“IN CLOUDS OF MYRRH AND FRANKINCENSE”:
THE SONG OF SONGS AS WISDOM POETRY

by

MARGARET ALICE MILLER

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Various interpretive approaches have been taken to the Song of Songs. One current approach views the Song as a lyric poem influenced by the ancient Israelite wisdom tradition. This is the general approach taken in my thesis. However, I introduce wisdom influence in the Song from a different perspective. My perspective on wisdom influence in the Song of Songs flows from an analysis of the poetry of the Song. Aspects of Turner’s theory of liminality inspire my method of analysis. It is also informed by the interpretive possibilities of the poem's original Hebrew language and by feminist observations. Five groups of images form the basis of this analysis: images of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters. These images are examined for their literal and figurative connotations and followed as they move through the “worlds” of the Song: the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. This method of analysis offers a way to explore the complex and beautiful poetry of the Song of Songs. I suggest that new insights into wisdom influence in the Song may be drawn from this analysis.
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INTRODUCTION

Various interpretive approaches have been taken to the Song of Songs. One current approach views the Song as a lyric poem influenced by the ancient Israelite wisdom tradition. This is the general approach taken in this thesis. However, I introduce wisdom influence in the Song from a different perspective. My perspective on wisdom influence in the Song of Songs flows from an analysis of the poetry of the Song. Aspects of Victor Turner’s theory of liminality inspire my method of analysis. It is also informed by the interpretive possibilities of the poem’s original Hebrew language and by feminist observations. This method offers a way to explore the complex and beautiful poetry of the Song of Songs. I suggest that new insights into wisdom influence in the Song may be drawn from this analysis.

Turner’s theory of liminality has been applied to wisdom texts by several scholars. The studies of Camp, Perdue, Clements and Van Leeuwen all show that liminality is a feature of wisdom in these texts. Turner’s theory of liminality also provides the impetus for my exploration of wisdom influence in the Song of Songs. The key is Turner’s observation that movement is a significant indicator of liminality. Applying this perspective, I engage in a literary analysis of images that demonstrate the Song’s rich and complex sense of movement. Five groups of images form the basis of this analysis: images of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters. These images are examined for their literal and figurative connotations and followed as they move through the “worlds” of the Song: the natural world, the
social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. This analysis leads to understandings of wisdom influence in the Song that do justice to the Song’s unique poetic vision.

The methodology used to explore the Song of Songs is a synthesis of three approaches. First, my method of literary analysis draws upon Turner’s theory of liminality. More specifically, Turner’s idea that movement is an indicator of liminality is the basis for my analysis of the Song’s imagery of movement. Second, throughout the analysis of the Song’s imagery I pay close attention to the original Hebrew language. Semantic and conceptual issues, questions of context, grammatical forms and the language’s rich interpretive possibilities are explored. And third, I make observations that are influenced by the work of feminist scholars. While I do not follow one single feminist approach in this thesis, throughout this thesis I highlight the feminine quality of the Song’s imagery as well as other feminine aspects of the Song. As feminine scholars have not focused on wisdom influence in the Song, I think that these observations contribute to the scholarship. This synthesis of three methodological approaches provides a coherent way to enter into and explore the rich poetry of the Song. New insights into wisdom influence in the Song are drawn from this exploration.

The idea of conceptualizing the imagery in terms of four distinct worlds is based on an observation of Fox. Fox notes that the lovers commonly use metaphorical language drawn from nature (and elsewhere) to describe each other. These images “become independent of the referents and memorable in themselves. In other words, what do you remember more vividly after having read the Song – a boy and a girl who look a certain way, or black goats filing down a distant mountainside, perky young gazelle twins, heaps of wheat hedged by lilies, and so on? As the poem proceeds, the images, given an importance independent of their referents, combine to form a cohesive picture of a self-contained world” (italics mine) (Michael V. Fox, The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs [Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985], 329). I expand upon this idea, seeing the imagery in the Song in the context of four distinct yet interconnected worlds: the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world.
Part One - Background

Part One of my thesis situates the Song of Songs within the context of an ongoing scholarly discussion of how best to define ancient Israelite wisdom. In the first section of Part One, I review scholarly discussion around these definitions. Views presented range widely. Some scholars argue that the definition of wisdom is in danger of becoming too broad and that a limited definition should be established. Other scholars argue that the subject of wisdom is still very open and fluid and that definitions must continue to be flexible. Attention is paid to the work of feminist biblical scholars, who present views that challenge assumptions underlying the study of wisdom and seek to expand definitions.

In the second section of Part One, I discuss wisdom-influenced literature. Examples of studies into wisdom-influenced texts are provided and the wide-ranging definitions of wisdom influence are presented. I then describe how the Song of Songs fits within this context of wisdom influence. I note that feminist scholars have not focused on the Song as wisdom literature. I then show that numerous scholars have discerned the influence of wisdom in the Song of Songs. Typically these scholars frame wisdom influence in the Song in one of four ways: ideas specific to didactic wisdom, ideas specific to speculative wisdom, the literary theme of a search for wisdom, and a theology of creation are discerned in the Song. These approaches are defined and scholars who support framing wisdom influence in these ways are reviewed. Difficulties related to these approaches are dealt with in my analysis and conclusion.
Part Two - Methodology

In Part Two of my thesis, I describe my methodology. My literary analysis is drawn from Turner’s theory of liminality. Therefore, in the first section of Part Two, I present an overview of Turner’s theory. Turner’s contention that liminality is holistic, ambiguous and feminine is emphasized. This overview is followed by a review of scholars who have applied Turner’s theory of liminality to a variety of wisdom texts. While these scholars take different approaches, their studies show that liminality is a feature of wisdom in these texts.

In the second section of Part Two, I describe my method of literary analysis. The key to this analysis is Turner’s observation that movement is an indicator of liminality. Therefore, I identify images in the Song of Songs that convey a sense of movement. Images of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters are identified and carefully examined for their literal and figurative meanings. I explain that these images move in complex and evocative ways through the Song. In order to conceptualize this process I suggest placing the imagery in the context of four worlds: the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. These four worlds are described as distinct yet interconnected. This methodology takes into account the many interpretive possibilities of the original Hebrew language. Feminist observations that highlight the feminine connotations of the Song’s imagery and other matters of feminist interest are also an important facet of this method. This methodology offers a way to explore the Song’s unique poetic vision. New approaches to wisdom influence in the Song of Songs also emerge using this method.
Part Three - Analysis

In Part Three I present my analysis of the Song of Songs. The images of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters are carefully traced through the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. Exploring the many possibilities of these images offers a way to enter into the unique poetic world of the Song of Songs. The fascinating and evocative patterns that arise during this analysis give a sense of a world that is liminal – it is holistic, ambiguous and feminine. Based on this analysis, new understandings of wisdom influence in the Song emerge.

Part Four - Conclusion

Part Four of my thesis begins with my personal perspective on wisdom influence in the Song of Songs. I then suggest two new approaches to wisdom influence in the Song. The first of these approaches flows from a discussion of the Song’s liminality. I propose that describing the Song as liminal has important implications for how wisdom influence in the Song is construed. The second approach to wisdom influence in the Song is based on an interpretation of the poem’s imagery of movement, and in particular the movement of the dance. I compare movement imagery in the Song of Songs to the work of modern women choreographers. For example, I relate the poetry of the Song to the choreography of Twyla Tharp.

Unrelated single lines of movement began to seem chaotic and monotonous to me, crossing one another without purpose. We began exploring movement to learn ways of building harmonic possibilities. We inverted phrases, turning movements upside down, flexing instead of
extending the feet, changing circular motions from en dedans to en dehors, rotating parallel positions out and vice versa. The permutations were endless.

I suggest that viewing the movement imagery in the Song in light of the approach of these women choreographers points to the presence of a uniquely feminine wisdom in the Song of Songs.

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2 Twyla Tharp, *Push Comes to Shove. An Autobiography* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 99. Twyla Tharp is one of the most influential and innovative choreographers of the 20th century. In 1965 she began the dance company Twyla Tharp Dance; this company merged with American Ballet Theatre in 1988. Her work is an iconoclastic mix of avant-garde and classical elements. Natural movements like running and skipping are combined with traditional ballet; classical music is combined with pop tunes or silence.
PART ONE

BACKGROUND:
THE ISRAELITE WISDOM TRADITION

This study of the Song of Songs takes place within the framework of investigations into the Israelite wisdom tradition. In the first section of Part 1, I review the scholarly discussion around definitions of wisdom. The approaches of feminist biblical scholars are highlighted. In the second section, I discuss how the Song of Songs fits within the context of wisdom-influenced literature. I note that feminist readings of the Song have not focused on the text as wisdom literature. Other approaches typically frame wisdom influence in the Song in one of four different ways: ideas specific to didactic wisdom; ideas specific to speculative wisdom; the literary theme of a search for wisdom; and a theology of creation are discerned in the Song. In the course of my discussion I raise problems with these ways of viewing wisdom influence in the Song. I argue that none of these positions does justice to the unique poetic vision presented in the Song of Songs.

The Israelite wisdom tradition – definition and scholarly discussion

Arriving at a clear definition of the Israelite wisdom tradition has proved to be difficult.³ Von Rad observes that “with the increasing number of scholarly works in this

³ The designation 'wisdom tradition' stems from the frequent use of the term 'wise' (םוֹד) in Proverbs, Job and Qohelet. (The Masoretic canon includes Job, Qohelet and Proverbs in the wisdom corpus. The Septuagint adds Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon). מוד has a wide semantic range, and
field, the concept ‘wisdom’ has become increasingly unclear.”

He asks “whether the attractive code-name ‘wisdom’ is nowadays not more of a hindrance than a help, in so far as it disguises what stands behind it rather than depicts it properly.”

On the one hand, the definition given to wisdom may be so broad as to be unuseable. For example, Whybray observes that “the interests of scholarly observation are not served by the application of the word ‘wisdom’ to every manifestation of the ability to use one’s brain in ancient Israel.”

On the other hand, scholars argue that it is important that the definition not be

reviewing some of these meanings helps convey the breadth and complexity of the tradition. The verb שָׁדַי usually refers to the state of being wise (Prov 9:12, 23:15; Job 32:9). The noun, חַכָּם, which is feminine, refers to a state of wisdom (Prov 1:20, 9:1, 14:1). As a term to describe Solomon, who is often referred to as an important figure in Israelite wisdom, חַכָּם refers to cunning (1 Kgs 2:6-9), moral discernment (1 Kgs 3:9, 12), understanding justice (1 Kgs 3:28), encyclopaedic knowledge (1 Kgs 5:9, 14), literary skill (1 Kgs 5:12), and ability as a ruler (1 Kgs 5:21). Solomon was thought to have received his wisdom directly from God (1 Kgs 5:9). But wisdom was usually something that was learned and cultivated through conduct in the world. The wise man listens to advice (Prov 12:15) and answers questions discreetly (Prov. 17:27-28, 26:16). The teachings of the wise are held in high esteem (Prov 13:14). חַכָּם is also used in special senses, such as the understanding of dreams and omens (Gen 41:15, 39; Dan 1:17) and special skill or ability possessed by artisans such as Bezalel (Ex 36:2, 8) (H.-P. Müller, “חַכָּם,” TDOT 4:364-385). חַכָּם is frequently used in reference to the arts of poetry and song. The “composition and the rendering of songs, which were often done by the same individual, required a high order of skill. Thus the women skilled in lamentation at funerals are called hakamoth by Jeremiah (9:16)” (Robert Gordis, The Song of Songs and Lamentations [rev. and aug. ed.; New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974], 14).


5 von Rad, Wisdom of Israel, 8.

6 R.N. Whybray, Israel’s Intellectual Tradition (BZAW 35; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 3. Whybray initially argued against the existence of an institutionalized ‘wisdom tradition.’ : “But there is no evidence of an institution existing through the centuries which acted as the vehicle of this ‘tradition.’” He viewed the authors of the wisdom canon as “a separate ‘tradition’ only in the sense that they concerned themselves more than the majority of their contemporaries in an intellectual way with the problems of human life” (Whybray, Israel’s Intellectual Tradition, 70). However, this view changed somewhat—in subsequent articles he acknowledges the existence of a wisdom tradition (R.N. Whybray, “The Sage in the Israelite Royal Court,” in The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East [ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 133-140; R.N. Whybray, “The wisdom psalms,” in Wisdom in ancient Israel [ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H.G.M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 152-60).
too rigid. Murphy describes wisdom as an “elastic concept.” Scott also refers to the fact that wisdom is not a “static tradition” and points to its “many facets” and “extraordinary variety of meanings.” Crenshaw observes that the “multiplicity of wisdom’s representatives and answers must not force one into a definition that is so comprehensive that it becomes unusable.” He suggests that we keep in mind when studying the wisdom tradition and wisdom literature that “categories in biblical literature have considerable flexibility.”

Feminists engaged in biblical studies have introduced a new dimension to the study of wisdom. These scholars have challenged the assumptions underlying its study and introduced new lines of enquiry. Traditionally, scholars have “tended to describe


the so-called ‘wisdom literature’ of the Hebrew as the domain of the hypothetical ‘wise’: males, urban, elders in role if not in age.”

But feminist scholars state that the “enlargement of the scope of ‘wisdom,’ together with the questioning of its traditionally-defined character as male, opens up new possibilities for reading such instructive and/or philosophical texts; and for including other texts in the discussion.”

In drawing


Scholars attempting to understand the wisdom tradition have dealt with very complex challenges. A brief review of one key areas of research - the place of Israelite wisdom in the context of a broader ancient Near Eastern wisdom tradition - will give a sense of these challenges and some proposed solutions.


The difficulty in clearly defining the extent of this cross-cultural influence is reflected in the controversy surrounding the possible appearance of the Egyptian Ma’at in the biblical wisdom literature. The figure of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 8 has been compared to Ma’at, the Egyptian goddess of social and cosmic order, justice and probity. In one Egyptian text Ma’at is depicted as the first creation of the creator god; in other texts she is described as god’s daughter and as the cosmic plan by which he creates (Carole R. Fontaine, “Proverbs,” *HBC*: 495-517). But while Ma’at is an important figure in Egyptian wisdom, she is less active than the biblical Woman Wisdom; unlike Woman Wisdom, “[Ma’at] gives no speeches; she is rather talked about, not talking, in the Egyptian literature” (Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 162). It may be that Near Eastern goddesses other than Ma’at inspired the creation of Woman Wisdom. The Egyptian goddesses Hathor and Isis may also be part of the iconographic heritage of Woman Wisdom, and there could be links between Wisdom and the Babylonian Ishtar, the Sumerian Inanna, and a Canaanite vine-goddess (Fontaine, “Proverbs,” 502).

On a more conceptual level, the Egyptian concept of ma ‘at may have influenced Israelite wisdom’s concept of a harmonious order underlying the world. For the Egyptians, “ma’at is right order in nature and society, as established by the act of creation, and hence means, according to the context, what is right, what is correct, law, order, justice, and truth” (Siegfried Morenz quoted in Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 115). This sense of an ordered universe is an important theme in biblical wisdom. However the value of comparing Israelite wisdom’s conception of order with ma’at is questioned. “Is the Israelite understanding of wisdom to be identified with the Egyptian mind-set concerning ma’at? ... [Many] scholars have adopted this view: a kind of ‘ma’atizing’ of biblical wisdom has taken place. Such an interpretation is very tempting, since it is clear that Israel was influenced by Egyptian wisdom .... In both cultures, the right ‘way,’ similar values, and an emphasis on the good ‘life’ are cultivated. And this is to be transmitted by teaching. But the transfer of a mind-set from one culture to another calls for careful scrutiny” (Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 161).
attention to the male perspective of the texts and introducing new areas of enquiry, these scholars have greatly broadened the parameters of the investigation into Israelite wisdom.\textsuperscript{14}

Study of the wisdom tradition includes the exploration of wisdom influence in literature outside the canon of Proverbs, Job and Qohelet.\textsuperscript{15} This line of enquiry was

\begin{itemize}
  \item Feminists engaged in the study of Israelite wisdom have opened up several important areas to scholarly enquiry. These include the figure of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs. Woman Wisdom has been studied in relation to Ancient Near Eastern goddess traditions (for example, see Fontaine, “Proverbs,” 495-517); as an important figure in feminist theology (see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Wisdom Ways. Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation} [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001], and Silvia Schroer, “Wise and Counselling Women in Ancient Israel: Literary and Historical Ideals of the Personified hokmā,” in \textit{A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature} [ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 67-84); and as a role model for real-life women in Israelite society (see Claudia V. Camp, “The Female Sage in Ancient Israel and in the Biblical Wisdom Literature,” in \textit{The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East} [ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 185-204). Also studied is the הָרְECH הָרְECH. This figure of ‘Woman Folly’ in Proverbs has been examined in terms of her psychological, social, historical, religious, cultural, and symbolic significance. (There are several articles related to the הָרְECH הָרְECH in \textit{A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature} dealing with the הָרְECH. These include Meike Heijerman, “Who Would Blame Her? The ‘Strange’ Woman of Proverbs 7,” 100-109, and Gale A. Yee, “‘I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh’: The Foreign Woman (issa zara) in Proverbs 1-9,” 110-126). Feminist scholars are also very interested in social roles of women in a wisdom context (see Claudia V. Camp, “The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel,” \textit{CBQ} 43 [1981]: 14-29; in \textit{The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East}, see Rivkah Harris, “The Female ‘Sage’ in Mesopotamian Literature [with an Appendix on Egypt],” 3-18; and Carole R. Fontaine, “The Sage in Family and Tribe,” 155-164). The depictions of women in wisdom literature have also attracted the interest of feminist biblical scholars (see Athalya Brenner, “Some Observations on the Figurations of Women in Wisdom Literature,” in \textit{A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature} [ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 50-66).

