Song of Songs: Lady Wisdom Speaks to Solomon?

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**Introduction**

A pseudo-Solomon nudged me from Wisdom 8: “I desired to take her for my bride and became enamored of her beauty,” Ecclesiasticus[[1]](#footnote-1) also detailed attributes that compare her majesty to trees, plants, and exotic aromatics. Lady Wisdom herself declares: “those who drink of me will thirst for more.” There were echoes of the Song of Songs in these passages which evoked the question: did the scribe imagine Solomon singing the Song for his “desired bride” Lady Wisdom? However, the predominant woman’s voice in the Song hints the opposite: Is this Lady Wisdom’s song to Solomon? Hence emerged the questions in the abstract, my *process* for analysis. I found a tightly woven song offering many patterns, only one I will pursue here.

The thesis of this paper is: “The Song of Songs is a wisdom riddle about Solomon and his foreign wives. The riddle: “Who is the lover, who is the beloved, and who awakens love?” was crafted to be abstruse. But an approach from three viewpoints intersected in one unavoidable answer: Solomon and his foreign wives with Lady Wisdom as the awakener.

The three viewpoints that I found illuminating were: first, the nature of biblical poetry; second, the nature of Hebrew wisdom; and third, the myth of Solomon.[[2]](#footnote-2) Orientation to these viewpoints will be presented; followed by a discussion of four themes which they show support the thesis.

**First of Three Viewpoints is Poetry**

TheHebrew translation of the Song is difficult without a preconceived context. I contend this is intentional, reflected in the choice of lyrical poetry as the medium. Poetry has a peculiar kind of power. Because it is terse, uses ellipses, and eliminates many orienting cues such as prepositions and clear identification of speakers; it demands engagement of creative reaction over rational thinking. It can evoke emotions powerful enough to clarify truths and compel people to action. The start of more than one revolution- including the recent Arab Spring- is credited to poetry. Thus poetry is the editing of reality in order to trigger an emotional response which makes the truth easy to remember and difficult to avoid.

Even though there is no specific Hebrew definition or word for poetry, Kugel has identified three poetic devices that are commonly utilized in the Hebrew Bible: sharpness in parallelism, strangeness, and reworking of traditional themes. These devices plant the triggers.

Assuming “*If A is So, What’s More, B*”[[3]](#footnote-3)the A-B parallelism of the Song confounds us with lines like: “Your name is like purified oil, therefore maidens love you.”[[4]](#footnote-4) “Sharpness” [[5]](#footnote-5)signals potential subtleties hidden inside the two juxtaposed clauses. This sharpness is meant to spur to action or prick the conscience of the listener. It is a defining feature of most scripture- so Hebrews 4:12 “Indeed, the word of God is…sharper than any two-edged sword…” and Ecclesiastes 12:11 “The sayings of the wise are like goads...” As Lady Wisdom’s polemic “For Solomon” the Song’s sharpness is in irony: tainted by apostasy, Solomon’s name was not pure and *this* is why maidens loved him.

Kugel asserts pre-modern poems did not set out to forge new conventions. Their originality consisted of new variations within a conventionalized framework[[6]](#footnote-6)- such as the use ofconventions*[[7]](#footnote-7)* patterned after Egyptian[[8]](#footnote-8) love poems. Therefore, it is important to decode words and “B” phrases which disappoint and baffle. In a love poem we might expect references to kisses, caresses, wine, perfumes, vineyards and exotic fruit, but not mothers, watchmen, companions, military banners and shields, or shepherds and flocks. These clashes create the poetic device of strangeness.[[9]](#footnote-9) An Egyptian love poem would not equate necks with battlements or facial features with pomegranates. Is this skin tone or texture? To add confusion, elsewhere pomegranates are prized as mere ripe fruit.[[10]](#footnote-10) To decode this, both internal convention and external cultural context are needed: whereas in Egypt one might pelt a lover with a ripe pomegranate chanting fertility or binding spells, pomegranates in Israel symbolize the Land and long life; ironically what Solomon gave up for pomegranate-templed wives.

