another’s nakedness and vulnerability. The Song is a reminder to live one’s life with only

\textsuperscript{154}Huwiller, 266.
\textsuperscript{155}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156}Keel, 134.
\textsuperscript{157}Elliot, 88.
\textsuperscript{158}Keel, 137.
one other individual, to pledge to submit to each other, to expose one’s wounded self for healing, and to be melded into one brand new life together. The Song is a reminder of how much passionate enthusiastic, and utterly idealistic love is, how innocent and ardent the passion that brings human beings together is, and how unthinkable and supernatural is the actual union.

Application

Marriage is viewed as the most sublime metaphor for the relationship between God and human beings. It symbolizes the intimacy, love, and devotion characteristic of the covenant union. It is imagery of a union and the mystery for capturing all vicissitudes to live faithfully and spontaneously with the other. It is the closest bond possible for two human beings. It teaches lessons about grace, forgiveness, constancy, submission and love. It will take a supernatural attraction to keep them together. Living in a covenant union with another human being proves to be the most unglamorous, exacting, and excruciating work a person will undertake, a most extraordinary effort.¹⁵⁹

Unit Sixteen 4:1-7

Analysis

This unit is classified as a wasf. The poetic construction is normally taken from both natures and human craft. Wasf is a metaphor based on emotional response rather than physical similarity. It is a song praising the bride’s beauty. The lover admires the

¹⁵⁹Weem, 401.
beauty of his beloved and then proceeds to specify all the elements of her loveliness. The descriptive song has vertical viewpoints, moving downwards from eyes, hair, teeth, lips, checks, and neck to the breasts. Elements within the Song are arranged with both pattern and variation so as to maintain a structure yet to avoid monotony.

With these images one must pay careful attention both to their dramatic nature and to the ancient Near Eastern custom. Their custom was that of portraying the essential strength and significance of a deity or person by identifying his or her bodily features with the various powers and splendors of the surrounding world. The entire companion is visual, emphasizing shapes and colors. The poet is not describing so much how she looks but how he feels when he looks at her. The inherent powers of the beloved show the mystery of the attractive force of her beauty.

**Textual Notes**

4:1a. MT התלšג which lies
LXX αι ἀπεκαλυφθησαν that have appeared
Symmachus ἀεισάησαν

In 4:1b-b several Hebrew Manuscripts and the LXX read מִנֶּהְלַיִלְתּ “from Galaad excluding “mountain.” It is repeated in 6:5b. Mount Gilead is not a single mountain. The reference is to the hilly area in Gilead.

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160Keel, 139.
161Snaith, 60.
162Garret, 404.
163Keel, 139.
164Murphy, 150. Kethiv points to the action of speaking, while Qere seems to point to the organ of speech.
In 4:3a the variant refers to a special kind of Ketiv-Qere. It here designates the instrument and organ of speech rather than the action or content of speech.

In 4a the LXX reads εὐροφεῖνος (for an armoury). It has puzzled translators and commentators. The ancient translator adopted various solutions: the Vulgate “with battlements,” the Symmachus “to good height,” the KJ “armour,” the RSV “arsenal.” A. M. Honeyman offered the only plausible explanation of the term as meaning נִסְפָּה (to arrange in course).165 The issue here is not concerning grammar, but understanding the meaning.

In 4:6a the phrase, “who browses among the lilies” (2:16; 4:5) triggered the repetition of 2:17. Verse 2:17 is an invitation by the bride, whereas verse 6 expresses the groom’s resolve in words borrowed from the invitation.166

Interpretation

In 4:1 the dove is known for its delicacy, softness, gentleness, tenderness, bashfulness, its ability to speak (communicate), attractive pathos and news-bringing.167 The “speech” that touches the heart combines to suggest the effect of the bride’s eyes on the groom’s heart.168 The figure of her hair suggests the flow and movement of the maiden’s hair.169

165Pope, 467. He offers the history of the term on pages 466-8. Murphy, 155.

166Murphy, 155.

167Fox, 129.
Verse 4:2 shows the metaphor of twin teeth, which adds an exceptional feature to the portrait of this extraordinarily beautiful bride. To whom does she smile? Is her expression reserved only for those of her intimate circle? She is willing to grace everyone with the loveliness of her mouth. It suggests the ability of her brilliant smile to enthrall those who behold it. The bride projects a sense of vigor, purity, health and fertility. The bride’s teeth are healthy. This implies that none of her teeth are missing. Twins suggest symmetry. The twins emphasize the impression of order and blessed fertility. This extended simile evokes full blessings and images of the friendly and cheerful festivities of a sheep shearing.\footnote{Keel, 143.}

Verse 4:3 talks of the mouth (lips) and how it is not merely beautiful, but attractive and wholesome. Her mouth is cleverly portrayed with words flowing out of it. Its comparison of the lips to the scarlet cord would be like the metaphor, praising the ability both to articulate and to awaken the longing and readiness for love.\footnote{Ibid., 146.} The slice of pomegranates is compared to the beloved’s “soft” part, as the bride’s temples, but it seems most likely to refer to the beloved’s open mouth. The reference to the inside of the mouth strengthens and completes the references to the gleaming rows of teeth and the scarlet lips; the erotic effect of the open and yearning mouth is only heightened by the veil.\footnote{Ibid., 146.} The “veil” meant to cover her beauty, actually augments her mysteriousness,
which serves to enhance her attractiveness, her inaccessibility, and her subsequent desirability.

In 4:4 the analogy, as military terminology, cannot but convey a sense of unassailable strength. No man could “conquer” her, and her suitor is awed by the dignity she carries. Her lover is a gift; it could never become plunder. The simile “your neck is like a tower” describes the beloved as a proud, unconquered city (7:4(5); 8:10).

Verse 4:5 includes the phrase “your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle,” which expresses a perfect symmetry and in age, size and beauty. They make complementary units of the single self. Twins are uncanny and are associated with magic. They symbolize undifferentiated opposites. Keel suggests that the combination here is not natural but symbolic. Breasts and fawns of a gazelle symbolize the warmth of life and the inspiring and victorious counterforce to death. They are a notion of blessing, kindness, and nourishment and trust building, with a soft, warm security. The images as pictorial value are not trivial. Gazelles are graceful and sprightly. “Which graze among the lilies” functions to create the delicate pastoral

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174Garret, 404.

175Keel, 147.

176Pope, 470, Gordis, 56.

177Keel, 150-151.
Verses 4:6-7 express the imagery of hills and spices. These spices do not grow in Israel, they are costly perfumes imported from the east, like the bag of myrrh between the bride’s breasts in 1:13. Erotic smells were more fashionable then. Hills of fragrance and mountain of myrrh are the bride’s breasts for she is “perfumed with myrrh and fragrance.” These cannot be literal geographical references. This refers to the intoxication of lovemaking whether actual or anticipated (1:13; 4:14; 5:1,5,13).

Reflection

The bride’s warm smile and her pleasant manner of speech imply a certain degree of intimacy. There is a way in which the character and quality of our human commitments can act as a gauge for measuring the character and quality of our commitment to God.

Analysis

This unit is a garden metaphor and is the largest sustained metaphor of the Song. Literary devices like paronomasia, puns and repetitions hold this whole section

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178 Fox, 131; Snaith, 62-63. Gazelles are well known for their gracefulness and sprightliness. They interpret that several ways: (1) to the scent of her breast, (2) the delicacy of a fawn, (3) her breasts, (4) the delicate pastoral image.

179 Snaith, 63.

180 Fox, 132.
together. The dominant image in this unit is drinking and eating, which symbolize general enjoyment of sensuality. The intertwining strands of word-echoes and word plays are not merely ornamental devices. They unify its parts, clarify the meaning of the allusions, and interlock the words of the couple. The imagery has moved from the mountains to the garden. The names of places and animals in this unit were chosen to call to mind the names of spices and sweet things. These exotic places and animals evoke an atmosphere of beauty and majesty, in contrast to the gentle and idyllic landscape. This division comes to the climax with these two verses (4:16; 5:1), which form the point that everything moves towards the consolidation and confirmation of the adjuration to not rush love. There is sudden change in the atmosphere. 4:12-15 show the anticipation, 4:16 is an invitation, and 5:1 is consummation and affirmation.

Textual Notes

4:8a. MT רָצַע with me
LXX, Syriac, Vulgate δεῦρο ῥά to come from

The LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate read the imperative feminine singular רָצַע as “come from” as opposed to the MT’s רָצַע “with me.” But, the MT (“with me”) yields good sense and has a chiastic form with repetitive parallelism. The three bicola in the metrical scheme 3:3 have one perfect example of two-word repetitive parallelism (“with me”) and one of one-word repetition (טיָאָרָם, “from the top”).

181 Fox, 134.
182 Murphy, 155.
183 Albright, 3.
Verse 4:9a shows that in בְּאֵי יָרָה יָשִׁירֵי “with one of your eyes” there is a grammatical disparity between the masculine numeral and the feminine “eyes.” Several Hebrew Manuscripts read same masculine numeral. The attempt of the MT to substitute בֵּית (feminine) for בְּאֵי (masculine) evidently arose from a necessity to avoid the apparent incongruity of coupling a masculine numeral with a feminine noun. The solution lies in the fact that members of the human body, although usually feminine, are employed occasionally as masculine (Job. 31: 20, Zech 4:10).  

In 10a, b these words echo the compliments made by the bride in 1:2. There is an effective parallelism in 10c:

4:10c. MT שְׁחֵנַח your oils
LXX ἕπαρσα την σοῦ = שְׁחֵנַח your garments cf 4:11

The LXX was not supported by other variants.

4:11a. MT כְּרֵיהָ לְבָנָן like the fragrance of Lebanon
Mss מִקְלוֹנַהְצָה than all spices
Vulgate incense

The Mss wants to associate this verse with the previous verse (10bb). The Vulgate replaces לְבָנָן (Lebanon) with קֵמֵנַה (incense). This is an error of the Vulgate.

In 12a the BHS’s note suggests that the text should read מ (fountain) as with the Hebrew manuscript, the LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate. מ is used to designate a heap of stones or waves of the sea; many commentators render it here as “spring,” or the like and achieve parallelism with the מ.

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184Ginsburg, 159.

Verse 12 uses a term for a water supply as a figure for the female sexual partner. It is used to stress the point that a man should have and keep to his own private supply, which clearly indicates marital intimacy.\(^{186}\)

Verse 13 is a stumbling block to translators and commentators. The KJ, "plants;" the RSV and JB, "shoots;" the AT, "products;" the NAB, "you are a part" and the JPSV, "your limbs." It is figuratively used for the members of the body.\(^{187}\)

In 12 the LXX B reads "a fountain of garden" comparing 12 to 16.

4:16. MT לְבֵית his garden
LXX בֵית my garden

Hebrew manuscripts, the Syriac and the LXX, read בֵית as "my garden." The bride is the speaker in 4:16. The expression of "his garden," expresses her longing for the time when she shall be wholly his.\(^{188}\)

In 5:1 the LXX reads άρτον μου as "my bread."

**Interpretation**

In 4:8 she is high in the mountain peaks of the north surrounded by prides of lions and leopards. This image conveys an aura of threatening mystique, an almost numinous quality, and vulnerability of overwhelming forces of nature. As the bride in various texts describes her state of mind, so the groom here discloses his own perception of reality: he believes himself helpless and unable to attain her.\(^{189}\) The roughness of this mountain

\(^{186}\)Murphy, 157.

\(^{187}\)Ginsburg, 161.

\(^{188}\)Pope, 499.

\(^{189}\)Garrett, 406.
location with wild lions and leopards\textsuperscript{190} is as a literary motif representing threat, hazard, uncertainty and hostility and evokes a sense of loftiness and exoticism.

In 4:9 the sense of the verb could be either “you have taken away my heart,” in the sense of “I am hopelessly in love with you” or “you have ‘heartened’ me,” “you have sexually aroused me.”\textsuperscript{191} He describes the bride’s effect on his heart, and focuses exclusively on her. “My sister, my bride” is simply conventional lovers talk to express the closeness and permanence they desire in their union.\textsuperscript{192} He is a captive in a sense by the irrational calling of a bride in 4:8,9-10,11,12; 5:1, which means “the completed one, the fulfilled one, the consummated one.” It includes their own marriage and closes with the consummation of their love in the marriage bed.

In 4:10-11 the groom praises the pleasures of the bride’s caresses, not describing his present experience but the object of his desire. The emphasis on the scent of her perfume suggests that experiencing her love involves all the senses. Sight, touch and smell—all these work their magnetic power on her beloved.

In 4:11 the metaphor describes two qualities: sweetness of kisses (1:2; 4:10), and sweetness of speech.\textsuperscript{193} Milk and honey are standard symbols of the land of Palestine.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{190}Snaith, 65. The wild, threatening landscape is a literary device to describe the experience of love. Two places calls to mind the difficulties that must be overcome in attaining love. These suggest not only the bride’s inaccessibility (2:14), but also that there is danger in her environment. The reference to predatory beasts (lions, leopards) relates loosely to the foxes in 2:15.

\textsuperscript{191}Pope, 479-80. “you have taken my heart,” as a privative Piel. Carr “ravished my heart,” NEB, NIV, “stolen my heart,” the heart is the seat of the mind, the will, the conscience, the person himself, and the emotions.

\textsuperscript{192}Carr, 121.

\textsuperscript{193}Snaith, 67. This is a metaphor for pleasant conversation, and thoughtful speech.

\textsuperscript{194}“The land of promise” is the garden, which is the bride herself. That “honey and milk” are stored under the tongue probably means that the sweet words of the bride hold hidden promises yet to be
They were looked forward to with great anticipation in arid times of the wilderness. It is a foretaste of things to come, and, at a deeper level of interpenetration, is the climax of their consummation. Her garments are "tokens of virginity," and the delicacy and flimsiness of female underwear.

Verse 4:12 speaks of a locked garden and is an appeal for her to open her abundant pleasure to him. It is a good image of the beloved whose charms were reserved for her lover only.\textsuperscript{195} Sealed spring alludes to feminine sexuality as she is a "garden" (1:8; 4:15; 5:1; 6:2; 8:13). The imagery "Fountain" is used to describe the sexual life shared by husband and wife, and the context here has obvious sexual overtones.

In 4:13 "your shoots" obviously fits the new garden metaphor well and not the\textsuperscript{196} wasf. The poet expresses the beauty of the garden by stressing the budding of new shoots and the flowing of fresh water. Combined garden and water imagery convey the double metaphor of the feeling that the bride is in her lover. She is an orchard of pomegranates, with exquisitely tasting fruit.

In 4:14 the garden of exotic plants is a fantasy garden matching the fantasy of love, and suggests the intensity and fullness of the youth’s feeling.\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{195}Snaith, 67. This is the bride’s modesty and sexual exclusiveness. The garden is sensuality and potential fertility. The image of the garden suggests the unapproachableness of the area to all but those who rightfully belong. It is used as a euphemism for the female sexual organs. A fountain sealed, and a garden locked speaks of virginity.

\textsuperscript{196}This poem isn’t a real wasf, for the poem has moved on from the physical description. NIV, AV "plants," NEB, "two cheeks," Pope, "groove."

\textsuperscript{197}Snaith, 68.
In 4:15 "Lebanon" is used as a superlative expression denoting flowing water at its freshest and best.\textsuperscript{198} She is not an exposed public fountain, but an enclosed and very private one. The bride is described in such extravagant terms that the power of the metaphors seems to overwhelm the listener, and the bride herself seems to disappear from view, submerged as it were by the very lusciousness of the flora and fauna. The spring enclosed and the sealed fountains are both metaphors for the bride's privacy, her exclusivity, her sole allegiance to her lover, sexual exclusiveness and her non-availability to anyone but him, her virginity. She has kept herself reserved for her only love. He is not complaining of her inaccessibility. Rather he is proud that she is untouched by others, that her greatest act of self-giving has been reserved for him alone. This sexual exclusiveness is well expressed in Prov. 5:15-20.