\end{itemize}
popularized by von Rad, who concluded that “the Joseph narrative is a didactic wisdom-story which leans heavily upon influences emanating from Egypt.”16 Others followed in his footsteps, finding that “[evidence] of successive stages in a wisdom tradition appears sporadically from the … ‘proverbs of the ancients’ quoted in narratives and prophecy to the esoteric wisdom of apocalyptic, and the scribal learning of the interpreters of the Torah.”17 In addition to the Song of Songs, wisdom influence has been discerned in Isaiah, Amos, Genesis 2-3 and Esther.18 Gunkel notes that the psalter includes “several poems which should be considered as wisdom poetry.”19

Difficulties similar to those encountered in defining wisdom are seen in the efforts to define wisdom influence. On the one hand, it is argued that there is a danger that this line of enquiry may result in the parameters of wisdom literature becoming too broad. Crenshaw saw in the search for wisdom influence what he considered to be an

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For a general discussion of ‘wisdom influence’ and references, see Murphy, The Tree of Life, 97-110; and Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 165-183.

unfortunate "trend toward transforming wisdom into a kind of insatiable 'Sheol figure' who swallows the rest of the Hebrew canon." Yet on the other hand scholars acknowledge that because of wisdom's range of meaning a certain flexibility must be allowed. For example, Kuntz noted the difficulties in establishing "exact parameters of psalmic wisdom ... for sages, prophets and priests not only share some of the same formal elements of language, but they also focus on common concerns." And in his study of wisdom influence in the psalms, Luyten argues that it is "more meaningful to study the dimension of wisdom in the psalms. This allows us to keep in the forefront certain characteristics of the psalm which are important for the literary, culturally historical, or theological evaluation without demanding a procrustean decision regarding the psalm's *Sitz im Leben* or literary classification."

**Wisdom influence and the Song of Songs**

Various interpretive approaches have been taken to the Song of Songs. Until the latter part of the 20th century, there were three main positions with regards to the genre of

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the Song of Songs: allegory, drama and liturgy. The Song is now generally considered to be a work of lyric poetry. But while there is consensus about the Song’s genre, many unanswered questions about the Song remain. There is considerable debate as to whether


Popular in the nineteenth century, the dramatic interpretation sees in the Song either two principle characters and a chorus or three (or more) characters and a chorus. The two character approach generally sees the Song as a pastoral play portraying the simple love of Solomon and the Shulamith; the three character drama includes the lusty and sometimes villainous Solomon, the beautiful and vulnerable Shulamith and a faithful country lover. For a recent dramatic interpretation, see Michael D. Goulder, The Song of Fourteen Songs (JSOTSup 36; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986).

The liturgical interpretation dates from the early twentieth century and focuses on the linguistic and thematic parallels between the Song and Akkadian and Sumerian texts and, in particular, the parallels between Tammuz/Ishtar and Solomon/Shulamith. The ancient Near Eastern themes of the sacred marriage, dying and rising king, Ishtar’s search, as well as courting and marriage songs, are thought to be reflected in the Song. For example, see Theophile J. Meek, “The Song of Songs: Introduction and Exegesis,” IB 5:89-148.

The term lyric poetry is a fairly general term, loosely used to describe a particular kind of poem so as to distinguish it from narrative or dramatic verse. While the range and variety of lyric poetry is broad, it generally expresses the thoughts and feelings of the speaker in a personal and subjective manner (J.A. Cuddon, The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory [4th ed.; London: Penguin Books, 1999], 481-4). Viewing the Song as allegory, drama or liturgy present similar problems. In all of these approaches there is a presumption of narrative structure, some plot development and fixed characters. However, a real storyline does not exist in the Song and there is no real unfolding of a plot. There is some degree of consistency in the relationship of the lovers, as it is shown in the monologues and dialogues, but they themselves are never clearly identified. The advantage of viewing the Song as lyric poetry is that it takes the Song on its own terms – the Song is studied in its present form and questions of literary integrity, structure and meaning are addressed without relying on additions, re-ordering and omissions. (For a comprehensive critical review of the allegorical, dramatic, liturgical and lyrical positions see M. Timothea Elliott, The Literary Unity of the Canticle [European University Series 23; Bern: Peter Lang, 1989], 1-32).
the 117 verses of the Song of Songs stand as an anthology composed by a single or multiple poets or as a single poem of a relatively few units composed by a single poet. The poem’s figurative language and structure have been studied in an attempt to determine whether or not the Song can be viewed as a poetic unity. The date of the Song continues to be the subject of conjecture. And the poet of the Song of Songs is also unknown. There are, however, strong indications that the author of part or all of the Song is a woman. Scholars point to the poem’s predominantly female voice and perspective as evidence of female authorship. Parallels between the Song and works of arts created by women also support the argument that the poet of the Song is a woman.

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26 Gordis observes that because it is “lyrical in character, with no historical allusions, most of the songs are undateable” (Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 23). Pope states that “the dating game as played with biblical books like Job and Song of Songs ... remains imprecise and the score is difficult to compute. There are grounds for both the oldest and the youngest estimates” (Marvin Pope, *The Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 27). Three primary issues have been considered in the dating of the book: the connection of the book with Solomon (c. mid-10th century); geographical references with specific historical connotations (such as Tirzah in 6:4); and linguistic considerations (such as suspected Persian loan words like *سرین* in 4:14) (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 3-5; Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 23-24).

27 Brenner analyses the distribution of male and female voices in the Song. She finds that 53% of the voices are female and 34% are male; the remaining 13% belong to the chorus or are uncertain (Athalya Brenner, “Women Poets and Authors,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 87-91). Brenner observes that while there is no reason why a man could not have written the Song, she posits that several poems “are so essentially feminine that a male could hardly imitate their tone and texture successfully” (Brenner, “Women Poets and Authors,” 91). Goiten suggests that the poet was a woman living in the time of Solomon. “The Song was composed in honour of King Solomon by a young woman, daughter of a nobleman (*ndyb*), who was brought to his court in order to adorn his parties by her singing” (S.D. Goiten, “The Song of Songs: A Female Composition,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 65). While recognizing that “conclusive evidence will ever be
While recognizing that the Song is a work of poetry, numerous scholars also see the influence of the wisdom tradition in the Song of Songs. To date, feminist readings have not focused specifically on wisdom influence in the Song. Brenner sees the Song as wisdom literature only in a very general sense. Observing that the arts of poetry, music and dance have been referred to as "branches" of wisdom, she observes that

poetry, performed to musical accompaniment or recited, with or without dancing, on joyous as well as sorrowful occasions, was an integral part of Hebrew life. Shorter and longer poems, distributed throughout the biblical books, bear

lacking," LaCocque argues that the "amount of evidence ... works in favor of a female author" (André LaCocque, Romance She Wrote. A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs [Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press, 1988], 40). He sees in the Song's celebration of female sexuality evidence of a creative woman who is resisting social norms. Munro sees indications which "strongly suggest female authorship, a suggestion which however must remain an intuition in the absence, up till now, of confirmatory evidence" (Munro, Spikenard and Saffron, 147).

The Song is described in the context of a strong tradition of women's arts. In the Bible, wise women are specifically described as serving as mourners, writing and performing their own laments (Jer 9:16). "Their 'art' or skill required training in the poetic conventions of ritual mourning, which some have related to the high literary traditions of the epic poetry of their neighbours" (Carole R. Fontaine, "The Social Roles of Women in the World of Wisdom," A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 45. Bekkkenkamp and van Dijk see the composer of the Song as part of a tradition of women singers. Based on biblical references to women singers and quotations from their songs, they conclude that "it is very likely that we are dealing with women's poetry in the Song of Songs" (Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Fokkelien van Dijk, "The Canon of the Old Testament and Women's Cultural Traditions," in A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 79). Bekkkenkamp and van Dijk also note that the creation and performance of poetry, music and dance are often attributed to women; they point to Ex 15:20-21; 1 Sam 18:17, 21:12, 29:5; and Judg 5 as examples of the artistic creativity of women. Meyers observes that women performers are described in the Bible in connection with dances, the hand drum and singing (Carol Meyers, "Miriam the Musician," in A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994] 207-230). Meyers also notes, "Because women in many cultures are the creators of love poetry, and because of various literary features of the Song of Solomon that seem to indicate a specifically female perspective, a strong case can be made that it is a product of women's culture (Carol Meyers, ed., Women in Scripture. A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000], 313).

Brenner provides an overview of feminist approaches to the Song in The Song of Songs (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

witness to that fact. Some passages explicitly define poetry as ‘wisdom’ ....
There is no reason to exclude the SoS from this broad classification. 31

Many scholars who see the influence of the wisdom tradition in the Song are more
specific than Brenner in their claims. Wisdom influence in the Song is typically framed
by these scholars in one of four ways: ideas specific to didactic wisdom; ideas specific to
speculative wisdom; the literary theme of a search for wisdom; and a theology of creation
are discerned in the Song. In the following section I provide an overview of each of these
aspects of wisdom and present a review of those scholars who see these aspects of
wisdom reflected in the Song. I provide difficulties with these positions in the course of
this discussion.

Didactic wisdom

Didactic wisdom aimed to instruct and provide guidance for everyday life.

Teachings, often in the form of proverbs, educated students to be honest and diligent
(Prov 10:4, 26:14), to demonstrate a sense of responsibility (Prov 10:26, 27:23-27) and to
keep to the path of balance and moderation.

Take heed to the path of your feet,
then all your ways will be sure.
Do not swerve to the right or to the left;
turn your foot away from evil.
(Prov 4:26-27) 32

31 Brenner, The Song of Songs, 82. Brenner suggests that the examination of the Song from the
perspective of female authorship will "supply additional information with regard to biblical wisdom
traditions" (Brenner, The Song of Songs, 83).

32 The Tanakh. Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. 2nd ed. All further
references to the Tanakh are from this translation unless otherwise noted.
Didactic wisdom taught of the patterns and consistencies in the world (Prov 30:18-19) and aimed to bring the student into harmony with this perceived order. The wise believed that, if they diligently practiced the proven principles of wisdom, they would enjoy a happy and prosperous life, and both they and their society would bear the fruits.

Numerous scholars suggest that the Song reveals the influence of didactic wisdom. In support of this position, they point to what is viewed as its instructive tone and its emphasis on the way of order. White highlights Audet’s argument that the sages saw the Song as “instructive of the mutuality of the human love relationship .... The setting of the book, then, is didactic.”33 Song 8:6-7 is pointed to as an indication of the Song’s didactic purpose and wisdom character.

Let me be a seal upon your heart,  
Like the seal upon your hand.  
For love is fierce as death,  
Passion is mighty as Sheol;  
Its darts are darts of fire,  
A blazing flame.  
Vast floods cannot quench love,  
Nor rivers drown it.  
If a man offered all his wealth for love,  
He would be laughed to scorn.

Tromp views Song 8:6-7 as a proverb which was added by a sage who “composed, rewrote and edited the collection of love songs.”34 In a similar vein, Harrison contends that the Song is “actually an extended mashal or proverb which illustrates the richness and beauty of human love, and as such stands firmly within the gnomic tradition of the


Heb. Wisdom lit. (sic).” Munro also sees the Song as having a special sapiential purpose. The presence in the Song of the “daughters of Jerusalem” suggests that it is “a kind of *éducation sentimentale* addressed directly to the young women of the community,” designed to instruct them to be careful and discerning in their responses to young men. In situating the Song within a wisdom framework, Bergant notes that for “it to be wisdom teaching, it must be more than a report of the romantic escapades of the king. It must contain insights beneficial for right living, insights that will enhance human life.” The happiness depicted in the Song is “a by-product of an upright life, a life lived in harmony with the order set by God.” Seerveld views the Song as a didactic tract designed to encourage wayward Israelites to return to the way of order. “The Song, with Solomon as a miserable case in point, not as a villain, was given to teach the sex-saturated populace who had forgotten the Way [= Law, = Wisdom] of the Lord the meaning of faithfulness again.”

Casting the Song of Songs as didactic wisdom is perplexing. The mind-set of didactic wisdom – with its emphasis on instruction, order and systematic enquiry – is utterly foreign to the improvisational, multi-dimensional world of the Song. Indeed, the

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36 Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 147.


38 Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, 5.

didactic wisdom of Proverbs often seems to be a reaction to the Song of Songs. The Song functions on many levels simultaneously in a way that is far removed from the linear thought world of didactic wisdom. Unlike didactic wisdom, the Song is "infinitely defiant of institutional religion's need to impose fixed order, meaning and definition upon experience, to subdue reality to categories." The Song is not ruled by Ma'at, the goddess of order and probity. Hathor, the goddess of music and dance, is a much more likely sovereign.

Speculative wisdom

In contrast to the optimism of didactic wisdom, "speculative wisdom consists of speculations and reflections on man's destiny, criticizes the contradictions between conventional dogmas and actual reality and ponders the problems of retribution and divine theodicy." Didactic wisdom acknowledged that God was a mystery and beyond the capacity of human wisdom to understand (Prov 21:30). But problems with this view

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40 Bekkenkamp and van Dijk observe that "[in] the first seven chapters of Proverbs, particularly Proverbs 7, there are a number of passages which seem to be explicit reactions to (such a song as) the Song of Songs: the same images, often precisely the same choice of words" (Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Fokkelien van Dijk, "The Canon of the Old Testament and Women's Cultural Tradition," in A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 67-85). Daniel Grossberg concurs, noting that "[the] common subject of erotic love, linguistic locutions and literary themes associated Song of Songs and Proverbs 7. The one is a representation of popular love language, and the other is an adaption of aspects of the genre of an arresting wisdom lesson. Song of Songs celebrates a joyful, ideal sexual relationship, whereas Proverbs 7 warns against a perverse and ominous liaison. The Proverbs warning is compelling precisely because the teacher exploits the love lyrics in his didactic narrative poem and then subverts their charm by having the action of the narrative lead to disastrous results for the young man" (Daniel Grossberg, "Two Kinds of Sexual Relationships in the Hebrew Bible," HS 35 [1994]: 24).


42 Shupak, Where can Wisdom be found?, 12.
arose when events in the world did not turn out as would be expected in a universe
governed by a benevolent God - such as when the innocent suffered and the wicked
prospered.

In my own brief span of life, I have seen both of these things:
sometimes a good man perishes in spite of his goodness, and
sometimes a wicked one endures in spite of his wickedness.
(Qoh 7:15)

Initially, the sages attempted to fit the suffering of the innocent into an overall theory of
divine retribution, but it became increasingly difficult for the sages to maintain this
position. An event such as the catastrophic dissolution of the exile led some to reject the
belief in the inevitability of an ordered universe. “A human standard of justice is applied
to God, and it does not work. This situation is often termed the ‘crisis’ of wisdom..., and
the books of Job and Ecclesiastes are the prime evidence.”

43

For several scholars, speculative wisdom is a satisfactory way to conceptualize
wisdom influence in the Song. These scholars see parallels between the Song and the
speculative wisdom of Job and Qohelet in its exploration of the riddle of love, its ironic
tone, and its interest in universal human concerns. Sadgove views the Song as an
enigma, and links it to two “analogous wisdom enigmas as models: Ecclesiastes, and the
central portion of the book of Job.” The Song can “be regarded as an exploration of the
riddle of love, as Job and Qoheleth explore respectively the riddle of suffering and of
human existence.”

44 In Sadgove’s view, 8:6-7 is a “piece of reflective wisdom” and the
climax of the Song, which suggests that “the Song of Songs passed through the hands of


an editor of the wisdom school, who used it as an opportunity to reflect upon the mystery of human sexuality and love."\(^45\) Landy compares the Song to Qohelet, seeing them both as ironic comments on wisdom. "Both perform the same task, and use the same symbolic figure, the type of the most fortunate man, as a means for teaching the worth of limitless wisdom, power and pleasure. Ecclesiastes negates all the warmth and wonder of the Song; in it Wisdom declares itself folly, and exhausts itself in contradiction. In the Song, too ... everything is vanity – except love."\(^46\) Like Qohelet, the poet of the Song "uses the techniques of the wisdom tradition – careful comparison, the classification of experience, exploring and seeking to understand the world – in order to expose its values."\(^47\)

Emmerson also thinks that viewing the Song as speculative wisdom provides a key to its interpretation. While Job and Ecclesiastes look at life’s dark side, the Song celebrates its delights. Job and Ecclesiastes look at life from an individual perspective but have universal human concerns. “So also is the Song. It, too, is personal, portraying the intimate relationship between two lovers, but it speaks to all human life of the giving and receiving of love.”\(^48\) In a similar vein, Childs states that the Song “is wisdom’s reflection

\(^45\) Sadgove, “The Song of Songs,” 246.


\(^47\) Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 30.

on the joyful and mysterious nature of love between a man and a woman within the institution of marriage.”

Framing wisdom influence in the Song in terms of speculative wisdom acknowledges that the poem does not assume a conventional perspective. But the Song of Songs is not interested in taking a position on particular issues, be it the riddle of love or other human concerns. In this respect the Song “differs radically from Ecclesiastes and Job, those other extraordinary texts. It is not a protest poem, it is not anti-patriarchal; rather, it lives in an alternative dimension, as if patriarchy did not exist.”

The poetic vision presented in the Song is more radical than even the speculative wisdom texts.

The search for wisdom

The wisdom texts differentiate between the passive acquisition of knowledge from a teacher and the active acquisition of knowledge through independent observation and examination. In the wisdom literature, the active acquisition of knowledge is often described as a search for wisdom. This search is expressed metaphorically in a variety of ways. Wisdom is compared to precious jewels (Prov 25:11-12). And the search for wisdom is compared to a search for hidden treasure.


51 Shupak describes two “Quest” verbs in the wisdom literature: רָצַע and נְפָנָה. She observes that רָצַע “does not denote the acquisition of transferred knowledge or mastery of given material, but means independent study not subject to any specific authority” (Shupak, *Where can Wisdom be found?*, 69). In tracing the semantic development of נְפָנָה, she notes that “[a]t first it denoted the acquisition of knowledge but came to mean ‘observation’ and ‘investigation,’ thereby diverging from the ancient system of passive acceptance and obedience to tradition” (Shupak, *Where can Wisdom be found?*, 70).
There is a mine for silver,  
And a place where gold is refined.  
Iron is taken out of the earth,  
And copper smelted from rock.  
He sets bounds for darkness;  
To every limit man probes,  
To rocks in deepest darkness.  
They open up a shaft far from where man live,  
[In places] forgotten by wayfarers,  
Destitute of men, far removed.  
Earth, out of which food grows,  
Is changed below as if into fire.  
Its rocks are a source of sapphires;  
It contains gold dust too.  
...

But where can wisdom be found;  
Where is the source of understanding?  
(Job 28:1-6, 12)

The search for wisdom is often conceived of as a search for a woman.\textsuperscript{52} To search for wisdom is to search for a “bride” (Wis 8:2)\textsuperscript{53} or a “sister” and a “kinswoman” (Prov 7:4). The search for wisdom is perhaps most powerfully expressed in the figure of Woman Wisdom. Woman Wisdom herself encourages people to engage in the search (Prov 8:1-4). Wisdom will make herself known to those who have the desire to seek her (Prov 8:17; Wis 6:12-14). And she will generously reward those who earnestly seek her (Prov 8:18-19). Those who desire and earnestly search for wisdom will reap the benefits.

