Song of Songs: Resources

# Ancient Egyptian Love Poems

She has no rival,there is no one like her.  
She is the fairest of all.  
She is like a star goddess arising  
...at the beginning of a new year;  
brilliantly white, shining skin;  
such beautiful eyes when she stares,  
and sweet lips when she speaks;  
she has not one phrase too many.  
With a long neck and shining body  
her hair of genuine lapis lazuli;  
her arm more brilliant than gold;  
her fingers like lotus flowers,  
ample behind, tight waist,  
her thighs extend her beauty,  
shapely in stride when she steps on the earth.  
She has stolen my heart with her embrace,   
She has made the neck of every man   
turn round at the sight of her.  
Whoever embraces her is happy,  
he is like the head of lovers,  
and she is seen going outside  
like That Goddess, the One Goddess."

She is one girl, there is no one like her.   
She is more beautiful than any other.   
Look, she is like a star goddess arising at the beginning of a happy new year;   
brilliantly white, bright skinned; with beautiful eyes for looking, with sweet lips for speaking;   
she has not one phrase too many.   
With a long neck and white breast,

her hair of genuine lapis lazuli;   
her arm more brilliant than gold;   
her fingers like lotus flowers,   
with heavy buttocks and girt waist.   
Her thighs offer her beauty,   
with a brisk step she treads on ground.   
She has captured my heart in her embrace.   
She makes all men turn their necks to look at her.   
One looks at her passing by,   
this one, the unique one.

From <http://themagentahornet.com/ancient-egyptian-love-poems.html>

# What Might the Song of Songs Do for People?[[1]](#footnote-1)

Only perhaps in communities that are both essentially patriarchal and committed to the authority of the Bible may the Song still have a liberating effect and be able to suggest a vision of an alternative style of being. (David Clines)[[2]](#footnote-2)

Keep this book away from your girlfriend – it contains too many of your secrets to let it fall into the wrong hands.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Soon after I moved to California someone commented (perhaps they were quoting from someone else) that in Britain one does theology looking over one’s shoulder at the Germans but in the U.S.A. one does theology looking over one’s shoulder at fundamentalism. Most of my students come from communities that are “essentially patriarchal and committed to the authority of the Bible,” indeed fundamentalist. They themselves mostly repudiate patriarchalism and fundamentalism (or keep quiet about the matter), though they may have a hard time ministering in such communities when they return to them – as they will have a hard time ministering in the light of other aspects of the different understanding of the Bible into which the seminary has sought to invite them. But then, surely most readers of the Bible belong to patriarchal communities that are committed to the Bible’s authority? It would therefore be no trivial achievement if the Song of Songs were to have a liberating effect and suggest an alternative style of being for such average Bible readers.

So what would this look like? I begin from stories about such communities on three continents.

## 1 The Context

The southern part of the United States is the most Christian part of this quintessentially Christian nation. At a Dixie Chicks’ concert in Los Angeles, no song received a more enthusiastic response than Dennis Linde’s “Goodbye Earl”:

Well, it wasn’t two weeks after she got married

That Wanda started gettin’ abused

She put on dark glasses and long sleeved blouses

And make up to cover a bruise…

After Wanda initiated divorce proceedings and Earl responded by putting her into intensive care, she and her friend Mary Anne formed a plan. They cooked Earl a nice southern meal with black-eyed peas and something more sinister, and when it had done its work they wrapped his body in a tarpaulin, and dropped it in the lake. At the end of the story Mary Anne and Wanda are running a roadside stand on Highway 109, selling Tennessee ham and strawberry jam. The disclaimer “The Dixie Chicks do not advocate premeditated murder, but love getting even” was not enough to stop their song getting banned on the radio, presumably by men.

This past quarter, a student of mine from southern Africa wrote a paper on gender violence in Judges and Isaiah, interweaving biblical study with accounts of her life at home. She began with an account of homestead life in her grandparents’ day. Her grandfather had eleven wives, each of whom had six to ten children. His wives’ huts stood in a half-moon, his in the center so that he could monitor and control his family. If another man angered him and he could not fight the man, he would beat one of his wives. When one wife got pregnant and he thought another man was the father, before the other wives he beat her till she aborted. The wives fled but returned in fear of wild animals, and as the ringleader the student’s grandmother was beaten, her collarbone being broken. Her parents were among the first people who came to believe in Christ when Christian missionaries followed on the coattails of British colonists and soldiers, but one should not assume that Christianization totally transforms a culture in this respect. The woman had just heard about the death of a friend after being beaten by her husband. The story of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19 reminded her of a woman who used to run away to her brother’s house because her husband beat her. The husband would always come to get his wife back, and the brother would always surrender her because the husband had the right to do what he liked with her, as his property. If she had run back to her parents’ home, this would be to invite a lecture from her mother on submission to her husband. Eventually he hit her on the head with an iron bar and she died. The same property understanding of marriage means that women have no right to withhold themselves sexually from their husbands when the latter have contracted AIDS or HIV through their promiscuity, so that many of the countless women who have died from AIDS were infected by their husbands.