In 4:16 she invites him to come and enjoy her love. This is the consummation of their marriage. Her garden becomes his garden. It is a subtle indication of the bride's surrender of herself to her lover. The north and south wind provide the right balance and parallelism for the poetic line. "All winds" is pure literary artistry. His garden and its choice fruit would skillfully lead up to 5:1, where the lover responds by entering and claiming his garden.\textsuperscript{199} Her invitation now "opens" the locked garden. "Do not awake love until it pleases"\textsuperscript{200} (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) turns positive as she invokes the wind to awake, for love has stirred. North wind and south wind is parallelism. The alternation between cool and warm freezes stimulates the growth of the garden. She is not merely passive, but

\textsuperscript{198}Snaith, 69.

\textsuperscript{199}Snaith, 70.

\textsuperscript{200}It was a call to avoid premature awakening. But now the time is ripe. There is to be no restraint.
ardent and eager. She wants him to feel her attractiveness, her desirability. She wants him to enter her garden and taste its exquisite fruits. The use of “to enter” is a Hebrew metaphor for sexual intercourse. The garden is their mutual possession.

Verse 5:1 conveys the joy of sexual love without vulgarity; at the same time, the meaning is quite clear. The catalog of luxuries implies that he has partaken of her pleasures to the full. She is now his garden, no longer locked, and he comes to enjoy all the pleasures it/she offers. Everything in it is now his, the possessive adjective my occurs eight times. The tenses of the verbs are problematic. That they are anticipating what is about to be the connection between the life of nature and sexual enjoyment is well illustrated. He accepts her invitation and enters the garden. He picks up the clue with alacrity and eagerly calls everything in the garden. Verbs of eating and drinking can allude to sexual enjoyment. The lovers are to “eat” and “drink” love. “Get drunk on love” means to give oneself over to sexual ecstasy. The metaphors of honeycomb describe the private parts of the lower female genitalia. They are abandoning themselves unreservedly and unashamedly to each other in an intoxicating orgy of lovemaking. The lover’s activity in 5:1 affirms that what they are doing is good, wholesome, right, and proper. It is the natural physical consummation of their love. Their abandonment in self-giving is thoroughly approved and endorsed. There is to be no reserve, no restraint, but a complete and happy enjoyment of each other in their mutual love. They are to be

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201 Garrett, 407.
202 Snaith, 70-71.
203 Fox, 139.
inebriated, on a physical and emotional high. It is a literary device to indicate an external approval of the closing scene of intimacy.

Reflection

In chapter 8 she looks down with aloof contemplation. There is a sudden and seemingly arbitrary change in mood and aspect that initiate mystery. It acts as a cushion and it is important to the partner. The lover overcomes his hesitations, braves his self-doubts, and moves ahead with confidence to his union in marriage. In any relationship, the element of unpredictability can be both stimulating and alarming.

She is not sexually experienced. In the western European society, chastity is not considered a virtue, on the contrary it is mocked. Those who are “sexually inexperienced,” both male and female, are looked down upon with contempt. It arises from hostility towards those who do not conform to their own immoral behavior. There is the unspoken assumption that lack of experience at this sexual level is somehow a disqualification from progress in this modern world; that the chaste or the celibate is somehow incomplete or unfulfilled; that they are emotional cripples bound by outmoded religious scruples. The metaphor of the bride as a garden indicates that she is alive, fertile and blossoming in every sense. She has an inner spring that is a source of life, not of barrenness. She herself is the guardian of that fountain, to give or to refrain from giving as she so chooses. The self-possession of the bride is suggested by the inapproachability of the mountain; the indiscriminate, inaccessibility of the enclosed garden, and the sealed fountain are traits that are highly prized today.
Application

The entrance of the garden is the image of the garden’s fertility and pleasure. The poet is well aware of the distinctive properties of this garden. As a real garden, it holds the secrets of life; as a symbol of the primordial garden, it holds the secrets of creation. The human body, whether male or female, is one of nature’s wonders. It is through the body that we are engaged in the world and with each other. A kind of God’s creativity can be discerned in this stunning creature. The individual body is unique, and it is our way of being. Sexuality can open up to another, prompting one to share.

Whoever the bride is and whatever she posses with the other, it is important to note that she is not described as self-centered and isolated. She is assuredly in a relationship with the groom, but he does not rule her. She is willing to share her riches, but she decided when, how, and with whom this was to be done.

The Fourth Cycle 5:2-6:3

In the beginning unit of this cycle, the lover is outside and seeking for the entrance. At the conclusion he is within and in possession of his beloved in the image of the garden. The first subdivision in 5:2-8 corresponds to the outside pole, the description of the dynamic patterns of call and response, action and reaction. The second subdivision (5:10-16) corresponds to the inside pole and subtly discloses a growing communion. Describing her lover in his absence, the beloved expresses their actual union and mutual presence by means of new combinations of images in a mirroring effect. After the dramatic climax in 5:1, a new cycle of poems begins in 5:2 with a very sudden change of
mood, which is carried on through to 6:3. There is an inherent unity of the narrative and dialogue in this sequence. The cycle of 5:2-6:3 lies between the garden-motif poem and the poem describing the bride. The poem consists of an account of the indirection of language (5:2-6:3), a seeking and finding motif (5:6-7), and a carefully constructed dialogue between the bride and the daughters of Jerusalem (5:8-6:3).

Unit Eighteen 5:2-8

Analysis

These verses in 3:1-5 are frequently considered almost doublets and are preparation for their nocturnal sleep. Between the beloved and the voice of her lover, are patterns of call and response, action and reaction. These verses are more reminiscent than the ones in 1:7-8, which hesitate in seeking the beloved and opening herself to him; as a result, because the lover is impetuous and impatient, she misses the opportunity. The bride recounts the approach of her beloved, her delay comes from acting on his request for entrance, his retreat, and her subsequent search for him. The absence-presence-absence theme is clearly sketched. A reference to the balance of sleep and wake can be best understood as a poetic fiction that draws its images from both the world of dreams and the world of reality. Interpreting the phrase in this way recognizes the use of double entendre, while insisting on a precise and consistent meaning diminishes the poetic force of the imagery.204

204Donald C. Polaski, “What Will Ye See in the Shulammite?” Biblical Interpretation 5 (January 1997): 78-81. The internalized patriarchal standards of judgment and value enter into the text unconsciously through the bride herself. The bride is watched by an unseen watcher, a disciplinary gaze, a male gaze and society. The bride constructs herself individually, serving as a model for reading the Song.
She tells how the groom came to her door. Verses 2-7 are filled with sexual innuendos. This passage can express “dream,²⁰⁶ half-dream, half-awake state, and realism.” All possibilities are available. In a metaphorical sense, the poet is using this poetic device, as a variable of genre, which true contents reveals. Both literal, or real, and metaphorical interpretations are required here to fully understand the true contents. A dream episode is dramatized in the keen psychological insight, in this state of heightened tension, emotional state, and complexed visual image.²⁰⁷ The unit ends on a note of unfulfilled desire.

**Textual Notes**

The accumulation of the terms of endearment is further emphasized by the alliterative effect of the pronominal ending (ַ-ַ). ²⁰⁵

| 5:4a | MT עלי for him | Mss עלי upon me, within me |

A number of Hebrew MSS read here עלי as “upon me,” which is preferred by a number of critics (Ewald, Graetz, Dalman, Zapletal, and Horst) and is interpreted in the sense of "for me." The RSV adopted "within me," the JB "my being," the NAB "within me" and the NEB "within me." It is also possible to translate it as “for him.” There is no reason to adopt עלי, which is found in some Hebrew manuscripts but in none of the

²⁰⁵Bergant, 88.

²⁰⁶A dream cannot be analyzed with logical exactitude. It often includes irrelevant details. Dreams contain unknown horrors.

²⁰⁷Grober, 89.
ancient versions. 208

Verse 6a is absent from the LXX. The asyndetic construction of רְבַע קָפָּר is striking and emphatic.

Verse 5:8a is similar to 2:7.

In 8b the LXX adds ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς Ἰσχύσεσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ (by the powers and the virtues of the field) to 8b. Compare to 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.

Interpretation

In 5:2 she tosses and turns in a half-awake state of anxiety. "Is knocking" has the metaphorical sense of "to urge" or "to entreat," and exemplifies the energy of her loving desire.

"Dew" denotes blessing and fertility in other contexts. The lover’s wet locks imply a long journey under the cover of night. 209 "My perfect one" is ethical and moral blamelessness, integrity, excellence, and her undivided commitment to him. "Open to me" presents the erotic character of his request.

In 5:3 the thought of soiling her feet doesn’t stop her from wandering around the streets looking for him. "How" shows petulant unwillingness or even teasing. "Feet" is used as a euphemism for genitals (Ruth 3:3-9, 2 Sam. 11:8). The word is also used for female genital organs. We have another case of a delicate double entendre. 210 He opened the door himself and entered, and came to her in her cleanliness of both body and soul. If

208 NKJ, NRS, KJV.

209 Snaith, 72.

210 Ibid., 73.
“hand” does mean the male member, her latch-hole is its female counterpart. The erotic meaning is present. This is a picture of her defenselessness, without her clothing as a covering, without her lover as a protection. 211

In 5:4 “My heart was thrilled” is certainly to be taken as that of emotional excitement. 212 Such emotional states were expressed in ancient Hebrew culture in frank terms, which are difficult for us to understand and translate precisely. In “the groom thrust his hand,” his hand is a euphemism for phallus. This is most likely a reference to some sort of sexual arousal. She is in a general state of excitement at her lover’s arrival.

Verse 5:5 is certainly ecstatically poetic before it is even descriptive. “I arose” is a feature of dialect rather than of date. “Hands dripped with myrrh,” alluded to her genital area and recall the water images used to describe the bride and the drinking images associated with their lovemaking. “Upon the handles of the bolt” refer to various detailed parts of the female sexual regions; myrrh means the natural secretions of a bride in a state of sexual arousal. “I opened,” recapitulates 3:2 as 5:4-5. However, if we start looking for references to intercourse and private parts everywhere, we lose track of the main theme of the Song and begin to sink into a quagmire of eroticism.

In 5:6 she is desperate in his absence. She realized her stupidity and begins her panic-stricken search.

Verse 5:7 is used purely as a poetic motif. Such contretemps are vividly expressed now in dream terms, revealing that her unconscious mind is deeply troubled by the “agony” of love. This is the area of “the agony and the ecstasy” here. She seems hemmed

211 Gledhill, 178.

212 Translations try various images: NIV, FOX, AB, NEB, JB.
in by the guardians of morality, the disapproving watchmen of the city walls, and by her brothers who forced her to work under their close supervision in the vineyard (1:6).

In 5:8 “I adjure you, daughter of Jerusalem (2:7; 3:5; 8:4),” means what the beloved formulates an entirely new and positive statement of obligation. There are the various nuances of meaning in the oath formulas. Verses 2:7 and 3:5 express an obligation positively. Verse 8:4bc uses a negative prohibition, while 5:8 takes up a construction to formulate a positive statement of an entirely different obligation.

Reflection

Every marriage will have problems, but a successful marriage will work through those problems. The root of the problem is her indifference, ingratitude, long hesitating response, fatigue and distraction. Eventually they are moving towards reconciliation. It is a deliberate seductive ploy, revealing her own desirability to her lover. She plays on to taunt him and rouse his urgency. Her behavior masks an underlying insecurity about their relationship. Her lover loses patience and rattles the door lock. This poem raises a number of different themes. There is the fear of loss and the tension between his presence and his absence. When her lover comes, she wants to be alone and her responses drive him away: (1) It reflects a deeper tension within the human personality. The bride in our song needs space to be alone. She wants to cultivate that private space around her. (2) The bride longs for the presence of her lover. She wants to know the security of his presence, and fears his absence. Her whole life in now suffused with his presence, she wants to give herself completely to him. To surrender and risk interaction is to grow and

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213 S. Craig Glickman, A Song for Lovers (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1976), 65-66, 146.
receive life through pain and accommodation. (3) She is playing on her lover’s emotions. She is deliberately withdrawing her affection, as the slight or lack of appreciation. (4) Something of the irrationality of love can be seen. She goes into the city squares heedless of what others might think. (5) She seems hemmed in by the guardians of morality. They fear the disapproval of the guardian of public conventions. It is necessary to insist that the fullness of love can blossom within the boundaries of religious and social conventions. The conventional need never be dull. Joy, exuberance and fulfillment are to be found within its walls.

Application

The bride is shown to be self-possessed and self-determined. She enjoys freedom of movement. She speaks assertively, unafraid of revealing the depth of her emotional state. Such self-assurance requires both a healthy self-image and great courage. This entire attitude is highly prized today. She is not a victim of some sexual stereotype that claims that women do not experience erotic sensations. The chauvinistic stereotypes of the assertive man and the passive bride are shattered here. Though not explicitly articulated in the poems, the presupposition accepts each person as a unique individual with distinctive attributes, interests, and capabilities. It is precisely this uniqueness that makes human love an exhilarating adventure being portrayed here. 214

214Bergant, 96-97.
Unit Nineteen 5:9-6:3

Analysis

These verses imply the third person figurative description and both were inspired by nature and by some familiar status of gods. The descriptive motif, or *wasf*, is the only one in the Song spoken of by the bride about the groom. The images here are largely visual and the reference to precious metals and stones are evocative of sculpture. The movement is from the head down to the legs and perhaps the feet (bases). In responding to the Jerusalem girls, she rediscovers her love for him. She had in fact chosen him, just as he had chosen her. She must recognize that she gave herself to him for a reason, that she is in fact deeply in love with him. He is, in her ages, better than all other men. We find another *wasf* like those in 4:1-9; 7:2-10 and 5:10-16 as the groom’s features are described in material terms. The poet draws artistic terms of comparison. Along with the predominance of metaphor over similes and the concentration on colors and precious materials (gold, ivory, jewels), these precious jewels and stones give the impression of unexpected, colorful and somewhat barbaric splendor. It is not an actual description of her lover, but a portrait of ideal masculinity and male desirability. The aim of her poetry is to persuade her audience to see what she sees in her lover. She describes him as she experiences him, using imagery of the sights, sounds, and smells of their rural, pastoral Bedouin culture. The lover’s most enduring and distinguishing quality is not his genital area, but his speech (5:16).
Textual Notes

In 5:9 the BHS suggests the reading, "I adjure us."

In 5:11 Horst proposal to read קאֵלֶו פֶּאָצֶז "and refined gold." קָטֶמ ָּת (gold, pure gold) is difficult; they are in apposition. Perhaps קָטֶמ ָּת is to be read as a construct form. The LXX separates them with a conjunction. The BHS is supported by the LXX.

5:13. MT

Several medieval manuscripts

like bed of spices

Verse 13 refers to the pronominal suffix of the MT’s קָצֶרָה. The note suggests that the text should read קָצֶרָה as plural with a few medieval manuscript versions. On the analogy of 6:2, it is likely that consonantal קָצֶרָה should be vocalized as a plural; however, the MT reads it as singular. Nonetheless, the plural reading is supported by some Hebrew manuscripts. The use of pronominal suffixes is associated with the catchword קָצֶרָה (6:2 "beds.” The comparison seems to have in mind the groom’s perfumed beard. It is not grammatically correct. The issue here is not concerning grammar, but the custom of generalizing the plural.

In 13 the LXX and Vulgate read פָּעָמַי. Consonantal קָצֶרָה is preferably read as the Piel feminine plural participle of קָצֶרָה "put forth, or grow.” The MT vocalizes קָצֶרָה (towers), which refers to the shape of perfume bottles.

In 6:2 קָצֶרָה (beds of spices) seems to be a catchword with 5:13 “like beds of spice.”

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215Murphy, 166.

216The concept of plural is not in number.
Interpretation

In 5:9 the daughters of Jerusalem pose two questions for her. It is a challenge or a request for information. In the first, the bride could be asking “What makes your lover so special that we should bother helping you to find him?” The second, “What are his identifying characteristics, so that we will know whom to seek?” The third, “Why do you suppose that your beloved is more than another beloved,” in that you charge us with the task of looking for him?”217 “Most beautiful of women” probably alludes to the increased feeling of self-worth induced by passion and the free expression of one’s own needs.218

In 5:10 the brevity of the introduction sharpens the assertiveness of her love; he is the best man of all. He is not just good looking but healthy and full of life. The same root as ruddy is to have good color. The groom both emanates radiance from within and resembles a luminous status that reflects the brilliance of external light. He is incomparable and distinguished above all others (Ps. 3:6).