\textsuperscript{52} It is argued that this search for wisdom appears to be exclusively a male prerogative. “[Given] the erotic imagery that surrounds both Lady Wisdom and the 'išša zārdā [in Proverbs], the most profoundly unsettling message that comes across particularly to the female reader is that only man pursues Wisdom like a lover, and it is a woman who seduces him away from her … The Proverbs 1-9 texts leave the female reader with questions that still need to be resolved. Can a woman ever seek and ultimately find Wisdom? Or does she simply suffer the fate of the 'išša zārdā, an object of aversion and ever condemned?” (Gale A. Yee, “I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh,” 126).

\textsuperscript{53} References to the Wisdom of Solomon are from The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha. Exp. ed. RSV. 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed.
Several scholars discern the theme of a search for wisdom in the Song of Songs. They argue that this theme is reflected in the Song's quality of a perpetual search, in its depiction of an affinity between wisdom and eros, and in its language of seeking and finding. Munro observes that the Song, "as has been said many times before, is a perpetual search, a search that is completed only in the finding of the loved one and in the beginning of the search all over again."\(^54\) Murphy observes that the affinity between wisdom and eros found in wisdom literature is also found in the Song of Songs. In the Song, as in the canonical wisdom texts, "the quest for wisdom is a quest for the beloved."\(^55\)

... Sirach tells his students to take hold of Wisdom and not to "let her go" (Sir 6:27), just as the woman in the Song found her lover and would not let him go (Cant 3:4). The one who pursues Wisdom is one who "peeps through her windows" (Sir 14:23), much in the style of the lover in Cant. 2:9. Wisdom is compared to a young bride who will nourish the youth with her food (Sir 15:2-3; cf. Prov 9:5) just as the woman in Cant 7:14-8:2 offers food to her lover. In 51:13ff., Sirach speaks with passion of his pursuit of beloved Wisdom, just as 'Solomon' describes his love affair with Wisdom in Wis 8:2, 'I sought to take her for my bride.' 'Solomon' loved Wisdom beyond all else (Wis 7:10), and he discovered that she responded in like manner; one would find her 'sitting by his gate' (Wis 6:14).\(^56\)

In her study of Proverbs, Camp draws attention to the similarity between the search for wisdom in Proverbs and the search for the beloved in the Song of Songs. The same "loving-seeking-finding language"\(^57\) is found in both. As an example, she compares the

\(^{54}\) Munro, Spikenard and Saffron, 137

\(^{55}\) Murphy, The Tree of Life, 106.

\(^{56}\) Murphy, The Tree of Life, 107.

\(^{57}\) Camp, Wisdom and the Feminine, 100.
man in Proverbs waiting at the door of Wisdom’s house (8:34) to the man in the Song standing behind the wall and gazing in her window (Song 2:9).

The search theme of the wisdom literature has a limited application to the Song. The lovers constantly yearn for and pursue each other in a way that recalls the metaphorical search for wisdom in several of the texts. But reading the Song in terms of this one particular theme misses the rich complexity and many connotations of the lovers’ world. The search theme in the canonical texts lacks the Song’s sense of an endless, elaborate dance. And whereas in the canonical texts it is primarily the man who is enjoined to search for wisdom, in the Song the search for the beloved has a definite feminine bias.\(^{58}\)

Creation theology

Many scholars argue that the wisdom literature appeals to a theology of creation.\(^{59}\) They suggest that creation theology is reflected in the wisdom tradition’s interest in

\(^{58}\) The term “seek” (ψάλλω) is only used to describe the woman’s search for her lover (3:1; 5:6, 6:1). In comparing the search theme in the Song of Songs and Proverbs, Camp observes: “In the Song, it is primarily the woman who ‘seeks and finds’ (though c. 8.13), while in Proverbs, it is the man who is enjoined to do so (8.17, 34-36; cf. 2.3-4) and chastised when he does not (1.28). On the other hand, it is female Wisdom who goes out to call for her lovers in a manner similar to the ‘Shulamite’s’ quests. It is also to her house that she and her lover will retire (Prov 8.34; cf. Songs 8.2)” (Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 99).

\(^{59}\) Scholars making this argument often point to the work of Zimmerli: “If we now try to characterize the theological attitude of Wisdom, we must say: Wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation. That is confirmed by the fact that God, whom the Proverbs cite by His proper name Yahweh, while Ecclesiastes speaks about ‘God’ (‘elohim), never appears as the ‘God of Israel’ nor as the ‘God of the Fathers’ nor as Yahweh Zebaoth, whereas occasionally He can be named ‘Maker’ or ‘Creator’” (Walter Zimmerli, “The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* [ed. James L. Crenshaw; New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976], 316; repr. from *SJT* 17 [1964]). For an overview of creation theology in the context of the wisdom tradition, see Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 118-121.
studying correlations that demonstrate the order and interconnectedness of nature. Even when mankind cannot see or comprehend the workings of the world, the harmony of creation continues to exist. All the “created sphere of the natural world conforms to the plans and intentions of the divine Creator. If there is mystery and disorder it lies, not in the creation itself, but in the weak and imperfect manner by which the creaturely human eye and heart respond to this order.”

For the biblical poet, God created the cosmos like an elegant and well-designed building.

Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? 
Speak if you have understanding. 
Do you know who fixed its dimensions 
Or who measured it with a line? 
Onto what were its bases sunk? 
Who set its cornerstone 
When the morning stars sang together 
And all the divine beings shouted for joy? 
(Job 38:4-7; cf. Prov 3:19-20)

And the world is held together harmoniously and beneficiently by wisdom’s mysterious design (Ps 104:24-25). God is the creator who daily recreates the world (Job 38:12-13), revitalizes the earth (Job 38:24-25) and sustains all creatures (Job 38:39-41; 39:1-30). These poetic images convey the idea that divine wisdom is identified with the design, skill and power of creation. They also convey the belief that the world is intrinsically intelligible and good.

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61 Crenshaw disputes the emphasis placed on creation theology. “The claim that wisdom moves resolutely through creation runs the risk of trivializing the kind of thought underlying the majority of collections in the Book of Proverbs. Perhaps one should qualify this dictum thus leaving room for everyday maxims with specific moral functions, rather than submitting these to the Cosmic ramifications of another kind of wisdom altogether. Both anthropocentric and cosmocentric wisdom probably existed from the beginning” (Crenshaw, *Unresolved Issues*, 225).
This theology of creation is thought by numerous scholars to infuse the Song of Songs. These scholars see creation theology in the Song's inferences that creation is whole and good, that God's presence pervades all things, that male-female relationships are part of the created order, and that creation is a pattern and example for man to follow. Murphy argues that the sages and the poet of the Song "share an intense interest in the created order." But he distinguishes between the wisdom approach as found in Job and Qohelet, which looks at the natural world in an objective, analytical manner, and the approach of the Song, which relishes the subjective qualities of nature. "Lessons from the natural order are still heard and appreciated, but more as musical accompaniment to the inner stirrings of a human heart." Murphy also sees in the Song's depiction of all the varied wonders of nature and the joyful love between a man and a woman an expression of the view that the whole of God's creation is good. In this depiction there is "a vision of God's creation become whole again." Elliott situates the Song of Songs firmly within the framework of creation theology.

The poet of the Canticle respects and affirms the beauty and order placed by God within all creation. He savors the natural beauty of all creatures – plants, animals, and particularly human beings. There is a total lack of any dichotomy between the 'religious' and 'profane' spheres of human life. God, his wisdom, order and presence can be found in all things.

According to White,

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62 Roland E. Murphy, The Song of Songs. A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 67.

63 Murphy, The Song of Songs, 67.

64 Murphy, The Song of Songs, 68.

65 Murphy, The Song of Songs, 103.

66 Elliott, Literary Unity, 263-264.
[the] "theology" of the Song reflects the human attempt to deal responsibly with the male-female relationship as a gift of the created order ....

The mere absence of God's name in the Song does not denote the work as "non-theistic" literature. On the contrary, the Song was appropriated, or even edited, by the wise men of Israel who sought to understand and celebrate the male-female relationship as a part of God's creative domain. The Song, therefore, celebrates the human capacity to love as ordered by the creator. To this extent, the Song of Songs describes the human attempt to come to terms with sexual love - part of the natural and social world. The "theology" of the Song participates in the broader scope of wisdom theology: that which participates within the framework of God's creation.67

And Sadgove observes that while, the Song's imagery of springtime renewal is in one sense part of the language of love, "its incorporation into the orbit of wisdom thinking would have imported to it a specific theology of creation, the wisdom theology of the self-revelation of creation as pattern and exemplar to man ... [With] its distinctive doctrine of creation, wisdom can disperse with the use of the divine name altogether, and yet remain indisputable (sic) Yahwistic."68

Casting wisdom influence in terms of creation theology touches upon the poem's sense of the interconnectedness of all spheres of life. However, the difficulty with framing the Song in terms of creation theology is suggested by the term "theology."

Theology refers to the study of God and God's relation to the world. But the Song is not

67 White, Study of the Language of Love, 133-134.


Viviers observes not a creation theology but what he calls "eco-delight" running through the Song of Songs. "The Song simultaneously ... delights in Earth and all its inhabitants. This 'eco-delight' goes hand in hand with the deep feelings humans have for each other. Humans have 'eyes for Nature' as much as they have 'eyes for each other'. Instead of Israel's general 'cool' attitude towards Nature, the attitudes of the lovers speak of warmth and heartiness" (Hendrik Viviers, "Eco-Delight in the Song of Songs," in The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions [ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 154). Viviers argues that the Song depicts a mystical approach to nature. "Nature's worth is taken a step further by ... focusing on the mystical aspect of Earth and the Earth community, adding 'ultimate' value to it" (Viviers, "Eco-Delight," 152).
God-centred. "The religious nature of the song, if we can call it that, is not expressed in God-talk (theology) but in language and symbolism taken from the daily life in a village and from nature." The Song presents a view of a reality that weaves together the natural world, the social world, the world of lovers and a spiritual world. This reality is not dominated by any one perspective. To cast this reality in terms of a theology limits the Song’s unique poetic vision.

Framing wisdom influence in the Song of Songs in terms of these aspects of wisdom raises a variety of difficulties. The emphasis of didactic wisdom on instruction, order and systematic enquiry is foreign to the multi-faceted poetry of the Song. Like speculative wisdom, the Song has an unconventional perspective. But the Song is not interested in addressing specific issues and its presentation of a world beyond patriarchy is more radical than even the speculative texts. Instances of the search theme in the wisdom texts do not share the Song’s sense of the pursuit as an endless and elaborate dance. And in contrast to the wisdom texts, in the Song it is primarily the woman who does the searching. To view wisdom influence in the Song in terms of creation theology touches upon the poem’s depiction of the interconnectedness of life. However, to cast the Song’s perspective as a theology is both misleading and limiting. The difficulty common to all these approaches is that they do not take into account the unique poetic vision presented in the Song of Songs. There is also inadequate recognition of the Song’s

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69 It is unlikely that the term יַנַּחַל in 8:6 should be understood as containing the name of God. “While it is likely that —yah derives from ‘Yah,’ the short form of ‘Yahweh,’ this ending long ago lost its association with God’s name, and became simply a suffix denoting intensity” (Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, The Song of Songs. A New Translation [New York: Random House, 1995], 213).

70 Bekkenkamp and van Dijk, “Women’s Cultural Traditions,” 79.
distinctively feminine quality. In my view, a way of framing wisdom influence that recognizes the Song’s poetic vision and feminine quality is required. In my analysis in Part 3, I introduce such an alternative.
Before turning to my literary analysis of the Song of Songs I will present my methodology. The main impetus for my analysis is Turner’s theory of liminality. Therefore, in the first section of Part 2, I introduce Turner’s theory. Turner’s contention that liminality is holistic, ambiguous and feminine is emphasized. I then review those scholars – Camp, Perdue, Clements and Van Leeuwen – who have applied his theory to wisdom texts.

In the second section of Part 2, I describe in detail how I intend to incorporate Turner’s idea that movement is an indicator of liminality into a literary analysis of the Song of Songs. I reiterate that attention to the Hebrew language and feminist observations are both important facets of this analysis.

Using elements of Turner’s theory as methodological tools in a literary analysis of the Song presents a way to explore the poem’s unique vision. Insights gained using this method point to new ways of understanding wisdom influence in the Song of Songs.

**Turner’s theory of liminality**

In developing his theory of liminality, Turner drew upon van Gennep’s study of rites of passage. Van Gennep described the three phases which an individual or group

moves through during these rites: separation, margin (limen) and aggregation. In the
first phase, the individual is separated from their regular, fixed place in society. Once
this has occurred she or he enters a liminal stage, during which few if any of the previous
social elements are present. In the third phase she or he is reincorporated into society in a
new position. Turner’s particular focus was on the second, liminal, stage.\textsuperscript{72}

Turner is primarily interested in liminality in social contexts.\textsuperscript{73} However, he
recognizes that a work of art can also be liminal. A liminal work of art “has a multivocal
character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many ...
levels simultaneously”.\textsuperscript{74} This way of perceiving and organizing reality is counter to
what is generally considered to be normal. This radical conception of reality is
essentially holistic, ambiguous and feminine. The holistic nature of liminality is
described by Turner in terms of two contrasting models of society.

All human societies implicitly or explicitly refer to two contrasting social
models .... The first model is of a differentiated, culturally structured,
segmented, and often hierarchical system of institutionalized positions. The
second presents society as an undifferentiated, homogeneous whole, in which
individuals confront one another integrally, and not as ‘segmented’ into
statuses and roles.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} While Turner studied several specific passages and their accompanying rites (such as birth,
puberty, marriage, death, and kingship installation), he also thought that a liminal stage could emerge in
situations other than rites of passage. Much of his work was focused on pilgrimages as liminal experiences;
however, he felt that liminality could occur in any situation that marks a transition from the old to new,
such as a change in season or a society that is undergoing a radical structural shift (Victor W. Turner, \textit{The

\textsuperscript{73} For example, pilgrimages, monastic orders, millenarian movements, countercultural movements,
and “outsider” groups such as hoboes and gypsies.

\textsuperscript{74} Turner, \textit{The Ritual Process}, 129. Turner argued that philosophical systems and works of art can
emerge from the liminal state. “Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which
are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural
forms provide men with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of

\textsuperscript{75} Turner, \textit{The Ritual Process}, 177.
He termed these two social models “structure” and “anti-structure.” Liminality is associated with the latter, holistic, model. Liminality is also essentially ambiguous. “The attributes of liminality or liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space.” Liminality is experienced as a state of being “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” Another important feature of liminality is a reversal in gender focus from the social norm. Therefore, in a patriarchal society

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76 Turner theorized that a phenomenon he called communitas developed out of anti-structure. In communitas, people experience an intense degree of comradeship and bonding that is independent of class, rank, wealth, and social status. In contrast to the usual structured and status-based human relationships, the bonds of communitas are “undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, extant, non-rational, existential, I-Thou” (Turner, The Ritual Process, 111). For the Song of Songs to be described as liminal in the sense intended by Turner it should also exhibit communitas. The focus of this thesis is on imagery that conveys movement. However, in several ways the relationship of the lovers in the Song of Songs is consistent with Turner’s idea of communitas. By all indications their love affair is taking place outside the institution of marriage. There are indications that the woman is punished for moving beyond her socially prescribed role (1:6; 5:7; 8:1). The gender focus of communitas is opposite to the social norm, and the matrifocality of the lovers’ world in the Song of Songs is in contrast to the patriarchal world of the Bible. (For references to the mother see 1:6, 3:4, 3:11, 6:9, 8:1, 8:2, and 8:5). As Turner notes, “communitas is made evident … only through its juxtaposition to … aspects of social structure” (Turner, Ritual Process, 127) – it is in contrasts that things become clear. The woman is the most prominent voice in the Song. “She opens and closes the entire Song, her voice dominant throughout. By this structural emphasis her equality and mutuality with the man is illuminated” (Phyllis Trible, “Love’s Lyrics Redeemed,” in God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality [ed. Walter Brueggemann et al.; OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978], 145). There is a sense of balance and wholeness in the lovers’ relationship. “What is extraordinary in the Song is precisely the absence of structural and systemic hierarchy, sovereignty, authority, control, superiority, submission, in the relation of the lovers” (Ostriker, “A Holy of Holies,” 50). For an opposing view, see J. Cheryl Exum, “Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know about the Song of Songs,” in The Song of Songs [ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, FCB 2/6, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 24-35. The contrast between the woman’s relationship with her lover and the woman’s contentious experiences in society highlights the equality of their love affair. True to the spirit of communitas, they are “not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber’s ‘I and Thou’” (Turner, The Ritual Process, 132).

such as ancient Israel, liminality would be experienced as having a feminine bias. A key feature and indicator of liminality is movement. "One archmetaphor for that which is outside structure, between structure, and dissolvent of structures, is 'movement,' 'nomadism,' 'transience.'"79 I return to this idea in the discussion of my method of literary analysis.

Camp, Perdue, Clements and Van Leeuwen apply Turner's theory to Israelite wisdom.80 Focusing on the social setting and symbolic language of wisdom literature, their studies indicate that liminality is a feature of wisdom in certain canonical and non-canonical texts.81

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78 Turner argues that in this sense liminality reveals a society’s deeper identity and acts as a force for regeneration. When “patrilineality is the basis of social structure, an individual’s link to other members of society through the mother, and hence by extension and abstraction ‘women’ and ‘femininity’, tends to symbolize that wider community and its ethical system that encompasses and pervades the politico-legal system” (Turner, The Ritual Process, 117).


81 Camp and Clements view the exile and return as a liminal experience and argue that this experience greatly affected the growth and development of the wisdom tradition. Their approach is framed in terms of the origins and socio-historical development of wisdom. As a detailed description of this very complex and dynamic process is outside the scope of this thesis, the following is only a very general overview.