Another student spoke of the place of women in society and church in his experience of growing up in Korea. He thinks Korean culture was once more egalitarian, but under Confucian influence the family came to be thought of in patrilineal terms, and the church now strongly supports the patriarchal tradition. So if a woman’s first child is a girl, Christians may wonder whether she must have committed a sin. Marriages are arranged by the couple’s parents and their pastor. It is then assumed that a woman leaves her parents’ family when she marries and joins her husband’s parents’ family. The married couple is expected to live in his parents’ house and under their authority, especially if he is the eldest son. This tradition is seen as an ethical principle and a couple who resisted the expectation would cause a scandal in society worthy of reporting in the newspaper. The church accepts this tradition as part of its emphasis on the duty of respect to parents, though it does not emphasize any correlative obligation of parents to children. On marriage a woman is expected to resign her job to stay at home in the shared ménage, and the situation is a frequent cause of conflict between the parents and the married couple, especially between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The church’s teaching is that one should be thankful in the context of such difficulties and believe that an attitude of thankfulness is the key to resolving difficulties. The situation is also a cause of conflict between the couple themselves, and a cause of a kind of formalization of the relationship rather than the development of a personal relationship. It is a major reason for divorce and for Korean emigration to North America.

What might the Song of Songs do for such Christian cultures?

## 2 Allegory and Displacement

Let us first dispose of one possible misapprehension. It is traditional to understand the Song of Songs as an allegory of Christ’s relationship with us. Now sometimes allegorical interpretation derives from unease about a text’s literal meaning, and the origin of allegorical interpretation of the Song could then lie in unease about sex. But the background of allegorical interpretation in general is actually more complex, and so is its function with regard to the Song. The problem about the Bible which generates allegorical interpretation is not so much what it says about the issues it talks about. It is that it does not always talk about the issues that interpreters think it should talk about. For instance, many Christians are inclined to assume that the Bible is supposed to be a manual about how to relate to God, and allegorical interpretation can focus on making texts speak to that agenda. While applying allegorical interpretation to the Song will help people who are uneasy about sex, its background need not lie in that unease but rather in that broader assumption about what the Song must be about. Actually, I doubt whether Christians in general are in great need of liberation from sexual repression into the joy of sex. I recently heard a conservative pastor say that to satisfy the interests of his congregation, he really needed only three Sunday School classes – one on sex, one on the end times, and one on whether there will be sex in the end times. Conservative Christians are as keen on sex as anyone else. But their presuppositions about God and the Bible do not encourage them to bring Bible and sex into relationship, except in certain moralistic ways. Their traditional Christian morality may indeed have some effect on the way they give expression to their enthusiasm for sex. The divorce rate among conservative Christians in the U.S.A. is apparently even higher than among other groups, because people still feel obliged to get married in order to have sex, but the marriages then do not last. In this connection the liberating effect of the Song of Songs might lie in encouraging conservative Christians to rework the way they think about sex and marriage and their relationship, given that the Song does not link these two.

I do not mean the Song would not presuppose a link, which in its own culture is unlikely. If heuristically we may reify the lovers in the Song as if the poems all concern the same couple, whether or not this was originally so, the Song does point to their being a man and a woman whose sexual involvement belongs in the context of an exclusive one-to-one relationship so all-consuming that one would expect them to reckon it would be lifelong – in other words, a quasi-marital relationship. (The wisdom of the poems may be Solomonic, but it is difficult to imagine the historical Solomon in a relationship like this one.) Certainly the process whereby the Judean community came to treat the Song as scripture would have involved the presupposition that the sexual relationship belongs in the context of marriage. Of course “certainly” means I have no evidence of this, but the circumstantial evidence is strong. Indirect testimony to the fact that readers knew how to read the Song appears in the rabbinic warning about singing it in the banquet hall as if it were an ordinary piece of music(e.g., *b. Sanhedrin* 101a). In contrast, there is neither direct nor circumstantial evidence for the often-stated view that the Song was accepted into the canon only on the basis of first having been understood as a treatise on the relationship between Yhwh and Israel.