Beneath its “love banter”, the Song is loaded with traditional themes. These include: worship references- such as high places, incense, praise phrases, oaths, purity, and goddess associations. There are references to military or foreign alliances such as towers, watchmen, exotic imports and places, warriors, names related to peace; there are symbolic references to the land of Israel like the flora and fauna and place names, as well as allusions to The Creation in gardens, and to Wisdom in the scenes with mothers, daughters, and the little sister; also allusions to the “foreign or strange woman” in skin tones, peering through lattices, roaming about at night, calling out, use of myrrh and spices, drunkenness etc. There are themes from Solomon’s Old Testament narrative and legends outside the canon. This use of traditional references disrupts our sense of ease with the “love language,” yet the Song of Songs undeniably still works subconsciously by arousing its audience’s own desires.

This is what shapes The Song of Songs into the form frequently used by Solomon’s challengers- the riddle- and also by Jesus- the parable. While the conscious mind battles out layered meanings, emotional responses provide the goad and allow clarity to emerge. Or not. Because as Jesus said, sometimes we don’t have ears to hear.[[11]](#footnote-11) The riddle fits Solomon and his Foreign Wives, but also fits a declaration between equal partners, or a story a fearful virgin evolving into an empowered wife, or an allegory for God’s steadfast love. Poetry intentionally allows for double entendre, for both/and interpretations.

**The Second of Three Viewpoints is Wisdom.**

Scholars often associate the Song with wisdom literature without elaborating on the connection. Like poetry, wisdom was not a category of Hebrew literature until academic scholarship made it so; therefore it’s necessary to review some assumptions.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Wisdom is the puzzle of the universe, the cosmic mystery tested concretely. Wisdom has a special intersection with time- it is a key waiting for the right door. Proverbs warns us to seek wisdom and we will not be fools, but Ecclesiastes shows that we need a mediator in order to successfully cope with reality. Each wisdom book has its own contribution but ultimately the only thing we can know is that God sets the limits of our understanding and gives us relationship instead of answers, ask Job.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Wisdom literature exposes a worldview- theology, ethics, attitudes towards humans and nature etc. and Israel’s worldview- the very context of the Old Testament- is not secular.[[14]](#footnote-14)

For Israel, wisdom was critical to their relationship with the Promised Land. It had to define a relationship to the seasons and guide them in obtaining earthly sustenance in a way that included their relationship with Yahweh[[15]](#footnote-15) and precluded the pagan fertility beliefs surrounding them.[[16]](#footnote-16) We see in Ecclesiastes and Job that they couldn’t find answers for all the questions they had- they had no choice but to be faithfully dependent on God, a religious solution not an intellectual one. [[17]](#footnote-17) Therefore Wisdom literature is also salvific in that it reveals our limitations which are set by God and most critically, demonstrates that we cannot save ourselves.

Thus the Old Testament context of the Song of Songs addresses mystery and cannot do otherwise and is religious and cannot be otherwise. Does the Song address any of Lady Wisdom’s theologically significant functions: cosmic order, school learning, divine intelligence, mediation between the world and Yahweh, or God’s creative involvement in saving the world? [[18]](#footnote-18) Are passages like “Do not awaken love until she pleases” or “Love is strong as death; Jealousy as severe as Sheol” wisdom sayings?[[19]](#footnote-19) In a religious context, the confounding of the wise regarding love is particularly treacherous.[[20]](#footnote-20) If we are reminded from Solomon’s story, goaded by the Song, that Yahweh is active and jealous; and that religion is not negotiable- this is wisdom.

**The focus can be tuned further by Solomon’s story, the third viewpoint.**

In classical mythological terms Solomon represents the “Golden Age” of Israel in Jerusalem. It is a significant moment, they are in the Land, God has given them peace; it is time to draw all nations to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. But instead it led to a time of super powers dominating Israel. Why? Because they forgot.[[21]](#footnote-21) Once Solomon received more than he ever dreamed of having (1 Kgs. 3:11), he forgot to walk in the ways and keep the commandments of Yahweh. The legend of Solomon is tragic and most of the literature in the Bible describing this tragedy is ironic.