According to the socio-historical approach, the development and changing nature of wisdom is generally seen as coinciding with developments in Israelite society. Society moved through a series of stages of development and wisdom followed suit. Very generally, these stages were folk wisdom, royal wisdom and exilic and post-exilic wisdom. Based in family and tribal clan, the focus of folk wisdom was on practical local concerns. Women are thought to have been particularly influential during this early
Camp describes the post-exilic period as “a liminal period of decentralized and relatively weak social structure.”\(^{82}\) During the monarchy, power was centralized and social roles were formalized; as a result, family-based wisdom had no public outlet. However, in the post-exilic period there was a “need to formulate both social institutions and symbolic representations to replace the fallen monarchy and its royal theology.”\(^{83}\) In response to this need “the female household, with the woman at its centre, [was] held up as the defining element of society as a whole.”\(^{84}\) In Camp’s view, the female imagery of Proverbs emerges during this liminal period. Camp further argues that the appearance of Woman Wisdom and Strange Woman suggests a very deep process in Israelite society, one which would only occur in a state of anti-structure. “At a time when the center of male power, the monarchy, has been eradicated, the kind of power born of the love and nurture of the woman-centered family household recalls Israel to its fundamental values


\(^{84}\) Camp, “The Female Sage,” 192.
and serves as the life- and identify-source for the community." A reading of Proverbs in these terms opens a possibility of "a positive valuation of women's power as anti-structural, regenerative because of its liminality."

Perdue argues that "liminality as a major focus of V. Turner's model may provide us with important clues to the social settings of wisdom literature." He begins by examining several Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom texts, concluding that they can be described as liminal. In Israelite texts "we are in most cases faced with the absence of explicit information that points to the specific social settings in which the instructions were used"; however, in David's Last Testament in the Succession Narrative and Tobit's instructions of Tobias in the Tobit legend, he sees a social setting which may be described as liminal. Perdue concludes that liminality could also be considered a social setting in the texts where there is no specific social setting: "guidance for a threatening journey, a transition from home to residence in a scribal school, the status elevation of a


86 Camp, "Wise and Strange," 155. Camp looks at the liminality of wisdom in the context of her examination of the North American trickster myth. She asks whether it is possible to state that the biblical woman's "less-than male" status has a hermeneutical function in Proverbs "similar to the trickster's liminal animality." Camp thinks "that it does and that this function finds its focus in the poems' representation of women as the source of both power and love. Such a representation is 'anti-structure' at its most apparent" (Camp, "Wise and Strange," 153).

87 Perdue, "Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Literature," 125.

88 Perdue, "Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Literature," 125. "It is our suggestion that the social setting for these instructions may best be described in terms of liminality which is a phase within the rites of passage that accompany status elevation. In these cases, then, the son is leaving his former status and is to be reincorporated into society at an elevated status, usually filling the position of the father. It is in this context that the instructions are given by the father to the son, and embody the important social values of the respective society. In addition the teachings bear the authoritative impress of the societal structure, the father, and even a claimed divine approval. The teachings' function is not only to transmit societal knowledge, but also to bring about an ontological change in the character of the son" (Perdue, "Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Literature," 125.)

89 Perdue, "Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Literature," 122-3.
son who is replacing his father, and the leaving of the training ground of a school and the entering of a career.”

Clements looks at the Israelite experience of exile and return in terms of liminality. “Our suggestion is that it is ... liminality which can best describe the situation of those Jews who passed, after 587 BCE, from an established world, made meaningful by a sense of national identity, into the new world of the Jewish dispersion.” In the exile there was “constant danger of becoming non-persons” but rather than having their religious and personal identity destroyed, the Jewish community ultimately defined and expressed itself in new ways. “It is this condition of the exile that we can usefully describe as one of liminality. Jews found themselves brought to the frontiers of human existence, respecting the past and hoping for a better future, but meanwhile being compelled to re-think and redefine what it means to be the people of God.”

Clements argues that much of the wisdom literature arises from the liminal experience of the exile. This experience meant that post-exilic Israelite wisdom had a

\[90\] Perdue, “Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Literature,” 125.


\[94\] Clements argues that “[this] hitherto rather narrow and privileged stream of Israelite intellectual life offered the intellectual resources necessary to deal with a situation of liminality. Once prophecy had provided the raison d'être for the coming into being of the state of dispersion, and the physical distancing of a majority of Jews from the formal temple cultus, wisdom laid out the basis for a more far reaching reminting of the Israelite world-view. No longer was this to be drawn from the mythology and traditions associated with the Jerusalem temple worship, but from the concept of a world order established at creation by God through the exercise of wisdom” (Clements, *Wisdom in Theology*, 32).
worldview which “offered a new, non-monarchic and non-cultic, framework for concepts concerning the nature and meaning of the world.”95

Van Leeuwen frames the symbolic language of Proverbs in terms of Turner’s theory. He observes that this language speaks to the question of boundaries and to the clear choice to be made between a negative and positive path.96 The message of the book of Proverbs is that “Good behaviour consists of staying on prescribed paths, evil actions are trespasses over forbidden limina. Folly is not staying where you belong, not walking on the path prescribed for you, not being in tune with the order of the cosmos.”97 The concept of negative and positive paths is primarily expressed in the symbolic figures of Woman Folly and Woman Wisdom. Drawing upon Turner’s social model, Van Leeuwen observes that “Turner has pointed out that every healthy society requires both structure and anti-structure: any given society needs a healthy interaction of structure and communitas.” According to Van Leeuwen, “the proper place of true communitas, of legitimate equality and comradeship in love, is symbolized by the liquid abandonment of married love in chapter 5.”98 He argues that the author of Proverbs expresses these ideas

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95 Clements, Wisdom in Theology, 36. As noted in Part One, dating the Song is very difficult. However, many scholars agree that the final redaction of the Song of Songs likely took place during this post-exilic “‘heyday of Wisdom literature’ (Camp, Wisdom and the Feminine, 100; Gordis, Song of Songs, 24; Sadgove, Song of Songs, 245-48; Tromp, Wisdom, 88-95; White, Study of the Language of Love, 55-56).

96 Van Leeuwen views the speech of sinners as reported by the parent to the son (1:11-14) as a description of the negative rite of passage of the wicked, and identified in this speech the three ritual stages of separation, limen, and reincorporation. The company of brigands described in Prov 1:1-10 “offers the illusion of perpetual marginality with the egalitarian prosperity of communitas. The parent, however, warns the son of the inherent instability of such anti-structure” (Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview,” 128). The instructions of the parent to the son (Prov 1:8; 6:20; 23:22, 24-25; 31:2; 40) are intended to alert the son to the negative consequences of moving beyond prescribed boundaries.


most notably through the imagery of water. The “strange woman’s lips drip honey in
invitation to enter forbidden orifices (5:3; 9:16), to cross illicit limina (9:14 pth byth,
16a), to drink ‘stolen waters.’” But as God has set limits for the sea to prevent it from
overwhelming the earth (Job 38:8-11), humans must “set limits to the flow of their
sexual fluids” (5:15-21).

The studies of Camp, Perdue, Clements and Van Leeuwen demonstrate that
Turner’s theory of liminality opens canonical and non-canonical wisdom texts to new
insights. Framing these texts in terms of the radical restructuring of reality associated
with liminality contributes to our understanding of the social setting and symbolic
language of wisdom literature. Turner’s theory also has much to offer an exploration into
wisdom influence in the Song of Songs. In the following section I describe how a key
facet of this theory forms the basis of my literary analysis of the Song of Songs.

**Literary analysis**

Turner’s idea that movement is an important indicator of liminality inspires my
analysis of the Song’s imagery.

One archmetaphor for that which is outside structure, between structure, and
dissolvent of structures, is ‘movement,’ ‘nomadism,’ ‘transience.’

Poetic imagery that conveys a sense of movement is the basis of my literary analysis.
Turner does not specifically define what he means by movement, nomadism or

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100 Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview,” 130.
transience; therefore, standard dictionary definitions of these terms are assumed. In its most general sense, 'movement' is "The action or process of moving ...; change of position; passage from place to place, or from one situation to another." In a broader sense, movement may pertain to a change in emotions or ideas. It is also "one of a series of motions, or the whole series, in the performance of a process of nature; as the movements of the tides; the movements of sap." It may be "transference from place to place; as, the movement of a ship; movement of merchandise; movement of an army." While the term 'nomad' implies a member of a desert tribe moving from place to place seeking pasture, 'nomadism' suggests the practice of any person or group who lives a life of movement without a permanent, settled home. Finally, 'transience' is the "passing by or away with time; not durable or permanent; temporary; transitory." Transience implies a movement that is brief, momentary, and fleeting. As can be seen, 'movement' has a very broad range of possible connotations. During the course of this analysis I remain open to these various possibilities.

The initial phase of this exploration involved a careful analysis of all the kinds of movement in the Song of Songs. During this process, the Song’s tremendous variety and complexity of movement became apparent. But as the exploration progressed, recurring patterns of movement began to emerge. In particular, five types of images were found to create fascinating and evocative patterns. These images are of:

104 OED, s.v. "Nomad" and "Nomadism."
105 OED, s.v. "Transient."
• Awakening;
• Dance and encircling;
• Fragrance;
• Blowing winds; and
• Flowing waters.

These images flow through the Song, taking on a wide range of meanings. I thoroughly examine the literal level of an image before suggesting more figurative connotations. Particular attention is paid to the literal meaning an image may have had in an ancient Near Eastern context. Throughout the analysis I pay close attention to the original Hebrew language. Semantic and conceptual issues, contextual questions, grammatical forms and the language’s rich interpretative possibilities are examined. I also make feminist observations relating to the imagery as well as other matters relevant to the discussion.

In order to conceptualize the way this imagery works in the Song, I find it helpful to see it in the context of four distinct worlds: the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. This idea of conceptualizing the imagery in terms of four worlds is suggested by an observation of Fox. Fox observes that the metaphorical language used by the lovers to describe each other combines, as the poem

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106 "Imagery as a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and any sensory or extra-sensory experience." (J.A. Cuddon, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 413). An image may relate to one or all of the senses; an image may be visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, gustatory, abstract and/or kinaesthetic.

Figurative images are primarily similes or metaphors. However, there is "widespread agreement among modern literary theorists that the classical grammatical distinction between simile and metaphor is not in itself significant with regard to poetic effect … The force of 'Your eyes are doves' (4:1), for example, is not noticeably different from that of 'his eyes are like doves' (5:12). Most metaphors in Canticles use the kaph of comparison, but others lacking it do appear, apparently at random" (Fox, The *Song of Songs*, 275-6).
proceeds, "to form a cohesive picture of a self-contained world." I elaborate on this idea, seeing the imagery in the context of four distinct worlds. Each of these worlds can be seen as complete in itself. However, it also becomes apparent that by virtue of this imagery the four worlds are interconnected. For example, the imagery of dance relates to the movement of gazelles in the natural world, to a victory dance in the social world, to the encircling and entwining in the lovers' world and to a sacred dance in celebration of the divine in the spiritual world. When the imagery of these four worlds is finally viewed in totality, the ambiguous nature of this imagery is revealed. There is also a sense of an inter-related whole and of a feminine bias. The overall impression created by this imagery is that the Song of Songs is a liminal world.

This methodology offers a way to enter into explore the complex and richly-textured poetry of the Song. This exploration points in turn to new ways to conceptualize wisdom influence in the Song of Songs.

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107 Fox, The Song of Songs, 329.
PART THREE

ANALYSIS:
MOVEMENT IMAGERY IN THE SONG OF SONGS

My original analysis of the Song of Song follows. This analysis is organized in terms of the four worlds of the Song: the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. Images relating to awakening, fragrance, dance and encircling, blowing winds and flowing waters are identified and examined for possible literal and figurative meanings in the context of each of these worlds. Remaining open to the interpretive possibilities of Hebrew as well as to the feminine connotations of the imagery greatly enriches this process. As I progress through this analysis complex patterns evolve. This analysis reveals the four worlds to be distinct yet interconnected. The liminality of the Song is suggested by the poem’s holistic, ambiguous and feminine qualities. From this analysis of the Song’s imagery of movement new understandings of wisdom influence in the Song of Song emerge.

The natural world

The first world to be considered is the natural world. At this most elemental level, the world is charged with movement. The imagery that emerges from this initial analysis – of awakening, fragrance, dance and encircling, blowing winds and flowing waters – forms the basis of the discussions of the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. In this first world there is a feminine focus in the imagery of fragrance.
Imagery of awakening, fragrance, and dance and encircling are introduced in relation to the world in springtime. In the Song of Songs, the long dark winter is in the past and the earth is awakening. 

For now the winter is past, 
The rains are over and gone. 
(2:11)

After the cool, rainy winter, the warmth of springtime is a cause for rejoicing.

The blossoms have appeared in the land, 
The time of pruning has come; 
The song of the turtledove 
Is heard in our land. 
(2:12)

I went down to the nut grove 
To see the budding of the vale; 
To see if the vines had blossomed, 
If the pomegranates were in bloom. 
(6:11)

Let us go early to the vineyards; 
Let us see if the vine has flowered, 
If its blossoms have opened, 
If the pomegranates are in bloom. 
(7:13)

The earth is in a state of flux. The seasons are turning and winter is moving into spring.

The sense that the earth is awakening is reflected in imagery of glorious floral growth: flowers, flowering trees and vines. The rose of Sharon and lily of the valleys (2:1; cf. 2:2; 5:13; 6:2, 3; 7:3) likely both refer to the white lily, a beautiful white flower.

108 R.B.Y. Scott observes that "[when] the results of modern meteorological observations are compared with the picture of weather conditions reflected in the Old Testament, it seems that the climate and weather phenomena of Palestine in the first millennium B.C. were essentially the same as today." (R.B.Y. Scott, "Meteorological Phenomenon and Terminology in the Old Testament," ZAW 64 [1952]: 16). In the Near East, winter and summer are the major seasons. The cool, rainy winter from December to March and the hot, dry summer from June to September are separated by the brief, transitional, spring and fall.
with a particularly delightful night fragrance.\textsuperscript{109} The crimson-coloured pomegranate blossoms (4:13, 6:11, 7:13), the tiny, greenish flowers of the vines (2:15, 6:11, 7:13, 7:9), the fragrant white henna blooms (1:14) and apple blossoms (2:3, 7:9, 8:5) are bursting into flower before our eyes. The fruit of the fig tree is emerging (2:13). The nut grove may be almond (6:11),\textsuperscript{110} which is among the first trees to flower in spring; its white flowers "symbolize the awakening of spring."\textsuperscript{111} This is a world of vibrant, exuberant growth. But flowers by their nature are fragile and transient, and decay suddenly after a few moments or days of splendor. The visual appearance and scent of flowers evoke springtime growth, but their appearance and scent are fleeting. The flower's scent is also transient – the fragrance wafts by delicately, lingers for a moment or perhaps longer, and then drifts away.

The scent of blossoms mingles with the fragrance of the exquisite perfumes and oils that waft through the Song. There are many general references to perfumes and oils in the Song of Songs. Perfumes, aromatic oils, incense and spices are referred to generically as שָׁבַע (4:10; 4:14; 4:16; 5:1; 5:13; 6:2; 8:14). While the meaning of רֶפֶן in

\textsuperscript{109} This is the opinion of Zohary. He states: "Havatzeleth, translated by the RSV as 'rose' in the Song of Solomon 2:1 and 'crocus' in Isaiah 35:1, should also be rendered 'lily', in accordance with the parallel "blossom of the valley" (Hosea 14:5), and 'like the crocus (havatzeleth) it shall blossom.' Havatzeleth appears only in the two quoted passages and is clearly synonymous with the true lily" (Michael Zohary, \textit{Plants of the Bible} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 176. However, opinions abound as to the identity of the flower or flowers in this verse. The rose of Sharon has been identified as a rock-rose, crocus, narcissus, and meadow saffron; the lily of the valleys has been identified as a lotus, water lily, rose, violet, jasmine, amaryllis, gladiola, iris, narcissus, camomille and red anemone.

For the רֶפֶן to be a white flower seems appropriate in light of the repetition of the root בַּר throughout the Song. (This will be discussed below). That the white lily has a particularly beautiful fragrance is consistent with the abundant imagery of fragrance in the Song.

\textsuperscript{110} Many people think refers to a walnut (for a discussion of the term see Pope, \textit{Song of Songs}, 574-579).

\textsuperscript{111} Irene Jacob and Walter Jacob, "Flora," \textit{ABD} 2:806.
2:17 is uncertain, it is often seen as parallel to הָעָלְיוֹן in 8:14 and so is also commonly rendered as "spices." Other general terms for fragrances are found in 3:6. רַחַם ("clouds") is a word generally used to describe something that is "completely filled with fragrance, completely filled with incense," and אֵבָרִים ("powders") has the sense of "scent-powders." The scent of nard, myrrh, frankincense, cinnamon and aloe drift through the air, merging with the fragrance of the flowers. Fragrance has a number of connotations in the Song which will be discussed in the course of this analysis. However, fragrance is often associated with the woman in the Song. She speaks of her fragrances (1:12-13, 4:16) and she is described in terms of fragrance (4:10, 4:12-14). This imagery contributes to the feminine tone of the poem.

Dancing animals wander across the Song’s springtime landscape.

Go follow the tracks of the sheep,
And graze your kids

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112 Other suggestions have included "Bethar," "bethel nut" and "cleft mountains." (See Murphy, The Song of Song, 139; Pope, The Song of Songs, 409).

113 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, "יַקָּרָּה," HALOT (SE) 1:638.

114 Koehler and Baumgartner, "יָפָה," HALOT (SE) 2:1094.

115 Koehler and Baumgartner, "יְשָׁבֵה," HALOT (SE) 1:9.

116 "Nard" (spikenard) (1:12; 4:13-14), "myrrh" (1:13, 3:6, 4:6, 5:1, 5:5, 5:13), "frankincense" (3:6, 4:6), "aloe" (4:14) and "cinnamon" (4:14) are specifically mentioned. Also mentioned are "oils" (scented oils) (1:13; 4:10), "aromatic woods" (4:14) and "fragrant reed" (4:14).

117 Elsewhere in the Bible, fragrance is associated with seduction; in Est 2:12, the woman of the harem spent "six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women’s cosmetics."
By the tents of the shepherds.
(1:8)

The woman describes her lover as a gazelle (גָּזַל) or a young stag (יָרֵן), animals known for their quick flight, fleetness and graceful movement.118

There he comes,
Leaping over mountains,
Bounding over hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle
Or like a young stag.
(2:8-9)

“Hurry, my beloved,
Swift as a gazelle or a young stag,
To the hills of spices!”
(8:14)

The movement of the gazelle and young stag has a dance-like quality. “Leaping” (לָקַח) and “Bounding” (גֹּרֵם) are parallel terms and refer to a skipping type of dance step.119

There is also the suggestion of a dancing motion in the term “Set out” (בָּא).