In 5:11 his face is not only tanned, but is of the highest value to her. The thickness and blackness of his hair speak of his youth. The gold metaphor amplifies the idea of shininess. The head is described as “distinguished” in splendor and value. Black raven depicts the mysterious and uncanny side of the beloved. Raven contrasts sharply with the gleaming gold.

In 5:12 “Washed in milk” refers to the white of the eye. “On the water-brook” evokes a happy time of abundance. The groom’s eyes are like doves in pleasant

217Keel, 197. He suggests that it is the work of a redactor.

218Ibid., 198.
surroundings. The dove metaphor emphasizes the freshness, radiance, and happiness characteristic of eyes that proclaim love.\(^{219}\)

In 5:13 she is not referring to his appearance but his effect on her. The description moves from visual sensations—light and darkness—to the realm of odors. The comparisons are fantastic hyperboles and superlatives. The bride’s beloved evokes notions of divinity. The metaphor of the lips as “lilies” refers to his form or to the red color of a flower and expresses the enlivening effect of their kisses (Prov. 24:26).\(^{220}\)

In 5:14 she conveys her estimation of his value through the description of purely poetic hyperbole. The accent here is not on the shape but on the sheen and value of the materials. The primary sex characteristics are never mentioned directly.

5:15 describes a sense of nobility and strength, and speaks of his worth and proverbial types of majesty in her eyes. She is describing how she feels about him rather than how he looks.

Verse 5:16 refers to his words and kisses. She affirms his surpassing worth to Jerusalem’s girls.

In 6:1 a second question from the daughters of Jerusalem was that of their admiration and envy from all the women toward the bride. The implication is that his love for her has elevated her in the eyes of the Jerusalem girls. Secondly, she uses sexually charged language and essentially says, “He is with me.” Their question provides

\[^{219}\text{Keel, 201.}\]

\[^{220}\text{Ibid. This doesn’t express the form or the color. Grober, 91. Through the use of assonance the lips are spread to form the hissing s (σ) and s (ς) sounds, thus mimicking the movement of the lips in the act of kissing.}\]
the opportunity for the central bride to respond that she knows quite well where her lover has gone (6:2). 221

In 6:2 “his going down to his garden” refers to his coming to make love to her. As in 2:1-2, the lilies refer to the bride herself. The groom is not pasturing his flock but grazing like a lamb or gazelle in a pasture. Thus the usage is metaphorical for his lovemaking. In reaffirming that she and her lover belong to each other, she is both asserting the exclusiveness of the relationship and further distancing herself from her attachment to the Jerusalem girls. Her powerful imagination has brought about the reality of his presence. She realizes that she really does belong to him, and he to her.

In 6:3 she reverses the previous order of the expression of their mutual possession in 2:16 to “my lover is mine and I am his.” It is a progression in the lovers’ relationship. The bride’s fear of loss has culminated in a happy reunion. The whole picture is a literary stylization. It is the author’s poetic creation that articulates the ideal of beauty and attempts to get into the emotional frame of mind of the groom and his bride.

Reflection

The lovers’ togetherness is secure, not only emotionally and psychologically, but also physically. Her lover has gone down to his garden. The plural here is a plural of composition or a plural of extension. The garden can be developed in a number of ways. (1) A garden is a source of pleasurable fruit (4:13; 5:1). Her price is an indication of her potential for bearing fruit. The Song has very little interest in conception and procreation. The art of sexual union is an act of pleasure, which is an expression of mutual love. (2) A

221 Huwiler, 277.
garden is also a private exclusive world, a place for retreat, relaxation and meditation, and order. It gives hints of the invisible gardener, the cultivator of the paradise. It is a place of order, of the primal wildness of nature tamed and brought under control by the gardener. The garden has to be tended to look its best, and needs constant attention. (3) We all know the seductiveness of a garden. We enter a beautifully maintained garden, with reverence, as if it were holy ground. There is always the pruning, weeding, staking, potting, bedding of seedlings, watering and maturing. Its inherent privacy is both forbidding and inviting. We are privileged to enter into this private exotic world. (4) This is the garden into which the lovers enter. She is the garden. She creates a new world for him, a new dimension, in which garden imagery develops into an asymmetrical metaphor. The physical asymmetry of the act of sexual union, a biological and anatomical inevitability, also underscores this aspect. But the emotional, psychological and mental reciprocity is something that is a mutual two-way interaction. Her garden waters the groom and gives succor, wholeness and shade to him.

Application

The bride graphically and in great detail extols features of the groom’s body. She is able to describe his features in imagery that is well crafted. It is a genuine admiration of the form and substance of the groom she loves. Her descriptions of the charms of her lover are both poetic and discreetly provocative and sensuous. As a God-given desire, a bride’s interest should not be disdained. This part of the unit is of greatest importance today. In mutuality “she is his and he is hers.” Mutuality is not the same as equality. It respects differences. It is can be reciprocal without being strictly equal. They must be
mutually respectful, attentive and engaged. A relationship is built on reverence of the fundamental human dignity of the other.

The Fifth Cycle 6:4-8:4

The fifth cycle of the Song of Songs begins with the lover’s exclamation of awe at the beauty of his bride. In the opening verse (6:4) the beloved is compared to the cities of Jerusalem and Tirsah. The elements of beauty are accented both in general and specifically. The aspect of royalty is emphasized by the epithetic vision. The eyes of the lover are continuously turned towards his beloved in contemplation of her beauty. Verses 6:3 and 8:3-4 determine the external limits. The text is composed of two long descriptive songs in praise of the beloved (6:4-10 and 7:2-10). The entire unit is masterfully unified by means of various rhetorical and poetical devices, which serve to create parallels with previous sections and to underscore the overall unity of the Song.

Unit Twenty 6:4 –10

Analysis

Verses 6:4-7 are identical to those in 4:1d-3d. The groom addresses his beloved directly with an admiring description and minor variations. The formulation of 6:10 is on the basic pattern of 6:4 and reinforces the strength of the inclusion and also makes the answers to the question of interpretation obvious. The imagery here is quite different and
does not directly respond to her words of praise. He is expanding on the seven praises he gave her earlier (4:1-3). He adds the praises of queens and concubines.

This passage describes the central bride’s head as a general admiration of her. The first and last verses of the passages conclude with the same line in Hebrew. This repetition, like in 2:10 and 2:13, functions as a framing device, which pushes the reader to read the passage as a unit.\textsuperscript{222} They contain military imagery. The near verbatim repetition means that his desire and admiration of her have not diminished now that he has possessed her sexually. Genuine artistry can add a dimension of beauty to raw material. Therefore, while praise of a city is indeed recognition of human ingenuity, it is also celebration of the merit of the materials used in the building. There is a very close bond between religious imagination and artistic creativity. His bride’s awesome beauty is her waving glistening hair, her magnificent display of teeth, and her checks or forehead. The repetition is seen here in the Song, which helps to sustain the ambience of the Song.

Three quite different settings are urban, rural, and cosmic. Cities may be beautiful, but they are also fearful and inspiring. Animals and fruit may be pleasing to the sight, but they are also robust. The cosmic referents are clearly daunting. It is an open beauty, not protected or hidden from view. It is an honest beauty, neither seductive nor in any other way manipulative. It is unpretentious, authentic and straightforward.

\textit{Textual Notes}

Verse 6:4\textsuperscript{a} is compared to 2:2\textsuperscript{b}:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
6:4\textsuperscript{b} & MT & הָעַרְבֵּי & like Tirza  \\
& LXX, Syriac, Targum, Vulgate & וְאָלֹכֵי & with pleasure
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{222}Snaith, 278.
It is a striking fact that the LXX and G.B did not recognize a proper name in רְצֵיָּה (Tirzah), despite the parallelism with “Jerusalem.” It translates from the root meaning, רְצֵה (be pleasing.) One can recognize a play on the word Tirzah. Pope proposes "verily pleasing" for רְצֵה (Asseverative רְצֵה), with the consequent deletion of "as Jerusalem." But, Tirzah is probably to be identified with the modern tell.224

In 6:4c the BHS evaluates that the MT probably added this line (cf v. 10). נְפָלָיו (like those bannered) is derived from the noun נְפָל (banner). The NEB is "bannered troops" and the NIV "bannered hosts." Another meaning can be conjectured from the Akkadian daglu (to look). The term might designate visual objects of distinctive and spectacular character; hence the conjectural rendering is "trophies."225 The issue here is not concerning an emendation, but etymology of language and poetic imagery that the poet created.

In 5a-d the BHS suggests that it probably transposes after verse 10. The masculine pronoun הוא refers back to "eyes," which are feminine. This fluctuation of gender occurs throughout the Song.226 The abnormal gender of the pronoun would be explicable. The word חֲרֵבַיָּה (they disturbed me), was interpreted by the LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate in the sense of “fly away,” due perhaps to the groom’s disappearance in chapter 5, “turn away your eyes from me for they have ravished me.”

In 5b the LXX reads אֶל עַשְּפַעַתְךָ as (which have appeared) cf 4:1e.f.

223Pope, 559.
224Murphy, 175. The paronomasia of this term can be used to effectively communicate imagery.
225Pope, 501.
226Murphy, 175.
In 6:6 the LXX, Aquila, Symmachus and Syriac add 4:3 to it. In these cases, text critics recommend that the shorter readings are preferable and more likely original.

In 6:10 the BHS proposed that the MT probably inserted 5. This question appears in 3:6 and 8:5; here it is certain that the reference is to a female, in contrast to 3:6.

**Interpretation**

Verse 6:4 is in response to 6:3, and parallels 4:1-3. The wasf is only partial, so it leaves the reader to speculate as to what he might have said about the rest of her body. She is not only a pretty bride, but also a dignified, strong bride. Even if her brothers, Jerusalem’s girls and the watchmen don’t respect her, her lover sees her in images of majesty and stature. His awe of her is as great as ever. He cannot storm her by force (the wall of the city). The beautiful bride is compared to royalty, power, and stature, not to physical beauty. Tirzah and Jerusalem are compared with her. A foundation of well-being, peace and security, a prominent position (aspect), grandeur, dignity, and loftiness, an archetype of the delightful gardens, royal impregnability, and the perfection of beauty all point to her.

In 6:5 the request to turn “your eye from me” expresses his sense of her power.

In 6:5-7 as in 4:1-5, the description is not to be taken literally but metaphysically.

In 6:8-9 as in 2:2 she is praised to be unique by the comparisons with beautiful queens and princess, and specifically chosen concubines. Twice she is referred to as “one,” meaning unique. She is the special favorite of her mother. She is the subject of so many admiring comments. The capacity to receive the gracious approval of others is also
a gift not to be despised. The bride in the Song is not a cold, lifeless statue, with a remote untouchable beauty. She is a real-life, warm-blooded person. Beauty is a gift on loan to us, to be received and cultivated with joy. Her mother who brought her out, knowing her best, accentuates her youth and innocence. The youth puts words of admiration in the women’s mouth as in Proverb 31:28.

Verse 6:10 is a concluding generalization typical of a praise song (4:7; 5:16; 5:16a; 7:7). Her beauty is as splendid as the moon and as lustrous as the sun and transcends nature like the stars. These natural manifestations have a tendency to produce in us a feeling of reverence, an element of awe, of majesty, of remoteness. Those feelings of awe prevent any degree of intimacy. Reality always involves the pain of interaction. We need part of the pain of intimacy, of facing and accepting the reality as it is and of working within the constraints of those limitations. She is not only as bright as these; she is lofty and impressive. The word for “moon (white)” contrasts with her dark skin. “Dawn” is in contrast with “black” in 15. “Sun” seems to imply that she is dazzling to behold.

Reflection

Relationships progress more smoothly with a little praise. It is often surprising how a small word of praise goes such a long way in energizing and establishing a relationship. Through rough and smooth circumstances, we can begin to appreciate the infinite value of the one we love so dearly. A capacity to fill each other’s cup of happiness is a very blessed condition. The richness deriving from mutual self-surrender,
and from self-giving, creative expressions of love in the wider community can lead to a
deeper-seated contentment that give some deep happiness. In those moments of deep
happiness together, we may become aware of an inner loneliness, an unutterable
existential longing, which no earthly union can ever assuage. Let us never be deceived
into thinking that our most profound happiness can ever reside in any human partnership.
We are made in the image of our creator, and it is in Him alone that we find our true
rest.\(^{228}\)

**Application**

Human beings are beautiful in themselves, with all of their individuality and
uniqueness. People should not be compelled to conform to a standard of size, shape,
coloring or age determined by the arbitrary tastes of some select group.\(^{229}\)

Unit Twenty-One 6:11-12, 13 (7:1)

**Analysis**

This short passage (6:11-12) is very difficult to translate and interpret. The patient
and impatient checking on whether the time for love has awakened is the theme of a
whole series of poems in the Song. Caring for the blossom and picking the ripe fruit, this
caring contact may have its institutional basis in the fact that, before their sexual
maturation, young brides were often promised in marriage and engaged to an elder’s

\(^{228}\)Ibid., 196.

\(^{229}\)Bergant, 115.
These verses break with this context. The meaning depends on the speakers. In taking a walk to the budding vineyard, she is also exploring her own developing sexuality. Verse 12 is the most difficult verse to translate in the entire book and its meaning is uncertain.

**Textual Notes**

In 6:11a the LXX adds ἐκεῖ δόσω τοὺς μαστοὺς μου σοι (there I will give you my breasts) after 6:11a representing a phrase found in 7:13.

Verse 6:12a is a famous crux of the interpretation. The MT literally seems to say "I do/did not know my soul (it) set me chariots of my noble people." The MT is untranslatable, and the various emendations that have been offered either involve radical changes to the text or produce readings that are not much more comprehensive than the MT’s. The proper reading has never been successfully discovered. The MT is certainly corrupt, and is hardly susceptible to translation.231 The LXX says “there I will give thee my breasts: my soul knew it not: it made me as the chariots of Aminadab.” The ancient versions provide no help. The LXX translation is as problematic as it is literal.

The syntactic relationship between the verb ריכָּשׁ (it put me) and the following פֹּארָה (chariot) is problematic. One cannot properly translate the MT as "placed me on" without a preposition. There are senses in interpreting the line. First, a small emendation

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230 Keel, 223-4.

231 M. Deckers, “The Structure of the Song of Songs and the Centrality of Nepes,” In A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 192-6. He does not believe that 6:12 is a mistake made by a copyist, or a gloss, or something of this kind. According to Hebrew poetics 6:12 has its own intrinsic and decisive meaning. His literal translation is “I don’t know, my being determines me, vehicle of my noble people.”
of the consonantal text appears by deleting the final ע of "ע"מ (my people) and reading ו instead. Secondly, ע (my soul) is understood reflexively: ”I did not know myself: I found myself in the chariot with the prince.” Thirdly, if ע (my soul) is seen to be the subject of the verb, the verse can be rendered as “before I knew, my desire set me on the chariot with a prince.”

The KJ states this passage as, “I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadab.” JB proposes “before I knew, my desire hurled me on the chariots of my people, as their princes.” The NEB interprets it as “I did not know my desire myself; she made me feel more than a prince reigning over the myriads of his people.” Murphy says, “Before I knew it, my heart made me (the blessed one) of the prince’s people.” Fox intimates, “I do not know myself—you have put me in a chariot with a nobleman.” One can’t anticipate the correct translation. It will be best to paraphrase with subjectivity. Horst gives a hint and proposes to read ע (it makes me glad). The speaker’s gladness is associated with “noble-people in chariot.” The writer’s translation is “I was not aware how glad my heart would be with the noble people in the chariot.” The issue is not in the preposition that is emitted, but how to translate the verb ע. The readers understood the poetry without a preposition. The meaning will differ according to the subjective judgment of every interpreter. What is more, it is important to understand the creativity of the poet who made the imagery.

232 RSV, “Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince.” NRS; Pope, 585. “Unaware I was set in the chariot with the prince.”