Psalm 72 and 127 are dedicated, as is the Song, *lišělōmōh* “for Solomon.” Yet line by line point by point we can show how he is in stark contrast of the ideal king portrayed in 72, and as for 127 there was no rest or happiness: Solomon’s people toiled in slavery, his wives may have participated in child sacrifice, and his children rebelled against him- in the end he was put to shame by Yahweh.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Women and desire play a powerful role in the OT narrative of Solomon, beginning with his mother Bathsheba. Along with David’s kingdom Solomon apparently inherited his earthly father’s erotic impulses; though not his natural bent for understanding, or his fear of the Lord. Every step of Solomon’s journey he was challenged by sexually-charged women. As went the king’s women- so went the kingdom. A dispute over Abishag the Shunammite threatens his rule and puts his brother to death, his mother negotiates his coronation and is seated at the right hand of the throne,[[23]](#footnote-23) immediately after Yahweh grants him his wish for wisdom-two prostitutes challenge him over a child[[24]](#footnote-24) the first event mentioned after the kingdom is established[[25]](#footnote-25) is a marriage alliance with Pharaoh’s daughter.[[26]](#footnote-26) She warrants her own house just after Yahweh’s temple is built.[[27]](#footnote-27) High officials are married to Solomon’s daughters.[[28]](#footnote-28) The Queen of Sheba[[29]](#footnote-29) comes to test him with riddles. He wrangles with kings and queens (Hiram and Sheba), seemingly casting spells over them, and amasses wives, great wealth, and peace in the land but in direct violation of Yahweh’s people and laws.[[30]](#footnote-30) Israel as a people and Yahweh as their God are scarcely mentioned. Eventually “love” is a direct rival for Yahweh, Solomon’s love for his foreign wives disposes him to follow their gods. [[31]](#footnote-31)

After Solomon, 1 Kings mentions women as playing a role in the downfall in another way- as the wives and mothers of his adversaries[[32]](#footnote-32) Mothers are mentioned seven times in the Song, given the influence of mothers on children regarding religion, the mother referred to in the Song could easily bring to mind a foreign mother-in-law with undue influence and or refer to goddess worship.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The description of the beloved man in the Song is in terms of exotic luxuries[[34]](#footnote-34) and perhaps it is his earthly success[[35]](#footnote-35) that accounts for the appeal of Solomon as a grand myth outside the canon. Many of the legends that make up the myth of Solomon outside the canon - including Jewish midrash, and the Qu’ran- contain details that may connect to the Song. In these myths his war host- made up of jinn, Liliths, humans, wild beasts, birds, and reptiles-[[36]](#footnote-36) is controlled with a signet ring or ‘seal’. He commands and rides on the wind into battle and allows his son by the Ethiopian Queen, presumably Sheba, to abscond with the Ark of the Covenant.[[37]](#footnote-37) Song 6:12 refers to suddenly being put over or above chariots, which may be a reference to flying on the wind and in 6:16 the winds are given a direct command.

Solomon’s magic powers are left out of the Old Testament narrative for a reason. Israel knows that there is no secret formula for success in life, no magic spell, only pursuit of Lady Wisdom, which will leave you with unanswerable questions. They know that the only real power rests in Yahweh and relationship with Yahweh, the jealous one. A canon written for God’s redeemed people -laws, wisdom teaching, narrative, prophetic books, and their canticles- “have that people’s *continuing sinfulness as a key focus*.” [[38]](#footnote-38) Is there a salvific lesson in Solomon? Even when you have more than a man can dream of- wisdom, peace, prosperity- you are still powerless to save yourself. Yahweh gave Solomon his success and perhaps that was not an accident, because it is not likely God just forgot that power is an aphrodisiac.

**Examples**

In light of these viewpoints, four overarching themes in the Song, brought into focus by the nature of poetry, by Hebrew wisdom as innately religious, and by Solomon’s legend, support the Song as Lady Wisdom’s polemic against Solomon’s infatuations.[[39]](#footnote-39) The themes are not separated by chapter or verse, the entire Song is tightly bound, each line building on or foreshadowing multiple allusions.