Set out, my beloved,
Swift as a gazelle
Or a young stag,
For the hills of spices!
(2:17)

The verb בָּא suggests the movement of turning about or encircling. בָּא “involves an external circular movement or an inner change.”120 In the context of the natural world,

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118 For example, Asahel, son of Zeruiah, is described as “swift of foot, like a gazelle in the open field” (2 Sam 2:17).
this verb suggests a gazelle leaping or joyfully turning in circles. There is also a dance-like quality in the movement of the goats and ewes:

Your hair is like a flock of goats
Streaming down Mount Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of ewes
Climbing up from the washing pool;
(4:1-2; 6:5-6)

The “Streaming down” (שָׁגַע) of a herd of nimble-footed goats conveys a sense of leaping and frisking and “Climbing up” (עָפל) in this context of freshly shorn ewes suggests a scampering motion.

The imagery of awakening, fragrance, and dance and encircling is introduced in the context of the world in springtime. A feminine focus is suggested in the imagery of fragrance. The movement of the wind is conveyed through equally rich and varied images.

The Song’s references to the wind are distilled through the language of poetry, but they are grounded in the world of nature. For example, the day is described as “blowing.”

When the day blows gently
And the shadows flee
(2:17, 4:6)

There is a summer wind that begins to blow in the morning and increases in strength over the day. Therefore, it may be that צֵבָה הָיָם refers to the morning wind and the end of darkness as day dawns and amorous activities drawn to a close. This sense of a

121 “During the summer, a pleasant west wind regularly begins to blow in the course of the morning; toward evening it becomes stronger” (O. Keel quoted in F. Reiterer, “ะס,” TDOT 11:506.

122 Murphy, The Song of Songs, 139; Pope, The Song of Songs, 408.

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light morning wind is consistent with the term "gently." But נֵבָּה has an aspect of
tumultuous activation and so the verse is likely referring to this stronger wind of the late
day; "[when] the invigorating wind of late afternoon relieves the paralyzing heat of the
day, the spirit of enterprise is aroused."\(^{123}\)

This powerful aspect of the wind is also felt in 3:6.

Who is she that comes up from the desert  
Like columns of smoke

This description is suggestive of a so-called "dust devil," a dramatic whirlwind of sand
that occurs in the desert in the summer. "Dust devils are rotating columns of dust which
rise from a hot surface in unstable air with light winds; they attain a height of 600-700
feet, and drift with the wind."\(^{124}\)

The turbulent winds are also felt in the woman’s dramatic evocation:

Awake, O north wind,  
Come, O south wind!  
Blow upon my garden,  
That its perfume may spread.

In evoking the winds, she does not use the general term for wind, נֵבָּה, but specifically
calls two of the four directional winds, the winds of the north (יוֹרָק) and the south (יוֹרְנָה).
The cold north wind comes from central Asia in the winter; these cold winds surge into
Israel, dispersing the rain clouds.\(^{125}\) In the summer, winds from the south bring sultry air
from the desert. There are two southern winds: the calm mid-summer winds and the

\(^{123}\) Reiterer, *TDOT* 11:506.

\(^{124}\) Scott, *Meteorological Phenomenon*, 22.

\(^{125}\) Luis I.J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World. A philological and literary study*
tumultuous and violent winds at the beginning and end of the summer season. The use of imperatives (תִּזְעַזַע, עֲלֵיהֶם) suggests that it is more likely these more tumultuous late-summer winds that are envisioned. עֲלֵיהֶם has the basic meaning of “to excite, stir up.” also has the sense of being “set in motion” from a sleeping or resting state. As the basic meaning of פַּחַשׁ is to “blow vigorously”; the inference is suggestive of a “violent tempest.” The entire force of the wind is activated to penetrate every corner of the garden and disperse its fragrance.

Throughout the Song there is a close relationship between wind and fragrance. Three roots - וַתִּשַּׁה, רַחַשָׁה and נַחַשׁ - are particularly evocative of the movement of these scents on the wind. The wind (רוח) has embedded within it the fragrance (רוח) that wafts throughout the Song. The inference is that fragrances drift on the wind into every part of the world and that, like the wind, fragrances are intangible, insubstantial and elusive. is used in connection with the scents of blossoms and apples.

The vines in blossom give off fragrance (2:13)

Your breath like the fragrance of apples (7:9)

The mandrakes yield their fragrance (7:14)


129 The word רוח is derived from the root רוח. In the context of the natural world, the noun רוח refers to a wind or breeze (T. Kronholm, “רוח,” *TDOT* 13:362). In the Song, the term רוח is never used. However, the specific terms for the north and south winds - בָּלָה and יִשְׁמְעֵה - are found in 4:16.
is also used in relation to perfumes and aromatic oils.

Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance
(1:3)

My nard gave forth its fragrance
(1:12)

Your ointments more fragrant
Than any spice!
(4:10)

The sense of the movement of air is also embedded within the aromatic apple and apple

The root of the word “apple” (עַלְפָּה) is related to

which has a primary meaning of “breathe, blow”\(^{130}\) and a secondary meaning of “to

scent.” The apple is thus imagined as the “scenting fruit.”\(^{131}\) In a phrase such as “Your

breath like the fragrance of apples”\(^{7:9}\), the juxtaposition of עַלְפָּה עַבְרֵיהַ is

charged with the movement of fragrance on the breath of the wind.

Throughout the Song, the movement of the wind is often powerful and dramatic:

this is a world of dust devils and tempests. As the wind is contained within the scents

that drift through the Song, fragrance has now emerged as a very significant image. As

noted, this fragrance imagery has a feminine quality. In the final section, the equally

evocative imagery of flowing water are considered.

Water flows freely and abundantly in the natural world of the Song. The poet

says that “the winter is past” \(^{2:11}\), but here נַפְשׁ may also be rendered as “flowed” - the

\(^{130}\) Reiterer, \textit{TDOT} 11:504; P. Mailberger, “רָעָה,” \textit{TDOT} 9:486. As will be noted below, עַלְפָּה also

has connotations of the breath of God.

\(^{131}\) Ernest Klein, \textit{A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers

rainy winter has literally flowed by. But while the rains have stopped falling, the springs continue to give abundantly. In the desert, springs well up in valleys or flow from openings in hillsides. With a pattern of winter rains and summer droughts, these springs were a critical source of water, and in the ancient Near East their presence often determined the site of a village. En-gedi was named for the copious spring that watered it (1:14). A well was often located at the site of a spring and was fed by the spring.

[You are] a garden spring,
A well of fresh water
(4:15)

Water from a spring could be used to irrigate gardens (4:13; 4:15a) and to provide the water needed to wash animals ("Climbing up from the washing pool" [4:2; 6:6]). Or a spring could be sealed and its water stored and conserved.

A garden locked
Is my own, my bride,
A fountain locked,
A sealed-up spring.
(4:12)

The water streaming down from the mountains of Lebanon was water at its coldest and freshest ("A rill of Lebanon" [4:15]). Springs are a continuous flow of "living" water; in constant motion, they represent not simply water but a great abundance of water. Giving rise to gardens, washing pools and wells, springs are characterized by a sense of life and unrestricted movement.

Water imagery is not limited to that of springs. The imagery of water appears in connection with the young man’s arrival at the home of his lover.

“Let me in, my own,
My darling, my faultless dove!
For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of night.”
(5:2)
In ancient Israel, dew was thought to fall or descend from the heavens. Heaviest during the dry summer months, dew was often the primary source of water for irrigating crops. As is illustrated in 5:2, those who stayed in the open overnight would be soaked by these mists from heaven. Evaporating quickly in the sunlight, dew is transient and ephemeral, like smoke escaping through a window.

Fragrances drift with the wind; they also flow like water. Like the water flowing from Lebanon (4:15c), the scent of the woman’s garden flows plentifully and abundantly.

Blow upon my garden
That its perfume may spread
(4:16)

Sweetness is described as “dripping” (נָדַע) like water.

Sweetness drops
From your lips, O bride
(4:11)

Myrrh is also described as “dripping” (נָדַע) and “flowing” (לִבְּרָה).

My hands dripped myrrh
My fingers, flowing myrrh
(5:5)

His lips are like lilies
They drip flowing myrrh
(5:13)

As “dripping” (נָדַע) may also be rendered as “flowing,” and “flowing” (לִבְּרָה) has the sense of “overflowing,” these images suggest the fluidity of fragrance.

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132 In Dt 33:28, the heavens were described as “dripping” dew.
Thus Israel dwells in safety,
Untroubled in Jacob’s abode,
In a land of grain and wine,
Under heavens dripping dew.
(cf. 2 Sam 17:12; Num 11:9; Ps 133:3)
Like the imagery of awakening, fragrance, dance and encircling, and blowing winds, the imagery of flowing water is essential to the Song. This flowing water is described as rain and dew; however, it is primarily seen as the constantly moving, "living" water of springs. And as fragrances arise from the earth and drift with the wind, they also flow like water.

In this exploration of the world of nature, several key images emerge: of awakening, fragrance, dance and encircling, blowing winds and flowing waters. There is a feminine focus in the fragrance imagery. As is apparent from this initial discussion, the Song is not linear or orderly – there is a surprising, improvisational quality to the language. However, in the exploration of the second of the Song’s worlds – the social world – patterns of images begin to emerge. Much of the imagery that conveys movement in the natural world is now seen from a slightly different perspective.

The social world

Three main groups of people criss-cross the social world of the Song of Songs: armies, nomads, and merchants. A notable feature of all these groups is the fact that their

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133 There is also a temporal ambiguity to several of the images. The natural world of the Song gives the impression of being the world in springtime; and most of the images confirm this impression. But several of the images suggest other possibilities. Pomegranates (4:3, 4:13, 6:7) and grapes (7:9) ripen in the late summer and early fall. North and south winds (4:16) are connected with the winter and summer seasons; dust devils (3:6) occur in the summer; heavy dews (5:2) are also associated with the dry and hot summer months.

This temporal ambiguity is consistent with Turner’s conception of the liminal condition. Liminality is experienced as “a timeless condition, an eternal now, as ‘a moment in and out of time,’ or as a state to which the structural view of time is not applicable ... Every day, is, in a sense, the same day, writ large or repeated” (Turner, Dramas, 238-239).
lives are largely lived in motion. As these groups move through the Song glimmers of
the imagery seen in the natural world re-emerge. The imagery of encircling and dance
are suggested in the picture of the armies; water, dance, fragrance and wind in the picture
of the nomads; and fragrance in the picture of merchants.

**Armies**

The Song of Songs includes numerous allusions to the military and to the
movement of armies. Military imagery is part of the texture of the Song. The woman
is described using military terminology:

Your neck is like the Tower of David,
Built to hold weapons,

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134 In his study of nomads, Berman makes an interesting observation which may be relevant to the
movement of social groups through the Song. “Movement is not only crucial in terms of fission and fusion,
conflict resolution, and low population density; it is also important from a physiological point of view.
Thus, in *The Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin, argues that movement is not only a leveling mechanism, something
that prevents the emergence of social inequality, but also something that is central to nomadic
consciousness, to human fulfillment, and that serves to make life so rich here on earth that there was no
need for many or most HGs [the nomadic tribe studied by Berman] to create religion or concepts of an
afterlife. Wandering, says Chatwin, reestablishes an original harmony (read: paradox) that existed between
human beings and the universe. He argues that it is an instinctive migratory urge, something we carry with
us in a genetic or inherent sense” (Morris Berman, *Wandering God: A Study in Nomadic Spirituality*
[Albany: SUNY Press, 81]).

135 While the Israelite army evolved and changed over many centuries, the references in the Song
may be seen in the context of the armies of Kings David and Solomon. David began the task of creating
the army by developing the first regular unit he had inherited from Saul; Solomon completed the task by
adding new corps, such as units of war chariots (Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., “Army,” *Illustrated Dictionary
and Concordance of the Bible* [Jerusalem: G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing]. The Israelite army was
composed of the regular army and the militia. The regular army was composed of about 600 Israelite men
and was headed by thirty ‘mighty men’ – the military elite (2 Sam 10:7; 23:9, 16, 17, 22.). There was also
a non-Israelite group in the regular army that acted as bodyguards. The militia was composed of units of
24,000 men, with each unit serving one month a year. It is also interesting to note that, in the Bible,
springtime is mentioned as the time when armies go off to war (2 Sam 11:1; 1 Chr 20:1).

136 These descriptions are evocative of the goddess Anath. “The dominant characteristic of Anath
presented by the extant Ugaritic texts is that of a warlike, blood thirsty, violent goddess ....In a passage in
the Baal Epic, Anath is depicted as a fierce, invincible warrior, slaughtering people, tying their heads and
hands to her person, wading knee deep in the blood and gore of those she has slain, reveling in fighting and
Hung with a thousand shields –
All the quivers of warriors.
(4:4)

The brothers describe their sister as a “wall” upon which to build a “silver battlement”;
she in turn describes her breasts as “towers” (8:9-10). Like an ancient city she is
surrounded (בָּאוּר) by walls, with battlements around her (בָּאוּר) serving for defence.

To her lover, the woman is as beautiful as Tirzah and Jerusalem; she is also as
tremendous and terrifying as the spectacle of the army marching into battle.

You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah,
Comely as Jerusalem,
Awesome as bannere hosts.
(6:4; 6:10d)

Her beauty is so intense that he must demand that she “turn away” (נָעַל) (6:5). And the
description of the woman of “a mare in Pharoah’s chariots” (1:9) may refer to the
Egyptian military tactic of unleashing a mare in heat in order to distract the enemy’s war
horses.

137 "Military architecture concentrated on the two essential parts of fortification: the sloping bank
(glacis) and the wall itself .... From the time of Solomon and probably under the influence of Phoenician
craftsmen, great progress was achieved in masonry, in the sense that, on the one hand, the walls to be
constructed rested upon rock and that, on the other, the wall itself was made of stones carefully hewn,
allowing a construction with unmortared joints giving perfect adherence .... [The] line of the crenellated
ramparts was interrupted at regular intervals by rectangular towers, the base of which was often fitted with
a circular bastion; as they jutted well out, they enabled the defenders to take on the flank and with crossed
shooting, those assailants who had reached the foot of the wall.” (W. Corswan, A Dictionary of Life in
Bible Times [trans. Arthur Heathcote; compl. and illus. Edouard Urech; Bungay, Suffolk: Hodder &
Stoughton, 1956], 127).

138 “The root sbb (both verb and adverb) occurs frequently as part of formulae and texts
characteristic of military and martial institutions” (Garcia-López, TDOT 10:131). See also 2 Sam 5:9, 1 Kg
3:1.

139 Bloch and Bloch think that “[the] point here is the elegant beauty of the mare, not its unbridled
ferocity; see 1:10-11.” (Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 145). The “chariots of Ammi-nadib” (6:12)
may also be a reference to Egyptian war chariots. However, this verse is very corrupt and has rendered in a
variety of ways. For example, Bloch and Bloch render 6:12 as follows:
In the Song there are several references that suggest the movement of armies. In the Bible, an army’s motions are often described as circular – the root בָּכָר is often used to describe this circular movement of troops.\(^{140}\) An allusion to the “mighty men” acting as escorts or bodyguards suggests that the warriors “encircle” (בָּכָר), or surround, Solomon’s couch.

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There is Solomon’s couch
Encircled by sixty warriors
Of the warriors of Israel,
All of them trained in warfare,
Skilled in battle,
Each with sword on thigh
Because of terror by night.
(3:7-8)
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“Sixty warriors” may be a superlative; the number of formidable warriors encircling Solomon’s couch are twice that of David’s Thirty. Or this number may simply be a literal rendering of the number of bodyguards that accompanied an entourage through the wilderness.

Members of the Israelite militia were charged to patrol cities at nighttime, and it may be that the watchmen are fulfilling this role.\(^{141}\)

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I met the watchmen
Who patrol the town.
(3:3)
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I met the watchmen
Who patrol the town;
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And oh! Before I was aware,
She sat me in the most lavish of chariots.
(Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 97).


\(^{141}\) There is considerable disagreement as to the identity and role of the watchmen. For example, some see in the city patrol a parallel with the guards to the underworld in the myth of Ishtar’s Descent to the Underworld (Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 419; 527).
They struck me, they bruised me.
The guards of the walls
Stripped me of my mantle.
(5:7)

Here, נַשְׂפָּה suggests the circular movement of the patrol as it makes its way through the city streets and squares.

In 7:1 there is a scene that suggests a woman dancing in celebration of a military victory.

Turn back, turn back,
O maid of Shulem!
Turn back, turn back,
That we may gaze upon you.
“Why will you gaze at the Shulammite
In the Mahanaim dance?”

While Mahanaim may refer to a camp of nomadic wanderers, it seems more likely that it refers to a military camp. 7:1e-f has therefore been rendered as follows:

Why should you look upon the Shulamite,
A dance before two armies?
(NRSV)

is likely derived from רוח, ‘to whirl.’ רוח “refers to the turning and twisting of the body, in a sort of brisk dancing motion.” The exclamation “Turn back, turn back” (شعبך) reinforces this sense that the woman is performing a dance. The mahol was the type of dance that was “danced as an expression of joy upon the safe return of the

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142 Bloch and Bloch observe that “while a mahaneh is often a military camp, it can also be simply a dwelling place of a tribe temporarily ‘settling down,’ or any group of people in a place at a given time, not necessarily soldiers; see Gen. 33:8, 50:9; Exod. 14:19, 20; Lev. 17:3” (Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 199).

143 Sendrey, Music, 446.

144 Pope, The Song of Songs, 595. Pope renders this “Leap, leap, O Shulamite!”
armies of Israel from battle.”

Women performers are identified with celebrations of military victory. As dance, song and drumming were associated with these performances, the joyful dance depicted in 7:1 may have been accompanied by rhythmic music and song.

In the Song’s numerous allusions to the military and to the movement of armies, there is again a recurrence of imagery first seen in the natural world. Encircling is now seen as a significant image, from the perspective of military fortifications as well as in the movement of troops. And dancing now occurs within the context of a victory celebration. There is a feminine focus to this imagery; the woman is described using military terminology and she is the central figure in the performance of the victory dance.