233 NEB, FOX.

234 Delitzsch, JB, RSV, NAB, AB, KJB, ASV, NRS, NKJ.
Verse 7:1a (6:13) has not been explained with any certainty. It is probably an epithet, not a proper name, with the definite article indicating the vocative. On the contrary the LXX codex Vaticanus reads ה סוחנמית (Shunamite), as a proper name. The distinction between proper name and epithet is not easy to maintain since a proper name often develops from epithets. The MT is respected as a proper name or epithet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse 7:1a</th>
<th>MT</th>
<th>Mss</th>
<th>as the dance with (in) the dance in the dance As bonds of (armies)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:1a</td>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Mss</td>
<td>Symmachus</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ؕ γ ν τροσεσον</td>
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Both the LXX and Symmachus support the MT and understand the preposition as comparative as.

In 7:1b (6:13) the BHS editor suggests προς (camps) with the support of LXX’s των παρεμβολων (armies). מחנאים (two camps, or camps) is a well-known place, "Mahanaim," in the transjordan near the Jabbok (2 Sam. 7:24) but evidence is lacking to associate a particular dance with the site. The term is dual in form, literally meaning "the two camps."

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235Murphy, 18. The following solutions have been proposed: first, it is Sulmanitu, a goddess of love and war known from Mesopotamian sources; second, the term is to be understand as a feminine gentile, equivalent to “Shunammit,” designating a bride of Shunem, hence association has been made with Abishag, the beautiful “Shunammite” bride of Kin. 1:3,15.

236Pope, 600.

237Ibid., 605. He remarks that the as (k) may be taken as having temporal meaning, on the occasion of the dance, i.e. as she dances. Gordis take the as as asseverative, attributing the words to the company in response to the maiden’s question. Gordis, 95.

238Delitsch, 120-1.
Interpretation

In 6:11 the bride has accepted his sexual invitation of verses 2:10-15 as if now responding to his invitation. She finds herself in some heightened ecstatic state; she has lost her balance or normal sense of composure. The freshness of springtime becomes a metaphor representing the fullness of youth and the untouched innocence of the relationship between the bride and the groom.

Verse 6:12 is considered the most difficult in the entire Song. Most interpretations emend the text, thereby determining its meaning rather than discovering it. To be set among the chariots would refer to a wedding custom. The point is that she is about to leave the Jerusalem brides and enter married life.

In 7:1 (Heb) (6:13) the dance becomes another enclosed image relating to the beloved. It introduces the predominant sense of roundness found in the descriptive elements in the Song of praise. 7:1a (6:13a) is calling her back from somewhere in surprise or skepticism and he wants to look her over. This request is an urgent appeal.

Verse 7:1b (6:13b) “why would you gaze at the perfect one?” is reproachful and less than completely respectful. The youth rebukes the bride’s companions for looking upon her disdainfully as if she were a common dancer. The tone of 6:13b seems to be somewhat petulant, hostile or defensive. She might consider performing an erotic dance for the groom alone, but she is not an exhibitionist.

Reflection

The scene itself conveys connotations of nobility, royalty, glamour and splendor. We may dream of our future spouses. Yet the diverse realities of mutual adjustment must
be encountered with patience, hope and humor. We accept our spouses as they actually are and not as we would perhaps like them to be. The mutual accommodation, with its yielding, deferment, tolerance and love, opens up the pathways to hitherto unexpected discoveries, which never cease to amaze, however far one travels along this road of adventure together.

Dance is a marvelous metaphor for life. Both dance and life spring from the balance between spontaneity and control. There are a variety of dance steps just as these are various aspects of life. Both life and dance have great diversity, making the experience exciting and frightening.

**Application**

The youthfulness and innocence are marks of the health, straightforward forces of energy and attraction present in all living thing. Nature is never ashamed to disclose its life force or the fruit of its life-giving properties. Neither is genuine love. Sexuality influences many of our preferences and it motivates much of our activity. It is an integral facet of our spirituality. The bride in a manner is compatible with a contemporary view. She is self-motivated, neither obsessed with nor intimidated by winning her sexual interests. It is the groom she loves who is the object of her pursuit, not sexual satisfaction in itself. According to current standards, this is a very healthy bride.

Dance is also the forcefulness of its expansion and the reliability of its symmetry. She appears to be unafraid of her own sensuality or of the sexual interest that it can generate. At the same time, she does not manipulate nor exploit others, which is evidence of human maturity and she does not exploit.
Analysis

The exclamation of “how beautiful...” and “beautiful” are the lover’s most frequent and spontaneous expressions of delight before his beloved (1:15; 4:1,7,10; 6:1; 7:7). All his songs that are praising her begin with this expression in conjunction with an epithet (4:1; 6:4; 7:2). Whereas the first song (4:1-7) developed a vertical line from the head down wards, this last one begins at the feet and moves upwards to her head, and resembles the beloved’s song in 5:10-16 which proceeds from high to low, or head to feet.

Textual Notes

7:2a. MT נְבֵרֵיָה noble daughter
      LXX Naαββ Αμιναβ Aminab

The LXX reads as a proper name. But the precise nuance נְבֵרֵיָה (noble, prince) is disputed; it can refer to her generous character. There may be some association between נְבֵרֵיָה “noble daughter” here and נְבֵרֵיָה “my noble daughter” in the enigmatic 6:12, at least as a catch word. Delitsch translated it as “noble,” Ginsburg as “noble man” and Siegfried as “a great bride.” The MT is preferred.

Compare 7:4a (7:3) to 4:5.

Compare 7:4b (7:3) to 4:5a.

In 7:5a (7:4) the BHS proposes that a stitch is missing, and פֶּסֶר אַל אָרֵי בֶהֶשׁ (set in sockets of porphyry) should be inserted, after this verse. This description stands as
an isolated life (7:5a), in contrast to the poem’s prevailing pattern of bicola. Thus, there is reason to suspect that a parallel colon has been lost or misplaced.

In 7:5b (7:4) the LXX reads ως λυμαν as (as pool). It is a metaphor.

In 7:5c (7:4) the LXX reads the plural שם as (gates).

7:5d.  

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<th>Bathrabbim</th>
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The LXX literally translates the MT, but the construction should be paralleled and kept to Heshbon as a proper name, although the site cannot be identified.

7:6a.  

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<th>MT</th>
<th>LXX</th>
<th>Bathrabbim</th>
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It is doubtful. הָרֶם (ךְָרֶם “in lock of hair”) is used to refer to the gutters or troughs through or into which the water runs for watering flocks in Aramaic and Syriac (4:1). Pope translates it as "A king captive in the tresses."239 The translation "tresses" rests on the idea that her wavy hair evokes the image of running waters. The issues here are about a morphological meaning.

Interpretation

In 7:2 (7:1) “sandal” makes the feet particularly beautiful. Along with their aesthetic value, sandals have a juridical value that one dare not overlook. Sandals permit a firm step, in both the literal and figurative sense. The removal of sandals expresses a waiver of rights (Ruth 4:7; Deut. 25:5-10), mourning (2 Sam. 15:30), poverty (Jer. 2:25) or subjugation (Isa. 20:2-4). The word “prince” means literally one who is “liberal,”

239 Pope, 630.
"generous." The clearest sign of nobility in the Old Testament is the opportunity and the ability to be generous (Job 29:1-25). Generosity gives social standing and the resultant self-confidence. 240 "Thigh" is frequently used in the Old Testament as a euphemism for "sex organ" (Gen. 46:26; Ex. 1:5). Artists and artisans belonged to the highest level of society (Jer. 24-25; 52:15, Prov. 8:30) because of the value of the material. Navel and vulva were employed interchangeably.

In 7:3 (7:2) the unusual wish added in 7:2b "may it never lack mixed wine" is an unambiguous metaphor requiring "navel" to be understood here as a euphemism for vulva.

Navels are compared with the goblet that can always satisfy his thirst. Belly is compared with the wheat that may allude to the color of her skin. 241 Belly is not simply the abdomen in general but is also understood as the womb. The part calls to mind above all fertility and nourishment, as wheat was the most important foodstuff in Israel (Deut. 8:8; Ps. 81:16(17); 147:14). The soft, rounded form of the heap of wheat and its yellowish-brown color is the ideal color of female skin. The lotus blossoms illustrate the freshness and regenerative powers of the ointments, beverages, and foods served in these bowls.

In 7:4 (7:3) the bride's breasts are compared to young gazelles and allude to her playful, lively, life-giving power.

Compare 7:5 (7:4) to 4:5a. Neck, metaphorically expresses "pride." Towers symbolize the self-confident military preparedness of a city or fortress. The off-white

240 Keel, 231.

241 Fox, 160.
color of the precious and artistically fashioned material gave the tower a luxurious luster. It produced an almost magical fascination just like the proudly outstretched neck of the bride. The metaphorical sense of “eye” in Hebrew is the “gleaming of waters” to represent a massive intensification. These particular pools, called “bathrabbim,” evoke the crowds of people to drink and to wash and refresh in them. The beloved’s eyes have the same effect on the crowds and especially on her lover. Nose means “snorting, animosity, anger.” Although the bride’s friendly eyes charm and refresh every passerby like royal pools, anyone who arouses her displeasure must reckon with insurmountable resistance. The tower is a symbol of proud military preparedness. It also represents distance and oversight. Her neck seems to be highly crafted from the finest materials. The depth of beauty indicates eyes. Her nose complements and sets off her facial beauty with symmetry and comeliness to an otherwise nondescript profile.

In 7:6 her head is like crimson, deep red. The groom’s hair is raven black (5:11). The comparison of eyes with pools is a play on the words “eye” and “spring.” Height and pride are further qualities conveyed by this image. Head intensifies the motion of dominating height. But the Song does not end with this description of her pride. The hair of purple does not mean that it was “red” but that it was vital, dark and gleaming. One hears the result of the seductive attraction of the bride’s flowing tresses; an admirer is caught in them as though in a net.

*Reflection*

The groom responds to the gaze of the onlookers and affirms his beloved’s beauty in this *wasf*. The powers of imagination are sufficient to enable the onlooker to describe
the various unseen parts. The poem is not primarily visually descriptive, but rather is the emotional response of the lover towards the beauty of his bride. What he sees produces within him a train of fanciful metaphors and illustrations of his own inner feelings. He said her feet are delicate and dainty. She evokes the same atmosphere of royalty and nobility as within a prince’s daughter. Our images of beauty are nearly always idealizations, somewhat distanced from the actual harsh realities. All art creates an atmosphere of fantasy. It is the goal of all art forms, to soften the harsh realities of the life we live, and to project us into a more secure world of escape.

Application

The bride was originally taken out of the flesh of the groom, and they were reunited in to the one-flesh bodily union of marriage (Gen. 2:22-25). Man in his solitariness had found no suitable helper. The creation of the bride brought the possibility of the gift of peace, as shown in his triumphant cry, “this at last is bone of my bones...”(Gen. 2:23). The groom’s poem of praise quickly arouses his desire for complete union with his beloved, and she is equally ready to reciprocate.

Unit Twenty-three 7:7-10 (Heb) = 7:6-9(Eng)

Analysis

The three classic poems of this type (4:1-7; 5:9-16; 7:15) are a portrayal of anticipated erotic pleasures. These verses are related to those in 1:2-4 and 4:9-11, songs that long for and extol love’s delights. The statements in the perfect provide the basis for
the plans, wishes and hopes expressed in the imperfect, which concentrates completely on the admiration and descriptions of the “you.”

*Textual Notes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7:7a (7:6)</th>
<th>MT</th>
<th>ןַכֶּבֶּת</th>
<th>love</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>אֲמַדְנְת</td>
<td>love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulgate</td>
<td>charissima</td>
<td>most dear one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ןַכֶּבֶּת (loved one) is literally “love.” The abstract can be used for the concrete and the noun “love” is used to denote the person. The BHS recommended vocalizing, the passive participle שָׁמַךְ as the “loved one.” But the object of love is uncertain. The AT interprets it as “beloved one,” the RSV, Murphy, and Keel as “O loved one,” the JB and NAB as “my love,” the NEB as “my loved one,” but the KJ and Ginsburg as “O, love.” There is no need to emend “loved one” in order to attain the sense “beloved” or “my love.”

In 7:7b (7:6) Aquila’s version reads תִּתְנִינֵהּ רַפְעָפָו (daughter of delights). It rests upon a correction of the MT, which reads בְּהָתָנְנֵהּ as (with delight). The BHS supports that it seems better to recognize haplography here and read בֶּהָתָנְנֵהּ with the support of Symmachus. The error of miss-division could have resulted from an auditory or scribal lapse or both. The MT does not stop the flow of meaning in this context. The MT should remain without miss-division.

In 7:10a (7:9) probably BHS suggests to read לְדָוִד but this is neither supported by

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242 Pope, 632.
243 Brotzman, 115.
Mss, nor yields a better understanding.  

7:10\textsuperscript{b} MT שפתות שינהא sleepers’ lips LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate χειλεσίν μου καὶ δόσοςαν my lips and teeth

In 7:11\textsuperscript{a} (7:10) the BHS suggests (and to). The preposition here used with מְבֹרָא (desire), is בַּל (upon), rather than אל (unto), (Gen 3:16 and 4:7). The MT renders literally “the lips of sleepers.” The basic question is “who are the sleepers?” It seems better to emend the text, reading זָפִית נメイン (my lips and teeth) with the support of the LXX. Also, in the consonantal text involves the very easy confusion of a short vertical stroke (֔) with a full length one (ם). These are frequently confused before יִשְׁרֵצִית; the final מ of the last word may be regarded as enclitic.  

“Sleepers” is literary imagery about sexuality. Those who are intoxicated with love are not one, but a couple. The MT is resorted by the flow of meaning and expression of imagery.

In 7:7 she proves all the delights and pleasure of love. The abstract love stands for the concrete “the loved one.”

In 7:8 “love, with delights” expresses “daughter of all delights.” A palm tree is as a source of nourishment; it was frequently used to symbolize the tree of life. The image of a fruitful tree provides the groom with features that represent her desirability. The fruit of the tree and the breasts of the bride are mature. The breasts are the focus of the groom’s sexual attraction and stimulate his desire.

Verse 7:9 alludes to harvest periods. The maturity of the couple, at least of the bride, is alluded to through the use of harvest imagery. It is the source from which he and

\textsuperscript{244}Ginsburg, 182.

\textsuperscript{245}Pope, 641.
she can derive sensual satisfaction. It is sufficient merely to describe the nourishing, refreshing and intoxicating effect of climbing the palm. The symbol of breasts emphasizes wholly on the reproductive organs. The date cluster (breasts) suddenly becomes “cluster of the vine.” Both tastes are coupled with the sweet smell. Reference to her nose may suggest either nose-kissing or passionate breathing. The allusion is to deep, passionate, open-mouth kissing. These images are descriptive of her sensuous mouth.

In 7:10 wine and erotic pleasures are also paralleled in 2:4; 5:1 and 7:2b (3b). The bride’s mouth is soft and moist as wine, and sends her lover into a state of intoxication when it opens to his pressure. Both wine and erotic ecstasy continues to moisten the lips of those who have bliss fully fallen asleep, overcome by their frenzy.

**Reflection and Application**

They hope to enjoy each other mutually. Just as the awesome beauty, exhilarating sensation and mature fruitfulness of the world are naturally attractive, so are the physical features of the bride. Female beauty and sexual attraction are authentic dimensions of the world of nature. Physical, intellectual and spiritual attraction are God-given forces just as the law of gravity. It should not to be denied, nor be abused.

Unit Twenty- four 7:11-14(Heb) = 7:10-13(Eng)

**Analysis**

Unit 7:11-14 continues its use of nature imagery in its proposal of mutual passionate enjoyment on the lips of the bride. The bride interrupts the groom and
completes the thoughts of this verse compared with 4:1-15. Here he has scarcely begun to express his desire for her when she interrupts to say that she is his. Verse 11 repeats 6:3 verbatim and 2:16 reverses the order. The songs of desire are 1:2-4 and 4:9-11, which are related to 7:6-9, and have no such response. Verse 7:11 functions as the basis for the invitation in 7:12-13. This particular desire is balanced and in control. The possession is done, not in a domineering fashion, but in the manner of self-giving love. The domination of the groom over the bride, so clearly stated in the Genesis passage, is overturned here.