**First Theme is** **intoxication of love entangled with worship**.

Poetic devices are used to trigger comparison between the intoxication of love and the ecstasy of worship; echoing Solomon’s love relationships which became a substitute for obeying Yahweh. Strange use of phrases echo religious language: “rejoice and be glad” and “the upright love you”[[40]](#footnote-40) referring not to Yahweh but to love extolled more than wine. The comparisons of love with wine subliminally link romantic love and intoxication.[[41]](#footnote-41) 5:1 encourages the lovers to imbibe deeply, in 7:2 the woman’s navel is never lacking of “mixed wine”- implying the ongoing ability to intoxicate her lover, and in 7:9 the mouth provides something smooth that puts the lover to sleep, a drunken stupor recalled again in 8:2.

At least a score of instances of intertwining of worship, eros, and intoxication are found –allusions to both pagan worship and Yahweh.[[42]](#footnote-42) There are references to the man and woman coming from “high places”; Doves are a coded theme for both love and spirit,[[43]](#footnote-43) clefts in the rock remind us of Moses; The woman states: “My beloved is mine, and I am his”[[44]](#footnote-44)- a strong parallel with “I will be your God and you will be my people.”[[45]](#footnote-45) The Jerusalem daughters are adjured by oath in a familiar religious rhythm.[[46]](#footnote-46) The watchmen of the city were traditionally teachers of scripture and enforcers of Oral Law.” [[47]](#footnote-47)

Because poetry is aimed at an emotional atmosphere, not a rational appeal, there isn’t necessarily a one-on-one symbolic correspondence with religious specifics. An elasticity of interpretations is poetically intentional, by layering meanings, Lady Wisdom makes the point that intoxication with *eros* leads not only to desire for the lover but to corruption of religious dedication. These allusions should grate on a religious person who is used to similar language being used in a sacred context.

**Second Theme: Women as a military tool.**

Military references in the Song seem baffling. Solomon reigned during a time of peace but Solomon’s wives undoubtedly played a political role in alliances with their nations of origin. The banners over them could represent their foreign affiliation, if not their religious affiliation. Just a few years ago the conflict between Sudan and Chad was mitigated by the marriage of the daughter of a Sudanese Janjaweed Rebel leader to the president of Chad. A huge dowry was exchanged.[[48]](#footnote-48) Solomon’s marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh may have had a similar motivation in securing Egypt as an ally. When the man in the Song goes out to look for signs of spring,[[49]](#footnote-49) traditionally the time men go out to war, there are signs of war – foxes, chariots, dances of armies- but he substitutes admiration of his beloved for inclination to battle - reminiscent of Solomon’s father David. The bride is literally as awesome as an army with banners. [[50]](#footnote-50) The little sister sequence in 8:8-12 could be interpreted as the story of securing Jerusalem and taking in shekels from a vineyard procured in such an alliance.

**Third theme:** **Foreign women and choice of path:**

Shepherds of flocks are symbols for leadership, and taking the right path is consistently used for making the wise choices that lead to life not death. The Song inquires “where do you pasture your flock,” and flocks are constantly in view.[[51]](#footnote-51) Solomon led his flock astray, and the cause was pasturing them among the lilies- code in the Song for women.

Cues that the women of the Song are similar to the “foreign or strange women” warned about in wisdom literature include: she is unfamiliar with the local trails, the beams of their houses[[52]](#footnote-52) refer to exotic not local woods;[[53]](#footnote-53) she is unusually bold; her eyes captivate[[54]](#footnote-54) and confuse[[55]](#footnote-55) him, she is a caster of spells[[56]](#footnote-56) and “the king is captivated by (her) tresses.” She uses myrrh and is adorned with jewelry. Myrrh has more than one implication- it is a perfume, it is used as an offering, but also for embalming the dead- implying the wrong path.[[57]](#footnote-57) Scores of lines in the Song[[58]](#footnote-58) suggest the temptress that draws men off the path.