146 Women performers are described in the Bible in connection with dances (נֶחֲפִיל), the hand drum and singing. The context of these performances is the public celebration of military victories by Israelite warriors (Carol Meyers, “Miriam the Musician,” 207-230). For example, Miriam and other female performers celebrate with a victory song at the Red Sea:

Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels. And Miriam chanted for them:

Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously;
Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.
(Ex. 15:20-21)

When the [troops] came home [and] David returned from killing the Philistine, the women of all the towns of Israel came out singing and dancing to great King Saul with timbrels, shouting, and sistrums. The women sang as they danced, and they chanted:

Saul has slain his thousands;
David, his tens of thousands!
(1 Sam 18:6-7; cf. Judg 11:34, Jer 31:4)

Meyers argues that תַּרְנָךְ, here rendered as “timbrel,” should be rendered as “hand-drum” (Meyers, “Miriam the Musician,” 221).
Nomads

The Song offers brief glimpses into the wandering lives of nomadic shepherds of Arabia and the arid eastern Mediterranean. Early in the Song, the woman describes herself in terms of the world of nomads.

I am dark, but comely,
O daughters of Jerusalem –
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the pavilions of Solomon.
Don’t stare at me because I am swarthy,
Because the sun has gazed upon me.
(1:5-6)

The “tents of Kedar” (1:5) refers to an Arabian tribe or league of nomadic tribes that was engaged in breeding sheep, goats and camels in the Syro-Arabian desert. It has been suggested that “Solomon” in 1:5 should as “Salmah” or “Shalmah,” in reference to a nomadic south Arabian tribe described in ancient Near Eastern and later Jewish sources. “Gilead” (4:1, 6:5) was a mountainous area east of Jordan that teemed with the livestock of nomadic tribes. And “En-gedi” (1:14), ‘The Spring of the Kid’ was a renowned oasis and resting place for nomadic tribes near the Dead Sea. It seems that the woman has lived a life in the outdoors – “the sun has gazed upon me” (1:6). Her description of herself as “dark” as the “tents of Kedar” (1:5) is likely an allusion to tents made from the wool of black goats. (unft is also a wordplay on “black”). The “pavilions”

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147 Also see Is 60:7; Jer 49:29; Ezek 27:21. Kedar was the second son of Ishmael (Gen 25:13; 1 Chr 1:29).


149 Mic 7:14; Jer 50:19
(1:5) suggests fabric or animal skins that have been stretched over poles to form the roof and walls of a tent; the word “curtains” (תענוגות) is frequently parallel to “tents” (תָּנִינָא).

The life of nomadic shepherds was one of almost continual wandering as they followed the earth’s seasonal cycles. While their sheep and goats could live on a minimum of water and grass, these animals still needed to be moved from pasture to pasture in order to survive. The “flock of goats / Streaming down Mount Gilead” (4:1; 6:5) suggests the herding of goats from an upper to a lower pasture. The “flock of ewes / Climbing up from the washing pools” (4:2; 6:6) evokes the washing of ewes prior to their wool being shorn. Caring for sheep required leading them from nighttime protection in a sheepfold to places where they could graze and water.

Go follow the tracks of the sheep,
And graze your kids
By the tents of the shepherds.
(1:8)

After morning grazing and watering, sheep lie down at midday for several hours in a shady or cool place.

Tell me, you whom I love so well;
Where do you pasture your sheep?
Where do you rest them at noon?
(1:7)

Glimmers of the imagery that was first observed in the natural world is now presented in the context of the lives of nomads. The dancing of goats and ewes (גַּלְגַּל and זֵזֵי) is seen in the social context of the lives of these nomad herders. A spring of abundant, living water is alluded to in reference to the oasis of En-gedi. And while drifting fragrances and gentle winds are not specifically referred to, these are implied by the presence of the En-gedi oasis and to the references to oasis-like settings.
The third group of people moving across the landscape of the Song is the merchants. From at least the second millennium onwards, Israel was at the crossroads of international trade. The ‘Way of the Sea’ (*Via Maris*) along the Mediterranean coast and the ‘King’s Highway’ through Transjordan both traversed Israel. These two ancient trade routes lead to Egypt in the west and Assyria in the north; they connected with the Incense Route to Arabia and to routes leading to Mesopotamia, India and the Silk Road into the Far East. As an important hub in this flourishing and elaborate trade network, throughout the year the roads of Israel were crowded with merchants from all over the world. The primary exports from Israel were grains, olive oil and wine. The main imports included woods from Lebanon, and perfumes, spices, gems and metals from southern Arabia, Africa and the Far East.

*There are indications of this international movement of people and goods in the Song of Songs.* Heshbon and Damascus were cities on the trade routes.

Your eyes like pools in Hesbon  
By the gate of Bath-rabbim,  
Your nose like the Lebanon tower  
That faces toward Damascus

(7:5)

Heshbon, a town in the Transjordan, was on the King’s Highway. And Damascus, a caravan centre in a fertile oasis in southern Syria, dominated the major overland trade routes. The wood of the prized cedar of Lebanon (1:17, 5:15) was transported by sea and land from Tyre into Israel along the Way of the Sea. There are numerous references to goods that were traded internationally. Precious metals and gems were traded from all over the world. Gold (1:11, 3:10, 5:11, 5:14, 5:15) was not mined in Israel, coming from
Egypt, Arabia and India. Silver (1:11, 3:10, 8:9, 8:11) was mined and imported from Anatolia, in the mountains bordering the Red Sea and by sea from Spain. The identity of the gem referred to as “Beryl” (5:14) is not clear. Green beryl (emerald) was found in Africa and east Asia; another possibility is chrysolite (peridot), which was found by the Red Sea.\(^{150}\) Sapphire (5:14) was formed in rocks beneath the Himalayas, and ivory (5:14, 7:5) was traded from Africa and the Far East.

The perfumes mentioned in the Song of Songs were brought from even greater distances. In addition to references to specific perfumes, there are numerous references to oils (1:3; 4:10), spices and perfumes (4:10, 4:14, 4:16, 5:1, 5:13, 6:2, 8:14). Caravans carried these precious commodities along the Incense Route through the Arabian desert and from the Far East. The Song’s fragrant gardens may be an allusion to south Arabian gardens of myrrh:

\[
\text{I have come to my garden,} \\
\text{My own, my bride;} \\
\text{I have plucked my myrrh and spice} \\
(5:1)
\]

\[
\text{My beloved has gone down to his garden,} \\
\text{To the beds of spices} \\
(6:2; \text{cf 5:13})^{151}
\]

\(^{150}\) The name of this gem also evokes a distant land. רֵי is referred to in Jonah 1:3 and 2 Chr 9:21. While the exact location of רֵי is unknown, it may be in Spain or Cilicia.

\(^{151}\) Rabin observes that “[because] of the repeated use of the Hebrew verb רָעַה ‘to pasture’ and its participle meaning ‘shepherd’ most commentators think that the Song of Songs depicts a kind of shepherds idyll. But what kind of a shepherd is the lover, who ‘has gone down to his garden, to the flowerbeds of perfume (or balsam), to pasture in the gardens, to gather lilies’ (6:2)? In an agricultural society such wanton destruction of valuable property would not have endeared him to his fellows, or for that matter to the contemporary reader. The reference is again to the perfume gardens of South Arabia, and the verb ‘to pasture’ may have some technical meaning connected with the management of camels” (Chaim Rabin, “The Song of Songs and Tamil Poetry,” \textit{SR} 3:3 (1973/4): 214).
The “hill of spices” (2:17; 8:14) may refer to the mountain slopes in South Arabia where aromatic woods grew profusely.\(^{152}\)

The list of perfumes in 4:13-14 is “much like the bill of goods of a … caravan merchant.”\(^{153}\)

Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates
And off all luscious fruits,
Of henna and of nard –
Nard and saffron,
Fragrant reed and cinnamon,
With all aromatic woods,
Myrrh and aloes –
All the choice perfumes.

Nard (spikenard) came from the mountains of India (1:12, 4:13-14); saffron and “fragrant reed” (ginger grass) were also carried from India; cinnamon, from which a fragrant oil was extracted, come from Sri Lanka; the small shrub from which myrrh is processed journeyed from Arabia (1:13, 3:6, 4:6, 5:1, 5:5, 5:13). The aloe tree, from which a rare and expensive oil was extracted, came from East Africa and Northern India, and frankincense came from Arabia and East Africa (3:6, 4:6).\(^{154}\) The exotic mystery of an approaching caravan train is suggested in 3:6.

\(^{152}\) Rabin argues that the Song reflects the economic activity and international trade during the reign of Solomon. He argues that it is “possible to suggest that the Song of Songs was written in the heyday of Judaean trade with South Arabia and beyond (and this may include the lifetime of King Solomon) by someone who had himself traveled to South Arabia and to South India and had there become acquainted with Tamil poetry” (Rabin, *Tamil Poetry*, 216).

In her study of the etymology of several of the Song’s terms for aromatic plants, Brenner concludes that etymological connections suggest commercial links between India and Israel. However, she does not support Rabin’s dating of the Song to the reign of Solomon (Athalya Brenner, “Aromatics and Perfumes,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 75-81).


\(^{154}\) It may be that “saffron” refers here to the crocus which grew wild throughout the Levant. However, the fact that it is mentioned in relation to spices that were imported from the Far East suggests that it may be Indian saffron (Zohary, *Plants of the Bible*, 206).
Who is she that comes up from the desert
Like columns of smoke,
In clouds of myrrh and frankincense,
Of all the powders of the merchant?

The train emerges from the desert after an arduous journey from Arabia or the Far East, laden down with treasured and exotic goods. The sand and dust raised by the caravan "rises like smoke from a fire, but the sight of the smoke also raises the association of the scent the caravan spreads around it as it halts in the market and unpacks its wares." 155

Moving across the landscape of the Song are caravans of merchants. The fragrance imagery that was first observed in the natural world can now be placed in this social context of international trade and commerce. While various trade goods are mentioned, fragrance imagery is brought to the fore by the numerous references to aromatic plants. As many of plants are destined to be transformed into women’s perfumes and cosmetics, this imagery can again be described as having a feminine quality.

Three groups that live their lives in almost constant motion traverse the Song. Much of the imagery used to convey movement in the natural world has re-emerged: dance and encircling are now seen in the context of armies; flowing water, dance, gentle winds and fragrant flowers are seen in the context of nomads; and fragrance is seen in the context of merchants. The imagery of fragrance and of dance have feminine connotations. In the next world – the world of the lovers - these developing patterns of imagery become increasingly layered and complex.

155 Rabin, Tamil Poetry, 214.
The world of the lovers

In the third world, the world of the lovers, patterns of imagery that were seen in the natural world and social world emerge with a different texture. In particular, the imagery of dance, encircling, fragrance and awakening convey the movement of their relationship. This imagery evocatively conveys the complexity and richness of the lovers’ world.

The imagery of dance that is described in the natural and social worlds is now seen in the context of the lovers’ world. In describing each other as gazelles and ewes (2:8-9; 4:1-2; 6:5-6) the lovers use the language of dance. And their relationship is like an elaborate dance - throughout the Song there is a constant movement of drawing near, being together, and moving apart.

From beginning to end the lovers go from seeking each other to finding each other. But this action does not move in a straight line from separation to union: it leaps, in impulsions of voiced desire, from anticipated joy to actualized joy, and back again. Any speech may discover itself anywhere on the circle of seeking and finding.¹⁵⁶

There is considerable ambiguity surrounding the lovers’ movements.¹⁵⁷ The Song’s spatial and temporal sequences begin abruptly and have inconclusive endings. But with


¹⁵⁷ As Ostriker observes: “In contrast to linear narratives, the lyrics of the Song occur in a continuing present, with the reassuring occurrence of refrains, but no particular order. Notwithstanding the efforts of generations of commentators to impose a coherent narrative plot on the Song, it goes nowhere and ends without closure. Ambiguity and riddling are part of its fabric” (Ostriker, “A Holy of Holies,” 47). To follow the steps of the lovers in a linear fashion reveals the range of their movements. Together and apart, the lovers pass through a variety of diverse settings, including: a king’s chamber (1:4); a family vineyard (1:6); pastures by the tents of nomads (1:8); a banquet room (2:4); the streets and squares of a town (3:2); a mother’s house (3:4); a procession in the desert (3:6-11); mountains in the Lebanon and Anti-
the logic of love, the world ebbs and flows with the other’s absence and presence. When her lover is absent, the woman is faint with emotion.

I opened the door for my beloved,  
But my beloved had turned and gone.  
I was faint because of what he said.  
[I was faint because of him.]  
(5:6)

I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem!  
If you meet my beloved, tell him this:  
That I am faint with love.  
(5:8)

She is compelled to search for him.

Upon my couch at night  
I sought the one I love –  
I sought, but found him not.  
"I must rise and roam the town,  
Through the streets and through the squares;  
I must seek the one I love."
(3:1-2; cf. 5:2-7)

There is the suggestion that her family is constraining her.

My mother’s sons quarreled with me,  
They made me guard the vineyards;  
My own vineyard I did not guard.  
(1:6)

"We have a little sister,  
Whose breasts are not yet formed.  
What shall we do for our sister  
When she is spoken for?  
If she be a wall,

Lebanon range (4:8); a house (5:26); a town (5:7); a garden (6:2); a nut grove (6:11); a chariot (6:12); an army camp (7:1); fields, villages and vineyards (7:12); the desert (8:5); under an apple tree (8:7); a vineyard (8:12); the hill of spices (8:14). The time of year is ambivalent, as is the time of day. The time of day when “the day blows gently / And the shadows flee” (2:17, 4:6) may be dawn or dusk. The woman’s second search through the city (5:2-8) may occur at dawn or at nighttime. The dew in the man’s hair suggest the morning, whereas the references to sleep, the watchmen patrolling the town, and similarities to the scene in 3:1-4 (“Upon my couch at night”) suggest a nighttime scene. There is no systematic, logical progression, and space and time can seem fragmented and incoherent.
We will build upon it a silver battlement;  
If she bet a door,  
We will panel it in cedar.”
(8:8-9)

Social mores can be an obstacle to the lovers’ coming together.

I met the watchmen  
Who patrol the town;  
They struck me, they bruised me.  
The guards of the walls  
*Stripped me of my mantle.*
(5:7)

If only it could be as with a brother,  
As if you had nursed at my mother’s breast:  
Then I could kiss you  
When I met you in the street,  
And no one would despise me.
(8:1)

Her lover may be absent and yet tantalizingly present. A lattice reveals and conceals.

There he stands behind our wall,  
*Gazing through the window,*  
*Peering through the lattice.*
(2:9)

And a door gives the lovers the possibility of access to each other but still keeps them apart.

Hark, my beloved knocks!
...
My beloved took his hand off the latch  
And my heart was stirred for him.  
I rose to let in my beloved;  
My hands dripped myrrh –  
My fingers, flowing myrrh –  
Upon the handles of the bolt.  
I opened the door for my beloved,  
But my beloved had turned and gone.
(5:2, 4-6)

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158 While there are no explicit references to a door, the references to the beloved knocking, to the “latch,” and “handles of the bolt” suggest an actual door. And it is “not uncommon for the verb ‘to open’
The man's awareness of his beloved's absence may be expressed in terms of her physical distance.

From Lebanon come with me;
From Lebanon, my bride, with me!
Trip down from Amana's peak,
From the peak of Senir and Hermon,
From the dens of lions,
From the hills of leopards.
(4:8)

The menace of foxes (2:15) and perhaps lions and leopards (4:8) can also be an obstacle to the lovers' coming together. But the man's awareness of the woman's absence is primarily expressed in terms of her being hidden. The woman is like a dove, hidden in the rocks.

"O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks,
Hidden by the cliff,
Let me see your face,
Let me hear your voice;
(2:14)

She is concealed behind her veil.

Your eyes are like doves
Behind your veil.
(4:1)

Your brow behind your veil
[Gleams] like a pomegranate split open.
(4:3, 6:7)

to be used without a word for door, gate, etc. in unambiguous contexts" (Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 180). So ראפ in 5:2, 5:5 and 5:6 may be rendered "open the door." The door has been described as follows: "In Near Eastern villages old-fashioned door locks (how old is uncertain) and keys were made of wood. The key was often of considerable size, usually over a foot in length, and the keyhole large enough for a man's hand. The lover could thus put his hand through the hole, but could not open the door without the key. The door, of course, could be opened from the inside by lifting the bolt which was provided with handles for that purpose" (Pope, The Song of Songs, 518-9).
And she is concealed within her mother’s house (3:4, 8:2), her room (3:1, 5:2-6) and a litter (3:6-11). Like the dawn, she is barely visible on the eastern horizon (6:10).

The lovers’ coming together is expressed in language that suggests a gradual encircling and entwining. This language may take the form of a provocative dialogue. For example:

W: I am a rose of Sharon,
    A lily of the valleys.

M: Like a lily among thorns,
    So is my darling among the maidens.

W: Like an apple tree among trees of the forest,
    So is my beloved among the youths.
    I delight to sit in his shade,
    And his fruit is sweet to my mouth.
(2:1-3; cf 1:15-16)

This entwining motion around and toward each other is also seen in the “mirroring” of the other’s words.

[Repetitions] of image and motif are more than mere echoes, repetitions or parallels at a formal level. It is significant that they generally occur at some distance from one another in the poem, eliminating the possibility that they are simply returning a compliment by way of repartee…. Instead, the poet has creatively used this device of “mirroring” to suggest the transforming power of love whereby one changes and begins to resemble the person loved, to assume similar values, desires, feelings, and in time, even physical characteristics. Subtly, but nonetheless surely, the poet affirms their growing communion.159

The same image is attributed first to one and then to the other. The term “dove-like eyes” is used by the man to describe the woman.

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159 Elliott, Literary Unity, 247. Fox calls this technique ‘echoing.’ “The poet … brings out the interaction of the lovers and establishes the reciprocity of their communications by the use of echoing, in which the words of one lover are patterned on the other’s and thus recall them” (Fox, Song of Songs, 318).
Ah, you are fair, my darling,
Ah, you are fair,
With your dove-like eyes.
(1:15)

And the woman says of the man that “His eyes are like doves” (5:12). Whereas the woman compares the man to a “gazelle” (2:9, 2:17, 8:14), he describes her breasts as “Twins of a gazelle” (4:5, 7:4). She is like “a lily among thorns” (2:2) and his “lips are like lilies” (5:13).

The lovers’ reflected words describe their progression towards each other. The man invites his lover to come away with him.

Arise, my darling;
My fair one, come away!
(2:10; 2:13)

And she speaks to him in similar terms.

Come, my beloved,
Let us go into the open;
Let us lodge among the henna shrubs.
(7:12)

She implores him to come to her.