Yet some people who listened to the Song presumably noticed that either the couple were not married or that theirs was a very odd kind of relationship involving an inversion of the practice of living together without being married. The Song may take for granted that this couple were on their way to marriage, at least, or had an odd kind of marriage, but it is not very interested in that aspect of the relationship. Indeed, it is not interested in it at all, except in the picture of a wedding procession in 3:6-11 and the epithet “bride” in 4:8—5:1. It assumes that marriage is not the only framework within which sex needs to be considered, because marriage is about many things other than sex. There is food for thought in the joke about marriage being when two people stop having sex. Marriage is (for instance) a way of imaging God in the world as two people who are markedly different from each other make a lifelong commitment to each other that creates something bigger than the sum of their parts and persists no matter what pressures drive them apart. Marriage is an institutionalized, legal, community structure for such a lifelong one-on-one relationship. Marriage is an arrangement in whose context people can have sex so that within it children may be born, brought up, educated, and looked after. Marriage is a device whereby a woman moves from the ownership and protection of one man (her father) to those of another man (her husband).

We could have most of those things without having marriage, but marriage provides a way of having them. The Song is concerned with none of them but with the happiness and the fear, the anxiety and the fulfillment of sexual love. In some cultures there has been little link between those and marriage, as is so now in Western culture. There is little direct indication that First Testament or New Testament scriptures link the happiness and the fear, the anxiety and the fulfilment of sexual love, with marriage. Even if the Genesis accounts of the origin of man and woman are much less patriarchal than they have been read, they do not emphasize the personal relationship of marriage in the way we might wish.[[4]](#footnote-4) Indeed, outside the Song the scriptures show little interest in the happiness and the fear, the anxiety and the fulfilment of sexual love. This is food for thought regarding either the scriptures or Western culture or both. But the importance of this topic in Western culture shows how important the Song is. Not its least significance is to require Christians to bring the topic of sex into Christian discussion in connections other than the moral ones that often preoccupy us.

Roland E. Murphy observes that an interpretation of the Song as portraying the relationship between God and the people of God “held sway from late antiquity until relatively modern times and continues even today to find some support.”[[5]](#footnote-5) These words could give the impression that such an understanding has now been generally abandoned. This is only the case in the rarified groves of the academe. It is still the way most readers understand the song. Perhaps paradoxically (or perhaps not), even in some Christian circles that are enthusiastic about sex, an interpretation of the Song as referring to the love relationship of God and the believer remains alive and well. It is important to continue to urge that this is a meaning imposed on the Song. It offers no hint that the poems have anything to do with our love relationship with God or God’s with us. The allegorical understanding has been provided with partial justification on the grounds that elsewhere scripture portrays the relationship between God and people by analogy with marriage, but this justification does not work. One the one hand, we have noted that the Song is not concerned with marriage. Conversely, there is no hint elsewhere in scripture (for instance, in the Psalms) that we have a relationship with God that on our side has the dynamics of sexual love.

The kind of love that our love for God resembles is rather that of (adult) children and parents, or subjects and rulers, or students and teachers. The relationship is characterized by warmth, affection, mutual self-sacrifice, and commitment, but the disparity of status and power make the dynamics of the love portrayed in the Song inappropriate to it. Perhaps it would be odd if we thought we had a relationship like this with the Holy One, and the scriptures do not suggest we do. As the Song does not speak of a love that involves self-sacrifice and commitment, so the scriptures never speak of our emotional relationship with God in terms of passionate love. Love for God is a matter of commitment. Indeed, in scripture, people never declare that they love God. In the English Bible the exception that proves the rule is the opening of Psalm 18, where the verb is *rakham* – the only use of the qal of this verb and surely one of the strangest and most enigmatic readings in the Hebrew Bible (it perhaps follows Aramaic usage, where the word refers to commitment). The converse may be less true; scripture is less reticent in attributing emotion to God’s relationship with us, which may also be suggestive about being a parent or a leader or a teacher. But the Song’s particular portrayal of relationship is misleading when applied to God. The allegorical interpretation of the Song thus fails a standard traditional test for such interpretation, that it should fit the way other parts of scripture speak more directly. Love’s shafts are fiery, flames of Yhwh (8:6). If human love reflects God’s love in this respect,[[6]](#footnote-6) this is a frightening fact. Other parts of scripture imply that God is always reaching out for us and wanting to be in relationship with us, like a parent in relation to children. It is not a normal part of this relationship for God to be like a beloved whom you are not sure you will be able to find.