**Fourth Theme: Solomon and loss of the Land.**

Reminders of the Land are prominently woven throughout the Song; in places like: Carmel, En-gedi, Sharon, Mount Hermon.[[59]](#footnote-59) In local flora and fauna: [[60]](#footnote-60) vineyards and wine, milk and honey, doves, gazelles and hinds, daughters of Jerusalem, figs, lilies of the valley. And in reminders of Israel’s story: the wilderness and the columns of smoke echo Israel’s journey in Exodus; reference to the tower of David casts the shadow of Solomon’s father; Mandrakes remind us of Rachel and Leah and Jacob’s story;[[61]](#footnote-61) choice fruits- first fruits- over the doors, stored up, remind us of the marking of doorposts at Passover for the first born.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Solomon’s crown from his mother [[63]](#footnote-63) is literally the Land, his kingdom. The woman’s body becomes defined as the land- a reminder that Solomon has literally exchanged the Land for her. Solomon is mentioned by name six times. We cannot underestimate the dedication of the Song as “For Solomon” against his iconic position as the symbol of Biblical wisdom[[64]](#footnote-64)- he is the Song’s unavoidable backdrop and if we miss the implications of his presence, we miss a valuable lesson about the limits of human wisdom and human power. We should particularly take heed, we are more like Solomon than like David or the ancestors.

**In Conclusion**

The Song is part of Israel’s narrative, a polemic on Solomon and his foreign wives. It belongs with other Wisdom literature because in it Lady Wisdom asks us to question the truth about desire, love, and our ability to control our own relationships. Left to explore are: connections with Passover, interpretive implications for contemporary sex and romance, the woman’s seeming unhappiness, the closeness to death for women in love, the number of women portrayed, is it Eve or Lady Wisdom under the apple tree in 8:5, pagan worship practices and double entendre, was the Song’s scribe commissioned by an abandoned wife?

The Riddle is solved for us in the last lines “Hurry, my beloved, And be like a gazelle or a young stag...” The one you are thinking of when you read these lines gives you *your* answer. In Jewish tradition it was God, for some scholars- Egyptian goddesses, for young people in Landy’s study group- potential fiancés, for some of us - our spouse. Lady Wisdom, the muse of the Song, compels us – she awakens our *eros* with her words. We know the adjuring not to awaken love is ironic- we can’t control who we fall in love with any more than Solomon could. And this should be enough to put the fear of God into anyone.

1. Ecclesiasticus identifies personified wisdom with the Torah or Law. (in chapter 24) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Particularly those aspects integral to the overarching Old Testament narrative from Genesis to Kings [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kugel, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 1:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kugel, 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kugel, 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Longman III (140) 4:1-7 comprises a form-critical unit- called a *wasf* in recent years. *Wasf* is an Arabic term, which simply means description, and its application to biblical scholarship originated with the research of J. G. Wetzstein in the nineteenth century. Wetzstein was not a biblical scholar, but rather a German diplomat living in Syria at this time. As he attended local weddings, he noted similarities between the customs and songs of the day and what he read in the Song of Songs. ..he talked about songs where the groom and the bride would describe one another’s physical beauty as a prelude to lovemaking…Since this time other more ancient analogies to these descriptive songs have been discovered and described, but they have none the less retained the name wasf in the literature. The others are 5:10-16; 6:4-6; 7:2-8. Only 5:10-16 is a description of the man by the woman. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Keel, 24-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kugel, 89-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. (4:4; 7:4) (4:3; 6:7). (4:13; 6:11; 7:12). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. or that message isn’t for us right now. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. used to measure if the Song fits. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Only God knows creation’s precise elements and timing (Job 28:23-27 puts it succinctly). For Jews and Christians our seeking and finding wisdom is through our mediated relationship with God. Von Rad puts it this way: wisdom records “an unfinished and even unfinishable dialogue about man and world.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Dell, 153Wisdom writings are not divorced from religion because the Israelite world view could not be divorced from religion. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Von Rad puts it (62): “The experiences of the world were for (Israel) always divine experiences as well, and the experiences of the God were for her experiences of the world.” Adds Goldingay: “It is the natural world which is the context of Israel’s little history, blessing which is God’s ongoing gift that brings it to its fulfillment, and wisdom which shows them the way to grasp that gift and to live the life of God’s redeemed creatures in God’s created world.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Goldingay, [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, P 208 “Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes say “These are the rules for life, try them and find that they work.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Johnson, She Who Is 90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. They might seem true but categorizing them as wisdom literature in itself does not seem to shed any light on their specific meaning or intended application. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. (Prov. 30:18-19)Many scholars have made the case for the Song as either demonstration of God’s love for Israel or a validation of intentional *eros*. Both concepts are useful but when we look at the strange and sharp bits these interpretations do not solve the whole puzzle of the Song. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Brueggemann’s answer is that “The central temptation of the land for Israel is that Israel will cease to remember and settle for how it is and imagine not only that it was always so but that it will always be so.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This clash between the ideal and the real is an example of what Brueggemann refers to as the tension between the experience of hurt and the grand dream. The Song shows us this same kind of tension regarding expectations of love and desire. Solomon couldn’t have objected to the Song or Psalms 72 & 127, but we can imagine the goad they could have been to him. And they should make us extremely uncomfortable, we in the West are much more like Solomon than we are like David. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Alluded to in Song 3:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. (1 Kgs. 3:16-28), [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. (2:46) (notice this is not acknowledged as ‘by the hand of Yahweh, who put down David’s enemies) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. (3:1) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. (9:24). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This not his first marriage since it is noted in chapter 4 which [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Handy, 447. Linda S Schearing, “A Wealth of Women” “Subsequent readers of the Second Testament, however, found references to the Queen of Sheba in Acts 8:27 (with its reference to Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians) and in Matt 12:42 = Luke 11:31 (with its mention of the ‘Queen of the South’ who ‘came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon’).