The overall tone of pleasures in the countryside is more important. She clarifies the main point of her words in verse 12, “there I will give you my love.” They are to go on a tour in the springtime to see the blossoms and budding fruit. Their love has blossomed and become fragrant. They are ripe for love.

Textual Notes

In 7:11 (7:10) the BHS suggests רofi ל (and to). The preposition here used with הבש (desire), is יבי (upon), rather than ל (unto) (Gen 3:16 and 4:7).

In 7:13 (7:12) the LXX’s version is του μαστου μου (my breasts). cf. 1:2a.

Interpretation

In 7:11 (Heb) this line spells out the experience for this mutually deep solidarity.

On all three occasions of 2:16; 6:3 and 7:11 (10), the importance of their solidarity is found in the mouth of the bride. The term “desire” seems to relate directly to Gen. 3:16. In the same way her yearning and passion were directed toward him, his passion and yearning are now directed toward her. The brotherly and sisterly equality given in
creation is restored. Love is experienced as a return to paradise. Gen. 3:16 says, “your desire will be for you husband, but he shall dominate you.” In 7:11, the subject is reversed, he desires her, and she is wholly given to him. This phrase, which is so suggestive of Genesis, awakens the further awareness that the refrain falls between a unit in which the primary image is “tree” (7:7-10) and one in which the image is “garden” (7:12-14). In the former, the desire is for the beloved; in the latter it is her desire for her lover. The refrain functions as a statement of balanced desires, of mutual invitation and responses, as a conclusion of one unit and initiation of the next.

In 7:12 the field refers to the open country outside the settlements; the Song talks about the gazelles of the “fields” (2:7; 3:5; Gen. 25:27). This outdoor lovemaking has been practiced by lovers of all ages, both because of social necessity and because of the special bond between lovers and the buds and blossoms of new life. The reader has already encountered the vineyard as a place for love in 1:6 and 2:13. 7:12 repeats 6:11cd verbatim. The groom is invited to go out into the fields. The word used denotes an open uncultivated area outside of a walled city. Finally, an invitation into the vineyards brings to mind all the earlier sensuous references and allusions to vineyards (1:14; 2:15; 8:12), vine (2:13; 6:11; 7:8), and wine (1:2,4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:9; 8:2). The love of the bride and groom has already been well established, and the awakening of springtime reflects love’s source of life. In that place of flowering life, the bride will give the groom her love.

Verse 7:13 calls for special notice. First, the mandrake is regarded as an aphrodisiac. The meaning of its fragrance would not be lost on the ancient audience. Secondly, the concept of a door is ambiguity and tension. While the door was both a barrier and a way of access with tension and danger, now they are hung with delicacies.
Third, the picture of “new and old” treasures implies that as they grow in love they will both repeat familiar pleasures and find new ones as well. It describes the very heights of fevered anticipation, and stimulation. The tangential mention of the groom is a literary device to give a sexual friction to the poetry. A scenario for the door is envisaged. Every kind of rare fruit and delicacies, old and new are stored. She has reserved herself exclusively for her lover. They explore new ways of stimulating and pleasing each other in their physical relationship. She is very suggestive, seductive and confident of her capacity to satisfy him. She describes the circumstances where she will give him her love.

In 7:14 there is a play on words between “my love” and mandrakes, the beautiful purple flower that produces juicy, golden fruit. This exotic plant was considered an aphrodisiac and thought to be an aid in effecting pregnancy (Gen. 30:14-16). The fragrance is quite distinctive and presumably provocative. Once again, there is an allusion to the erotic nature of the sense of smell (1:2f,12-14; 4:10,14,16; 5:5). “The doorways” are with all of the choicest fruits. Earlier in the poem the choicest fruits were really the physical charms of the bride (4: 13,l6). The abundance of the fruit is seen as “old and new,” which is a literary construction called merism, a form that implies totality by naming opposing poles.246

Reflection

Love in the springtime is a common literary motif suggesting that dominate powers and urges burst forth without restraint. The imagery seems to indicate that there is a time and a season for everything. There were times when restraint was necessary, but

246 Merism is a form of synecdoche in which the totality or whole is substituted by two contrasting or opposite parts.
now it is a time to embrace. Romance in the great outdoors is also a picture of untrammeled freedom and of closeness to nature. She is creating a mental and physical environment in which their union may be consummated with maximum intensity and minimum inhibition. All is fair play in the desire for a happy release of sexual tension.

Application

The sexual connotations are plain and unabashed. Their withdrawal is for the sake of privacy rather than secrecy. Sexual vitality is as natural as any other life force found in nature. Pursuing it and enjoying it are as normal as relishing any of the other delights of the world. “I am his and he is mine” has no trace of gender domination. There is neither sexual exploitation nor minimizing of the other. There is only reciprocal desire and shared anticipation. It speaks both of belonging and guardianship. It means that they are not alone but are freed from the isolation. It gives them responsibility and identity. We recognize, as did God, that it is not good for them to be alone.

Unit Twenty-Five 8:1-2

Analysis

The aspect of royalty is emphasized in 6:12; 7:1,2; 7:6, (queens, concubines, and maidens). Its walls enclose the city; its gates are the means of entrance and exit. Paradoxically, the garden and vineyard formerly presented as “closed” and contained, is “open” to the lover. Visions and contemplation hold a primary place. The union of the lovers is also presented under the familiar images of fragrance food, and drink. These
verses take place out-in-public in a human community. The setting here is a residential area. The bride longs for the opportunity to openly demonstrate her attention for her lover. This unit concludes with a second song of yearning by the bride (8:1-4). It possesses strong similarities with two earlier poems (3:1-5; 5:2-8). All three suggest a romantic rendezvous in a house and mention precarious encounters with the public. This unit concludes with a second song of yearning by the bride (8:1-4). It possesses strong similarities to two earlier poems (3:1-5; 5:2-8).

**Textual Notes**

In 8:2 the MT is ambiguous. Many commentators emend the text in the light of some support from the ancient versions. The LXX and Syriac reflect the final clause of 3:4 (6:9; 8:5) καὶ ἐπὶ ταμίειον τὴς συλλαβούσας με (and to the chamber of the one who conceived me). Also the omission of μ in it would yield δεύτερη (who bore me). The MT does not neglect both the ingenuity and educational meaning that the poet created. Mother can bear children and teach. MT is retained without a little re-vocalization.

**Interpretation**

In 8:1 her wish that her lover was her brother seems strange to the modern reader. She wishes to be free to display her affection for her groom openly and freely. The freedom to kiss in public would not apply to her husband.

In 8:2 the mood of her words is not subjunctive but indicative. Since she cannot express her love with a kiss openly, she will express her love much more fully

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247 The first line is in asyndetic style.
privately. Two ways to explain “the house of my mother” is, first, the groom is expected to be on his best behavior in her mother’s house. The groom must find this atmosphere rather suffocating and inhibiting, even irritating and frustrating. It acts as a brake to his amorous intentions. However, the second meaning is the place where motherhood originates, that is, the womb. That is the intimate place to which she wants to bring her lover. This reveals a steady progression of intimacy and movement inwards: “I would meet you, I would kiss you, I would give you something to drink.” The action begins outside and moves inside. The idea of bringing the lover into her mother’s house is found already in an earlier poem (3:1-5). The context requires that this teaching be understood as instruction about love (Jer. 13:21). The consequence of his “teaching” would be that she would give him something to drink. The teacher’s instruction will surely result in the joy of erotic ecstasy.

**Reflection**

What she desires is the freedom to spontaneously express her love in public as children do, without risking social censorship (7:13). This verse means more than disdaining people or blaming them for something. Lovers desire to express their devotion openly and feel the need to protect it from judgmental eyes. They devise ways of behaving in public so that they have invaluable meaning known only to each other. The assertiveness of the bride is undeniable and the complementary quality of the human passion depicted is evident.

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248 Garrett, 425.
Application

There are two great powers. Social order and passionate love are so elemental and so strong that often only flights of imagination can bring them together and prevent the destructive outbreak of open warfare between them.\textsuperscript{249} The bride’s passion directs both her and the groom she loves. It is a passion that cannot be easily hidden away, but that must be allowed to reveal itself in the open.

Unit Twenty-Six 8:3-4

Textual Notes

Verse 8:3\textsuperscript{a} reproduces 2:6 verbatim, except for the omission of the preposition ה between רוח (under) and ראש (my head). “Epitomes of this sort are characteristic of the canticle.”\textsuperscript{250} Many Mss read יד לי ראש (His left hand is under my head) as in 2:6.

Verse 8:4\textsuperscript{a} is compared to 2:7\textsuperscript{a}.

About the absence of the formula in 8:4, Keel suggests that it is perhaps due to objections raised against oaths invoking gods other than YHWH.\textsuperscript{251}

In 8:4\textsuperscript{b} a few Mss and LXX add 2:7\textsuperscript{ab} as 3:5, compared to 5:8.

In 8:4\textsuperscript{c} a few Mss read אלא as “do not…” compared to 2:7; 3:5 and 5:8.

In 8:4\textsuperscript{d} a few Mss read אלא as “and do not….”

\begin{footnotes}
\item[249] Keel, 262.
\item[250] Pope, 661.
\item[251] Keel, 264.
\end{footnotes}
The LXX Mss conform to the parallel passages 2:7 and 3:5. The MT here varies slightly from the wording of 2:7 and 3:5, with replacement of the adjuration formula אַזֵּה...אַזֵּה by the negative. Marvin Pope continues "וְאִנָּה (on the negative) and omission of the allusion to the gazelles and hinds...is appropriate to the change from adjuration to prohibition, since there is no place in the prohibition for reference to the objects by which an adjuration is made."\(^{252}\)

In the context of marriage, nobody will prohibit a couple. They don’t need to have adjuration. The couple without any obstacle is absolutely free with their lover, and they have peace of mind.

**Reflection and Application**

In 8:1-4 the bride is yearning for public recognition of their love. There is a strong movement from the public social realm to the privacy of loving intimacy. Yet hovering in the background are her mother, a brother and the daughters of Jerusalem. These public figures seem to act as a brake on the amorous activities of the young lovers, so they are in constant tension. Although their love is very private, they long for public recognition of their relationship. She longs for him to be as a brother to her. She wants their intimacy to be seen and demonstrated publicly. The reason is that a brother and sister could openly display affection towards each other without public or social disapproval. They wanted to be free of the restraints of society, and possess public recognition of their love. Public recognition by society is a valuable acknowledgement. The marriage certificate is not "just a piece of paper" which transforms an immoral cohabitation into an acceptable

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\(^{252}\)Pope, 661.
relationship. But it is a public exchange of vows that the couple will support and edify each other “for better, for worse, in sickness, in health, till death do us part.”

The Sixth Cycle 8:5-14

The section 8:5-14 serves to recapitulate the principle themes. The unit begins with the introductory question, “Who is this coming up from the wilderness” (8:5). The end of the unit is marked by a variation of the refrain that closes the second unit (2:17). The final unit, a notoriously difficult section to exegete, is tied together by its intense structure. The second sub-unit (8:5b) shifts from the arid virtually treeless wilderness to a more verdant scene. Verses 6-7 and 11-12 both touch the possession and financial value of love. The verses depend on the audience with a strong emotional impression of the nature and power of love. It resumes several of the more important images and motifs, weaving them together in an integrated pattern.

Unit Twenty-Seven 8:5-7

Analysis

The closing verses focus on the bride. She solemnly announces the seriousness of love. She declares her independence. The ending is destabilizing for the plot development and opens the way for the characters.\textsuperscript{253} The epilogue serves to complete the plan of the

\textsuperscript{253}Huwiller, 280.
work. It usually recapitulates the principal themes. The epilogue draws a practical application from the work and delivers a strong emotional appeal to the audience.

**Textual Note**

Verse 8:5a is identical to 3:6a. The LXX reads λευκανθημένη (made white). It seems clear that the deviations from the MT were motivated by concern for blanching the black beauty of 1:5.254

In 8:5b the Syriac reads נְנִי (you) following the feminine suffixes. The MT vocalizes the second person singular pronominal suffix (you, your) as masculine, and hence attributes their lives to the bride. A change in vocalization of the suffix, to read feminine forms, would be very minor emendation, but, among the ancient versions, only Syriac versions attest such a reading against the MT.

In 8:5c the Syriac reads נ as “you” (female)

In 8:5d the Syriac reads נָ as “your (feminine) mother “

In 8:5e the LXX (Syriac, Vulgate) reads נָ נְוּ (she that bore you).

The BHS suggests that the Hebrew original reads נָ נְוּ (she who give birth to you). The MT and the LXX may be translated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>there she travailed and gave birth to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>there she who bore thee brought thee forth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The LXX has expressed generally the urgency and particularly of bearing a baby in the MT. We follow the example of the MT because of the appropriateness of reading

254 Pope, 662.
its context as internal evidence.\textsuperscript{255}

The Syriac versions attest such a reading against the MT. Virtually all interpretations go against the MT vocalization of the object suffixes of this verse, which are all masculine. According to Delitsch, "We must then here altogether change the punctuation of the text, and throughout restore the feminine, suffix forms as those originally used 5\textsuperscript{b} and 5\textsuperscript{d}.”\textsuperscript{256} The MT vocalization of the suffix as masculine must reflect an ancient tradition since it would have been simple and convenient to alter the vocalization in accord with the standard allegorical interpretation of the bride as Israel and the groom as Yahweh.\textsuperscript{257} Pope rightly points out that the vocalization in the MT does not support the mainstream of Jewish allegorical interpretation.\textsuperscript{258} This verse rivals 6:12 in obscurity by changing all suffixes in the verses to the feminine. It is a hazardous procedure, in view of the fragmentary and unclear nature of the passage as a whole. His theory of interpretation permitted retention of the masculine suffixes of the MT\textsuperscript{259}

In 8:6\textsuperscript{a} the construction הָגוֹרָו (its flames) is quite unusual and difficult. The noun occurs in Ezek. 21:3 and Job 15:30, meaning flame. In the LXX φλόγες αὐτῆς “its flames” presupposes the same consonants as the MT, but understood the final נ to be a third feminine singular pronominal suffix (referring to יוֹרֵהוּ “love”). A divine epithet is sometimes used to express the superlative. Hebrew divine names are used with an


\textsuperscript{256}Delitsch, 142.

\textsuperscript{257}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{258}Pope, 663.

\textsuperscript{259}Ginsburg, 99.
intensifying superlative force (Gen. 23:6; 30:8 Ex. 9:28; 1 Sam. 14:5; Ps. 36:7), \(^{260}\) and it is frequently translated, “a most vehement flame” (KJ, RSV, NAB). The NEB and NIV translate it as superlative.

The BHS suggests to read יָהָשְׁלָלְהָשִׁים as “flame of Yahweh,” instead of שלכתה as “its flames.” In this context "flame of Yahweh" or "divine flame" seems to be the better translation. Here it appears almost transparent as a divine personification of love.\(^{261}\) The BHS suggests perhaps its original reading was יָהָשְׁלָלְהָשִׁים (flames of Yahweh are its flames). The rhyme of the verse (3+2) would demand separations of יָהָשְׁלָלְהָשִׁים (Yahweh) from שלכתה (flames). Those who claim that the sacred name does not appear in the Song obviously do not accept the expression in this sense. After the preceding plurals שלכתה (its flames are flames of), a plural vocalization of שלכתה makes better sense. JB rendered “a flame of Yahweh himself.” The BHS indicates that the final syllable יָהָ is “Yah” was construed as the short form of the ineffable name of Israel’s God. But Pope points out that to seize upon the final consonants as the sole reference to the God of Israel in the entire Canticle is to lean upon a very scanty and shaky support.\(^{262}\)

**Interpretation**

Verse 8:5 repeats 3:6 verbatim. “Desert” frequently corresponds to “field,” and introduces it into the epilogue (8:5,13). The same “desert/garden, open/closed, wild/cultivated, infertile/fertile. The alternating “ō” and “ā” vowels and the alliteration of the

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\(^{261}\) Elliot, 197.