Perhaps looking for an emotional love relationship with God is a form of displacement; we look to God for something that is actually designed to appear in our human relationships. As with many other aspects of life, no doubt God is prepared to live with this displacement on the part of people who do not have other human beings with whom to enjoy this love relationship. But there are dangers in the displacement. We may be avoiding the human relationships that are designed to be the context in which these human capacities are realized, perhaps because these are more fraught with risk and vulnerability. Getting it off on God provides us with a cheap form of intimacy. In the Song, there are at least two sorts of reasons for the pain of the relationship, reasons that come from other people’s attitudes and reasons that come from inside the individuals. In our own relationships, at least, even the first kind may be externalizations of the latter, of the hesitations that lie inside the individuals: the tension between seeking intimacy and fearing intimacy. Further, we may be avoiding the form of love appropriate to a relationship with God: the acceptance and the making of sacrifice. Our love for God is more about letting God make a sacrifice for us and committing ourselves to trusting God and living for God than about woozy feelings. The allegorical understanding of the Song might (or might not) have been an edifying way for medieval celibates to use it, but it is important for people (especially men) in the cultures to which I have referred not to evade the implications of its literal meaning. Whereas Helmut Gollwitzer suggested that sexual love is here celebrated as “its own legitimation,”[[7]](#footnote-7) Murphy declared that on the contrary it is to be treasured because it is a vital part of God’s gracious design for human life.[[8]](#footnote-8) While Murphy is right theologically, as far as the Song itself is concerned Gollwitzer seems to me to have the better of the argument.

## 3 The Nature of the Relationship

So what does the Song tell us about the sexual relationship? It opens with shocking directness: *May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth* (1:2). The poems draw – or rather yank – readers straight inside the physical relationship between two people. Like many movies in their portrayal of such relationships, the Song is not saying human beings should be like this, but just that we are, and that readers had better own the fact – in the way that much of Proverbs does not say that life should be a certain way, simply that it is. Secular poetry, music, films, and novels presuppose this, even though religious literature usually does not.

The poems open with the woman’s words, notwithstanding this being “the Song of Songs which is *lishĕlomoh*.” Whatever the meaning of that expression,[[9]](#footnote-9) it is striking that the phrase introduces poems in which a woman speaks first and longest, and often takes the initiative in the relationship. Whereas NIV’s headings describe the man and the woman as “lover” and “beloved,” the poems point readers to a more egalitarian understanding of the relationship, questioning any assumption that the man has to make the approaches or set the pace (TNIV has “he” and “she’). A woman is free to take the initiative and a man is free to expect that. Both express appreciation and longing for the other.

The poems do not prioritize the physical over the relational, nor the relational over the physical. They assume that the two belong together, like body and spirit. They do reflect the fact that physical appearance may be more important to a man than to a woman; the man spends more time talking about this than the woman does. They invite a woman to be aware of that. She may make the most of it if she wishes, but she might also be wary of it. If David Clines is right that the Song is a male fantasy,[[10]](#footnote-10) then one of its values to women will be its revelations regarding what men are like. Women could of course discover this by watching movies or sitcoms, but these are not in the Bible and therefore have less formal authority than the Song of Songs, even if they have more effect in shaping behavior than the average book of the Bible does. On the other hand, the Song’s angle may suggest it was written by a woman; whether or not this is so, it does (sometimes) represent a woman’s perspective.

The presence of the Song in scripture implies that the kind of relationship it celebrates might be significant for people in general, not just for young people on their way to marriage. One reason is that “Everybody’s searching for intimacy…. Everybody’s hurting for intimacy.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The Song is significant (for instance) for married people with their lives focused on their children and their work, and middle-aged people whose children now have children of their own, and people whose spouse is handicapped or has died, and in Western culture, for people who have stayed single or have divorced. In Western culture, the attractiveness of romantic comedies for people in all these situations parallels this. So does the capacity of middle-aged or old people to fall in love again when their marriage has gone stale or they have divorced. There is nothing time-limited about falling in love.