    (mentioned in both testaments [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. (particularly Dt 17:14-20). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. in 1 Kings 11:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. (11:19, 11:26-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. (6:9-10).After Solomon, (2 Kings 17:10) “the people set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles on every high hill and under every green tree; there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. (2 Kings 23:13) King Solomon had built high places for the abominations Astarte, Chemosh, and Micom. Mountains are included five times in the Song (not counting high places like Carmel, Mount Gilead, Mount Hermon) and could easily serve as a double entendre for an erotic reference as well as an allusion to the beloved man- Solomon- coming down from offering worship in a high place. Trees also play a significant role in the Song and both mountains and trees are sometimes mentioned with spice names that imply incense offerings. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. (Song 5:10-16) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Brueggemann, The Land, 85. During Solomon’s reign of peace Israel’s world view was fundamentally altered. Brueggemann points out that the Land during Solomon’s era is secured by strategy and manipulation, it becomes property and not a gift. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Lassner, 165. (Out of the Targum Sheni to the Book of Ester) (demons & spirits), (one of the female night creatures listed in the Dead Sea Scrolls)- both of whom - [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Kebra Nagast* (“Glory of Kings,” Ethiopic national saga, ca 6th-14th centuries CE). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Goldingay: “Saving acts of God in history were needed because the insights and energy of the created order itself were insufficient to solve the problems caused by humanity within the created order, but even the acts of God in history do not solve these problems. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Here, the word *eros* will be used for romantic longing and sexual desire for a loved one. Due to the number of characters present, the Song is assumed to be a performance piece heard by an audience, not an individual love poem read privately between lovers only; this assumption is validated by the tradition of reading the Song at Passover, when loss of the land is especially poignant. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. 1:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. 1:2 and 4:10 could be interpreted to say “(your) love is more intoxicating than wine”. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Keel, 91-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. (Luke even uses them for Jesus baptism); [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. In 2:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. columns of smoke in the wilderness evoke the Exodus 3:6, of Exod. 13:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. A significant example is the Jerusalem girls being asked three times (2:4, 3:5, 8:4) to swear an oath “by the gazelles and hinds of the field” which scholars consider to be a circumlocution or wordplay on “by (Yahweh) Sabaoth *צבאות* and by God Shaddai שׁדי אלהים .” The Septuagint (LXX) uses “by power and might of the field” here and Keel (91-93) has documented the place of gazelles and deer in goddess icons as being representative of the joys of love and sexuality. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. 501, Goldingay, Psalms (*Midrash on Psalms*, 2:310) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The leader was given 26 million dollars in dowry (the daughter received 1 million in gold and jewelry). Chad was no longer attacked by the Sudanese Janjaweed. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. (2:11-13; 7:12; ), [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. (6:4) The man sees the woman in association with pharaoh’s chariots (1:9), he often seems to come to her from far away (1:7; 2:8; 2:17; 4:8; 4:16; 5:2; 5:6-9; 6:1; 7:11; 8:1), her very features are seen as associated with battlement defenses (4:4; 7:4), his warriors accompany what some see as the traveling bridal coach (3:7) guarding against unnamed terrors. At 6:12 potential war trouble maybe is surveyed and “the Shulammite” may refer to the peace made by marriage alliance- she is literally the cause of peace if the union occurs. The noble people beg her to let them gaze at peace- Solomon is encouraged in 6:13 to take a look at this proposed peace instead of the battle between armies. What he finds in 7:1-12- a beautiful dancing prince’s daughter- satisfies him, he falls in love- the wine goes down smoothly- and everyone can sleep in peace again. This scripturally integrated reading which assumes the riddle is about Solomon resolves many of the strange and sharp military references. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. If we take from 2:1-2 that “lily” refers to a woman, then it is not a far leap that “he is pasturing his flock among lilies” means the women are key to where he has led his flock. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. ( 1:17) (cedar, cypress) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. and shepherds (1:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. (1:15) seeking kisses from the man and asking him to join her [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. (6:5) [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. doves from her eyes are easily signs of “love” but also of spirits. and even Luke uses this symbol for Jesus baptismal anointing. By 6:9 the woman has become the dove; and in 7:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. He peers at her through the windows and lattice (2:9) – another symbol associated with women to beware of. Bodner, Proverbs 7, “Robert O’Connell locates this passage 7:6-9 within seven instances of the ‘woman and the window’ type-scene (R. H. O’Connell, “Proverbs VII 16-17: A Case of Fatal Deception in a ‘Woman in the Window’ Type-Scene,” *VT* 41 (1991): 235-41. The type-scenes he lists are: Gen 26- Abimelech looking down at Isaac ‘laughing’ with Rebekah, Josh 2- Rahab and the spies, Judg 5 – the mother of Sisera anxiously awaiting her son’s return, 1 Sam 10- Michal facilitating the escape of David, 2 Sam 6- Michal subsequently despising David, 2 Kings 9 – Jezebel communicating with Jehu son of Nimshi, and the present scene in Prov. 7.) A common thread in these type-scenes, he notes, is ‘sexual attraction, or its frustrated potential.’ (ibid, 237) For the Jezebel scene in 2 Kings 9 he refers the reader to ‘the sexual imagery associated with eye make-up in Jer 4:30; Ezek 23:40.’ Even so, another theme shared by these texts is ‘deception and the threat of death,’ which is a cogent aspect of this narrative event. P 118 “If this passage is part of a larger intertextual network, it signals the audience to observe certain patterns of action, in this case especially deception or possible death-threats embedded in the language.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. She goes about seeking him in the city at night (highly unusual- you can’t help but think of wicked women) and calls to him in the high places where he cannot possibly hear her – a Lilith like quality- although Solomon was supposed to be able to control the Liliths. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. 1:5-6- it roams from Jerusalem to wilderness to king’s palace [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. pastures and flocks (1:7-8; ;) wine (1:2,4,6; ), doves (1:15; 2:14; 6:9),gazelles, daughters (1:7), (1:7), (2:13), [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Gen 30:14 “In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field. And brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.’ 15 But she said to her, ‘Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son’s mandrakes also?’ Rachel said, ‘then he may lie with you tonight for your son’s mandrakes. 16 When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, ‘You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.’ So he lay with her that night.17 And God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.”…sixth son, daughter Dinah…22 then God remembered Rachel…she bore Joseph. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. rose of Sharon (2:1), lily of the valley, Carmel (7:5), pomegranates (4:3; ) the wilderness (3:6) with the columns of smoke is reminiscent of Israel’s journey to the Land; reference to the tower of David (4:4) brings Solomon’s father into the atmosphere of the poem; milk and honey (4:11; 5:1); in 6:5 we hear Your hair is like a flock of goats that have descended from Gilead. Mandrakes remind us of Rachel and Leah and Jacob’s story (7:13) and all the choice fruits over the doors, stored up, remind us of the marking of doorposts at Passover for the first born, the first fruits- the choice fruits (7:13). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. 3:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. (1:1,5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Solomon could easily have been reminded by a number of passages about his father David, who he wanted to be like but wasn’t. Some scholars think this is not enough to warrant his participation or that he is a “distant figure” in the poem but I disagree

    **According to John Goldingay**: “EVV imply that לֽsuggests 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-64)