\(^{262}\) Pope, 671.
consonant “m” give 8:5ab a tone of awe as well as a slow measured pace. “I awake you
(the lover),” is an awakening to new life. She aroused his love in the same way that his
mother had aroused her lover in order to conceive this very son. 263 In the embrace of
love, she has given him a new birth. This is the nature and the power of the love of which
the Song sings. Thus, the inference is made that the beloved who “awakes” her lover
corresponds in someway to his mother who was in labor and brought him forth into the
world. 264 This paternalistic view, reserving all initiative to the groom, was less obvious in
the ancient Near East. (3:1-5; 4:9; 6:5). In the Old Testament when the groom did not
carry out his traditional role decisively, the bride could sometimes take over that role in
order to advance their common interest. Such action was often not without its bravado
and public recognition. The apple tree obviously evokes the notion of love under the tree
(1:17), and it is not only an erotic spot (2:3), but also this connection gives eroticism a
solemnity and erotic symbol of fertility that it does not possess on its own. “Coming up
from the wilderness” implies leaving a wild and inaccessible area. In 4:8 the groom
pleads with the proud “lady of the wilderness” to come down from her peak, to leave her
terrifying lions and leopards; but now the bride leans on her lover, supporting herself on
him. 265 She has become so tame.

The image of the fruit tree resumes in 2:3. “Leaning upon her beloved” is
described in the third person. “Leaning on her lover” indicates a sense of dependence, a

263 Keel, 268.
264 Elliot, 93.
265 Keel, 265.
sense of possession. Here is the bride on her beloved's arm.\textsuperscript{266}

The "figure of his mother" being "under the apple tree" means that his mother was with his father. The place where his mother conceived and gave birth to him refers to the female parts (see 8:2 "house of my mother"). She and he are now participating in the same act by which the groom himself was given life.\textsuperscript{267} In 2:3 he is compared to "the apple tree," which is the stock of general rustic imagery of erotic poets. She wants the approval of civilized society for their match. She is eager for their blessings.

Verse 8:6 is referred to as the climax of the Song on the mystery of love. It offers a final word about love, about the nature of the love to which the Song witnesses. She asks to become like the personal seal he wears on a cord around his neck, which rests upon his heart, or like one he wears upon his arm. Becoming this seal, she would identify who he is and authentically all he does. It is a series of enclosed images. She would become a type of enclosure for him, for all his thoughts, affections and deeds. The repetitive parallelism in 8:6 initiates a pattern of alliteration (k) and assonance (a, o) that intensifies as the text develops. She expresses yet another dimension of this love. The term "love" continues to have a certain fluidity of meaning and is transformed into a greater reality.

The introduction of death and the grave to this context surprises the reader. Even in the ecstasy of love the couple is aware that this is transitory. If love is as strong as death, it may in some sense transcend death. The passion is not strictly a sexual passion but rather a strongly emotional attachment to another, which is possessive and exclusive.

\textsuperscript{266}Snaith, 118.

\textsuperscript{267}Garret, 420.
as in the “passion” of the Lord for Israel. Its rendering describes love as a flame that is both powerful and eternal. To celebrate love is to celebrate life. Here the strength of love is compared with death and Sheol and raging flames. The themes of 8:6-7 are a personal seal, death and the grave, fire and water and riches, which describe the fierce vigor of love well. Here the imagery changes to impersonal forces of some strength. A man’s personal seal is a possession of considerable authority. Jealousy may well be like a blazing fire. Jealousy is “passion, ardor.” It describes the compelling power of love. The power of love described here by images gradually intensifies: first, there is love’s strength and relentlessness, and then there is its passionate vehemence, symbolized by fire and floods. Verses 8:5ab and 8:6 contain the theme of public approval of the lovers’ union. The bride seeks the security of that public affirmation of their intimacy. Here the poet intrudes into his own creation and meditation on the nature of love itself. If 5:1 represents a climax in the lovers’ physical relationship, then these verses represent a climax in the praise of the union quality of love in the face of all its foes. The seal is applicable in this metaphorical usage. The seal amulet protects the wearers from misfortune and disease, and increases their vitality and lust for life. There is the idea of a publicly visible mark of identity or possession, and preciousness, closeness, and intimacy and his confidence in a secure union. She wants their union to be intimate (over your heart), and public (on your arm) (Deut. 6:6-8). He is the center of her life. She is the center of his life. It is the strength and enduring nature of true love. Mutual self-fulfillment is part of the pleasure of love. It is not selfishness multiplied by two. Love is all embracing

\[26^8\] Keel, 272.
Death is paralleled by the grave, love by jealousy, and strength by steadfastness. Death is an active power, holding its victim in its irresistible sway that none can escape. The strength of love is like the strength of death. The process is one-way and irreversible. Love is a permanent bond, an external force that overpowers and masters its victims. The statement about love being as strong as death is about the struggle between the powers of life and of death.

"Its jealousy is as unyielding as the Sheol." What is the Sheol? First, it is the literal grave; "the realm of the dead, the general domain inhabited by the Shades." Secondly, it is a monster with an insatiable appetite, with a wide-open throat or gaping jaws. It is a one-way channel. Such is the jealousy of love. It is the emotion of single-minded devotion and produces an overpowering zeal to promote an undivided glory of the person who is loved. Jealousy is a "single-minded passion." The Song is singing of the all-embracing jealousy of love, its zeal, its passion, and its ardor, which will accept no rivals. Death is a personification of the life-denying force. Death and Sheol are often paired together in the Old Testament. Love is the "flame of Yahweh, almighty great flame." The flame of ardent love is the good gift of a beneficent creator.

Verse 8:7 can be seen as the restating of 8:6. The comparison of love to a flood alludes to its overwhelming power. It is the escalating description of the powers of love. It is the powerful floods of the great cosmic deep of ancient mythology. The primeval waters were much more threatening than death or fire. In abstract, "it would be utterly scorned." It wants to say that purchasing love is just as impossible as buying death (Ps. 49:7-8). Love can be neither aroused nor abated with money (Prov. 6:30-35), but if love

\[^{269}\text{It is as the insipid, aphoristic comments of a wise teacher.}\]
is a force that, like death, defies any kind of manipulation, how can it acknowledge the authority of morals?\textsuperscript{270}

“Many waters” is Yahweh’s struggle, his subduing of the aliens who speak falsely (Ps. 144), personal enemies, the red sea and chaotic water. Love’s triumph over the “many waters” and the “streams” is a victory over cosmic evil. “Many waters” is all kinds of disasters, obstacles, experiences of struggles with evil and oppression. Love is stronger than they are. They cannot suffocate it. A very particular love relationship is defined as a created force (8:5c-e), requiring an unbreakable bond of mutual commitment (8:6ab). It soars upwards like a flame to the transcendent experience of God who is love.\textsuperscript{271} “It would be scorned.” The emphasis is on the surpassing value of love rather than the valuables of the groom who also tries to purchase it.\textsuperscript{272}

\textit{Reflection}

The focus of attention is the bride, not her lover. She is old enough now to look after herself, to form her own mind, or choose her own pathways. She wanted to break free from the constraining ties of family and friends, and launch out on her own voyage of discovery with her chosen lover. This verse is concerned with whether the groom receives the approval of society when the bride presents him publicly. We discover one portrayal of the ideal that is in Prov. 31:10-31. By awakening love, conceiving, and giving birth, the bride is a keeper of the family tree—even more, and the tree, in whose

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{270}Keel, 276.
\item \textsuperscript{271}Elliott, 198.
\item \textsuperscript{272}Fox, 171.
\end{itemize}
shadow she nurtures love, grows from her own womb (4:13a). God gives marital love. Marriage is an honorable estate, the gift of a loving creator. The Bible indicates that the very capacity to enjoy, the divine origin of human love is in the formation of mankind in the image of God. All human love is to some degree a reflection of the love of God, whose image we bear. She attests to the absolute devotion of a couple in love, a love that is eternal. It embraces pleasure, pain, passion, fear, possession, freedom, blindness, weakness, peace, loftiness, expression, self-centeredness totally and other-centeredness, and is giving, receiving, cautions, and brave. It transcends logic, rationality, definition and sense. In all its agony and ecstasy love is to be experienced. The seal symbolizes both possession and unbreakable devotion.

Application

The awakening of love has something fateful and heroic about it (Gen. 19:30-38). They used the boldest means to ensure the continuity of generations. The juxtaposition of the images of fire and water, together with the usage of the verb “to quench,” now give a powerful illustration of the indestructibility of love. Although water can quench any flame, there are no hostile forces, which can quench the flame of love. It is inevitable that love will always be tested and tried, and will always encounter forces that threaten to undermine and destroy it. These may be the outward circumstances that erode love’s power: the pain of separating, the uncertainty of the present or the future, or the loss of health and means of livelihood. The love that is fueled by the energy of God will triumph

273 Keel, 269.

274 This designates the restless, threatening chaotic waters of the first flood.
and overcome all these adversities and will become purer, stronger and more precious through the testing. This supreme quality in human experience is not something that can be traded; it cannot be bought or sold as a commercial transaction. One cannot buy allegiance or faithfulness like buying gifts. Those who attempt such commerce will be utterly scorned, along with their wealth. “Flame” and “flames” are terms associated with a divine intervention. Here its flame is a divine personification of love. In verse 8:5b, it also speaks of a desire for public approval of their union. The individual’s identify is defined by his place in society. Here the tree probably represents an erotic symbol of fertility. This verse is a literary device, representing the lovers’ solidarity with the past and the future.

The imagery of giving birth under the tree is somewhat grotesque. The state of pregnancy involves agony, and a most delirious state of pain. The propagation of the species and preservation of the species is the result of becoming one-flesh along with the complementarities of pain. The giving and receiving of sexual pleasure is one of the several means of finding and strengthening a growing relationship of love.

Unit Twenty-Eight 8:8-10

Analysis

The role of a bride’s brother in protecting her and in making marriage arrangements is well attested. (Gen. 24; 35:6-18; 50-51). They will take steps to preserve her virginity until the proper time arrives. Both wall and door are to be understood as the barrier of virginity. This implies that the custody of her will not be harsh or cruel
In 8 and 9 the old days of her immaturity are recalled in her brother’s words. They are over-worried about her courtship and marriage. They must protect her, and architectural metaphors (wall, battlement) are used to express this. The theme of this poem is the power of love to bring full maturity to a young bride. Here this tone of authoritarian guardianship is entirely suitable (Gen. 24:50). This is the playfulness of the brother’s banter. The bride’s brothers are here using such luxurious language to make fun of her defending her virginity.

**Interpretation**

In 8:9 the verse is constructed in synonymous parallelism. “Wall” and “door” are both to be understood as enclosed images. They are frequently paired and associated with a city’s defense (Dan. 3:5; 2 Ch. 14:6; Neh. 3:15; 6:1. Ezek. 38:11). “Encampment” and “board” are military figures connected with a siege. Qualified by “silver” and “cedar” they become precious adornments, fortifying and safeguarding the beloved’s integrity. Here the speaker claims that their sister’s breasts have not yet grown, while the central man has compared her breasts to date clusters (7:7), and the bride will claim that her breasts are like towers (8:10). The speaker expresses a desire both to protect and to decorate the bride, by building silver towers and cedar door panels. The brothers intend to increase the bride’s value, first by adorning her with silver and cedar, and second by ensuring her inviolability. They claim that she is still a child and she is in need of male

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275 Garrett, 428.
276 Smith, 124.
277 Ibid.
protection in 1:6. However, in 8:9 she claims that she can keep herself. The brother hovers around her defensively while she is growing up, while in 8:10 she asserts with great self-confidence and aplomb, her self-possession and power to please.

In 8:10, she said, “I am a wall and breasts are like towers.” In emphatically affirming her maturity, she employs an analogous military image already attributed to her (4:4; 7:5). As a result of both her integrity and maturity the beloved can say; “thus, in his eyes, I have become as one who has found peace or the one who brings it.” It is often used of a bride gaining the affection of a man (Dan. 24:1 and Esth. 2:17). “Peace” at the end of 8:10 is also an important word. The communion of the lovers was described by their mutual reflection in one another’s eyes. Peace brings the entire exchange between the brothers and beloved to a point of resolution. The metaphor of the wall and the door are saying the same thing as well as the opposite. Morally and sexually she is a wall and her breasts are like towers. They are decorative and attractive, full, mature, ripe for love. In 8:10 she makes a word play with “wall.” She has reached sexual maturity. She no longer needs to defend her virginity against the male.

**Reflection**

She remains under the domain of her brothers’ authority until she actually gets married. As an eligible young bride she is fussed over, cosseted, decorated and beautified as one of the family’s most important assets. The brothers are simply performing their duty of protection, preservation and public presentation towards their sister.

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278Huwiller, 289.
Application

These are symbols of her self-confident self-possession. She will give her consoling breasts only to whom she is committed. She can look after herself now. Her virginity, her chastity, her maturity and her strength are all a source of Shalom (peace) to her beloved. In what sense does the bride give Shalom to her beloved? He will be proud of her body, which she has reserved solely for him. He will feel like a whole person, now he is in love with her. He is glad that her brothers and mother have finally accepted their relationship. They are now all at peace. She has breasts that adorn her beauty in his eyes. “Like one bringing contentment” he is presumably thinking of a love scene. She brings peace. The lover has found true peace in his eyes. In the eyes of her lover the bride is making peace in the family; the military metaphor is continued and concluded as she climbs down from her proud position and brings peace to her brothers.²⁷⁹

Unit Twenty-Nine 8:11-12

Analysis

They have the characterization of any royal personal through a song of boasting or exaggeration. Just as the historical king, with his many and vast vineyards becomes the symbol of wealth, so here the vineyard is a literary fiction, a symbol for something else. The themes of the enclosed garden (4:12), the walled city (8:8-10) and the notions of 8:11-12 denote the inaccessibility of the bride to all others. Solomon may have vaster holdings, but they are not for his exclusive enjoyment. Wealth does not guarantee greater

²⁷⁹Snaith, 126.
pleasures. No amount of wealth can buy love (8:7). The unit has symbolism and is reminiscent of other narrative poems (Is. 5:1; 1Kin. 21:1) of the historically-legendary Solomon.\textsuperscript{280} A man who would give all the wealth of his house for love, and a man who would bring a thousand pieces of silver for the fruit of the vineyard are the same. The enclosed image of the vineyard relates to the enclosed city (8:8-10) as a figure of the beloved.\textsuperscript{281}

\textit{Interpretation}

Verse 8:11 parallels 1:6 describing a vineyard (1:6; 2:15; 4:12-14). She is compared with Solomon's vineyard. The beloved's vineyard is for no one else, its value is beyond all price. This short poem serves as a culmination of the other three passages. There are two different vineyards. One is Solomon's literal vineyard. The other is the bride's own metaphorical vineyard, which is not to be let out for hire. His literal vineyards were of legendary fame. Baal Hamon means the "owner of wealth," or "owner of a crowd." Solomon's vineyard may be considered as more than just a source of grapes, but a source of sensual pleasure. The bride is emphasizing her own rights over how to govern her own vineyard.

In 8:12 the vineyard metaphor is here used in reverse: the bride has previously been the lover's garden (1:6; 4:16). It means either her own sexual charms or, more probably her lover. Solomon's vineyard represents his large harem; the numbers are included to take the thousand with his very own. Her vineyard is her own private matter,

\textsuperscript{280}Elliot, 206. He sees the units as parables of the vineyard speaking from 8:10 to 8:12. The entire parable is an illustration of the quasi-proverbial statement found in 8:7ed.

\textsuperscript{281}Elliot, 208.
so her beloved is in control of her own life, not subject to the conventions of a court harem. Human love is more direct than that; the bride and her lover enjoy a free and exclusive relationship.

Reflection

The implication will be different depending who speaks in 8:12 “my own vineyard is before me”? The answer to initial question is the bride. This is not the battle cry of a woman liberated from the bondage of a demanding or over bearing spouse. She asserts here her freedom of choice and reflects the maturity, the mutuality, and the equality of the sexes that permeates the entire book. Also it presents a relationship of love, respect, compliment, honor and devotion for each other. Both enjoy the courtship, the marriage and choice. Both are secure, happy and fulfilled. Certainly her “vineyard” was her own. His wealth is his own. But in the context of wholesome marriage, what is his is hers and what is hers is his. Now she is at the place where she chooses to shut the door, leaving her brothers on the outside.282

On the contrary, who may be the speaker in this small unit in a positive and literal view? The groom is the speaker. He expresses the unique preciousness of his own girl, and the comparison of his “own vineyard” with that of the incomparable king gives expression to the incomparability of this beloved and possible bride.283

Her person, her body and her sexuality are not to be made into an object of commercial transaction. Money is powerless to buy love and allegiance.