In the good old days, people often had marriages arranged for them by their parents or by the community, or had to get their family’s involvement even if first they did get drawn to one another. If they were lucky and/or the job was well done, they could then fall in love with each other (cf. Gen 24). Western cultures do not have the benefit of that arrangement, and many people stay single not out of choice but because their numbers never come up in the lottery. But because people are still single in their thirties or forties or fifties, that does not mean they stop longing for such a relationship. Of course there are also people who stay single by choice and are happy that way, so we must not assume that every single person wishes they were married. And there are many married people who wish they were single. But in traditional cultures, no doubt many arranged marriages never led to love, and the way we organize relationships in our culture means that many people are not going to get married.

In California, where “Everybody’s Searching for Intimacy” was written,[[12]](#footnote-12) everybody is avoiding intimacy. This is not to deny that at some level they are longing for it, but the problem is that they are also hurting for it. A therapist friend pointed out to me, when I was dismissive about their avoiding intimacy, that half of them have been brought up in broken homes and they are disabled for intimacy. As another country song puts it, “Nobody love, nobody gets hurt,”[[13]](#footnote-13) but people are in no position to take the risk. The Song invites readers to summon up the strength to take the risk. Sitting under the surface of their lives, if not on the surface, most have the kind of feelings described in the Song. These poems, like the romantic comedies, bring them to the surface in some way. One might have thought that was a risky thing, but maybe the existence of the poems in scripture suggests it is a good thing, or perhaps just a thing that happens. One reason is that if readers do not own these feelings, the feelings may catch them out as they find expression in inappropriate ways. They may, for instance, fall in love when they are not in a position to do so. The Song gives expression to intrinsic human needs. It presupposes the human need for loving recognition and acceptance, for the sense of being “special,” which makes self-acceptance more possible. The girl describes herself as dark-complexioned or darkened by the sun, but pretty (1:5-6); she is OK about herself because she is loved. She is only a common wild flower; but to him she is a lovely flower against the background of weeds (2:1-2). He is not an impressive tree compared with the giant redwoods; but as far as she is concerned, he provides shade and produces lovely fruit (2:3). They are just an ordinary couple, but their love turns them into a prince and a princess (3:6-11).

The Song invites its readers to recognize that relationships are always on-the-way and continue to involve risk. They cannot be taken for granted. The couple spend much time in ecstatic enjoyment of each other’s presence, but/and also spend much time in pained grief at separation from each other. This separation makes them feel ill (2:5; 5:8). They long for meeting and seek each other anxiously. She does not know where she may find him (1:7-8). She can only dream of their being able to live together (3:1-5). She dreams of missing him or losing him and of her dreams turning to nightmares, as happens in a romantic comedy (5:2-8). He seems to have disappeared: is he off with someone else (6:1-3)? There is an “if only” about the relationship, caused by the need to observe society’s constraints (8:1-3). She still wants him to make her the most valuable thing in the world to her. Her passionate, jealous love for him (’*ahabah* is explained by *qin*’*ah*) is fierce as death, as strong as Sheol. He will not be able to resist it. Vast floods could not quench those fiery flames it flashes (8:6-7). Experience suggests this is not true of every passionate love; people do fall out of love. In the Song the point is that when you are the subject or the object of such love, you cannot do anything to make yourself stop loving the other person or to make the other person stop loving you. And as you cannot decide when it goes, so you cannot decide when it comes, and therefore (for instance) try to buy it (8.7b).

“I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me” (7:10). There are a number of ways of reading the statement, all of which may be instructive. The word “desire” comes only twice elsewhere. In Gen 4:7 it is unequivocally negative, referring to sin’s desire for Cain. Does the Song realistically acknowledge the way our selfish instincts spoil even the idyll of love? There is no Hollywood ending here, then. Butin Gen 3:16 “desire” could be neutral/positive: the woman will have a natural sexual desire for her husband, but he will dominate her sexually and in other ways. On the other hand, the negative connotations of the man’s domination and of the word “desire” in Gen 4 could imply that in Gen 3 it refers to lust. Song 7:10 could then be implying that sexual desire (here the man’s) is okay, or could be accepting the fact that love and lust are mixed and not be fretting at it (cf. 7:12: “There I will give you my love”?).