When the day blows gently
And the shadows flee,
Set out, my beloved,
Swift as a gazelle
Or a young stag,
For the hills of spices!
(2:17)

And he responds to her.

When the day blows gently
And the shadows flee,
I will betake me to the mount of myrrh,
To the hill of frankincense
(4:6)

When they come together, their union is described in physical terms.
They lean on each other.

Who is she that comes up from the desert,
Leaning upon her beloved?
(8:5)

They embrace.

His left hand was under my head,
His right arm embraced me.
(2:6; 8:3)

She clings to him – “I held him fast, I would not let him go” (3:4). He “browses among the lilies” (cf. 2:16; 6:3). 160

My beloved has gone down to his garden,
To the beds of spices,
To browse in the gardens
And to pick lilies.
(6:2)

Like a flower she opens to him, giving him her love.

Let us go early to the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine has flowered,
If its blossoms have opened,
If the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give my love to you.
(7:13)

Like performers in an elaborate dance, the encircling and entwining movement does not stop with their union. The Song ends with the lovers again separated, and the movement towards each other begins again.

160 “Like its English equivalent “to pasture,” the Hebrew verb נָעַר can mean “to tend flocks,” said of a shepherd, as well as “to graze, feed,” said of the sheep, see Exod. 34:3. The image of the lover as shepherd (compare 1:7), when amplified by “grazing among the lilies,” is an erotic double entendre, especially since lilies are mentioned in connection with the Shulamite’s body, 4:5, 7:3, or her lover’s lips, 5:13, and he is described as “gathering” lilies, 6:2.” (Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 157).
“Hurry, my beloved,
Swift as a gazelle or a young stag,
To the hills of spices!”
(8:14)

The imagery of fragrance re-emerges in the context of the lovers’ world. The intoxicating fragrances drift irresistibly through the Song and draw together and envelope the lovers. The sense of smell is closely intertwined with emotion, arousal and memory, and these clusters of images convey this interaction. One cluster is centred around the root לָבָן (laban) and connects the imagery of Lebanon (לֵבָנָון, levannot), frankincense (לְבָנִין, lebanin) and the moon (לַלְבָנָה, lavelanah). For the ancient Israelite, Lebanon was an echo of Eden, a paradise of beauty and abundance. The robes with the “scent of Lebanon” (4:11) may be an allusion to the fragrant flowers or waters of the paradisical Lebanon, to the exotic aroma of frankincense, or perhaps to both. There is this same ambiguity and mingling of images when the man goes to the “hill of frankincense” (4:6) and calls on his absent lover to come to him from the mountains of Lebanon (4:8). In describing the woman as “Beautiful as the moon” (6:10) the poetic form, לַלְבָנָה, is used – this image also becomes charged with the connotations of Lebanon and frankincense. And to this cluster of images may be added the image of the הָנַם, the beautiful white lily, with the luxurious fragrance, becomes the woman herself (2:1), becomes her lover’s lips (5:13), becomes a field of love (6:2-3). In these images, fragrance and eroticism intermingle, enveloping the lovers in an intoxicating spell.

162 Lebanon – 4:8, 4:11, 4:15, 5:15; frankincense – 3:6, 4:6; moon – 6:10. These nouns play about this sense of “whiteness” in the root לָבָן.
163 Ps. 104:16; Ezek. 31:9, 16.
Another cluster of images is even more sexually charged. Throughout the Song, the root תַּנַּת connects the woman’s “lover” (תַּנַּת) and his “love” (תַּנַּת). The fragrant mandrake, a plant with aphrodisiac qualities, shares the same root (תַּנַּת). The image of the mandrakes in the place where the woman promises to give her love is ambiguous; however, it suggests the merging of love and nature.

Let us go early to the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine has flowered,
If its blossoms have opened,
If the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give my love to you.
The mandrakes yield their fragrance,
At our doors are all choice fruits;
Both freshly picked and long-stored
Have I kept, my beloved, for you.
(7:13-14)

As the “mandrakes yield their fragrance,” so too will the lovers will give themselves to each other.

As was noted in the discussion of fragrance in the natural world, attention is paid to the fluidity of fragrance. When looked at in the context of the world of the lovers, this imagery becomes very evocative and sensual. When the woman reaches for the door in order to open to her lover, myrrh is described as ‘dripping’ and ‘flowing.’

My hands dripped myrrh
My fingers, flowing myrrh
(5:5)

And when she describes his lips, they are again ‘dripping’ and ‘flowing’ myrrh.

His lips are like lilies
They drip flowing myrrh
(5:13)

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As "drip" (לֹֽאַדָּה) may be rendered as "flowing," and "flowing" (לֶבֶר) has the sense of "overflowing," the movement of the aromatic myrrh over her lover’s fragrant, lily-like lips is extremely fluid and sensuous. Throughout the Song the "scent of each other’s fragrance expresses the communion of their selves, an exchange which takes place even in the absence of the loved one."

As a fragrance is diffused everywhere, so the lovers’ communion lingers.

From the beginning of the Song, perfume is a metaphor for the lovers’ irresistible attraction to each other.

Oh, give me the kisses of your mouth,
For your love is more delightful than wine.
Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance,
Your name is like finest oil—
Therefore do maidens love you.
Draw me after you, let us run!

(1:2-4)

The mere mention of her lover’s name (נְפִיס) is a balm (נְפִיל) that conveys his presence. The man’s scent is so compelling that not only she but also her companions are enthralled. The maidens’ response to the man’s fragrance is to love him. The woman’s response is to yearn to be drawn into his presence. In 4:10 her lover mirrors her words.

How sweet is your love,
My own, my bride!

165 Munro, Spikenard and Saffron, 48.

166 Bloch and Bloch note that this phrase is enigmatic. “All that can be said with certainty is that in the Bible a name often reflects a person’s characteristic traits (compare 1 Sam. 25.25), and that the ‘oil’ here, whatever its identity, is symbolic of the young man’s sensual attractiveness” (Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 138). Murphy is more emphatic: “The repetition of נְפִיס (‘perfume’) is particularly effective, and it forms a play on נְפִיס (‘name’)” (Murphy, The Song of Songs, 125). In a similar vein, Munro notes that in 1:3 “the very mention of his name is balm to her (1.3b), conveying his presence to her and lifting her spirits” (Munro, Spikenard and Saffron, 49).
How much more delightful your love than wine,
Your ointments more fragrant
Than any spice!

In 1:12-14 there is an all but complete disintegration of distinctions, a dissolving of boundaries that reflects the lovers’ communion.

While the king was on his couch,
My nard gave forth its fragrance.
My beloved to me is a bag of myrrh
Lodged between my breasts.
My beloved to me is a spray of henna blooms
From the vineyards of En-gedi.

The nard with which she had anointed herself calls forth the image of her lover as a “bag of myrrh”; not the couch but her breasts becomes his bed for the night. The image of the fragrant henna blossoms conjours the oasis of En-gedi. While the shift to this new setting is ambiguous, the reference to En-gedi may serve to evoke an oasis known for its fragrant plants and trees, a suitable setting for their union. The language of fragrance evokes the lovers’ intimacy.

The sense of the enveloping and transforming quality of fragrance is perhaps most powerfully felt at the centre of the Song, in 4:12-5:1 (italics mine).

M: A garden locked
Is my own, my bride,
A fountain locked,
A sealed-up spring.

Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates
And of all luscious fruits;
Of henna and of nard –
Nard and saffron,
Fragrant reed and cinnamon,
With all aromatic woods,
Myrrh and aloes –
All the choice perfumes.
[You are] a garden spring,
A well of fresh water,
A rill of Lebanon.
W: Awake, O north wind,
Come, O south wind!
Blow upon my garden,
That its perfume may spread.
Let my beloved come to his garden
And enjoy its luscious fruits!

M: I have come to my garden,
My own, my bride;
I have plucked my myrrh and spice,
Eaten my honey and honeycomb,
Drunk my wine and my milk.
(4:12-5:1)

In creating a metaphor for his lover, the man piles images of exotic fruits and perfumes
on top of each other. She is fragrance itself, in a most concentrated and delicious form.
But she is unavailable to him. A “garden locked,” she is hidden away, a “sealed-up
spring,” her life is somehow being prevented from flowing. To bring herself to him the
woman evokes strong elemental winds, winds that will have the power to blow her
fragrance to wherever her lover may be. Enveloped by her scent, he enters her garden
to gather “my myrrh and spice.”

In the context of the natural world there is the suggestion that the earth is
awakening. The relationship of the lovers is also described in terms of awakening. can simply refer to the state of being awake, as seems to be the case in 5:2.

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167 The root of the word “Blow” is . is also the root of “apple” (). As noted above, is related to , which gives a sense of the apple as a fragrant fruit. This image in 4:16 may therefore be reflected in 7:9 (“Your breath like the fragrance of apples;” cf. 2:3, 2:5).

168 While the concept of being ‘asleep but awake’ is ambiguous, this could imply that she is resting and alert at the same time. Bergant disagrees with those commentators who say that the woman is dreaming, semi-awake, or fantasizing. Rather, “we can say that the woman may be in some kind of sleep, but her mind is awake… The reference to sleep and wakefulness can probably be best understood as a poetic fiction that draws its images from both the world of dreams and the world of reality. Interpreting the opening phrase in this way recognizes the possibility of double entendre, while insistence on precise and consistent meaning tends to diminish the poetic force of the imagery used” (See Bergant, The Song of
also refer to sexual desire. The woman knows that desire must be allowed to move and awaken in its own time.

Do not wake or rouse
Love until it please!
(2:7, 3:5)

The apple tree seems to arouse the lovers’ desire: she sits in his shadow, delighted by his fruit.

Like an apple tree among trees of the forest,
So is my beloved among the youths.
I delight to sit in his shade,
And his fruit is sweet to my mouth.
(2:3)

And she rouses him under the apple tree.

Under the apple tree I roused you
(8:5)

As the apple tree has embedded within it, the breath of the apple may be seen as somehow fanning their desire. This sense of the wind arousing desire is also seen in 4:16 – the sleeping north wind is awakened to blow the woman’s scent towards her lover so as to awaken his love. In the world of the lovers, an awakening to the other is implied by the dissolution of boundaries between the two people:

My beloved is mine
And I am his
(2:16)

I am my beloved’s
And my beloved is mine
(6:3)

This sense of awakening suggests the love that is at the heart of the lovers’ world.

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*Songs*, 60-61). This understanding of the verse is consistent with 3:1: “Upon my couch at night / I sought the one I love.” Again, she is in repose but is mentally engaged.
The juxtaposition of תֹּרֶעְשׁ and bin in 8:5 suggests other possible connotations of תֹּרֶעְשׁ.

Under the apple tree I roused you;
It was there your mother conceived you,
There she who bore you conceived you.  
(8:5)

The terms תֹּרֶעְשׁ and bin are ambiguous in this context. Nonetheless, there is an obvious causal connection between תֹּרֶעְשׁ as sexual awakening and bin as either conception or travail. And perhaps it is possible in this context to connect bin and bin.

As noted, bin is the root of the ‘whirling dance’ (תרבנ). But תֹּרֶעְשׁ, חֹל, also has a sense of ‘writhing and twisting’ in travail. In light of the many and varied references

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169 bin may be rendered “to conceive.” It can also be rendered “to bring forth in travail.”

Under the apple tree I awakened you.
There your mother was in travail with you,
there she who bore you was in travail.  
(8:5)

170 The terms תֹּרֶעְשׁ and חֹל are ambiguous in this context. Nonetheless, there is an obvious causal connection between תֹּרֶעְשׁ as sexual awakening and חֹל as either conception or travail. And perhaps it is possible in this context to connect חֹל and חֹל.

171 Gesenius defines the Piel of חֹל as “to writhe with pains or sorrows, [hence] to bring forth. Cant. 8:5; Ps. 7:15” (author’s italics) (Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius, Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, “הלך” [trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979], 257). חֹל is defined as “pains, pangs, especially of parturient women” (author’s italics) (Gesenius, 257). And in addition to its reference to a whirling dance, חֹל is defined as “to twist oneself in pain, to writhe, to be in pain … especially used of parturient women” (author’s italics) (Gesenius, “חיל,” 265).
to dance in the Song, there is also a suggestion of the dance in this scene of sexual awakening under an apple tree.

Imagery that moved through the natural world and into the social world has now taken on evocative new connotations in the world of the lovers. The lovers describe each other using the language of dance and relate to each other in elaborate dancing and encircling patterns. The imagery of drifting and flowing fragrance re-emerges to convey the lovers’ movement toward and envelopment of each other. And in the context of the lovers’ world, awakening suggests sexual awakening and the dance. The fourth and final world to be considered is the spiritual world.

The spiritual world

The imagery of dance and encircling, fragrance, wind, water and awakening have important connotations in the Bible. The preponderance of these images through the Song suggests that they may be imbued with special significance. In the following, the focus shifts from the natural and social worlds and world of the lovers, and I consider spiritual connotations of these images. There is no mention of God in the Song of Songs. But tracing the patterns of this imagery reveals glimpses of a spiritual dimension.

Dance was humanity’s original way of connecting with a divinity.

Now, in the animistic stage what first suggested the presence of life in anything was movement. The cause of the movement was neither understood nor enquired into. A tree, swayed by the wind, moved; therefore it was alive. But it would not strike a more or less primitive savage that it was the wind which caused the movement. What he would instinctively have recognized was that here was something which he did not understand; and therefore there was a mystery about it which inspired awe. So, too, with streams, and rivers, and the sea; they were
alive because they had motion .... Thus motion, movement, which, on the analogy of man himself, was believed to denote life, was the first thing which the savage mind connected with supernatural powers.\textsuperscript{172}

Dance originated in the desire of early people to imitate what was conceived to be the main characteristic of supernatural powers. Dance was considered

the first and chief means adopted by prehistoric humanity of entering into active union with the deity adored. The first idea was to imitate the measured movements of the god, or at any rate what were supposed to be such. Afterwards this fundamental motive was forgotten, like so many other religious forms which tradition and habit sustained even when the spirit was gone.\textsuperscript{173}

For the ancient Israelites, dance had a deep significance. This is attested to by the fact that Hebrew has more expressions to describe the various aspects of dancing than any other ancient language.\textsuperscript{174} The arts of singing and dancing "both gushed forth from the same psychic impulse," coming together to create "a religious hymn presented with dancing evolutions."\textsuperscript{175}

Dancing is part of the texture of the Song. Dance imagery emerges in the natural and social worlds and the world of the lovers. The terms "Leaping" ($\chi\nu\gamma\tau\gamma\nu$) and

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\textsuperscript{173} Albert Réville quoted in Oesterley, \textit{Sacred Dance}, 16-17.

\textsuperscript{174} Sendrey, \textit{Music}, 445. There are 12 verbs to express the act of dancing.

\textsuperscript{175} Sendrey, \textit{Music}, 450. In the Bible, dance is almost always associated with a religious event. For example, David and the Israelites dance before the ark as it is brought to Jerusalem. Abinadab; Uzza and Ahio guided the cart, and David and all Israel danced before God with all their might – with songs, lyres, harps, timbrels, cymbals, and trumpets. (1 Chr 13:7-8)

Dance also occurs more generally in praise of God.

Let Israel rejoice in its maker;
Let the children of Zion exult in their king.
Let them praise His name in dance;
With timbrel and lyre let them chant His praises.
(Ps 149:2-3; cf. Ps 87:4; 150:4)
"Bounding" (םַמִּסְתָּיו) (2:8) are drawn from the language of dance; "Streaming" (שְׁלַשָׁיו) and "Climbing" (שָׁלֵשׁ) (4:1-2; 6:5-6) suggest dance-like movements. The woman performs a whirling dance (נַחַל) (7:1); in the context of this scene the word "livy" is a call for a dancing "leap." An examination of roots suggests there may be a connection between the whirling dance (נַחַל) and conception/travail (רָחֳל) (8:5). This imagery of dancing is also seen in connection with the Song’s many images of encircling. Solomon’s couch is encircled by warriors (3:7); the woman beseeches her love to “set out” (בָּא) (2:17); he begs her to “Turn” her eyes from him (חַלֶל) (6:5); the movement of the lovers can be seen as a dance-like encircling. This encircling movement suggests a sacred encircling dance. This imagery of dance may be seen in this light. There is also the suggestion of a spiritual dimension to the fragrance imagery that drifts through the Song. Many of the fragrances in the Song have the connotation of incense. Myrrh, frankincense, aloe and cedar are all sources of incense and, as noted, 

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176 The structure of the Song has also been described as circular. “It is not surprising and unexpected that the Song of Songs is built as a cycle. Verses 13-14 of Canticle 8 build an end that is, at the same time, a rebound of the whole poem, a return to the beginning. And thus the Canticle is an endless song. . . . [The] Song of Songs is indeed a round, the rondeau of the Middle Ages, that is, an endlessly repeated song” (LaCocque, Romance She Wrote, 190) (author’s italics).

In a similar vein, Trible observes that the Song “unfolds in five major movements: 1:2-2:7; 2:8-3:5; 3:6-5:8; 5:9-8:4; 8:5-14. The beginnings and endings of these sections demonstrate the interweaving of cyclic patterns in the overall structure” (Trible, “Love’s Lyrics Redeemed,” 152).

177 The “ritual encircling dance, whether in procession with measured tread or in the form of a dance step . . . is perhaps the commonest kind of sacred dance (Oesterley, Sacred Dance, 88). The root בָּא has the connotation of a circular procession around an altar or sacred object (Sendrey, Music, 447).

I wash my hands in innocence,
and walk around your altar, O Lord
raising my voice in thanksgiving,
and telling all Your wonders.
(Ps 26:6)

The sense of בָּא as an external movement accompanied by an inner change also suggests the whirling dance when it is performed as a meditative practice.
In the Bible, incense is viewed as a holy substance reserved in cultic contexts for God,\(^{178}\) and the burning of incense surpassed sacrifice as a practice in worship.\(^ {179}\) In a symbolic sense, incense connects “human beings with the godhead, the finite with the infinite and the mortal with the immortal.”\(^ {180}\) It is a medium for wafting prayers to heaven.\(^ {181}\) The presence in the Song of Songs of fragrances with the specific connotations of incense serves as a reminder of an eternal reality.

Throughout the worlds of the Song there is a connection between wind and fragrance. In the context of a spiritual world, this connection suggests the presence of spirit. In 3:6 there is an image of a woman ascending from the desert surrounded by swirling clouds of fragrant incense.