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Application

The basic message of those verses is that love is not a commodity as though it were the subject of some kind of commercial transaction. Awakening love is the dawning realization of the convenience for mutual self-gratification.

Unit Thirty 8:13-14

Analysis

The groom speaks first, and the bride responds. The primary focus of the phrase is not their listening but the listening of the groom. The bride pleads that the groom flees with the sweetness of a gazelle or a young stag on the mountain of spices. The Song ends, not with final consummation of the passionate love that is described throughout its many individual poems, but on a note of separation. The ending of the Song is difficult because it is such an unexpected conclusion for a love poem such as the Song.

Textual Notes

In 8:13 the LXX explains the participle as masculine (ὁ καθημενος) and the Syriac read it as plural (those who dwell). The variations reflected in the LXX are not significant enough to modify the reading in the MT.

Interpretation

Verse 8:13 “The bride dwells in the garden” is a reference to the garden songs of
4:12-5:1 and 6:11. Verse 8:13c repeats 2:14cd; 2:17 and 4:6. The verse is a source of every kind of pleasure. A speech consisting of quotation and allusion is comprehensible only to those who know the sources. The text moves easily from vineyard to garden, from one enclosed image to the next. She has moved out of her old world—the world of her brothers and of the Jerusalem's brides. She has entered his. "Friend pay heed to your voice" means that all attention is fixed on her. He regards her as the center of attention because that is what she is to him. As a final confirmation of her value as a person, he calls on her to speak. She is not confined to silence, as though she were a possession, but is fully free and fully a partner. See 6:12.

Verse 8:14 is reminiscent of 2:17. She is using the language of warnings to invite him. The central characters are again waiting for a reunion.\footnote{Elliot, 290.} She refers to the pleasure of love in general. The call for him to depart with her is an apt closure to the Song. Their life together has begun. Fox resolves the dilemma by saying she is telling him to leave his friends and come to her. It seems better to retain the tension in the beloved's imperative, and to allow the Song to conclude in an open-ended way. She is telling him to go off quickly, but implies that his going is a way of coming again. That absence is a form of presence. Their love is dynamic and continuously developing. It seems to echo earlier material, with phrases from 2:17. Fox suggests that the Song never reaches completion, just like love, which is never satisfied: true love is always a quest, a going on, a looking forward.\footnote{Fox, 226} Verse 14 here seems to sum up the whole experience of the lovers with each other, using quotations of earlier passages. So, since there is no reconditioned stage or
goal in the lovers’ relationship to be reached, and, as all loving relationships, is on going and looks towards the future, it seems fitting to leave the lovers doing just that! Could the verb here that indicates both the lovers’ departure from the companions of verse 13 and his sexual approaches to his beloved be another case of double entendre? It appears to be an anti-climax with these two obscure and enigmatic verses. It seems a rather peculiar way to conclude a beautiful love-song, hanging in mid-air with a number of unresolved questions.

Application

The young lovers overcome mountainous obstacles in order that they might achieve their goal of finally being united together. Real life is often very different. There is the endless cycle of love, its restless ebb and flow and fluctuating moods, for in any developing relationship, we never arrive. There are always new lessons to learn and old lessons to re-learn.

Sub-Conclusion

Textual criticism cannot be bound to any poetic ideas to emend the suspicious text. Literary criticism can contribute to determining the correct text. The process of trying to understand a particular text that earlier readers understood is often aided by our understanding of Hebrew poetic devices. Alliteration, assonance, images, symbols,

286Watson, 42.

287 Paronomasia (1:2,3; 2:17; 3:10; 4:10; 5:11; 8:1-2), Alliteration (1:3; 2:1-5; 2:2,15; 3:1-11; 5:2; 8:5-6), Contrast (8:5), onomatopoeia (1:2, 2:12; 4:16), metonymy (1:5; 5:2,4,6; 7:1), imagery, chiastic structure, simile (4:1-7), hyperbole (1:8; 5:11), assonance (6:3), alliteration (2:14; 3:2; 4:13), synecdoche (5:2,4,6; 7:1) synonymous parallelism, personification, symbolism, repetition parallelism (4:8), epithets
motifs, figures of speech, repetition and chiasmus are acknowledged factors needed to make sense of the text.

The poetic analysis is based entirely upon the Hebrew Masoretic Text. The poetic structure, in relation to the form and functional coherence of meaning, brings careful attention to issues of textual criticism. Correct identification of poetic features has implications for textual criticism and supports a synthetic survey.

The function of re-vocalization of scribes was involved in analyzing the MT with poetic ingenuity and creativity. Unvocalized Hebrew texts of the LXX were fully vocalized by the BHS editors or translators. The re-vocalization offers the precise form of the word of consonantal variants, helps compare the variants and gives ideas for emendation. The MT’s vocalization is constituted of sound for the sake of the human being. The decision of translation requires the choice of an adjustable, communicative meaning.

Hebrew grammar plays as the phonological, syntactical and semantic functions in the textual criticism. The language of the MT represents the Hebrew grammar used during the Biblical period.

The scribes’ errors appear in misdivision, transposition, grammar and vocalization in the Song, but any particular one is not necessary for such emendation

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288 Masoretic scribes’ revocalization incurs the diversity of meaning.

289 These are problems that involve changes not to the consonantal text but to the interpretative framework. Transmitted misdivision is as a result of a misinterpretation of the meaning of the passage as a whole or a misunderstanding of its poetic form.
that would change the consonantal. The change of meaning or interpretation did not come from emendation only, but also from the MT.

The poet seemed to completely change the meaning through sound imagery (2:7). The function of sound plays a suspiciously important role to incur the important theological appellations. The sound of the name of an animal was similar to the name of God when making an oath. Images of sound are circumlocutions for the title of God. The poetic device of sound shows the theological matter using a metaphor in regards with textual criticism.

The use of the masculine in reference to the feminine is frequent in the Song (4:2; 5:8; 6:8). The poet also creates a surprising effect of the image by using grammar. Such grammar is not right in the sight of modern standards, and it can be requested for emendation; however, it is a convention of ancient poetic grammar.

In contrast, the feminine designates "neutrum" (3:6). If the demonstrative designates masculine, the protagonist of the content will be Solomon, but if it designates feminine, the demonstrative contents will be others. The grammatical device helps to overcome the misunderstanding of textual criticism and preserves the intelligence of the content.

The most difficult issue here is in verse 6:12. Scholars suggest that the lack of meaning is because of the missing preposition between sentences. Such grammar incurs to make an obscure interpretation; however, literally, the ancient community made sense

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200 Scribes frequently modernized archaic features of the grammar of a passage. In cases where archaic features were retained, they were sometimes misunderstood by the scribes, and led to various kinds of textual corruption.

201 Often the same consonantal text is interpreted in different ways by the various witnesses, as shown by the vocalization of MT or the translation.
of it. The emendation of this verse is not necessary for an assurance of meaning because of the multifold characteristic of poetic imagery. Poets often tend to omit the *capulative* elements in the poetry. If the poet in the Song missed them, it is natural.\textsuperscript{292} It would give the audience a variety of poetic imaginations. The poet’s skill and ability take control of the characteristics of poetry.

The part of that emendation that will be necessary to change the consonantal cannot be discovered.\textsuperscript{293} If the purpose of textual criticism is to present the text as the author intended, it is wise to understand the author’s skill of creating literary devices for interpreting the text. This gives more confidence in confirming the meaning of the text.

As we have seen, Hebrew poetic devices do not usually play a determinative role for emendation in textual criticism. On the other hand, they help us to understand the possible meaning of the text, especially when that text is under suspicion of being a textually corrupt, obscure text. Poetic understanding can help us interpret the text given to us and even play a supporting role in making critical judgments. The poetic devices and poet’s unique usage of grammar, the vocalization of the MT scribes and the creativity and ingenuity of poets work together for textual criticism.

Many details of the Song were read metaphorically rather than literally, or as double entendres. All the images convey the pleasure, joy and glory that the lovers experienced. They are psychological and emotional explorations. The Song had no complete storyline. There were some sporadic motives relating to marriage and love regarding the united structure of the Song. Brightness and darkness were interwoven on


\textsuperscript{293}Its attempt is to reconstruct an original reading that has not survived among extant witness.
the journey of romance. Their process of love is stories of overcoming mountainous obstacles in order that they might achieve their goal of being united together. Their love-journey was not cheap, easy, commercial nor self-satisfactory. That story seems to be a fairy story. Real life is often very different. The sexual union results in not only the consummation of love, but also has a tendency to fall in as a means of lust or commercial temptation in the immature love. The Song functioned to mirror something of reality, the endless cycle of love and fluctuating moods. In any developing as relationship, we never arrive at the assurance that we are experts in the realm of human relationships. We need to start rebuilding again, slowly, painfully and honestly, clearing the air through mutual forgiveness, mutual thanksgiving, mutual acceptance and tolerance. Just like the finding and seeking in the Song, all this can be emotionally exhausting. We spiral around each other; sometimes drawing closer in the deepest intimacies of intercourse, sometimes withdrawing, we need to be secure in the knowledge of our ultimate mutual acceptances and attraction. Each cycle of movement towards and away from each other must bring a deeper sense of that underlying commitment. Love is a power too strong to be overcome by anything but flight. In the Song, we only find our true selves in our self-surrender; in order to live, we must die. Love and marriage is a mystery, beyond the capacity of human understanding.

The role of this text as wisdom is apparent. It prepares the reader for the joy as well as trauma of love. It readies the bride for marriage and gives the groom an added cause to appreciate and admire his bride. It is also a celebration of the bride’s love, both as a gift she gives the groom and as a signification of her own value and character. It is a
Song of love victorious over pain. "Love is as strong as death and passion as unyielding as the grave."²⁹⁴
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

The debate over how to interpret the Song of Songs has continued for generations and despite the development of interpretation is still a difficult task for today’s interpreters, preachers and audience. Whether literary criticism of the text is willingly adopted or not, one practical fact cannot be doubted. The writer himself is not fully aware of all the intentions of the author of the Song, specifically the latent and the cryptic ones. Thus let the text speak for itself. The Song speaks with a spectacular aestheticism, which displays a solid unity. The literary criticism might serve as an interpretative key to unlock the revelatory possibilities of the text because the characteristic of this criticism is intelligible, technical, communicable, applicable, experiential and audible.¹ This chapter will summarize the contents of the previous chapters.

Chapter 2 begins with interpretation. The distance between the literal sense of the text and an allegorical reading of it is so considerable that large hermeneutical problems arise. With respect to the genres of the Song, allegory, typology, dreams, drama, cultic (liturgy) and lyric, the literary approach differs widely regarding both the internal, overall interpretation of the contents and the corresponding possibilities for understanding its message for the community of faith.

The allegorical approach played an important role in the canonization of the Song based on the monotheistic impact and the prophetic tradition. The typological approach

¹Literary criticism emphasizes the unity of text and views the text as an end in itself.
gave birth to the Christological issue. The cultic view explains the background of the metaphorical language. The dramatic view gives an influential insight directly into the intimate human love between a man and a woman within the ethical compass, as well as a didactic instruction. The dream theory portrays the creativity and abundant speculations of the author. Literal interpretation served as an appropriate foundational study for an interpretation of the Song that is most consistent with a grammatical-historical-contextual hermeneutics. Literal interpretation avoids the seeking out of religious or theological significance arbitrarily and apologetically. It evaluates, receives, applies, and determines that the text has literal-didactic, wisdomic-didactic, spirituality and higher literary purposes.

Its unapologetic depiction of rapturous, reciprocal love between a man and a woman models an important dimension of human existence and an aspect of life that is intertwined with the figurative expressions of the lovers’ experiences and happiness. Human love is made complete by the influence of the love of God through God’s purposeful blessing in the relationship of human sexuality.

Literary methodology demands understanding of the vivid imagery, which conveys the rhetorical, emotive, cognitive, perceptive and pictorial effects. These effects create the meaning of the text, and encourage reaction to the truth and an effective response in the community of faith.

In chapter 3, building the structural unit of the Song through the function of imagery was the primary task. Mainly, literary devices consist of a closely unified

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dialogue, a coherent refrain, parallelism, and chiasm. Verbal repetitions were the most important criterion for discerning the limits of poetic units in the Song. Chiastic parallelism as literary architecture gave total understanding of the text and setting. These major literary units were not arranged in a linear scheme but in a chiastic one, composed of ten major literary units. Each of the units exhibited a chiastic literary device as internal cohesion or an internal structure. The final verse of each unit is comprised of a selected refrain (2:6-7; 3:1; 3:5; 6:3; 7:11(10); 8:3-4).

The metaphorical language of the Song revealed the contextual flow and the depth of resonance of certain images, and intensified the vividness of the mental picture. The imagery is also needed to convey to the hearers the arousing emotions experienced by the bride and groom in the Song. The Song's logic is found in the repeated pattern of the absence of the loved one, the pursuit and discovery of the loved one, the presence of the loved one, and the praises upon the loved one.

In chapter 4, the textual criticism functioned as the hermeneutical key to understanding the entire Song of Songs in a highly paradoxical situation. It additionally selected the adequate translation, determined the linguistic characteristic, the culture of language, the form of grammar and the original meaning of the word in the cultic background and analyzed the poetic devices. Basically, the textual criticism aided literary criticism with the discovery of repetition, alliteration, assonance, images, symbol, motifs and figures of speech. It gave understanding of the poet's skills of creating the literary

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3 Each refrain may be contributed to advance the theme (2:7), a motif or image (6:2), dominant setting (6:11), the consistency to characterization (2:16).

device, the text’s flow of content and his unique usage of grammar. These show how the creativity and ingenuity of the poet work together as the function of imagery.

Chapter 4 stated that the Song has the same authority as all of Scripture. This assurance encourages the carrying out of the hermeneutic task. The eclectic and uncommonly synthetic hermeneutical key attributed to the discrimination and justification of the Song. Its key departed from the text itself and the inter-textual application included an analogy with Genesis chapters 2 and 3, the tradition of wisdom, the patriarchal model and the interpreter’s subjective reflection. Hermeneutic issues brought a shift from a historical-critical judgment to a text-oriented and reader-oriented judgment.

The important themes are the attraction and articulation of beauty, joys and tensions, erotic arousal, betrothal and marriage, consummation of love, and the permanency of love. Their love is challenged, emerges triumphant and makes them richer and stronger. It prepares them for the joy as well as the trauma of love. It is also a celebration of the gift of love and the signification of their own value and character. It is the victory of love over pain. “Love is as strong as death and passion as unyielding as the grave.”

Hermeneutic exegesis is accomplished through a literary spectrum on the basis of a literal reading of the straightforward eroticism of the Song. Verse by verse, a succinct

52 Tim. 3:16. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped of every good work.”

reflection was used upon each small unit to amplify the reader’s appreciation of this exquisite love poetry. The Song affirms and celebrates mutuality, there is no male dominance, no female subordination and no stereotyping of either sex. The Song explores psychological and emotional entailments.

Two large structures consist of the macrostructure and microstructure units. The macrostructure contributes to building up the Chiastic parallelism, which reveals the wedding motif. It plays a role in the poetic function and internal coherence, while the microstructure consists of the small units and plays a key role in recognizing the motif for application, the dynamic translation, imagery, reflection of the message by the faith community and the theological issues, which do not appear on the surface.

The protagonists of the Song, through their metaphorical language, speak to today’s young adults. The audience of today’s preacher is the young adult generation. The preacher as a teacher of the Song must understand how the message of the Song functions for the mind of the young adult generation. The protagonists deliver their experienced message to today’s youth with the language of youth, their emotions and intellect and their metaphorical language.