Notwithstanding the impossibility of controlling whether another person falls in love with one, or of making oneself fall out of love, the poems talk about not arousing love till the right moment (e.g., 2.7). To some extent, then, at least, we can control whether love gets aroused. This implication contrasts with the mythology of Western culture, which takes love as an irresistible force. Yet the Song also talks about having one’s heart captured (4.9); that is, it recognizes that one person may overwhelm another whether the latter wants this or not. The poems keep asking for love not to be aroused before its time, but they themselves arouse love in a way that for many readers may be before its time.

They also raise the question whether people can rekindle love when the flame seems to have gone, in a way that also fits the exhortation in Prov 5:15-19. People do find security in a love relationship that leads to marriage, but once they take that for granted, they may imperil it, in several senses. Part of the thrill of the not-yet-married relationship is its not-yet-ness. It has the excitement of being on a journey. This is also one of the attractions of having an affair. So there is a sense in which couples need not to take each other for granted and need to see themselves as still on the way. One image in the poems is that of wanting to get away from everyone else (2:10-13), and couples need that.

The first time I gave a nascent version of this paper in a lecture, a man in his thirties rather scornfully suggested that I was taking these expressions of teenage feelings too seriously, but he then told his discussion group (I later heard) that he said this because was uncomfortably aware that his marriage no longer had the spark of the Song. He knew I was raising the question whether he might have a vision for rekindling love. In papers they wrote, three middle-aged women in the class also described their interaction with the Song. For one, getting attracted to another man was making her try to rekindle love in her relationship with her husband; she was succeeding, and getting a response. The second as a single person had been caused to revisit the great love of her life and do some more coming to terms with the fact that that relationship came to an end, and yet somehow find hope for this part of her. The third had been abused as a teenager and had never been at ease about sex, but the Song had been giving her a new vision or hope for her sexual relationship with her husband. The Song thus came to her, too, as a gospel text, a promise about God’s vision for us that may only be fully realized at the resurrection, but in some sense will be realized. She reminded me of an aspect of my experience with my handicapped wife. When Ann was first diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a pastor invited us to live with the comment once made to Jesus (at a wedding), “You have kept the good wine till last” (Jn 2:10). Our experience over the years has been that Ann has lost more and more of her mobility and mental abilities, and I do not know what that pastor’s words might mean. Yet I know they are somehow true, and not just in the slightly trivial sense that everything will be okay in heaven. Indeed, thinking about the Song makes me reflect on the way over the past year or two I have been trying to let myself feel the warmth of feelings for Ann that I used to have, which is a painful business because it reminds me of happier times and because I can never know whether there is any response from her; but it still feels also a good thing.

If the Bible-believing patriarchal communities of southern Africa or of the U.S. south or of the flourishing Korean church were to read the Song of Songs, it could surely be a liberating text that suggested a vision of an alternative style of being. No doubt it would cause some trouble, too, as liberation does.

1. First published as “So What Might the Song of Songs Do to Them?” in *Reading From Right to Left* (Festschrift for David J. A. Clines, ed. J. C. Exum and H. G. M. Williamson; London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), pp. 173-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. From a review of Nick Hornby’s novel *High Fidelity* as quoted on the blurb of his novel *About a Boy*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, e.g., David J. A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 25-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. So Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *A Song of Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *The Song of Songs*, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. EVV imply that *l* suggests authorship, but BDB notes that this is a rare usage and other meanings of the preposition seem more likely. It might mean “to”; were these poems offered or dedicated to Solomon? It might mean “belonging to’ (cf. “Belonging to the Korahites’, Ps. 42); in other words, they count as Wisdom. It might mean “for”; for Solomon to use or learn from? Since he was especially inclined to use sexual relationships as a political device, this would be a telling hope. It might mean “on behalf of,” with similar implications. It might mean “about,” with some irony. The succeeding references to Solomon (1.5; 3.6-11; 8.11-12) suggest “about” or some similar meaning rather than “by.” My guess is that (as BDB implies in connection with *l* in the Psalms) the meaning of the expression changed over the centuries. If it originally suggested “to” it may have come to mean “belonging to” and then “by,” when people wanted to associate the authorship of works within scripture with someone famous. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See “Why Is There a Song of Songs, and What Does it Do to You If You Read It?” *Interested Parties*, pp. 94-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. From a song by Billy Steinberg and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. It was sung in its hit version by The Corrs, who are Irish, but Steinberg is a Californian. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A song by Bobbie Cryner, known to me in the version by Suzy Bogguss. They are allegedly words written out by the orthographically-challenged would-be robber of a 24-hour supermarket who meant to write “Nobody move, nobody gets hurt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)