Like columns of smoke
In clouds of myrrh and frankincense

This image is evocative of a whirlwind, a vehicle for divinity.\(^ {182}\) The term כְּתִימָת אֵשׁ (“columns of smoke”) here suggests the column of fire and cloud that represented the divine presence during Israel’s desert wanderings.\(^ {183}\) And the fact that רוּ ה is formed from רוּה suggests that there is an element of the spirit in the many fragrances that drift

\(^{178}\) Ex 30:37-38; 2 Chr 2:4, 13:11


\(^{181}\) Ps 141:2 - “Take my prayer as an offering of incense” – equates prayer to incense as equally pleasing to the deity.

\(^{182}\) Job 38:1, 40:6

\(^{183}\) Ex 13:21, 22; 14:19, 24; Neh 9:12, 19
through the Song. רוח is God’s invisible energy, the creative force that brought the cosmos into being.\textsuperscript{184} It is the spirit of God that animates all life;\textsuperscript{185} “human beings and all living creatures belong to a single, all-inclusive domain, because they all share the same רוח of God.”\textsuperscript{186} There is also the suggestion of an intermingling of fragrance and spirit flowing from the root נס. (עץ) relates to which, as noted, has a primary meaning of “breathe, blow.” But נס also has connotations of the breath of God in a sense parallel to רוח.\textsuperscript{187} Once again, the suggestion is that fragrances are somehow being carried on, or are mingling with, the spirit.

In the Song, awakening emerges in the contexts of the awakening of the earth and the awakening of the lovers. The imagery of awakening also has suggestive connotations in the context of the spiritual world. In 4:16, the imperative “Awake” (עוצר) is found clustered with images of wind and fragrance:

Awake, O north wind,
Come, O south wind!
Blow upon my garden,
That its perfume may spread.
(4:16)

\textsuperscript{184} Gen 1:2

\textsuperscript{185} Gen 6:17, 7:22


\textsuperscript{187} Mailberger, TDOT, 9:486.
In the bible, it is often God who stirs nations and people to action.\textsuperscript{188} And God “awakens” those whom he intends to use as instruments by rousing their רוח.\textsuperscript{189}

While the term רוח is not used in this verse, the sense of wind as spirit may be implied from the winds of the north and south. The suggestion of a spiritual dimension to this verse is reinforced by the use of the imperative “Blow” (בהקוק). This verb may have the sense of “to cause to breathe,” with a secondary meaning of “to bring to life.”\textsuperscript{190} In the bible, all life comes from the breath of God.\textsuperscript{191} In the Song of Songs, however, these words are spoken not by God but by a woman; these

\textsuperscript{188} The initiative to act in battle comes from God. Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for battle! Arouse the warriors, Let all the fighters come and draw near (Joel 4:9) People call on God to rise up and fight for them. Give ear, O shepherd of Israel Who leads Joseph like a flock! Appear, You who are enthroned on the cherubim, At the head of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh! Rouse Your might and come to our help! (Ps 80:2-3; cf. Ps 7:7) God also activates foreign nations to fight Israel (Jer 6:22) and to help Israel (Isa 41:2, 45:13).

\textsuperscript{189} In Hag 1:14 it may be that awakening of רוח can be seen as religious. In Jer 51:1, Jer 51:11, 1 Chr 5:26, 2 Chr 36:22 and Ezra 1:1, 5 this awakening is not considered to be religious in nature (Schreiner, \textit{TDOT} 10:573-4).

\textsuperscript{190} “This difficult verb is often translated ‘to blow, breathe, exhale,’ on the basis of its use in the simple stem, 2:17, 4:6. But since the form in 4:16 is in the causative stem (root פָוָה, hip’il), a literal rendition might be closer to the mark: ‘to cause to breathe,’ perhaps with a secondary meaning ‘to bring to life’” (Bloch and Bloch, \textit{The Song of Songs}, 178).

\textsuperscript{191} “In the OT view, all earthly life derives from the breath of God (cf. Isa. 42:5; Job 33:4); when this breath is taken away, they die (Ps. 104:29; Job 34:14f; Isa. 57:16).” (Mailberger, \textit{TDOT} 9:486). Ezek 37:9 offers a close parallel to Song 4:16: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live. In Gen. 2:7, “[God] blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.” The root in both Ezek 37:9 and Gen 2:7 is רוח which, as noted, is phonetically and semantically close to מֹט.
images of a divine awakening, blowing wind and fragrance therefore have a distinctly feminine quality. There is a similar cluster of images in 8:5.

Under the apple tree I roused you
It was there your mother conceived you,
There she who bore you conceived you.

Again, fragrance is suggested in the image of the apple tree (the “scenting fruit”). The breath of life is suggested by נון (the derived root of נון). This reading of נון as “to bring to life” is supported by the imagery of conception/travail (ברוח). As in 4:16, the imagery in 8:5 of awakening, blowing wind and fragrance takes a feminine turn. It is the mother who gives birth to the man; it is a woman, not God, who awakens him.

The imagery of flowing water also moves through the worlds of the Song. In the context of the spiritual world this imagery is richly symbolic. Water is often seen as a blessing in the Bible: the abundance of God’s provision is reflected in an abundance of water. The landscape of the Song is dotted with springs (1:14, 4:2, 4:12, 4:15, 6:6), joyous places where miracles occur. And the mornings are drenched with dew (5:2), a

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192 As Bloch and Bloch observe, “this verse with the Shulamite ‘commanding’ the elements is also reminiscent of Isa. 5:6, ‘I will command the clouds’” (Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 178).

193 Many ancient myths describe the birth of a god under a tree. (See Pope, The Song of Songs, 663).

194 This sense of the blessedness of water is caught in the word נזר (a pond or pool), which has as its root נון (bless).

195 For example, Hagar encounters an angel of the Lord by a spring in the wilderness (Gen 16:7-16).

As the word for “eyes” is the same as “springs” (נתיב), the many references to beautiful eyes in the Song of Songs implies that this sense of blessedness encompasses the lovers. (Although the majority of references are to the woman’s eyes: 1:15, 4:1, 4:9, 6:5 and 7:5 refer to the woman, whereas only 5:12 refers to the man).
form of blessing and spiritual refreshment. The Song’s proliferation of water imagery implies that this is a world rich in blessings. This sense of blessedness is highlighted by the parallels between the water imagery in the Song of Songs (and particularly 4:12-5:1) and the imagery of water in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2-3). The water that issues from the Garden of Eden is called a river (ךָּבֶּרֶךְ) but, because it seems to arise from a source like a headwaters and divides into four, it has the quality of a spring. As the Garden of Eden is nourished by bountiful water, the Song’s springs of living water issue forth to create an abundant, blessed world.

The imagery of dance and encircling, fragrance, wind, awakening and flowing water move through the natural and social worlds and into the world of the lovers. In this final section this imagery emerges in new ways in the context of a spiritual world. In this context a feminine aspect is discerned in the imagery of fragrance, wind and awakening.

This exploration of the spiritual world concludes my original analysis of the Song of Songs. The literary analysis that flows from Turner’s idea that movement is an indicator of liminality leaves no doubt as to the beauty and complexity of the poetry of the Song. The movement imagery of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance,

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196 When Isaac blesses Jacob he says, May God give you Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, Abundance of new grain and wine (Gen 27:28) And God says “I will be to Israel like dew” (Hos 14:6).

197 The term כָּרַךְ is used in Song 8:7 (טַבְּרָאָה יָלָּה מִשְׁפָּגְתָּן).

198 For an interpretation of the Song of Songs in light of Gen 2-3 see Trible, “Love’s Lyrics Redeemed.”
blowing winds, and flowing waters are richly laden with literal and figurative connotations. Exploring these images with an eye to the interpretive possibilities of Hebrew and to feminist observations greatly enriches this process. My analysis shows that by virtue of these images the Song can be viewed from the perspective of four worlds. Viewed independently, the natural world, social world, world of the lovers and spiritual world are distinct. Viewed as a totality, these four worlds are like strands of a weaving that together create an interconnected whole. My analysis also shows that the fascinating and evocative patterns that move through the Song give a sense of a world that is liminal – it is holistic, ambiguous and feminine. In my conclusion in Part Four I examine these ideas further. I suggest that my exploration of the poetry of the Song leads to two new understandings of wisdom influence in the Song of Songs.
Several years ago, I was introduced to the ancient Israelite wisdom tradition. At that time I noted with interest the comments of scholars who saw wisdom influence in the Song of Songs. While it had been many years since I had read the Song my curiosity was piqued. I looked further into the matter and found that several scholars viewed the Song as a lyric poem influenced by Israelite wisdom. I reread the Song, keeping the ideas of these scholars in mind. As I reacquainted myself with the rich and complex language of the Song, I found these scholars' approaches to wisdom influence in the Song to be, on the whole, incongruous. It was as though an effort had been made to force a rigid frame over something that is essentially in a constant state of flux. These approaches did not do justice to the Song's remarkable poetry. I resolved to look for a new way to enter into and explore wisdom influence in the Song. This thesis is the fruit of these enquiries.

Before turning to my conclusions, I will review the discussion so far. Part One situates this thesis within the context of the study of ancient Israelite wisdom. I sketch the wide range of scholarly opinions around the definition of wisdom. Particular attention is paid to the work of those feminist biblical scholars who present views that expand the definitions of wisdom. I then turn to the concept of wisdom influence. The scholarly debate of this topic is outlined and examples of studies provided. I then explain how the Song fits within this context. I observe that feminist scholars have not focused
on the Song of Songs as wisdom literature. However, many scholars have discerned
wisdom influence in the Song. These approaches typically frame wisdom influence in
the Song in one of four ways. The ideas of didactic wisdom; the ideas of speculative
wisdom; the literary theme of a search for wisdom; and creation theology are described.
Scholars arguing from these positions are reviewed. In the course of this discussion I
raise problems with these ways of viewing wisdom influence in the Song. I argue that
none of these approaches adequately takes into account the Song's unique vision.

In Part Two, I describe the methodology I chose to conduct this analysis. A
description of Turner's theory of liminality is given; attention is drawn to Turner's
contention that the liminal state is ambiguous, holistic and feminine. This is followed by
a review of scholars who have applied Turner's theory to wisdom texts: Camp, Perdue,
Clements and Van Leeuwen. I then explain that the key to my analysis of the imagery in
the Song is Turner's contention that movement is an important indicator of liminality.
Five images of movement form the basis of this analysis: the images of awakening,
dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters. The literal and
figurative connotations of these images are carefully examined as they move through the
worlds of the Song: the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the
spiritual world. I explain that while each of these worlds is complete in itself they are
also interconnected. I note that this method of analysis pays careful attention to the
interpretive possibilities of the original Hebrew language. Feminist observations that
highlight the feminine connotations of the imagery and other matters relevant to the
discussion are also an important facet of this method.
My original analysis of the Song of Songs is presented in Part Three. The images of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters are carefully traced through the Song’s natural world, social world, world of the lovers and spiritual world. Tracing the evocative interplay of these images through these four worlds offers a way to enter into the unique poetry of the Song. Based on this analysis, two new approaches to wisdom influence in the Song will now be presented.

The first approach is related to the liminal quality of the Song. Exploring the very rich connotations of the imagery of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flower waters reveals the Song to be liminal: it is ambiguous, holistic, and has a feminine focus. Ambiguity is seen in the absence of one clear definition for the imagery – to reiterate an example previously noted, dance can relate to the movement of gazelles in the natural world, a victory dance in the social world, an encircling and entwining in the lovers’ world, and a sacred dance in the spiritual world. There is no consistent, unambiguous way to view this imagery of dance. There is also ambiguity in relation to specific Hebrew roots (פומ, רוח, חבל, לב and דוד) and in relation to the Song’s spatial and temporal settings. Exploring this imagery also reveals the holistic nature of the Song. Following the patterns of imagery through the four worlds shows that this imagery connects the world; the final impression created by the totality of this imagery is of one world that is holistic and integrated. There is also a strong feminine current running through the Song. While this is most apparent in the imagery of fragrance, numerous other examples are noted. Turner’s definition of a liminal work of art rings true to the Song of Songs. Like other liminal art, the Song “has a multivocal
character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many levels simultaneously."  

Camp argues that the Israelite wisdom tradition has a liminal dimension that sets it apart from the mainstream of Israelite religion. "There is indeed a sense in which the wisdom tradition is, as its scholarly denigrators have long argued, set apart from ‘mainstream Yahwism.’"  

After noting that liminality is a state during which there is a movement between the sacred and daily life, she observes that [in] all of Israel’s religious literature, it is the wisdom tradition that most clearly discloses such a meeting place of the divine and the human. Here, the sacred is not set apart in the holy of holies, or reserved for the chosen few prophets. Woman Wisdom, who embodies both human wisdom and divine authority in an unexpected female form, stands in the public places, calling to and delighting in all.

This analysis of the Song shows that its ambiguous, holistic and feminine qualities mark it as having a liminal dimension. And many have found that the Song reveals the kind of encounter that Camp describes as exemplary of the wisdom tradition. "For those who experience the Song as erasing the border between sacred and secular, it offers a sense of the holy at odds with what is usually understood as religious." This expression of the

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201 In her discussion of the trickster myth, Camp observes that one “dimension of liminality evident in the trickster is that of his movement and mediation between the world of the sacred and that of daily life” (Camp, “Wise and Strange,” 154).


203 Ostriker, “A Holy of Holies,” 49. This sense of the holiness of the Song recalls the following words of Rabbi Akiva:
encounter between the divine and human in the middle of life becomes one way of understanding wisdom influence in the Song of Songs.\textsuperscript{204}

The second approach to wisdom influence in the Song of Songs relates more closely to the poem’s imagery of movement. The analysis in Part Three reveals that movement in the Song can be distilled down to five key images: awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters. This imagery moves in a variety of ways through the worlds of the Songs. The complex and innovative interplay of the images through the worlds of the Song can be described as a dance: the Song as a whole is a kind of elaborate dance of life. It is as if the poet is a choreographer of words, creating a tremendously complex and highly imaginative spectacle. Strands of recurring patterns are woven together in fascinating ways to create a whole that is harmonious, unique and compelling.

This sense of the Song as a dance is reinforced when the observations of modern women choreographers are considered. Twyla Tharp describes how choreographers explore ways to build harmony from movement.

We parsed movement into its components, recombining the pieces in various ways. We looked at movement as energy; we looked at it as rhythm; we looked at it up close and far away .... Unrelated single lines of movement began to seem

\textup{... for the whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holiest of the holy. \quad \textbf{(Rabbi Akiva quoted in Bloch and Bloch, The Song of Songs, 28)}

Turner argues that because liminality “transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships,” liminality is “almost everywhere held to be sacred or ‘holy’” (Turner, The Ritual Process, 128).

\textsuperscript{204} But Camp also argues that this liminal dimension of the wisdom tradition served a critical regenerative role in Israelite religion. The regenerative force of the liminal dimension of wisdom is such that “Yahwism could not long exist without it” (Camp, Wise and Strange,” 155).
chaotic and monotonous to me, crossing one another without purpose. We began exploring movement to learn ways of building harmonic possibilities. We inverted phrases, turning movements upside down, flexing instead of extending the feet, changing circular motions from en dedans to en dehors, rotating parallel positions out and vice versa. The permutations were endless...

The thoughts of Tharp echo the poet who uses combinations of imagery to create an overall impression of integration and harmony. The words of another choreographer, Isadora Duncan, also reflect the Song. Duncan describes how movement takes different forms as it emerges from nature, culminating in the movement of the dance.

Do you remember yesterday we were speaking of the movement in Nature and you said that the wave was the great foundation movement of Nature? This idea continually presents itself to me and I see waves rising through all things. Sitting here and looking through the trees they seem also to be a pattern conforming to lines of waves.... [And] when we come to the movements of organic nature it would seem that all free natural movements conform to the law of wave movement. The flight of birds, for instance, or the bounding of animals .... Do you remember yesterday we were speaking of the dance and when I asked you where you would look for the source of this art, you answered Nature? Since then the idea will not leave me, and I see dance motifs in all things about me.

In the Song, images of movement also emerge from nature. These images can be carefully followed as they are transformed through the worlds of the Song. In the Song, as in Duncan's choreography, this process reveals the harmony and interconnectedness of life. While Duncan uses the medium of dance, the creator of the Song uses the medium of poetry to express this interconnectedness.

These connections between the poetry of the Song and dance highlight key features of the Song. As the choreographers create harmony with moving bodies, the

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poet of the Song creates an integrated and harmonious whole with the imagery of movement. With this in mind, I suggest that wisdom in the Song may be conceptualized in terms of the woman poet’s use of complex and sophisticated language to create a vision of a harmonious and interconnected world. Viewing wisdom influence in the Song in these terms addresses three factors. First, it recognizes wisdom as a branch of the arts. Like one of the wise women of Jeremiah, the poet of the Song is highly skilled, using language in a very complex and sophisticated way. Like an innovative dance, the language offers constant surprises and changing perspectives. Second, it reaffirms the feminine perspective of the poem. The similarities between the poetry of the Song and the work of modern women choreographers buttress the argument of those who view the Song as the work of a woman poet. And third, this approach takes into account the focus of creation theology on an interconnected world. The imagery of awakening, dance and encircling, fragrance, blowing winds, and flowing waters are woven through the natural world, the social world, the world of the lovers and the spiritual world. The vision of the world created by this imagery is not founded in a specific theology. But taken together, these strands of imagery create a vision of a world that is intrinsically harmonious and whole.

207 In Part One, I point to the strong indications that the Song is the work of a woman poet. The discussion of the dance performance (7:1) in Part Three also provides glimpses of the Song as part of a tradition of women’s art. As Brenner observes, framing wisdom influence in the Song of Songs in terms of arts created by women will provide “additional information with regard to biblical wisdom traditions” (Brenner, The Song of Songs, 83).

208 As noted in Part One, in Jer 9:16 wise women are described as mourners who write and perform their own laments.

209 This approach is distinct from creation theology for the reasons given in Part Two.
The two approaches to wisdom influence in the Song of Songs presented here are not unambiguous. The nature of the Song is such that it does not offer obvious solutions. Once drawn into the Song, any number of paths and by-ways present themselves. It may be that there is no “treasure” of wisdom influence to be found. It may be that the Song, with its myriad of possibilities, is simply the perfect vehicle to engage the spirit of discovery that so enlivened the sages.


Funk & Wagnall Dictionary. 18th rev. ed.


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