The joy and tension of the young people is displayed through the metaphorical language; however, there is no progression toward marriage. Motifs of sexual union relating to marriage appeared before and after the wedding ceremony motifs (3:5-5:1). If these motifs reflect a sequence toward marriage, it would appear that the protagonists

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7David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1992), 90. It means that Scriptures were understood in a straightforward fashion, resulting in the plain, simple, and natural meaning of the text being applied to the lives of the people. It is foundation for all other hermeneutical development.
commit premarital wrongdoing. Therefore, a complete doctrine on sexual morality or marriage cannot be derived from the Song alone but must also consider the Hebrew culture, which also prohibited premarital sexual relations. The use of the chiasmus of the macrostructure did not come near to the solution. Upon further judgment, the sexual motifs were sporadically found everywhere in the Song. Although the Song is not primarily a moral, wisdomic, theological or patriarchal book, it does teach us a great deal about human relations. It is a celebration of love in all its dimensions.

In summary, the Song contains much metaphorical language describing various actions relating to sexual activity (kissing, caressing, intercourse, and so on), as well as double entendres. There were two options in dealing with these. Either leave the ambiguities unresolved, so that it is left to the young adult generation to exercise its imagination in unwrapping the metaphor, or comment explicitly, and elaborate on the force of the metaphor, exposing new reflections and applications through literary criticism. In the name of the function of imagery, even if literary interpretation proves to be a stumbling block to readers this particular line of interpretation was used to acknowledge every explicit sexual allusion. This literary device was satisfactory.
APPENDIX ONE

SURVEY OF PREACHERS

This survey is a Doctor of Ministry thesis.

Pastor’s age ( ), the name of the Church ( )

1. How long have you been preaching?

2. How often have you taught or preached the Song?

3. For what purpose did you preach the Songs?

4. Do you plan to preach the Song in the future?

5. If you do not like to preach the Song, what are your main reasons?

   a) Difficult to interpret
   b) Difficult to speak about human sexual love
   c) No theological motif
   d) No relationship with spiritual life
   e) Inconsistency of plot
   f) Hard to catch the subject
   g) It is easier to interpret other books than the Song.

6. Do you think it is possible to effectively interpret the Song using the function of poetic devices?

7. Traditionally, the Song was interpreted allegorically, that is, “Love between Israel and God, between church and Christ.” Do you still think that the Song should be interpreted allegorically?

8. Do you have the courage and intention to preach the Song to young adults with the purpose of delivering a message on pure humane love?
This evaluation is the result of a random survey of fifty pastors. It not only deals with the majority response, but also with the minority. The aim is to see how often preachers have preached the Song of Songs with an adequate interpretation that can influence young-adults. Also, this survey seeks to discover if the message of the Song can save today’s young-adult generation from sexual immorality. The presupposition is that the Song, by using the literal interpretation or literary criticism, will be applied to discourage young adults from falling into sexual deviation and will have a positive effect on today’s community of young adults.

It is not easy to discover a young adult-oriented message, especially in the Bible. It is amazing that the Song supplies answers that can prevent sexual troubles facing today’s young adult. The effect of the message depends on the method of interpretation of the Song. The reasons young adults can be victimized is partly because of the emphasis on the allegorical interpretation. First, allegorizing emphasizes God’s love and forgiveness of sin, and causes one to neglect accountability with others. Men can misuse the forgiveness of the love of God. Secondly, the allegorical interpretation does not play a key role in saving men from sinning, because of the lack of a preventive message. Its message only attempts to solve the problem of the aftermath of sinning. The presuppositions and importance of the study of the Song emerges throughout the survey.

The first question is “How often have you taught, or preached the Song of Songs?” It measures the frequency of the relative message to the length of the ministry. These questions are concerned with the value and adequateness of the messages preached on and about the Songs. The Songs is not involved in public worship. It is worthless in the community of faith. It is only used as church event. The frequency of usage could rise
if the preacher led a series of Bible studies, such as a couple’s class. Figure 4 shows that results.

![Fig 4. Average Frequency of Preaching on the Song (out of 40 people)](image)

The second question is “For what purpose did you preach the Song?” It is concerned with searching the motif of the Song. The analogies of Christ’s marriage to the church and the love of God to His people are made possible on the basis of allegorical interpretation. The message in the Song can be classified into two purposes: the romance between a married couple, and the analogy of Christ’s marriage to the church and the love of God toward the His people. One is based on the romance text used for a wedding ceremony. The other flows from the allegorical interpretation. More than fifty percent of preachers prefer to teach the Song using an allegorical interpretation.

According to figure 5, quite a few preachers choose the double entendre: analogue of Christ’s marriage to the church, and romance between marriage partners. Whereas older preachers tend to preserve the allegorical interpretation, younger preachers seem to be open to the literal interpretation. A little more than half of the pastors have never
preached either of the interpretations. This shows an indifference to the value of the message in the Songs.

The third question is “Do you plan to preach the Song in the future?” Figure 6 shows the general responses were “Yes,” “Not necessary” or “I don’t know.” The replies to this question show that the value of selecting the Song’s the text is lower than other passages of Scripture. The chart shows a majority says, “Yes” but it doesn’t compare it to frequencies of other Scriptures.
The fourth question is “If you do not like to preach the Song, what are your main reasons?” The answers to this question can be widely classified into two interpretations and a motif as seen in figure 7. It is easier to interpret other books than the Song. The primary reasons range from the problem of “how to interpret” and “what to preach” to “to whom one should apply the message.” The preachers cannot easily solve this fundamental problem. This task is often the responsibility of the interpreters, or commentators. This thesis was written due to the anguish of choosing the most effective interpretation. The interpretation and application are addressed later.

![Fig. 7. Reasons for Difficulty in Preaching on the Song](image)

The fifth question is “Do you think it is possible to effectively interpret the Song by using the function of poetic devices?” Figure 8 shows that the preachers’ interest coincided primarily with interpreting the Song with literary criticism. If the preacher would avoid the allegorical interpretation, and positively accept the literal, or literary
interpretation, literal interpretation could be a fruitful message, which can be directly applied to today's young couples.

The sixth question is “Do you still think that the Song should be interpreted by allegorical interpretation?” Traditionally, the Song was interpreted allegorically, that is, as the love between Israel and God, or between the church and Christ. Although they want to preach using literary criticism, there is a lack of application. This difficulty then causes preachers to return to the allegorical interpretation for application and practical instruction. Indeed, the difficulty of a literary approach is not denied. As seen in figure 9, allegorical interpretation was chosen most frequently for application and practicality in interpretative circumstances.
The seventh question is "Do you have courage and the intention to preach the Song to young adults with the purpose of delivering a message on pure humane love within marriage?" More than half of the pastors surveyed are willing to preach the Song based on literary criticism, whereas 12 out of 40 pastors responded with the inability to abandon the use of allegorical interpretation. Today’s task for preachers is to apply the appropriate interpretative methods such as literary criticism, which may in turn positively influence young adults.
A Pure human love must not be isolated from the love of God. The perfect example of pure love is Jesus Christ who loves the person. It is the fine way of God.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.... if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.... if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us...the one who loves God should love his brother also.¹

The love of a couple is similar to loving a neighbor. The couple’s love is not separate from the love of God. The message in the Song of Songs is useful for this generation of young adults. It allows a couple to establish a pure love for each other. Some preachers are afraid of using the phrase “human love,” but humans cannot be isolated in the body, soul and Spirit.

APPENDIX TWO
SURVEY OF YOUNG ADULT GENERATION

Your age---- Gender (female, male)

How old were you when you started dating?

How old were you when you became a Christian?

1. Rate how much your Christian faith has affected your sexual activity before marriage:
   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (0- the lowest, 10- the highest)

2. What variables are important for a dating couple to consider before they would decide to get married? Rank the following.
   e. Commitment----f. Financial stability---- g. Family background ----

3. What do you think are the main reasons that couples in a dating relationship choose to have sex before marriage? Rank the following.
   a. They put themselves in places where it’s hard to say “No”  b. For fun----
   c. Lust---- d. Feelings of satisfaction---- e. To feel loved---- f. Social pressure----

4. Do you think that premarital sex or sexual intimacy is more acceptable if the two people love each other? (Circle one)
   yes/ no/ unsure

5. Rate how much your Christian faith would affect your decision to remain abstinent after sexual sin and repentance: (0- the lowest, 10- the highest)
   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. As a Christian, do you think that it is acceptable to divorce if you will have conflict in marriage? (0- the lowest, 10- the highest)
   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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This survey is to evaluate the sexual morality of the young adults within their context. It might help to compare the value systems between American and Korean students. The marriage age is similar to the age of the lovers in the Song. The survey was of twenty American Christians and twenty Korean Christians between the ages of twenty and twenty-five at Liberty University. The primary aim is to see if the Song may play an important role as a message for the today’s young-adult generation.

The first question is “Rate how much your Christian faith has affected your sexual activity before marriage.” It evaluates whether the Christian devotional life will prevent sexual activity before marriage.

Figure 11 shows the results were very strong and influential with a high majority of students choosing “10.” The message of God and their life were not separated from each other. Their Christianity occupies their entire life.

![Figure 11. The Rate of How Much Christian Faith Affected Sexual Activity before Marriage](image)

The second question is “What variables are important for a dating couple to consider before they decide to get married?” It evaluates the variables involved in
deciding on the marriage partner. The results are shown in figure 12. The majority of both student groups chose Christian life as their top priority when choosing a partner. The category of their Christian life was distinguished as the following: praying together, having spiritual unity, having Godly beliefs, reflecting on Biblical principles, being a faithful Christian, developing spiritual growth, and being spiritually mature being a spiritual leader. The Christian life includes all the areas of emotion, intellect and will. The Christian life highly demands the moral value of purity regardless of their past life. Both groups had a tendency to be interested in the personality, because they believe their inborn personality cannot be changed and invisible characteristics will play a key role in marriage life.

Additionally, American students were interested in “commitment” and “compatibility.” They imply details as following: respectful personality, and an honest look, Godly character, good morality, communication, the same goal in life, compatibility and belief.

![Fig. 12. Variables Important for Dating Couples](image_url)
According to figure 13, the main reasons couples in a dating relationship choose to have sex before marriage is lust. It does not relate to love in any way, but, includes physical temptation, the driving sexual need, lack of self-control, dominance of flesh, sinful nature, there is no control not willing to see the consequences, and the focus is off of the Holy Spirit. There is no intention to maintain a pure love with each other from the beginning. Their choice comes from the demonic and sinful nature of man. Having a date, or the activity of physical love, beyond the wall, rather stimulated to offer the source of a victim. Secondly, the notion that love includes sex comes from the society and the socially accepted phrase “socially, everybody is doing it.” It is the social-normal and peer pressure. It means to follow the “flock” mentality, population, or philosophy of an immoral majority. Thirdly, when they were alone in a secret place, they were tempted because in the place where no one was watching them, it was hard for them to overcome the physical temptation.

The Koreans were more sensitive to the influence of a secret environment that was not approved by the moral boundary. The Korean culture tends to suppress their emotions for a long time. In a secret place, their sexual passion is emanated instinctively. To make their love feel close Koreans are involved in sexual intimacy. To them it is a symbol of love, an emotional expression of love. Their group separated sexual activity and love. It was only for entertainment. The Koreans tend to have sex on the condition of thinking about a future marriage and only for love.
In figure 14 their point of view about the acceptance of premarital sex or sexual intimacy on the condition that the two people love each other is minimal. American students ranked higher than the Koreans. The "unsure" of the Korean seems to lean to the negative side because Koreans' values are fluctuating. It is clear that the Christian faith has awakened their consciousness to sin. Even though they are weak when faced with sexual temptation, they realize that premarital sexual intimacy is sinful.
The results of the question of "Rate how much your Christian faith would affect your decision to remain abstinent after sexual sin and repentance," are shown in figure 15. Both groups were high. The affect of their decision depended on the conviction of the Gospel. They abstained from engaging in sexual activity in obedience to the message of God and by the power of the Gospel and the grace of God.

The final question is "As a Christian, do you think that it is okay to divorce if you have conflict in marriage?" As seen in figure 16, Christian approval of divorce was low. The students did not see conflict as a reason for divorce excluding adultery. They do not want to arrive at the bottom of faith due to bitterness. In the Korean situation, even though the husbands committed adultery, they tend to be patient and not divorce because they do not want their children to be without protection. They feel that divorce would bring forth social shame and the destruction of the family line. Divorce is not the best decision in the Christian life. Fortunately, the message of the Christian faith has influenced the young adult generation to build the future family totally and deeply.
If the message of God is shared effectively, the function of the message for the young adult generation will be preventive. In this situation, the message of the Song is the best message to prevent them from sexual activity. The mass media is teaching our children; their peers are teaching our children. Today's young adults had better have the message of the young lover in the Song. They would like to speak them message to today’s young adult in metaphorical language. Premarital sex paralyzes the function of love. Sexual life cannot completely fill up our marriage life.

The celebration of love as well as the conflicts will remain in our marriage life. Our marriage life needs to be complemented, completed, satisfied, recovered, and fulfilled by the power of love between the couple. The mighty power greater than death is love. The love is supreme love. The consummate love of marriage can be accomplished through uniting human love and the love of God. The lack of human love is supplemented with the love of God. To keep a marriage couple pure involves one ingredient of love. The result of the survey reveals our weaknesses.
GLOSSARY

Aquila. Early second-century A.D. reviser of the Septuagint known for his literal Renderings.

BHS Apparatus. At the bottom of the BHS (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia) page is the textual apparatus, listing selected readings that do not appear in Codex Leningradensis, the text on which the BHS edition is based.

Canon/Canonical. The term canon refers to the group of books acknowledged by the early church as the rule of faith and practice.

Exegesis. Exegesis means, “to explain the meaning of a text in its original context.” Exegesis and hermeneutics are sometimes used synonymously.

Hapax legomenon (♀). It indicates when a word is used only once or spelled a certain way only once in the Old Testament.

Haplography. Scribal error resulting from accidental omission of a letter (s) or a word(s).

Hermeneutic. From the Greek hermeneuein: toxpress, to explain, to translate, to interpret. It is variously defined, but refers to a theory of interpretation. Traditionally, hermeneutics sought to establish the principles, methods, and rules needed in the interpretation of written texts particularly, sacred texts.

Homoeoarkton. Scribal error leading to omission of elements of the text that is based on similar beginnings of words.

Homoeoteleuton. Scribal error leading to omission of elements of the text that is based on similar endings of words.

Intertextuality. It refers to the studying of concrete relationships between texts.

Kethiv. “That which is written,” text variant represented by the consonants that are written/printed in the text.

Masoretes. Jewish scholars who devised a graphic system to represent the traditional vocalization of the Hebrew text.
Masoretic Text (MT). The standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament as transmitted by the Masoretes.

Meaning. Meaning is a highly ambiguous term, and the only safe way of handling. It is to identify the various senses in which it is used. The meaning refers to the interpreter’s attempt to ground meaning in either the author’s intention or the author’s result. The meaning suggests that the interpreter’s findings have authority for the interpreter and may even be binding upon the interpreter.

Midrash. Jewish interpretation of Scripture; more precisely, a commentary that contemporizes Scripture for current and practical situations.

Qere. “That which is read:” text variant represented by the vowels printed in the text and the consonants printed in the margin.

Septuagint. Greek translation of the Old Testament (named for the traditional seventy translators) and its many revisions and recensions.

Symmachus. Late second-century a.d. reviser of the Septuagint characterized by good Greek style.

Targums. Translation of the Old Testament in Aramaic; originally orally based, they are characterized by paraphrase.

Variant reading. Any reading in a Hebrew manuscript or version that disagrees with the accepted base text.

Vocalization. Vowel signs, which were added to the consonantal framework of Hebrew Bible, were developed between the years 500 and 700 C.E by Jewish scholars, Masoretes. Its function was to remove doubts regarding the reading of the text when this allowed for more than one interpretation.

Vorlage. Elements of the Hebrew texts underlying the various ancient translations need to be reconstructed. This reconstructed text from which a translation was made is called the Vorlage of a translation, that is, the text that lay before the translator.

Vulgate. The revision of the Old Latin by Jerome lasted from ca. A.D. 390 to 405. Old Latin is the earliest Latin version of the Old Testament; made from the Septuagint.
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